

Development Framework

Land to the west of Rowton Bridge Road

Hilbre Overlea Ltd

M3991-DF-25.08-V2 August 2025



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1.0 Introduction

This Development Framework has been prepared by Asteer Planning to demonstrate the suitability of the land to the west of Rowton Bridge Road, Christleton for residential-led development and to set out a compelling case to allocate the land adjacent to the north of Whitchurch Road and to the west of Rowton Bridge Road ('the Site') for residential-led development in the emerging Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan ('emerging Local Plan').

- 1.1 This document should be read alongside representations which robustly demonstrate that to be justified and effective, Cheshire West and Chester ('CWaC') need to provide sufficient, deliverable land to: meet the significantly increased housing need in the Borough resulting from the update to the Standard Method calculation in December 2024; address local affordability issues and catalytic jobs growth projections; and, to be consistent with a new direction in national planning policy that seeks to immediately boost housebuilding and address the UK's acute housing crisis.



Fig 1

Site Location and Context

1.0 Introduction

- 1.2 To support this growth and to plan for CWaC's needs throughout the emerging Plan Period, it is essential that CWaC considers the allocation of land in the Green Belt – and in particular those sites which fit with the Government's new definition of 'Grey Belt' and which have a limited impact on the wider purposes of CWaC's Green Belt as a whole.
- 1.3 The Site presents an opportunity to deliver development that provides an exceptional quality of place within a landscaped setting on a site that is self-contained with clear, defensible boundaries. The development of the Site can also deliver a range of public benefits which have been identified by the Christleton and Littleton Parish Council for the safety and enjoyment of existing and future residents. These benefits include: a contribution to air quality monitoring in the village centre; the resurfacing of the Canal footpath at Rowton Bridge to encourage use by local residents and reduce the quantity of local schoolchildren walking along the A41; the provision of a 40m section of footpath on Rowton Bridge Road to ensure residents have a continuous footpath and are not required to walk into the road; and, traffic calming measures to reduce the load on the A41.



Fig 2

Precedent Images - Pritchard Architectural Design

1.0 Introduction

- 1.4 Hilbre Overlea Ltd is fully committed to the Site and is currently preparing a planning application for up to 29 homes that will fully demonstrate the deliverability of the Site to complement the CWaC process.
- 1.5 This document sets out how the Site is available and can be delivered early in the next Plan Period providing up to 29 homes with associated community infrastructure, to complement a spatial strategy that supports sustainable and appropriate development across Cheshire West, and a Local Plan that fully meets the housing and employment needs of the region to the end of the Plan Period and beyond.



Fig 3

Rough Sketches of the Potential Scheme - Pritchard Architectural Design

1.0 Introduction



Fig 4

Illustrative Landscape Layout - Barnes Walker / Pritchard Architectural Design

Content

- 1.6 This Development Framework has been prepared by a professional design and technical team and includes the following sections:
- **Site Context** – a summary of the Site in context, including its wider strategic positioning and a description of the Site and its surroundings;
 - **Technical and Environmental Considerations** – a summary of the technical work that has been undertaken to demonstrate that the Site is deliverable;
 - **Planning Policy** – a review of the existing and emerging planning policy context that frames the emerging Local Plan and the Site;
 - **The Case for Allocation** – a summary of the case for allocating the Site, including the exceptional circumstances that exist for reviewing the Green Belt and an assessment of the Grey Belt and Green Belt credentials of the Site;
 - **Vision** – an overview of what the development of the Site could deliver for the community of Christleton;
 - **Deliverability and Key Benefits** – a summary of the availability, suitability and achievability of the Site, and an articulation of the key benefits that the allocation of the Site would deliver.
- 1.7 Should any further information be required by the Council, Hilbre Overlea Ltd and the appointed design and technical team would be happy to address any queries or requests. Hilbre Overlea Ltd is fully committed to undertaking further detailed design and technical work to support the delivery of the Site through the emerging Local Plan process.

The Site is located to the south of Christleton and is strategically located on the A41 (Whitchurch Road), with access to the Borough's major employment and population centre of Chester – providing an opportunity for an integrated development with strong connections across the region.

A Sustainable Location for Growth

- 2.1 Christleton lies c.600m to the east of the main built residential area of Chester, being separated by the North Wales Expressway (A55) and the A41 Ring Road. Christleton is therefore exceptionally well positioned to provide sustainable growth and excellent strategic connectivity. The Site is in an appropriate location for modest residential-led development which would positively contribute to both Christleton's and CWaC's identified, unmet housing needs. The development of the Site can also deliver community benefits including pedestrianising the southern section of Rowton Bridge Road, improving the Canal footpath, and providing traffic calming measures for the village.

The Site and Surroundings

- 2.2 The Site area extends to approximately 3.13 acres and comprises greenfield land which is shown as the land edged in red. The Site is strategically located with potential access onto the A41, while being extremely well-contained

with the A41 to the south, the Shropshire Union Canal Mainline and the built form of Christleton immediately beyond this to the north, and further built form of Christleton to the east and west. The settlement of Christleton therefore forms three of the boundaries to the Site, with the A41 forming the fourth boundary resulting in a heavily urbanised character to the Site.

Accessibility

- 2.3 The Site is strategically located with access to existing services, facilities, and employment locations. The Site has existing walking, cycling and public transport links, and offers the potential to improve the highway, pedestrian, and cycling links that support an accessible development in Christleton. The traffic calming measures provided as part of the benefits package would also enable more efficient and safer movement of residents into and through the village.
- 2.4 Christleton offers a good range of local facilities, including: a primary school, secondary school, nurseries, sports clubs, convenience store, cafes, churches, dental practice, public houses, and Little Heath Play Area and King George's Field. A significant range of main town centre uses are also directly accessible in the City of Chester, with the City Centre located c.3km to the north-east via the A41.

- 2.5 The Site is served by regular bus services along the A41 which provide services into the centre of Chester and to Chester Railway Station which is located approximately 3.4km to the north west of the Site. Chester Railway Station provides hourly services to Liverpool Lime Street, Manchester Airport, and south to London Euston via Crewe.
- 2.6 The Site also benefits from existing pedestrian and cycling accessibility via a path along the Shropshire Union Canal. There are also Public Rights of Way ("PRoW") c.50m – 100m to the north and east of the Site comprising footpaths and bridleways which provide additional connectivity.
- 2.7 The Site is uniquely positioned to provide new homes in an accessible location, and Hilbre Overlea Ltd is fully committed to exploring the delivery of significant walking, cycling and public transport enhancements to enable safe access to the village centre without having to cross the A41. This will therefore support the sustainability of the development, which will not only benefit existing residents, but also those in neighbouring communities, such as Littleton and Waverton.

3.0 Technical and Environmental Considerations

This section sets out the key environmental and technical considerations, and serves as a framework for more detailed design and technical assessment work as the CWaC Local Plan progresses.

