



ST HELENS BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN 2020-2035 EXAMINATION

HEARING SESSION 4

MATTER 4 – HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT ALLOCATIONS AND SAFEGUARDED LAND

BOLD, ECCLESTON, SUTTON MANOR, THATTO HEATH AND ST HELENS CORE AREA

ON BEHALF OF REDROW HOMES NORTH WEST & WALLACE LAND INVESTMENTS

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Pegasus Group has been instructed on behalf of their clients, Redrow Homes North West and Wallace Land Investments, to prepare Hearing Statements to the St Helens Local Plan Examination (EiP).
- 1.2 This Statement deals with **Hearing Session 4, Matter 4**, which addresses '**Allocations, Safeguarded Land and Green Belt boundaries in Bold, Eccleston, Sutton Manor, Thatto Heath and St Helens Core Area**'. We have prepared separate Hearing Statements to deal with the remaining allocations and safeguarded land sites which are to be discussed at Hearing Sessions 5 & 6.
- 1.3 At the outset we note that the Council published an updated 'Employment And Housing Land Supply Position as of 31st March 2021' (**SHBC007**) on 12th May 2021, which extends the plan period to 2037 as the Council suggest they would do as a Main Modification in their responses to PQ24 and PQ25 and which we endorse.
- 1.4 Accordingly, this statement is based on this latest evidence and extended plan period; however we note that this post-dates, and therefore does not align with, the Inspectors questions. It has also given representors just 8 working days to respond, given the 21st May deadline for Matter 4 Statements.

2. ISSUE 1: OMEGA SOUTH WESTERN EXTENSION (1EA) AND OMEGA NORTH WESTERN EXTENSION (1ES)

2.1 We do not wish to comment on questions 1 to 10 and would refer to our Matter 2 Statement in respect of employment requirements and where they have implications on the housing requirement.

Question 1 - Do the Green Belt assessments support the allocation and safeguarded land and demonstrate exceptional circumstances for the removal of the land from the Green Belt?

Question 2 - In relation to these exceptional circumstances, is Site 1EA justified to meet Warrington's needs, having particular regard to the stage that Warrington's LP has reached?

Question 3 - If exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated have these been clearly articulated in the Plan?

Question 4 - Are the configuration and scale of the allocation and safeguarded land justified taking into account development needs and the Green Belt assessments?

Question 5 - Would the adverse impacts of developing Site 1EA (Green Belt impacts, traffic, air quality) outweigh the benefits?

Question 6 - Is Site 1EA deliverable, taking into account any offsite transport infrastructure required?

Question 7 - Should Site 1ES be allocated rather than safeguarded so that it can contribute to meeting needs in the Plan period?

Question 8 - Are the indicative site areas and appropriate uses for Sites 1EA and 1ES within Tables 4.1 and 4.7 justified and effective?

Question 9 - Are the requirements for Site 1EA within Policy LPA04.1 (Sections 2, 3, 4 and 5) and Appendix 5 (Site Profile) and for Site 1ES within Appendix 7 (Site Profile) positively prepared and effective?

Question 10 - Are there any barriers to Site 1EA coming forward in the Plan period?

3. ISSUE 2: BOLD FOREST GARDEN SUBURB (4HA), LAND SOUTH OF GARTONS LANE (5HA) AND FORMER PENLAKE INDUSTRIAL ESTATE (3HA)

Question 11 - Does the Plan reflect the current status of Penlake Industrial Estate (3HA) as a commitment?

3.1 No comment.

Question 12 - Do the Green Belt assessments support the allocations 4HA and 5HA and demonstrate exceptional circumstances for the removal of the land from the Green Belt?

3.2 No. Whilst an assessment of land against Green Belt purposes is an important component of a Local Plan evidence base seeking to release Green Belt land for development, it is only one of many aspects to consider in terms of Green Belt/exceptional circumstance matters. Whilst both parcels have low contributions to the purposes of the Green Belt, as explained in our Matter 3 Hearing Statement, the spatial strategy in terms of housing distribution is uneven, leading to concerns regarding sustainable development.

3.3 Accordingly, whilst exceptional circumstances clearly exist for Green Belt release in St Helens, we are of the view that the Council must re-assess their approach to spatial distribution in terms of suitable and deliverable Green Belt release sites. Indeed, we consider there to be an over-concentration of proposed development within the Bold area, which is at the expense of growth on suitable and deliverable Green Belt release sites in other areas of St Helens (like Burrows Lane, Eccleston and Land to the south of Mill Lane, Rainhill).

3.4 Exceptional circumstances have not been justified to support allocations 4HA and 5HA.

Question 13 - If exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated have these been clearly articulated in the Plan?

3.5 No. Whilst the Council have demonstrated exceptional circumstances to release Green Belt land in general, there is insufficient explanation set out under Policy LPA05 generally and no attempt has been made to explain why exceptional circumstances exist to release specific allocations. Indeed, such circumstances might vary significantly or just slightly in relation to each case, which should be explained.

3.6 The principal exceptional circumstances to release Green Belt land within St Helens is to address evident housing and employments needs **that arise within the plan period**. There is a separate test applied for safeguarded land to ensure Green Belt boundaries endure well beyond the plan period, but such land does not need to be released for development now and will therefore stay 'green' for a prolonged period after the plan is adopted.

3.7 Noting the above, there is insufficient explanation of the exceptional circumstances to release the significant allocation at 4HA. As illustrated in our **Appendix 1** site proforma, this is a very large allocation within 12 separate ownerships where only **14%** of the total number of homes afforded to this allocation is expected to be delivered within the plan period. In short, the Council accept

that approximately 19 hectares of land is expected to be delivered within the plan period, with 114 hectares developed afterwards.

