

# Warrington Local Plan Examination

## Matters Statements

### MATTER 7E – SITE ALLOCATION - WINWICK

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August 2022



## **MATTER 7E – SITE ALLOCATION – WINWICK**

### **Issue**

**Whether the site allocation at Winwick (Policy OS6) is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.**

(NB. Examination Library reference numbers are provided in brackets after each document referred to in the Matters Statement)

### **Questions**

#### **1. What is the background to the site allocation and how was it identified?**

1.1 The assessment for the high level spatial distribution of options is outlined in Section 2 of the Development Options and Site Assessment Technical Report Sept 2021 (O1) and has been fully documented in response to Matter 3.

1.2 The site was submitted as part of the Call for Sites as a site for residential development (SAP2 - Pages 543 to 545) in 2016 (ref. R18/040). Section 3 of the Development Options and Site Assessment Technical Report Sept 2021 (O1) outlines the process for how each settlement site was identified. The site assessment process concluded that:

This site is considered to be suitable – unlikely to have a major impact on trends. The site is adjacent to the settlement of Winwick, located to the immediate north of the settlement. The site is considered to be in a sustainable location and it is available being free from ownership issues, having been promoted by the site owner. The site has good accessibility to formal play space, and primary and secondary schools. It is available, as it is not in active use and is being promoted by the owner. The site is achievable as it is in an area of moderate viability and there is developer interest and known demand. However, there are some suitability issues due to the distance to GP services and local natural greenspace; there is a small section of potentially contaminated land in the north eastern corner and a section of historic landfill site buffer zone (250m) in the south western corner, and therefore, there are known abnormal development costs. The site also falls within Zone 1 (inner protection zone) of the Environment Agency's Groundwater Source Protection Zone. There are also pylons running across the site however these could be avoided given that the site exceeds the housing requirement for Winwick. Although the existing boundary is less durable, a more durable Green Belt boundary could be established. As such, development of the site would be in accordance with the objectives as set out in the draft Warrington Local Plan, particularly W1 to strengthen existing neighbourhoods, W2 which seeks to facilitate the sensitive release of Green Belt land, W4 to promote sustainable modes of transport, and W6 to minimise the impact of development on the environment.

**2. What are the conclusions of the Green Belt Assessment in relation to the contribution of the land in question to the purposes of the Green Belt and the potential to alter the Green Belt in this location?**

2.1 The site was assessed in the Green Belt Site Selection – Implications for Green Belt Release - August 2021 Report (GB3) as making a moderate contribution to Green Belt purposes.

2.2 The assessment concluded that whilst development of the site would entail a small incursion into undeveloped countryside, the removal of the site from the Green Belt will not harm the overall function and integrity of the Green Belt around Winwick. A new recognisable and permanent Green Belt boundary would be created by strengthening existing boundaries.

**3. What would be the effect of developing the site on the purposes of the Green Belt?**

3.1 The Green Belt Site Selection – Implications for Green Belt Release - August 2021 Report (GB3) concluded that the site currently makes a moderate contribution to Green Belt purposes. Whilst development of the site would entail a small incursion into undeveloped countryside, the removal of the site from the Green Belt will not harm the overall function and integrity of the Green Belt around Winwick. A new recognisable and permanent Green Belt boundary would be created by strengthening existing boundaries.

3.2 Full details of the effect of developing the site on the five purposes of the Green Belt are detailed in the Green Belt Site Selection – Implications of Green Belt Release 2021 (GB3) document.

**4. Are there exceptional circumstances to alter the Green Belt in this particular case? If so, what are they?**

4.1 This allocation site will increase housing choice, provide affordable housing and support the vitality and viability of local services in Winwick. The green field and relatively unconstrained nature of the land will enable the site to be delivered in the early period of the Plan meeting identified housing needs in the shorter term.

4.2 This allocation also forms part of a wider spatial strategy that will ensure that sufficient land is provided to meet Warrington's development needs, that housing affordability is addressed and new sustainable communities are created, in a manner that will support the delivery of strategic infrastructure that will also unlock major brownfield development sites.