Highways and Access

- 3.1 Whiteacre Consultancy has been appointed to assess the vehicular access options and highways capacity of the Site. Initial work has demonstrated that the Site is accessible, can be accessed safely, and will be adequately accommodated into the local highways network.
- 3.2 The Site is located to the north of Whitchurch Road (A41) and therefore access to the facilities within Christleton is available without the need to cross the A41. The High School is a short walk from the Site (around 375m or just under 5 minutes) as are the local bus stops. The primary school is around 625m or less than an 8 minute walk from the site access.
- 3.3 The Site is located just off the A41 that leads directly into Chester city centre and provides access to the wider major highways network within 1.2 miles. The Site also provides access to the Canal towpath, which in turn forms a pedestrian and cycle friendly route into Chester centre and beyond.
- 3.4 The Site is considered to be a logical, appropriate and sustainable development site.

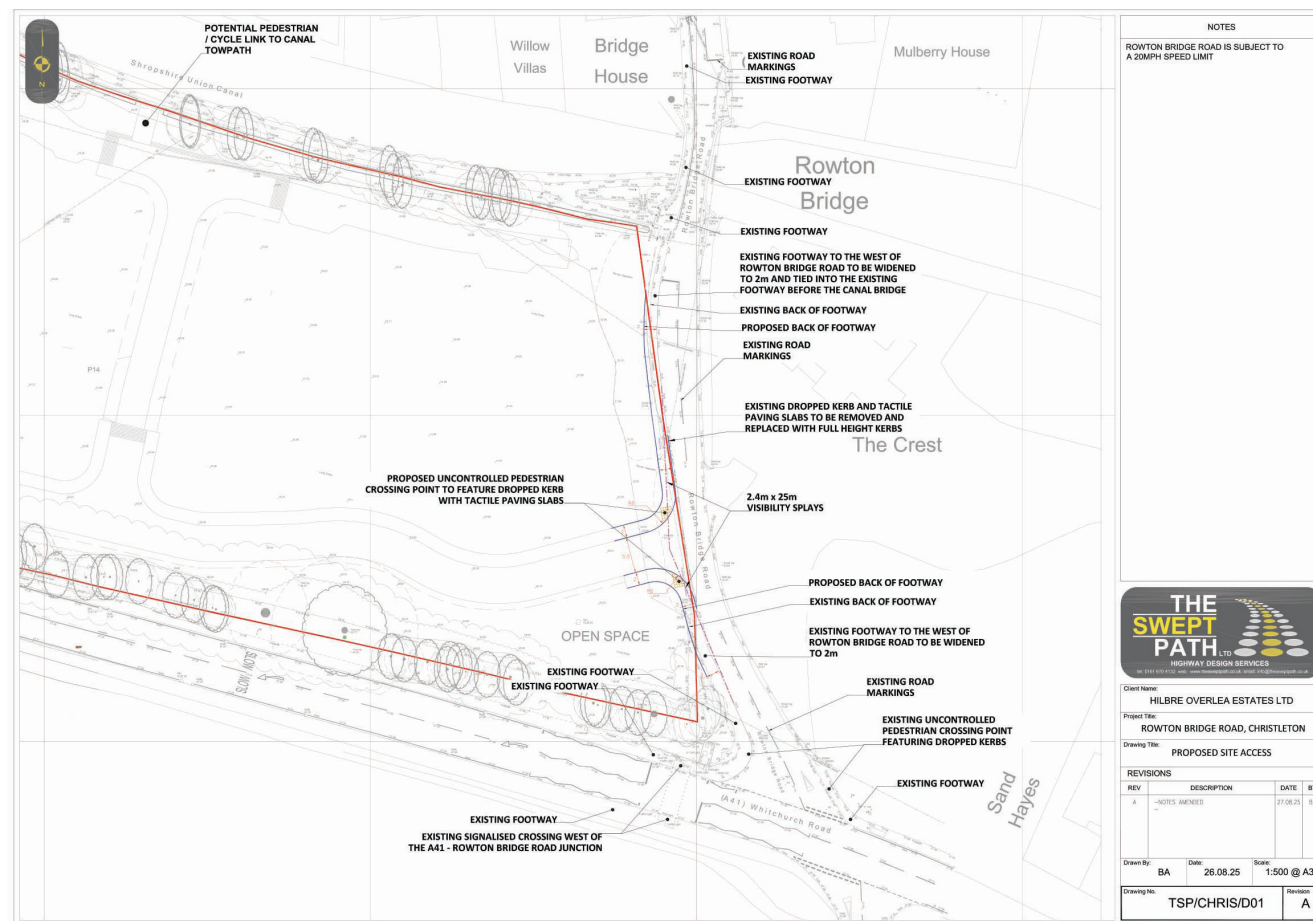


Fig 5 Proposed Site Access - The Swept Path

3.0 Technical and Environmental Considerations

Vehicular Access

3.5 It is proposed to install a simple priority T junction onto Rowton Bridge Road to serve the proposed development of up to 29 units. The proposals would be suitable in scale to safely accommodate a development of this size. This includes 6m corner radii, a 5.5m wide carriageway plus a 2 m wide footway on the northern side of the access road and a verge to the south. The proposed visibility splays onto Rowton Bridge Road are in line with the mandatory 20 mph speed limit in force along Rowton Bridge Road.

3.6 Vehicle and cycle parking will be provided in accordance with CWAC SPD: Parking Standards. Infrastructure for electric Vehicle (EV) charging points will be provided to each dwelling in accordance with Approved Document S of the Building Regulations.

Access Detail

3.7 It is also proposed to extend and improve the footway link along the entire length of Rowton Bridge Road from Whitchurch Road (A41) up to the existing canal bridge (Rowton Bridge). The proposal would provide a 2m wide footway with dropped crossings / tactile pavings at appropriate locations and would benefit pedestrian access to the existing canal towpath and the facilities within the centre of Christleton including the Primary school and High school as well as local bus stops.

3.8 The new section of footpath will be located within the boundary of the site and the adopted highway, and will be of significant benefit for pupils traveling to school and the wider local community.

3.9 This aligns with the vision contained in the Planit-IE "Christleton Village Cycling, Walking and Traffic Plan" for Rowton Bridge Road. Contributions resulting from the development could also be used to extend this further along Rowton Bridge Road.

3.10 A new access point from the Site onto the existing canal towpath, which provides a traffic free route for pedestrians and cyclists into Chester City Centre, the village centre, Waverton and beyond is also proposed.

Traffic Impact

3.11 An initial assessment of the anticipated traffic movements associated with the proposals has been undertaken using the TRICs database and it is anticipated that the proposals would generate the following trips on the proposed site access:

ANTICIPATED VEHICLES FROM 29 UNITS	ARRIVALS	DEPARTURES	TOTAL TWO WAY
AM PEAK	5 VPH	11 VPH	16 VPH
PM PEAK	10 VPH	5 VPH	15 VPH
DAILY	71 VEHS	72 VEHS	143 VEHS

Note: VPH is vehicles per hour, VEHS is total number of vehicles

3.12 Assuming a 50%/50% split of traffic onto Rowton Bridge Road the proposals would be anticipated to add only 8 vehicles per hour (total two way) to Rowton Bridge Road during either highway peak. This equates to 1 additional vehicle per 7.5 minutes on average during the highway peak hour which cannot be considered to represent a severe impact.

