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Warrington Borough Council

Local Plan Review

Regulation 18 Consultation: Standard Response Form

October 2016

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2: Questions

Question 1

Do you have any comments to make about the Council's evidence base?

Question 2

Do you consider the assessment of Housing Needs to be appropriate?

Question 3

Do you consider the assessment of Employment Land Needs to be appropriate?

Question 4

Do you consider the alignment of Housing Needs and Job's Growth to be appropriate?

Question 5

Do you consider the assessment of Land Supply to be appropriate?

Question 6

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

Question 7

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

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?

Question 9

Do you consider it appropriate to include Minerals and Waste and Gypsy and Traveller needs in the scope of the proposed Local Plan review?

Question 10

Do you consider the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report to be appropriate?

Question 11

Do you consider the Spatial Distribution and Site Assessment Process at Appendix 2 to be appropriate?

Question 12

Do you agree with the assessment of Local Plan Policies at Appendix 1?

Question 13

Do you consider the proposed 20 year Local Plan period to be appropriate?

Question 14

Having read this document, is there anything else you feel we should include within the 'Preferred Option' consultation draft, which you will be able to comment on at the next stage of consultation?

3: Responses

Question 1

See attached statement

Question 2

See attached statement

Question 3

See attached statement

Question 4

See attached statement

Question 5

See attached statement

Question 6

See attached statement

Question 7

See attached statement

Question 8

See attached statement

Question 9

See attached statement

Question 10

See attached statement

Question 11

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Question 12

See attached statement

Question 13

See attached statement

Question 14

See attached statement



Representations

Warrington Borough Council Local Plan Review:
Regulation 18 Consultation

For: Brenrun Ltd

16-453

Project : 16-453
Document : Warrington Borough
Local Plan Review
Client : Brenrun Ltd

Date : December 2016
Author : Shaun Gaffey

Approved by : John Coxon

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Emery Planning are instructed by Brenrun Ltd to prepare and submit representations to the Regulation 18 Consultation currently being conducted by Warrington Borough Council.
- 1.2 The representations are submitted in the form of this statement, which assesses the strategic element of the consultation before going on to promote our client's site specific interest at Cherry Lane, Lymm as part of the call for sites exercise. The formal response forms are also submitted.
- 1.3 We address each relevant question as set out in the Regulation 18 Consultation Standard Response Form in turn. Many of the questions are intrinsically linked which results in some overlapping in our responses. We have only responded to questions relevant to our client's interests.

2. Regulation 18 Consultation

- 2.1 As stated above, this section of the statement addresses the questions as set out in the Regulation 18 Standard Response Form. Each relevant question is addressed below.

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

- 2.2 We do not provide a full response to this question, as the evidence base is integrally linked to our response to the topic specific questions below.

Question 2 - Do you consider the assessment of Housing Needs to be appropriate?

- 2.3 In broad terms we consider that the assessment broadly takes into account the components of OAN required by the PPG.
- 2.4 We would have had significant concerns about certain elements of the Mid Mersey SHMA had a requirement in the order of 839 per annum been taken forward, as it failed to fully take account of several components of the OAN, in particular the alignment with economic growth and insufficient uplift to address affordability. However the addendum SHMA paper seeks to properly align the OAN with employment growth, and therefore in principle we consider that

the approach is reasonable. We do however have some issues over how the OAN has been aligned with economic growth. We address these in our response to Question 4.

2.5 We note that a more comprehensive update of the SHMA is to be undertaken 'in due course'. The 2014-based household projections have been available since July 2016, and we would therefore urge the Council to update the SHMA as soon as possible. Nevertheless although the 2014-based projections will change the starting point, it will still be necessary to take into account all of the other components of the OAN, and critically align the OAN with economic growth.

Question 3 - Do you consider the assessment of Employment Land Needs to be appropriate?

2.6 The Economic and Development Needs Study considers different scenarios to establish the OAN for employment land. The report considers that the appropriate approach is to project forward past take-up rates considering both local and strategic needs.

