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Annex 7:

Extract from 1997 Inspectors Report Deposit Draft Warrington Borough Local Plan pages 136-139

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1997 Inspectors Report DEPOST DRAFT WARRINGTON BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN pages 136-139

Area of Search 19 - Chester Road, Walton

As to the first issue, the original allocation site consists of open farmland at the edge of the extensive built-up area of Lower Walton. Beyond a narrow belt of mature woodland which borders most of the eastern side of this land there is housing; further development adjoins to the south. Directly west of the identified site is a strip of farmland and then a substantial wooded area which includes a small nursery holding. The A56 dual carriageway (Chester Road) marks the northern site boundary; there are fields on the opposite side.

3.AS19.3 The allocation land is, due to its scale and nature, plainly open in character and appearance. Also, largely because of the woodland belt along the eastern side, it is not particularly well related to the built-up area but is seen rather more as part of the countryside fringe whereabouts. Yet despite those considerations I do not share the views of **Walton Parish Council** and **Mr Appleton** who say that this site should be designated as Green Belt. There are 2 main reasons for this.

3.AS19.4 First, the present land is distinctly different in nature from the extensive area of dense woodland to the west; also the dual carriageway establishes a clear division between this site and the fields to the north. These features, combined with the tree belt and housing on the other boundaries, create a noticeable measure of self-containment. As such I do not believe that the continued exclusion of the allocation land from the proposed Green Belt would seriously weaken the designated area in this vicinity in terms of its ability to serve its acknowledged purposes. It is not therefore necessary to keep this site permanently open. Secondly, my earlier comments [*see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4*] about the need to identify certain sites for safeguarding notwithstanding their Green Belt potential are particularly relevant here since this is the only Area of Search, either allocated in the Plan or otherwise recommended by me for adoption, in the south-western sector of Warrington; it therefore adds welcome variety to the Borough-wide distribution of such land.

3.AS19.5 Accordingly in these circumstances, and given my conclusions on the second primary issue, I am convinced that the value of the present site as part of the Plan's reserve of safeguarded land far outweighs its potential contribution to the proposed Green Belt. The boundaries of the designated area as now intended by the Borough Council are firm and defensible; this point is explained further under the third primary issue. There is nothing to warrant their alteration.

3.AS19.6 Turning therefore to the second issue, both the **Parish Council** and **Mr Appleton** claim that the allocation land is of high amenity value and that its development would seriously spoil the appearance of these surroundings. I observe that this site has no formal landscape quality designation. Although it is quite pleasant in appearance, mostly this can, to my mind, be attributed to its setting between 2 attractive areas of woodland both of which are the subject of protective policies in the Local Plan. Even so the allocation land is prominently located beside a major route into Warrington and development here, if it were to be allowed

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in the future, would amount to a noticeable outward spread of the existing built-up area. However it would be visually contained, especially by the edge of the woodland to the west, thereby helping considerably to minimise the impact of any such development on this landscape. Sensitive treatment of the section closest to Chester Road would further assist in this respect; several policies in this Plan are aimed at achieving appropriate designs and layouts. In these circumstances the environmental argument raised by these Objectors is not so strong as to preclude this site from being safeguarded for future consideration for development purposes.

3.AS19.7 **Mr Appleton** expresses other concerns too but none is well founded. Regarding traffic safety considerations the Borough Council acknowledges there are limitations; however it says that access is possible on to the road system within the built-up area to the east albeit that the full development potential of the allocation site could not be realised. On drainage grounds it says that adequate provision can be made in order to serve any future scheme satisfactorily. The Objector provides no technical evidence to contradict the Council's case on infrastructure matters. As for agricultural land quality, there is no information about the formal classification. However in evidence **Ashall Developments Ltd** says that this land is not of high quality and the Council confirms there is no overriding argument on this score; I also note that MAFF has raised no objection to this Area of Search allocation.

3.AS19.8 Regarding the third primary issue, at the Proposed Changes stage the Council decided to take into the allocated area the piece of farmland directly west of the original site. The **CPRE** submitted a counter-objection but raised no site-specific argument to substantiate its claim for reinstatement of the Green Belt designation. Its case is solely on more general grounds about the scale of safeguarded land Borough-wide and the Plan's approach to sustainable development issues. These matters I have already dealt with under Policy LPS3.

3.AS19.9 To my mind the Proposed Change (part of LPS3-a and b, and LPS5-b) is entirely sensible. The extra land now to be safeguarded is comparable to the original site in terms of character and appearance and deserves to be treated by the Local Plan in the same fashion. Importantly this would result in the provision of a well-defined boundary (namely the woodland edge) for the Green Belt on the western side of the Area of Search replacing the rather arbitrary line shown in the Deposit Draft Plan.

3.AS19.10 Lastly, on the fourth issue, **Ashall Developments Ltd** proposes the immediate allocation of this site for housing purposes based on current land supply considerations and its inherent suitability for such development. However my analysis under Policies LPS2 and LPS3 of the development land supply position, both during the remainder of the present Plan period and in the longer term beyond, demonstrates that there is no need to allocate this site for housing at this time; strategic requirements can be satisfactorily met from other more acceptable sources either already identified/allocated in the Plan or recommended by me for adoption. Equally though, there is clear evidence that the availability of suitable land for safeguarding is limited. On that understanding, and given my conclusions on the other primary issues in this case, it is plain that the Chester Road site would make a valuable contribution to the reserve of land from which the longer term development needs could, if necessary, be met.

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