

RSWF Response to the WBC Local Plan Consultation: Report 3 – DEFRA Agricultural Land Classification (ALC)



Figure 1 – UK Government Defra Agricultural Land Classification.

The Defra ALC for the area of green belt which constitutes the proposed areas of green belt release to satisfy the Warrington UPSVLP21 are shown above. They are classed as Very good to Moderate. This equates to ALC grades 2 and 3. These are typical throughout Cheshire and comprise some of the better and fertile areas of productive land for crop growing.

It can be seen from the map above that the majority of the land in the proposed local plan area is in fact Class 2, very good. It also has a classification of 2 as being some of the Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land in the area.

The Government **Guide to assessing development proposals on agricultural land** (Updated 5 February 2021) requires the following: -

- 1) Developers and local planning authorities (LPAs) should refer to the following government policies and legislation when considering development proposals that affect agricultural land and soils. **They aim to protect:**
 - **the best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land from significant, inappropriate or unsustainable development proposals**
 - all soils by managing them in a sustainable way
- 2) A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment sets out the government's 25-year plan to **improve the health of the environment by using natural resources more sustainably and efficiently. It plans to:**

- **protect the best agricultural land**
- put a value on soils as part of our natural capital
- manage soils in a sustainable way by 2030
- restore and protect peatland

3) LPAs should use the NPPF to make decisions about the natural and local environment to:

- protect and enhance landscapes, biodiversity, geology and soils
- recognise soils as a natural capital asset that provide important ecosystem services
- **consider the economic and other benefits of BMV agricultural land, and try to use areas of poorer quality land instead of higher quality land**
- prevent soil, air, water, or noise pollution, or land instability from new and existing development.

CONCLUSION

It should be clear from the above government criteria that the proposed Local Plan to release green belt land throughout the proposed local plan area is both unjustified and unsound. It will remove valuable agricultural land from productive food production and will cause untold harm to the environment. It clearly flies in the face of complying with climate change requirements and promoting a move to a carbon neutral future.

For these reasons alone the Updated Proposed Submission Version of the Local Plan (UPSVLP21) should not be allowed to release green belt land for residential development.