- 3.8 It would also appear that only one parcel of land has an active housebuilder promoting land for development (Taylor Wimpey)- see land ownership plan contained at **Appendix 2**. This translates to just 6% of the whole site area being promoted by a Developer/Housebuilder. As such, there isn't sufficient evidence to determine the land is genuinely available.
- 3.9 There is no specific policy requirement for the site to be planned in a comprehensive manner and therefore it is even more apparent that many of the ownership parcels within the allocation would not make a positive contribution to housing supply within the next 16 years. Even if it is concluded that the site is suitable, one has to ask why all of the land is now being allocated now rather than safeguarded in its entirety or part allocated / part safeguarded.

Question 14 - Are the configuration and scale of the allocations justified taking into account development needs, the Green Belt assessments and land ownerships?

- 3.10 No. As highlighted under Question 13, the scale of allocation 4HA is not justified in the context of demonstrating exceptional circumstances for releasing this site from the Green Belt. Moreover, market desirability, and in turn deliverability, of this site have to be questioned given the scale of the site, number of landowners involved and lack of developer interest.
- 3.11 The Council state in their March 2021 response to the initial Inspectors questions paper (**SHBC005**) that they do not consider land ownership to be a constraint that could affect the delivery of site 4HA, beyond the cautious delivery rate of 60 dwellings per annum, when considering the scale of the site. We do, however, have concerns that the Council's evidence base in respect of the assumed delivery rate does not reflect the Council's position on development costs for this site and assumes in both cost assessments¹ a sales rate of 120 homes a year, rather than the assumed quoted rate of 60 a year. This has the effect of drastically reducing the assumed build cost as this has the effect of halving the build period by 25 years, resulting in substantial savings in respect of preliminary costs, interest (to which the Council have made no allowance for) and contingency. The evidence in respect of site-specific viability is fundamentally flawed in this respect and needs reviewing in light of the Council's own assumptions to gather a true perspective of the site's viability.
- 3.12 The site mobilisation process for a site of this scale, with 12 landowners, will be a significant challenge. Furthermore, the PPG² notes the following in relation to assessing the availability of a site:

"A site can be considered available for development, when, on the best information available (confirmed by the call for sites and information from land-owners and legal searches where appropriate), there is confidence that there are no legal or ownership impediments to

¹ Pages 28 & 29 of Document Reference: SD27

² Paragraph: 019 Reference ID: 3-019-20190722

development. For example, land controlled by a developer or landowner who has expressed an intention to develop may be considered available.”

3.13 In document reference SHBC005, the Council state the following:

“The Local Plan preparation process has been informed by a number of Call for Sites (CFS) exercises which has resulted in a number of landowners/agents coming forward to promote development interests on land that is part of site 4HA. Landowners also came forward at the LPSD consultation stage providing concept masterplans for their specific pieces of land and for site 4HA as a whole. Some of these responses have indicated the ability to build out at higher rates than assumed by the Council.”

3.14 Paragraph 6.3 of the Bold Forest Garden Suburb Position Statement (document reference: SD027) also states the following:

*“The **majority** of private landowners have submitted a Call for Sites application form and a number have employed planning consultants to represent them. All private landowners were written to and invited to meet with St Helens Council at LPPO consultation stage. The purpose of these meetings was to confirm the nature and extent of ownership, aspirations and proposals in respect of land held, known constraints and existing or emerging developer interests. Many landowners took this opportunity to speak to officers and discuss the potential development of the site.”*

3.15 Whilst the above call for sites evidence is therefore in line with PPG guidance in relation to availability matters, this is only one factor to consider. We note that the majority (and therefore not all landowners) have expressed an interest in developing the site. An expression of interest from the landowners to develop a site does not automatically translate to market desirability. This is an important suitability consideration, as explained in the PPG. Under the subtitle what factors can be considered when assessing the suitability of sites/broad locations for development, the PPG³ notes that plan makers should consider relevant information including:

“Appropriateness and likely market attractiveness for the type of development proposed”

3.16 We raise concerns regarding the market attractiveness of this site, given the fact it has been a proposed immediate housing allocation since 2016, however numerous Landowners on the site do not appear to be affiliated with any housebuilder or land promoter after five years and the plan reaching such an advanced stage of progression. This raises concerns regarding the market uptake of this site, which is an important consideration given the significant scale of the allocation (2,988 dwellings). It is far from evident that this is a commercially desirable site and therefore this site allocation is not justified.

3.17 We are also concerned that there will be an over-concentration of development in this location which may not be able to commercially deliver to the scale that is envisaged by the Council. It

³ Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 3-018-20190722

again also raises concerns about the overall spatial strategy, with an over-concentration (and potential market saturation) in the Bold area at the expense of sustainable development in other key settlement areas of St Helens.

- 3.18 We do not have any specific comments to make on the scale and configuration of allocation **5HA**. However, we do note in the Inspector’s initial questions to the Council that a question was asked if any cumulative highway impacts of developing site 5HA alongside 4HA have been considered. The Council’s response, in document SHBC005, is as follows:

*"The highways impacts of developing 5HA were assessed through the St Helens Local Plan Transport Impact Assessment, January 2019 (TRA003). The impacts of the full site 4HA were assessed through Bold Forest Garden Suburb Transport Review (TRA005). Only Phase 1 (197 dwellings) of the Bold Forest Garden Suburb was assessed for its impacts through the Transport Impact Assessment (TRA003). **It is therefore not the case that the full extents of sites 4HA and 5HA were cumulatively assessed for their highway impacts through the TIA, albeit the highway impacts have been assessed for each site.**"*

- 3.19 Whilst the Council then outline how Policy LPA05.1 will ensure highway matters are carefully considered, and the different delivery timescales for the two allocations, the fact remains that the cumulative development in this area proposed by 4HA and 5 HA is substantial (3,557 dwellings). It is not considered that sufficient technical evidence has been put forward by the Council at this stage to justify the significant, cumulative scale of development that is to be accommodated in Bold. This is fundamental to justifying the suitability of the proposed 4ha and 5ha allocations, and indeed the overall spatial strategy of the Local Plan, can be found sound. Additional highways evidence should be provided to assess the cumulative impact of the allocations on Bold’s highway network.

