

Land south west of School Lane, Mickle Trafford, CH2 4FA

Cheshire West and Chester Issues and Options
Regulation 18 Consultation

August 2025

REPORT CONTROL

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CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION
2	OPTIONS
3	HOUSING NEED AND GREEN BELT REVIEW
4	INFRASTRUCTURE
5	SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT
6	SITE AT MICKLE TRAFFORD
7	CONCLUSION

Appendices

- Appendix A – Site Location Plan for proposed development at Mickle Trafford
- Appendix B – Grey Belt Assessment for proposed development at Mickle Trafford
- Appendix C – Transport Assessment for proposed development at Mickle Trafford
- Appendix D – Landscape Visual Impact Assessment for proposed development at Mickle Trafford
- Appendix E – Masterplan

/1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. PWA has been retained by Rowland Homes Ltd to make formal representations to the new Local Plan being prepared by Cheshire West and Chester Council which will replace the existing current Local Plan policies (Part One and Part Two). The current consultation focuses on the "Issues and Options" document, which outlines potential strategies for accommodating future development, including housing and employment needs.
- 1.2. Rowland Homes Ltd welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Issues and Options consultation for the emerging Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan. They control land on the edge of Mickle Trafford capable of delivering up to 160no. dwellings, including 45% affordable housing, in a highly sustainable location.
- 1.3. The location of the site can be viewed at Appendix A. An outline planning application has been prepared and will soon be submitted, underlining its deliverability and ability to make an early contribution to the Council's acute housing shortfall. The site demonstrates the benefits of directing growth to sustainable settlements with capacity for sensitive, well-designed expansion. Rowland Homes Ltd wish to promote this site for allocation through the emerging Local Plan. A Masterplan for the development of the site is contained at Appendix E.
- 1.4. PWA is a planning consultancy based within the Central Lancashire area which has dealt with many planning applications and continues to have a close involvement with the development plan and development management systems in the local authority area. PWA is therefore able to offer comments on the emerging plan which flow from first-hand experience of operating in the area and hence a close working knowledge of current development plan documents.
- 1.5. Please accept these representations on behalf of Rowland Homes Ltd.
- 1.6. PWA can be contacted via email using info@pwaplanning.co.uk
- 1.7. The postal address is as shown below:

Unit 2, Lockside Office Park, Lockside Road, Ashton on Ribble, Preston PR2 2YS

/2 OPTIONS

- 2.1. **Option 1** is to continue with the current strategy without significant Green Belt release. Given the evidence set out in the consultation regarding the scale of housing need, limited urban capacity, and the geographic constraints of the Borough, we do not believe Option 1 can deliver the required growth. The consultation documents acknowledge that Green Belt boundaries will need to be reviewed to identify sustainable, well-contained, and defensible sites that do not undermine Green Belt purposes. This is reinforced by the consultation's recognition that meeting future housing requirements will almost certainly require Green Belt release. The strategy should meet the full housing requirement, as sought by the NPPF and consequently a review of Green Belt boundaries is required.
- 2.2. **Option 2** is to amend the spatial strategy to focus growth in the most sustainable settlements, with some Green Belt release where justified. It allows targeted Green Belt review in sustainable settlements with good access to services and transport.
- 2.3. Rowland Homes Ltd support Option 2 as the most appropriate spatial approach. This option focuses growth in the most sustainable settlements whilst enabling targeted release of Green Belt land where justified. This is consistent with the revised NPPF (December 2024), which recognises "Grey Belt" and allows proportionate Green Belt release to address housing need without fundamentally undermining Green Belt purposes.
- 2.4. **Option 3** promotes a more dispersed approach to growth across a wider range of settlements, including smaller villages, with some Green Belt release.

/3 HOUSING NEED AND GREEN BELT REVIEW

- 3.1. The consultation highlights the significant housing land shortfall that Cheshire West and Chester is currently facing. The latest evidence confirms that the Borough is unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply, with provision falling to 1.98 years, substantially below the minimum requirement set by the NPPF. This presents a pressing issue that must be addressed through the emerging Local Plan to ensure that the authority can meet both its objectively assessed needs and its wider obligations to deliver housing choice and affordability.
- 3.2. The consultation recognises the spatial limitations of relying solely on non-Green Belt locations to meet this need. Brownfield and infill opportunities, while important, cannot deliver at the scale required to address the shortfall. Many of these sites are also constrained by viability, infrastructure, and land assembly issues, meaning that their contribution to housing delivery will be limited or delayed.
- 3.3. For these reasons, the consultation correctly acknowledges that Green Belt boundaries will need to be reviewed. This review should focus on identifying sustainable, well-contained, and defensible sites that do not undermine the overall purposes of the Green Belt. A comprehensive review provides the opportunity to release land in a managed and evidence-based way, ensuring that growth is directed to locations where it can be sustainably accommodated and where impacts on the integrity of the Green Belt are minimised.
- 3.4. The concept of “Grey Belt” introduced in the 2024 NPPF provides a clear framework for guiding this process. “Grey Belt” refers to land within the Green Belt that makes only a limited contribution to its purposes, for example, land that is already partially enclosed by existing development, visually contained, or of reduced openness due to its context. The NPPF makes clear that such land can and should be prioritised for release where it can deliver significant public benefits. These include the delivery of affordable housing, new public open space, green infrastructure, and climate-positive design solutions.
- 3.5. In this context, the site at Mickle Trafford provides a clear example of how a targeted, evidence-based Green Belt review can identify land that is both sustainable and deliverable. The site is visually contained, does not play a strategic role in preventing settlement coalescence, and has strong, defensible boundaries. Its release would therefore align with national policy by ensuring that housing need is met in a way that respects Green Belt

