

CAN M.B.C PLANNING DEP
APPLICATION REFERENCE

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Application by Wainhomes Developments Ltd
to the east of Stone Cross Lane North, Lowton

PLANNING STATEMENT

EPP reference: PS1-8712-SH-gs

November 2012

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Emery Planning Partnership is instructed by Wainhomes Developments Limited to prepare this Planning Statement in support of their outline planning application on land east of Stone Cross Lane North, Lowton for up to 400 dwellings.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.2 The site is located adjacent to Lowton and is bounded by existing residential development to the north and east, employment development to the west and the A580 East Lancs Road (ELR) to the south. It is therefore a very well contained and logical site for development. Indeed this is recognised in the adopted Wigan UDP as the site is designated as Safeguarded Land which means that the land is allowed to come forward for development when required. The statement addresses the key planning issues to demonstrate that the site is required now.
- 1.3 The council cannot demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply. During the Core Strategy Examination, the appointed Inspector stated on 24th May 2012 that the council's housing land supply was 2.9 years. This is a significant shortfall when paragraph 49 of the NPPF requires local planning authorities to demonstrate a 5 year supply. If they cannot, then their housing policies are out of date and the presumption is in favour of development unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.
- 1.4 In the council's own calculations in the October 2012 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), 150 dwellings are included from this site in the next 5 years. Therefore to meet the council's expectation for this site this planning application has been prepared.
- 1.5 The application site is identified for development in the emerging Core Strategy. Policy SP4 of the emerging Core Strategy dated February 2011 identified the site as one of four development options along the ELR. The Core Strategy considered that at least one of the sites was required in the plan period. Emery Planning Partnership attended the Core Strategy Examination earlier this year seeking the inclusion of the site as an allocation for development in the next 5 years. Following the close of the Examination the Inspector wrote to the council on 24th May 2012 informing it of his concerns on a number of matters. The shortfall in housing land supply over the next 5 years and across the plan period was the most significant.
- 1.6 As a result of the Inspector's findings, the council undertook further work on its Core Strategy and a consultation was held during from 31st July to 11th September 2012. In that

consultation, 5 options were considered as to how the shortfall could be addressed. Option B was:

"Meet the shortfall primarily by using land safeguarded for future development at Goldborne and Lowtorf".

- 1.7 The council's conclusion was that Option B was the most appropriate and that the three sites in the ELR are all needed to deliver some 2,300 dwellings by 2026. The application site is one of those three sites. The two other sites are Rothwells Farm and Pocket Nook.
- 1.8 Following the close of the consultation a report was taken to Cabinet on 25th October and Full Council on 7th November respectively to agree the way forward. The report identifies that the principle of developing the Golbourne and Lowton sites was part of the submitted Core Strategy, albeit not necessarily all three sites being developed by 2026. Having considered all the representations and other evidence including an updated Sustainability Appraisal the report concludes that the remaining shortfall of housing land to 2026 is best met through development of the Golbourne and Lowton sites. The recommendations of the report were fully endorsed by the Cabinet and Full Council.
- 1.9 To conclude, the proposed development would provide both market and affordable housing in a sustainable location. As the site is specifically identified in the council's own Core Strategy and supporting documents to deliver 150 dwellings in the next 5 years from this site planning permission should be granted accordingly.

2. THE APPLICATION

- 2.1 In this section we set out a description of the site, the accessibility of the site and the proposed development.

The Site

- 2.2 The application site is shown on the location plan submitted with the application. An illustrative layout has also been submitted. The application site extends to some 13.1 hectares.
- 2.3 The proposed development site is relatively flat, with a gentle slope down from east to west and north to south. The site currently comprises a number of open fields and a handful of farmsteads together with an area of woodland/open space to the eastern edge (to the rear of the properties on Martland Avenue). The agricultural land is used for a range of primarily arable purposes and is not best and most versatile agricultural land.
- 2.4 The application site is a logical development site as it is bounded on all sides by built development. Immediately to the north and east is existing built development which forms

part of Lowton. To the south is the ELR and to the west of the site is an employment area (EM1A).

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The Proposals

2.5 This application is in outline with all matters except access reserved for future approval. The proposed development which will be phase 1 of the wider development for 670 dwellings is for:

- up to 400 houses, 20% (80 houses) of which will be affordable housing;
- creation of new footpaths and cycleways, with links to the wider area,
- provision of new public open space; and,
- retention and enhancement of existing wildlife habitats.