Question 15 - Is the allocation of Site 4HA broadly consistent with the Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan?

- 3.20 No. Whilst the Council note⁴ how the scale of site 4HA is compatible with the Bold Forest AAP, we disagree.

- 3.21 There is insufficient information within the Local Plan that allocation 4HA will be consistent with policies in the AAP including:

- BFP INF3 – Clock Face Country Park Recreation Hub/Cycling Centre;
- BFP INF6: Creating an Accessible Forest Park;
- BFP SN1: Meeting the Development Needs of the Borough in a Manor Appropriate to the Forest Park;
- BFP SN2: Planning Obligations;

⁴ Council response to PQ23 of SHBC005

- BFP ENV1: Enhancing Landscape Character; and
- BFP ENV2: Ecological Network.

3.22 Each of the above policies come with their own set of issues and costs that need to be clearly addressed when articulating what is and isn't acceptable in terms of development at allocation 4HA and the implications of meeting these policy requirements must be considered as part of any viability appraisal. Without a clear and specific site allocation policy within the Local Plan for allocation 4HA, it is not evidently clear that the allocation is justified or consistent with the aims and policies of the AAP.

3.23 A key objective of the AAP is to provide an accessible area of countryside to the local community that promotes active travel, healthy lifestyles and protects important landscapes and ecological areas. Policy BFP SN1 notes that some development may have to come forward in the future to meet the ongoing needs of the Borough but confirms:

"Development must:

(a) Contribute positively to the development of Bold Forest Park;

(b) Not result in the loss of critical infrastructure elements of the Forest Park or prevent their implementation; and

(c) Housing or employment development should include measures to enhance connectivity between the urban area and the Forest Park."

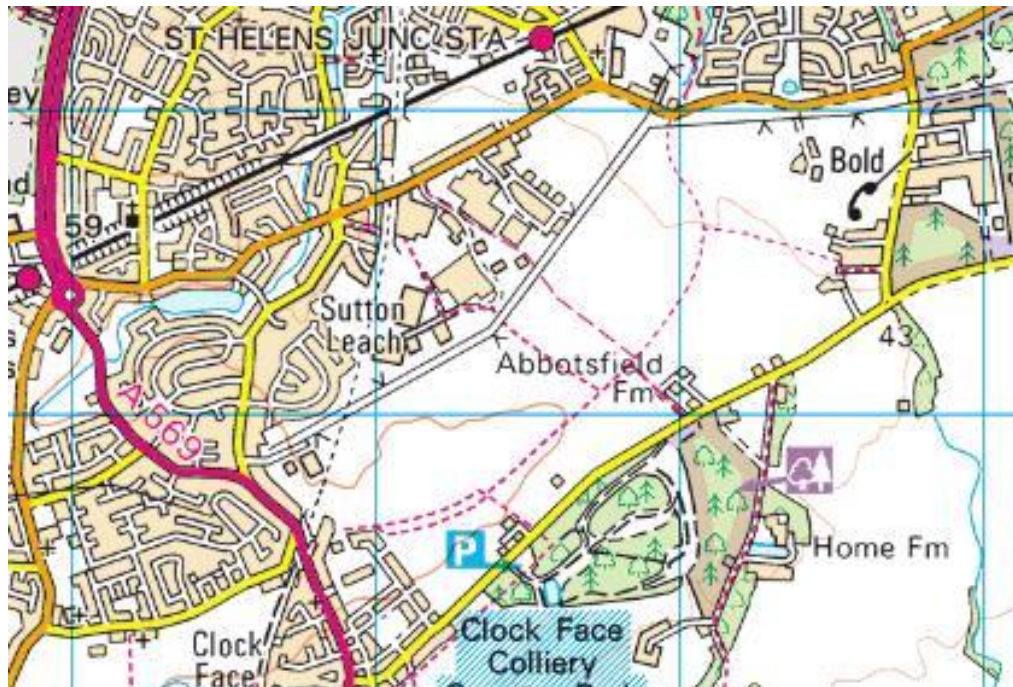
3.24 It's not clear within the Local Plan how the above will be achieved and it's not clear in the evidence base as to what is expected from prospective developers in terms of physical development that is acceptable and what financial burdens may follow.

3.25 With regards to access and BFP INF3 and 6, we note that the Bold Forest area is 1,808 hectares and includes land both to the North and South of the M62 with a circa 50/50 split north and south.

3.26 Site allocation 4HA totals 132.86ha, which equates to 7.3% of the entire Bold Forest Park area. The Council considers this to be acceptable. However, the land north of the M62 is evidently more accessible to the existing communities and population for accessing the open countryside and informal recreational pursuits compared to land south of the M62. Moreover, the allocation at 4HA is traversed by many public rights of way that facilitate such access (see purple lines in Figure 3,1 below). These well used routes provide access to the Clock Face Country Park to the south of Gorsey Lane and therefore the allocated site provides essential access to the open countryside for a large part of the existing community in the area. We consider the development of this site would be contrary to policy BFP INF6 in particular.

- 3.27 It's also not clear as to what contribution the Council will expect to deliver/enhance components of the Clock Face Country Park area through developer contributions in line with Policy BFP SN2 and BFP INF3.

Figure 3.1 – Bold Footpaths Map



- 3.28 With regard to Policy BFP EMV2, we note that a Local Wildlife site is largely surrounded by the 4HA site allocation boundary but there is no clear indication as to how development should interface with this area.
- 3.29 Whilst any draft masterplan may be able to retain the routes and step back from the ecology areas, development on the allocation will inevitably urbanise an important and accessible part of the overall Bold Forest Park and it is not clear from the evidence as to which ownerships may be less incentivised to participate in a cohesive masterplan when considering these issues.
- 3.30 Addressing these policies and the cost of doing so is a critical component in determining if the allocation at 4HA is actually suitable and viable.

