

Statement of Common Ground [SoCG] between: Warrington Borough Council and Story Homes

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this SoCG is to set out the latest position that has been reached between Story Homes and Warrington Borough Council [the Council] to assist in the Examination of the Warrington Local Plan 2021-2038.
- 1.2 The content of this SoCG relates to the 'land Warrington Road, Culcheth', proposed for allocation in Site Policy OS2, as indicated on the proposed Policies Map. It covers the areas of agreement between the parties.

2.0 Site allocation information

- 2.1 The proposed allocation site is located to the east of the settlement of Culcheth, bounded by Warrington Road (A574) and Holcroft Lane. The site is within walking distance of a range of shops, services and facilities. Culcheth is served by a wide range of facilities including Culcheth Community Primary School, and Culcheth High School which are located on the opposite side of Warrington Road. These schools are supported by associated community facilities including a leisure centre, children's dentist and a day nursery. The local centre of Culcheth provides a wide range of additional facilities including a Sainsbury's foodstore, numerous other local shops, a post office, GP surgery, pharmacy, several restaurants and public houses.
- 2.2 The site is well served by public transport. Bus stops are located on Warrington Road along the northern boundary with several other bus stops within walking distance. These stops are served by 30-minute services to central Warrington, along with services to other destinations including Leigh and Birchwood.
- 2.3 The site is allocated as follows in the draft Local Plan:

Site name	Culcheth
Allocation reference number	OS2
Allocation Area	8.8 hectares
Type of Development	Housing
Proposed Development	Minimum of 200 homes

- 2.4 The site allocation falls within two ownerships. The land promoted by Story (Approximately 8.4ha) is within single ownership and Story has an agreement with the landowner to bring forward the site for residential development. There are therefore no legal or ownership constraints to the delivery of housing on the site. The remaining 0.4ha of land is in separate private ownership and will be brought forward independently of the wider site allocation.

3.0 Evidence Base

- 3.1 Story Homes has undertaken a number of environmental and technical studies during the preparation of the Local Plan, which has informed their own master planning 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 Culcheth. This allocation site will increase housing choice, provide affordable housing and support the vitality and viability of local services in Culcheth. 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 Story 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 Story agree with the conclusions of the Council's Green Belt assessments.

5.0 Areas Warrington Borough Council and Story Homes are in Agreement

- 5.1 The following Site Policy OS2 Principles are of agreement between Story Homes and Warrington Borough Council:
- a The Site is available, deliverable and achievable within the plan period.
 - b The site can achieve a minimum of 200 units.

- c A minimum of 30% affordable housing can be provided on site in line with Policy DEV2.
- d The site can achieve the policy requirements minimum level off high-quality open space in accordance with Policy DC5.
- e Transport Improvements as required to ensure appropriate access arrangements for the site, the provision of cycling and walking routes within the site and connections to the wider existing footway network to the north and west.
- f A site wide surface water strategy incorporating Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems and flood alleviation measures in line with the principles of the emerging Local Plan Policies.
- g Both parties will work collaboratively to bring forward a high-quality scheme at land off Warrington Road, Culcheth (Policy OS2).
- h The site represents a fully deliverable site, capable of being delivered in line with the Council's housing trajectory to help meet the borough's housing and affordable housing need.
- i The Council's Local Plan Viability Assessment (V2) has demonstrated that the site is in principle viable, taking into account the infrastructure and policy requirements set out in the allocation policy. However, Story have made comments on the lack of specific breakdown on the IDP projects to which the contributions will go towards as set out in the Matters Statement 11.

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 by 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 OS2:

*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.*

6.3 The principle of providing green belt compensatory measures is agreed between Story Homes and WBC. However, Story Homes have made comments on the nature of this requirement within their response to Matter 7b (Matter Statement M7b. 04).

6.4 **Holcroft Moss** – 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

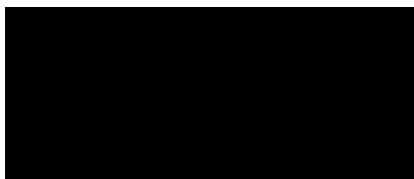
Mosses Special Area of Conservation, the Council is currently working with Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) on potential mitigation measures for the moss.

- 6.5 Therefore, within Matter 7b, paragraph 14.2, the Council is proposing a modification to the Plan, and specifically a modification to Part 19 of Policy OS2, 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.
- 6.6 Story Homes note Warrington Borough Council's intention to implement this proposed change and reserve the right to comment further once the proposed modification wording is set out.
- 6.7 The Council has made Story Homes 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

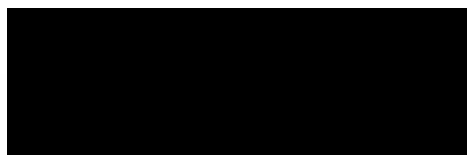


Name: Steve Park

Position: Director of Growth

Date: 15 August 2022

Signed:



On behalf of Story Homes

Name: Andy Pepper

Position: Head of Strategic Land and Planning (NW)

Date: 15 August 2022