2.6 The proposal provides the opportunity to provide sustainable market and affordable housing in close proximity to local services and employment opportunities and the creation of high quality open space.

2.7 The relatively low density design of the scheme combined with the gradual transition into the high quality open space to the south of the site would allow the development to provide a sympathetic transition from the hard 1970's urban fringe of Lowton to the Wigan Green Belt situated to the south of the ELR.

2.8 There is an identified need for lower density, higher value housing in the Borough. The council appreciates that it is important to build such housing to ensure that the borough can contribute and compete with the wider Manchester city-region. If the provision for such housing is not made, Wigan is likely to fall behind its competitors both economically and socially.

2.9 Vehicular access to the site is proposed off B5207 Church Lane to the east and Stone Cross Lane North to the west. Additional access by foot and cycle is also proposed off the existing infrastructure to the perimeter of the site.

Accessibility

2.10 The site is in a highly sustainable location with excellent links to public transport services, existing community facilities, and the services and facilities in the village of Lowton. The site abuts Stone Cross Employment Area. The application site provides an excellent opportunity for a development of this scale in such close proximity to existing services and facilities to maximise walking, cycling and the use of public transport.

2.11 An important part of the application is the safe connectivity with the wider area as the proposal will seek to integrate the existing public footpaths into the development. The

high quality low density design of the development scheme will ensure it lies harmoniously with the existing dwellings to the north.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 2.12 Emery Planning Partnership requested a formal Screening Opinion on the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment under paragraph 5 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011. The council considered that an EIA was required and therefore an EIA has been prepared and submitted with this application.

Public Consultation

- 2.13 Wainhomes has taken an active part in the emerging Wigan Core Strategy including attendance at the Examination earlier this year. The application site is one of the sites that was identified in Policy SP4 of the emerging Core Strategy and subject to consultation by Wigan Council.
- 2.14 A further consultation was undertaken on the 31st July 2012 for 6 weeks which was titled "*Options for meeting the shortfall of housing land, and other proposals*". In that consultation 5 options were considered, these being:
- a) Land safeguarded for future development at Standish
 - b) Land safeguarded for future development at Golborne and Lowton
 - c) Land in the Green Belt around Wigan
 - d) Land in the Green Belt at Leigh
 - e) Combinations of the above options.
- 2.15 Having considered all the representations the land within the ELR (Option B) was deemed by the council to be the most appropriate to address the Inspector's concerns. This requires all three of the sites identified in the ELR to come forward by 2026 and deliver 2,300 dwellings. The application site is one of the three sites required to come forward. The other two are Rothwells Farm and Pocket Nook.
- 2.16 Therefore the local community has been consulted upon through the emerging Core Strategy process on the principle of development. The local community of Golborne and Lowton were also represented by a number of speakers at the Examination. In addition the elected members of Wigan Council have now resolved to approve the emerging Core Strategy which specifically includes this site for development.
- 2.17 Discussions and meetings have been held on aspects of the development with the officers of the council and the Highway Authority.

- 2.18 The applicant has also sought the views of the local community and a public exhibition was held on Tuesday 20th November 2012. This followed a leaflet drop to some 1,200 addresses in proximity to the application site enclosing the illustrative masterplan and inviting comments either by email, in writing or attendance at the exhibition. The outcome of that consultation is set out in the submitted Statement of Community Involvement.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 In this section we set out the planning policies which are applicable to the application. We address the policies dealing with the principle of development in this Planning Statement. The Environmental Impact Assessment and supporting documents submitted with this application deal with the environmental and technical policies in the adopted and emerging development plan and we do not repeat that assessment here.

National Planning Policy Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – March 2012

- 3.2 The NPPF was published on 27th March 2012 and sets out the Government's planning policies for England. All former Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) and Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) have been replaced by the NPPF, with the exception of PPS10: Planning for Sustainable Waste and The Planning System: General Principles.

The presumption in favour of sustainable development

- 3.3 At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision taking (paragraph 14). For decision making this means approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting planning permission unless:

- Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or
- Specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.

- 3.4 Paragraph 19 states that the Government is committed to ensuring that the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth. Planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth.