2.7 In our view insufficient consideration has been given to the potential impacts of the Northern Powerhouse agenda. There is clear potential for Warrington to outperform past trends. For example, the Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review was published in 2016. This identifies the following outcomes for the Northern Powerhouse:

- The generation of 850,000 new jobs by 2050 over the baseline position of 710,000 jobs which will be created in any event.
- That productivity will increase by 4 percent more than the baseline forecast
- That GVA will be 15 percent higher.

2.8 We also note that the 'Review of economic forecasts and housing numbers' highlights that the Council has ambitions for Warrington to progress from a New Town to a 'New City'. We cannot see how it is compatible for a 'New City' at the heart of the Northern Powerhouse to simply plan for trend-based employment land take-up and below trend based jobs growth.

2.9 We therefore consider that there is justification for electing a higher employment land growth figure than past trends, particularly in the context of preparing Local Plan with the flexibility to respond to rapid change.

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

- 2.10 We broadly welcome the council's revised approach and acknowledgement that there is an acute need for housing to accommodate future growth in the borough. However, whilst the revised identified requirement of 984 as set out in the published SHMA Addendum document is a welcome update to the previous SHMA, the OAN identified may still insufficient to meet the needs of the borough over the plan period. It is considered that there are potential flaws in the methodology, particularly relating to the relationship between the proposed jobs growth and the amount of housing required to deliver it.
- 2.11 Our client's main concern is that the chosen jobs growth figure is extremely conservative. The Review of Economic Forecasts and Housing paper prepared by Mickledor provides information on how the projected employment growth figure of 27,280 as identified in the preferred Devolution Deal policy trend has been reached. If past trend data between 1992 and 2014 continues throughout the plan period, it indicates an increase of 36,175 jobs between 2016 and 2037. Considering that past data is inclusive of the worst economic recession since records began, it is unrealistic to expect future growth to be below past trends.
- 2.12 We note that the Economic and Development Needs Study considers different scenarios to establish the OAN for employment land. The report considers the amount of land required to meet the jobs growth projected from the Devolution Bid, but discounts this approach in favour of projecting forward past take-up rates:
- However, the market assessment and a review of the historic trends in employment change and land take up (see Section 8.0) suggest that these forecasts underestimate land needs significantly. **The preferred forecasting method is therefore a projection forward of past take-up rates that considers both strategic and local needs.***
- 2.13 It is therefore apparent that the Economic and Development Needs Study considers that land for significantly more than 31,000 jobs needs to be provided in Warrington.
- 2.14 Notwithstanding, even if the Devolution Bid is accepted as the basis for determining the OAN, it is apparent that Warrington has significantly outperformed other parts of the region in terms of delivering employment land and jobs growth. This reflects the strategically significant location of Warrington, in particular having regard to its connections to the M6, M56 and M62. This adds

further weight to the trend based growth figures, which in our view could actually be exceeded through the Devolution Bid and Northern Powerhouse projects.

- 2.15 The Northern Powerhouse jobs growth figure put forward in the Mickledor report is plainly not realistic. The increase in jobs growth suggested in the Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review is for the entire Northern Powerhouse area, and has been taken completely out of context in applying that figure for Warrington. However the reality is that despite the context of the Northern Powerhouse, Warrington is seeking a jobs growth figure substantially lower than past trends.
- 2.16 We therefore consider that the chosen jobs growth figure is too low and does not meet the Government's requirement to 'plan positively'.

Question 5 - Do you consider the assessment of Land Supply to be appropriate?

- 2.17 We would question whether the supply of employment land identified in the Economic Development Needs Study is robust. A number of the committed sites may not be attractive to the market and/or viable for employment development, and may well come forward for alternative uses. We are aware of at least one site (ref: 369, Tanyard Farm, Lymm) which is being proposed for residential development.
- 2.18 It is therefore critical that the deliverability of site allocations is fully considered, including the likely phasing of larger sites, and that sufficient contingency is provided.

