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## **Wigan Core Strategy EiP: Matter 7b**

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On behalf of Persimmon Homes

East Lancashire Road Corridor

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## INTRODUCTION

The key issue identified by the Inspector is whether the East Lancashire Road Corridor broad location for new development is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

## QUESTIONS

- 1) *What is the justification for including four site options spread over a broad area in a submitted Core Strategy and retaining the potential for more than one or even all the sites to be developed? Does it provide sufficient guidance for later DPDs? How?*

The SHLAA Practice Guidance states that broad locations are areas where housing development is considered feasible and will be encouraged, but where specific sites cannot yet be identified (parag. 46). However, part 6 of Policy SP4 does list four specific sites within the broad area of the East Lancashire Road Corridor. It would therefore be more appropriate to identify one of these specific sites as a strategic allocation under Policy SP3. This is particularly the case given that there are serious concerns with regard to the deliverability and economic viability of housing development at the Northleigh Park strategic site within the timescales proposed (see Matter 6). As discussed under Matter 7c, the other broad locations are constrained and of doubtful viability and therefore not capable of designation as strategic sites themselves to compensate for this.

The delivery of the strategy requires the rebalancing of the housing market, as specified in paragraph 9.37. This is the purpose of allocating land in the East Lancashire Road Corridor. Evidence that a site is essential to the delivery of the plan can justify its designation as a strategic site. Our client's site at Pocket Nook qualifies as a potential strategic location, as it can provide a logical urban extension to provide initial low-density housing. It is not affected by viability issues and has scope for subsequent phases to meet ongoing development needs.

Should the Inspector resolve that the choice of site should be deferred to a subsequent DPD, the site selection criteria in PPS3 would be an appropriate starting point. However, given the priorities of the proposed strategy and also the characteristics of some of the sites the additional criteria should include:

- The potential attractiveness of the site to more affluent house purchasers seeking low density detached housing
- Ease of access for those wishing to reach the regional centres of Liverpool and Manchester
- The desirability of not compromising established employment sites and their expansion where appropriate

- 2) *How much housing could be delivered on each site option or all of them together? How would this relate to the overall scale and pattern of housing development planned in the Borough?*

Little detail is given within the policy as to how much housing each site option could deliver. It is only stated that the site options “*will provide primarily for lower density, higher value housing*” with some development likely to be around 10 houses per hectare. We presume that this will be a minimum and that individual masterplans will be produced with a range of low to average densities to respect the character of the sites and their surroundings.

The Persimmon ownership at Pocket Nook consists of 7.7 hectares within the 66 hectares of safeguarded land. Additional land owned by Gordon Moon Properties to the south (11.5 hectares) is also now combined with the Persimmon ownership, whilst Milnes Gaskell Estates have been promoting a further substantial component. An initial masterplan for the whole of the safeguarded area by e\*SCAPE Urbanists shows a mix of low and medium density properties (see Appendix). Further reference to its findings is made under Question 7. Clearly development on this scale would be phased. Within the SHLAA (Update 2010), the Pocket Nook site alone is prescribed to deliver 1,668 units in the 5-10 year period (although at the upper end of the density range at 30dph). For indicative purposes alone, we note that the entire safeguarded site (which we propose for the strategic allocation) developed at an average of 20 dwellings per hectare would produce 1,320 houses. The first phase could focus on housing of the lowest density to provide the greatest rebalancing effect.

The only indication of envisaged numbers from the Council is from the discussion of education provision in the Key Site and Broad Locations Evidence Paper, where a “*general assumption of 1668 new dwellings is used for the East Lancashire Road corridor as a whole*”. We do not know the origins of this figure, but development at this level implies that a strategic allocation is appropriate and that development may encompass more than one of the sites.

Point 2 of Core Policy 6 states that around 85% of new housing will be focussed in the East West Core. As discussed under Question 3, we have doubts about the wisdom of this degree of concentration. However, this would leave 2,250 in the rest of the Borough and there is scope to provide a significant proportion of these at Pocket Nook in the East Lancashire Road Corridor to contribute to rebalancing the housing market.

3) *What is the justification for development on this scale outside the EW core? How would the proposal fit with the spatial strategy?*

We have commented under Matter 1 that the Core Strategy has an over-dependence on the East West Core. There are significant viability and deliverability issues to overcome on many of the sites here, as it has been defined on the basis that this is the most deprived area which suffers from the greatest degradation. An imbalance could therefore impede investment and threaten housing delivery, thus not achieving the economic benefits associated with housing development. The 85% of housing directed to the East West Core should be reduced and at least 15% of housing allocated to the East Lancashire Road Corridor, focussed on an additional strategic site at Pocket Nook.