The Development Plan

- 3.5 The development plan consists of the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West (RSS) and the replacement Wigan Unitary Development Plan. Wigan Council is in the process of preparing a Local Development Framework that will supersede the Wigan Unitary Development Plan.

North West Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)

- 3.6 The RSS was published in September 2008. Whilst we note the intended revocation of the RSS, it is still part of the development plan.
- 3.7 The RSS document does not contain policies directly relevant to the application site, although the following policies are applicable:

- Policy DP 1 Spatial Principles;
- Policy DP 2 Promote Sustainable Communities;
- Policy DP 3 Promote Sustainable Economic Development;
- Policy DP 4 Make the Best Use of Existing Resources and Infrastructure;
- Policy DP 5 Manage Travel Demand; Reduce the Need to Travel, and Increase Accessibility;
- Policy DP 6 Marry Opportunity and Need;
- Policy DP 7 Promote Environmental Quality;
- Policy DP 9 Reduce Emissions and Adapt to Climate Change;
- Policy RDF 1 Spatial Priorities;
- Policy W 1 Strengthening the Regional Economy;
- Policy L 1 Health, Sport, Recreation, Cultural and Education Services Provision;
- Policy L 2 Understanding Housing Markets;
- Policy L 3 Existing Housing Stock and Housing Renewal;
- Policy L 4 Regional Housing Provision;
- Policy L 5 Affordable Housing;
- Policy RT 1 Integrated Transport Networks;
- Policy RT 2 Managing Travel Demand;
- Policy RT 3 Public Transport Framework;
- Policy RT 4 Management of the Highway Network;
- Policy RT 9 Walking and Cycling;
- Policy RT 10 Priorities for Transport Management and Investment;
- Policy EM 3 Green Infrastructure;
- Policy EM 5 Integrated Water Management;
- Policy EM 10 A Regional Approach to Waste Management;
- Policy EM 11 Waste Management Principle;

- Policy EM 12 Locational Principles;
- Policy EM 16 Energy Conservation & Efficiency
- Policy EM 17 Renewable Energy;
- Policy MCR 1 Manchester City Region Priorities; and,
- Policy MCR 5 Northern Part of the Manchester City Region.

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Wigan Unitary Development Plan

3.8 The Wigan Unitary Development Plan was adopted on 26 April 2006 and will remain a 'saved' Development Plan until it is replaced by development plan documents prepared under the terms of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

3.9 The relevant policies are:

- GB2 Safeguarded Land
- R1B New Housing Sites
- R1D The Design of New Residential Development and House Extensions
- R1E Open Space in New Housing Developments
- R1H Affordable Housing
- EV1A Land Redamation and Renewal
- EV1B Pollution
- EV2 Nature Conservation
- EV2C Features of Major Importance for Nature Conservation and Wildlife Corridors
- EV2D Species Protection
- EV2E Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows
- EV3 Design
- EV3A Design of New Development
- EV3D Landscaping of Development
- EV3H Public Art
- A1 Accessibility
- A1A Transport Assessments
- A1B Travel Plans
- A1C Access for All
- A1D Walking
- A1E Cycling
- A1F Bus Provision – New Development
- A1G Physical Improvements to Bus Network
- A1N Strategic Route Network
- A1P Major Highway Schemes
- A1R Highway Access – New Development

- A1S Parking in New Development
- A1U Improving Access to Support a Sustainable Pattern of Settlement
- C1 Community Facilities, Open Space, Sport and Recreation
- C1B Open Space, Sport and Recreation Provision
- C1C Protection of Open Space and Sport and Recreation Provision
- C1E Greenway Network
- WM1 Waste Management
- WM1A Waste Management Facilities
- WM1B Operation and Restoration of Waste Management Facilities
- WM1C Control of Waste Management Facilities
- G1A Impact of Development on Amenity
- G1B Planning Obligations
- G1C Development and Flood Risk
- G1D Renewable Energy

The emerging Development Plan

3.10 The Local Development Scheme sets out the council's intention to produce five development plan documents, these being:

- The Core Strategy;
- A Greater Manchester Joint Waste Development Plan Document;
- A Greater Manchester Joint Minerals Development Plan Document;
- Wigan Central Area Action Plan; and,
- A Site Allocations Development Plan Document.

3.11 The key document for this application is the Core Strategy. The Core Strategy was submitted to the Secretary of State in September 2011 for examination. Below is a summary of the key policies.

