

Statement of Common Ground [SoCG] between: Warrington Borough Council and Bellway Homes (Manchester)

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this SoCG is to set out the latest position that has been reached between Bellway Homes (Manchester) [Bellway] and Warrington Borough Council [the Council] to assist in the Examination of the Warrington Updated Proposed Submission Version Local Plan 2021-2038 (September 2021) [WUPSVLP] [SP1].
- 1.2 The content of this SoCG relates to ‘Land at Deacons Close, Croft’ proposed for allocation in Policy OS1 – Croft, as indicated on the proposed Policies Map. This SoCG covers the areas of agreement between the parties.

2.0 Site Allocation Information

- 2.1 The proposed site allocation is located to the north east of the settlement of Croft, adjacent to Deacons Close. The site comprises part brownfield with the southern part of the site containing Heathcroft Stud Equestrian Centre, which operates as a commercial livery and stud farm. The site is within walking distance of a range of shops, services and facilities. Croft is served by a wide range of facilities including Croft Primary School (situated within 45m of the site), and St Lewis Catholic Primary School, a local centre, and community facilities including a village hall and youth centre.
- 2.2 The site is well served by public transport. Bus stops are located on, Mustard Lane and Lord Street, with the nearest stop situated within 85m of the site. These stops are served by an hourly service between central Warrington and Leigh, which stops at Culcheth where there are connections to Birchwood
- 2.3 The site is allocated as follows in the draft Local Plan:

Site name	Croft
Allocation reference number	OS1
Allocation Area	3.51ha
Type of Development	Housing
Proposed Development	Minimum of 75 homes

- 2.4 Bellway has an agreement with the existing landowners to bring forward the site allocation for residential development. There are therefore no legal or ownership constraints to the delivery of housing on the site.

3.0 Evidence Base

- 3.1 Bellway has undertaken a number of environmental and technical studies during the preparation of the Local Plan, which have informed their own masterplanning and delivery schedule. This material has, where of direct relevance to the Local Plan's site selection process, been shared with the Council. However, the Council has relied upon its own evidence base to inform its decisions.

4.0 Conclusions on the Green Belt

Exceptional circumstances

- 4.1 The WUPSVLP (SP1) includes a demonstration of the exceptional circumstances for each area, including justifying the release of Green Belt land around the outlying settlements, including Croft. This allocation site will increase housing choice, provide affordable housing and support the vitality and viability of local services in Croft. The largely 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 Bellway and the Council agree that exceptional circumstances exist to alter the borough's green belt boundaries to remove this site from the green belt.

Five purposes of the Green Belt

- 4.4 As evidenced within the Council's Green Belt Assessment (Green Belt Assessment Collated Report – 2021) (GB4), the site makes a moderate contribution to two purposes, a weak contribution to one, and no contribution to two. In line with the methodology, the assessment concludes that the site makes a weak overall contribution to the green belt. The Council's Green Belt Site Selection – Implications for Green Belt Release - August 2021 Report (GB3) also concludes that the site currently makes a weak contribution to the Green Belt purposes.
- 4.5 Bellway agrees with the conclusions of the Council's Green Belt assessments.

5.0 Areas the Council and Bellway are in Agreement

- 5.1 The following Site Policy OS1 Principles are of agreement between Bellway and the Council:
- a The site is available, deliverable and achievable within the plan period.
 - b The site can achieve a minimum of 75 homes.

- c An average minimum density of 30dph can be achieved on the site.
- d A minimum of 30% affordable housing can be provided on site in line with Policy DEV2.
- e The site can achieve the policy requirements minimum level of high-quality open space in accordance with Policy DC5.
- f A package of transport improvements as required to ensure appropriate access arrangements for the site, the provision of cycling and walking routes within the site, which connect into the wider footway network, and other necessary network improvements identified within an appropriate Transport Assessment.
- g Bellway will work collaboratively with the Council to ensure a high-quality residential scheme is brought forward at Land at Deacons Close, Croft (Policy OS1).
- h The site makes an overall weak contribution to the five purposes of the Green Belt.
- i There are no technical or environmental constraints that will preclude the delivery of housing on this site.
- j There are no ownership constraints to the delivery of housing on this site in compliance with the emerging policy.
- k The site represents a fully deliverable site, capable of being delivered early in the plan period to help meet the borough's housing and affordable housing need.

5.2 The Council's Local Plan Viability Assessment (V2) has demonstrated that the site is viable, taking into account the infrastructure and policy requirements set out in the allocation policy.

6.0 Modifications proposed by WBC

6.1 The Council has proposed selected modifications to Policy OS1 which are set out within Hearing Statement Matter 7a. The extent to which these are agreed is outlined below.

6.2 **Compensatory Green Belt improvements** – Within Matter 7a, paragraph 14.1, WBC has proposed the following wording to be included within clause 13 of Policy OS1:

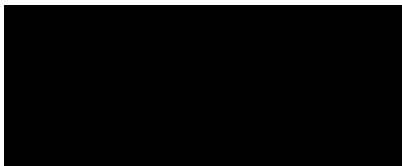
6.3 *A scheme of compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of land remaining in the Green Belt will be required. **In the first instance, the improvements should be made in the immediate vicinity of the site and delivered by the developer. The Council will consider improvements 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.*

- 6.4 The principle of providing green belt compensatory measures is agreed between Bellway and WBC. However, Bellway have made comments on the precise wording of the policy within their response to Matter 7a (Matter Statement M7a. 04).
- 6.5 In relation to **Holcroft Moss** and 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.
- 6.6 Therefore, within Matter 7a, paragraph 14.2, the Council is proposing a modification to the Plan, and specifically a modification to Part 18 of Policy OS1, 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.
- 6.7 *Bellway* note the WBC intention to implement this proposed change and reserve the right to comment further once the proposed modification wording is set out.
- 6.8 The Council has made Bellway aware that the cost of any mitigation works will be of an order within the contingency included in the Local Plan Viability Assessment and therefore will not impact on the viability of the site.

7.0 Signatories to Statement of Common Ground

Signed:

For Warrington Borough Council

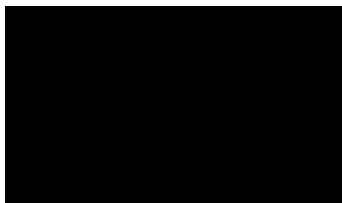


Name: Steve Park

Position: Director of Growth

Date: 15/08/2022

On behalf of Bellway Homes (Manchester)



Name: Kirstie Oakey

Position: Associate Director

Date: 11/08/2022
