



# Hearing Statement on behalf of Wainhomes (North West) Ltd

In relation to: Matter 3 – Spatial Strategy and Strategic  
Policies

for Wainhomes (North West) Ltd

Emery Ref : 17-005  
Hearing : Matter 3  
Client : Wainhomes (North West)  
Ltd

Date : May 2021

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## 1. Introduction

1.1 Emery Planning is instructed by Wainhomes (North West) Ltd to attend the St Helens Borough Local Plan Examination. Wainhomes (North West) Ltd has an interest in the following sites:

- Land off Camp Road and Strong Road, Garswood;
- Land off Lords Fold; and,
- Land off Winwick Road, Newton-le-Willows.

1.2 This hearing statement sets out our response to the Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions in relation to Matter 3 – Spatial Strategy and Strategic Policies. It should be read in conjunction with our detailed representations to the Submission Version of the Plan and our other Hearing Statements submitted to this examination.

## 2. Response to Matters and Issues

### **Q8. Has enough or too much land been proposed for safeguarding to meet longer-term development needs?**

2.1 Insufficient land has been identified for safeguarding to meet longer-term development needs for the borough.

2.2 Paragraph 139 of the Framework states when defining Green Belt boundaries, plans should:

*c) where necessary, identify 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;*

*e) be able to demonstrate that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period (our emphasis)*

2.3 Sufficient safeguarded land should be provided to ensure that the current requirement could be carried forward to the next plan period. Assuming the plan is adopted in late 2021 in line with the LDS, safeguarded land should be identified to at least 2052, to ensure that sufficient land is available to support future growth without the need for further Green Belt release.

2.4 This would provide opportunity and a greater level of flexibility for future growth whilst ensuring the permanence of the Green Belt and that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be further

altered at the end of the plan period unless necessary due to a significant change in housing and/or employment needs.

- 2.5 The Housing Need and Supply Background Paper (October 2020) sets out the council's approach to safeguarded land. The Paper states the Council have adopted no specific methodology to calculate the post plan period requirement, rather the plan period requirement in respect of housing is carried forward and is considered a reasonable basis to measure provision of safeguarded land against.
- 2.6 In response to the Inspectors Preliminary Question PQ45 the Council states they have not sought to identify a specific employment land need figure for post 2035, and have instead "*identified a reasonable amount of land to safeguard in order to meet future development needs*". However, it is unclear how the Council have concluded what a "reasonable" amount of land is and why this approach is justified.
- 2.7 The amount of safeguarded land needed in practice was considered at the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy Examination (Appendix 1). In this case it was determined that sufficient safeguarded land should be made available for another full plan period following the end of the current plan period. Therefore, sufficient land should be safeguarded to ensure that the current plan requirement could be carried forward to at least 2052.
- 2.8 With regard to the amount of safeguarded land proposed under LPA06, this amounts to 85.88ha of employment land and land sufficient to deliver 2,641 dwellings.
- 2.9 In terms of employment land this represents only 32% of the land allocated for employment use under Policy LPA04. This is clearly insufficient.
- 2.10 In terms of housing, the Council identify within their response to PQ45. this would equate to 6.4 years of housing land based on the requirement of 486dpa as proposed under LPA05.
- 2.11 The Council have significantly underestimated the amount of land required for release from the Green Belt to meet housing need and consequently have underestimated the amount of safeguarded land that is required for the next plan period.
- 2.12 This should be remedied through the designation of additional safeguarded land.

## Appendix 1

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# Report to Cheshire East Council

by **Stephen J Pratt BA (Hons) MRTPI**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government**  
**20 June 2017**

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Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004  
(as amended)

Section 20

## **Report on the Examination of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy Development Plan Document**

The Plan was submitted for examination on 20 May 2014

The examination hearings were held between 16 October – 3 November 2014,  
20-30 October 2015 & 13 September - 20 October 2016

File Ref: PINS/R0660/429/3

seemed flawed, particularly the release of sites from the Green Belt and the provision of Safeguarded Land; there was also insufficient justification for the proposed new area of Green Belt around Crewe. However, during the suspension of the examination, CEC undertook more work to address these matters.