Core Strategy Revised Proposals and Draft Policies (February 2011)

3.12 The relevant draft policies in the submission draft relevant to this application are:

- Policy SP 4 'Broad locations for new developments' - identified the land subject to the application as one of three options for lower density, higher value housing.
- Policy CP 6 'Housing' – recognizes that the local authority will help ensure that there is sufficient housing in the borough to meet peoples needs and support a good quality of life.
- Policy CP 7 'Accessibility'- the local authority seek to improve accessibility to key destinations for people and goods; and intend to connect people to opportunities both within and outside the borough by ensuring new development is integrated into the existing infrastructure.

- Policy CP 8 'Green Belt and Safeguarded Land' – recognizes that safeguarded land within the 'broad locations for new development' and other safeguarded land within the 'east-west core' of the borough will be reviewed, and allocated for development in a subsequent development plan document, in accordance with the spatial policies.
- Policy CP 9 'Strategic Landscape and Green Infrastructure' - Seeks to improve the natural environments and open spaces within both existing and proposed developments within the borough.
- Policy CP 10 'Design' – was adopted to improve the built environment of the borough and help make it a better place to live, visit and work.
- Policy CP 15 'Waste' – requires developments to adopt a sustainable approach to handling waste both during construction, and once the development is occupied.
- Policy CP 17 'Flooding' – sets out a clear protocol to follow to reduce the risk of flooding from all sources.
- Policy CP 18 'Environmental Protection' – is designed to maintain, enhance and protect the natural environment.

3.13 The Examination commenced in early 2012. However in a letter dated 24th May 2012 the Inspector considers the "*submitted core strategy to be unsound in that it fails to demonstrate an adequate and realistically deliverable supply of housing land.*" As a result the Examination was suspended and further work was required. This work was published in a document titled "*Options for addressing the shortfall of housing land, and other proposals*" on 31st July 2012.

Options for addressing the shortfall of housing land, and other proposals (July 2012)

3.14 Five options are set out and assessed in the consultation document to address the Inspector's identified shortfall of 2,500 dwellings, these being:

- Option A: Land safeguarded for future development at Standish;
- Option B: Land safeguarded for future development at Golborne and Lowton;
- Option C: Land in the Green Belt around Wigan;
- Option D: Land in the Green Belt at Leigh; and,
- Option E: Combinations of the above options.

3.15 In the consultation document the council's position was that Option B, which includes the application site, was the most sustainable option to address the housing shortfall.

3.16 Following the close of the consultation a report was taken to Cabinet on 25th October 2012 and Full Council on 7th November 2012 respectively to agree the way forward. The report

identifies that the principle of developing the Golbourne and Lowton sites was part of the submitted Core Strategy in February 2011, albeit not necessarily all three sites being developed by 2026. Having considered all the representations and other evidence including an updated Sustainability Appraisal the report concludes that the remaining shortfall of housing land to 2026 is best met through development of the Golbourne and Lowton sites. The recommendations of the report were fully endorsed by the Cabinet and Full Council.

- 3.17 When assessing the application against paragraph 14 of NPPF it is clear that the site is a deliverable housing site and now it is part of the council's resolved position in progressing with its Core Strategy. Therefore its release now would not result in any adverse impacts that would significantly or demonstrably outweigh the planning benefits.

Additional Policy Documents

- 3.18 There are a number of additional policy documents. Many of these documents are more applicable to any subsequent reserved matters application.

Open Space in New Housing

- 3.19 Wigan Borough Environmental Services Department published 'Open Space in new housing' in October 2005. The document sets out the councils adopted standards for the design and layout of open spaces and children's play facilities within and close to housing developments. It sets out a range of physical and social infrastructure which an applicant may have to make a financial contribution to, via a Section 106 agreement.

Landscape Design Submissions

- 3.20 The 'Landscape Design Submissions' supplementary design guidance was adopted in October 2005; the document highlights the minimum standards and quality of landscape design submissions required by the council.

Supplementary Planning Document for Affordable Housing

- 3.21 Wigan Borough Council published the 'Supplementary Planning Document for Affordable Housing' in April 2006. The SPD sets out the site thresholds and requirements for affordable housing. This Current policy requires that 20% of homes are provided as affordable homes.