Question 16 - Would the adverse impacts of developing Sites 4HA and 5HA (including Green Belt impacts, traffic, air quality, flood risk, loss of agricultural land, biodiversity) outweigh the benefits?

- 3.31 As highlighted in our site proforma for allocation 4HA, contained at **Appendix 1**, the site scores comparatively poorly in both the Council's Sustainability Appraisal (SA) scoring and our SA scoring of the site. Indeed, using the score ranking system that we devised⁵, **the site scored the worst of all proposed housing allocations in the SA** (and only better than one safeguarded land

⁵ See page 1 of Appendix 1 for comparative SA scoring of all allocations and safeguarded land sites

allocation). The Council's SA identified that the site scores particularly poorly (i.e. red) on agricultural land given its Grade 3 nature and biodiversity. The fact that the site scores the second worst of all allocations and safeguarded land sites in the Council's SA Assessment does raise a number of concerns in relation to the suitability of the site. It also raises concerns regarding the significant development quantum proposed on site.

3.32 In terms of suitability matters for 4HA, upon review of the Bold Forest Position Statement (**SD027**), and as outlined in our detailed assessments contained at **Appendix 1**, we highlight the following concerns:

- **Ecology & Biodiversity:** Paragraph 2.25 of Document **SD027** states that MEAS have confirmed that there are known great crested newt (GCN) ponds within the adjacent Local Wildlife Site, and some of their terrestrial habitat falls outside the Local Wildlife Site and within the 4HA allocation. MEAS have advised, there are other ponds within the allocation site which may also be used by GCN. Some of these ponds have not been subject to past survey. The Council state that the requirement for GCN mitigation will be considered as part of the masterplanning process and preparation of an SPD. However, given that this a protected species, we are strongly of the view that this matter must be addressed upfront and as part of the Examination in Public process, in order to confirm the suitability of this site and whether the site allocation is justified.
- **Highways:** The WSP (August 2019) Bold Forest Transport Review (**TRA005**) concludes that there will be a number of junctions that will experience impact in terms of traffic flow as a result of the development. Whilst further detailed information is to follow in stage 2 of the technical work, we raise concerns with the 35% modal shift towards sustainable travel assumption, which the WSP Transport Study itself describes as optimistic⁶. This is considered highly optimistic, with SWECO highway consultants stating that a 15% modal shift assumption is far more realistic. We therefore question this assumption which in turn raises concerns that traffic impact will be far greater than currently suggested and raises concerns about the suitability of the site.
- **Agricultural Land:** The SA notes that the site does not contain any ALC Grade 1-2. On average over 95% of the parcels contain ALC Grade 3 and the SA scores the site as red in this category. Detailed information on agricultural land has not been provided (i.e., if some land is Grade 3a), therefore it is unknown if this site could be classed as Best and Most Versatile Land (Grades 1-3a).

3.33 Until this information has been provided, it cannot be concluded at this stage that the allocation is suitable or justified, nor can an accurate planning balance exercise be undertaken in terms of impacts and benefits.

⁶ Paragraph 2.18, page 6 of 2019 Transport Review (Examination Ref: TRA005)

- 3.34 In terms of site 5HA, this scored much better in the Council’s SA assessment and therefore we do not have any particular comments to make on this allocation.
- 3.35 Cumulatively speaking, we have already raised a number of concerns regarding the quantum of development (3,557 dwellings) proposed in Bold. This is not least due to the considerations relating to Bold Forest Park, but also other key matters such as highways impact and air quality which have not been appropriately assessed. It is considered a more even approach to spatial distribution should be taken across St Helens, in order to reduce significant environmental impacts being focused on particular locations (which may well prove to be the case in Bold due to the combined development quantum of 4HA and 5HA).

Question 17 - Are the requirements for Sites 4HA and 5HA within Policy LPA05.1 (Section 2) and Appendix 5 (Site Profiles) positively prepared and effective, particularly in relation to ensuring Green Infrastructure and sustainable modes of travel are delivered alongside the development?

- 3.36 We note that the Council has provided additional wording in relation to the requirements for these sites since the Submission Draft of the plan, which are outlined in document **SD003**. Whilst these go some way in providing further comfort that green infrastructure and sustainable modes of travel will be dealt with, it is considered that far more information and technical assessments will be required in order to justify how 3,557 new dwellings will be delivered in Bold. Specifically, the Council must demonstrate that infrastructure and mitigation will be in place to deal with this significant amount of development in this area. As already noted, we are strongly of the view that a more even distribution of development across the Borough should be adopted which would reduce significant infrastructure concerns and the danger of over development in a particular location.
- 3.37 We also note that the proposed changes to Appendix 5 do not include reference to an SPD for Site 4HA, despite this being consistently referred to in the Bold Forest Position Statement (**SD027**). Clarity on this needs to be provided but bearing in mind our comments in relation to the Bold Forest AAP, we consider a site-specific policy is required for the Bold Forest allocation in particular so the environmental and financial impact of development on the site can be thoroughly assessed.

Question 18 - Are the net developable areas, minimum densities and indicative site capacities within Table 4.5 justified and effective?

- 3.38 No, given the land ownership matters in relation to site 4HA, we do not consider the 2,988 dwellings figure to be justified and effective at this stage. We have concerns regarding the deliverability of the site to the scale envisaged given potential market interest issues.
- 3.39 The absence of a collaboration agreement between the respective landowners is another concern, as this should be a minimum requirement on an allocation of this scale to ensure that a comprehensive masterplan can be agreed and delivered. Indeed, this will ensure that the site comes forward in a comprehensive masterplanned fashion and provides suitable infrastructure rather than piecemeal, uncoordinated development. Site 4HA is not justified until a collaboration agreement has been prepared.