4.3 These are considered to constitute 'Exceptional Circumstances'.

**5. What is the basis for the scale of development proposed and is this justified? Could this be readily accommodated, given the sensitive location adjacent to both a registered battlefield, and a service reservoir?**

- 5.1 The Council considers that the scale of housing growth is consistent with the Plan's Spatial Strategy of 'incremental growth' in each of the outlying settlements. The outlying settlements were reconsidered in the Development Options Report 2021 (O1) with consideration given to suitability, and achievability of development of the site. The broader sustainability factors as set out in the Council's Sustainability Appraisal SA Report August 2021 (SP3) were also assessed including Green Belt issues, flooding, natural environment and local facilities.
- 5.2 The policy at point 18 requires the development proposals to assess the impact on the groundwater environment and the operational asset in close proximity to the site (reservoir) and to incorporate appropriate mitigation measures in accordance with other infrastructure policies. The developer (Bellway Homes) is aware of their requirement to satisfy United Utilities (UU) requirements to mitigate impact and protect access to infrastructure. They have provided a draft layout for the development in Appendix 2 of their submission USVLP 2297 and will clarify in their Matters Statement any agreed mitigation and allowances to protect UU infrastructure including the service reservoir.
- 5.3 The policy sets out at point 24 the requirement for the development to conserve and enhance the historic significance, appearance and integrity of; and the ability to understand and appreciate the setting of the Battle of Winwick. Additionally, the allocation policy at part 23 specifies that development proposals will be required to be in accordance with the Winwick Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA7) which has been prepared working closely with Historic England. Appendix 2 of the developer's submission USVLP 2297 (page 29) states that the development will affect the rural setting of the Battlefield, however the density and massing of development will be sympathetic to the site's relationship with the village and will carefully consider the context of the proximity of the Battlefield and its rural surrounds. Any planning application will address the heritage issues and seek to mitigate harm.
- 6. What is the background to the specific requirements of Policy OS6? Are they justified and consistent with national policy? Do they provide clear and effective guidance on constraints and suitable mitigation?**
- 6.1 The specific policy requirements either relate to the Local Plan objectives including the type and tenure of homes to be delivered, or to ensure appropriate mitigation in bringing the site forward for development and addressing site-specific constraints. The requirements have been established taking into account the Council's evidence base and site assessment work, engagement with the landowner and developer (Bellway Homes), engagement through the Duty to Cooperate with other public bodies and feedback from previous rounds of consultation. The Council considers the requirements are clear, justified and consistent with national policy.
- 6.2 The policy provides clear guidance on what the Council expects will be delivered as part of the development including any special considerations concerning heritage, Green Belt, climate change and the natural environment.

**7. Does the policy identify appropriate and necessary infrastructure requirements? How will these be provided and funded? Is this sufficiently clear?**

7.1 The Council considers that the level of development proposed in the outlying settlements, including that proposed in Winwick, can be accommodated by existing infrastructure provision, with some limited infrastructure enhancements. The policy requires that S106 contributions are made for school places, built leisure facilities/playing pitches and primary care capacity. The development will be expected to provide minimum open space/equipped play in line with Council standards.

**8. Is the requirement for Green Belt compensatory improvements justified and appropriate?**

8.1 Paragraph 142 of the NPPF requires that where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, local authorities should also set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land.

8.2 The Council acknowledges that the approach to Compensatory Green Belt improvements could be clearer in the Policy. As such the Council is proposing a modification to clarify that in the first instance improvements should be made in the immediate vicinity of the site and delivered by the developer. The Council will then consider improvements in the wider area where it can be demonstrated that the improvements cannot be delivered in the immediate vicinity of the site or where this will provide greater benefits. Financial contributions will only be considered where this would help to ensure that the benefits of compensatory improvements can be maximised by providing them in a more appropriate location.

8.3 The proposed wording for the modification is detailed at paragraph 14.1.

**9. Are there potential adverse effects not covered above, if so, what are they and how would they be addressed and mitigated? N.B. The Council's response should address key issues raised in representations**

9.1 **There has been concern that the development will increase pollution, decrease air quality and have a negative impact on people's wellbeing.** The Local Plan contains specific objectives and policies relating to health and wellbeing, improving air quality, protecting existing areas of open space and green infrastructure and providing new and improved areas of open space and green infrastructure. The impact of the Local Plan on health and wellbeing was a key consideration in the Sustainability Appraisal process. The Local Plan Air Quality Modelling Report (E5) concludes that the burden of poor air quality on people's health is expected to reduce in Warrington considerably in the future, as emissions are reduced, largely due to improvements in vehicle emissions outweighing increases in the number of vehicle journeys. Additionally, the policy at point 19 states that the development

should be designed to mitigate the impacts of climate change: be as energy efficient as possible and meet a proportion of its energy needs from renewable or low carbon sources in accordance with policy ENV7.