3.13 In summary, it is not considered that there are any highways constraints preventing the Site being brought forward for residential development.

3.0 Technical and Environmental Considerations



Fig 6 Extract from Plant-IE IE "Christleton Village Cycling, Walking and Traffic Plan"

3.0 Technical and Environmental Considerations

Heritage and Archaeology

- 3.14 The Site lies within the Christleton Conservation Area and Shropshire Union Canal Corridor on which is a Grade 2 Listed Canal Bridge located outside the north-eastern boundary of the Site. The Christleton Heritage Assessment that is cited in the Parish Priority Statement identifies the Village Green as the primary focal point for the Christleton Conservation Area's heritage assets. The Site lies c.560m to the south of the Village Green and does not have any visual connection to its associated Heritage Assets.
- 3.15 The primary heritage concern in relation to the development of the Site would be in relation to the Canal Conservation Area. The Canal River Trust have produced a Shropshire Union Canal Policies Document which provides a Heritage Policy (SUC 2) identifying Rowton Bridge as one of three listed bridges with the vicinity of the Christleton and states that *"Any development should safeguard the heritage value of the respective Canal Conservation Areas and Listed Structures, and protect the historic significance of the canal corridor"*. Hilbre Overlea Ltd will take a proactive approach and seek to work with all relevant heritage Consultees to ensure a sensitive development which achieves the aim of the Shropshire Union Canal Policy SUC 2, and contributes to related improvements identified by the Parish Council (such as the pedestrian/cyclist priority for Rowton Bridge Road identified in the Heritage Assessment).
- 3.16 Orion Heritage Ltd have been appointed to undertake an Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment on the Site. In accordance with government policy (National Planning Policy Framework 2025), this assessment draws together the available archaeological, historic, topographic and land-use information in order to clarify the heritage significance and archaeological potential of the Site.
- 3.17 The preliminary assessment concludes that the Site has low potential for archaeological remains from all periods therefore no further archaeological work would appear to be warranted on this Site.
- 3.18 The proposed development is not considered to impact upon the settings and significance of any Scheduled Monuments, Registered Parks and Gardens, and Historic Battlefields.
- 3.19 During the Civil War (1642-45) a battle took place at nearby Rowton Moor, c. 0.5 km to the south-east of the site (see Fig 7), as such, there is a low possibility of evidence from that period within the site.
- 3.20 Development of the Site has the theoretical potential to impact upon the settings and significance of a number of Listed Buildings located within the surroundings of the Site. However, views to and from the Site in the direction of all the Listed Buildings, with the exception of the Grade II Listed Canal Bridge Number 120, are blocked by either modern development and/or mature trees. Therefore, no impacts on their settings or significance are anticipated.
- 3.21 Development also has the theoretical potential to impact upon the setting and significance of Chester Canal Conservation Area. However, it is considered that the retention of open space within the Site, sensitive plot design and an appropriate green landscape buffer along the northern and eastern perimeter of the Site as part of the development proposals, will mitigate any adverse impacts on the Grade II Listed Canal Bridge Number 120 and the Chester Canal Conservation Area.
- 3.22 In summary, it is not considered that there are any heritage or archaeological constraints preventing the Site being brought forward for residential development.

3.0 Technical and Environmental Considerations

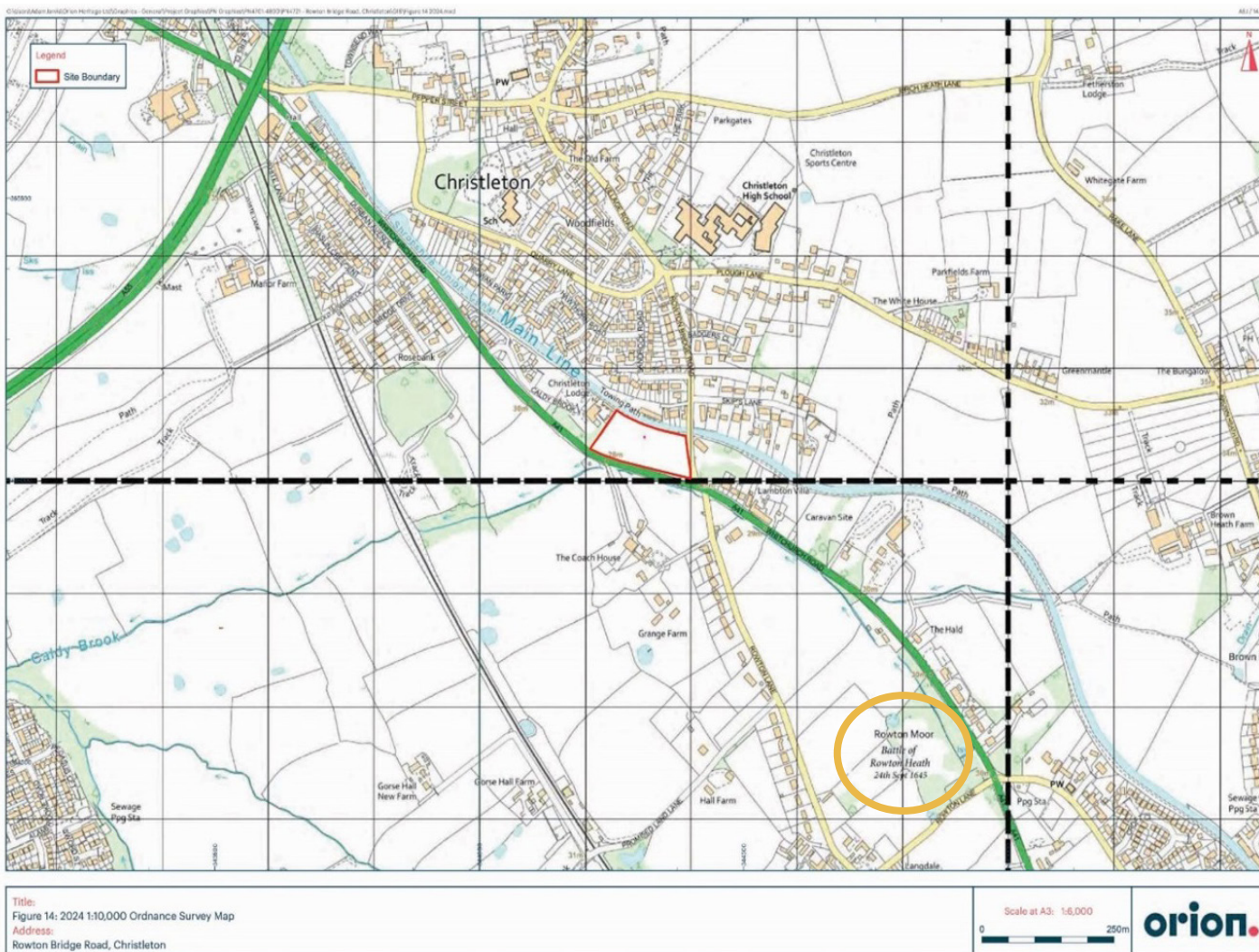


Fig 7 Battle of Rowton Moor location (circled orange) in relation to the application site