purposes while unlocking substantial public benefits, including 45% affordable housing and the delivery of new green infrastructure.

/4 INFRASTRUCTURE

- 4.1 We support the consultation's emphasis on aligning new growth with existing and planned infrastructure. This is an essential principle of sustainable development, ensuring that new housing can be accommodated without overburdening local services. Concentrating growth in sustainable settlements makes best use of existing facilities and infrastructure, while also providing opportunities for targeted enhancements where needed.
- 4.2 Option 2 offers the most practical and deliverable strategy in this respect. By directing development towards settlements which already benefit from access to schools, shops, public transport and close proximity to larger settlements growth can be integrated effectively and support the long-term vitality of these services. At the same time, development can secure further improvements through financial contributions, investment in local facilities, and the delivery of new open space and green infrastructure.
- 4.3 By contrast, new settlements or a highly dispersed pattern of growth would require major up-front infrastructure investment in schools, transport, and utilities before housing could realistically be delivered. This would create significant costs, long lead-in times, and slower delivery rates, an approach which would not address the Borough's pressing housing needs.
- 4.4 In summary, Option 2 ensures growth is located where it can be supported by existing infrastructure, while also providing realistic opportunities for enhancement. As discussed later in this document, the Mickle Trafford site exemplifies this approach, offering a sustainable location with existing facilities in place and the ability to deliver additional benefits for the local community.

/5 SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

- 5.1 The Issues & Options document rightly highlights the importance of locating new development in settlements that are well served by public transport. Directing growth to such locations supports the Council's objectives around modal shift, carbon reduction, and air quality improvements, while also promoting healthier, more inclusive travel choices.
- 5.2 Concentrating new housing in areas with existing bus and rail connections reduces reliance on the private car, making it easier for residents to access employment, education, healthcare, and leisure opportunities in a more sustainable way. This approach is fully aligned with the Council's declared Climate Emergency response, as well as national policy priorities set out in the NPPF, which require local plans to actively support sustainable patterns of development.
- 5.3 By contrast, dispersing growth to smaller, poorly connected villages would risk embedding unsustainable travel patterns, increasing traffic congestion, and undermining the Borough's ability to meet its climate change commitments. New settlements in isolated locations would also require significant investment in new transport infrastructure before they could become viable, which would delay delivery and add further cost.
- 5.4 Mickle Trafford provides an excellent example of how growth can be directed to a settlement with existing transport connections. The village benefits from regular bus services into Chester and surrounding towns, and its location close to the A56 and wider transport network makes it highly accessible without requiring major infrastructure upgrades. Importantly, the site is within walking and cycling distance of local services and facilities, encouraging active travel for everyday trips and reducing dependence on the car.
- 5.5 In this way, development at Mickle Trafford would not only deliver much-needed housing but also contribute positively to the Borough's sustainable transport strategy, supporting carbon reduction and ensuring the creation of a balanced, accessible community.

