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'Call for Sites'

Warrington Borough Council Local Plan Review

Call for Sites Registration Form

October 2016

Please note this 'Call for Sites' is for five or more dwellings or economic development on sites of 0.25 ha (or 500sqm of floor space) and above, Gypsy, Traveller and Show People and Minerals and Waste sites.

The identification of sites does not imply that the Council considers that the site is suitable for development, either now or in the future. It cannot be taken as representing either an intention to allocate these sites, or as a material consideration in the determination of a planning application.

Potential sites that have been identified will be further tested through the Plan-making process, including through the Spatial Distribution and Site Assessment Process, Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment, several stages of public participation and independent examination.

Please also note that all the responses and information received as part of the 'Call for Sites' will be published and made available for public viewing as part of the open and transparent Plan making process.

NOTE: Please read the accompanying guidance note [here](#) before completing this form and complete a **separate** form for each site that you are submitting to the Council.

Please return your completed form and any accompanying supporting material to Planning Policy, Warrington Borough Council no later than 5.00pm on Monday 05th December 2016.

By e-mail: ldf@warrington.gov.uk

By post: Planning Policy, Warrington Borough Council, New Town House, Buttermarket Street, Warrington, WA1 2NH

Should you require further advice and guidance on completing this form, please contact the Planning Policy Team by telephone on 01925 442841 or by e-mail to ldf@warrington.gov.uk

(1) Your Details

Please provide your contact details and those of your agent (if applicable). Where provided, we will use your Agent's details as our primary contact.

	Your details	Your Agent's details
Name		
Position		
Organisation		
Address		
	Town	
	Postcode	
Telephone		
Email address		

(2) Site Details

Please provide the details of the site you are suggesting. If you are suggesting more than one site, please use a **separate** form.

Name of site /other names it's known by		
Address		
	Town	
	Postcode	
Ordnance Survey Grid Reference	Easting :	Northing :
Site area (hectares)		
Net developable area (hectares)		
What is your interest in the site? (please tick one)	Owner	Lessee
	Prospective Purchaser	Neighbour
	Other	Please state:

Please Note: It is essential that you provide a map showing the site's location and detailed boundaries for each submission.

(3a) Proposed future use(s)

Please indicate the preferred use that you would like the site to be considered for. Please also indicate any other uses you would consider acceptable. If you wish the site to be considered for a mix of uses, please tick all uses that apply.

	Residential	Gypsy & Travellers	Employment	Retail	Leisure	Other*	
Preferred future use							
Alternative future use(s)							
Potential Capacity	houses:	Number of Pitches:	SqM	SqM	SqM	SqM	
	or flats:						
Employment Use Class (E.g. B1)							
* If "Other", please indicate which use(s):							
Potential Density							
	Has any design, viability, master planning work or other studies been undertaken for any proposed use?			Yes	No		

(3b) Proposed future use(s) - Minerals and Waste

Details:

(4) Site Ownership

Please record the site ownership details. If there are more than three owners, please record the fourth owner, etc. on a separate sheet. Please indicate the extent of individual landholding(s) on the site map.

If you do not know who owns the site, please state so below.

	Owner 1	Owner 2	Owner 3
Name			
Address			
	Town		
	Postcode		

Or: I do not know who owns the site

Has the owner (or each owner) indicated support for proposed redevelopment?

Please also record these details for the 4th and subsequent owners (where necessary).

Yes			
No			
Don't know			

Are there any Restrictive Covenants & Ransom Strips affecting the site?

--

(5) Market Interest

Please choose the most appropriate category below to indicate what level of market interest there is in the site:

		Any comments
Site is owned by a developer		
Site under option to a developer		
Enquiries received		
Site is being marketed		
None		
Not known		

--

(6) Site Condition

Please record the current use(s) of the site (or for vacant sites, the previous use, if known) and the neighbouring land uses.

Current use(s)		
Neighbouring Uses		
If vacant	Previous use(s)	
	Date last used	

What proportion of the site is made up of buildings, and what proportion is (open) land?

Proportion covered by buildings	%	Proportion not covered by buildings	%
---------------------------------	---	-------------------------------------	---

If there are buildings on the site, please answer the following questions:

How many buildings are there on the site?		buildings
What proportion of the buildings are currently in use?	% in use:	%
	% derelict:	%
	% vacant:	%
Are any existing buildings on the site proposed to be converted?		

For the **parts of the site not covered by buildings**, please answer these questions:

What proportion of the land is currently in active use?		%
What proportion is greenfield (not previously developed)?		% (A)*
What proportion is previously developed and cleared?		% (B)*
What proportion is previously developed but not cleared? (e.g. demolition spoil, etc.)		% (C)*

* A plus B plus C should add to 100%.

Please provide any additional comments on a separate sheet if necessary.

(7) Constraints to Development

Please tell us about any known constraints that will affect development for the proposed use, details of what action is required, how long it will take and what progress has been made.

Please use a separate sheet where necessary to provide details. If using separate sheets, it would be helpful to make reference there to the particular constraint, e.g (7)(e) – Drainage.

	Yes, No or Don't know	Nature and severity of constraint *	Action needed, timescales and progress	Confirmed by technical study or by service provider?	
				Yes	No
a) Land contamination					
b) Land stability					
c) Mains water supply					
d) Mains sewerage					
e) Drainage, flood risk					
f) Tree Preservation Orders					
g) Electricity supply					
h) Gas supply					
i) Telecommunications					
j) Highways					
k) Ownership, leases etc.					
l) Ransom strips, covenants					
m) Other (Please provide details)					

(8) Site Availability

Please indicate when the site may be available

Excluding planning policy constraints, when do you believe this site could be available for development?

