

# **Report to Greater Manchester Combined Authority**

on behalf of **Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan Councils**

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Inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State

Date: 14 February 2024

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Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended)

Section 20

## **Report on the Examination of Places for Everyone**

**Joint Development Plan Document for Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan**

The Plan was submitted for examination on 14 February 2022

The examination hearings were held between 1 November 2022 and 5 July 2023

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## Abbreviations used in this report

2004 Act	Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended)
2012 Regulations	Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended)
AQMA	Air Quality Management Area
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
GMCA	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
HENOA	Heat and Energy Network Opportunity Areas
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
MSA	Minerals Safeguarding Area
NIA	Great Manchester Wetlands Nature Improvement Area
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
PPG	Planning Practice Guidance
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SBI	Site of Biological Importance
SCI	Statement of Community Involvement
SPA	Special Protection Area
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
The Plan	Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document for Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan (Publication Stage August 2021)
WMS	Written Ministerial Statement

## Evidence and Examination Documents

All of the supporting evidence submitted with the Plan, representations made under regulation 20, and documents that we issued, requested or accepted during the examination were published on the examination website<sup>1</sup>. Each document has its own individual reference number such as SD1, 06.01.03, IN4, GMCA2.5, OD4, etc. Where appropriate, we refer to documents by their reference numbers in this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The examination website [GMCA – Places For Everyone Joint DPD | Helen Wilson Consultancy Limited \(hwa.uk.com\)](https://www.gmca.gov.uk/places-for-everyone-joint-development-plan-document) includes separate sections for submission documents, supporting documents and examination documents.

## Non-Technical Summary

This report concludes that the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document (the Plan) (alongside relevant local plans) provides an appropriate basis for the planning of the districts of Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan, provided that a number of main modifications are made to it. The local planning authorities for those nine districts have specifically requested that we recommend any main modifications necessary to enable the Plan to be adopted.

Following the examination hearings, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, on behalf of the nine local planning authorities, prepared schedules of proposed modifications and carried out sustainability appraisal and habitats regulations assessment of them. The main modifications and updated sustainability appraisal and habitats regulations assessment reports were subject to public consultation over an eight-week period between 11 October and 6 December 2023. In some cases, we have amended the detailed wording of the modifications and/or added further main modifications where necessary. We have recommended the main modifications to the Plan after considering the sustainability appraisal and habitats regulations assessment and all of the representations made in response to consultation on them.

The main modifications can be summarised as follows:

- Various changes to clarify the relationship between, and relative roles of, the Plan and individual local plans, and to clarify that the Plan does not apply to the parts of Oldham that are within the Peak District National Park.
- Extension of the plan period to look ahead to 2039 (rather than 2037), and updates to the housing and employment land supply information to 2022 (rather than 2021).
- Clarifications to spatial strategy policies JP-Strat1 to JP-Strat11 and associated diagrammatic maps, and deletion of High Crompton Broad Location from policy JP-Strat7.
- Extensive changes to the detailed wording of site allocation policies JPA1 to JPA37 to ensure they are consistent with national policy, justified, internally consistent and effective in achieving sustainable development having regard to relevant site-specific issues.
- Deletion of allocation JPA10 Global Logistics and retention of parts of the site in the Green Belt.
- Deletion of allocation JPA28 North of Irlam Station and retention of the site in the Green Belt.
- Amendments to the site boundaries of allocations JPA1.2 Simister and Bowlee; JPA3.2 Timperley Wedge; JPA14 Broadbent Moss; JPA18 South of Rosary Road; JPA26 Hazelhurst Farm; and JPA32 South of Hyde.
- Modifications to policies JP-S1 to JP-S7 to ensure consistency with national policy and effectiveness, including deletion of policy JP-S4 Resilience as it serves no decision-making purpose.

- Modifications to policies JP-J1 to JP-J4 to reflect changes to the plan period, and to remove unnecessary or inconsistent requirements.
- Clarifications to policies JP-H1 to JP-H4 relating to housing development, and changes to the approaches to phasing and five-year supply to ensure consistency with national policy and that housing needs are met as soon as possible.
- Modifications to policies JP-G1 to JP-G7 to ensure consistency with national policy and effectiveness.
- Changes to JP-G5, JP-G9, JP-C7 and relevant site allocation policies relating to the South Pennine Moors, Rochdale Canal and Manchester Mosses protected habitats having regard to the habitat regulations assessment.
- Changes to policies JP-G9 and site allocation policies relating to biodiversity including any irreplaceable habitats on sites containing peat.
- Changes to JP-G2 and site allocation policies to secure compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt.
- Deletion of policy JP-G8 relating to green space standards.
- Deletion of policy JP-G11 relating to safeguarded land.
- Modifications to policies JP-Strat12, JP-P1 to JP-P7 to ensure consistency with national policy and effectiveness.
- Inclusion of an additional policy in chapter 10 relating to the strategic road network.
- Various changes to the transport improvements referred to in the Plan, and addition of Appendix D setting out indicative transport mitigations for each allocation.
- Deletion of 30 of the 49 Green Belt additions proposed in the Plan.
- A number of other modifications to ensure that the plan is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

## Introduction

1. This report contains our assessment of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document for Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan (the Plan) in terms of section 20(5) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) (the 2004 Act). It considers first whether the Plan's preparation has complied with relevant legal requirements, and then whether the Plan is sound. The National Planning Policy Framework (2021) (NPPF) makes it clear that, in order to be sound, a local plan should be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.
2. The Government published revised versions of the NPPF on 5 September 2023 and 19 December 2023. Transitional arrangements set out in Annex 1 of those documents mean that our examination of the Plan is under the 2021 version of the NPPF.
3. The starting point for the examination is the assumption that the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) submitted, on behalf of the nine local planning authorities, what they consider to be a sound plan<sup>2</sup>. The Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document for Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan submitted on 14 February 2022 is the basis for our examination. It is the same document as that published for consultation in August 2021 under regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) (the 2012 Regulations).

