



# Warrington Local Plan Review

Land at Warrington Road, Culcheth

December 2016

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Appendix 1 - Site Location Plan, Story Homes

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 These representations have been submitted by Story Homes North West in response to Warrington Borough Council's (WBC) consultation on the Local Plan Review 'Scope and Contents Document' and 'Call for Sites' dated October 2016. These representations relate specifically to land which Story Homes have an interest in at Warrington Road, Culcheth ('the Site'), as shown edged red on the accompanying Site Location Plan at Appendix A.
- 1.2 The purpose of this document is to further demonstrate the suitability, availability and deliverability of the Site as an appropriate location for the allocation of new homes in the Warrington Local Plan Review. In addition to a willing landowner, the Site is represented by a high quality house builder committed to the delivery of new homes at the earliest opportunity upon realignment of Green Belt policy.
- 1.3 In addition to these representations, Story Homes are currently undertaking the various technical assessments of the Site to form a Site Vision Document which will be submitted to the Council in due course.

### The Story Difference

- 1.4 Story Homes is a privately owned house builder. Founded by Fred Story in 1987, it has a long and successful reputation of building quality and high specification homes across the North West. The family owned business has grown in size and status over the years but remains grounded, built on its original ethos of 'doing the right thing' and creating a brand synonymous with quality.
- 1.5 In 2017 it plans to build 1,100 new homes across the North of England. For nearly 30 years Story Homes has been the name most often associated with aspirational houses for sale throughout Cumbria, the North East and Lancashire. A passion for quality and excellence has seen Story Homes become a multi-award winning UK property developer; with modern and attractive homes instantly inspiring buyers.
- 1.6 A 97% approval rating has led to Story Homes being awarded a top '5 Star' rating in the house building industry's annual customer satisfaction survey. Story Homes'

success is underpinned by a determination to understand the needs of communities where they build and a goal to deliver design quality and high quality building specifications that enhance locations.

- 1.7 Story Homes' presence in the North West is growing significantly and has recently been shortlisted for two Lancashire Business Awards. The BIBA's (Be Inspired Business Awards) have shortlisted Story Homes in the "Construction Business of the Year" and "Most Inspiring Business of the Year" categories.
- 1.8 The Story Difference – comprising a commitment to design quality, place-making and customer experience – will be instrumental in delivering an exemplary new community which Warrington can be proud of.

### Contextual Background

- 1.9 The Development Plan for WBC comprises the Warrington Local Plan Core Strategy ('Core Strategy') which was adopted in July 2014. Following a High Court Challenge lodged by Satnam Millennium Limited to the adoption of parts of the Core Strategy the Judge ruled in favour of the claimant on three of the nine issues resulting in the removal of the following elements of the housing policies from the Plan:
- 1.10 The housing target of 10,500 new homes (equating to 500 per year) between 2006 and 2027;
- 1.11 References to 1,100 new homes at the Omega Strategic Proposal.
- 1.12 In April 2015 the WBC Executive Board approved a revised Local Development Scheme (LDS) which set out a work programme to re-instate the Local Plan housing target - which had been quashed by the February High Court judgement - through a Primary Plan Alteration and introduce a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). A Primary Plan Alteration (or Local Plan Review) was to be progressed by the Council as a matter of urgency in order to establish a new housing target and to provide guidance on the location of new homes.
- 1.13 In a report to the Executive Board in October 2015, Council Officers acknowledged that through its evidence base work "it is becoming increasingly apparent that the

Council is not currently able to identify sufficient land to meet its likely housing need in accordance with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This means that the Council will need to undertake a more fundamental review of the Plan than currently envisaged in the LDS with further work required to enable the Council to assess the options for and implications of meeting its housing need in full.”

- 1.14 In January 2016 the Council published its Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) which identified a number of potential development Sites within the Borough although discounted Sites situated in the Green Belt due to policy constraints.
- 1.15 The Council jointly commissioned GL Hearn to undertake a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), in partnership with Halton and St Helens Councils who together with Warrington form the Mid-Mersey Housing Market Area (HMA). This confirmed the ‘Objectively Assessed Need’ for the HMA equated to 1,756 homes per annum of which 839 homes per annum should be apportioned to Warrington. This figure was updated in October 2016 in a SHMA Addendum which suggested a revised housing need in Warrington of 984 dwellings per annum.
- 1.16 The Council has now published its Local Plan Review Scope and Contents document for consultation until 5 December 2016 together with its supporting evidence base including a Green Belt Assessment. In it the Council identifies a minimum housing target of around 1,000 dwellings per annum across the Plan period with sufficient Green Belt land release to accommodate approximately 5,000 new homes.

### **Purpose of the Representations**

- 1.17 The key purpose of this representation is to promote land at Warrington Road, Culcheth for Green Belt release and secure its designation through the Local Plan Review for housing. Responses are also provided to the overarching questions posed by the Council in respect of the Scope and Contents Document.

## Structure of the Representations

1.18 The structure of this representation is separated into two distinct parts:

Part 1 - Overarching representations to the Scope and Contents Document questions; and

Part 2 - Site specific representations presenting the justification for the release of the Site from the Green Belt and its allocation for housing in the Local Plan Review.