3.0 Technical and Environmental Considerations

Landscape and Visual

- 3.23 Barnes Walker Ltd have been appointed to prepare a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) to accompany the application. The LVA will establish the landscape and townscape baseline in terms of the nature and appearance of the Site and its context, before determining relevant planning policy and any landscape and or heritage-based designations, whilst also ascertaining the overriding character of the landscape and townscape within a defined study area. Establishing the baseline will also establish the landscape and visual receptors that will be subsequently assessed.
- 3.24 The Site forms a single field that is located within a narrow tract of land on the southern edge of Christleton. It is visually and physically contained by the A41 (Whitchurch Road) to the south, the Shropshire Union Canal to the north, the Cheshire Cat PH to the west and existing residential development on Rowton Bridge Road and the A41 to the east. Furthermore, the Site's boundaries are lined with mature trees and vegetation, which enhance its discrete nature.
- 3.25 Given the presence of existing residential development associated with Christleton located to the north of the A41 and open agricultural land extending to the south of the A41, Whitchurch Road forms a distinct edge to the southern extent of the settlement in this location (these differences in character to the north and south of the A41 are described by the photographs below).
- 3.26 As a result, the proposed development of the Site is considered to be consistent with the pattern of development in Christleton, in that it will be located within a contained location to the north side of the A41. As such, the development of the site will be consistent with its townscape context and the character of the village and is not expected to exert itself upon the character of the wider rural landscape (identified as Landscape Character Area 9d: Saughall to Waverton Plain by the Cheshire West and Chester Landscape Character Assessment).
- 3.27 Visually, the containing built form and vegetation combine to limit the visual prominence of the Site and the proposed development therein. People experiencing a view of the Site that may be affected by its development (Visual Receptors) are limited to people using the canal corridor, road users on the A41 and Rowton Bridge Road, the staff and patrons of Cheshire Cat PH and the residents of nearby properties.
- 3.28 In general, the limited number of visual receptors experience partial, limited views of the Site that are likely to vary on a seasonal basis due to the deciduous nature of the boundary trees and vegetation. The visual changes brought about by the development of the site are expected to be of a subtle nature and the introduction of houses into the views experienced would be wholly consistent with existing views within this location.
- 3.29 As a result, the proposed development of the Site is not expected to generate any higher, unacceptable levels of adverse landscape or visual effect.

3.0 Technical and Environmental Considerations

A41 Whitchurch Road behind trees

Cheshire Cat Public House

The Shropshire Union Canal behind trees



Site Photo View of the Site from its south-eastern corner



Photo View of the rural landscape to the south of the A41 Whitchurch Road, in proximity to the Site

3.0 Technical and Environmental Considerations



Photo Existing residential development to the north of the A41 in proximity to the Site



Photo Existing residential development to the north of the A41 in proximity to the Site

3.0 Technical and Environmental Considerations

Ecology and Biodiversity Net Gain

- 3.30 Tyrer Ecological Consultants have been appointed to prepare Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) appraisals to provide an assessment of the Site's ecological value and to identify opportunities for ecological enhancements as part of the proposed development.
- 3.31 Initial conclusions are that the majority of the Site is classed as "poor condition modified grassland" whose loss could be mitigated through the creation of higher distinctiveness grassland / scrub / tree planting within the areas of open space to achieve the required 10% BNG uplift..
- 3.32 The trees surrounding the Site are classed as linear features with these being largely retained or replaced with native species; these actions should achieve the required 10% BNG uplift.
- 3.33 Although the proposals have no direct impact on the canal, it falls within 10m of the Site and is therefore classed as a watercourse; however, its current classification would be "poor condition". The offset of the Site from the canal along with the towpath and retention of most of the trees along this boundary will result in its condition being unaltered. Overlea Hilbre Ltd are committed to ensuring the required 10% BNG Uplift is met through either on-site or off-site provision.
- 3.34 In summary, a combination of onsite habitat creation / enhancement alongside the purchase of a small number of offsite will deliver the required 10% BNG uplift across the board. As such, it is not considered that there are any ecological constraints preventing the Site being brought forward for residential development.

3.0 Technical and Environmental Considerations

Trees

- 3.35 An Arboricultural Impact Assessment has been undertaken by Tree Solutions Ltd to provide an assessment of the existing tree and hedgerow population and to identify opportunities and constraints in relation to potential development at the Site.
- 3.36 The illustrative site plan has been designed to ensure that surrounding trees and hedgerows are retained and, where appropriate, integrated into the layout in a manner that safeguards their current and future health and vitality.
- 3.37 Trees and hedgerows along the northern boundary, adjacent to the canal towpath, will be retained and managed to protect the strong landscape amenity they provide to users of the canal and associated public right of way.
- 3.38 Along the southern boundary, many of the existing trees have naturally regenerated as multiple-stemmed specimens arising from historic coppice management of the former hedgerow. These trees have limited long-term viability and will either be re-coppiced or selectively removed to facilitate the planting of a new indigenous hedgerow. This intervention will improve overall structure, enhance biodiversity, and increase the amenity value of the retained mature trees within the boundary.
- 3.39 Several trees along the southern boundary with the A41 have been identified as displaying physiological and morphological defects. Targeted works will be undertaken to address these health and safety concerns, thereby safeguarding users of the adjacent highway and public footway. All works will be undertaken in accordance with the approved Planning Application Ref: 24/03547/TPO.
- 3.40 Retention of Category A and B trees, as defined by BS 5837:2012 – *Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction – Recommendations, ensures compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework (2025) and with Policy DM 45 of the Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan.*
- 3.41 The contribution that trees make to the landscape character and setting of the Site has been carefully considered within the illustrative site plan, ensuring no adverse impact on local biodiversity.