- 3.40 Other Council's in the North West have sought to have collaboration agreements in place for their large allocations, including Tameside (for the proposed Godley Green allocation of 2,350 dwellings) and Warrington (for the proposed Warrington Garden Suburb of 7,400 dwellings). These are both very recent examples and show the level of collaboration that is required to bring forward developments of a significant scale.
- 3.41 Furthermore, under question 16 we also raise further concerns in relation to the suitability of this site, and in turn the suggested development quantum of 2,988 dwellings. Indeed, ecology matters in particular may reduce the development quantum on site.
- 3.42 There is also insufficient information on supporting infrastructure which again may reduce the development quantum should infrastructure need to be provided on site. The Bold Forest Position Statement (**SD027**) outlines how:
- At this stage it is unclear what education provision may be required. The Services Team is currently in the process of assessing schools to determine which schools could be extended and where a new school could be required. These findings will feed into the Masterplanning process going forward.⁷
 - There could be a need for a new general practice surgery to be constructed within site 4HA to accommodate the increased demand for healthcare in Bold.⁸
 - Due to its size it is considered that Site 4HA could possibly support a small local centre containing community and retail facilities.⁹
- 3.43 Should the above infrastructure be provided on site, the development quantum of 2,988 dwellings could significantly reduce (therefore the current site capacity is not justified at this stage).
- 3.44 In short, the evidence base to date is insufficient and it has not been demonstrated that site 4HA is suitable for development or a justified allocation. More evidence must be provided, otherwise the site should be removed from the plan.
- 3.45 No comments in relation to site 5HA.

Question 19 - Should the Bold Forest Garden Suburb (4HA) have a bespoke policy in view of its scale?

- 3.46 Yes, as previously highlighted we have concerns regarding the allocation being treated under a generic policy that deals with all proposed housing allocations. A specific policy for the allocation is required given its scale, which should clarify deliverability matters and also the sites' relationship with the Bold Forest AAP.

⁷ See paragraphs 2.14-2.16 of SD027 for discussion on education.

⁸ Paragraph 2.17 of SD027.

⁹ Paragraph 2.19 of SD027.

3.47 As outlined in the Bold Forest Position Statement, the Council intend to deal with the development of this site through an SPD and Masterplanning Exercise. Table 2 of document SD027 confirms the anticipated stages for this and how a draft Masterplan and SPD is envisaged in Summer/Autumn 2022. We do not consider this goes far enough and the suitability of this site must be fully addressed at the EiP stage now, not post Local Plan adoption. The suitability of site 4HA is not currently justified.

Question 20 - Will infrastructure to support the allocations be delivered at the right time and in the right place?

3.48 No, based on the information provided to date, we have concerns as to whether appropriate infrastructure can be put in place to sustain/accommodate the level of proposed development in Bold.

3.49 Until further information on infrastructure matters (including highway impact, education provision) is provided, the suitability of the allocations in terms of infrastructure provision cannot be fully justified.

Question 21 - Are there any barriers to Sites 4HA and 5HA coming forward as anticipated by the housing trajectory, for example land assembly/multiple ownerships?

3.50 Yes, as noted throughout, we have concerns regarding the deliverability of site 4HA. In summary:

- The site is under 12 land ownerships, with only two parties having known developer interest, St Helens Council and Taylor Wimpey, and they own just 36% of the land area total. The rest of the landowners appear to have no affiliation with housebuilders or land promoters, despite the fact that this has been a draft housing allocation for the past five years. We therefore have concerns regarding the commercial desirability of this site and potential market uptake issues.
- Land assembly issues will no doubt arise from a site of this scale which could delay delivery.
- We have significant concerns regarding the suitability of this site delivering nearly 3,000 dwellings (primarily highways impact and ecology). There are also concerns regarding conformity with the adopted policies of the Bold Forest AAP, given insufficient technical assessments of the cumulative impact of development.
- The required infrastructure for the site has not been thoroughly assessed at this stage, which needs to be factored into viability considerations. In this regard, none of these factors have been considered in the viability costings contained at Appendix A of document **SD027**. We have concerns regarding the viability assumptions for the site, namely:
 - i. The sales rates artificially lower cost by drastically shortening the build period from the Council's assumed position of 50 years (60 homes a year) to 25 years (120 homes a year). This has dramatic cost savings in respect of preliminaries, interest and contingency.

- ii. The all in build cost does not make allowances for meeting future building regulations requirements. Based on our latest understanding from the housebuilders, the Council should be making an additional allowance of £5k a plot for meeting part L building regs from 2022 onwards and then an additional £10k a plot for the further changes due to take effect in 2025, which set greater energy efficiency requirements, and this site will be caught by both of these factors. As such the Council need to add an additional £15k a plot to the costs for this site.

Until these costs are added and re-tested within the viability appraisal process, we dispute the conclusion that the site could support 30% affordable housing¹⁰, which is clearly an important factor when considering the overall suitability of this site. We also note the reference to the potential use of equalisation of planning obligations¹¹, however no such agreement has been reached yet and again could hamper delivery given the various land interests on this site.

- 3.51 In conclusion, insufficient evidence has been provided to justify the 4HA allocation and the site should be removed from the Plan. Furthermore, we consider there will be an over-concentration of development in Bold, posed by the significant development proposed in the 4HA and 5HA allocations. We recommend that a more evenly distributed approach to development across St Helens is undertaken, directing development to other sustainable sites such as Burrows Lane, Eccleston and land south of Mill Lane, Rainhill.

¹⁰ Paragraph 2.25 of Bold Forest Position Statement: SD027
¹¹ Paragraph 2.26 of Bold Forest Position Statement: SD027

4. ISSUE 3: ECCLESTON (3HS), SUTTON MANOR (6HS), AND THATTO HEATH (10EA, 9HA, 7HS)

Question 22 - Does the Plan reflect the current status of Former Linkway Distribution Park (9HA) (with planning permission) and Lea Green Farm (10EA) (completed)?