There is also a positive case for sufficient development in the East Lancashire Road Corridor set out in the Core Strategy. The most important is the rebalancing of the housing market, as discussed under Question 5. As acknowledged in paragraph 8.26 of the Core Strategy, the lower density, higher value housing to be provided here is unlikely to be developed in the East West Core before 2026, with the possible exception (in the Council's view) of Garrett Hall

Paragraph 8.4 recognises the position of the borough in relation to the major cities of Manchester and Liverpool. It also states an intention to make sure that people are well placed to take advantage of these opportunities. The East Lancashire Corridor is well placed to capitalise on this. The appraisals of the sites in the Corridor in the Key Site and Broad Locations Evidence Paper cite how they would be attractive to workers in the City Region through ease of access along the A580.

Development in this location is also justified by its ability to support the viability of marginal sites in the East West Core, due to the proposed mechanism to facilitate essential infrastructure.

- 4) *How in practical terms will development in the East Lancs Road Corridor benefit regeneration in the EW core? How will it be phased? Could investment and demand be diverted from the EW core, particularly in difficult market conditions?*

Under Matter 4 (Housing) we explore the economic benefits of housing development. It is estimated that every £1 million of new house building output supports twelve net jobs (seven direct and five indirect) for a year. The construction industry also makes a crucial contribution to improving the skills level of the workforce. In addition, high quality housing helps to attract and retain the most talented and skilled members of the workforce that will be the catalysts of economic growth in the future. These benefits will only be achieved if housing is viable to deliver. However, they will not be confined to policy areas defined in the Core Strategy. The economic multiplier from development in the East Lancashire Road Corridor will clearly benefit residents and business within the nearby East West Core.

In order to maintain a genuine five year supply and to address recent undersupply, it would be appropriate to 'frontload' greenfield land which has been safeguarded and so previously identified as suitable for development, where this would be consistent with the plan strategy. In the case of our client's site at Pocket Nook, this would also assist in achieving other planning objectives, in particular the supply of executive housing which will not otherwise be satisfied.

Regarding the proposed mechanism to facilitate essential infrastructure, Persimmon have not opposed this in principle. CIL would be appropriate for this purpose, but we are not yet in a position where adequate evidence is available of the costs of bringing development of marginal viability forward. Our discussion under Matters 6 and 7c substantiates these

concerns. It would be possible to secure financial contributions from the development pending CIL, as financial contributions to rebalance the housing market are capable of meeting S016 tests including being necessary to make the development acceptable and directly related to it. These issues will require further analysis in the Site Allocations DPD.

We are already in a position when insufficient development is occurring in the East West Core, despite a five year supply claimed by the Council, due to these sites not being viable. It would be an oversimplification to conclude that preventing development which is currently viable divert development to locations which do not make economic sense in a poor market. The likely results are that housing need will not be met and that the borough will not achieve the economic uplift identified in 'Laying the Foundations', the Government's housing strategy.

5) *What are the benefits of seeking lower density housing and how will this be achieved?*

We have also provided our comments on this question under Matter 4. The Core Strategy recognises that the main benefit of lower density housing in this location is that it will help balance the local housing market.

An appropriate housing mix must take account of the needs and aspirations not only of existing residents, but of the households which Wigan must attract to enhance its economic prosperity.

There is evidence of the existing mix of housing following on from paragraph 3.46 of the Housing Topic Paper. Although the data is 10 years old, this shows that Wigan has a significantly lower proportion of detached properties (16.6%) than nationwide (21%). More recently, the 2008 Wigan Housing Needs Survey reveals that out of existing and concealed households 39.3% sought detached housing.

Wigan is perceived as less desirable to professionals in certain regards. This is reflected in it having some of the lowest house prices in Greater Manchester. An increased proportion of higher value low density homes is an important means of addressing this. Larger owner-occupied family homes also have the greatest economic impact. Lower density housing will both retain more affluent households and encourage professional and managerial workers to locate within the borough, supporting its council tax base.

The role of the Core Strategy is to set out the aspiration and to enable the allocation of sites where it will be practicable to achieve the desired development mix. Further guidance should be contained within the Allocations and Development management DPD. However, it would be inappropriate for the Council to micromanage individual sites when developers will have to justify their proposed mix in any case, in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 69 of PPS3.

6) *What potential adverse effects are there e.g. traffic, capacity of local infrastructure, open land/greenspace, biodiversity and residential amenity?*

As the sites are safeguarded, they have previously been identified as suitable for development. They should not be compared with Green Belt with the presumption that it should remain open in the long term.