Immediately

(Note: to be "immediately available", a site must be cleared, unless being considered for conversions.)

If not immediately, please state when it could be available:

If the site is not available immediately, please explain why – e.g. the main constraint(s) or delaying factor(s) and actions necessary to remove these:

(9) Any Other Information

Please tell us anything else of relevance regarding this site if not already covered above that will ensure that it contributes positively to the achievement of sustainable development. Please use a separate sheet/s if necessary.

**Planning Policy– Warrington Borough Council,
New Town House, Buttermarket Street, Warrington, WA1 2NH**

ldf@warrington.gov.uk

01925 442841

This form is available in other formats or languages on request.

Our ref: 39899

5 December 2016

Warrington Borough Council
Planning Policy & Programmes
New Town House
Buttermarket Street
Warrington
WA1 2NH

ldf@warrington.gov.uk

Dear Sirs

RE: Warrington Local Plan Review – Regulation 18 Consultation and ‘Call for Sites’

Land to the North of Eaves Brow Road, Croft, Warrington

Introduction

This representation is submitted on behalf of Elterwater Investments in response to the current consultation on the Warrington Local Plan Review and associated ‘call for sites’ exercise, which commenced on 24 October 2016. Our client controls land to the north of Eaves Brow Road in Croft and considers that the site should be removed from the Green Belt and allocated for residential development. Given the nature of our client’s interests, we focus on housing related matters within this letter of representation.

Site and Surroundings

The site comprises approximately 3 ha of undeveloped land adjacent to the north-east of Croft, which is a free-standing settlement inset from the Green Belt under Policy CC1 of the adopted Warrington Local Plan Core Strategy (LPCS). The roughly rectangular shaped site comprises heavily wooded land. The site is bounded to the west and south by existing residential properties situated along Betsyfield Drive, Gerard Road and Eaves Brow Road, and by open land to the north and east. The land does not extend any further into the countryside than the existing settlement footprint, and looking at the wider context and surrounding residential uses we consider that residential development at the site would represent a logical ‘rounding off’ of the urban area of Croft.

Whilst the site is currently designated as part of the Green Belt within the adopted LPCS, it is important to note that the site has previously been identified as land ‘safeguarded’ for future development. The site historically formed part of the North Cheshire Green Belt which was first formally adopted as part of the Cheshire Structure Plan 1977 (adopted 1979), but it was identified as an ‘Area of Search’ and safeguarded for development beyond 2001 within published versions of the Warrington Borough Local Plan (WBLP) until its abandonment in June 1999. Whilst the WBLP was not formally adopted, the Local Plan Inspector supported the designation of the site within an ‘Area of Search’, thereby excluding the land from the Green Belt.



Within the First Stage Deposit Draft version of the Warrington Unitary Development Plan (UDP) which was consulted on during summer 2001, the site continued to be identified as safeguarded land which was required for future development. Owing to a 'sea-change' in national policy at the time involving an aspiration to minimise greenfield housing development and (now revoked) Regional Planning Guidance considering that Warrington was able to meet its housing needs until at least 2016 without incurring into safeguarded land. Therefore, all safeguarded sites, including our client's land, were re-designated as Green Belt within the Revised Deposit Draft UDP, which was published for consultation during winter 2002 and subsequent versions of the (now 'saved') Warrington UDP. It is clear therefore that the principle of residential development at our client's site has previously been considered to be acceptable by Warrington Borough Council.

We acknowledge that Policy QE5 of the adopted LPCS identifies the land as a Local Wildlife Site ('Croft Grasslands'). However, as we will discuss later in this letter, natural succession has all but eliminated the grassland interest for which the LWS was originally designated and the site is now a relatively young woodland area. The allocation of this site presents a golden opportunity to potentially restore and enhance this habitat to incorporate a managed woodland area alongside a sensitively designed residential scheme.

Our client's site has been subject to a number of previous planning applications for residential development, all of which were refused¹. Common reasons for the refusal of these planning applications relate to the site being designated within the Green Belt and an adequacy of housing land supply. However, the general policy background position has moved on considerably and circumstances are now materially different to when these applications were determined. As we explain below, there are now clearly defined and acknowledged 'exceptional circumstances' requiring the release of Green Belt land in order to meet Warrington's challenging housing needs, and it is therefore appropriate to re-examine the release of our client's land at Eaves Brow Road for development, which is deliverable and has the potential to make a genuine contribution to meeting the Borough's dwelling targets.

Meeting Warrington's Housing Needs

The most up-to-date study assessing the objectively assessed housing needs (OAN) for Warrington is the Mid-Mersey Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2016. For Warrington, the Mid-Mersey SHMA identifies an OAN of 839 dwellings per annum up to 2037.

The Scope and Contents Document which is the subject of this current consultation recognises that the SHMA is based on a baseline forecast of employment growth, and it is necessary to ensure that the housing needs figure conforms with the increase in job numbers envisaged. To ensure a balance between homes and jobs, the Scope and Contents Document identifies that it will be necessary to increase the minimum supply of homes to around 1,000 dwellings per annum and therefore this is the housing requirement that the Council intends to take forward through the Local Plan Review.

The Scope and Contents Document goes on to acknowledge that if the Borough is to meet its development needs, Green Belt land will need to be released to deliver approximately 5,000 homes over the next 20 years. We welcome the Council's recognition that there is a need to release Green Belt land in order to meet its housing needs, and that the Council has now taken steps to assess the Green Belt to inform its plan making.