## Main Modifications

4. In accordance with section 20(7C) of the 2004 Act, the nine local planning authorities requested that we should recommend any main modifications necessary to rectify matters that mean that the submitted Plan is not sound and or not legally compliant and thus incapable of being adopted<sup>3</sup>. Our report explains why the recommended main modifications are necessary. The main modifications are referenced in bold in the report in the form **MM1.1**, **MM1.2**, **MM2.1**, **MMR1** etc<sup>4</sup>, and are set out in full in the Appendix.
5. Following the examination hearings, the GMCA prepared a schedule of proposed main modifications<sup>5</sup> and carried out sustainability appraisal<sup>6</sup> and

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<sup>2</sup> All references to "the GMCA" in this report should be taken to refer to the nine local planning authorities where relevant in accordance with the provisions of section 28(1) and other parts of the 2004 Act.

<sup>3</sup> GMCA97 10 August 2023.

<sup>4</sup> The first part of the MM reference number refers to the relevant chapter of the Plan (by number) or, in the case of the allocation policies in chapter 11, to the relevant district (by letter).

<sup>5</sup> MDC1 Schedule and MDC5 Composite Plan (and accessible versions MDC1.1 and MDC5.1).

<sup>6</sup> MDC6 to MDC12.

habitats regulations assessment<sup>7</sup> of them. The main modifications and updated sustainability appraisal and habitats regulations assessment reports were subject to public consultation for eight weeks between 11 October and 6 December 2023. We have taken account of the consultation responses in coming to our conclusions in this report and, as a result, have made some amendments to the modifications and added further modifications where these are necessary for consistency or clarity. None of the amendments significantly alters the modified policies as published for consultation or undermines the participatory processes and sustainability appraisal or habitats regulations assessment that has been undertaken. Where necessary we have highlighted these amendments in the report.

## Policies Map

6. The nine local planning authorities must each maintain an adopted policies map which illustrates geographically the application of the policies in the adopted development plan for their district. When submitting a local plan for examination, local planning authorities are required to provide a submission policies map showing the changes to the adopted policies map that would result from the proposals in the submitted local plan. In this case, the submission policies map is that published in August 2021 and submitted for examination in February 2022<sup>8</sup>.
7. The policies map is not defined in statute as a development plan document and so we do not have the power to recommend main modifications to it. However, a number of the published main modifications to the Plan's policies require further corresponding changes to be made to the policies map. In addition, there are some instances where the geographic illustration of policies on the submission policies map is not justified and changes to the policies map are needed to ensure that the relevant policies are effective. These further changes to the policies map were published for consultation alongside the main modifications<sup>9</sup>. In this report we identify any amendments that are needed to those further changes in the light of the consultation responses.
8. When the Plan is adopted, in order to comply with the legislation and give effect to the Plan's policies, the local planning authorities will each need to update the adopted policies map for their district. They will need to include all the changes proposed in the submission policies map and the further changes published alongside the main modifications incorporating any necessary amendments identified in this report, in so far as they relate to their district.

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<sup>7</sup> MDC13.

<sup>8</sup> SD2

<sup>9</sup> MDC2, MDC3 and MDC4.

## **Context of the Plan**

### **Geography**

9. Greater Manchester is a large city-region made up of the ten individual local authority districts of Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan. It is bordered by the Pennine hills and Peak District National Park to the east; Cheshire to the south; Merseyside to the west; and Lancashire to the north.
10. Greater Manchester is largely urban in character, with many historically separate cities, towns and villages having merged over the last century or so. Most of the undeveloped land is designated as Green Belt which covers over 45% of the area. It is served by national and local rail services, a tram network (Metrolink), and east-west, north-south and orbital motorways. Manchester Airport is located immediately to the south of the main urban area with access from the M56 motorway.
11. The Plan covers the whole of Greater Manchester with the exception of the borough of Stockport (see below). The population of around 2.5 million people is projected to increase by nearly 200,000 by 2039. There are around 1.4 million jobs, with a baseline forecast for an increase of around 100,000 by 2039. In recent years, growth has been concentrated in Manchester, Salford and Trafford in the southern parts of the city region. There are high levels of deprivation across much of the Plan area, particularly in the central and northern parts.

### **The role of the Plan and relationship with local plans**

12. Work started in 2014 to produce a joint plan for the ten Greater Manchester local authorities, and four consultations about the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework took place between 2014 and 2019 under regulation 18. However, in December 2020, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council decided to withdraw from the joint plan. The nine remaining local planning authorities resolved in early 2021 to establish a joint committee to continue to prepare a joint plan for their districts. The Plan was subsequently published in August 2021 for consultation under regulation 19.
13. The key roles that the Plan performs include identifying the amount of housing, office, and industrial and warehousing development needed; setting out a spatial strategy and thematic policies to accommodate and inform that development; and allocating a number of sites outside the urban area to help meet development needs in accordance with the spatial strategy, including through removing land from the Green Belt.
14. Each of the nine local planning authorities covered by the Plan has an existing local plan; those were adopted at various times between 1997 and 2023. Each authority is committed to preparing a new local plan within the context of the strategic policies for the city region set out in the Plan. Those local plans will,

amongst other things, identify a supply of housing sites (in addition to the allocations in the Plan) to ensure that the minimum housing requirement for each district set out in the Plan can be met, looking ahead a minimum period from their adoption date as required by national policy. Similarly, local plans will, where necessary, allocate sites for industrial, warehouse and office developments in addition to the employment allocations in the Plan.

15. In other words, it is not the role of the Plan alone to identify sufficient land to ensure that all objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses can be met, as much of the supply will be brought forward through local plans. Nor is it the role of the Plan to address all strategic and other priorities in all districts, as local plans will be able to contain strategic and non-strategic policies, provided that they are consistent with the Plan and with national policy.
16. In the context of the above, each of the nine authority's local plan will be essential to ensure that sufficient land is identified to allow development needs, including those set out in the Plan, to be met in a timely and plan-led manner. However, our role is to determine if the Plan before us is legally compliant and sound, and it is not necessary to recommend a modification to specify when each local plan should be prepared. This is because national policy requires local plans to be reviewed and kept up to date<sup>10</sup>, and the scope and timing of each local plan must be set out in each authority's local development scheme<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, we are not convinced that setting a timetable for the preparation of local plans would be effective as each authority would still be individually responsible for carrying out the necessary work to prepare its local plan.
17. Some representors consider that the Plan should have addressed matters that it does not. However, we have examined the Plan as submitted in the context of relevant legislation and national policy which give considerable discretion to the relevant local planning authorities in choosing what to address in a joint plan and what can be left to individual local plans. Subject to the main modifications that we recommend, the Plan has a clear role in addressing certain, but not all, strategic matters including those referred to in paragraph 13 above.
18. The Plan's policies are intended to provide a strategic framework for local plans and/or provide a clear approach to inform the preparation and determination of planning applications. We consider whether each policy is effective in those respects throughout this report and recommend main modifications where necessary. However, in order to ensure that the purpose of the Plan and its relationship with individual local plans (as described above) is clear, main modifications are required to paragraphs 1.26, 1.57 and 1.58 in the Introduction chapter [**MM1.2**, **MM1.10** and **MM1.11**].

