

Warrington Preferred Development Option **Response Statement**

Submitted by Hollins Strategic Land and on behalf of 


September 2017

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Response Statement (RS) relates to the Warrington Borough Council (WBC) Local Plan Preferred Development Option (PDO). It demonstrates that land west of Stocks Lane, south of Friends Lane and south of Liverpool Road, Great Sankey ('the site')¹ should be allocated in whole or in part for residential development.



- 1.2 The locationally sustainable site is some 32ha in extent and is capable of providing approximately 900 – 1,100 dwellings within close proximity of existing services and facilities. It is also well related to the centre of Warrington and its increased New City offering, with excellent pedestrian, cycling and public transport connections.
- 1.3 The site is greenfield land and no constraints to its development have been identified. Furthermore, it has potential for multiple vehicular and pedestrian access points via the existing road network, including Friends Lane, Stocks Lane, Liverpool Road and Laburnum Lane. The absence of constraints and the numerous access options allow the site to be capable of providing housing early in the plan period, including significant development within the initial five-year period.

¹ Appendix 1: Location Plan

- 1.4 Early delivery would be assisted by the fact that Hollins Strategic Land (HSL) is not a housebuilder. Rather, HSL, as promoter of the site, can work with the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to secure a residential allocation that could be developed by numerous housebuilders. This would increase delivery rates early in the plan period and plug the gap while other strategic Green Belt releases are brought forward in conjunction with their own and other significant infrastructure projects, such as the Western Link, which will take many years to come forward.

- 1.5 Hollins Strategic Land would welcome the opportunity to meet with the LPA to discuss the development potential of the site and how it can assist in meeting the housing objectives of the emerging Local Plan (eLP).

2 Land south of Liverpool Road, Great Sankey

The Site and its Setting

2.1 The site is some 32ha in extent and is predominantly greenfield land which is currently allocated as Green Belt. It is however very well contained by existing development:

- To the north, the site is bound by Friends Lane and Liverpool Road. Existing residential development runs along Friends Lane and a variety of uses can be found along Liverpool Road; directly opposite the site there is a public house and a new residential development of 140 dwellings is under construction.
- To the east, the site is bound by Laburnum Lane and Stocks Lane. Residential development runs along both roads.
- To the south, the site boundary is formed by the railway line and regular services run throughout the day between Warrington, Liverpool and Manchester.
- To the west, telephone wires run along the partially vegetated site boundary in line with the existing road traffic speed signs, which mark the entrance/exit to Great Sankey and Warrington Borough.



Image 1: View across site from south eastern corner



Image 2: View along western site boundary

Green Belt purposes

- 2.2 The LPA has assessed the site's contribution to the five purposes of the Green Belt as part of a larger parcel (17). This includes a large swathe of land to the south of the railway line which adjoins Widnes. As would be expected, the LPA has subsequently found that the parcel makes a strong contribution, primarily given the risk of Warrington and Widnes merging.
- 2.3 The land to the north of the railway makes a weak contribution to the Green Belt purposes when assessed in isolation:
- The level of containment of the site ensures that its development would not result in the unrestricted sprawl of Warrington. Rather, it would continue the existing built pattern in a sympathetic and sustainable manner.
 - The western boundary to the site is some 1.6km from the nearest settlement, Bold Heath. There is a significant and well vegetated gap and subsequently, no impression of there being any risk of Great Sankey merging with Bold Heath.
 - The level of containment also ensures that the site has a limited connection with the countryside.
 - The site does not form part of the setting or special character of an historic town.
 - The LPA acknowledges that it must release significant Green Belt land because it has a limited supply of derelict and other urban land.



- 2.4 Once professional judgement is applied to the site in isolation, it is evident that it represents an opportunity to develop land that makes a weak contribution to the

purposes of the Green Belt, particularly the part of the site located to the south of Friends Land and to the west of Stocks Lane.

