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Warrington Borough Council

Local Plan

Preferred Development Option

Regulation 18 Consultation

Standard Response Form

July 2017

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Which best describes you? (tick ✓ one option only)

Resident in Warrington

Resident from outside of Warrington

Business

Other, please specify



Representations

Warrington Borough Council Local Plan Review Regulation
18 Consultation (September 2017)

for Brenrun Ltd

17-316



Project : 17-316

Document : Warrington Borough
Council Local Plan
Review

Client : Brenrun Ltd

Date : 29 September 2017

Author : [REDACTED]

Approved by : [REDACTED]

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Emery Planning has been instructed by Brenrun Ltd to prepare and submit representations to the Preferred Development Option Regulation 18 Consultation on the Warrington Borough Council Local Plan.
- 1.2 Representations were submitted on behalf of Brenrun Ltd to the previous round of consultation on the Local Plan in December 2016. A copy of these representations is enclosed with this statement at Appendix EP1.
- 1.3 We respond below to each of the questions set out in the Regulation 18 response form relevant to our client. Many of the questions are intrinsically linked. This has resulted in some overlap in our responses to certain questions.
- 1.4 The representations below should be read alongside the Overarching Representations to the Regulation 18 Consultation on the Local Plan prepared and submitted by Emery Planning.

2. Response to Preferred Development Option questions

- 2.1 We respond to the questions contained in the Regulation 18 response form relevant to our client below.

Do you have any comments to make about how we've worked out the need for new homes and employment land in Warrington over the next 20 years (question 1)?

- 2.2 We raised concern in our response to the previous consultation on the Local Plan in December 2017 that the need for housing and employment land in Warrington is not ambitious enough.
- 2.3 We address the need for housing land and how this ties with what we consider to be a unambitious and low jobs growth figure in detail in the Overarching Representations to the Methodology of the Local Plan submitted separately by Emery Planning. However, we comment on the employment land figure below.
- 2.4 Despite what appears to have been significant criticism of the Council's employment land methodology by representors to the previous round of consultation, no changes have been made to that methodology.

- 2.5 The Preferred Development Option consultation document is clear that the preferred employment land forecasting method is to project forward an average of past take-up rates over the past 20 years. Using this method, the consultation document states that there would be a need for a further 381 ha of employment land to 2037.
- 2.6 As made clear in our previous representations, we do not consider that this method of relying solely on past take-up rates is either robust or ambitious.
- 2.7 The period over which an average of past take-up rates has been taken includes the deepest and most protracted recession that the country has experienced since the second world war. That recession had an unprecedented impact on economic growth and would have suppressed employment land take-up rates greater than has been experienced before and at a level that is unlikely to be felt again, certainly in the plan period.
- 2.8 It is therefore considered that not making an allowance for that recession period, and simply taking an average of past take-up rates does not reflect the likely economic performance that will be experienced during the plan period. Indeed, whilst it is considered appropriate to take into account that in some years, employment land take-up may be below average, it is considered to be both unrealistic pessimistic and highly unambitious to plan for take-up to drop to levels experienced in the previous recession.
- 2.9 Furthermore, there are other factors that may have suppressed past take-up rates. The right land (in terms of factors such as size and location) may not have been available over the period that the average of past take-up rates has been taken. This is particularly considered to be the case given that employment land allocations in Warrington have not been updated since the 1998 Unitary Development Plan, which itself was formulated from an evidence base from even earlier.
- 2.10 Additionally, employment land take-up may have been low due to insufficient infrastructure availability, particularly during the recession when spending on infrastructure was low.

- 2.11 We therefore consider that basing future employment land requirements on an average of past take-up rates alone can only result in an employment land requirement that is too low, unambitious and may not reflect the demands of the economy over the plan period.
- 2.12 The National Planning Practice Guidance states that an assessment of future land needs should be determined by looking at both past trends and future forecasting methods. This is acknowledged in the consultation document.
- 2.13 However, the proposed future employment land requirement does not take into account any future forecasting. In particular, it does not take into account potential future initiatives and ambitions for Warrington and the North of England that could have significant implications for economic growth and employment land requirements in Warrington.
- 2.14 In particular, relying solely on past employment land take-up trends does not take into consideration the potential impacts of either the Northern Powerhouse Agenda, the Devolution Bid or the benefits to the region of HS2, never mind the current investment in the port of Liverpool.
- 2.15 Warrington may have a central part to play in the Northern Powerhouse agenda given its strategic location close to the motorway network and in between two of the North of England's largest conurbations (Liverpool and Manchester). There is therefore clear potential for Warrington's economy, and therefore employment land take-up rates, to exceed past trends, particularly past trends which are based on significant recession years.
- 2.16 As stated in our previous representations, the Northern Powerhouse Independent economic Review (published in 2016) identifies the following intended potential outcomes for the North of England under the Northern Powerhouse:
- The generation of 850,000 new jobs by 2050 over the baseline position of 710,000 jobs that would be created in any event;
 - An increase in productivity by 4% more than the baseline forecast; and
 - GVA 15% higher than the baseline forecast.