## Collaborative Working

1.19 Story Homes will seek to work collaboratively with WMBC to deliver a 'sound' Local Plan Review which meets the identified housing needs in the Borough. We would welcome future meetings with WMBC Policy Officers and the local community to discuss the development opportunities at the Site.

## 2. Representations to the Local Plan Review

### Question 1 - Do you have any comments to make about the Council's evidence base?

2.1 A comprehensive review of the Local Plan Review 'Scope and Contents Document' and WBC's supporting evidence base has been undertaken. Story Homes have specific comments on the following evidence base documents which should be taken into account by the Council in the preparation of the Draft Local Plan:

- Mid-Mersey Strategic Housing Market Assessment Update (October 2016)
- Strategic Housing Land Assessment (October 2016);
- Urban Capacity Statement 2016 (October 2016); and
- Warrington Borough Green Belt Assessment (October 2016)

Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2016/ SHMA Update (October 2016)

2.2 Story Homes note the findings of the SHMA and SHMA Update and note the Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) figure of 984 dwellings per annum identified. It is acknowledged that a more comprehensive update of the SHMA will be required in due course to reflect more recent population and household projections which have been released following publication of the 2016 SHMA.

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) (January 2016)

2.3 The SHLAA seeks to establish realistic assumptions about the availability, suitability and the likely economic viability of land to meet the identified need for housing over the plan period. Story Homes notes that there are a very limited number of sites within the Culcheth Settlement boundary which can realistically deliver housing over the Plan period. Given that all suitable, available and achievable sites within the settlement boundary have been identified in the SHLAA the only option is to release sustainable located Green Belt sites, an approach which accords with paragraph 84 of the NPPF that states:

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*“When drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries local planning authorities should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development.”*

#### Urban Capacity Study (October 2016)

- 2.4 The Urban Capacity Study identifies an urban capacity within the Borough of 15,226 units including SHLAA sites, Masterplanned Areas and windfall sites. Whilst it is acknowledged that the study provides an initial indication of urban capacity which will be supplemented with a more detailed assessment ahead of the Preferred Development Option Stage, Story Homes have a number of concerns about some of the assumptions made. These are detailed in our response to question 5.
- 2.5 In the light of the above, the Council may need to release further Green Belt land in order to meet its housing requirement over the Plan period. In addition, WBC should be looking to allocate areas of Safeguarded land to ensure that Green Belt boundaries are capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period, as set out at paragraph 85 of the NPPF. Further assessment of the evidence will be undertaken at the Preferred Development Option Stage.

#### Warrington Green Belt Assessment (October 2016)

- 2.6 Overall, Story Homes are very supportive of the release of sustainably located Green Belt sites in order to meet identified development needs and welcome the Council's bold approach to accommodating its housing need. We fully agree that exceptional circumstances exist that warrant amending the existing tightly drawn Green Belt.

#### General Comments on the Evidence Base

- 2.7 It is important that the evidence base prepared to inform the Local Plan Review takes account of the emerging Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) and Liverpool City Region Spatial Framework (LCRSF) and supporting evidence base to identify opportunities for cross-boundary working in accordance with the Duty to Co-operate set out in the NPPF.
- 2.8 Furthermore, the proposals to be identified in the Government's forthcoming Housing White Paper and updated NPPF should also be taken into consideration.



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## **Question 2. Do you consider the assessment of Housing Needs to be appropriate?**

2.9 At this stage Story Homes note WBC's assessment of housing need and note the identified OAN of 984 as set out in the SHMA Addendum. The OAN only provides the starting point for the housing requirement and other considerations are necessary which may lift the amount of housing required to be delivered by the Plan.

## **Question 4 – Do you consider the alignment of Housing Needs and Job's Growth to be appropriate?**

2.10 The Mid-Mersey SHMA and SHMA Addendum seeks to align economic and housing needs and is supported by Story Homes. This approach is considered consistent with paragraph 158 of the NPPF and PPG (ID 2a-018). Overall, it is considered that the conclusions drawn are appropriate and acknowledge that the OAN only provides the starting point for the housing requirement and other considerations are necessary which may lift or reduce the amount of housing required to be delivered by the Plan.

## **Question 5. Do you consider the assessment of Land Supply to be appropriate?**

2.11 A detailed assessment of the sites included within the SHLAA and Urban Capacity Study has not been undertaken at this stage and therefore it is not possible to comment on the deliverability of the individual sites identified. However, Story Homes has a number of concerns which should be taken into account by the Council when preparing the Preferred Options Consultation document which include:

- Windfall allowances;
- Lapse Rates; and
- Buffer to cover non-delivery

2.12 These matters are addressed in turn below.

## Windfall allowance

- 2.13 Paragraph 48 of the NPPF advises that LPA's may make an allowance for windfall sites in the five-year supply provided that compelling evidence exists demonstrating that "such sites have consistently become available in the local area and will continue to provide a reliable source of supply". Whilst LPAs may include historic windfall delivery rates in allowances it must also have regard to expected future trends to ensure realistic estimates, something which is absent from both the SHLAA and Urban Capacity Study.
- 2.14 It is noted that the Council is reliant upon a 64dpa windfall allowance and does not appear to have applied any discount to extant planning permissions. This figure appears to be based solely upon historic completions from this source between 2009/10 and 2014/15. This indicates an average of 64 dwellings from windfalls each year. However the delivery from windfalls in 2013/14 and 2014/15 delivered higher levels of windfall dwellings (83 and 139 respectively) which has the effect of pushing up the overall average across the period. The reason for this increase may be partially as a result of the policy vacuum created when the Core Strategy's housing policies were quashed. Removing these two years has the effect of reducing the windfall average to 41dpa.
- 2.15 Story Homes also have concerns that the windfall allowance has been applied from year 1. This is likely to create an element of double counting as many of the windfall sites which will deliver in years 1 to 3 will already need to benefit from planning permission to be completed in this period. We therefore recommend that a discount is applied to the first few years and further consideration is given to the impact of the final two monitoring years upon average windfall delivery.
- 2.16 There is no published guidance on how a windfall allowance should be derived and any approach is therefore a matter of local discretion. However, it is clear that the assessment should be made in the context of a new plan and the evidence base which informs it. Story Homes therefore recommend that further scrutiny be undertaken of the sources of windfall supply and consideration given to their likely delivery over the plan period.

### Discount applied to extant planning permissions

- 2.17 From our initial review of the SHLAA and Urban Capacity Study there is no mention of whether a lapse rate has been applied to sites with extant planning permission thereby acknowledging that not all of the sites will come forward. In line with Planning Appeals ref. APP/X2410/A/13/2196928 ‘Land off Mountsorrel Lane, Rothley, Leicestershire’ and APP/H1840/A/12/2171339 ‘Land between Station Road and Dudley Road, Honeybourne, Worcestershire’ consideration should be given to the application of a standard 10% lapse rate across the board. Both inspectors considered that a 10% reduction was justified overall and reasonable having regard to lapses, delays and reduced delivery.

### Buffer to cover non-delivery

- 2.18 As recommended in the Local Plan Expert Group (LPEG) Report to the Communities Secretary and to the Minister of Housing and Planning (March 2016) Story Homes consider that the plan contain a buffer of sites to insure against any none or under-delivery from Local Plan allocations or windfall sites. The reasons for the inclusion of such a buffer are two-fold. Firstly, the NPPF at paragraph 182 is clear that plans should be positively prepared, aspirational and significantly boost housing supply. In this regard the housing requirements set within the plan should be viewed as a minimum requirement, not a ceiling, an interpretation which is consistent with numerous inspectors’ decisions at Local Plan examination. Therefore if the Plan is to achieve its housing requirement as a minimum, it stands to reason that additional sites are required to enable the Plan requirements to be surpassed. Secondly, due to a variety of reasons, some sites will either underperform or fail to deliver during the Plan period. A buffer of sites will therefore provide greater opportunities for the plan to deliver its housing requirement and allow for additional flexibility.

## Question 6. Do you consider that Green Belt land will need to be released to deliver the identified growth?

2.19 The evidence presented by WBC clearly demonstrates that there is insufficient land to meet its housing and employment needs within the urban area. Paragraph 83 of the NPPF states that (SH emphasis in bold):

*“Local planning authorities with Green Belts in their area should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans which set the framework for Green Belt and settlement policy. Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be **altered in exceptional circumstances**, through the **preparation or review of the Local Plan**. At that time, authorities should consider Green Belt boundaries having regard to their **intended permanence in the long term**, so that they are capable of **enduring beyond the plan period**.”*

2.20 The need to boost significantly the supply is a key ambition of the NPPF. The Local Plan Review represents a key opportunity to meet the OAN, address the housing delivery shortfall and tackle growing affordability issues, especially in rural areas. It is considered that exceptional circumstances exist to release Green Belt land for the following reasons:

- The SHLAA and Urban Capacity Study has demonstrated that the OAN for housing cannot be met within the existing built-up area;
- Northern Powerhouse agenda and bold vision contained in the Local Plan Review is driving growth;
- The Green Belt is tightly drawn around settlements in some locations which has led to high demand which can't be met and affordability issues;
- Lack of opportunities to provide the sites the market wants, especially in areas such as Culcheth;
- Significant affordability issues in certain areas of the Borough, including Culcheth; and
- Releasing sustainably located strategic sites, such as Land East of Warrington Road, offers opportunities to provide sustainable patterns of development at a scale, which

can be linked to existing and/or potential transport networks; respond to market demand and; have transformational potential.

2.21 This Local Plan Review therefore represents an excellent opportunity to review the Green Belt boundary to meet its development needs beyond the Plan period. Story Homes strongly supports the release of sustainably located Green Belt sites especially in settlements where growth has been stifled by tightly drawn Green Belt boundaries such as Culcheth.

### Question 7. Do you consider the three identified Strategic matters being the appropriate initial focus of the Local Plan review?

