

**Representations to Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan Issue and Options (Regulation 18) Consultation**

Land to East of Hough Lane and West of Cow Lane, Norley

**August 2025**

Woodford Land and Planning Limited

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 These representations have been prepared by Woodford Land and Planning Limited (“WLPL”) on behalf of several parties who are working together (“hereafter referred to as the landowners”) in response to the Cheshire West and Chester (“CWaC”) Local Plan Issues and Options (Regulation 18) Consultation (“Issues and Options Consultation”), running from 4th July 2025 until 29th August 2025. These representations provide a response to the Issues and Options Consultation specifically in relation to land situated between Hough lane and Cow Lane, Norley (“the site”).
- 1.2 A Site Location Plan is enclosed at Appendix 1. The area edged red extends to 4.27 ha (9.4 acres) and the blue 3.68 ha (8.1 acres). Both are put forward at this stage with the area edged red as the first phase.
- 1.3 The landowners support the Council’s decision to progress with a new Local Plan to create a single Local Plan document, which will update and replace all policies in the current Local Plan (Part One) (“LPP1”) and Local Plan (Part Two) (“LPP2”). The new Local Plan will provide an opportunity for Cheshire West and Chester to plan for its strategic growth, ensuring that its development needs are met over the next Plan period and beyond. This is particularly important in light of the Government’s revised National Planning Policy Framework (“NPPF”) and the updated method for estimating housing need, which has resulted in CWaC’s Local Housing Need (“LHN”) figure increasing substantially from 532 dwellings per annum (“dpa”) to 1,914dpa (259.77% increase).
- 1.4 The Council has also recently published its latest Housing Land Monitor Summary Report (2025), which states that the Council has a five-year housing land supply position of 1.89 years. Therefore, it is clear that there is an acute and serious level of housing need in Cheshire West and Chester.
- 1.5 The purpose of these representations is to help to inform the emerging Local Plan’s spatial strategy, strategic policies and land allocations, and to demonstrate the deliverability of the site for residential development.
- 1.6 The landowners are committed to demonstrating the site’s deliverability and suitability as a residential allocation as the emerging Local Plan is progressed and would welcome continued engagement with the Council as the consultation responses are considered. WLPL would be happy to discuss any feedback regarding these representations or in relation to the site specifically.

### **Structure of Submission**

- 1.7 The remainder of this submission is set out as follows:
- **Planning Policy** Context: provides an overview of key national and local policy;

- **Comments on the Issues and Options Document:** comments on the potential growth strategy options and suggested policy approaches detailed in the Issues and Options Document, specifically in relation to the site;
- **A Deliverable Site:** assesses the site's context and its surroundings and accessibility/sustainability, and provides a summary of the deliverability of the site and its key benefits; and,
- **Conclusions and Recommendations:** provides conclusions and recommendations on the Issues and Options Document, which it is respectfully requested are taken forward in the next stage of the new Local Plan.

## 2.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 This section provides an overview of the national planning context and presents the case for the allocation of the site for residential development.

### National Policy Context

2.2 Housebuilding is at the forefront of the Government’s economic agenda, with the stated intention being to deliver 1.5 million homes over its Parliament<sup>1</sup>. To achieve this, the Government has already published a “*new growth focused [National Planning Policy Framework]*”<sup>2</sup> and is pushing ahead with a Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which the Government sees as central to its plan to deliver economic growth.

2.3 The aim of the updated NPPF, which was published in December 2024, was to “*radically reform the planning system*” and included various changes to speed up and streamline the planning process.

### Local Housing Need

2.4 Following the publication of the latest iteration of the NPPF, the Government updated the method for estimating housing need by introducing a new standard method. As set out in paragraph 78 of the NPPF, the new Local Housing Need (“LHN”) is applied with immediate effect to CWaC’s five year housing land supply (as the adopted Local Plan is more than five years old). The new standard method has resulted in a substantial increase in Cheshire West and Chester’s LHN figure from 532 dwellings per annum (“dpa”) to 1,914 dpa (**259.77%** increase).