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<sup>10</sup> NPPF 15 and 33.

<sup>11</sup> Section 15 of the 2004 Act.

## Assessment of Legal Compliance

19. In the above context, we now consider whether the Plan has been prepared in compliance with relevant legislation including the 2004 Act, 2012 Regulations, Equalities Act 2010, Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, and Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

## Withdrawal of Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

20. As referred to above, the preparation of the Plan (then known as the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework) up until December 2020 included Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council. The Plan published for consultation under regulation 19 in August 2021 (which was subsequently submitted for examination) was the first version that did not include Stockport.
21. Section 28 of the 2004 Act and regulation 32 of the 2012 Regulations apply where one authority withdraws from an agreement to prepare a joint development plan document. Together they enable a joint plan to continue to progress in the event of one of the authorities withdrawing, provided that the plan has substantially the same effect on the areas of the remaining authorities as the original joint plan.
22. The joint committee of the nine remaining local planning authorities considered, prior to publishing the Plan under regulation 19, whether it had substantially the same effect on their areas as the last version that had included Stockport<sup>12</sup> and concluded that it did.
23. The purpose of the examination defined in section 20(5) of the 2004 Act does not include consideration of compliance with section 28. Furthermore, we consider that, on balance, it is likely that regulation 32(2) of the 2012 Regulations was made under section 28(11) of the 2004 Act, rather than under section 36 relating to the preparation of development plan documents. On that basis, the question of compliance with regulation 32(2) also falls outside the scope of the examination as defined in section 20(5) of the 2004 Act.
24. We do not, therefore, consider it to be our role to come to a formal conclusion about whether the Plan complies with section 28 and regulation 32(2). However, we understand that this matter has not been considered by the court and it could be possible to conclude that regulation 32(2) is a regulation made under section 36 relating to the preparation of development plan documents. We have, therefore, considered both the meaning of the legislation and the effect that the Plan has, including through discussion at a hearing session. Nothing that we read or heard during the examination indicates to us that the judgement of the nine local planning authorities (that the Plan has substantially the same effect on their areas as the last version that included Stockport) was unreasonable.

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<sup>12</sup> Greater Manchester Spatial Framework 2020.

## Duty to Cooperate

25. Section 20(5)(c) of the 2004 Act requires that we consider whether the local planning authorities complied with any duty imposed on them by section 33A: the duty to cooperate during the preparation of the Plan in relation to strategic matters<sup>13</sup>.
26. The Duty to Cooperate Statement and Log of Cooperation and Statements of Common Ground<sup>14</sup> provide evidence on engagement with other local planning authorities and prescribed bodies on strategic matters during the preparation of the Plan. Since March 2013, the GMCA has proactively engaged with adjoining authorities, and other relevant organisations including statutory bodies such as Natural England, Historic England and National Highways. This includes involvement of these organisations in governance bodies for the Greater Manchester area. A wide range of strategic matters were identified and agreed upon with the relevant organisations.
27. Further discussions between the GMCA and organisations such as Natural England on the content of the Plan has continued after its submission but no local authority or prescribed body has objected on the basis of the duty to cooperate.
28. The strategic matters needing to be addressed with Stockport Council following their withdrawal from the joint plan in December 2020 were agreed and there is a Statement of Common Ground between Stockport Council and the GMCA. There are no objections from Stockport Council that the GMCA have not met the Duty to Cooperate.
29. We are, therefore, satisfied that where necessary the local planning authorities engaged constructively, actively and on an on-going basis in the preparation of the Plan and that the duty to co-operate has therefore been met.

## Public Sector Equality Duty

30. We have had due regard to the aims expressed in section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010. This has included our consideration of several matters during the examination including housing for different groups in the community, including travellers, older people, people with disabilities and those who require affordable housing (policies JP-H2 and JP-H3); sustainable transport and accessibility (JP-C4); socially inclusive and accessible development (JP-P1);

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<sup>13</sup> A "strategic matter" is defined in section 33A(4) of the 2004 Act as (a) sustainable development or use of land that has or would have a significant impact in at least two planning areas, including (in particular) sustainable development or use of land for or in connection with infrastructure that is strategic and has or would have a significant impact on at least two planning areas, and (b) sustainable development or use of land in a two-tier area if the development or use is a county matter or would have a significant impact on a county matter.

<sup>14</sup> SD4-SD7.

education provision (JP-P5); health (JP-P6); and how the Plan will be delivered to achieve the outcomes set out in these policies (JP-D1 and JP-D2).

31. These matters are discussed as appropriate under our assessment of soundness that follows.

## **Sustainability Appraisal**

32. The GMCA carried out an Integrated Assessment, which includes sustainability appraisal, during the preparation of the Plan and prepared a report of the findings. The report was published along with the Plan and other submission documents under regulation 19. The appraisal was updated to assess the main modifications<sup>15</sup>.
33. The Integrated Assessment<sup>16</sup> includes a Scoping Report which describes its scope. The Scoping Report was reviewed and updated in 2016, 2019 and 2020 and considered the declaration of a climate emergency in each of the nine districts and implications of the Covid pandemic.
34. There are differences in the opinions and planning judgements in relation to the accuracy, consistency, choice of data sources, the need for quantitative assessment and objectives of the Integrated Assessment and the one undertaken for the main modifications consultation. However, this does not to our minds undermine the appraisal process. Furthermore, decisions about the content of the Plan have not been made solely based on the appraisal. This is a high-level document focussing on the likely significant effects and impacts of the Plan. Taken as a whole, it allows a range of considerations to be assessed and for potential mitigations to be identified in a consistent and coherent way. The Integrated Assessment is part of the process, but it is not used in isolation to determine the strategy. Judgements about the content of the Plan have been appropriately made using the Integrated Assessment.
35. We conclude that the Integrated Assessment had been carried out satisfactorily, it is proportionate and is adequate.