The East Lancashire Road is a strategic transport route between the regional centres of Liverpool and Manchester which also provides connectivity to the regional motorway network. Some mitigation in relation to the effects of specific development is to be expected, but it must be remembered that development here is consistent with the plan strategy in paragraph 8.4.

Much of the analysis provided in the Key Site and Broad Locations Evidence Paper relates to the broad location generally. It does not identify any constraints which are likely to be a major impediment to development. Bearing in mind the scale of the sites, the issues raised by the question are ones which we would expect to be accommodated within the individual masterplans although they will of course affect site capacity.

In relation to our client's site at Pocket Nook, the appraisal by e\*SCAPE Urbanists included in our Appendix show that there is the capacity to accommodate the effects of the development within the safeguarded area, as is to be expected on a site of this scale.

7) *Are the sites realistically viable and deliverable? What evidence is there?*

The Viability Advice report (November 2010) does not include the sites in the East Lancashire Road Corridor. This reflects the fact that these are greenfield sites, to varying extents within established market areas. Generally speaking, any abnormal costs are likely to be typical of developments of the scale proposed and there is no indication of issues of viability. Indeed, unlike many sites within the East West Core, the sites will have the ability to contribute to affordable housing (whether on site or by means of an off-site contribution according to market balancing objectives). The Council also anticipates an infrastructure contribution, which should be achievable if pegged at a realistic level

As a housebuilder which has long been active in the vicinity, Persimmon considers that the provision of low to medium density family housing in this area will prove attractive to the market. Their confidence is confirmed by the expansion of their land interests at Pocket Nook.

Bearing in mind the significant viability constraints for the strategic site at Northleigh Park and the other broad locations, in order to be effective the Core Strategy should include a

strategic site where this is not an issue and deliverability can be relied upon. Pocket Nook is such a location.

To support the site appraisal and masterplan for Pocket Nook by e\*SCAPE Urbanists, Persimmon have carried out a series of technical assessments. The overall site is well related to adjacent residential areas and is accessible by a range of different transport modes. It is well located to local services and amenities including primary and secondary schools. Initial highways work shows a number of access opportunities and there are existing and potential pedestrian and cycle linkages into the surrounding area.

As indicated under Question 6, it is a relatively straightforward matter to work around the site-specific opportunities and constraints on a site of this scale. This is particularly so when its safeguarded status means that it has previously been assessed as suitable for development. For example, a small area immediately adjacent to Carr Brook has been identified as being within an area of flood risk. This is not a limiting factor, but simply allows space to implement green infrastructure and landscape elements.

We have argued elsewhere that there is a case for early delivery of low density units within the broad location. The area owned by Persimmon without Pocket Nook would be an ideal location for this. It relates well to the existing urban boundary and could form a first phase of the proposed strategic site. The Persimmon Homes ownership has the benefit of two existing access points from the housing area to the north. Traffic modelling has been undertaken and concludes that 150 new homes can be provided with the capacity tolerance of the existing highway network.

This portion of the site is capable of an immediate planning application. Our client's ownership means that there no negotiations or legalities are required to exercise an option. There are no technical constraints affecting this area. There are no viability issues to preclude an affordable housing contribution. This reflects the absence of abnormal costs, a good housing market locally, and the fact that our client has owned the site for some time and not acquired it at an unrealistic price.

Having regard to the allocation criteria which we advocate under Question 1, the four sites within the broad location vary in their ability to create their own market and to break free of the perceptions of surroundings where these currently have negative associations. Hence Rothwell Farm suffers from its association with Golborne. It is also detached from East Lancashire Road. Land at Coldahurst Lane should not be regarded as part of the East Lancashire Road Corridor but as an extension of the less desirable East West Core which it adjoins.

Whilst Stonecross Park has some merits in locational terms, this has also been a successful location for recent attractive high quality employment development. This has a prominent road frontage in an accessible location. Housing development should not preclude the expansion of this important source of local employment and it may be undesirable for the existing primary access to be shared by both HGVs and residential traffic.



These sites and locations will not attract the higher quality housing of which Pocket Nook in Lowton is capable. It would clearly be the most effective site in achieving the plan strategy of rebalancing the housing market and generating off-site contributions, due to the higher values achievable in Lowton as the best market area in the vicinity. The overall site is relatively unconstrained and is available either in whole or part immediately. Its allocation as a strategic site would provide much needed certainty. It would help to secure the soundness of the Core Strategy by ensuring that its housing strategy is effective, by satisfying housing need and by contributing to the economic prosperity and regeneration of Wigan.

## Appendix

Masterplan for Pocket Nook, Lowton by e\*SCAPE Urbanists