Access for All Supplementary Planning Document

- 3.22 Wigan Borough Council published the supplementary planning document in September 2006. The document sets out the main requirements that a development proposal will need to meet in order to show that it will create an accessible environment.

Design Guide for Residential Development Supplementary Planning Document

- 3.23 The Design Guide for residential Development was adopted in 2005 and sets out guidance on design issues and standard criteria against which any proposed development should be considered.

Development and Protected Species Supplementary Planning Document

- 3.24 Wigan Borough Council adopted the supplementary planning document in June 2007. The document includes guidance on when surveys for protected species will be required, guidance is also given on when a survey should be carried out and details of the information expected to be included within a survey report.

Development and Air Quality Supplementary Planning Document

- 3.25 The Development and Air Quality Supplementary Planning Document was adopted in September 2007, its primary function is to safeguard the environment by encouraging sustainable development that balances and integrates economic, social and environmental benefits. The document also provides guidance on mitigation and compensating measures relating to the significance of the air quality impact.

Travel Plans Supplementary Planning Document

- 3.26 The Travel Plans Supplementary Planning Document was adopted in June 2007. The document was created to ensure that new development is accessible on foot, by cycle and by public transport.

4. HOUSING LAND SUPPLY

- 4.1 Housing land supply is a significant material consideration in the determination of this planning application. NPPF sets out the Government's expectations. Paragraph 47 states:

"To boost significantly the supply of housing, local planning authorities should:

- use their evidence base to ensure that their Local Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area, as far as is consistent with the policies set out in this Framework, including identifying key sites which are critical to the delivery of the housing strategy over the plan period;*
- identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years worth of housing against their housing requirements with an additional buffer of 5% (moved forward from later in the plan period) to ensure choice and competition in the market for land. Where there has been a record of persistent under delivery of housing, local planning*

authorities should increase the buffer to 20% (moved forward from later in the plan period) to provide a realistic prospect of achieving the planned supply and to ensure choice and competition in the market for land;

- *identify a supply of specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth, for years 6-10 and, where possible, for years 11-15;*
- *for market and affordable housing, illustrate the expected rate of housing delivery through a housing trajectory for the plan period and set out a housing implementation strategy for the full range of housing describing how they will maintain delivery of a five-year supply of housing land to meet their housing target; and*
- *set out their own approach to housing density to reflect local circumstances."*

4.2 During the consultation process for both the SHLAA and Core Strategy, we have consistently maintained our view that the council cannot demonstrate a five year deliverable land supply.

4.3 Following the Examination, the Inspector stated in his letter dated 24th May 2012 that "*the submitted core strategy to be unsound in that it fails to demonstrate an adequate and realistically deliverable supply of housing land*". The Inspector stated that for the plan period (2011 to 2026) the housing requirement is for at least 16,500 dwellings. He went on to state that in the council's housing trajectory there is a shortfall of at least 2,500 dwellings. The need to address this shortfall was the focus for the further work that has been undertaken since the Examination was suspended.

4.4 The above shortfall was identified based on the council's housing completions at April 2011 and the housing trajectory which envisaged 400 dwellings being completed in year 2011/2012. We now have the benefit of the completions for the period 2011/2012 which totalled 278 dwellings.

4.5 For the next 5 years the Inspector states that a 20% NPPF buffer is required in addition to the annual requirement of 1,000 dwellings per annum. This results in the need for at least 6,000 dwellings. Against this requirement the Inspector's conclusion was that the council's supply was 2.9 years. Therefore paragraph 49 of the NPPF is engaged. This paragraph states:

"Housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up-to-date if the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites."

4.6 Therefore for this application paragraph 14 of NPPF requires the council to grant permission unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits or where specific policies in the NPPF indicate development should

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be restricted. We now assess whether there are any such adverse impacts in relation to the application site.

5. PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 We now assess the key planning considerations. As noted earlier the Environmental Impact Assessment addresses the environmental and technical matters.

The Release of Safeguarded Land

- 5.2 The Greater Manchester Green Belt was designated in 1984 and covers parts of Wigan Borough. Policy GB2 of the Wigan UDP designates safeguarded land. Safeguarded land is land specifically excluded from the Green Belt to give the existing town and villages the necessary flexibility to grow over the long term without the need for a continual Green Belt review. The application site is designated as safeguarded land.