¹ App Ref: 74/0603 – Outline application for the erection of a residential development – Refused 26.09.1974

App Ref: 79/8229 – Outline application for proposed residential development – Refused 01.08.1979

App Ref: 81/11377 – Outline app. for proposed residential development – Refused 15.04.1981



Our client's site forms part of Parcel CR4 within Green Belt Assessment, which is identified as making an overall 'moderate contribution' to the Green Belt:

"The parcel has been judged to make a moderate overall contribution as although it supports a strong-moderate degree of openness and the boundaries between the parcel and the settlement are non-durable, there are durable boundaries between the parcel and the countryside. Thus any development would be contained and would therefore not threaten the openness and permanence of the Green Belt."

We are pleased that the Green Belt Assessment concludes that the development of Parcel CR4 would not harm the openness and permanence of the Green Belt. It is important to note that Parcel CR4 covers a much larger extent of land beyond our client's ownership, and as such had this site been assessed individually then we consider that the Green Belt Assessment would have concluded that its overall contribution to the Green Belt purposes is poor.

Our client's site is located immediately adjacent to the existing settlement of Croft, and its development would not lead to an incursion into the wider open countryside beyond the existing settlement boundary to the north and east. Croft cannot be defined as a 'large built up area' and so development at this site will not lead to 'unrestricted sprawl', nor is it an historic town. Development of our client's land would clearly not lead to any coalescence with other settlements. On that basis we consider that the land currently performs virtually no function in terms of the five purposes of including land in the Green Belt listed under paragraph 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and is therefore an ideal candidate for release now for residential development.

Suitability of the Site for Residential Use

Our client's site is well related to the existing settlement of Croft and would represent an excellent opportunity to 'round off' the settlement if bought forward for residential development. Croft is a sustainable settlement which benefits from a range of services and facilities including a primary school, village hall, several public houses and a general store. The site is also within easy walking distance to bus stops providing public transport services to the surrounding area.

The surrounding housing was developed by our client and this site was intended to be brought forward as the next phase of the wider residential scheme. Development stalled as a result of the policy context described earlier and the land has been left open ever since. However, there is an existing vehicular access to the site directly from Eaves Brow Road which was constructed to service residential development at the site. The land is therefore sustainable and deliverable.

As noted above, we acknowledge that the site is currently designated as a LWS (Croft Grasslands) under Policy QE5 of the LPCS. This was due to the nature conservation value of the neutral grassland that dominated the site at the time of designation in 2000. PBA has undertaken an up-to-date ecological review in order to understand the site's current ecological conditions. The Ecological Review, which is submitted alongside this representation, demonstrates that natural succession has all but eliminated the grassland interest for which the LWS was originally designated. The site is now dominated by young broadleaved woodland and remnant grassland is now limited to small areas along cleared pathways and small damp glades within the woodland.

Bringing forward a residential scheme that is proportionate in scale and sensitive to its setting opens up the opportunity to potentially create a well-managed woodland area, wrapping around the northern and eastern site boundaries and incorporating the existing watercourse, which will have the dual purpose of retaining and enhancing the habitat and opening it up for proper management, while also creating a landscape 'buffer' to separate the new housing development



from the wider countryside beyond. From the point of view of visual impact and openness the site will not appear materially different than at present. Thus a residential scheme here could deliver much needed new housing within the Borough, while retaining and creating a managed woodland area, without any tangible landscape or Green Belt impact.

Summary

Residential development at land to the north of Eaves Brow Road in Croft will not only assist Warrington Borough Council to meet its challenging dwelling targets, but it will contribute towards a more robust housing strategy that will adequately cater for housing needs in different markets and locations across the Borough.

The current Local Plan sought to deliver a much lower level of development which could be accommodated without the need for any release of Green Belt land, however the Council has now acknowledged that it is unlikely to be able to meet its objectively assessed housing needs without the release of land that is currently designated as Green Belt. Our client's site is located adjacent to an existing settlement and performs no tangible function in terms of its contribution to the Green Belt. The site represents an excellent and very logical opportunity to 'round off' the settlement and will contribute towards addressing what is a very significant shortfall in the Borough's housing needs.

An up-to-date Ecological Review has confirmed that the grassland interest for which the LWS was originally designated no longer exists, and therefore the continued designation of the site as a LWS is questionable. However, bringing forward a residential scheme that is proportionate in scale and setting, opens up the opportunity to deliver ecological enhancement that will sustain and enhance the LWS. This could involve grassland restoration in those areas, primarily in the east of the site, where there is remnant grassland; beneficial management of woodland at the site boundaries, particularly in the north of site; and measures to improve the watercourse and its adjacent habitats. These measures have the potential jointly to enhance the intrinsic ecological vale of the site and its connectivity with the wider landscape, while also contributing towards meeting housing needs.

We can confirm that the site is suitable, available and deliverable for residential development. We would also reiterate that the Council has previously accepted the principle of additional residential development in this location, having included the land within an 'Area of Search' safeguarded for future development. We therefore respectfully request that the Council re-examines the contribution that this site could make towards the housing land supply in Warrington, and proceed to release the site from the Green Belt and allocate it for housing.

We look forward to receiving confirmation of your receipt of this representation and we would be grateful if you could please keep us informed of the Council's progress as it moves forward with the Local Plan Review. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require any further clarification regarding any of the points made in our correspondence.