96. In my Further Interim Views (Appendix 2), I considered that the approach and content of CEC’s updated Site-Selection Methodology and Green Belt Assessment (GBAU) [RE/F010; PS/E034] reflected national policy and other guidance in the NPPF & PPG; it provided a set of objective, comprehensive and proportionate evidence to inform CEC’s selection of Green Belt land, which addressed most of the earlier shortcomings of the previous Green Belt assessment without “retro-fitting” the evidence. It not only addressed the need to demonstrate exceptional circumstances, but also considered alternative options to releasing Green Belt land, assessed sites against the purposes of the Green Belt, and considered the selection of sites in a sequential manner, prioritising non-Green Belt sites before considering Green Belt sites based on their contribution to Green Belt purposes; this included assessing their contribution to urban regeneration and took account of the assessment of the potential of brownfield/windfall sites likely to come forward within the urban areas [PS/E039].
97. The GBAU included a strategic assessment of 44 general areas in the Green Belt throughout Cheshire East, as well as a more detailed assessment of over 400 smaller parcels of land, to provide a key input into the site-selection process. CEC also updated and clarified the final assessment of some sites in response to criticisms of others. No other evidence has comprehensively assessed the opportunities for releasing Green Belt land and no new evidence or information was presented at the later hearings or in further representations to alter these conclusions. I deal with the site-specific aspects of proposed releases of land from the Green Belt on a general and town-by-town basis, later in my report; I also understand that the SADPPDP will consider the possibility of identifying further smaller scale releases of land from the Green Belt, if exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated, in line with the site-selection methodology. I deal with the issue of the new Green Belt originally proposed around Crewe later.
98. Consequently, and having considered all the evidence and discussions on the Green Belt issue, I consider that CEC’s general approach to the Green Belt and the selection of sites is appropriate, fully justified, effective, soundly based and consistent with national policy. However, the list of sites in the policy and the general extent of the existing Green Belt (Fig 8.1) need to be amended to reflect CEC’s latest proposals, including the deletion of Sites CS51 & 64 **[MM05]**. With these recommended modifications, the overall approach to the Green Belt set out in Policy PG3 is soundly based and consistent with national policy.

#### *Safeguarded Land*

99. Policy PG4 sets out CEC’s approach to identifying Safeguarded Land, confirming that development will not be permitted in such areas unless it is justified through a review of the CELPS, and designating the sites identified as Safeguarded Land. The Policy remains unchanged from that in the CELPS-SD, apart from updating the list of sites and deleting the reference to identifying further Safeguarded Land in Poynton, and its approach is consistent with national policy (NPPF; ¶ 85). The CELPS-PC proposes to release some 200ha of land from the Green Belt for Safeguarded Land in the north of the Borough, which is justified in the supporting evidence (SLTA) [PS/E031a.5]; various options for the distribution of Safeguarded Land were also considered by CEC [RE/F010; Appx 2]. The overall amount of



proposed Safeguarded Land is intended to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the end of the current plan period; in fact, taking account of other sources of land, it should be sufficient for another full 15-year period beyond 2030, so that the Green Belt boundary defined in the CELPS-PC will not need to be amended until at least 2045.

100. Some participants are concerned that the overall amount of proposed Safeguarded Land is inadequate to meet future development needs, but as confirmed in my Further Interim Views (Appendix 2), I consider CEC has taken a balanced and cautious approach to the amount of Safeguarded Land to be identified, which seems to be logical, rational, effective and justified by the supporting evidence; CEC has also justified the exceptional circumstances needed to release Green Belt land to provide Safeguarded Land. Since then, no new evidence has been presented to alter this conclusion.
101. Some participants are concerned about the spatial distribution of Safeguarded Land, pointing out that Macclesfield has over 50% of the total amount of such land. However, CEC has fully explained the process and methodology used in selecting and distributing Safeguarded Land, [PS/E031a.5; RM3.001; RE/F010], based on the principles of the revised spatial distribution of development, focused on Macclesfield and the towns in the north of the Borough. Since Macclesfield has the highest amount of growth outside Crewe and is the only Principal Town in the Green Belt, it is sensible and reasonable that its allocation of Safeguarded Land is proportionately higher than other settlements. However, CEC agrees to slightly reduce the area of one Safeguarded Land (Site CS32) for site-specific reasons **[MM06]**. At Handforth, the apportionment of Safeguarded Land is based on its resident population, rather than on the revised spatial distribution of development [RH/B002.013]; this is more appropriate, given that the alternative would result in far more Safeguarded Land than is necessary being allocated to Handforth, particularly in view of the larger scale of development being allocated at the NCGV and the fact that Handforth may not continue to assist with meeting the needs of other Green Belt settlements into the next plan period.
102. CEC also confirms that the SADDPDP will consider the need to provide a modest amount of Safeguarded Land at the LSCs, if necessary, in line with the spatial distribution of Safeguarded Land envisaged in the supporting evidence [RE/F010; Appx 2]. Of course, identifying Safeguarded Land does not necessarily mean that it will be developed in the future, but offers the potential for development to be considered in future reviews of the CELPS without needing to alter the Green Belt. The amount and location of development that would be needed on Safeguarded Land would also be based on an assessment of needs at that time.
103. Some argue that the policy should indicate how Safeguarded Land will be brought forward for development within the current plan period. However, this approach would not reflect the purposes of identifying such land, in terms of meeting longer-term development needs beyond the current plan period, and would conflict with national policy (NPPF; ¶ 83-85). Furthermore, the CELPS has identified sufficient housing and employment land to meet the assessed requirements, so it is not necessary to identify further alternative or “reserve” sites at this stage. The monitoring framework provides a trigger for action and review if and when a shortfall in housing provision arises.
104. As regards specific sites, CEC proposes to reduce the area of Site CS32, and delete Sites CS51 & CS64 from the list of sites in Policy PG4 and on the accompanying diagram (Fig 8.3) **[MM06]**. I deal with specific issues related to these and other