3.0 Technical and Environmental Considerations



Fig 8 Preliminary Tree Constraints Plan

3.0 Technical and Environmental Considerations

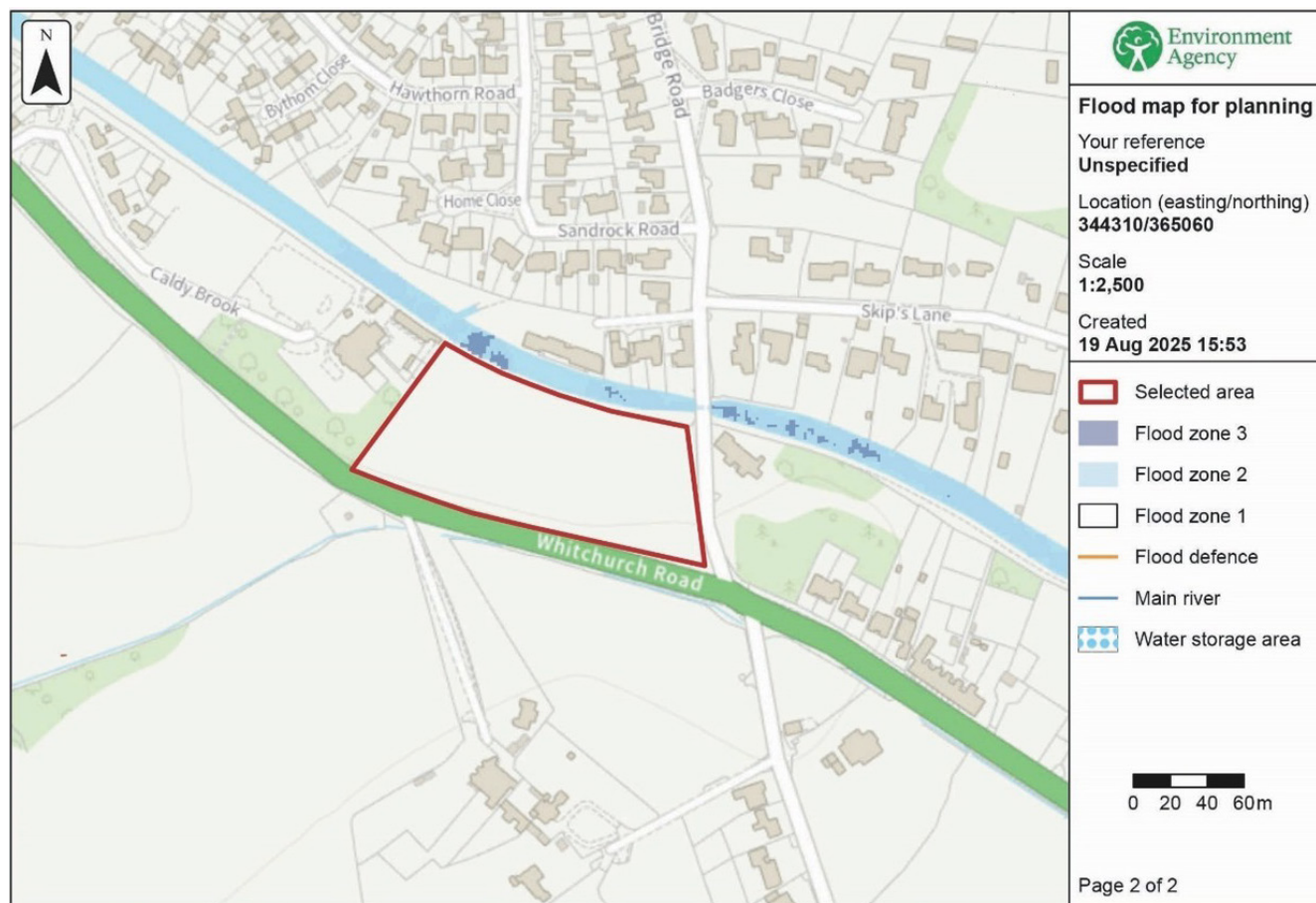
Site Investigation

- 3.42 Coopers Chartered Consulting Engineers have been appointed to undertake a desktop Site Investigation works for the Site.
- 3.43 This will determine whether any monitoring or remediation is required prior to construction works commencing and will inform the design specification for the foundations and ground floor slabs.
- 3.44 Preliminary results anticipate that there are no ground related constraints that would prevent the Site being brought forward for residential development.

Flood Risk and Drainage

- 3.45 The entirety of the Site is in Flood Zone 1 and does not have any areas at risk of surface water flooding. Notwithstanding this, as the area of the Site is greater than one hectare, a full Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) is required to be submitted with any future planning application.
- 3.46 Coopers Chartered Consulting Engineers have been appointed to undertake the FRA and to design a sustainable drainage strategy for the Site.
- 3.47 This will potentially take advantage of the existing drainage network that crosses and abuts the Site.

- 3.48 In summary, it is not considered that there are any flood risk or drainage constraints preventing the Site being brought forward for residential development.



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Fig 9 Flood Risk Map - Environment Agency

3.0 Technical and Environmental Considerations

Utilities and Infrastructure

- 3.49 The Site is located off one of the principle access roads into the village and the A41 with existing development to the east, west and north (on the other side of the canal) therefore appropriate services including electricity, water and broadband will be available.

Air Quality and Noise

- 3.50 NJD Environmental Associates Ltd have prepared an Air Quality Assessment for the Site in accordance with Environmental Protection UK (EPUK) and Institute of Air Quality (IAQM) document 'Land-Use Planning and Development Control: Planning for Air Quality' (2017).
- 3.51 Based on the scale of the Proposed Development, development traffic flows will have a **not significant impact** on local air quality. Air Quality (IAQM) document 'Land-Use Planning and Development Control: Planning for Air Quality' (2017).
- 3.52 The review of measured and mapped background pollutant concentrations, indicated that all pollutants considered are below the relevant Air Quality Objectives (AQO) and target value, without the risk of exceedance.



Fig 10 Location of Existing CWAC Air Quality Monitoring Stations

3.0 Technical and Environmental Considerations

- 3.53 The residual effect of the Proposed Development on air quality is therefore, judged to be **not significant** for NO₂, PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}, according to the EPUK/IAQM assessment criteria.
- 3.54 In summary, it is not considered that there are any air quality constraints preventing the Site being brought forward for residential development.
- 3.55 The development of the Site could contribute to the delivery of AQ2 of Christleton Parish Council's Air Quality Working Group (AQWG) *"Request S106 funding to ensure continuous monitoring and reporting of PM 2.5 and NO₂ on the A41/51 and in the centre of Christleton."*
- 3.56 PDA Acoustics have been appointed to undertake a Noise Impact Assessment (NIA) to gauge the existing noise environment and make any recommendation should any mitigation be required to meet the requirements of the NPPF and BS 8233:2014.
- 3.57 PDA note that noise levels at the Site are dominated by road traffic from the A41 Whitchurch Road to the south of Site during both day and night times
- 3.58 PDA recently undertook the NIA for the nearby application at land to the west of the Cheshire Cat (App Ref: 25/01980/FUL) that has a similar relationship with the A41 Whitchurch Road as this Site; the results showed that:
- Garden areas during the daytime were predicted to be below the 50 dB LAeq,T criterion therefore the external amenity areas are acceptable without any need for mitigation.
 - Noise mitigation would be required to selected elevations of the new houses in the form of enhanced glazing and acoustic trickle vents to achieve the requisite criterion.
- 3.59 In summary, it is not considered that there are any noise constraints preventing the Site being brought forward for residential development.