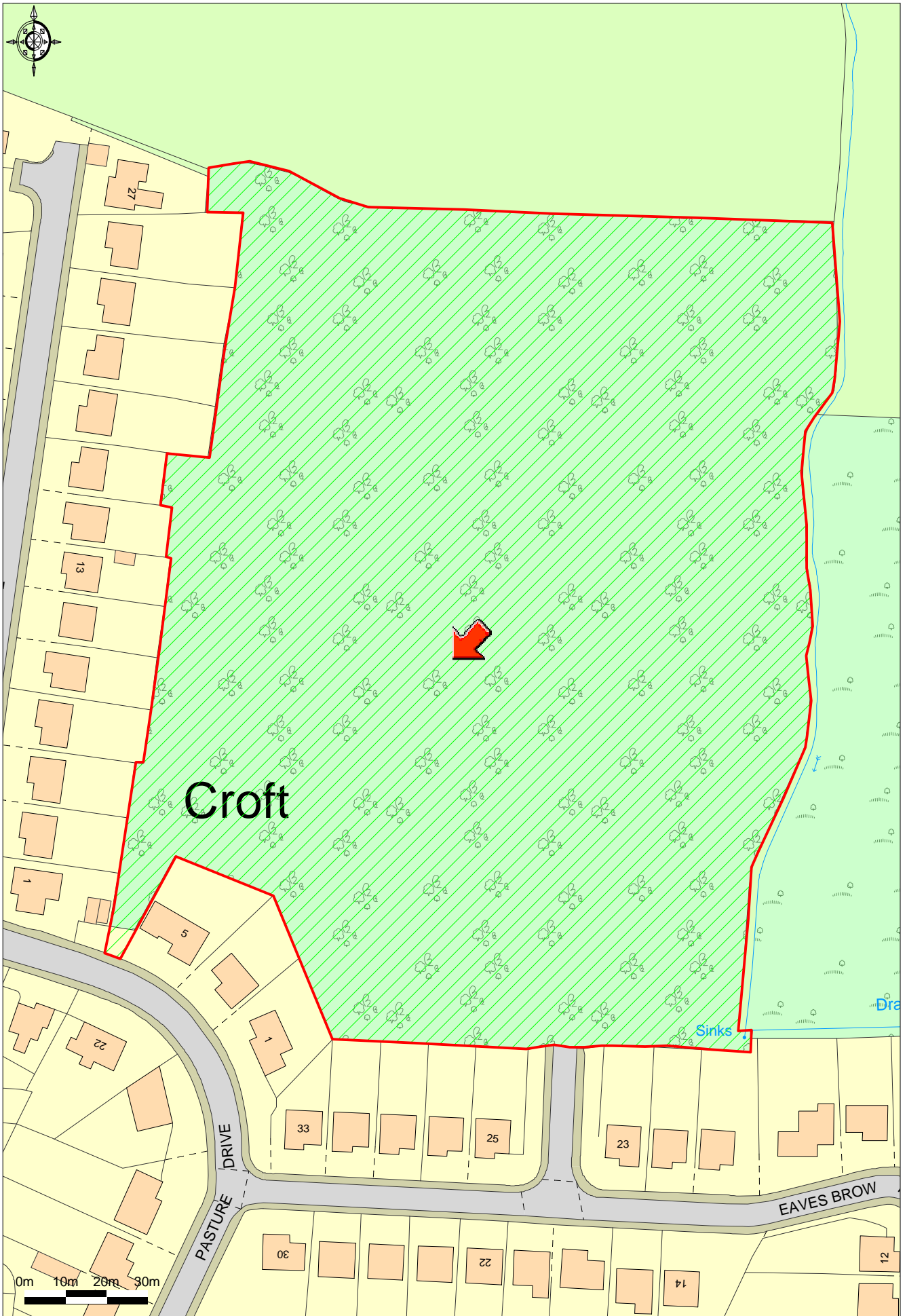
Yours sincerely

Michael Gilbert
Senior Associate
For and on behalf of
PETER BRETT ASSOCIATES LLP



Encs: Call for Sites Form
Site Plan
Ecological Review (Peter Brett Associates)

Land to the North of Eaves Brow Road, Croft, Warrington



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Land to the North of Eaves Brow Road, Croft, Warrington

Ecological Review

On behalf of **Elterwater Investments**

Project Ref: 39899 | Rev: AA | Date: December 2016



Document Control Sheet

Project Name: Land to the North of Eaves Brow Road, Croft, Warrington

Project Ref: 39899

Report Title: Ecological Review

Date: 01 December 2016

	Name	Position	Signature	Date
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Approved by:	Michael Gilbert	Senior Associate	MG	02.12.16
For and on behalf of Peter Brett Associates LLP				

Revision	Date	Description	Prepared	Reviewed	Approved

This report has been prepared by Peter Brett Associates LLP ('PBA') on behalf of its client to whom this report is addressed ('Client') in connection with the project described in this report and takes into account the Client's particular instructions and requirements. This report was prepared in accordance with the professional services appointment under which PBA was appointed by its Client. This report is not intended for and should not be relied on by any third party (i.e. parties other than the Client). PBA accepts no duty or responsibility (including in negligence) to any party other than the Client and disclaims all liability of any nature whatsoever to any such party in respect of this report.