Locational Sustainability

2.5 The site is immediately adjacent to the existing built up settlement and as such, benefits from being within close proximity to a wide range of existing services and facilities. As a result of the excellent public transport, pedestrian and cycle links, all of the following are easily accessible from the site:

- district/neighbourhood centre;
- several local centres;
- a number of primary schools;
- Great Sankey High School;
- Penketh High School;
- Kings Leadership Academy Free (High) School, Penketh
- GPs, Dentists and Pharmacies;
- Public houses and cafes,
- Places of Worship;
- Leisure Centre;
- Lingley Mere Business Park;
- Omega Business and Distribution Park;
- Gemini Retail, Leisure and Business Park;
- Bus stops; and,
- Sankey railway station.



Image 3: Existing pedestrian/cycle routes from the site

- 2.6 The existing bus stops provide access to regular services to the wider area, including the centre of Warrington. The railway station is only some 1.5km walking distance from the site and provides regular services to destinations including Warrington, Manchester and Liverpool. Furthermore, there is already funding in place for a future Warrington West Station.

- 2.7 The site is evidently already locationally sustainable, as acknowledged by the LPA when approving the new residential development on the opposite side of Liverpool Road.



Figure 1: Context Plan²

² Appendix 2: Context Plan

Vision Statement

- 2.8 The site can accommodate up to 900 – 1,100 dwellings comprising of a mix and tenure to respond to local needs. Density can respond to neighbouring development along the northern and eastern boundaries, before reducing towards a landscaped area in the south west to achieve an effective transition to the open countryside beyond. These landscaped areas can form part of a network of significant public open space which can link in with existing pedestrian/cycle routes and make use of existing landscape features, including trees, hedgerows and ponds. This POS would benefit existing residents and respond to a significant deficit in both equipped play areas and informal play space in West Warrington.



Figure 2: Concept Plan³

- 2.9 Vehicular and pedestrian access points can be achieved from the existing surrounding road network, including Friends Lane and Stocks Lane, Liverpool Road and Laburnum Lane; these will provide permeability, legibility and inclusivity, ensuring a cohesive relationship with the existing settlement.
- 2.10 Furthermore, HSL can work with the LPA to provide additional infrastructure requirements if necessary, such as retail floorspace and a satellite health facility. The

³ Appendix 3: Concept Plan

level of infrastructure would of course be dependent upon whether the LPA chooses to:

- A. only allocate this site, or part(s) of this site, in West Warrington; or,
- B. identify the site as part of a larger West Warrington Urban Extension (WWUE).

2.11 If a larger WWUE is favoured by the LPA, HSL can work with other land owners to secure additional infrastructure, such as education provision, via an equalisation approach. HSL has recent experience of this, particularly in the North West, through land interests in the North West Preston Strategic Location and the North Lancaster Strategic Green Belt Release.

2.12 No matter which of the two options the LPA chooses to pursue, HSL is confident that the site can provide housing early in the plan period. The site can take advantage of existing infrastructure. No significant highways works would be required and there is capacity within existing education and health facilities to accommodate new development.

Summary

2.13 This RS has demonstrated that the site:

- is very well contained by existing development and forms a cohesive relationship with Great Sankey;
- makes a weak contribution to the Green Belt purposes when assessed in isolation;
- is already locationally sustainable, with services, employment and public transport all easily accessible by foot/cycle;
- can provide c. 1000 dwellings comprising of a mix and tenure to respond to local needs that can come forward early in the plan period and take advantage of existing infrastructure;
- can provide large areas of accessible POS in response to a significant deficit in West Warrington;
- can respond to infrastructure requirements, through joint working between HSL and the LPA, as well as other landowners within West Warrington if required.