## **Habitats Regulations Assessment**

36. The revised and updated Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) (November 2022)<sup>17</sup> sets out that a full assessment has been undertaken and that the Plan may have some likely significant effects which arise from the scale of housing and economic growth which will require mitigation. A Statement of Common Ground has been signed by Natural England confirming that the

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<sup>15</sup> MDC6-MDC12

<sup>16</sup> SD8-SD20

<sup>17</sup> OD 7.1

updated HRA complies with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. HRA of the main modifications was also undertaken.<sup>18</sup>

37. In relation to in-combination air quality effects arising from the Plan, the Warrington Local Plan and wider growth in the area, mitigation measures in the form of proportionate contributions from development towards restoration measures and the production of a Habitat Management Plan would ensure adverse effects on the Holcroft Moss Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) would be avoided.
38. In respect of the South Pennines Moor Special Area of Conservation (SAC) / South Pennines Moor Phase 2 Special Protection Area (SPA) / Peak District Moors SPA, impacts would be from an increase in recreation disturbance in relation to residential development. Effects can be avoided by the implementation of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces and a Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy.
39. To reflect the findings of the HRA, we recommend later in this report a modification to policy JP-G5 to ensure that it is effective in preventing development proposed in the Plan having adverse impacts on the protected habitats of the South Pennine Moors. This includes a requirement for all development within 7km of the SAC or SPAs to provide suitable alternative natural greenspace either on- or off-site, and to make a financial contribution to the implementation of a strategic access, monitoring and management strategy for the protected areas. To ensure effectiveness, the policies relating to the relevant allocations (ie those within 7km of the protected areas) need to be modified to refer to the requirement in JP-G5. In relation to the Rochdale Canal SAC, effects of boat movements, water pollution, light spillage and shading impacts would need to be mitigated and the policies relating to the relevant allocations need to be modified to reflect this.
40. Modifications to the Plan are necessary to reflect the conclusions of the HRA and to ensure effectiveness and consistency with national policy. These are detailed later in the report relating to thematic policies JP-G5, JP-G9 and JP-C7. Modifications to some of the allocation policies are also necessary to ensure that mitigation of the effects on designated sites can be secured. The modifications which set out the mitigation measures are covered elsewhere in our report and relate to allocation policies JPA2 Stakehill, JPA12 Beal Valley, JPA14 Broadbent Moss, JPA15 Chew Brook Vale, JPA16 Cowlshaw JPA20 Castleton Sidings, JPA22 Land North of Smithy Bridge, JPA23 Newhey Quarry, JPA24 Roch Valley, JPA31 Godley Green Garden Village and JPA33 New Carrington.

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<sup>18</sup> MDC13

41. Subject to main modifications to the policies and site allocations set out in this report, the required mitigation will be secured through the Plan.

## Climate Change

42. Action on climate change is embedded into the Plan's Vision and Strategic Objectives. The Plan contains ambitious targets and requirements in relation to carbon neutrality and net zero development. These objectives and policy are supported by a range of thematic policies which seek to make the most of previously developed land, avoid or mitigate flood risk, promote sustainable travel, protect and enhance green infrastructure and biodiversity and support energy efficiency and renewable energy production.
43. It is acknowledged that some allocations may affect deep peat in the area. It is also inevitable that meeting housing and employment needs will lead to increased resource use. We address the particulars of this later in the report. Nevertheless, the Plan contains thematic policies which seek to protect or enhance the significant areas of remaining lowland wetlands and mosslands and upland bogs, which can be important in terms of carbon storage.
44. We are satisfied that, when read as a whole, this Plan includes policies designed to secure that the development and use of land in the area contributes to the mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

## Consultation

45. Section 19(3) of the 2004 Act requires Councils to comply with their Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). This applies to all nine Councils equally, with each having to carry out engagement and consultation in accordance with their individual documents. The GMCA's Consultation Statements<sup>19</sup> set out the process of consultation as part of the Plan's preparation for each Council. They also include details of how representations were considered and how they shaped the strategy. At publication stage, all consultees, anyone who had made comments during the previous stages of consultation, as well as anyone who had requested to be kept informed were notified of the consultation.
46. There was some inconsistency in how residents in each of the districts were consulted. This includes examples where some districts directly contacted people living within a certain distance of an allocation and some did not, or where some districts sent out correspondence to all residents and others did not. However, while this might understandably be frustrating for some, it does not mean that any authority has failed to comply with their own SCIs.
47. The Regulation 19 consultation took place under the temporary regulations relating to the Covid pandemic, which removed the need for local authorities to

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<sup>19</sup> SD21-SD74

make hard copy documents available for public inspection<sup>20</sup>. Again, there may have been some inconsistency between Councils in terms of whether hard copies of some documents were made available, or the breadth of locations available to view them. As above, an inconsistent approach is not determinative. There was no legal requirement for a consistent approach and there is no clear evidence that any Council was in breach of the relevant regulations at the time.

48. It was put to us that the consultation prejudiced those without access to a computer or the internet, as a large amount of the evidence base was only available online. The SCIs do not commit to providing *all* evidence base documents in hard copy. Where SCIs refer to the provision of 'relevant' supporting documents in hard copy, it is a matter of judgement for the individual Council to determine what they consider most 'relevant' to the consultation. Given the number of supporting documents it is unlikely to have been a realistic or desirable prospect to have had hard copies of all documents associated with the Plan available at every location.
49. Nowhere has it been suggested that the Councils would not have provided hard copies of documents on request or that requests for such documents had been made. Access to online documents were available from libraries or Council offices for those without access to a computer. We are therefore satisfied that the regulations and SCIs were adhered to in this regard and that no interests were significantly prejudiced by the manner of the consultation carried out.
50. Other criticisms of individual Councils' consultation material or approaches also do not amount to a failure to meet the requirements of their own SCIs or that there was a fundamental failure to meaningfully engage with interested parties. It is clear from the scale of response that the Plan was well publicised. It is also clear from the Regulation 22 statements that consideration was given to matters raised. That the Councils did not see fit to alter the Plan to meet many of the concerns raised is not in itself an indication of a lack of engagement.
51. We are therefore content that consultation on the Plan was carried out in accordance with each authority's SCI and met the necessary statutory requirements.