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Appendices

Appendix A	Croft Grassland LWS Citation
Appendix B	Site Photographs

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1 Executive Summary

- 1.1.1 Elterwater Investments controls land to the north of Eaves Brow Road in Croft, and is submitting the site for residential development as part of the current 'call for sites' exercise taking place alongside a Regulation 18 consultation on the Warrington Local Plan Review. The majority of the land proposed for development is notified as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) known as Croft Grasslands (**Figure 1**).
- 1.1.2 Peter Brett Associates LLP (PBA) was commissioned by Elterwater Investments to undertake a review in order to gather information in relation to current ecological conditions at the LWS, to assist in determining the viability of pursuing development proposals.
- 1.1.3 A desk study has been undertaken to review open source information and a field survey completed to determine the broad habitat types currently present at the site. The information gathered has supported an assessment as to whether the criteria resulting in notification of the LWS continue to be satisfied.
- 1.1.4 The desk study has confirmed that no sites with a statutory designation for nature conservation are associated with the site, or are likely to be effected by progressing a residential led scheme at the site.
- 1.1.5 Information held on the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) website confirmed the site is registered on the National Forest Inventory as being broadleaved woodland.
- 1.1.6 The citation for Croft Grasslands LWS confirms the site was notified in 2000 for its neutral grassland interest, but that the site at the time of its last monitoring visit had largely succeeded to woodland, and that remaining grassland was restricted in extent.
- 1.1.7 A recent field survey has confirmed the site is now dominated by broadleaved woodland, comprised primarily of young and semi-mature trees. As such the site no longer supports the neutral grassland interest for which it was notified.
- 1.1.8 Bringing forward a residential scheme that is proportionate in scale and setting, opens up the opportunity to deliver ecological enhancement. Grassland restoration in those areas, primarily in the east of the site, where there is remnant grassland; beneficial management of woodland at the site boundaries, particularly in the north of site; and measures to improve the watercourse and its adjacent habitats, have the potential jointly to enhance the intrinsic ecological value of the site and its connectivity with the wider landscape.
- 1.1.9 An effective approach would need to be informed by further botanical (and others) surveys. However, the ecological history of the site and the nature of its current features are such that habitat restoration and management could be expected to be effective in delivering ecological gain. This could comprise a key focus for a landscape strategy delivered as an inherent component of any proposals for the future development of the site.

2 Introduction

2.1 Overview

- 2.1.1 Elterwater Investments controls land to the north of Eaves Brow Road in Croft, and is submitting the site for residential development as part of the current 'call for sites' exercise taking place alongside a Regulation 18 consultation on the Warrington Local Plan Review. The majority of the land proposed for development is notified as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) known as Croft Grasslands (**Figure 1**), hereafter referred to as 'the site' in this report.
- 2.1.2 Peter Brett Associates LLP (PBA) was commissioned by Elterwater Investments to undertake a review in order to gather information in relation to the current ecological conditions, and in particular to determine the habitats that now dominate the site.
- 2.1.3 This report sets out the findings of the review in order to support a preliminary assessment of the current condition of the site, and in particular whether it continues to satisfy the criteria for which the LWS was notified.

2.2 Background

Site Location

- 2.2.1 Croft Grasslands LWS is located at grid reference SJ635934, to the north of Eaves Brow Road in Croft, approximately 6km to the north-east of Warrington.
- 2.2.2 Residential properties and their gardens lie at the western and southern boundary of the site. Fields that are in arable production lie to the north.

Proposed Development

- 2.2.3 Proposals for the site have yet to be developed, although the opportunity to bring forward a residential led scheme are currently being explored. The land is being submitted to the current 'call for sites' exercise being undertaken by Warrington Borough Council as part of the Local Plan Review process.

2.3 Report Purpose

- 2.3.1 The purpose of this report is to describe the habitats currently present at the site in order to determine whether the criteria resulting in its notification as a LWS continue to be satisfied; and hence whether a future residential led scheme could be viable, when considering the ecological sensitivities of the site.

2.4 Report Objectives

- 2.4.1 The objectives of this report are therefore to:
- Describe the methods used to complete a desk study and field survey;
 - Set out the findings of the desk study and field survey;
 - Assess whether Croft Grasslands LWS continues to meet the criteria for which it was notified; and
 - Present summary measures with the potential to improve the condition of the LWS in line with its reasons for notification and/or to enhance ecological value.

3 Methodology

3.1 Overview

- 3.1.1 This section confirms the approach to the desk study and field survey that support the assessment as to whether Croft Grassland LWS continues to satisfy the criteria for which it is notified.

3.2 Study Area

- 3.2.1 For the purposes of the field survey the study area comprised Croft Grassland LWS and the habitats immediately adjacent to its boundaries. The desk study extended to 2km from the site boundary to provide ecological context, and in particular to determine the nature and location of any priority habitats in the wider landscape.

3.3 Desk Study

- 3.3.1 A desk-based assessment of existing ecological information relevant to the site and its surroundings was undertaken. This involves a review of:
- Statutory designated nature conservation site information held on the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) website;
 - Records of European Protected Species licences granted in relation to areas within 1 km of the site held on MAGIC;
 - Aerial photography and habitat layers (MAGIC website) of the site and the surrounding area;
 - Citation for Croft Grasslands LWS; and
 - Criteria for Local Wildlife Site selection for the Cheshire region (Cheshire Wildlife Trust and partners 2014)

3.4 Site Survey

- 3.4.1 A walkover survey of the site was undertaken on 29th November 2016 by Paul Howden-Leach MCIEEM. The survey was based on the JNCC (2010) Phase 1 Habitat Survey Guidelines. During the survey, the broad habitat types present were mapped with notes made on dominant or characteristic flora.
- 3.4.2 Particular attention was paid to the remaining grassland areas in order to record the grass and forb species present.

3.5 Limitations

- 3.5.1 The survey was not specified to be a detailed botanical assessment given the time of year. The purpose of the survey was to determine the broad habitat types currently present within the site and to note the dominant species. The habitats present were readily evident and the surveyor was able to characterise and map these reliably. As such there was no limitation to the survey.