2.5 In the Local Plan Part One (Strategic Policies) Review (January 2025), the Council acknowledged the considerable impact that the revised LHN has had on its housing numbers and has re-emphasised the need for an updated Local Plan, stating that (Author’s emphasis in **bold**),

2.6 “*The **dramatic increase** for Cheshire West and Chester from a Local Housing Need (LHN) of **around 530 dwellings to over 1,900 dwellings per annum represents a significant change**. The **Local Plan housing requirement of 1,100 dwellings is now considerably lower than LHN**. As set out in the Cabinet report in January 2025 it is acknowledged that **changes to LHN are significant and that if the Council had not already decided to update the Local Plan would have prompted an update.**”*

<sup>1</sup> Gov.uk., 2024, *Press release: Planning overhaul to reach 1.5 million new homes*, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/planning-overhaul-to-reach-15-million-new-homes#:~:text=Our%20Plan%20for%20Change%20means.blockers%20and%20obstructs%20the%20builders>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

- 2.7 Consequently, and as recognised by the Council, the changes to the LHN “*significant*” and there is a clear need for housing to be delivered in Cheshire West and Chester.
- 2.8 Further to the above, the Council’s Cabinet recently decided to adopt the Housing Strategy 2025-2035, within which it is acknowledged that “...*there are challenging times ahead, there is a national housing crisis, housing is less affordable, and many people have support needs making it even more difficult to access and sustain accommodation.*”<sup>3</sup> Coupled with these challenges, the Housing Strategy acknowledges that the population of Cheshire West and Chester is forecast to increase by more than 10% by 2038. Therefore, there is a clear need for housing within the borough.

### **Five-Year Housing Land Supply**

- 2.9 As set out above, the five-year housing land supply is calculated based on the new standard method requirement (1,914 dpa). As a result, according to CWaC’s Housing Land Monitor Summary Report (2025), the Council has a five-year housing land supply position of **1.89 years**.

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<sup>3</sup> CWaC, 2025, *Housing Strategy 2025-2035*,  
<https://cmttpublic.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/ielistdocuments.aspx?CId=983&MId=7225>

### 3.0 COMMENTS ON ISSUES AND OPTIONS LOCAL PLAN

3.1 This section provides comments on the emerging spatial strategy, strategic policies and land allocations in the Issues and Options plan, as they relate to the national policy context.

#### Comments on Key Topic Questions

#### Suggested Policy Approach SS 1 – Housing Needs

**Question SS 1:** *Is there any reason for the Council not to plan for delivering a minimum of 1,914 new homes each year?*

3.2 The landowners fully support suggested Policy Approach SS 1, which seeks to meet the housing needs of the Borough as mandated by the Government’s Standard Method. In accordance with Government policy, Council’s must seek to, as a minimum, meet their local housing needs, informed using the Standard Method (including meeting the needs of neighbouring Authorities if appropriate); unless there are strong reasons why an Authority cannot do this. Paragraph 11 in the NPPF states that

3.3 *“For plan-making, this means that:*

***b) strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas, unless:***

*i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area; or*

*ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.*

3.4 The landowners do not consider that there is any strong reason for restricting development in CWaC, nor would doing so outweigh the benefits of meeting the Borough’s identified housing needs. As such, CWaC should plan for 1,914 new homes per annum, as an absolute minimum (and subject to considering neighbouring Authorities needs as part of its Duty to Co-operate).

**Question SS 2:** *Do you think the Council should consider a stepped housing requirement that plans for a lower level of housing delivery earlier in the plan period?*

3.5 The Landowners do not consider that a stepped housing requirement that plans for a lower level of housing delivery earlier in the Plan Period, is necessary. CWaC will already be significantly underdelivering on the Standard Method housing requirement in the interim period before the Local Plan is adopted and

therefore should be proactive early in the Plan Period to rectify this and ensure that homes are delivered within the Borough to address existing housing needs and meet mandatory targets.

- 3.6 Moreover, a ‘backloading’ of housing delivery presents a serious risk of the Local Plan not delivering its housing requirement throughout the Plan Period, where significant pressure will be placed on the later years of the period with no guarantee of delivery. The Council should identify clearly deliverable sites that will support the required delivery of housing early in the Plan Period – on deliverable infill sites such as Norley - ensuring that CWaC boosts delivery in the early part of the Plan Period.

### **Suggested Policy Approach SS 3 – Spatial Strategy Principles**

***Question SS 4:** Do you agree with the suggested policy approach towards the spatial strategy principles, as set out in SS 3 ‘Spatial Strategy Principles’? If not please suggest how it could be amended?*

- 3.7 The suggested Policy Approach SS 3 outlines that the spatial strategy will follow the principle of directing new development towards previously developed sites within settlements first, and then consider urban extensions on the edge of existing settlements, in locations with the best access to public transport and existing services and infrastructure, as the next best sustainable option.
- 3.8 The landowners support the suggested Policy Approach to SS 3 and emphasises that this policy approach should also give preference and priority to delivering a substantial level of the required growth in CWaC’s top tier settlements, including its Main Towns such as Northwich, which have the capacity, sites and existing infrastructure to deliver the level and type of sustainable growth required.
- 3.9 However, this strategy principle must be accompanied by rural sites making a contribution towards the overall housing target through appropriate extensions to local service centres such as Norley.