## Peak District National Park

52. Main modifications are required to paragraph 1.57 and various maps and illustrations in the Plan (and changes to the Policies Map) to clarify that part of Oldham Borough is within the Peak District National Park meaning that area is not subject to policies in the Plan but rather to development plan documents prepared by the Peak District National Park Authority [**MM1.12** and **MM2.1**]. This will ensure that the geographic scope of the Plan is clear and consistent with the relevant legislation.

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<sup>20</sup> Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020

## Other Legal Requirements

53. The Plan has been prepared in accordance with each of the local planning authority's Local Development Schemes.
54. The Plan, taken as a whole, includes policies to address strategic priorities for the development and use of land in each local planning authority's respective areas. Local plans will also address strategic priorities in individual districts.
55. Regulation 8(5) of the 2012 Regulations states that where a local plan contains a policy that is intended to supersede another policy in the adopted development plan, it must state that fact and identify the superseded policy. Appendix A of the Plan broadly meets this requirement. However, main modifications are required to ensure full compliance in terms of ensuring the list of superseded policies is accurate, specifying the names of the relevant adopted plans and clarifying which parts of any partially superseded policies are being replaced [MMApxA.1].
56. The Plan complies with all other relevant legal requirements, including in the 2004 Act (as amended) and the 2012 Regulations.

## Assessment of Soundness

### Main Issues

57. Taking account of all the representations, the written evidence and the discussions that took place at the examination hearings, we have identified 53 main issues upon which the soundness of the Plan depends. This report deals with these main issues; it does not respond to every point or issue raised by representors.

### **Issue 1 – Does the Plan identify quantified needs for housing, industrial and warehouse, and office development that are positively prepared, justified and consistent with national policy?**

58. National policy advises that strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, other than in a number of defined circumstances<sup>21</sup>. Policies JP-H1, JP-J3 and JP-J4 set out the minimum amounts of development needed for housing, offices, and industrial and warehouse uses in the plan area over the period 2021 to 2037.

### Plan period

59. The submitted Plan looks ahead to 2037 from a base date of 2021 using land supply information relating to 2020 and estimated completions for 2020-2021.

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<sup>21</sup> NPPF 11(b).

However, to ensure consistency with national policy<sup>22</sup>, relevant policies in the Plan need to look ahead to 2039 (at least 15 years from adoption).

60. During the examination, updated land supply information (for housing, office, and industrial and warehouse development) relating to 2022 became available. Such information is collated and published annually by GMCA, based on data provided by each of the nine authorities gathered having regard to relevant national guidance relating to housing and economic land availability assessments<sup>23</sup>. We took account of this relevant and proportionate evidence in our assessment of soundness. To ensure that the Plan is effective and justified, the relevant policies and reasoned justification need to reflect the latest (2022) land supply data.
61. We therefore recommend that the plan period be modified to 2022 to 2039, and relevant parts of the Plan, including Tables 6.1, 6.2, 7.1 and 7.2, be modified accordingly [**MM1.2**, **MM1.3**, **MM1.6**, **MM1.7**, **MM6.6**, **MM6.8** to **MM6.13**, and **MM7.1** to **MM7.3**]. We deal with the implications for the policies relating to development needs and land supply in subsequent sections of this report.

## Housing development

62. Policy JP-H1 states that a minimum of 164,880 net additional dwellings will be delivered between 2021 and 2037, or an annual average of around 10,305 over that period. This figure is based on a local housing need assessment conducted using the standard methodology in accordance with national policy and guidance. Higher and lower levels of household growth were considered during the preparation of the Plan. These included restricting the amount of development to that which could be accommodated on non Green Belt land, and higher levels to reflect economic growth ambitions and other factors that could impact on demographic behaviour, or to deliver more affordable homes. The proposed minimum requirement of 10,305 net additional homes per year compares to an average completion rate of around 7,582 between 2001 and 2021<sup>24</sup>. It would therefore represent a substantial increase in delivery of over 35% compared to completions over the last 20 years or so.
63. Whilst meeting the identified need for homes in full necessitates releasing land from the Green Belt, for the reasons set out later in this report we are satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances to justify that. Furthermore, meeting needs in full is essential to deliver one of the Plan's strategic objectives. We are therefore satisfied in principle that the application of NPPF policy protecting Green Belt does not represent a strong reason to restrict the amount of housing development in this Plan.

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<sup>22</sup> NPPF 22.

<sup>23</sup> PPG ID:3.

<sup>24</sup> GMCA11 Table AP7.1

64. The minimum requirement for an average of 10,305 homes per year is therefore consistent with national policy, positively prepared and justified. However, to reflect our recommendation to amend the plan period, policy JP-H1 and other parts of the Plan need to be modified to refer to a minimum requirement for a total of 175,185 net additional homes between 2022 and 2039, based on the annual average of 10,305. The figures for individual local planning authorities in Table 7.2 need to be modified accordingly (as well as to take account of our findings later in this report in relation to the phasing of housing development) [MM7.3].

## Employment development

65. There is no prescribed methodology for identifying employment land requirements. The PPG<sup>25</sup> advises on how need can be assessed and the data to be considered. The GMCA broadly followed the approach set out including making use of sectoral economic forecasting and projections, assessments of population and labour supply and analysis of past take-up rates<sup>26</sup>. Although more could possibly have been done in terms of specific engagement with individual sectors outside the normal consultation process, including with the logistics industry, there have been ample opportunities for representatives to make their views known and for the GMCA to consider them. We do not consider this undermines the approach or resulting requirements.
66. Both take-up rates and employment forecasts resulted in similar outcomes. However, the original forecasting approach included Stockport whose role, according to the GMCA, could not easily be disaggregated. It was therefore determined that this data could not be relied on. Moreover, the GMCA considered it would adversely affect the preparation of the Plan were they to re-do the forecasting exercise. Given that the analysis of completions had garnered similar results, the GMCA deemed that the combination of trend data and use of an allowance or margin provided the most timely and robust basis on which to establish requirements.
67. As submitted, policies JP-J3 and JP-J4 set requirements of a minimum of 1,900,000 sqm of office floorspace and 3,330,000 sqm of industry and warehousing floorspace respectively across the plan area for the period 2021-2037. These are based on an assessment of development trends for the period between 2004 and 2020<sup>27</sup>. The figures also include an uplift of 2.2% for offices and 3.8% for industry and warehousing to take account of the recession, which served to suppress take-up of new floorspace during that period. A 31% margin was also added to the base take-up rate figure. This equates to around 5 years of overall supply and is intended to address matters of uncertainty and provide a degree of flexibility.