4 Results

4.1 Overview

- 4.1.1 This section summarises the results of the desk study and field surveys, with further detail provided in **Appendix A** (Croft Grasslands LWS Citation) and **Appendix B** (Site Photographs).

4.2 Desk Study

Designated Sites and Impact Risk Zones

- 4.2.1 A review of the statutory designated nature conservation site information held on the MAGIC website confirms that neither the site or any areas within 2km of its boundary are subject to a statutory designation.
- 4.2.2 The data held on the MAGIC website confirms the site falls within the Impact Risk Zones (IRZ) relating to Highfield Moss Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) c. 3km to the north-west and Risley Moss SSSI c 3km km to the south-west. Natural England has identified the types of development that may have adverse effects on the two SSSIs; in neither case is rural housing identified as a concern.

European Protected Licences

- 4.2.3 The MAGIC website confirms that there is one site within 2km of the site for which a European Protected Species licence has been approved by Natural England in the last three years. This was a great crested newt licence to authorise works at a location c. 1km to the south of the site, and south of the M62 motorway. The licence expired in July 2014.

Aerial Photography and Habitat Layers

- 4.2.4 A review of aerial photography indicates site to be a woodland located in a predominantly agricultural landscape. This comprises both arable and pasture fields, with varied boundary vegetation that include hedgerows and occasional standard trees.
- 4.2.5 The habitat layers on the MAGIC website also records the site as being woodland. It also confirms the site to have been entered on the National Forest Inventory in 2014 as being deciduous broadleaved woodland.

Citation for Croft Grasslands LWS

- 4.2.6 The citation for Croft Grassland LWS is included in **Appendix A**. This confirms the site was first notified on 5 September 2000, and that there was a revision in 2010 (date not specified). The criteria for selection as a Local Wildlife Site is stated to be H7 – Neutral Grassland.
- 4.2.7 The citation confirms the date of the last survey was in July 2010, and that since the previous survey in 2003 the process of succession had continued such that the site had a woodland character, with oak, ash and hawthorn being the predominant species.
- 4.2.8 The continued presence of small areas of grassland is recorded; these were along a cleared path; in small damp glades; and in places where householders have extended their gardens into the site along the western boundary. These remnant areas of grassland were, at the time of the 2010 survey, supporting some species of interest including orchids, meadow vetching, black knapweed and common birdsfoot trefoil.

Criteria for Selection of Local Wildlife Sites in Cheshire

- 4.2.9 Cheshire Wildlife Trust and its partners clarified the selection criteria for Local Wildlife Sites for the Cheshire region in 2012; these were subsequently updated in 2014. In its introduction the document setting out the selection criteria confirms Local Wildlife Sites are varied in their size and nature but all have a role to play in conserving the UK's natural heritage, providing refuges in their own right as well as acting as stepping stones, buffers and corridors to protect wildlife.
- 4.2.10 Croft Grassland LWS was selected in 2000 because, at the time, it satisfied the criteria set out for H7 – Neutral Grassland.
- 4.2.11 H7 grasslands includes NVC grasslands types MG4, MG5 and MG8; and to qualify as a LWS must also meet a threshold relating to species composition, requiring a minimum number of indicator species (set out in appendices to the document confirming the selection criteria) of:
- four 'occasional' indicator species at least three of which are listed as neutral grassland indicators; or
 - four 'rare' neutral grassland indicators.

4.3 Field Survey

- 4.3.1 The habitats present on site, as recorded during the site survey on 29th November 2016, are described below. Their location and distribution is confirmed in **Figure 1**; site photographs are in **Appendix B**.

Woodland

- 4.3.2 The site was dominated by young broad leaved woodland, the majority of which did not appear to have been subject to any formal management. Many of the trees were consequently close together resulting in a sparse ground flora. The tree canopy was dominated by ash and oak although other species including sycamore, willow and hawthorn were also present.
- 4.3.3 The woodland was dominated by young and semi mature trees, However, there were a number of mature trees within the site. These were located on a raised embankment running east-west near the centre of the site, likely to be a former hedge line. In addition, trees associated with stream to the east of the site appeared to be more mature, with many showing evidence of having been coppiced and/or pollarded in the past.

Scrub

- 4.3.4 There are power lines over the east of the site. The area beneath appeared to have been subject to management and bramble dominated scrub had established.
- 4.3.5 At the southern and western boundaries, adjacent to the neighbouring gardens and houses, the woodland canopy extended up to the garden boundaries. The shrub layer was denser in this area of the site and supported native and non-native species including bramble, elder, holly, hawthorn, raspberry, hazel, cotoneaster (possible garden escape), snowberry, honeysuckle and dog rose. The ground layer included: the grasses, cocksfoot and Yorkshire fog; ruderal species, nettle and rosebay willowherb; garden escapes, monbretia, garden privet and geranium species; as well as more typical woodland flora species including pendulus sedge, male fern and common ivy.

Grassland

- 4.3.6 The site no longer included any substantive areas of grassland. At the woodland edge grass species were limited to cocksfoot, Yorkshire fog and common bent (along the stream). A sedge was also present in the sward; this was thought to be carnation sedge, although due to the time of year this could not be confirmed.
- 4.3.7 Anecdotal evidence provided to the surveyor by a local resident indicated orchids were present within the site. However, given the time of year that the survey was undertaken no evidence of orchid was found, or expected to be found.