3.0 Technical and Environmental Considerations

Public Rights of Way

- 3.60 The Site is private land, with the only access being from Rowton Bridge Road via a locked gate.
- 3.61 There are no Public Rights of Way (PRoW) within or leading to the Site.
- 3.62 The canal towpath that runs along the northern boundary of the Site forms part of the Baker Way with this turning north along Rowton Bridge via the Grade 2 Listed canal bridge (point A) before progressing east along Skips Lane (point B) - see Fig 11 below.

- 3.63 The proposed development offers the potential to include a new pedestrian and cycle link from the Site onto the canal towpath subject to further discussions with the Canal and Rivers Trust (CRT).
- 3.64 In summary, there are no PRoW that would impact upon or prevent the Site being brought forward for residential development.

Summary

- 3.65 In summary, there are no technical considerations which prevent the Site from being brought forward for residential development, and further detailed technical works will underpin a sensitive, comprehensive masterplan of the Site.



Fig 11 Map of the Baker Way

4.0 The Policy Framework

The Labour Government has placed the UK's housing crisis and housebuilding at the heart of its manifesto and as a central pillar to its' economic growth strategy. It is critical that Cheshire West and Chester do not ignore this context and seek to deliver a Local Plan that reflects this new policy landscape and the clear future housing needs of the region – by making the best and most efficient use of grey belt sites in line with well-established national policy.

The Adopted Development Plan

- 4.1 The adopted development plan for Cheshire West and Chester includes the Local Plan Part One (Adopted January 2015) and the Local Plan Part Two (Adopted July 2019). The Policies within these documents are therefore needing to be reviewed, as recognised by the progression of the emerging Plan through this Issues and Options Consultation.

A New National Policy Landscape

- 4.2 The key issues to consider in the context of the new NPPF are:

1. The significantly increased housing requirement for Cheshire West and Chester – which the emerging Local Plan should seek to plan holistically for, to support affordability and economic growth across the whole Plan Period.

2. A new approach to Green Belt land and 'Grey Belt' Assessment, which the emerging Local Plan should consider, particularly in the context of a significantly increased housing requirement. This sequentially elevates the priority of sites which do not meet the specific purposes of the Green Belt and therefore can be considered Grey Belt.
- 4.3 CWaC should not ignore this wider context and must plan positively to meet its needs based on the new housing requirement, which in turn requires a review of the Borough's Green Belt land.

5.0 The Case for Allocation

There is a clear and compelling case to allocate the Site in the emerging Local Plan. The exceptional circumstances to amend the Green Belt boundary in CWaC exist and, in the context of the new NPPF, the Site is considered to be 'Grey Belt' land that would not represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt. This section summarises the principle of allocating the Site for residential-led development in the emerging Local Plan.

The Exceptional Circumstances for Amending the Green Belt Boundary Meeting Housing Need

An Existing Lack of Supply

- 5.1 Central to the reasons for progressing the emerging Local Plan is Cheshire West and Chester Council's acceptance that they cannot demonstrate a five year housing land supply. In this context, it is extremely important that the future housing needs of CWaC are future-proofed and grounded in the new Standard Method, to ensure that the emerging Local Plan is robust and does not perpetuate future issues with housing land supply beyond the first five years of the Plan Period.

- 5.2 Specifically to Christleton and Littleton, the Christleton and Littleton Housing Needs Report (June 2024) identifies a shortfall of 75 net new affordable dwellings. Hilbre Overlea Ltd would seek to meet the required delivery of 45% affordable housing as part of the development which would deliver a significant proportion of the settlements' need.

Meeting Future Housing Needs

- 5.3 The NPPF and new Standard Method sets a requirement of 1,914 dwellings per annum ("dpa") for CWaC. The NPPF is clear that housing need now constitutes the 'exceptional circumstances' to trigger a review of the Green Belt (Paragraph 146). CWaC should undertake a review of Green Belt and Grey Belt land to be able to fully plan for its future need, and therefore sequentially consider Grey Belt sites, such as the land to the west of Rowton Bridge Road, to address this need.

Prioritising the Development of Grey Belt Land

- 5.4 In reviewing the Green Belt, Paragraph 148 of the NPPF is clear that "*plans should give priority to previously developed land, then consider grey belt which is not previously developed, and then other Green Belt locations*". There is not sufficient brownfield land within CWaC to adequately supply the significant level of housing need in the Borough and as a result CWaC Council will need make consideration for the release of grey belt land which is not previously developed.
- 5.5 The Site meets all the criteria for being considered as Grey Belt development and should therefore be sequentially considered as the highest priority for Green Belt release. The Grey Belt merits of the Site are considered further below.

5.0 The Case for Allocation

Could the Site be considered Appropriate Development in the Green Belt?

- 5.6 Paragraph 155 of the NPPF considers the circumstances in which the development of homes and other uses in the Green Belt should not be regarded as “inappropriate”. This includes consideration of whether sites meet the definition of Grey Belt (which is applicable for both plan making and decision taking) and provides a robust basis for considering the merits of the Site in the emerging Local Plan. It states that sites should not be considered “inappropriate” development in the Green Belt where:
- a. *The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;*
 - b. *There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;*
 - c. *The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework; and*
 - d. *Where applicable the development proposed meets the ‘Golden Rules’ requirements set out in paragraphs 156-157.*

5.7 Each of these criteria are considered in the context of the Site.

A Grey Belt Site

5.8 The NPPF and National Planning Practice Guidance (“NPPG”) on Green Belt Assessment, set out the criteria against which to assess whether a site is Grey Belt land. The definition of Grey Belt in the NPPF is as follows:

“For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, ‘grey belt’ is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143”.

5.9 Cheshire West and Chester performed a Green Belt Review in 2013 which only covered broad areas of land adjacent to Chester, as such, the Site was not assessed. In lieu of a formal Green Belt Assessment, the following sets out a high-level assessment of the Site against the Grey Belt purposes outlined in Annex 2 of the NPPF, using the more detailed criteria included in the NPPG, to assess whether the site makes a strong contribution to purposes a), b), or d).