### **Suggested Policy Approach SS 4 – Settlement Hierarchy**

***Question SS 5:** Do you agree with the suggested policy approach towards the settlement hierarchy, as set out in SS 4 ‘Settlement Hierarchy’? If not please suggest how it could be amended.*

- 3.10 Whilst it is recognised that larger settlements will accommodate most of the growth, smaller settlements must make a contribution given the critical need for new homes. Spreading growth across all smaller settlements such as Norley is a sustainable option to protect and enhance local services.
- 3.11 The landowners do not support the wording in this approach particularly where it seeks to restrict smaller settlements to accommodate “infill development and small previously developed sites”. It is clear that in the case of Norley that very few previously developed sites exist even since the 2016 Neighbourhood Plan prioritised such sites. Whilst part of this site is previously developed land, there

is a need for further proportionate growth in Norley as long as existing services and infrastructure can cope.

- 3.12 Critical to this is reviewing settlement boundaries and allocating sites such as this rather than shrink wrapping a settlement boundary and constraining growth. The settlement boundary to Norley must be reviewed and relaxed as it has not been reviewed for some time. If the significant and critical housing need for CWaC is to be delivered, smaller settlements such as Norley must be capable of making a proportionate contribution towards the overall target.

### **Policy Approach SS 5: Spatial Strategy Options**

**Question SS 11:** *Please select the option which is the most appropriate spatial strategy for CWaC:*

*Option A – Retain the Green Belt*

*Option B – Follow the current Local Plan level and distribution of development*

*Option C – Sustainable transport corridors*

*None of these*

- 3.13 The Policy Approach to SS 5 sets out the potential growth options that have been identified by CWaC, which are categorised into the three spatial strategies as set out in Question SS 11 (above). The potential growth locations for each settlement are set out to indicate the possible pattern of development where growth might take place. The site at Norley is not identified as part of any of the potential growth locations.
- 3.14 Within the growth options it is recognised that, *“a key difference between the Local Plan (Part One) and the new Local Plan is that there is a much more limited supply of previously developed land to accommodate new development, and unlike the last plan, larger areas of Green Belt and/or countryside are likely to be needed”*. The landowner welcomes this recognition and considers that as a first priority, CWaC should prioritise making the most effective use of land by allocating infill sites and allowing rural settlements such as Norley to accommodate some of the housing need. Part of the land is currently underutilised and forms a natural extension to the existing settlement boundary so it is a logical area for growth.
- 3.15 The preferred option therefore is none of the above and is a combination of Option B with distribution of housing growth across local service centres and settlements such as Norley. This will require not only a relaxation of rural settlement boundaries but a positive approach to allocating sites such as this in Norley. Given the sheer amount of growth required, all areas need to make a contribution not just large urban areas and urban extensions.

### **Suggested Policy Approach GB 1: Green Belt and Countryside**

**Question GB 1:** *Do you agree with the suggested policy approach towards Green Belt and countryside, as set out in GB 1 'Green Belt and countryside' above? If not please suggest how it could be amended.*

- 3.16 The suggested Policy Approach to Green Belt and the countryside identifies the potential to add in other uses appropriate to the countryside. The explanatory text also identifies that there is an option to split the policy into separate policies regarding the countryside and Green Belt.
- 3.17 The landowners are supportive of the approach to Green Belt and Countryside, or a separation of the policy, if it provides clarity on the policy differences between Green Belt and open countryside policy. It is recognised however that Green Belt sites will be required to meet the future housing needs and certain Green Belt sites which meet grey belt criteria, such as part of this land at Norley, may be a more sustainable option.

### **Suggested Policy Approach HO 3: Affordable Housing**

**Question HO 4:** *Do you agree with the suggested policy approach towards delivering affordable housing, as set out in HO 2 'Delivering affordable housing' above? If not please suggest how it could be amended?*

- 3.18 The landowners support the suggested Policy Approach towards delivering affordable housing, as set out in 'HO 2', which sets out the requirement to provide affordable housing on all new developments that include the provision of new homes, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- 3.19 The delivery of available and achievable housing developments, such as this site in Norley, provide the most effective way to deliver affordable housing along with the delivery of a mix of housing types to meet local needs. The provision of greater quantities of market housing will also help to alleviate the constraints on supply, and in turn help to reduce the upward pressure on house prices.