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

- 2.19 Yes.
- 2.20 It is apparent from the evidence base that a significant amount of Green Belt will now need to be released in order to meet the objectively assessed housing and employment needs. This need provides the exceptional circumstances required for Green Belt release.
- 2.21 The Green Belt in Warrington has not been reviewed in full for a significant period of time, during which development needs have not been met and adverse housing market signals have been allowed to perpetuate.

- 2.22 Paragraph 84 of the Framework requires that when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, local planning authorities should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development. They should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary.
- 2.23 In the case of Warrington, there would be very significant adverse social and economic consequences of not providing sufficient land to meet the objectively assessed needs. Warrington's neighbours (such as Cheshire East and Cheshire West) have recently prepared their own Local Plans, including Green Belt release, and are unlikely to be in a position to meet any of Warrington's need. Therefore it is apparent that the Green Belt around Warrington will need to be comprehensively reviewed and redrawn to provide land for development.
- 2.24 It appears that our view above is aligned with the Council. However where we take issue with the consultation paper is the quantum of Green Belt release required. The Scope and Contents document indicates that land for approximately 5,000 dwellings and XXXha of employment land will need to be found in the Green Belt. For reasons set out elsewhere within these submissions, we consider that this figure substantially under-estimates the amount of land that will need to be released from the Green Belt.

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

- 2.25 Whilst we agree that the matters identified are the main issues, we consider that they necessitate a full review of the Local Plan. The amount of land required for housing and employment goes to the very heart of the Local Plan, and has wide ranging implications for the vast majority of its policies.

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?

- 2.26 Yes.

- 2.27 Paragraph 83 of the Framework requires that when Green Belt boundaries are established or reviewed, authorities should consider the Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period.
- 2.28 Paragraph 85 states that when defining boundaries, local planning authorities should where necessary, 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. They should also satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be reviewed at the end of the plan period.
- 2.29 Therefore national policy is clear on the need to provide for safeguarded land. In Warrington, it is clear that the borough will continue to be a focus for development, and it is therefore critical that sufficient safeguarded land is provided to meet needs stretching well beyond the period.
- 2.30 How much safeguarded land is needed in practice was considered in detail at the Cheshire East Local Plan examination, which is now reaching its final stages. In summary, sufficient safeguarded land should be provided to ensure that the current requirement could be carried forward to the next plan period (i.e. 2037 to 2057) without the need for Green Belt release. In practice the minimum requirement is to provide a similar amount of safeguarded land to the amount of Green Belt being released for development in this plan period. Ideally more should be provided, to allow flexibility for higher growth and to increase the permanence of the Green Belt.

Question 11- Do you consider the Spatial Distribution and Site Assessment Process at Appendix 2 to be appropriate?

- 2.31 No.
- 2.32 It is considered that there should be further stages and options in the event of the answer to "*has sufficient additional capacity been identified within the existing urban area and green field sites outside of the Green Belt to meet development needs?*" being 'yes'. The key question of "*are there exceptional circumstances to justify the release of Green Belt land?*" should be considered even if the answer is yes. There is an overarching need to provide the right housing type and distribution of housing for the borough, and the distribution should not be completely led by the supply.

2.33 In order to achieve the best possible outcomes, the process should be changed from the current iterative process to a more responsive model that takes the need to deliver the right land for development in the right locations into consideration throughout the entire process. A key example of why the suggested methodology does not work can be seen in the relationship between the boxes entitled “confirm preferred spatial distribution” and “assessment of individual site”. These issues should be interrelated, as an assessment of individual sites could lead to a further review of spatial distribution once all constraints are identified. The proposed methodology does not allow for this.

Question 12 - Do you agree with the assessment of Local Plan Policies at Appendix 1?

2.34 We consider that a full review of the Local Plan is required. The amount of land required for housing and employment goes to the very heart of the Local Plan, and has wide ranging implications for the vast majority of its policies.