- 4.1 Site 9HA has outline planning consent (P/2018/0060/FUL) for up to 352 units, however a Reserved Matters application (P/2021/0405/RES) is pending determination for:

"Application for approval of reserved matters (layout, scale, appearance and landscaping) from permission P/2018/0060/FUL for a residential development of 294 dwellings with accesses from Sherdley Road including landscaping, public open space, garages, car parking, and associated infrastructure"

- 4.2 The planning position has therefore changed for 9HA given the live Reserved Matters application and the housing trajectory must be updated to refer to 294 no. dwellings.
- 4.3 No comments on 10EA.

Question 23 - What is the up-to-date position on the application for development at Eccleston Golf Course?

- 4.4 A live planning application (P/2020/0791/HYEIA) is pending determination for:

"Hybrid Planning Application comprising of Outline Consent for up to 646 dwellings (Parcels 1(a), 2, 4, 5, 6 & 7) up to 4,000 Sq ft of Convenience Retail (E(a) Use) and up to 7,100 Sq ft E(f) Nursery. Detailed planning permission for 168 dwellings (Parcel 1) and 186 dwellings (Parcel 3), including access road in detail from Rainhill Road and Portico Lane, landscaping, scale, design and associated infrastructure (EIA Development)"

- 4.5 The application has been valid since November 2020 and has attracted significant levels of local opposition (with circa 500 neighbour objections and a petition with 939 signatures), as well as statutory technical objections from the Woodland Trust, and Countryside Developments and Woodlands Officer. There are also important consultee responses still outstanding including from Sport England/ England Golf, suggesting that this is still some way from determination, with significant outstanding issues to resolve.
- 4.6 The next planning committee in St Helens is in June, therefore the application would be determined at the June planning committee at the very earliest. It is also highly likely that the application will be called in by the Secretary of State given that it is located within the designated Green Belt, therefore a decision on this application is likely to still be a few months away and potentially towards the end of this year.

Question 24 - Do the Green Belt assessments support the safeguarded land (3HS, 6HS, 7HS) and demonstrate exceptional circumstances for the removal of the land from the Green Belt?

- 4.7 As outlined in our accompanying Matter 3 Statement, there is a strong case for exceptional circumstances at the Borough wide level. As previously noted, the Council has failed to provide the case for exceptional circumstances for each individual site. This matter must be addressed in order for the proposed allocations and safeguarded land sites, and overall strategy, to be found sound.
- 4.8 In terms of the site-specific Green Belt assessments for safeguarded land sites, 6HS and 7HS, Pegasus Group has appraised all of the proposed allocations and safeguarded land sites in detailed site proformas (contained at **Appendix 1**). We disagree with the Council's conclusion that 7HS provides a low contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt. We conclude that the site makes a medium contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt, for the reasons set out in our detailed proforma. Therefore, in our view there is no clear justification for site 7HS being more suitable for release from the Green Belt than the sites at Burrows Lane, Eccleston or Mill Lane, Rainhill.

Question 25 - If exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated have these been clearly articulated in the Plan?

- 4.9 We have already noted how the Council has failed to provide the case for exceptional circumstances for each individual site. This matter must be addressed in order for the allocations, and overall strategy, to be found sound.
- 4.10 Generally speaking, we support the Council's position that exceptional circumstances are present to justify alterations to Green Belt boundaries. However, the Plan as drafted does not fully explain this in line with paragraph 136 of the NPPF, although it is addressed within paragraphs 1.11-1 of the Green Belt Review (SD020). Harm that will occur from failing to meet housing and employment needs; in terms of slower economic growth, a lack of labour force mobility, affordability issues, disruption to commuting patterns and the delivery of housing choice is a critical component of the exceptional circumstances required for Green Belt release in St Helens. Text reflecting this in the supporting text and policy would ensure the policy to release Green Belt land is justified.

Question 26 - Is the configuration and scale of the safeguarded land justified taking into account long-term development needs and the Green Belt assessments?

- 4.11 No comment.

Question 27 - Should any of the safeguarded sites be allocated rather than safeguarded so that they can contribute to meeting needs in the Plan period?

- 4.12 We have no specific comments to make here, other than to reiterate that additional Green Belt release sites need to be identified for allocation or safeguarded to meet emerging development requirements.
- 4.13 If any safeguarded sites were to be upgraded to allocations, additional safeguarded land would need to be identified to replace them and to meet longer-term development needs beyond the plan

period. Should further allocations be required, the Plan should not look to automatically upgrade existing safeguarded sites. Any additional allocations need to be evidence led, align with the spatial distribution and be informed by the findings of the sustainability appraisal. As explained throughout our Hearing Statements, there are numerous compelling reasons as to why the sites at Burrows Lane, Eccleston and Mill Lane, Rainhill should be re-assessed for allocation purposes.

Question 28 - Are the requirements for the sites within Appendix 7 (Site Profiles) necessary, positively prepared and effective?

4.14 No comment.

Question 29 - Are the net developable areas, minimum densities and indicative site capacities within Table 4.8 justified and effective?

4.15 The site capacity for site 9HA is incorrect because the live Reserved Matters application (P/2021/0405/RES) is for 294 dwellings and covers the entire site. The table and housing trajectory should therefore be updated to state 294 dwellings, not 352.

4.16 No other comments.

5. ISSUE 4: GERARDS PARK, COLLEGE STREET (11EA), LAND EAST OF CITY ROAD, COWLEY HILL (6HA), MOSS NOOK URBAN VILLAGE (10HA) AND LAND SOUTH OF A580, WINDLE (8HS)

Question 30 - What is the up-to-date position on the allocations 11EA, 6HA and 10HA?