2.22 Whilst the three strategic matters are considered to be broadly appropriate at this stage other matters should also be focussed upon by the Council. These include:

- The need for rural areas to grow; and
- The identification of a defined Settlement Hierarchy

#### The Need for Rural Areas to Grow

2.23 Paragraph 55 of the NPPF seeks to promote sustainable development in rural areas. It states (SH emphasis in bold):

*“To promote sustainable development in rural areas, **housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities** for example, where there are groups of smaller settlements, **development in one village may support services in a village nearby**. Local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside.”*

2.24 Paragraph 001 (Reference ID: 50-001-20160519) recognises that there are particular issues facing rural areas in terms of housing supply and affordability. It acknowledges that housing has a role in supporting the broader sustainability of villages and smaller settlements. The guidance states (SH emphasis in bold):

*“A thriving rural community in a living, working countryside depends, in part, on retaining local services and community facilities such as schools, local shops, cultural venues, public houses and places of worship. **Rural housing is essential to ensure viable use of these local facilities.**”*

2.25 The guidance continues (SH emphasis in bold):

*“Assessing housing need and allocating sites should be considered at a strategic level and through the Local Plan and/or neighbourhood plan process. However, **all settlements can play a role in delivering sustainable development in rural areas – and so blanket policies restricting housing development in some settlements and preventing other settlements from expanding should be avoided unless their use can be supported by robust evidence.**”*

2.26 The need for housing in sustainable rural locations such as Culcheth should therefore be fully explored in the Local Plan Review to ensure that growth is balanced and responds to local needs across the Borough.

#### Settlement hierarchy

2.27 Whilst not being explicit about requiring planning authorities to develop a settlement hierarchy to distribute future growth, Government planning guidance details a number of objectives which should be achieved through the development of planning policy which effectively require this to happen (i.e. delivering Sustainable Patterns of Development – focusing development in locations which offer a range of community facilities, services, jobs, and infrastructure).

2.28 Story Homes would support the identification of a settlement hierarchy in policy terms which directs development to sustainable locations throughout the Borough including rural areas (as above). Culcheth is a sustainable settlement which has historically been constrained by tightly drawn Green Belt boundaries which have restricted growth and created a significant housing affordability problem. The village is well served by a range of services, facilities and amenities, and is well connected in terms of public transport and the strategic highway network. The village could sustainably accommodate additional housing growth and Story Homes consider that it should be regarded as a Tier 2 settlement on account of its size and existing services.

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**Question 8. Do you agree that further land will need to be removed from the Green Belt and Safeguarded for future development needs beyond the Plan period?**

2.29 Paragraph 85 of the NPPF is clear that Local Planning Authorities where necessary should “identify in their plans areas of ‘safeguarded land’ between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the Plan period” which in this instance is 2027. This coupled with the NPPF’s aim to ensure that Local Plans are drafted to cover an appropriate time scale “preferably a 15-year time horizon” would suggest that Green Belt boundaries should be capable of enduring until at least 2042. The NPPF also seeks to ensure that Local Plans have a degree of flexibility such that they are able to respond to ‘rapid change’, as required by the presumption in favour of sustainable development. The identification of safeguarded land is a robust approach which has been accepted by a range of Inspectors presiding over Local Plan Examinations and is strongly supported by Story Homes. In light of the above, WBC must identify safeguarded land within the Local Plan.

2.30 There are two key benefits of safeguarded land:

- 1) The extra land assists with deliverability and enables the full housing target to be delivered over the Plan period. Should any residual land remain at the end of the Plan period then it is reasonable to assume that this land will be available for development in the next plan period; and
- 2) If all allocated land is fully-developed during this plan period it could be argued that the overprovision against need in this plan period will reduce development requirements by an equivalent amount in the next plan period.

2.31 A policy mechanism is required to release safeguarded land, if required to ensure flexibility and delivery. For the purposes of calculating the amount of Safeguarded Land, the development requirements for each settlement should be calculated and an apportionment through a defined Settlement Hierarchy policy. The level of safeguarded land proposed should be proportionate to the sustainability and accessibility of the settlement.

- 2.32 A policy mechanism could then be developed which releases safeguarded land for development when, for example, the Council is unable to demonstrate a deliverable 5-year housing land supply. Specific details of the policy would need to be developed through the consultation process. The scope is currently silent on this issue.

#### Conclusion

- 2.33 Story Homes therefore strongly support the need to remove further land from the Green Belt and safeguard it for future use. It is recommended that the Council carefully consider the amount of land required to ensure that Green Belt boundaries will endure past 2027 in order to ensure certainty and clarity to both the housebuilding industry and local community.

#### **Question 13: Do you consider the proposed 20 year Local Plan period to be appropriate?**

- 2.34 As highlighted in our response to question 8, the NPPF at paragraph 157 seeks to ensure Local Plans allow for at least a 15-year time horizon. As such, Story Homes considers that the proposed 20 year Plan period to be generally appropriate subject to monitoring policies being built into the Local Plan which ensure that the Council continues to maintain a deliverable 5 year housing land supply. It is currently unclear what the start date of the Local Plan will be and however any shortfall in housing delivery within the 5 years will be accommodated (i.e. Sedgefield approach). Story Homes seeks that sites allocated within the Local Plan are deliverable in the first five years in order to boost the supply of housing.



## 3. The Site

### Location and Ownership

- 3.1 Land east of Warrington Road extends to approximately 20 acres and is located to the east of Culcheth directly opposite Culcheth High School and Culcheth Primary School. Culcheth is recognised as being one of the Borough’s largest settlements outside of Warrington town. The large village is also recognised as a Neighbourhood Centre which reflects the high level of services and facilities the village benefits from.
- 3.2 The allocation of new Sites for development in Culcheth will assist the Council in meeting housing needs and help safeguard the vitality and vibrancy of existing services in the settlement.
- 3.3 The Site is within a single ownership and is represented by a property agent. Story Homes have an agreement with the landowner to bring the Site forward for residential development (subject to its release from the Green Belt). There are no legal or ownership constraints to its delivery.
- 3.4 The Site is greenfield and is currently within agricultural use. It is bordered to the north by existing housing and Holcroft Lane, to the west by Warrington Road (A574), to the south by Shaw Street Recreation Ground and to the east by an existing hedge line with intermittent trees. The proposal presents the opportunity to create a new landscaped eastern edge to the Site to prevent encroachment into the countryside in the long term.