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<sup>25</sup> PPG ID: 2a-025 to 032

<sup>26</sup> Economic Forecasts for Greater Manchester – February 2020 [05.01.01]

<sup>27</sup> 05.01.02 – Updated Note on Employment Land Needs for Greater Manchester – Nicols Economics.

68. There is dispute and disagreement about the scale of margins used. It is at the higher end of the scale suggested in the assessment. However, it is still within the range of figures identified and thus there is no reason to conclude it is unacceptable or excessive. The effects of the Covid pandemic and Brexit were also considered<sup>28</sup>. It was concluded that there was no clear justification for reducing the employment land requirements on these bases. There is no persuasive evidence that this conclusion was wrong.
69. There are clearly different ways in which the employment land requirement could have been derived. However, we must consider whether the approach taken was adequate in the context of national guidance, rather than simply whether other options exist. The use of past take-up data is advocated by the PPG and is an approach that is often used. The use of margins and allowances to provide flexibility is also logical given the inherent uncertainties relating to the changing need for employment land over time. We are therefore satisfied that the overall employment land requirement figures are based on relevant, up-to-date, and proportionate evidence and that the methodology used is acceptable.
70. As discussed above, for the policies to be justified and effective, main modifications are necessary to reflect the amended plan period. Policy JP-J3 needs to be modified to refer to a minimum of 2,019,000 sqm of office floorspace. Policy JP-J4 needs to be modified to refer to a minimum of 3,538,000 sqm of industry and warehousing floorspace. These policies, and the associated Tables and Figures also need to be modified to reflect the updated employment land supply data. Subject to this, the minimum requirements set out in policies JP-J3 and JP-J4 are consistent with national policy, positively prepared and justified [MM6.6 to M6.13]. The updated land supply position also mean Figure 11.1 will need to be modified [MM11.2].
71. Unlike for housing, the Plan does not include employment floorspace requirements at a district level. The GMCA submitted proposed modifications to the Plan to address what they saw as an omission in this regard<sup>29</sup>. We have considered GMCA's suggested methodology and resulting district level requirements it produced. However, in the context of a joint plan, there is no specific requirement in national policy to establish district level requirement figures; it is acceptable to have an overall plan-wide figure. The Plan therefore does not need to be modified to ensure consistency with national policy.
72. In terms of effectiveness, the Plan identifies the anticipated supply of floorspace in each area. It also includes employment allocations and policies on what are considered appropriate locations for new employment floorspace. It is reasonable to assume that the potential floorspace identified in the existing supply is in locations which are consistent with relevant development plan policies. There is therefore no reason in principle why sites within the existing

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<sup>28</sup> 05.01.03 - Covid-19, EU-Exit and the Greater Manchester Economy - Implications for the Greater Manchester Places for Everyone Plan – Nicols Economics.

<sup>29</sup> GMCA15.

supply could not be allocated to meet needs or why this should be problematic in terms of the spatial strategy. Should any Council wish to allocate additional sites outside of this supply, including in the Green Belt, then this would need to be justified through the relevant local plan examination. The consistency of any allocation with the spatial strategy set out in this Plan, as well as any specific policies, would then be assessed.

73. The approach of the submitted Plan would allow each authority to take local circumstances into account when drafting their local plans. Clearly, there will be a role for monitoring at the plan-wide, district and spatial strategy level to ensure the existing supply, including allocations, is providing sufficient floorspace to ensure the overall strategy is being adhered to. Modifications to the monitoring framework, as described in Issue 51, are therefore necessary to ensure effectiveness in this regard [MM12.1].
74. To this end, we have also amended the modifications to the reasoned justification for policies JP-J3 and JP-J4. The additional text explains the intended approach and role of monitoring, as set out above. This will provide clarity, without altering the intent or implementation of the policies [MM6.7, MM6.13].
75. Subject to this, we are content that the Plan provides an effective basis on which each district can plan for employment land.

## **Conclusion**

76. Subject to the main modifications identified above, we are satisfied that the Plan identifies quantified needs for housing, office and industrial and warehouse development that are positively prepared, justified and consistent with national policy.

## **Issue 2 – Do policies JP-Strat1 to JP-Strat11 represent an appropriate spatial strategy, taking into account reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence?**

77. The Plan's spatial strategy seeks to take advantage of the opportunities for delivering high levels of economic growth, whilst addressing the challenges for securing genuinely inclusive growth. It aims to boost significantly the competitiveness of the northern areas whilst ensuring that the southern areas continue to make a considerable contribution to growth by making the most of key assets. Four elements to the spatial strategy are illustrated in Figure 4.1: core growth area; inner area regeneration; boost northern competitiveness; and sustain southern competitiveness.
78. Policies JP-Strat1 to JP-Strat11 set out objectives and proposals for those four areas, and we consider those individually below. The spatial strategy is also articulated in the locational aspects of various other policies in the Plan; through the proposed distribution of housing development between districts set out in

policy JP-H1 Table 7.2; and through the location of the allocations in chapter 11. We will consider those parts of the Plan throughout the remainder of the report. However, before doing so, we consider now whether the overall spatial strategy aimed at achieving core growth and inner area regeneration, boosting northern competitiveness, and sustaining southern competitiveness represents an appropriate strategy based on proportionate evidence taking into account reasonable alternatives.