- 5.3 Policy GB2 states:

"The safeguarded land, defined on the proposals map, may be required to serve development needs in the longer term, well beyond the plan period. It is identified for this purpose in order that the boundaries of the adopted Green Belt will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period in 2016. This land is not allocated for development at present. It will be kept free of permanent development so that it may fulfil its purpose of meeting possible longer term development needs. Although temporary development may be permitted if this would assist in ensuring that the land is properly looked after, no development which would prejudice later comprehensive development will be permitted. Planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land will be granted only following a review of the development plan which proposes this."

- 5.4 There are a number of parts to policy GB2 which are relevant to this application. The first is the clear intention that safeguarded land is required for development when needed. In addition the last sentence states that planning permission will only be granted following a review of the development plan.
- 5.5 As set out in Sections 3 and 4 above a review of the UDP is being undertaken and that review is clear that the application site is needed not only within the plan period but within the next 5 years. This is set out in the council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and the emerging Core Strategy.

The SHLAA and Housing Trajectory

- 5.6 As we have set out in Section 4 above, the council cannot demonstrate a 5 year land supply. There have been a number of housing trajectories published since the Core Strategy was submitted for Examination in September 2011. The submission draft of the

Core Strategy assumed 600 dwellings to be delivered in the ELR by 2026. In the housing trajectory submitted to the 7th February 2012 (Examination Document CS28) the first completions on sites in the ELR were expected in 2014/15 which is only two years away. The only sites which can deliver these houses is safeguarded land.

- 5.7 In the October 2012 SHLAA, which has been the subject of consultation, Table 4 showed a 5 year housing supply of 5,063 dwellings. Whilst we contested the robustness of that figure it still falls well short of the Inspector's requirement of 6,000 dwellings to be delivered over the next 5 years. However the key point for this application is that even if that figure is correct, it includes 150 completions from the application site (Ref Wig151) in the next 5 years.
- 5.8 The only conclusion which can be drawn is that the application site is a component part of the council's 5 year housing supply. This also recognises the need for safeguarded land releases now. This is because the time from an application being submitted to first housing completions can take 18 months if permission is granted expeditiously. This is because a reserved matters application is then required as well as discharge of pre-commencement conditions approvals. Once all approvals have been given then construction work begins and first completions can take some 6 months from then. Table 1 of the SHLAA (October 2012) also recognises this and sets out lead in times of between 2½ and 3 years.
- 5.9 Our client is actively building throughout Wigan. Therefore if the site is permitted the council can have the confidence that the site will come forward as the market demand for housing in this location is strong.

Wigan UDP Inspectors Report (2005)

- 5.10 The Inspector into the Wigan UDP considered objections to what is now the application site. The objections sought two different outcomes. The first was that the safeguarded land designation should be removed and the land should be designated as Green Belt. The second was that the land should be allocated for development. For ease of reference we set out the Inspector's conclusions.
- 5.11 With the regard to the objection to designate the land as Green Belt, the Inspector did not agree to such a proposition and made the following comments:

6.178. the majority of it is cropped farm land and, therefore, green-field land which does not provide a beneficial wildlife habitat. The area not actively farmed has been inspected by an ecologist from the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit. It was found to have some wildlife value but not sufficient to warrant the status of Site of Biological Importance (SBI). In any case, the protection of wildlife is not among the purposes of green belt policy.

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6.179. The objectors value the area for its landscape value. PPG2 advises that the quality of the landscape is not relevant to the inclusion of land within a green belt. They argue that the land should be returned to its former Green Belt status, but the objection site has never been subject to such a designation. I conclude that exceptional circumstances have not been demonstrated which would justify the alteration of the green belt to include this land.

- 5.12 Following his clear conclusion that the land should not be designated as Green Belt the Inspector then considered whether the site should be allocated. He stated:

6.180. Other objectors seek the removal of the land at Stirrups Farm from its safeguarded land designation and its allocation, in whole or in part, for housing or for a mixed use development which would include employment. For the reasons I give in the section of this report which relates to policy R1A, I conclude that there is sufficient land available from sites with planning permission, the residential element of proposed mixed use allocations and the reasonable expectation of windfall sites coming forward on previously developed land within the defined urban area to meet housing development needs in the plan period. There is, therefore, having regard to the advice of PPG3 on the sequence of land allocation and development, no justification at this stage for the release of greenfield land for housing development, including that at Stirrups Farm, for this purpose, either in its own right or as part of a mixed use development.