- 5.1 No comment on site 11EA.
- 5.2 For site 6HA, a planning application (reference: P/2020/0083/OUEIA) was approved at the March 2021 planning committee, subject to the signing of a Section 106 Agreement for the erection of up to 1,100 dwellings and 3,925 sqm of mixed-use floorspace.
- 5.3 For site 10HA, outline planning consent (References: P/2003/219/22 (Hybrid) & P/2011/0058) is in place for up to 900 no. dwellings. At the time of writing Taylor Wimpey has an undetermined Reserved Matters application (P/2021/0015/RES) for 258 dwellings.

Question 31 - Should the status of any of 11EA, 6HA and 10HA be changed from allocations to commitments?

- 5.4 No comments on site 11EA.
- 5.5 Site 10HA could be changed to a commitment given the live reserved matters application (but only 258 dwellings). At this point in time 6HA should not be classed as a commitment, until the Section 106 has been signed and the decision notice issued. At this stage 10HA should remain as an allocation, especially given that it will be delivered in phases and over a number of years.

Question 32 - Does the Green Belt assessment support the safeguarded land (8HS) and demonstrate exceptional circumstances for the removal of the land from the Green Belt?

- 5.6 No further comments on this matter.

Question 33 - If exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated have these been clearly articulated in the Plan?

- 5.7 Please refer to question 25.

Question 34 - Is the configuration and scale of the safeguarded land justified taking into account long-term development needs and the Green Belt assessments?

- 5.8 We do have some concerns regarding the scale of development on this site given a number of technical constraints, however we address this under question 40.
- 5.9 We have mentioned throughout our Hearing Statements how there is a need for additional green belt land to be allocated or safeguarded, therefore the scale of development per se is acceptable when taking into account long-term development needs.

Question 35 - Should 8HS be allocated rather than safeguarded so that it can contribute to meeting needs in the Plan period?

5.10 There are concerns regarding the sustainability of this site in light of the Council's SA assessment of the site, which would not support this site being upgraded to an immediate housing allocation. As highlighted in our summary table and detailed site proforma of the site at **Appendix 1**:

- Site 8HS **scores the worst of all of the proposed allocations and safeguarded land sites** in terms of both the Council's and our Sustainability Appraisal scorings.
- Whilst the overall scoring of the site was slightly upgraded in the Council's 2020 SA Addendum in certain categories, it still performs the lowest of all sites. Whilst two categories were upgraded in terms of scoring, one was downgraded with the site scoring red against SA20 (access to services and local facilities).

5.11 Given the constraints that have been identified on this site in the Council's own evidence base, the site is not a particularly sustainable or suitable site which warrants an upgrade to immediate housing allocation. Indeed, there is insufficient justification for its current safeguarded land status and needs to be reconsidered or deleted.

Question 36 - Are the requirements for the Site 8HS within Appendix 7 (Site Profiles) necessary, positively prepared and effective?

5.12 No comments.

Question 37 - Is the configuration of Site 10HA justified taking into account the extant planning permission?

5.13 Configuration appears justified given live Reserved Matters application which will be accompanied by detailed technical information.

Question 38 - Are the requirements for Sites 6HA and 10HA within Policy LPA05.1 (Section 2) and Appendix 5 (Site Profiles) positively prepared and effective?

5.14 No comment.

Question 39 - In particular in relation to Site 10HA, will the Plan ensure that any playing fields lost will be replaced by the equivalent or better provision?

5.15 Council to clarify.

Question 40 - Are the indicative site areas, appropriate uses, net developable areas, minimum densities and indicative site capacities within Tables 4.1, 4.5 and 4.8 justified and effective?

5.16 In terms of site 6HA, we do not consider the Council's decision to upgrade the site capacity to 1,100 dwellings in their latest housing trajectory¹² to be justified.

¹² See page 7 of document reference SHBC007 (May 2021)

- 5.17 Whilst the outline consent permits up to 1,100 dwellings, at this point no housebuilder is attached to the site and a full suite of technical information needs to be provided to fully assess the constraints on site. Indeed, there are a lot of technical considerations on this site, with the committee report confirming the presence of mine shafts, contamination, flood risk, noise and land stability considerations. Furthermore, Pegasus has prepared detailed site layouts, which after detailed consideration of site constraints establishes a development capacity of around 790 no. dwellings.
- 5.18 The uplifted figure of 1,100 is therefore not justified in the absence of additional detailed information and a detailed residential layout. The development capacity of this site is lower and around 790 no. dwellings.
- 5.19 No comments on site 10HA.
- 5.20 In terms of site 8HS, as outlined at **Appendix 1**, we question whether total site capacity (1,027 dwellings) is accurate, because there are a number of constraints including ecology (presence of a Local Wildlife Site), flood risk as well as noise from the A580 to the north. We therefore consider that total capacity could be lower than the number currently suggested.
- 5.21 Also, given that the site scored poorly in the Council's SA assessment in terms of access to local services and facilities, a site of this scale may need to consider the provision of local facilities on site. This may reduce the currently suggested quantum of residential development to be delivered on site.

Question 41 - Does the Plan contain sufficient safeguards so that the development of Site 6HA would not prejudice adjoining employment uses?

- 5.22 No comment, Council to clarify.

Question 42 - Will infrastructure to support the allocations be delivered at the right time and in the right place?

- 5.23 No comments.

Question 43 - Are there any barriers to Sites 6HA and 10HA coming forward as anticipated by the housing trajectory?

- 5.24 Please refer to question 40 in relation to our comments on site 6HA.
- 5.25 No comments on 10HA.

6. ISSUE 5: OTHER GREEN BELT BOUNDARIES

Question 44 - Are the Green Belt boundaries elsewhere in Bold, Eccleston, Sutton Manor, Thatto Heath and St Helens Core Area justified?