Open Water

- 4.3.8 A stream flowed north to south along the eastern boundary of the LWS. This appeared to be very disturbed; with numerous worn areas along the banks and rope swings attached to several trees that overhung the stream.

Domestic Gardens

- 4.3.9 Occupants of numbers 19 and 21 Betsyfield Drive have created an informal extension to their gardens at the western boundary of the site which encroach into the woodland by c. 20 x 15m.

5 Interpretation

5.1 Overview

- 5.1.1 The desk study and field survey findings indicate the ecological conditions that prevailed within the site in the past, and have confirmed the nature and condition of the habitats now present.
- 5.1.2 Based on the findings of the desk and field studies, this section makes an assessment of the current value of the LWS having regard to the reasons for its original selection.

5.2 Current Habitat Conditions

- 5.2.1 Croft Grassland LWS was selected and added to the suite of Local Wildlife Sites on the basis of the nature conservation value of the neutral grassland that dominated the site at the time of designation in 2000.
- 5.2.2 The process of natural succession to broadleaved woodland has been allowed to continue with only minimal, incidental management intervention. The grassland interest has consequently been in decline since at least 2000.
- 5.2.3 The LWS is now dominated by young broadleaved woodland. This is evidenced by the findings of the recent survey and the listing of the site on the National Forest Inventory in 2014.
- 5.2.4 Remnant grassland is now limited to small areas at the edge of cleared pathways and along the wayleave. The findings of the survey have confirmed that Croft Grassland now comprises a young broadleaved woodland and no longer meets the LWS selection criteria in relation to H7 – neutral grassland.

5.3 Future Habitat Conditions

- 5.3.1 If the site remains largely unmanaged, the process of natural succession will continue and the woodland, both in terms of its structure and species composition, will mature. The canopy will close, further limiting the light reaching the woodland floor, such that the remnant grassland in the small glades that currently remain, will continue to decline and ultimately be lost.
- 5.3.2 The nature and condition of the habitats within the LWS are entirely dependent on how the site is managed in the future.
- 5.3.3 This review has determined that natural succession has all but eliminated the grassland interest for which the LWS was designed. However, grassland has been the dominant habitat within the LWS up until the recent past and some remnant grassland remains. This opens up the opportunity to potentially retrieve the position through a programme of habitat restoration, alongside a residential scheme. This would yield numerous benefits in terms of providing much needed new housing, while restoring some of the grassland interest that has been lost over time.
- 5.3.4 Woodland has established across the LWS as there has been no driver for sustaining a programme of management. As long as the site continues to have no function, that will remain the case. Bringing forward a residential scheme that is proportionate in scale and setting, opens up the opportunity to deliver grassland restoration and effective woodland management. This could comprise a key focus for a landscape strategy delivered as an inherent component of any proposals for the future development of the site.

5.4 Next Steps

- 5.4.1 The outcome of the desk and field studies set out in this report are adequate to establish the principles set out above. However, further habitat and species specific surveys, undertaken at the optimal time of year, will be required to gather sufficient information to establish (i) ecological sensitivities associated with the woodland that now dominates the site; and (ii) to inform development of an appropriate and acceptable scheme for the site.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1.1 The desk study and field survey have jointly established the following in relation to Croft Grasslands LWS:
- There are no sites with a statutory designation for nature conservation within 2km of the LWS;
 - The LWS lies within the Impact Risk Zones for the SSSIs that lie 3km to the north-west and to the south-east. Natural England do not identify development that brings forward rural housing as likely to have adverse effects on these SSSIs;
 - There is one record of a European Protected Species licence having been granted for a site within 1km of the LWS. This related to a great crested newt mitigation scheme and the licence expired in 2014;
 - A review of aerial photography indicated the site is now dominated by woodland. The site appears on the National Forest Inventory as broadleaved woodland.
 - The citation for Croft Grasslands LWS confirms it was originally notified in 2000 for its neutral grassland interest, but it has now succeeded to young woodland.
 - Review of the selection criteria for Local Wildlife Sites in Cheshire set out the qualifying criteria for H7 – Neutral Grassland which include the presence of certain key grassland indicator species. A detailed botanical survey has not taken place, but its succession to woodland is such that the site can no longer be regarded as a key grassland site. On this basis the current designation cannot be sustained.
 - A recent field survey has confirmed that the site is now dominated by young/semi-mature broadleaved woodland, with small areas of remnant grassland restricted to the edge of paths and along the wayleave.
- 6.1.2 The grassland for which the site was notified has been lost as the site has not been subject to management, allowing succession to woodland. Grassland interest could be re-established through appropriate management in some areas. However, succession to woodland will have enriched the soils such that recovery of substantial areas of grassland that supports key grassland indicator species is unlikely to be possible.
- 6.1.3 Bringing forward a residential scheme that is proportionate in scale and setting, opens up the opportunity to deliver ecological enhancement. Grassland restoration in those areas, primarily in the east of the site, where there is remnant grassland; beneficial management of woodland at the site boundaries, particularly in the north of site; and measures to improve the watercourse and its adjacent habitats, have the potential jointly to enhance the intrinsic ecological value of the site and its connectivity with the wider landscape.
- 6.1.4 An effective approach would need to be informed by further botanical (and others) surveys. However, the ecological history of the site and the nature of its current features are such that habitat restoration and management could be expected to be effective in delivering ecological gain. This could comprise a key focus for a landscape strategy delivered as an inherent component of any proposals for the future development of the site.





7 References

JNCC, (2010), Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey - a technique for environmental audit, ISBN 086139 636 7

Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Partners, (2014) Local Wildlife Site Selection Criteria for the Cheshire region.