- 5.13 The Inspector concluded that there was sufficient land to meet the housing needs of the plan period without allocating this site. He did however recommend that the site be considered to meet the employment need in the plan period.
- 5.14 As we have set out in Section 4 above the conclusion of the Inspector that there was sufficient land on previously developed sites has been found to be incorrect due to the land supply position the council now finds itself with. The Inspector wrote the above conclusions in 2005 and if he had the benefit of hindsight then there is a very strong chance that the site would have been allocated in the UDP at that time. Nevertheless the key conclusion of the Inspector's Report is that the site is suitable for development as the only reason it not being allocated was the lack of a need for greenfield development at that time.

Range and Type of Housing

- 5.15 Under the heading "*Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes*", paragraphs 47 to 68 seek to:
- Ensure that their Local Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area.
 - Identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years worth of housing against their housing requirements with an additional buffer of 5% to ensure choice and competition in the market for land.

- Where there has been a record of persistent under delivery of housing, local planning authorities should increase the buffer to 20%.
- Housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up-to-date if the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites.

5.16 This application is to deliver a range of new homes, including higher value homes, family homes and homes for local people.

Affordable Housing

5.17 The council's document titled Affordable Housing Provision – Guidance for Developers (August 2012) states that there is a shortage of affordable housing in the borough as a whole. It then states that the Housing Needs and Demand Study (2008) established the level of outstanding need at 417 units per annum. This was reviewed in 2011 and it is currently estimated at 277 additional units per annum. Based on 400 dwellings across the site, the application will deliver 80 affordable homes.

Higher Value Housing

5.18 Part 6 of Policy SP4 of the Core Strategy stated that the ELR is "*a location for housing primarily of lower density and higher value to help balance the housing market*". In addition, the council's answer in Section 16 of their response to the Inspector (Document EX5) sets out three key benefits which are:

- providing high value housing;
- enabling a share of the development value to be invested in the East-West Core; and,
- providing a more balanced housing offer in the borough.

5.19 Section 17 of the council's written statement to the Inspector to the Examination sets out the benefits of seeking low density (higher value) housing in the East Lancashire Road Corridor. This is supported by the 2008 Housing Needs and Demand Study. This sets out the type and range of housing need. This is primarily set out in Tables 9/2, 9/3 and 9/4. The key points are:

- 39.3% of respondents require detached properties;
- 31.9% of respondents require semi-detached properties;
- 43.7% of respondents require 3 bedrooms and 25.9% 4 bedrooms; and
- 58.8% require a 4 bed detached property.

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5.20 Table 9/6 then sets out the choice of location. This shows that areas outside the east-west core favoured locations for market housing. Orrell / Billinge / Winstanley were the most popular choice (20.6%), followed by Shevington / Standish / Aspull (15.4%) and Leigh (13.9%). Golborne/Lowton had 7.1%. Whilst these areas are attractive for market housing and should provide new housing, Golborne/Lowton is the only location to meet the council's aspiration for higher value homes along the ELR and should be prioritised.

5.21 Paragraph 8.27 of the submitted Core Strategy states:

"From within East Lancashire Road corridor a site or sites will subsequently be identified and allocated in a future development plan document. The attractive greenfield nature of sites in this area, along with their location close to the East Lancashire Road, makes them uniquely qualified to provide higher value housing suitable for those commuting to Manchester or Liverpool, or for business leaders in the borough who want to live locally."

5.22 The council's adopted economic framework (page 19) specifically refers to the ELR. It states:

"tackle the often poor housing standards and the lack of choice in the central core of the Borough and provide a range of accessible sites in the vicinity of the East Lancs Road to create strong cohesive housing markets which will be some of the most attractive residential offers in the Region".

5.23 In light of the above policies and the unique advantage that the ELR can provide any delay to the delivery of this site is likely to harm meeting the housing need and economic objectives of the council. Any delay would also be contrary to paragraph 19 of NPPF which states that the Government is committed to ensuring that the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth. Planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth.

5.24 In addition it should be noted that development along the ELR would not harm the delivery of housing within the east/west core. The reason for this is that they are two different markets and the same house along the ELR would have a higher value than a house in the east/west core due to the characteristics of the market. Therefore for Wigan to meet its housing and economic needs development needs to occur now in the east/west core and along the ELR.