- 6.1 No, as explained throughout our Matter 2, 3 and 5 Hearing Statements, the Council's current approach to Green Belt release is not justified across the borough, and not just within those areas listed in the above question. This includes land around Rainhill, which does not currently include any allocations or safeguarded sites. Eccleston, which is listed above, is also under provided for, as only includes the safeguarded Golf Course site, which whilst technically in Eccleston ward largely serves different suburbs of the core area (Thatto Heath and Eccleston Lane Ends).
- 6.2 The Council's failure to justify its Green Belt release is due in part due to a suppressed housing requirement which does not reflect the actual need (which we consider to be at least 570 dpa) and therefore requires additional green belt to be released. In addition to this, the Green Belt land that is proposed for release does not align with the wider spatial strategy, leading to an uneven distribution of growth, with numerous areas of the Borough receiving no or very limited growth and an over-concentration of development in Bold.
- 6.3 This uneven distribution is perfectly exemplified by the Council's recent publication of the May 2021 Spatial Distribution Document (**SHBC011**) which looks at distribution of committed sites and proposed allocations by ward. The below table consolidates some of these wards to reflect the core area and key settlements set out in the spatial strategy, and also considers growth against the existing ward populations, to test the Council's assertion in the SA that they have followed a balanced and proportionate approach to distribution.

Figure 6.1 : Spatial Distribution of Housing Land Supply

COUNCIL'S DISTRIBUTION DOC - 2016-2037 (MAY 2021)	SUB AREA	2011 Ward population	% Ward pop	Total Supply	% Total Supply	% of Core Area	Supply compared to existing pop
St Helens Core Area	Town Centre	10,978	6.26%	2,173	22.04%	19.17%	15.78%
	Moss Bank	10,682	6.09%	868	8.80%	7.66%	2.71%
	Bold (inc Clock Face)	9,759	5.57%	1,690	17.14%	14.91%	11.57%
	Eccleston	11,525	6.57%	223	2.26%	1.97%	-4.31%
	Parr	12,199	6.96%	490	4.97%	4.32%	-1.99%
	Sutton	12,003	6.85%	312	3.16%	2.75%	-3.68%
	Thatto Heath	12,280	7.00%	1,069	10.84%	9.43%	3.84%
	West Park	11,392	6.50%	283	2.87%	2.50%	-3.63%
	Windle	10,690	6.10%	167	1.69%	1.47%	-4.40%
CORE AREA SUB TOTAL		101,508	57.90%	7,275	73.78%	64.16%	15.88%
Key Settlements	Blackbrook & Haydock	22,055	12.58%	651	6.60%		-5.98%
	Newton Le Willows & Earlestown	22,033	12.57%	1,279	12.97%		0.40%
	Rainford	7,779	4.44%	335	3.40%		-1.04%
	Billinge & Sen' Green (inc Garswood)	11,080	6.32%	245	2.48%		-3.84%
	Rainhill	10,853	6.19%	75	0.76%		-5.43%
TOTAL		175,308	100.00%	9,860	100.00%		

- 6.4 This table highlights that proposed housing distribution is neither proportionate or balanced. Of particular note, Rainhill is set to receive just 0.8% of planned growth from allocations and commitments, even though it accounts for 6.19% of the total population (under provision of - 5.43%). The ward of Eccleston fairs similarly poorly, set to receive just 2.26% of overall planned growth even though it accounts for 6.57% of the total population (under provision of -4.31%).
- 6.5 It is clear from this evidence that the Council must re-assess their proposed spatial strategy in order for the Plan to be found sound. This will necessitate the re-assessment of Green Belt boundaries across the Borough.
- 6.6 In light of the above issues, we have continually advocated the case for amendments to the Green Belt boundary at Burrows Lane, Eccleston and Land at Mill Lane, Rainhill.
- 6.7 A detailed Delivery Statement for Burrows Lane, Eccleston is contained at **Appendix 3** which outlines its suitability for release, and this site is also considered alongside the proposed allocations in the detailed site proformas contained at **Appendix 1**, which conclude that the site:
- makes a medium contribution to the Green Belt purposes.
 - scores the same as safeguarded sites 1HS and 2HS in the Council’s own assessment; whilst our own Green Belt assessment concluded that sites 4HS, 5HS and 7HS also make a medium contribution to the Green Belt purposes.
- 6.8 A detailed Vision Document for Land at Mill Lane, Rainhill is contained at **Appendix 4** which outlines its suitability for release, and this site is also considered alongside the proposed allocations in the detailed site proformas contained at **Appendix 1**, which conclude that the site:
- Makes a low contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt in our Assessment.
 - scores the same as safeguarded sites 1HS and 2HS in the Council’s own assessment.
- 6.9 A Delivery Statement is also provided at **Appendix 5**, setting out Wallace Land Investment’s strong track record in securing end users to deliver the sites they promote.
- 6.10 We are making reference to this omission site now due its geographical proximity to the settlements and wards considered within this hearing session. This is because no allocations have been made in Rainhill whatsoever despite being a key settlement in the spatial strategy and as identified on Figure 6.1 and therefore no dedicated hearing sessions on Rainhill have been arranged.
- 6.11 To conclude, the Burrows Lane and Mill Lane sites perform similarly to other proposed Green Belt release sites in the Plan. Given that there is a compelling case for further Green Belt release in St Helens, we politely suggest that Green Belt boundaries around Eccleston and Rainhill should be reconsidered, with the Burrows Lane and Mill Lane sites should be identified for development based on the detailed evidence provided to date.
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APPENDIX 1 - SITE PROFORMAS FOR PROPOSED ALLOCATIONS AND SAFEGUARDED SITES

**APPENDIX 2 - LAND OWNERSHIP DETAILS FOR SITE 4HA (BOLD FOREST GARDEN
SUBURB)**

APPENDIX 3 - LAND AT BURROWS LANE, ECCLESTON DELIVERY STATEMENT

APPENDIX 4 - LAND AT MILL LANE, RAINHILL VISION DOCUMENT

APPENDIX 5 - LAND AT MILL LANE, RAINHILL – DELIVERY STATEMENT