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

2.35 We consider the proposed 20 year plan period to be appropriate in this instance. There may be significant slippage in the preparation and adoption of this plan. It is therefore prudent for the authority to extend the usual timeframe of 15 years to 20.

2.36 This completes our representations from a strategic perspective. We now submit specific sites for consideration as part of the call for sites exercise.

3. Call for Sites submission - Land at Booths Lane and Cherry Lane, Lymm

3.1 Emery Planning is instructed to submit the land at Booths Lane and Cherry Lane, Lymm to the Call for Sites exercise. The site is being promoted for an employment led mixed use allocation to the south-west of Lymm. A site location plan is appended at **EP1**.

3.2 We have previously promoted the site to the UDP and Core Strategy, including the evidence base. The Inspector examining the UDP concluded that there was no need to allocate additional land or to designate land as safeguarded, and therefore no site specific matters in

support of allocation or safeguarding were examined. The site has not previously been assessed within the SHLAA due to its Green Belt designation.

- 3.3 The site located within the Green Belt. We consider that Green Belt boundaries around Lymm should be reviewed.
- 3.4 We understand that other parties are promoting adjacent land to the south-west of Lymm. Our client's site could come forward as part of a wider allocation, or as a deliverable allocation in its own right.

Site description

- 3.5 The site is approximately 41ha in area and is within the ownership of our client. It is a greenfield site currently used for agricultural purposes.
- 3.6 The site is bounded by Booths Lane to the north, agricultural land to the east, Cherry Lane to the south, and agricultural land to the west. The M6 is located a short distance beyond the agricultural land to the west. We understand that the agricultural land to the east is being promoted by other parties for development. The M6 and M56 junction is located to the south of the site, and can be accessed via Cherry Lane.
- 3.7 We are not aware of any site specific constraints to development and the site is available and suitable for residential development, in line with local and national planning policy. Only the existing Green Belt designation prevents the site coming forward now.

Planning considerations

- 3.8 There is an acknowledged need to review the Green Belt boundaries to provide additional land to meet the objectively assessed development needs.
- 3.9 Lymm is extremely well located with excellent access to the M56 / M6 motorways, and would provide a sustainable and attractive location for a high quality business park capable of attracting significant inward investment. In our view the site would be well suited to meeting the needs of local, regional and international enterprise. Furthermore due to the sites proximity to the south of Lymm, this site also provides a unique opportunity to deliver housing as part of a mixed use development in a highly sustainable location. The provision of an element of

housing, linked to the employment development, would assist in ensuring that the site comes forward quickly to meet development needs early in the plan period.

- 3.10 The specific contribution that our client's site makes to the Green Belt purposes is considered below in our response to the Green Belt assessment. It is considered that the benefits of delivering an employment led mixed use development in this particular location would be capable of comprising the 'exceptional circumstances' required for the land to be removed from the Green Belt.
- 3.11 The site is not physically constrained by flood risk, ecological issues or topography and has good access to the surrounding highway network; particularly the M6 and M56 junction a short distance to the south.

Green Belt assessment

- 3.12 Paragraph 84 of the Framework states that when *"reviewing Green Belt boundaries, local authorities should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development"*. It is our view that this site should be removed from the Green Belt due to its location, its minimal contribution towards protecting openness, and its sustainable attributes.
- 3.13 We have reviewed the councils Green Belt assessment (October 2016) and note that the site is mainly not assessed. However, some of the eastern fields form a part of parcel LY26. This has been identified in the assessment as having a 'strong contribution' to the Green Belt. In our view this site makes a weak contribution to the Green Belt when considered in its entirety. This is assessed against the Green Belt purposes below:

Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

- 3.14 Parcel LY26 is identified in the Green Belt Assessment as making no contribution towards the prevention of urban sprawl. We agree with this assessment.

Prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another

- 3.1 Parcel LY26 is identified in the Green Belt Assessment as making no contribution towards the prevention of merging of settlements. We agree with this assessment.

Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

- 3.2 There would be some encroachment but this must be considered in light of the need for housing and employment land within the borough. The council acknowledges that releasing Green Belt is the only realistic option for meeting those needs. The council however states that LY26, which forms a small part of our client's site, makes a 'strong contribution' to the Green Belt in terms of encroachment, stating that:

"The parcel is connected to the settlement along part of its northern boundary. This consists of Booth's Lane, which is durable and would be able to prevent encroachment into the parcel. The parcel is well connected to the countryside along a mix of durable and non-durable boundaries. The eastern boundary along Cherry Lane is durable and would be able to prevent further encroachment beyond the parcel if the parcel is developed. The parcel's western and southern boundaries consist of hedge lined field boundaries, which are not durable and would not be able to prevent further encroachment. The existing land use mainly consists of open countryside. There are small amounts of vegetation and one residential property within the parcel. The parcel supports long line views and overall supports a strong degree of openness. Overall the parcel makes a strong contribution to safeguarding from encroachment."

- 3.3 We broadly agree with the council's assessment that there is a mix of durable and non-durable boundaries, particularly in terms of the client's site which extends beyond LY26 to the west. However, the site is contained by Cherry Lane to the south and Booths Lane to the north, and through development it would be possible to create significant landscaping along the boundaries of the site. Furthermore, any perceived intrusion into the open countryside needs to be weighed against the acute need for housing and employment in the borough. If these requirements are to be met, strategic employment sites such as the proposed must come forward. The site is well related to Statham and Lymm to the north, and has excellent links to wider highway networks such as the M6.

Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

- 3.4 This purpose is not applicable in this instance.

Assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

- 3.5 The Green Belt assessment states that the parcel known as LY26 makes a 'Moderate contribution' to this purpose. The assessment states that the Mid Mersey Housing Market has 2.08% brownfield urban capacity for potential development and therefore the parcel makes a moderate contribution. However, the release of Green Belt land will be essential to meeting the development requirements of the borough. In our view the development of the site would not conflict with this purpose. It would assist in urban regeneration by providing much needed employment and housing land to meet the needs of the borough.
- 3.6 The 'Justification for Assessment' column in the assessment of LY26 states that:
- "The parcel makes a strong contribution to one purpose, a moderate contribution to one and no contribution to three. In line with the methodology, professional judgement has therefore been applied to evaluate the overall contribution. The parcel has been judged to make a strong overall contribution as it supports a strong degree of openness and there are nondurable boundaries between the parcel and the countryside therefore the parcel has a strong role in preventing encroachment into the open countryside. The parcel therefore makes a strong contribution to fulfilling the fundamental aim of the Green Belt under paragraph 79 of the NPPF in protecting the openness of the Green Belt."*
- 3.7 Parcel LY26 was therefore concluded to make a 'strong contribution' to the Green Belt.
- 3.8 The above conclusion appears to be inconsistent with the assessment against the purposes, particularly in the context of the site being assessed as making 'no contribution' to three out of the five Green Belt purposes.
- 3.9 In this context, we consider that the exceptional circumstances relating to the acute need for employment and housing land, and in particular the strategic location of the site, outweighs the contribution that the site makes to the Green Belt purposes.

Conclusions

- 3.10 We support the identification of the land at Booths Lane/Cherry Lane as a strategic allocation in the Local Plan review. Our client's land at Cherry Lane, Lymm would provide a suitable and deliverable site for an employment led mixed use development to the south-west of Lymm. We would welcome further discussions with the council on this matter.
- 3.11 The site is available and suitable for residential development but is not deliverable at this time due to the Green Belt policy designation. Removal of this site from the Green Belt would not harm the purposes of the Green Belt, and would provide a deliverable site for development which would contribute towards meeting the Borough's objectively assessed needs.

4. Appendices

- EP1. Site location plan – Land at Cherry Lane, Lymm