3 Towards a Preferred Development Option

Land requirement for homes and employment

- 3.1 The PDO acknowledges that it is necessary to include provision for flexibility on top of the overall land supply to allow for market choice and sites not coming forward as planned. It states that “*the Council has chosen to make provision for an additional 5%*” (para. 4.13) and that “*this is at the lower end of flexibility rates considered by Inspectors in recent Local Plan examinations*” (para. 4.13). The LPA considers that this can be justified by three factors:
- Warrington’s track record of housing delivery;
 - The commitment to facilitate development through Warrington and Co.;
 - The potential development of Fiddlers Ferry Power Station during the plan period.
- 3.2 Whilst Warrington does have a reasonable record of housing delivery, this has not been in the context of significant Green Belt release. The major urban extensions proposed will test housing delivery in ways which are bound to impact upon speed of delivery in the early years of the plan period. It would not be appropriate to assume that housing delivery will continue as before. Warrington and Co. is focussed on economic growth, as opposed to residential development and cannot be relied upon to ensure housing delivery throughout the plan period. Finally, the PDO acknowledges that the Power Station may “*continue to be used for power generation*” (para. 3.6). There can be no certainty that it will be developable during the plan period and as such, it should not be relied upon to justify a low flexibility rate.
- 3.3 The Local Plan Experts Group (LPEG) report recommends that “*the NPPF makes clear that local plans should be required not only to demonstrate a five year land supply but also focus on ensuring a more effective supply of developable land for the medium to long term (over the whole plan period), plus make provision for, and provide a mechanism for the release of, developable Reserve Sites equivalent to 20% of their housing requirement, as far as is consistent with the policies set out in the NPPF*” (para. 41). It is evident that greater flexibility is required through the allocation of additional Green Belt land.

Safeguarding Requirements

- 3.4 The PDO states that it will continue ratios of urban to Green Belt land into the safeguarding period, but this is primarily based on the Power Station being developed. As previously stated, the LPA cannot demonstrate any certainty that this is developable and acknowledges that it could continue to be used for power generation. The eLP must not rely upon the Power Station and additional Green Belt land should be safeguarded for residential development.

4 Preferred Development Option

4.1 The PDO confirms that the Council considered 5 development options and has chosen to move forward with Option 2: a garden city suburb of approximately 6000 homes and an urban extension to the south west of Warrington of up to 2000 homes. The Council chose to discount options which included a 2500-home western urban extension because it was considered that:

- the land available for a 2500-home urban extension performed strongly against Green Belt objectives, both at General Area and individual parcel / development site level; and,
- there were infrastructure delivery issues given the relatively fragmented nature of available sites.

4.2 This RS has demonstrated that the land south of Friends Lane and Liverpool Road, Great Sankey, does not perform strongly against the Green Belt objectives; it is very well contained and will not create any sense of Warrington merging with the nearest settlement. This RS has also confirmed that HSL can work with the LPA and other land owners to deliver the infrastructure required to support the development of the site; therefore, greater certainty has been provided that the required infrastructure can be delivered and this represents a change in circumstance that warrants a reassessment of the potential of a western urban extension. HSL would welcome the opportunity to meet with the LPA and other land owners within the western urban extension area to explore this option in more detail.

4.3 Furthermore, HSL considers that the Council should explore a wider array of options, to include the land off Friends Lane and Liverpool Road, Great Sankey. For example, the Council could consider the merits behind an option which comprises of **a garden city suburb of approximately 5000 homes, an urban extension to the south west of up to 2000 homes and a western urban extension of up to 1000 homes**. This would allow the Council to achieve the following important objectives:

- Contribute to the New City Concept;
- Maintain the permanence of the Green Belt at a strategic level through managed release;
- Provide a Garden City which is of sufficient magnitude to be able to deliver necessary infrastructure;
- **Significantly broaden the supply of base of new homes** by providing development across three strategic locations, including a site in the north of the town;
- **Deliver significant levels of housing early in the plan period** via the western urban extension, which would be deliverable due to the lack of highways,

hazardous pipeline and other infrastructure constraints which are faced by the southern urban extensions;

- Deliver a western urban extension which is of such a magnitude that it can accommodate its required infrastructure and is located such that it can also make use of existing facilities and services, including schools;
- Provide housing in close proximity to existing major employment uses which are earmarked for future growth including Omega, Lingley Mere and Gemini business parks;
- **Respond to a significant deficit of public open space in west Warrington**, by achieving a western urban extension which provides the much-needed play equipment and informal play space in a location which has excellent permeability to the existing residential development to its north and east.