sites later in my report. Consequently, with the recommended modifications, I conclude that Policy PG4 provides an appropriate, justified, effective and soundly based approach to the provision of Safeguarded Land, which is consistent with national policy, is justified by the exceptional circumstances previously referred to and is necessary to ensure that Green Belt boundaries will be capable of enduring beyond the current Plan period.

### *Strategic Green Gaps*

105. Policy PG4a is a new policy covering the proposed Strategic Green Gaps around Crewe and between Crewe and Nantwich. In my Interim Views (Appendix 1), I considered there was insufficient evidence and no exceptional circumstances to justify establishing a new Green Belt in this locality, as proposed in the CELPS-SD; CEC subsequently proposed a new Strategic Green Gaps policy covering a similar area, following advice from their consultants [BE/011; PS/E015; PS/E031a.6]. At the heart of this policy is the need to manage the rapidly changing settlement pattern in south Cheshire, particularly due to the growth of Crewe. It defines Strategic Green Gaps which seek to provide long-term protection against coalescence, protect the setting and separate identity of settlements and retain the existing settlement pattern, with positive effects on sustainability objectives.
106. Some participants consider the policy is inappropriate, unjustified, ineffective and unduly restrictive, and serves no clear purpose, whilst others seek an extension to its spatial coverage or a return to the former proposed Green Belt policy. Having considered all the evidence and discussions, I consider the policy has a clear purpose, in preventing the coalescence of settlements, protecting their setting and separate identity and retaining the open land between them. The general principle of establishing Strategic Green Gaps around Crewe is wholly appropriate, reflects Policy NE4 in the existing Crewe & Nantwich Local Plan (C&NLP), is justified by specific evidence [PS/E015; PS/E031.a6] and is soundly based. Policy PG4a is necessary not only to manage the rapidly growing and changing settlement pattern in south Cheshire, enabling the growth of Crewe, but also to retain the separate identity of the surrounding towns and smaller settlements. It also takes account of local circumstances and reflects the different characteristics and roles of the various towns, settlements and local communities, in line with NPPF (¶ 10; 17; 150; 154-155; 157). I deal with issues relating to specific sites later in my report.
107. I realise that the current C&NLP policy has had mixed success at recent planning appeals, but its purposes have been recognised, even though the weight given to it has varied. Some of its policy objectives could be met by the open countryside policy (Policy PG5) (which also applies within the Strategic Green Gaps) and are similar to Green Belt policy, but it has a clear and relevant planning purpose. It is a restrictive policy and needs to be robust, covering all forms of development, in order to prevent the erosion of physical gaps between settlements and protect the visual and open character of the intervening landscape. Nevertheless, it would enable limited development which did not conflict with the purposes of this policy and those of Policy PG5. Without such a policy, development could begin to erode the gaps between existing settlements and possibly lead to their coalescence if only protected by the open countryside policy. Now that it is fully justified with proportionate and specific evidence, Policy PG4a is effective and sound.
108. The general extent of the Strategic Green Gaps policy has been addressed in the supporting evidence [BE/011], and whilst ideally its detailed boundaries should be defined in the CELPS, the revised policy provides sufficient strategic guidance and