### Accessibility

- 3.5 Land East of Warrington Road is situated in a highly sustainable location within 650m walking distance of Culcheth Village Centre. Many local amenities are situated within a short walk of the Site and would provide day to day services and facilities for new residents of the Site.

### **Education**

- 3.6 Culcheth High School and Culcheth Primary School are both located directly opposite the Site which provides a major benefit to encouraging new residents to walk to both schools. Consequently this reduces the pressure on parents driving their child to school and increasing pressure on parking or pick up/drop off points.
- 3.7 A footway currently exists on the western side of Warrington Road and the development has the potential to create an additional footpath on the eastern side of the road. The development could provide a signal controlled pedestrian crossing point across the carriageway to enable safe crossing for new residents.

### **Medical**

- 3.8 The nearest medical facilities are located around 800 metres from the Site at Culcheth Medical Centre located to the west of the Site. This can be reached by using the existing footways along Warrington Road and Common Lane. The nearest dental surgery is located approximately 700m of the Site at Bhawani's Dental Care on Common Lane to the west of the Site.
- 3.9 Leigh and Warrington Hospitals are both within a short bus journey of the Site.

### **Retail**

- 3.10 There are local retail facilities within the vicinity of the Site. The closest is a retail unit located at the BP Service Station on Warrington Road, approximately a 225m walk of the Site. A range of local amenities are located within the centre of Culcheth such as the following:
- Sainsbury's Superstore
  - Library
  - Post Office
  - Newsagents
  - Various Restaurants
  - Various hairdressers/barbers
  - Bakery

- Butchers
- Various public houses
- Various community buildings
- Pharmacy

### Recreation

3.11 There are a number of local recreation facilities within walking distance of the Site. Shaw Street Recreation Ground is located directly south of the Site with Culcheth Sports Club approximately 300m walk.

### Accessibility by Bus

3.12 The nearest bus stop to the Site is located directly opposite the Site on Warrington Road. The southbound bus stop has a formal waiting area with timetable information while the northbound bus stop has a formal waiting area.

3.13 Table 1, below, summarises the bus services that operate in the vicinity of the Site together with their frequencies per hour.

Service	Route	Daytime	Evening	Sat	Sun
19	Warrington-Leigh via Winwick, Croft, Culcheth	2	2	1	1
28	Warrington-Leigh via Padgate, Birchwood, Culcheth	1	1	1	0

**Table 1 – Summary of Bus Services Operating Past The Site (Per Hour)**

3.14 The table shows that up to 3 buses per hour travel past to the Site during weekdays and Saturdays. These provide direct access to a number of destinations between Leigh and Warrington. Services to Warrington provide access to further local and regional services as well as Birchwood Railway Station network to improve the accessibility of the Site.

### **Accessibility by Cycle**

- 3.15 In order to assess the accessibility of the Site by cycle, it is necessary to understand what destinations are located within 8km. The 8km cycling distance refers to a recommendation by Cycling England in the document ‘Integrating Cycling into Development Proposals’ (2009).
- 3.16 An 8km catchment extends as far as Leigh in the north, Newton-le-Willows to the west, Warrington to the south and Irlam to the east.

### **Accessibility by Rail**

- 3.17 The nearest train station is Birchwood, located approximately 4.7km from the centre of the Site. The 28A bus serves Birchwood Station.
- 3.18 The station provides regular services to destinations such as Liverpool, Manchester and Warrington. The services to all three destinations run twice an hour. Additionally, there are services to areas such as Leeds and York.
- 3.19 Warrington Road is considered to be accessible by sustainable modes of transport, and there are a number of public transport opportunities within an acceptable walking distance of the Site. The surrounding area benefits from pedestrian links to key services and facilities within desirable walking distances.
- 3.20 Due to the short walking distances to key services and facilities, this reduces the pressure on new residents using the private car and is in line with the core principles of the NPPF to locate new housing in locations that make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling. Story Homes consider the Site as being the most sustainable location for new residential development in Culcheth.

## 4. Green Belt Assessment

4.1 The Site is currently located within the Warrington Green Belt. However, as acknowledged by WBC, there are clear “exceptional circumstances” to release land from the Green Belt. The Council published a Green Belt assessment (undertaken by Arup) in October 2016 which assessed the Site as performing a ‘weak’ contribution to the 5 purposes of the Green Belt.

4.2 For the reasons set out below, Story Homes agree that the Site should be considered a weak contribution to the Green Belt and that the Site should be considered as a residential allocation.

### **To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas:**

Culcheth is not a large scale settlement, and its future growth is prevented by the Green Belt. Development adjoining Culcheth would ensure continued vitality and vibrancy of its services and facilities. The Site performs **no contribution** to this purpose as it is not adjacent to the Warrington urban area and therefore does not contribute to this purpose.

