



Homes England

Local Plan - Planning Policy and Programmes
Growth Directorate
Warrington Borough Council
East Annexe - Town Hall
Sankey Street
Warrington WA1 1HU

By email: localplan@warrington.gov.uk

Date: 15 November 2021

Dear Sir / Madam,

Warrington Updated Proposed Submission Version Local Plan Consultation

Homes England Response

As a prescribed body and a landowner in Warrington, Homes England would firstly like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Warrington Updated Proposed Submission Version Local Plan (UPSVLN).

Homes England is the government’s housing accelerator. We have the appetite, influence, expertise, and resources to drive positive market change. By releasing more land to developers who want to make a difference, we’re making possible the new homes England needs, helping to improve neighbourhoods and grow communities.

Homes England Support for Plan-Making

Homes England supports the efforts of Warrington Borough Council (WBC) in preparing a Local Plan for the future needs of the Borough. Homes England supports the preparation of Plans to ensure that long term housing needs and economic growth ambitions are met.

Except for policies that affect Homes England’s active land interests, Homes England does not propose to comment generally on the content of specific policies contained within the UPSVLN document. This is a matter for WBC to determine based on appropriate and available evidence.

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However, the overall role of the Plan in providing a positive and robust framework to ensure that growth is co-ordinated, sustainable and resilient, is supported by Homes England.

The Duty to Cooperate

Homes England is satisfied that WBC has engaged constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis with the Agency during the preparation of the UPSVLP.

Homes England Place-Based Working with WBC

Homes England actively works with WBC by deploying its resources, advice and expertise to jointly identify and prioritise opportunities to support the delivery of new housing. Homes England acknowledges that the regeneration and evolution of the Town Centre is a key priority for WBC, including the redevelopment of brownfield sites as a focus for high-density urban living – an important component in delivering the homes needed across the borough.

Whilst it is noted that Homes England is listed as a 'Delivery Partner' for Policy TC₁ – Town Centre and surrounding area and Policy DEV₄ – Economic Growth and Development, the Agency would wish to confirm that its current involvement relates to the provision of support with feasibility and master planning work relating to brownfield sites within, and close to, the Town Centre.

Homes England will continue to work in partnership with WBC to support delivery of its local housing needs and ambitions, including those within the Town Centre.

Homes England Land Ownership

Homes England owns land within Warrington Borough. Representations regarding the UPSVLP impacts on the Agency's land holdings are set out below and within the enclosures to this letter.

South East Warrington Urban Extension

Homes England owns c.220 hectares of land to the south east of Warrington. Within the UPSVLP, the majority of this land is covered by the South East Warrington Urban Extension (SEWUE) allocation. Together with Miller Homes, Homes England has prepared detailed representations relating to the SEWUE, set out within documents enclosed with this letter.

Enclosure 1 – SEWUE Planning Representations – prepared by WSP and Barton Willmore

Enclosure 2 – SEWUE: A Deliverable Allocation - prepared by Open, WSP, Savills and Barton Willmore

Miller Homes has submitted the same documents with its own representations.

Homes England has also prepared a further submission in support of the SEWUE which demonstrates the Agency's approach to planning for and delivering large residential-led sites.

Enclosure 3 - Accelerated Housing Delivery on Large Sites: The Homes England Approach

Peel Hall

Homes England owns 4.6 hectares within the proposed Peel Hall allocation, located off Blackbrook Avenue and is also known as Mill Lane Playing Fields. The relevant parcel of land is identified on the plan enclosed at **Enclosure 4**.

On 30 April 2021, Homes England entered into a conditional contract with Satnam for the sale of its land holdings at Mill Lane Playing Fields. As a result of the Secretary of State's decision dated 9 November 2021 to allow the appeal (Appeal reference: APP/Mo655/W/17/3178530) and grant outline planning permission (Application Reference: 2016/28492), Satnam has satisfied the contract conditions specific to the approval of that application.

Until all the remaining conditions of the sale contract are satisfied, Homes England remains the landowner and would like to make the following observations regarding the Mill Lane Playing Fields in relation to policies MD4, DC3 and DC5.

Homes England is supportive of the allocation of the Mill Lane Playing Fields land under draft Policy MD4 of the UPSVLP. Draft Policy MD4 provides detailed requirements related to land use and infrastructure, delivery / phasing and site-specific requirements, including type of homes, community facilities, transport and accessibility, open space and recreation, natural environment and protection and utilities. The policy is clear in the requirement for the replacement of the playing pitches at Mill Lane Playing Fields prior to any development commencing on the existing Mill Lane Playing Fields (MD4.1 (1m), MD4.2 (6), MD4.3 (27 and 29) and paragraph 10.4.3). Homes England supports the requirement for the provision of replacement sports pitches, in accordance with national planning policy. It should be noted that as part of the outline planning application/ Appeal process, reprovision of the Mill Lane Playing Fields was included within the wider Peel Hall development proposal and was accepted by Sport England and WBC, along with outline planning permission now being granted.