- 2.17 To not take into account the potential uplift in economic activity that could result from the Northern Powerhouse in setting an employment land requirement therefore could leave a significant shortfall of employment land going forward. This is particularly considered to be the case given that, as set out above, we consider that relying solely on past trends could in itself leave a shortfall in employment land supply given that past take-up trends are unlikely to be representative of future trends over the plan period, because they take into account a severe and prolonged recession, which is unlikely to be experienced again (certainly to the same extent) over the plan period.
- 2.18 Furthermore, the consultation document makes numerous references to Warrington's "New City" ambition. We consider that the proposed employment land supply, based solely on past trends, and not taking into account potential significant economic programs (such as the Northern Powerhouse) does not match this ambition.
- 2.19 We therefore consider that employment land needs should be resisted fundamentally reconsidered and the following taken into consideration, with a view to increasing the employment land needs:
- An allowance made for those years for which the economy was in severe depression. For example the severest recession years should be excluded when assessing average past take-up rates as they are unlikely to be representative of trends going forward; and
 - Future forecasting should take into consideration the potential uplift in economic activity that may occur as a result of the Northern Powerhouse and Devolution Bid, as well as the impact of committed and potential infrastructure improvements (such as the committed new Mersey crossing and potential additional new Mersey crossings, HS2, etc) which may encourage further investment.
- 2.20 Failure to take into account the above would likely result in the planned employment land needs falling short of actual need, leaving a shortfall of employment land in the Borough.

Have we appropriately worked out the amount of land to be released from the Green Belt, including the amount of land to be "safeguarded" (question 3)?

- 2.21 Given our response to question 1 above, (that we consider that the assessment of employment land need is too low) we consider that the amount of land proposed to be removed from the Green Belt for development purposes is also too low.

- 2.22 In particular, as the current amount of land to be released from the Green Belt is based on what we consider to be an unambitious employment land need, we consider that if the economic uplift of the Northern Powerhouse and Devolution Bid are as anticipated, and employment take-up is higher than past trends (which we consider to be likely given that past trends include heavy recession years), there would be no flexibility for both housing land supply and employment to absorb this increased economic activity, particularly towards the end of the plan period.
- 2.23 We therefore consider that further land for both employment and housing development should be released from the Green Belt for both allocations and for safeguarded land to be used after the plan period and avoid the need for further future Green Belt changes.
- 2.24 Paragraph 85 of the National Planning Policy framework (the "Framework") states that when defining Green Belt 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. It also makes it clear that local planning authorities should satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be reviewed again at the end of the plan period.
- 2.25 National policy is therefore clear on the need to provide for safeguarded land, and it is critical that a sufficient amount of safeguarded land is allocated in Warrington to meet development needs well beyond the plan period.
- 2.26 The correct approach to judging how much safeguarded land should be allocated was considered in the Examination into the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy (which has now been adopted). In summary, sufficient safeguarded land should be provided to ensure that the current requirement could be carried forward to the next plan period without the need for further Green Belt release at the end of the plan period. In practice therefore, the minimum requirement is to provide a similar amount of safeguarded land for after the plan period to the amount of Green Belt land being released for development during the plan period. Ideally, more should be provided however to allow for flexibility and higher growth and to increase the permanence of Green Belt boundaries.

- 2.27 The consultation document sets out that the total proposed safeguarded land amounts to "General Area 9" as identified in the Green Belt Assessment conducted in 2016, which is land located adjacent to the proposed "Garden City Suburb".
- 2.28 Given that we already consider that the amount of land to be released from the Green Belt for employment and general development needs during the plan period is too low and should be increased, we consider that the allocation of one strategic site as safeguarded land is not sufficient to meet the Borough's longer term development needs, particularly if trends are higher than past trends (which we considered likely, for the reasons set out above). This would result in a need for a further Green Belt release at the end of the plan period, which is contrary to paragraph 85 of the Framework. Indeed, the amount of land proposed to be safeguarded for future employment development is 76.2 ha. This is only 20% of the total amount of employment land need set out in the consultation document (which, as set out above, we consider to be too low).
- 2.29 Additionally, if this site does not come forward for any reason, there would be no further safeguarded land in the entire Borough. This is clearly not the correct approach.
- 2.30 We therefore consider that a range of sites throughout the Borough, including in the outlying areas, should be considered for additional Green Belt release for employment and general development needs during the plan period and further sites should also be considered for allocation as safeguarded land for employment development after the plan period.
- 2.31 In particular, given that the consultation document envisages that the greatest driver of the local economy is likely to be storage and distribution development, we consider that additional land should be allocated close to the Borough's motorway junctions, including close to Junction 9 of the M56 and the proposed Garden City Suburb. We consider that land to the east of this junction, including our client's land would be suitable. It would have good access to the Junction 9 and would be well-related to Lymm, which being one of the largest outlying settlements should be able to accommodate this additional employment growth.

Do you agree with our approach to providing new employment land (question 13)?