### **To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another:**

The development of the Site would not lead to the coalescence of two towns. The Site does not perform an essential gap between the Warrington urban area, Culcheth and Leigh. The development would not extend further than the existing residential dwellings to the north along Holcroft Lane and the Site would result in a rounding off of the settlement to the east.

Story Homes consider that the Site makes **no contribution** to preventing towns from merging.

### **To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment:**

The Site is well contained to the north and west by the durable boundaries of Holcroft Lane and Warrington Road (A574). The existing Shaw Street recreation ground and

vegetation provides a durable and strong boundary to the south. To the east, the Site boundary consists of a hedge line with intermittent trees.

It is considered that the Site is enclosed to the north, west and south by strong durable boundaries which would prevent encroachment into the countryside. The eastern boundary will be enhanced through the development to provide a strong green boundary with additional hedgerow and tree planting preventing encroachment into the countryside in the future.

Story Homes consider that the Site performs a **moderate contribution** to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

**To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns:**

Culcheth is not noted as a settlement of any historical significance. There are no designated historical assets nearby which would be impacted by the Sites development for housing. It is considered therefore that the Green Belt in this location does not fulfil this role.

Story Homes consider that the Site performs **no contribution** to preserving the setting and special character of historic towns.

**To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict land:**

A key purpose of the Green Belt is to assist urban regeneration. However, as set out above, the supply of brownfield land is now insufficient to meet Warrington's housing needs. The regeneration of inner urban areas will not be enough to support the Borough's economic growth. Other sources of land, including the use of Green Belt land to expand sustainable settlements such as Culcheth, is now urgent if Warrington is to achieve its aspirations for growth.

There is a lack of available brownfield opportunities within Culcheth therefore Green Belt release is required to protect the economic vibrancy of the village.

## Culcheth

- 4.3 Culcheth is considered within the Warrington Core Strategy as one of the most sustainable settlements outside of Warrington Town. The village has seen limited growth for a considerable period of time due to the existing Green Belt constraints, therefore contributing to the affordability issues within the village. The emerging Local Plan provides the opportunity to deliver growth to the village to enhance the vitality and viability of the existing services and to provide both affordable and market housing in an area of high demand.
- 4.4 The Arup Green Belt Assessment identified three Sites in Culcheth as providing a ‘weak’ contribution to the five purposes of the Green Belt. The remaining parcels identified through the assessment, were all identified as providing a ‘strong’ contribution to the Green Belt. Development of the land to the north of the settlement would result in the strategic gap between Culcheth and Glazebury narrowing. Land to the south of the settlement would extend beyond the disused railway line which acts as the defensible boundary to the south of the settlement boundary. The land to the west of the village has various access issues and is situated within close proximity to the Local Wildlife Site. The new updated route for HS2 also runs close to the settlement boundary of Culcheth to the south and west which may impact on the ability for land to come forward.
- 4.5 The most sustainable location to allocate new residential development is to the east of Culcheth given its highly sustainable location, easy access to the local highway network and lack of constraints preventing the Site coming forward for development.

## Conclusion

- 4.6 The release of the Site from the Green Belt is wholly justified and necessary. It represents a logical location for release which will have relatively limited harm to the general extent of the Warrington Green Belt, as confirmed by the Arup Green Belt assessment which classified the Site as providing a ‘weak’ contribution to the five purposes of the Green Belt.

- 4.7 Development of the Site provides the opportunity to deliver much needed housing on the most sustainable Site in the village alongside the delivery of a new defensible and permanent boundary to the east.



## 5. Technical Considerations and Opportunities

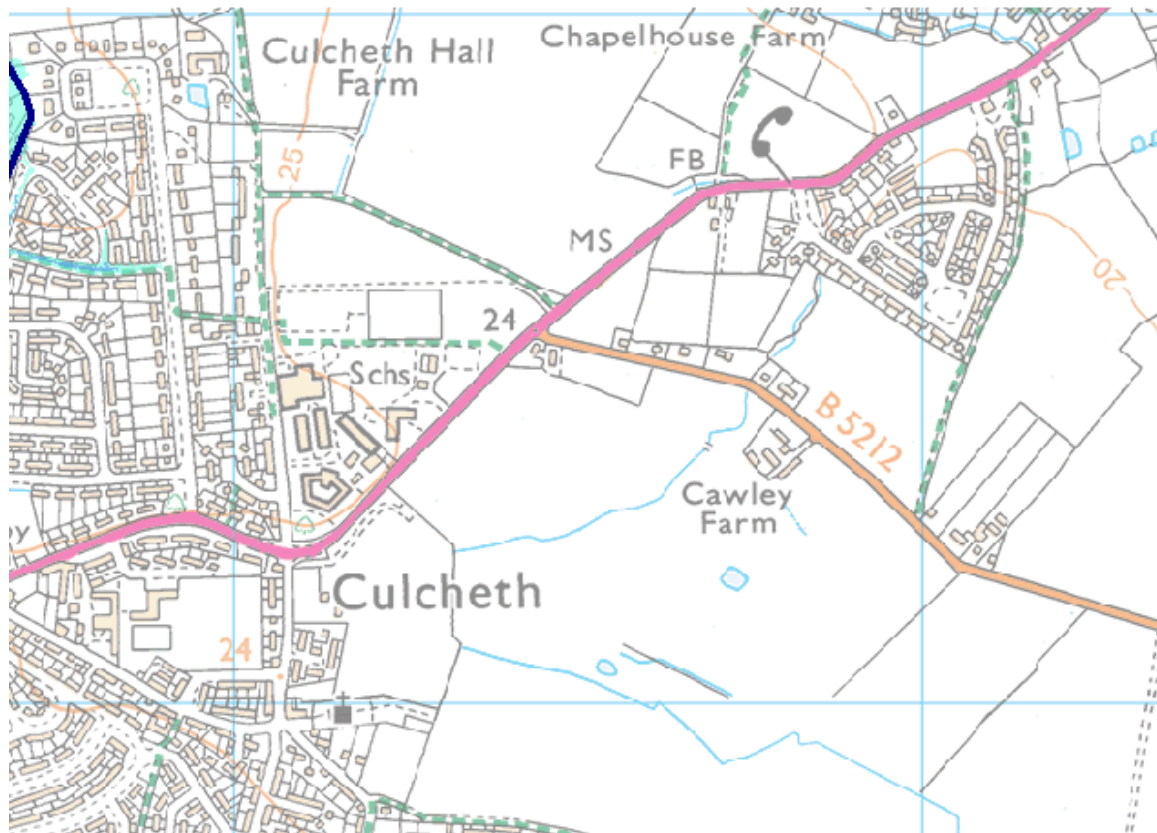
- 5.1 The Site is not subject or near to any restrictive environmental designations. There are no constraints other than Green Belt which present an obstacle to development.
- 5.2 Instead the Site has substantial opportunities to create an exemplar residential community. Strong place-making and high quality landscape features can be provided which will ensure that land east of Warrington Road is an attractive area of Culcheth. Sensitively designed to enhance local character and encourage sustainable lifestyles, the proposed development will deliver long-lasting character within both the natural and built environments.