Environmental and Technical Matters

5.25 The submitted Environmental Impact Assessment concludes that the proposed development constitutes a sustainable residential development that contributes

substantially to local and regional housing and development objectives and does not have any adverse environmental or technical impacts.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 To draw our conclusions, we have set out below the three roles for sustainable development that are set out in NPPF. These three roles enable a sound conclusion to be made when determining whether a site is sustainable. For ease of reference the sustainability criteria in NPPF are as follows:

- **an economic role** – contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;
- **a social role** – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being; and
- **an environmental role** – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.

An Economic Role

6.2 The Planning for Growth Ministerial Statement (23rd March 2011) refers to the Chancellor's ambitious set of proposals to help rebuild Britain's economy and the key role the planning system has to play in helping to secure a swift return to economic growth by ensuring that the sustainable development needed to support the economy is able to proceed as early as possible. In his statement the Minister set out that:-

"The Government's top priority in reforming the planning system is to promote sustainable economic growth and jobs. Government's clear expectation is that the answer to development and growth should wherever possible be 'yes', except where this would compromise the key sustainable development principles set out in national planning policy."

6.3 It goes on to state that:-

"Local planning authorities should therefore press ahead without delay in preparing up-to-date development plans, and should use the

opportunity to be pro-active in driving and supporting the growth that this country needs. They should make every effort to identify and meet the housing, business and other development needs for their areas, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth, taking full account of relevant economic signals such as land prices."

- 6.4 The inclusion of housing within the Ministerial Statement as an economic generator is an important consideration for this application. Therefore providing new housing in an accessible location would assist the local economy through construction jobs and jobs in the supply chain, as well as retail sales for new domestic products such as carpets and white goods.
- 6.5 This is a proposal by a local housebuilder who will bring the site forward; it is not a speculative land valuation exercise by a landowner seeking to take advantage of a low housing land supply position. Wainhomes builds around 300 dwellings per annum and is currently building on 12 sites throughout the North West. This demonstrates their commitment to build even throughout the last few years when development has commenced as soon as permission was granted.
- 6.6 In our examination of the housing land supply, that the council is not ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time. This application, seeks in part, to address this. The site is located adjacent to a key town in Wigan and this application would assist in providing additional housing. In addition this new housing has a direct impact on the economic success of Wigan as set out in the submitted Core Strategy and the council's adopted economic framework which specifically identifies that the ELR as the only area to provide higher value housing suitable for those commuting to Manchester or Liverpool, or for business leaders in the borough who want to live locally. Therefore the economic importance of this site is a significant planning benefit.

A Social Role

- 6.7 There are three strands to this criterion. The first is accessibility, the second is the provision of houses where required and the third is supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities.
- 6.8 Lowton is an accessible location for development. This is accepted through the Wigan UDP, the emerging Core Strategy and the supporting documentation including the Sustainability Appraisal.
- 6.9 With regard to the provision of houses there is a need for both open market and affordable housing in Wigan. This is because of the level of housing delivery to date has resulted in an undersupply of both affordable houses and open market houses.

- 6.10 The supply of larger detached dwellings is crucial for both economic and social sustainability. With the range of dwellings proposed and the associated open space, this application will assist in providing strong, vibrant and healthy community.

An Environmental Role

- 6.11 NPPF states that development should be restricted on sites protected under the Birds and Habitats Directives (see paragraph 119) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Heritage Coast or within a National Park (or the Broads Authority); designated heritage assets; and locations at risk of flooding or coastal erosion. None of these apply to the application site.
- 6.12 With regard to agricultural land quality the report prepared for the site found that the site did not include any '*best most versatile land*'. It identified the site consists of 11.97 ha of ALC Grade 3b and 1.06 ha of non-agricultural land.
- 6.13 An Environmental Impact Assessment has been prepared and submitted with this application. The development proposals have been assessed against planning policy, relevant guidance and recognised standards. All significant effects have been identified and, where adverse, have been minimised as far as possible through design or the application of suitable mitigation measures. It is considered that the development constitutes a sustainable residential development that contributes substantially to local and regional housing and development objectives.
- 6.14 To conclude the proposed development meets the criteria in NPPF and is sustainable development. On that basis, the presumption is in favour of the proposed development and planning permission should be granted accordingly.