- 9.2 **There are concerns on the impact on local wildlife and the loss of biodiversity as green areas are developed.** Policy DC4 seeks to protect priority species and habitats on development sites and achieve a net gain in biodiversity in line with section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act and the NPPF (2019 update) which indicates that in delivering sustainable development local authorities should enhance as well as protect biodiversity and natural habitats. This is strengthened by parts 10 and 11 of the policy which references the need for developers to take account of existing landscape features and reference to the DEFRA metric for biodiversity net gain.
- 9.3 **There has been concern for the increased flood risk as a result of the development.** The Updated PSVLP is supported by a Level 1 (E2) & Level 2 (E3) Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) taking into account all sources of flooding across the whole of the Borough. The proposed allocation is within Flood Zone 1 and therefore flooding is not considered to be an issue. Additionally, parts 16 and 17 of the policy require the site to put in appropriate drainage provision, improve water and sewage networks and ensure that the development mitigates against climate change.
- 9.4 **The development does not meet the needs of the area.** The development will provide a range of housing tenures, types and sizes in order to ensure development contributes to meeting the Borough's general and specialist housing needs, including family homes with gardens, specific provision for older people and for younger people looking to purchase their first home. 30% of homes will be affordable.
- 9.5 **Concern has been raised that the development will negatively impact the character of the village.** The Council considers that the allocations proposed in the outlying settlements, including in Winwick, are of a relatively limited scale which together with the safeguards in the allocations policies will mean that they will not impact on their respective characters. Additionally, the allocation policy at part 23 specifies that development proposals will be required to be in accordance with the Winwick Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA7) which has been prepared working closely with Historic England.
- 9.6 **There are health concerns in respect of the future occupants of the site due to the Overhead High Voltage Electric pylon route through the middle of the site.** The Council has taken into consideration National Grid's guidance on the proximity of housing development to powerlines when considering whether to allocate the site.
- 9.7 **The issue of the proximity of the site to a historical battlefield site has been raised.** Part 24 of the allocation policy specifies any development proposals will be expected to conserve and enhance the historic significance, appearance and integrity of and the ability to understand and appreciate the setting of the Battle of Winwick.

- 9.8 **Cheshire Constabulary requests the addition of text under community facilities of ‘Appropriate emergency services infrastructure’.** The Council will engage with the Cheshire Constabulary to consider their future needs but there is no evidence to demonstrate that any specific provision needs to be made as part of this allocation.
- 10. Is the Council satisfied that safe access to the site can be secured?**
- 10.1 Through the site assessment process, the Council’s Highways Officers confirmed that appropriate vehicular and pedestrian access can be provided to the site and that the level of development proposed in Winwick can be supported. This is subject to Parts 14 and 15 of the policy which require a Transport Assessment and an associated package of transport improvement measures to support the development.
- 11. Is the development proposed viable and deliverable within the period envisaged, noting that it is anticipated that first homes would be completed in 2024/5?**
- 11.1 The site is in one ownership. It is greenfield and the relatively unconstrained nature of the land will enable the site to be delivered in the early part of the Plan period. The Local Plan Viability Assessment August 2021 (V2) confirms that the site can provide all infrastructure in line with the policy requirements.
- 11.2 The developer (Bellway Homes) has stated that the site is available, suitable and achievable with no technical constraints to delivery. The Council is confident that the first homes would be completed by 2024/25, with the site as a whole completed by 2028/29.
- 12. What is the situation in relation to land ownership and developer interest?**
- 12.1 The site was promoted by the owner and is under option to Bellway Homes. There are no known ownership issues.
- 13. How is it intended to bring the site forward for development? What mechanisms will there be to ensure a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to development, ensuring that infrastructure requirements are provided?**
- 13.1 The policy sets out all the requirements for the comprehensive development of the site. This includes on-site requirements and contributions to offsite infrastructure improvements including community facilities; open space and recreation; transport and accessibility; and utilities.
- 13.2 The developer (Bellway Homes) has provided a Delivery Statement as Appendices to their representation USVLP 2297. In this document they have set out their approach to masterplanning the site and meeting the requirements of the policy.
- 14. Are any main modifications necessary for soundness?**
- 14.1 The Council acknowledges that the approach to Compensatory Green Belt improvements could be clearer within the Policy. As such the Council is proposing the following modification:

A scheme of compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of land remaining in the Green Belt will be required. **In the first instance, the improvements should be made in the immediate vicinity of the site and delivered by the developer. The Council will consider improvements in the wider area where it can be demonstrated that the improvements cannot be delivered in the immediate vicinity of the site or where this will provide greater benefits.** Financial contributions will **only** be considered where this would help to ensure that the benefits of compensatory improvements can be maximised by providing them in ~~the most~~ **a more** appropriate location.

- 14.2 As a result of concerns expressed by Natural England regarding the potential in-combination impact of the Local Plan on Holcroft Moss within the Manchester Mosses Special Area of Conservation, the Council is currently working with Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) on potential mitigation measures for the Moss. The Council is therefore proposing a modification to the Plan, and specifically a modification to Part 19 of Policy OS6, which will require a project level HRA to be undertaken and, if required, provide a financial contribution towards appropriate mitigation measures. The mechanism for establishing any required contribution from individual developments and how this will be used to undertake the mitigation could then be set out in an SPD and therefore an addition to the supporting text will need to be made referring to this.