### Key and unique opportunities include the ability to:

- Integrate with the existing community at Culcheth and connect to social and economic services and facilities which are in very close proximity to the Site.
- Connect directly into the existing highway network.
- Deliver high quality family homes in a sought-after location for families in Warrington.
- Enhance accessibility to adjacent and existing recreational features such as Shaw Street Recreation Ground as well as providing a fully landscape led approach which creates an unparalleled recreational and biodiversity resource for new and existing residents of Culcheth.
- Create a strong settlement edge to the east through new hedgerow and tree planting to round off the eastern side of the village.
- Provision of extensive areas of open space throughout the development which could be used by existing and future residents.

### Flooding and Drainage

- 5.3 The Environment Agency's (EA) Flood map for Planning indicates that the Site at Warrington Road, Culcheth lies within Flood Zone 1. This means that the risk of flooding from rivers and watercourses is low. Flood zone 1 is considered to be land assessed as having less than a 1 in 1,000 annual probability of river or sea flooding.



### Risk of Flooding from Surface Water

- 5.4 Surface water flooding occurs when rainwater does not drain away through the normal drainage systems or soak into the ground, but lies on or flows over the ground instead.
- 5.5 The Environment Agency's "Risk of Flooding from Surface Water" Map indicates that the risk of surface water flooding on the majority of the Site is very low. A small brook runs along the eastern boundary however this is considered to be of low risk to surface water flooding. Nevertheless, the eastern boundary could be developed as a green landscaped edge with housing located within the very low risk areas.



### Existing Drainage – Foul and Surface Water

- 5.6 Initial investigations have indicated that the Site drainage can be achieved via an appropriately designed Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS).
- 5.7 A suitable foul drainage strategy for the proposed development will be developed through formal consultation with United Utilities.

### On-Site Infrastructure

- 5.8 There is no infrastructure intersecting the Site that can preclude the delivery of housing at this location.

### Landscape and Visual Appraisal

- 5.9 The Site is not recognised as having a special landscape quality and is not the subject of any landscape designations. Residential development at the Site could be brought forward in a manner which was sympathetic to its local landscape and

townscape context, with any landscape and visual effects minimised and further offset by a strong landscape strategy to ensure that the development was considerate of its setting. The Site is well contained on to the north, west and south which would prevent encroachment into the countryside and the development would deliver a durable eastern edge to round off the settlement to the east.

## Ecology and Trees

- 5.10 The Site is not recognised for its biodiversity value. It is not subject to any ecological designations, such as SSSI's, SBI's or Local Nature Reserves, and there are no such designations nearby.
- 5.11 In due course, detailed surveys of the flora and fauna will be undertaken to ensure that there will be no harm to any high value species. There are opportunities to improve biodiversity at the Site through the replacement of intensively farmed agricultural land and the provision of enhanced habitats, including new green space.
- 5.12 Given that the Site is currently used for agriculture, it contains very few trees. All existing high value trees and hedgerows will be retained wherever possible alongside significant new tree planting, to enhance the character of the new development. Overall there will be an increase in the net biological value at the Site.

## Highways

- 5.13 Vehicular access to the Site can be achieved along the Warrington Road frontage. The Site has the potential to accommodate around 200 residential dwellings. As such, it is likely that only one formal vehicular access point would be required.
- 5.14 The main vehicular access located on Warrington Road can accommodate a formal priority junction arrangement with standard geometric parameters for residential developments with a 5.5 metre wide carriageway, footway on both sides of 2 metres wide and 10 metre radii.
- 5.15 Visibility can be achieved in both directions of at least 2.4 metres by 43 metres which ensures it complies with the guidance in Manual for Streets and Manual for Streets 2. The junction can also incorporate a formal right turning lane for traffic turning into the

Site from Warrington Road. All of this geometry can be accommodated within either the Site boundary or within the current limits of adopted highway.