79. The Plan is informed by a considerable amount of evidence, relating to social, economic and environmental issues in the city region, gathered and analysed over a number of years. That evidence was also used to inform the Greater Manchester Strategy and other initiatives in the city region. The key findings are summarised in section 2 of the Plan, which then identifies the key challenges that the Plan seeks to address. Based on this, section 3 sets out the Plan's 10 strategic objectives and section 4 explains how these informed the spatial strategy. We are, therefore, satisfied that the overall spatial strategy is based on proportionate evidence and reflects the strategic priorities for the city region. However, to ensure effectiveness, a new paragraph in the reasoned justification is needed to make it clear how policies JP-Strat1 to JP-Strat11 should be taken into account through district local plans **[MM4.4]**.
80. There are numerous references to the High Speed Two rail project ("HS2") throughout the Plan. On 4 October 2023, the Government published "Network North: Transforming British Transport" which outlines significant changes to the HS2 project including the cancellation of phases 2a and 2b Western Leg (West Midlands to Manchester). However, that document indicates the Government's intention to invest significantly in rail infrastructure in Greater Manchester and elsewhere in the north, including in relation to Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR), which is also referred to in the Plan. Neither the Plan's overall spatial strategy, nor its expression through housing and employment land requirements and distribution of allocations, is dependent on HS2. We deal with the implications of the October 2023 announcements about HS2 and NPR for a number of specific policies later in this report. However, modifications are required to the various references to HS2 throughout the Plan to ensure that the reasoned justification is factually accurate and up to date. In the main, we identify these in the relevant parts of this report. The following modifications sit outside any specific policies but are however necessary to explain what the cancellation of HS2 means for the Plan as a whole and bring the context up to date **[MM1.13, MM2.2, MM2.3, MM2.4 and MM2.5]**. None of the further or amended main modifications that we recommend relating to HS2 and NPR materially affect the Plan's strategy or policies and therefore we are satisfied that consultation about them is unnecessary.

### **Reasonable alternatives to the spatial strategy**

81. The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 require an assessment of reasonable alternatives, having regard to the objectives and geographical scope of a plan. The Integrated Assessment

considered and compared a number of reasonable alternatives as the Plan evolved from 2015 onwards. The evidence on this is also set out in the Growth and Spatial Options Paper, July 2021<sup>30</sup>.

82. The initial draft growth options considered three options for housing and employment floorspace requirements based on the capacity of the existing land supply (to avoid loss of Green Belt); objectively assessed need; and a higher accelerated growth scenario. Subsequent options included these but also considered meeting needs at the Greater Manchester and district levels. For the broad spatial distribution of housing, economic and other development a range of options including maximising densities, locating development close to public transport and re-distribution away from the City Centre were also considered in 2019 and 2020.
83. For the 2021 Plan, three options were considered including meeting objectively assessed need of the districts, limiting growth to existing land supply (again, to avoid loss of Green Belt), and an increased level of growth beyond objectively assessed need. We are therefore content that various reasonable alternative growth and spatial options were identified and considered, including through the Integrated Appraisal which itself used a wide range of data relating to current and future social, economic and environmental characteristics of Greater Manchester. As set out in Issue 5, the site allocations in the Plan were also assessed against reasonable alternatives.
84. In accordance with the regulations and national policy and guidance, we are satisfied that the assessment of reasonable alternatives was a proportionate approach and sufficient in scope and content. The reasons for rejecting options have been given and to our minds are clear. The options were sufficiently distinct to enable a meaningful comparison about the impact of them when considered against different sustainability objectives.

### **Land supply figures**

85. Policies JP-Strat1, JP-Strat2, JP-Strat3, JP-Strat5, JP-Strat7 and JP-Strat8 all include references to the scale of housing or employment land supply in the relevant part of the plan area for the plan period. These figures are not intended to be read as requirements to be carried forward through district local plans. Rather they are intended to be statements of fact about the scale of potential supply. On this basis, they have no role in either the future preparation of local plans or development management and are likely to cause confusion. Indeed, it is clear from the discussions at the hearings and responses to main modifications that the role of these figures as part of the policy has been largely misunderstood. For effectiveness, all references to supply figures in these policies should be deleted and inserted into reasoned justification. Here they will serve the purpose intended, which was to help set the context within which the strategy has been developed, particularly in terms of the ability to deliver the

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<sup>30</sup> 02.01.10

growth anticipated in accordance with the spatial strategy. To ensure consistency with other parts of the Plan they should also be updated to reflect the 2022 land supply information [MM4.6, MM4.7, MM4.8, MM4.9, MM4.11, MM4.12, MM4.15, MM4.16, MM4.19, MM4.20, MM4.22, and MM4.23].

86. There is no necessity in terms of national policy for the Plan to establish targets for housing or employment at these geographic levels. There is also no evidence before us which would justify specific requirements for each of the spatial strategy areas. Whether or not the policies are being adhered to will be able to be assessed through monitoring of the Plan as a whole. Nevertheless, the monitoring framework does need to be modified to ensure it will be effective. In particular, that relevant indicators, such as the amount of development carried out, are monitored and reported on for each of the areas identified [MM12.4, MM12.5].
87. The reasoned justification at paragraph 4.20 also needs to be modified to explain what the role of the individual figure or pictures are for each of the individual strategy policies. This is particularly important in terms of explaining the references to various transport schemes and how these relate to the new Appendix D [MM4.3]. This will ensure those elements of the Plan are justified and effective.

### **Key Diagram**

88. As required by NPPF 23, the Plan includes a key diagram which illustrates the broad spatial strategy and locations for growth. For effectiveness, main modifications are necessary to ensure the diagram is both clear and accurate. In particular, the arrows identifying the northern and southern areas need to be modified to properly illustrate the strategy, and the symbols used for allocations and strategic locations need to be modified for clarity and to ensure consistency with policies JP-Strat1 to JP-Strat14 and any associated pictures or figures. In addition, consequential changes to reflect other main modifications are also necessary, such as the removal of the High Crompton Broad Location and the deletion of allocations JPA10 and JPA28. The diagram also needs to be modified to remove reference to HS2 [MM3.1].

### **Policies JP-Strat1 to JP-Strat4 - Core Growth Area**

#### **Policy JP-Strat1 Core Growth Area**

89. The Core Growth Area broadly takes in the area spanning Manchester City Centre, Salford Quays, Trafford Park and Port Salford. Policy JP-Strat1 establishes the Core Growth Area as a key focus for growth. It states that the economic role of the area will be protected and enhanced while also seeing a significant increase in the number and range of homes. This approach is wholly consistent with the overarching spatial strategy and the NPPF's objectives of promoting sustainable patterns of development. The strategy for the Core Growth Area is therefore justified and consistent with national policy.

90. As set out above, the policy needs to be modified to remove superfluous references to housing supply and move them to reasoned justification [**MM4.6, MM4.7**]
91. The policy also refers to homes being supported by necessary green spaces, social infrastructure and being of an appropriate design. These are however generic matters that are dealt with more comprehensively elsewhere in the Plan and are not specific to the Core Growth Area nor fundamental to the spatial strategy. The wording used is also inconsistent with other parts of the Plan and there is no clear justification why these specific issues have been highlighted when other similar factors have been excluded. To avoid the potential for confusion, and thus for the Plan to be effective, these references should be removed [**MM4.7**]. This would not weaken the Plan in this regard as the need for good design, providing green space and providing social infrastructure are thoroughly covered by other development plan policies. This also applies to similar modifications to other strategy policies.
92. Finally, Figure 4.2 should also be modified to accurately illustrate the extent of the Core Growth Area [**MM4.5**].