### **Suggested Policy Approach HO 1 – Mix and Type of Housing in New Developments and Specialist Housing**

**Question HO 1:** *Do you agree with the suggested policy approach towards mix and type and specialist housing in new developments, as set out in HO 1 'Mix and type of housing in new developments and specialist housing' above? If not please suggest how it could be amended?*

**Question HO 2:** *Should the housing mix and type and specialist housing be delivered through a percentage policy approach that sets requirements for each category of housing?*

- 3.20 The supporting text to HO 1 states that a Housing Need Assessment is being prepared, which it is stated “*will provide the basis for delivering the mix of homes required and requirement for affordable housing.*” The landowner reserves the

right to comment on the Housing Need Assessment at the appropriate time, particularly as it is noted that the Council intends for this assessment to provide the basis for new Local Plan policies relating to the mix of housing. Nevertheless, it is important that any prospective planning policy relating to housing mix allows for flexibility owing to this being dependent on site and market factors.

- 3.21 Therefore, if the Council is intending to “*provide detailed policy requirements e.g. % of 1-2 bed dwellings including by tenures; % of plots for self-build and custom housebuilding...*” (as detailed in HO 1), these percentages should be labelled as ‘indicative’. Furthermore, the future planning policy should acknowledge that the mix should be proportionate to the scale of the development proposed.

**Question HO 5:** *Do you have any views on thresholds for affordable housing in relation to applying a lower threshold for designated rural areas and what approach could be taken to parts of the borough not subject to the designation?*

- 3.22 The thresholds for affordable housing should be consistent with national planning policy. Therefore, in accordance with paragraph 65 of the NPPF (2024), the provision of affordable housing should not be sought for residential developments that are not major developments, other than in designated rural areas (where policies may set out a lower threshold of 5 units or fewer).

### **Suggested Policy Approach DS 1 – High Quality Design**

**Question DS 1:** *Do you agree with the suggested policy approach towards high quality design, as set out in DS 1 'High quality design' above? If not please suggest how it could be amended?*

- 3.23 The landowners note that the Council is currently preparing a borough-wide Design Code, setting out the design requirements for developments in Cheshire West, which it is intended will form part of the evidence base for the relevant policies relating to design and sustainable construction. The landowner reserves the right to comment on this document at the appropriate time. Care needs to be taken with the introduction of a Design Code as it can stifle creativity and viability if applied too rigorously.

**Question DS 2:** *If the Council produces a borough-wide Design Code, should this form part of the new Local Plan?*

- 3.24 The Council’s Design Code should be treated as a Supplementary Planning Document, which should be produced in accordance with Regulations 11 to 16 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. As explained in the Planning Practice Guidance,

- 3.25 *“Supplementary planning documents (SPDs) should build upon and provide more detailed advice or guidance on policies in an adopted local plan. As they do not form part of the development plan, they cannot introduce new planning policies into the development plan. They are however a material consideration in*

*decision-making. They should not add unnecessarily to the financial burdens on development.”<sup>4</sup>*

- 3.26 As stated above, the landowners reserve the right to comment on the Council’s Design Code at the appropriate time. However, there is no reason to depart from the Planning Practice Guidance. Therefore, it should be made clear that the Design Code is a material consideration in decision-making, but that it does not form part of the Development Plan.

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<sup>4</sup> Planning Practice Guidance, Paragraph: 008 Reference ID: 61-008-20190315  
Revision date: 15 03 2019

## **4.0 A DELIVERABLE SITE**

### **4.1 The Site and Its Surroundings**

4.2 The site comprises an area of previously developed land with a larger area of undeveloped land, forming a natural and logical extension to Norley. Part of the site is previously developed land being occupied by an existing riding arena. The site offers the opportunity to not only deliver new homes but to also contribute towards providing new facilities for the benefit of the local community.

#### **Technical and Environmental Considerations**

##### ***Accessibility and Highways***

4.3 Access to the site is available via either Hough Lane or Cow Lane. The site is in a sustainable location with the opportunity to provide strong links into the centre of the settlement. There are also a range of services and facilities in close proximity, including school, post office, convenience store and pub.

##### ***Ecology and Trees***

4.4 There are no statutory ecological designations on the site and given the agricultural use of the site, the majority of habitats are likely to be common and only of local value. Opportunities for ecological enhancement will be taken as part of any future development to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain of at least 10%.