4.4 The PDO acknowledges that there remains significant work to be done to fully justify its preferred Option 2. It is considered that the above option, to include the site as a western urban extension, provides benefits of such significance that it must be afforded full consideration moving forward. HSL would of course welcome the opportunity to meet with the LPA to discuss this Option⁴.

4.5 HSL also considers that the Council should reconsider its approach to providing more than 1000 homes in the outlying settlements. Significant settlement extensions are proposed via Green Belt releases, yet these settlements represent far less sustainable options than urban areas. The Council must be able to justify why it is appropriate to increase the size of each outlying settlement by 10% but, at the same time, not increase the neighbourhoods within West Warrington at all.

4.6 The Council contends that it is necessary to provide 10% growth in the outlying settlements to enhance their sustainability. However, it does not consider whether this objective should also apply to the urban areas of West Warrington. Great Sankey, Penketh and Lingley Green will not see any significant additional development over the plan period, or beyond should no land be safeguarded in that location. The distinct lack of new development proposed in West Warrington is evident in Figure 9 of the PDO, which shows that development will be spread across the Borough, with an over-concentration of suburban housing development to the south of the Manchester Ship Canal, but that West Warrington will not benefit at all. This does not represent a sustainable development option, particularly when there is a significant POS deficit in West Warrington.

⁴ Or other variances which also achieve significant benefits

- 4.7 Furthermore, it is understood that some outlying settlements will require significantly more housing than proposed by the Council in order to provide the required infrastructure. It would not represent sustainable development to significantly increase outlying settlements which are far less sustainable in terms of access to services, including schools, employment opportunities and public transport. The outlying settlement extensions should be reduced and the housing redistributed to the urban areas of West Warrington.

5 Conclusions

5.1 This RS has demonstrated that land south of Friends Lane and Liverpool Road, Great Sankey should be allocated for residential development of c. 1000 dwellings during the plan period comprising of a mix and tenure to respond to local needs:

- It can provide large areas of public open space, to respond positively to the significant deficit of both equipped play areas and informal play space in West Warrington.
- The significant POS deficit would continue for another 15 – 20 years if the site is not allocated for housing and this does not represent sustainable plan-making.
- The allocation of the site would ensure that the sustainability of West Warrington is rightly secured and enhanced through the plan period. At present, the PDO neglects West Warrington in favour of the rest of the urban area and the outlying settlements.
- It would also broaden the supply base of new homes by providing development across three strategic locations, including a new one very well located close to Warrington's primary employment parks at Omega, Lingley Mere and Gemini.
- Housing would be delivered early in the plan period, with HSL working with the LPA to adopt a phased approach that makes use of existing infrastructure but also secures the additional required infrastructure.
- The site is very well contained by existing development and forms a cohesive relationship with Great Sankey:
 - It is bound to the north and east by residential development;
 - To the south, the railway line forms the boundary;
 - To the west, the vegetated boundary runs alongside telephone poles and aligns with the extent of existing built development.
- The site performs weakly against the purposes of the Green Belt given the level of containment and the significant distance to the nearest settlement to the west.
- It is already locationally sustainable with a wide range of services and facilities being accessible by existing foot/cycle links, as well as employment at Lingley Mere, bus stops and Sankey railway station.

5.2 HSL would welcome the opportunity to meet the LPA to discuss the numerous benefits that would arise from the allocation of the site.

Appendix 1

Friends Lane, Great Sankey

Location Plan



Appendix 2

Friends Lane, Great Sankey

Context Plan



Appendix 3