5.0 The Case for Allocation

Grey Belt Purpose	The New NPPG (Features)	Comments
<p>Purpose A – to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.</p> <p>This purpose only relates to the sprawl of large built-up areas. Villages should not be considered large built up areas.</p>	<p>Strong – Assessment areas that contribute strongly are likely to be free of existing development, and lack physical feature(s) in reasonable proximity that could restrict and contain development. They are also likely to include all of the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be adjacent or near to a large built up area. • if developed, result in an incongruous pattern of development (such as an extended “finger” of development into the Green Belt) 	<p>Christleton is identified as a village in the Parish Priority Statement. As a result, in accordance with the NPPG, the Site would not have an impact on this Purpose.</p> <p>Regardless of this we have still assessed the Site against the purposes identified in the Green Belt NPPG to demonstrate that the Site clearly meets the Grey Belt credentials.</p> <p>In accordance with the NPPG Guidance for ‘Weak or None’ features:</p>
	<p>Moderate – Assessment areas that contribute moderately are likely to be adjacent or near to a large built up area, but include one of more features that weaken the land’s contribution to this purpose such as (but not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having physical feature(s) in reasonable proximity that could restrict and contain development; • Be partially enclosed by existing development, such that new development would not result in an incongruous pattern of development; • Contain existing development; • Being subject to other urbanising influences. 	<p>1. In accordance with the definition provided in the NPPG for ‘villages’, the Site cannot be considered to be adjacent to a large built-up area; and,</p> <p>2. The Site’s contribution to the Green Belt is weakened significantly by having the built development along the entirety of the northern boundary, and built development to the east and west. This existing development adds significantly to the urban character of the Site. In turn, these buildings act as a physical feature that restrict development, enclose the Site, and act as a strong urbanising influence. Additionally, the presence of the A41 forms a strong, definite boundary on the Site’s southern boundary.</p>
	<p>Weak or None – Assessment areas that make only a weak or no contribution are likely to include those that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are not adjacent to or near to a large built up area; • Are adjacent to or near to a large built up area, but containing or being largely enclosed by significant existing development. 	<p>The Site therefore makes ‘weak or no’ contribution to Purpose A. Further work with a specialist landscape and visual consultant will be undertaken to analyse the extent and location of development and the proposed landscape framework required to frame the development.</p>

5.0 The Case for Allocation

Grey Belt Purpose	The New NPPG (Features)	Comments
<p>Purpose B – to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another This purpose relates to the merging of towns, not villages.</p>	<p>Strong – Assessment areas that contribute strongly are likely to be free of existing development, and include all of the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forming a substantial part of a gap between towns • The development of which would be likely to result in the loss of visual separation of towns. 	<p>Christleton is identified as a Village in the Parish Priority Statement. As a result, in accordance with the NPPG, the Site would not have an impact on this Purpose.</p> <p>Again, the following sets out an assessment of the Site in accordance with the Grey Belt criteria.</p> <p>The Site makes 'Weak or None' contribution to this purpose. This is because the Site does not form part of the physical and visual gap between Christleton and the neighbouring settlements. This is due to the existing settlement boundary of Christleton extending to the south east as a result of residential development further along Whitchurch Road.</p>
	<p>Moderate – Assessment areas that contribute moderately are likely to be located in a gap between towns, but include one or more features that weaken their contribution to this purpose, such as (but not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forming a small part of the gap between towns; • Being able to be developed without the loss of visual separation between towns. This could be (but is not limited to) due to the presence or close proximity of structures, natural landscape elements or topography that preserve visual separation. 	
	<p>Weak or None – Assessment areas that contribute weakly are likely to include those that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not form part of a gap between towns, or • Form part of a gap between towns, but only a very small part of this gap, without making a contribution to visual separation. 	

5.0 The Case for Allocation

Grey Belt Purpose	The New NPPG (Features)	Comments
<p>Purpose D – to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.</p> <p>This purpose relates to historic towns, not villages. Where there are no historic towns in the plan area, it may not be necessary to provide detailed assessments against this purpose.</p>	<p>Strong – Assessment areas that contribute strongly are likely to be free of existing development and to include all of the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form part of the setting of a historic town; • Make a considerable contribution to the special character of a historic town. This could be (but is not limited to) as a result of being within, adjacent to, or of significant visual importance to the historic aspects of the town. 	<p>Christleton is identified as a Village in the Parish Priority Statement. As a result, in accordance with the NPPG, the Site would not have an impact on this Purpose.</p> <p>The Heritage Assessment provided by the Parish Council identifies Christleton as being mentioned in the Domesday Book with a number of buildings in the Village core dating back to the 15th, 16th, and 17th Century onwards – notably the church of St James dating back to the late 15th Century. Christleton may therefore be viewed as a historic village.</p>
	<p>Moderate – Assessment areas that perform moderately are likely to form part of the setting and/or contribute to the special character of a historic town but include one or more features that weaken their contribution to this purpose, such as (but not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being separated to some extent from historic aspects of the town by existing development or topography • Containing existing development • Not having an important visual, physical, or experiential relationship to historic aspects of the town 	<p>The Heritage Assessment states that the Christleton Conservation Area “centres on the north-south and east-west routes through the village, with the core identified as the village green area, at the heart of the village”.</p> <p>The Site lies c.620m to the south of the village green area, and c.520m from the nearest of the 24 listed buildings which are located in the setting of the green.</p>
	<p>Weak or None – Assessment areas that make no or only a weak contribution are likely to include those that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not form part of the setting of a historic town; • Have no visual, physical, or experiential connection to the historic aspects of the town. 	<p>As a result, whilst this area holds historic value resulting from its proximity to the Canal Bridge, it is urbanised in character (for the reasons set out in Paragraph 2.2 above) and does not have any visual, physical, or experiential connection to the historic aspects of the village as described in the Heritage Assessment provided by the Christleton and Littleton Parish Council through the Parish Priority Statement.</p> <p>If a scheme can be developed that is sympathetic to the surrounding heritage then we consider a case could be made (subject to more detailed specialist heritage advice) that the site makes a weak or no contribution to this purpose.</p>

5.0 The Case for Allocation

5.10 In summary, there is clear case for considering the Site as Grey Belt, based on its limited contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt.

Addressing the Additional Criteria

5.11 In addition to the clear Grey Belt case, the following consider whether as a proposed development, the Site could also address criteria (b), (c) and (d) of Paragraph 155:

(b) Demonstrable Need – as set out earlier, there is both an immediate demonstrable need in Cheshire West and Chester (a lack of five year housing land supply) and the exceptional circumstances present for Green Belt review when considering need across the Plan Period. Additionally, there is a locally-identified need for affordable housing (shortfall of 75 dwellings) across Christleton and Littleton which this development would help to meet.

(c) Sustainable Location – in considering the sustainability of the site location, in the context of Paragraphs 110 and 115 of the NPPF, the accessibility of the Site and its proximity to services are important considerations. In addition, Hilbre Overlea Ltd are open to providing sustainable travel measures to substantially enhance the accessibility and sustainability of the site, which could include:

- **Improved Public Transport Connectivity** – including improved access to the bus stops on Whitchurch Road and a review of existing services, including a review of the frequency and integration of existing services.
- **Improved Active Travel Initiatives** – including improvements to Rowton Bridge Road to ensure priority access for pedestrians and cyclists, resurfacing of the Canal footpaths, and implementation of traffic calming measures in Christleton.

Golden Rules – the Site will provide necessary improvements to local infrastructure and will provide enhanced accessibility to the Green Belt and public green spaces that will be accessible to the wider community. In addition, Hilbre Overlea Ltd is committed to providing 45% affordable housing on the Site to meet the wider affordable housing needs of the Borough.