/6 SITE AT MICKLE TRAFFORD

- 6.1 Land controlled by Rowland Homes Ltd on the edge of Mickle Trafford represents a deliverable and sustainable site that can help meet local housing needs. The site illustrates how directing growth to a sustainable settlement can enable carefully planned, well-integrated expansion that respects local character and capacity.
- 6.2 The site currently lies within the Green Belt, where development is normally restricted under Policy STRAT9. However, the revised NPPF (December 2024) introduces the concept of Grey Belt, recognising that some land within the Green Belt makes only a limited contribution to its purposes and can therefore be considered suitable for proportionate release.
- 6.3 A Grey Belt Assessment (GBA) undertaken by Urban Green and appended at Appendix B demonstrates that the site does not strongly contribute to the key Green Belt purposes listed in Paragraph 143 of the NPPF. It makes only a moderate contribution to checking sprawl, being visually contained by existing development. It makes no contribution to preventing towns from merging. It makes no contribution to preserving the setting of historic towns. Accordingly, the site falls within the NPPF definition of Grey Belt.
- 6.4 The NPPF requires that development of Grey Belt land should not fundamentally undermine the wider function of the Green Belt. The GBA confirms that while there would be some localised encroachment into open land, this would not undermine Green Belt purposes in the wider plan area given the site's contained character and relationship to existing settlement edges.
- 6.5 The Borough faces a severe housing land supply deficit, with the 2024/25 Housing Land Monitor reporting only a 1.98-year supply. This represents a substantial and persistent failure against the 5-year requirement, giving rise to an urgent and compelling need for deliverable sites.
- 6.6 Paragraphs 155–157 of the NPPF ("Golden Rules") establish that where development is proposed on Grey Belt land, it should deliver the following; Enhanced affordable housing – the application proposes 45% affordable housing, significantly above the 30% Local Plan requirement and consistent with the NPPF uplift. Infrastructure improvements – these can be secured through planning obligations or conditions in response to statutory consultee requirements. Accessible green space – the scheme proposes new on-site public open space

for residents and the wider community. The proposal therefore fully meets the national Golden Rules for Green Belt development.

- 6.7 Mickle Trafford is a defined Local Service Centre, with a primary school, church, village hall, and recreational facilities. The site is within walking and cycling distance of these services and benefits from regular bus services to Chester and beyond. A Transport Assessment will be submitted with the outline application and is appended at Appendix C. It confirms safe and suitable access can be achieved, in full accordance with NPPF paragraphs 110–115, and that the scheme will not give rise to unacceptable impacts on highway safety or severe residual cumulative impacts. The development of Mickle Trafford would help sustain local services such as the school and community facilities.
- 6.8 Other technical supporting documents are submitted with the planning application including a Landscape Visual Impact assessment (included at Appendix D) which confirms that the site is visually contained and any effects will be limited and capable of mitigation.
- 6.9 The proposed development delivers a wide range of benefits, including:
- Up to 160 new homes, helping to meet urgent housing need.
 - 45% affordable housing, substantially exceeding Local Plan policy and in line with national Golden Rules.
 - New public open space and green infrastructure.
 - Investment in infrastructure improvements where required.
 - A sustainable, well-connected site capable of early delivery.
- 6.10 The site is suitable, available, achievable and deliverable in the short to medium term. Rowland Homes is a well-established housebuilder with a strong track record of delivering high-quality residential schemes across the North West. Their proven delivery record provides the Council with confidence that the land at Mickle Trafford can be brought forward quickly and efficiently once allocated.
- 6.11 Importantly, an outline planning application is prepped and ready to be for up to 160no. dwellings on the site. This demonstrates that the land is not only suitable and available, but also achievable and deliverable within the short term. The advanced stage of preparation provides a clear route to securing planning permission and commencing development without delay.

- 6.12 Given the Borough's acute housing supply position, the ability of the Mickle Trafford site to make an early contribution is particularly valuable. The scheme is capable of being delivered largely within the first five years of the new Local Plan period, helping to address the immediate shortfall while longer-term allocations are being prepared and brought forward.
- 6.13 By allocating Mickle Trafford, the Council can ensure that a deliverable, sustainable, and policy-compliant site contributes at the start of the plan period, providing much-needed market and affordable housing when it is most urgently required.
- 6.14 The site is therefore a strong candidate for allocation through the Local Plan under Option 2.

/7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 In conclusion, Rowland Homes Ltd strongly supports Option 2 as the most appropriate spatial strategy for the emerging Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan. The evidence clearly shows that the Borough cannot meet its future housing needs without a review of the Green Belt. Option 2 provides a pragmatic and sustainable approach, focusing growth in settlements with existing infrastructure and transport connections, while allowing for targeted Green Belt release in locations that are well-contained, defensible, and capable of delivering significant public benefits.
- 7.2 The site at Mickle Trafford exemplifies how Option 2 can be implemented effectively. It is visually contained, sustainably located, and well-related to existing services and transport networks. The site is capable of delivering up to 160 dwellings, including 45% affordable housing, alongside new public open space, green infrastructure, and necessary infrastructure contributions, making it fully deliverable and capable of early delivery.
- 7.3 Rowland Homes is a reputable, major regional housebuilder with a proven track record of delivering high-quality housing, and the site is capable of coming forward largely in the short term, contributing quickly to the Borough's five-year housing land supply.
- 7.4 Allocating this site would enable the Council to address the Borough's urgent housing shortfall, contribute to a five-year housing land supply, and support wider objectives for sustainable development, infrastructure provision, and carbon reduction. We therefore urge the Council to confirm Option 2 as the preferred spatial strategy and to consider the Mickle Trafford site for allocation in the emerging Local Plan.



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