##### ***Heritage***

4.5 There are no statutory heritage designations within the site or in close proximity to the site boundary. It is not considered that there are any heritage constraints that would preclude the development of the site.

##### ***Flood Risk and Drainage***

4.6 The site is located within Flood Zone 1, which has the lowest risk of flooding.

##### ***Landscape and Visual***

4.7 The site does not lie within or adjacent to any national or local landscape designations and is not within the setting of any landscape designations.

##### ***Public Rights of Way***

4.8 There are no Public Rights of Way ("PRoW") within the site.

### **Deliverability**

- 4.9 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 a Local Plan is adopted.
- 4.10 The landowners are fully committed to the whole site and consider that it could be brought forward immediately to meet the housing needs of the Borough.

### **Available**

- 4.11 The landowners have control over the entire site.

### **Suitable**

- 4.12 The site is entirely suitable for a residential development for the following reasons:
- It offers a natural and logical extension to Norley which is both physically and visually disconnected from the wider open countryside.
  - It immediately is close to Cuddington and Delamere which has a range of local services and facilities, including a station (1.71 miles) within close proximity to the site.
  - It offers an accessible and sustainable location for development that would support a balanced spatial strategy and which could be brought forward early in the plan period.
  - The site performs no function as part of the open countryside and has durable and defensible boundaries.
  - There are no environmental or technical constraints that would prevent the development of the site, subject to suitable mitigation and a sensitive approach to design.

### **Achievable**

- 4.13 An assessment of the site constraints illustrates that delivery of the entire site is achievable. Based on knowledge of the local area it is clear that a scheme would be economically viable in terms of the land value, attractiveness of the locality, level of potential market demand as well as the cost factors associated with the site including site preparation costs and site constraints. The development of the site is economically viable, deliverable and achievable in accordance with the NPPF.

### **Key Benefits**

4.14 The key benefits of the site are summarised as follows:

#### ***Economic Benefits***

4.15 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 Gross Value Added (“GVA”).
- Providing long term occupation benefits including new resident expenditure, attracting new and high earning residents to Norley, generating flow on and supported jobs and, overall, generating increased economic output in the Borough.
- Generating significant revenue for the Local Authority, with a development generating annual Council Tax revenue, and a New Homes Bonus.

#### ***Social Benefits***

4.16 The delivery of the site will have social benefits for existing and future residents, by providing greater choice for housing in Norley in a sustainable location. The key social benefits include:

- Delivering high quality market homes to meet the needs of the Borough’s existing and future employees.
- Delivering viable and deliverable affordable homes to address the Borough’s acute affordability crisis and support the housing of key workers and first time buyers.
- Providing new residents to sustain demand for good quality public services and local social infrastructure in Norley. This increase in housing and inflow of investment will further encourage the retention of a working-age population in the wider area which will encourage the realignment of the demographic disparity, providing long-term security for the settlement.

#### ***Environmental Benefits***

4.17 The majority of the site is currently agricultural land with an area of previously developed land. Key environmental benefits include:

- The site provides an opportunity to create new habitats for a range of species and deliver an uplift in biodiversity to meet Government targets.
- The protection and enhancement of existing features on the site that add value, including mature trees, hedgerows on the site boundary.
- Making effective use of an underutilised site which is currently private land.

- 4.18 In short, the site will enable a mix of affordable and market homes to be provided which will help support local services and contribute towards the creation of a sustainable balanced community through the attraction of family homes.

## **5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1 In summary, the landowners consider that the Norley settlement boundary should be extended to include the site at Hough Lane and Cow Lane, to make effective use of an underutilised infill site adjacent to the existing settlement boundary, and to provide much-needed housing in a sustainable location.

5.2 In summary, the landowners consider that the site:

- Should be considered as a key infill site for residential development in Norley, regardless of which spatial strategy is pursued.
- Forms a natural and modest extension to the existing residential area of Norley, which is defined by defensible boundaries.
- Performs no functional purposes for the open countryside and is private land representing an underutilised site and wholly enclosed site which immediately adjoins the settlement boundary.
- Will contribute to enhancing the sustainability of Norley by providing much-needed market and affordable homes, supporting the vitality of local services and facilities.
- Is available, achievable and suitable, and therefore, wholly deliverable in the context of the NPPF.

5.3 The landowners would welcome further engagement with the Council on the site, and are committed to robustly demonstrating the merits of the site as the Local Plan is progressed. We would be happy to provide further information or a meeting on the site, which can be facilitated via WLPL.

## **APPENDIX 1**