- 2.32 Whilst we do agree that the vast majority of new employment land will need to be land currently in the Green Belt, and that the area surrounding Junction 9 of the M56 is the most appropriate location for the majority of this Green Belt release and employment development, we do not consider that the amount of land proposed for employment allocation in this location is sufficient.
- 2.33 Given that the consultation document envisages that the a large proportion of employment growth and employment land demand will be from storage and distribution uses, we consider that locations close to the motorway junctions would be the most appropriate location for such employment allocations. Not only would development in these locations have good access to the strategic road network, it would minimise the number of large vehicles using potentially unsuitable roads within the urban areas.
- 2.34 However, linked to our response to the previous questions, we consider that a higher amount of employment land should be allocated at motorway junctions given our opinion that the consultation document underestimates the overall amount of employment land required.
- 2.35 Furthermore, we consider that the land surrounding Junction 9 of the M56 is one of the most suitable locations for further employment land allocation and we consider that the additional land should be allocated to the east of the motorway junction.
- 2.36 We consider that the local planning authority should not rely on an expansion of the Omega site to meet employment need, and indeed, we consider that given the uncertainty over the status of the St Helens Plan, the capacity of Junction 8 of the M62 and therefore the ability for an expansion of Omega to be deliverable, there should be no reliance of an extension to Omega in the plan to meet employment need. Instead, further land should be allocated close to the Garden City Suburb and Junction 9 of the M56.

3. Land at Booths Lane and Cherry Lane, Lymm

- 3.1 We have previously submitted details of our client's site to the UDP and the Core Strategy, including the evidence base, promoting it for a mixed-use allocation. The Inspector examining the UDP concluded that there was no need to allocate additional land or to designate land as safeguarded land, and therefore no site specific matters in support of an allocation of this site were examined.
- 3.2 However, given our comments above and the direction now adopted by the Local Plan to advocate further release and, Emery Planning's Overarching Representations on the Local Plan and our representations to the December 2016 consultation in relation to this site, we consider that there is a need to allocate both additional land currently in the Green Belt for employment and general development needs during the plan period and safeguarded land for employment development after the plan period. We consider that our client's site would be suitable for allocation and should be considered for such.

Site description

- 3.3 The site is approximately 41 ha in area and is within the ownership of our client. It is a greenfield site currently used for agricultural purposes.
- 3.4 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 and the M56 to the south. We understand that the agricultural land to the east has previously been promoted by other parties for development and it may be possible for both parcels to come forward together as part of a larger or subsequent phase of the Garden City Suburb. The M6 and M56 junction is located to the south of the site and can be accessed via Cherry Lane.
- 3.5 We are not aware of any site specific constraints to development and the site is available and suitable for development, in line with local and national planning policy, subject to its release from the Green Belt.
- 3.6 A plan showing the location of the site is attached at Appendix EP2.

Planning considerations

- 3.7 The site would be well-related to both the existing settlement of Lymm and the proposed Garden City Suburb on the opposite side of the M6. The site is considered suitable for both a mixed use allocation of housing and employment to complement the growth of Lymm and the proposed Garden City Suburb and could take some of the 500 homes currently proposed for Lymm in the consultation document¹.
- 3.8 The site is not physically constrained by flood risk, ecological issues or topography. It has good access to the strategic road network and to the settlement of Lymm.
- 3.9 Whilst the site is currently within the Green Belt, the consultation document acknowledges that Green belt release is required and, for the reasons outlined above and in Emery Planning's General Representations on the Methodology of the Local Plan, we consider there is a need to release further land than currently proposed from the Green Belt.
- 3.10 We consider that the site is suitable for release from the Green Belt. The vast majority of site was not assessed in the October 2016 Green Belt Assessment. However, some of the eastern fields of the site form part of Parcel LY26 in the Green Belt Assessment. Whilst this site was identified in the Green Belt Assessment as having a "strong contribution" to the Green Belt, in our view, the site as a whole makes a weak contribution to the Green Belt.
- 3.11 We assess the site against the purposes of the Green Belt below.

Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

- 3.12 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

- 3.13 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.

¹ However, we consider that a higher amount of housing development should be directed to Lymm. Please see Emery Planning's Overarching Representations to the Local Plan for further information.

Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

- 3.14 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."

- 3.15 We broadly agree with the council's assessment that there is a mix of durable and non-durable boundaries, particularly in terms of our 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 landscape buffers 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 development 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

- 3.16 This purpose is not applicable in this instance.

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

3.17 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 and this is now accepted through the allocations already identified in the consultation documents. 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.

3.18 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."

3.19 Parcel LY26 was therefore concluded to make a 'strong contribution' to the Green Belt.

3.20 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.

3.21 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 and the site should also be considered for Green Belt release alongside those already identified.

4. Appendices

- EP1. December 2016 representations to Regulation 18 consultation on behalf of Brenrun Ltd
- EP2. Site location plan

EP1



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 : 
Approved by : 

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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 be 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 **EPI**.
- 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

EP2

Cherry Lane, Lymm