Figure 1

Local Wildlife Site (LWS) known as Croft Grasslands

	Croft Grasslands LWS
	Broad-leaved woodland
	Gardens
	Scrub



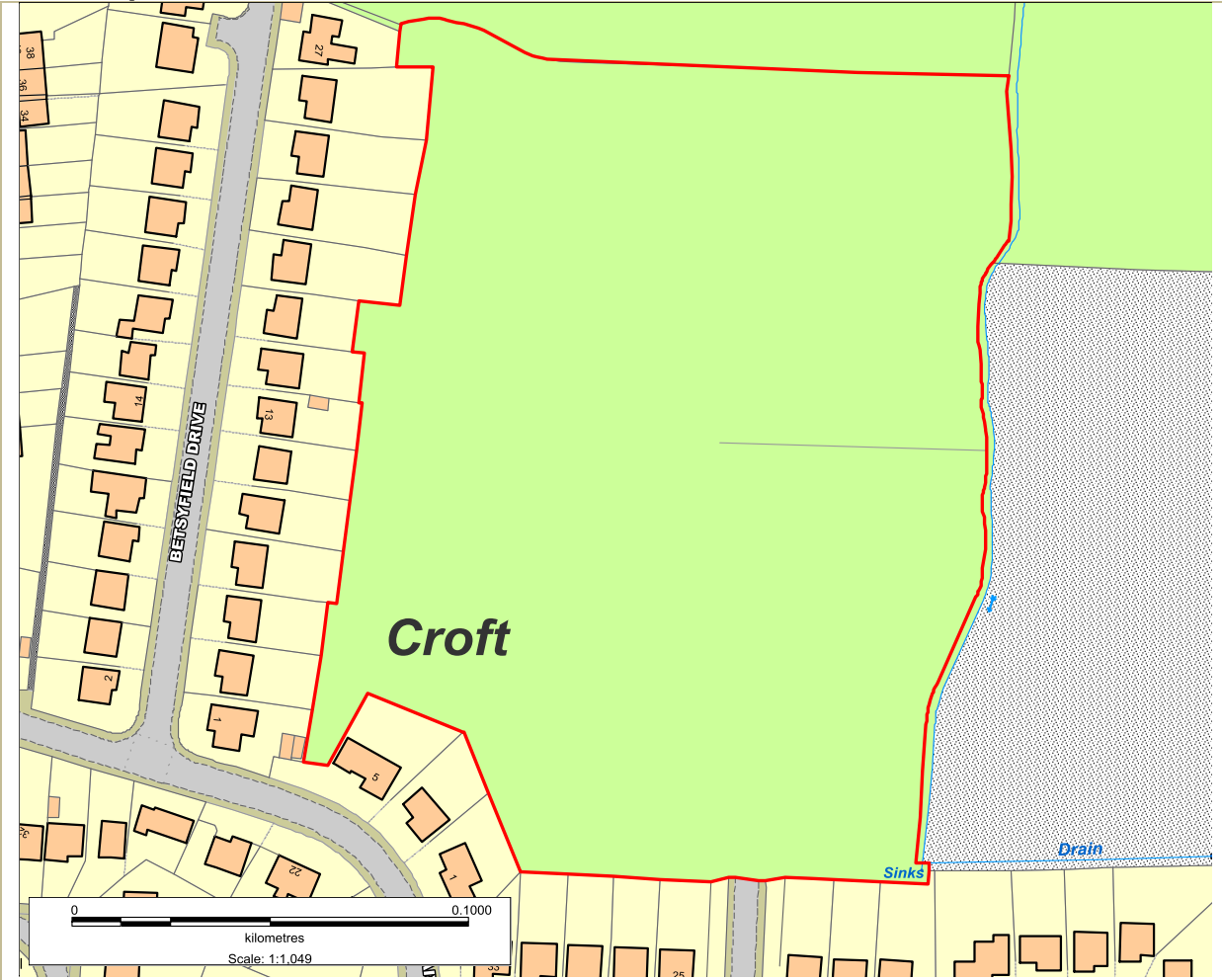
	Service Layer Credits: Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community	1:1,500 @ A4 05/12/2016 Drawn: DRL Checked: SM	Croft Grasslands LWS Figure 1: Phase 1 Habitat Plan	Figure 1	Rev A
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Appendix A Croft Grassland LWS Citation

Site name: Croft Grasslands

Site code: WA006

Site map:



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Ordnance Survey 100022848.

Site name: Croft Grasslands	Site code: WA006
Ward: Culcheth, Glazebury and Croft	Grid reference: SJ635934
Area: 3.0 ha	Ownership: Private
Date of Notification: 05/09/2000	
Date of Revision: 2010	
Status: Local Wildlife Site	

Description:

Since the last survey in 2003, the process of succession has continued so that the site now has the general character of a woodland. Oak, Ash and Hawthorn predominate.

A ride was cleared along the path which now has scrub and saplings and is a good area for butterflies. On the Western edge, one or two house-holders have created rough lawns within the site boundary.

There are small patches of herb-rich damp grassland (albeit with some scrub encroachment) and extensive areas dominated by Hawthorn scrub. The site still supports numerous grassland species such as orchids, meadow vetching, blacknapweed and common birdsfoot trefoil.

There are good numbers of woodland birds such as bullfinch, jay and great spotted woodpecker which visit adjacent gardens. Willow tit has reportedly been identified on site.

Criteria for selection:	H7 – Neutral Grassland
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Most recent survey:	July 2010
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Inventories:	
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Appendix B Site Photographs



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4