- Contribution to Openness and the Wider Green Belt**
- 5.12 National Planning Policy Guidance (para 64-001-20190722) states that the ‘openness’ of the Green Belt is associated with both spatial and visual aspects, so consideration of both the visual effects and the volume of built form therein, is usually undertaken when analysing the effects of a development upon the openness of the Green Belt.
- The Visual Aspect of the Openness of the Green Belt**
- 5.13 Initial desktop studies and site-based survey work has indicated that the Site is very well contained and discrete and that consequently, there are a limited number of visual receptors. The visual receptors experiencing a publicly accessible view of the Site is limited to people using the canal corridor, road users on the A41 and Rowton Bridge Road and the staff and patrons of Cheshire Cat PH.
- 5.14 Residential development forms a key component of the overriding character of the surrounding townscape and combined with the discrete nature of the Site, it is anticipated that the visual effects that may be generated by its proposed development upon publicly accessible views, will be somewhat limited.

5.0 The Case for Allocation

- 5.15 These anticipated low levels of visual effect are in turn, expected to generate a low level of effect upon the perceived openness of the Green Belt. These limited effects will be very much localised, as they will only be experienced by people using the canal corridor, the road users of two adjacent roads, staff and patrons of the neighbouring pub and a small number of residents located in proximity to the Site.

The Spatial Aspect of Openness of the Green Belt

- 5.16 The proposals to introduce residential development onto the Site will affect the spatial aspect of the openness of the Green Belt in this location.
- 5.17 The Site is currently open with no built form therein, so it is somewhat inevitable that the spatial aspect of the openness of the Green Belt in this location, will be materially affected.

The Openness of the Green Belt - Summary

- 5.18 The proposals to introduce residential development onto the Site is unlikely to affect the visual aspect of the openness of the Green Belt, but will inevitably affect the spatial aspect due to the increased presence of built form.
- 5.19 The Site and the proposed development therein will be visually discrete so any effects upon the

openness of the Green Belt that are generated by the changes to the spatial aspect, will be very much localised, therefore any effects upon the openness of the wider Green Belt are expected to be limited.

Summary

This section demonstrates **a clear and compelling case for amending the boundary at the land to the west of Rowton Bridge Road, Christleton based on existing and future housing needs. The Site should not be regarded as “inappropriate” development in the Green Belt and should be considered as “Grey Belt” in the context of new Government policy and guidance.** There is therefore a strong case for allocating the site in the emerging Local Plan – which is supported by its deliverability and compelling public benefits, which are set out throughout this Development Framework.

The redevelopment of the Site provides an opportunity to redevelop a grey belt site in a way that leaves a lasting and meaningful legacy for the Site and for Christleton.

The vision for the Site is to deliver a development that provides an exceptional quality of place, underpinned by the highest standards of design and sensitive placemaking. The development will improve the accessibility of the Site by enhancing opportunities for walking and cycling to, through, and from the Site.

The development will deliver the homes that people need, responding to the acute housing and affordability crisis by delivering the type, tenure and quality of market and affordable housing for current and future residents of Christleton. As well as creating habitats that support a significant uplift in biodiversity when compared to the Site as it exists today.

The land to the west of Rowton Bridge Road, Christleton offers a unique opportunity to develop an inaccessible parcel of Grey Belt land and deliver an integrated residential-led development that will support the sustainable growth of Christleton. The development will deliver a range of economic, social and environmental benefits that will contribute to meeting the needs of Cheshire West and Chester.

A Deliverable Site

- 7.1 The NPPF seeks to ensure that deliverable sites are provided in appropriate locations to meet housing needs and support economic growth. To be considered deliverable, sites should be available, suitable and achievable and should be available to be brought forward within a realistic timeframe once the Local Plan is adopted. In this context, the Site is:

Available – Hilbre Overlea Ltd has control over the entire site and has a strong track record in delivering a diverse range of high-quality new housing developments across Cheshire.

Suitable – the Site is entirely suitable for a residential development for the following reasons:

- It offers an accessible and sustainable location for development, with direct access via private and public transport to the Borough’s major population centre of Chester; and offers the opportunity to support an existing community with travel and accessibility improvements.
- It would bring an underutilised Grey Belt site into beneficial use, with a highly permeable, landscape-led residential development.
- It would meet the increased local housing needs of Cheshire West and Chester, and Christleton, and contribute to alleviating the affordability crisis on a Grey Belt Site.
- There are no initial environmental or technical constraints which would be an impediment the development of the site, subject to suitable mitigation and a sensitive approach to design.
- It can deliver satisfactory vehicular access and has excellent access to the strategic highway network via the A41.

Achievable – the illustrative masterplan demonstrates how the Site responds to its physical characteristics, technical considerations and surrounding context by providing a sensitive landscape-led, deliverable masterplan. An assessment of the Site constraints illustrates that delivery of the entire Site is achievable, and a professional team of technical experts has been retained to support the detailed design of the Site moving forward.

Public Benefits

7.2 The delivery of the Site will provide significant benefits to the Borough and its residents. These include:

Economic Benefits

7.3 The development of the Site would have economic benefits, both from its construction and occupation. Key economic benefits include:

- Generating investment during the construction phase of development through construction cost, Full Time Equivalent (“FTE”) construction jobs and an increase in GVA.
- Providing long term occupation / operational benefits including new resident expenditure, attracting new and high earning residents to Christleton, generating flow on and supported jobs and, overall, generating increased economic output in the Village.
- Generating revenue for the Local Authority, with a development of new homes generating revenue in Council Tax revenue, New Homes Bonus and through Section 106 Contributions.
- Providing the quality of housing and community infrastructure that will underpin the retention of skilled workers and support high value jobs in knowledge-led industries.

Social Benefits

7.4 The delivery of the Site will have clear social benefits for existing and future residents, in terms of providing choice and supporting identified housing needs. The key social benefits include:

- Delivering high quality market homes to meet the needs of the Borough’s existing and future employees.
- Providing viable and deliverable affordable homes to address Christleton and Littleton’s affordability crisis and support the housing of key workers and first time buyers. The Site will provide 45% affordable housing.
- Providing a highly permeable settlement layout with improved pedestrian and cycling routes throughout and adjacent to the Site to improve the connectivity to the historic core of the settlement for residents. This includes: the proposed improvements to the Canal footpath; the provision of a continuous footpath along Rowton Bridge Road; and, traffic calming measures proximate to the Site.

Environmental Benefits

7.5 The site is currently agricultural greenfield land that has limited biodiversity or recreational value. The development of the Site has the potential to significantly uplift the biodiversity, accessibility and overall enjoyment and environmental value of the Site. Key environmental benefits include:

- The site has limited ecology value at present, which provides an opportunity to create new habitats for a range of species and deliver a significant uplift in biodiversity which would, as a minimum, meet the 10% net gain requirement with the potential to exceed this.
- The provision of open space that will benefit existing residents and create new green corridors through the site.
- The protection and enhancement of existing features of the Site that add value, including boundary trees and hedgerows.