In addition to the Homes England site being allocated as part of the Peel Hall site under draft Policy MD4, it is also identified on the policies map as Policy DC3: Green Infrastructure and Policy DC5: Open Space, Outdoor Sports and Recreation provision.

Homes England previously queried the reasoning behind the designation of its site under draft policy DC5 Open Space, Outdoor Sports and Recreation, in addition to its allocation as part of the Peel Hall site under draft Policy MD4. Homes England notes the response provided by WBC to the Homes England Representations to the 2019 plan, which states that

'The policy only allocates the land for development in broad terms. Whilst it is acknowledged that through the planning application process there have been discussions regarding replacement playing pitch provision being provided elsewhere within the site the policy does not specify where that would be. Therefore, the Council consider that the open space designation should remain until such time as the quantity and location of replacement provision is agreed and it has been provided'.

Homes England recognise the rationale for this approach, as a means of guaranteeing reprovision of the Mill Lane Playing Pitches. However, Homes England would still note that the allocation of the site under draft Policy DC3 and DC5 as well as MD4 has the potential for a lack

of clarity regarding how the policies are applied in combination.

In particular, policy DC3 and MD4 requires a scheme for measurable Biodiversity Net Gain through the use of the Defra Metric. It is Homes England's understanding that any requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain would be covered by Peel Hall Policy MD4 (29) and therefore provided across the full extent of the Peel Hall site. This will enable a comprehensive and site wide approach to biodiversity net gain, rather than on a site-specific basis associated only with Mill Lane Playing Fields. To provide clarity we request that extra text is added to Policy MD4 (29). For example, the text could be amended to state: "29. A scheme for measurable Biodiversity Net Gain using the Defra Metric will be required. This will be inclusive (but not duplicate) of the relevant Biodiversity Net Gain requirement set out in Policy DC3 (6) and will be implemented across the full extent of the Peel Hall proposed allocation"

Omega and Omega West

Homes England has notable land interests in Warrington known as Omega, as well as Omega West in neighbouring St Helens. The UPSVLP proposals for these two sites are in keeping with the broader development strategy for Omega and Omega West.

Omega

Since 2002, Homes England, in partnership with Omega Warrington Limited (OWL), has brought forward the 233-hectare strategic employment site known as Omega which is situated to the West of Warrington. Commercial uses on the site are now largely complete with over 5 million sqft of B2/B8 development delivered, while the residential element is well underway and when complete will provide up to 1,400 new homes.

The UPSVLP continues to recognise the importance of Omega as an Existing Employment Area under Policy DEV 4: Economic Growth and Development. Homes England and OWL are committed to delivering the comprehensive development of Omega in accordance with both the extant planning applications and the planning policy designations.

Omega West

The UPSVLP also highlights the agreement between St.Helens Borough Council and Warrington Borough Council that a 31.22-hectare site, known as Omega West, will contribute towards Warrington's employment development needs. Omega West is an extension directly to the west of the established Omega development, is located in St.Helens Borough and is, under the ownership of Homes England. Whilst it is currently in the Green Belt, the site is proposed for allocation within the Draft St Helen's Borough Local Plan 2020-2035 (Site Reference 1EA), which proposes to allocate the land for employment uses. Homes England supports the co-operation between the two Councils which has seen the site in St.Helens proposed for allocation to meet Warrington's employment needs.

A hybrid planning application for the site proposing B2/B8 uses (St.Helens Borough Council planning application ref: P/2020/0061) received a resolution to grant at St.Helens Planning Committee on 27 October 2020. The application was called in by the Secretary of State in December 2020 and a public inquiry was held in late April 2021 (Appeal Ref: APP/H4315/V/20/3265899).

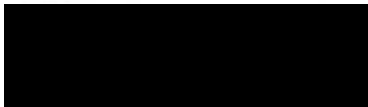
On 11 November 2021, the planning application was approved by the Secretary of State. As a consequence of this approval, Homes England consider that the UPSVLP should be updated to make reference within Policy DEV 4: Economic Growth and Development and / or its supporting text to the now approved planning status of the Omega West site.

Homes England is fully supportive of development at Omega West, which will provide an opportunity to deliver significant economic benefits, as well as contributing to Warrington's employment land needs. Homes England can confirm that it has entered a legal arrangement with OWL for the promotion and sale of Omega West and can therefore also confirm its land is available for this development.

Homes England wishes to appear at the Examination in Public in support of its Representations.

Homes England looks forward to continuing to work with WBC on its Local Plan and bringing forward development at the SEWUE, Peel Hall and Omega.

Yours faithfully,



Nicola Elsworth

Head of Planning and Enabling

Enclosures:

1. SEWUE Planning Representations (WSP, Barton Willmore – on behalf of Homes England and Miller Homes)
2. SEWUE: A Deliverable Allocation (Open, WSP, Savills, Barton Willmore – on behalf of Homes England and Miller Homes)
3. Accelerated Housing Delivery on Large Sites: The Homes England Approach (Homes England)
4. Homes England ownership at Peel Hall