- 5.16 It should also be acknowledged that the Site could be extended further east to accommodate a significantly larger Site than proposed, approximately 400-500 dwellings. This presents a potential opportunity to meet Culcheth's housing needs in one single village extension in a location which is close to the village centre and where there is significant highway capacity to meet this need. The land immediately east of the Site is within the control of our landowner and could come forward under one single ownership, ensuring its deliverability.
- 5.17 The Site is considered to be the most accessible and sustainable Site in the village and development would have limited impact on the local highway network. It is considered that competing sites in the village to the west suffer from various access and highway constraints while the east of the village is considered to have the least impact on the local highway network.

## 6. Conclusion

### Economic Social and Environmental Benefits

6.1 The Site represents an available, suitable and sustainable Site to be released from the Green Belt, having regard to the following benefits:

#### Economic Role

- The proposed development will secure a number of economic and fiscal benefits in terms of job creation and additional monies to the Local Authority. In addition to attracting and retaining economically active, skilled residents who will generate significant spending in the local area.
- Development of the Site will provide increased expenditure in the local economy which will support the continued vitality and viability of the settlement's existing services and facilities.

#### Social Role

- The Site has the potential to deliver a high-quality new residential environment delivering approximately 200 open market and affordable homes. These will make a valuable contribution towards meeting the full objectively assessed housing needs of Warrington.
- The Site provides the opportunity to deliver new housing, serving as a logical extension at a density of between 27dph- 30dph.
- Housing on the Site will be well-integrated with its surroundings, in particular existing housing to the north, schools to the west and accessibility to the Shaw Street Recreation Ground to the south.
- The Site occupies an inherently sustainable location for development of family homes with easy access to a range of services and facilities located within Culcheth.
- The Site has the potential to secure safe vehicular access from Warrington Road without having an unacceptable impact on the local highway network;

- The Site benefits from good access to local bus services, in turn providing access to the wider District, and further beyond via connections at Birchwood Railway Station.
- There is the opportunity to create integrated pedestrian and cycle linkages as part of the Site's development, encouraging alternative modes of transport to the private car and contributing towards a low-carbon economy.

### **Environmental Role**

- The Site has urban characteristics to its northern and western boundary and is well contained to the south by an existing vegetation buffer that together will form an enhanced and robust settlement edge. The eastern boundary presents an opportunity to create a new settlement edge to the east of the village.
- The proposed development will use local materials and vernacular styles in order to strengthen local character.
- The proposed development will be set within a strong landscape framework which will assist in absorbing the proposed development into the surrounding landscape character, in addition to providing significant ecological enhancements through the creation of new habitats.
- The Masterplan for the Site will take full account of local landscape and nature conservation interests.
- The proposed development will retain existing landscape features, including mature trees and hedgerows and these will be strengthened through the implementation of new soft landscaping at the edge of, and within the Site.

### **Conclusion**

- 6.2 The emerging Local Plan recognises that Warrington must provide new homes both to meet the needs of its population and to underpin economic growth. Warrington Borough Council acknowledges that this cannot be achieved on brownfield land alone. Green Belt releases are essential.

- 6.3 Culcheth is recognised as one of the most sustainable settlements in the Borough with a range of services and access to public transport to reach employment opportunities close by.
- 6.4 There is a clear and accepted need for Green Belt release within the Warrington Borough. The Council should apply a balanced approach to meeting their currently assessed OAN to grow the sustainable settlements in the rural areas and not just concentrate on delivering housing in Warrington town.
- 6.5 Land east of Warrington Road is demonstrated to be the most sustainable Site within Culcheth given the short walking distance to key services and facilities in the village centre, immediate access to the primary and secondary schools and access to public transport. This deliverability statement demonstrates that the Site does not meet the purposes of including land within the Green Belt as set out in paragraph 80 of the NPPF.
- 6.6 In conclusion, the Site is available now, offers a suitable location to help Warrington Council meet current and future housing needs. Ultimately the Site is deliverable with willing landowners represented by a high quality house builder.



## 7. Next Steps

- 7.1 The Site is in the control of a well-known high quality housebuilder (Story Homes), and is considered suitable and deliverable within the first 5 years of the emerging Local Plan period.
- 7.2 Story Homes are committed to progressing the technical assessments on highways, landscape and visual impact and design towards developing a Site Vision Document. This document will demonstrate a high quality residential development that responds to the local housing need, whilst taking into account and reflecting the character of the surrounding settlement, and ensuring the development of the Site would form a new defensible Green Belt boundary to the east of the village.
- 7.3 Story Homes looks forward to working with Warrington Borough Council to progress the proposals for the Site and welcomes any feedback.

# Appendix 1 – Site Location Plan, Story Homes



SITE  
Land at Warrington Road, Culcheth

DRAWING  
Site Location Plan

DRAWN BY - JW / ABC	DATE December 2016	
CHECK BY	SCALE NTS	
ISSUE	DRAWING NUMBER	REVISION
1		
REVISIONS		