#### **Policy JP-Strat2 - City Centre**

93. The City Centre falls within the Core Growth Area. Policy JP-Strat2 states that it is the most significant economic location outside London and that this role will be strengthened considerably. The policy also states that the City Centre will continue to be the prime location for business, retail, leisure, culture and tourism activity, as well as an increasingly important residential role that will be expanded. Given the economic importance of the City Centre, and its highly sustainable and accessible location, this policy is clearly consistent with the spatial strategy and national policy.
94. Again, the policy sets out housing and employment supply figures which serve no purpose and should, for effectiveness, be moved to reasoned justification. It also contains generic references to 'necessary infrastructure' which provide no clarity for decision makers. Reference to high density dwellings is locationally distinct and thus should remain in the policy [**MM4.8, MM4.9**]. Figure 4.3 should be modified to remove The Quays. This does not form part of the City Centre and so its inclusion on the inset plan is misleading [**MM4.10**].

#### **Policy JP-Strat3 - The Quays**

95. The Quays also falls within the Core Growth Area. Policy JP-Strat3 seeks to build on the existing role of the Salford Quays as an economic location of national significance, characterised by a wide mix of uses built at a high density. This is a logical approach which is consistent with both the spatial strategy and national policy.
96. To be consistent with other strategy policies, and to ensure effectiveness, the land supply figures should be updated and moved to reasoned justification.

Generic references to jobs, education, infrastructure and amenity should be deleted to avoid inconsistency with thematic policies covering those issues. It is necessary, however, for the policy to make it clear that it expects development to be high density. This is specific to this area. This should be added to the policy to help guide district local plan preparation [MM4.11, MM4.12].

#### **Policy JP-Strat4 Port Salford**

97. Policy JP-Strat4 states that Port Salford will be developed as an integrated tri-modal facility with on-site canal berths, rail spur and container terminal as essential elements of the scheme. The policy seeks to recognise the existing committed development activity relating to Port Salford but also to set the strategic context for the Port Salford Extension allocation (JPA29).
98. The delivery of Port Salford could have significant economic benefits for the region. It could also facilitate a shift toward more sustainable ways of moving freight. As will be considered in more detail below, the delivery of JPA29 will also have substantial environmental and viability challenges and impacts that will need to be addressed. Nevertheless, this development forms a fundamental part of the economic strategy for the area and is important at both a regional and national level. Continuing policy support for Port Salford is therefore justified in principle.
99. To be effective, this policy needs to be modified to provide clarity about the need to ensure associated transport infrastructure is delivered alongside the delivery of Port Salford and the Port Salford extension. This should provide necessary comfort, alongside the requirements of JPA29 itself, that that development can only proceed when infrastructure capacity is sufficient to accommodate it [MM4.13]. Figure 4.5 needs to be modified in the interests of clarity and accuracy [MM4.14].

#### **Policy JP-Strat5 - Inner Area Regeneration**

100. Policy JP-Strat5 establishes the principle of promoting the continued regeneration of the inner areas and seeking to reduce levels of deprivation and poverty as a result. This is consistent with both the spatial strategy and national policy. In principle, this will help guide the relevant district local plans. Nevertheless, to be effective the policy should be modified to remove superfluous generic elements that are neither specific to the strategy for this area or necessarily consistent with relevant thematic policies. The housing and employment land supply figures should also be updated and moved to reasoned justification to avoid confusion [MM4.15, MM4.16].
101. However, the GMCA particularly wish to emphasise the importance of delivering infrastructure in this area, especially provision of open spaces and improved access to green infrastructure. This is necessary strategic guidance which specifically relates to the likely pressures on land within the inner areas and potential deficiencies which already exist. This differs to more generic

requirements on new development. On this basis, to be effective the policy should be modified to highlight this expectation [MM4.16].

### **Policies JP-Strat6 to JP-Strat8 – Boosting Northern Competitiveness**

102. Policy JP-Strat6 relates to the “northern areas of Greater Manchester” (collectively Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, Tameside, Wigan and west Salford), whereas policies JP-Strat7 and JP-Strat8 relate to two specific growth corridors within those northern areas.

#### **Policy JP-Strat6 Northern Areas**

103. Policy JP-Strat6 aims for a significant increase in the competitiveness of the northern areas through urban regeneration, enhancing town centres, diversifying the residential offer and improving transport connectivity. To help achieve this, a significant amount of land is allocated in the Plan for housing and employment development in the relevant districts.

104. In most respects policy JP-Strat6 is consistent with the Plan’s overall spatial strategy and national policy. However, the following detailed changes are required to ensure soundness [MM4.18]. The reference to “prioritising the re-use of brownfield land” needs to be replaced by “making as much use as possible of suitable previously developed land” so that it is unambiguous and consistent with national policy. An amendment is needed to clarify that the allocations referred to in the policy are all of the relevant sites included in Chapter 11 of the Plan and to avoid ambiguity about whether further changes to the Green Belt are being proposed. Clarification is also required that the residential offer is to be “diversified”. The references to development being of good quality design and protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment need to be deleted to avoid inconsistency with more detailed thematic policies.

105. Finally, to ensure effectiveness, paragraph 4.43 needs to clarify that policy JP-Strat6 applies to Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, Tameside, Wigan and west Salford [MM4.17].

#### **Policy JP-Strat7 North East Growth Corridor**

106. Policy JP-Strat7 aims to deliver a nationally significant area of economic activity, supported by a significant increase in the residential offer, along the M62 corridor from junction 18 (M60/M66) to junction 21 (Milnrow) through parts of Bury, Rochdale and Oldham (as illustrated on Picture 4.2). Three major development sites are proposed in the corridor, each of which is subject to a detailed policy set out in chapter 11 of the Plan: JPA1.1 Heywood / Pilsforth (Northern Gateway); JPA1.2 Simister and Bowlee (Northern Gateway); and JPA2 Stakehill.

107. Policy JP-Strat7 is broadly consistent with the overall spatial strategy, policy JP-Strat6 and policy JP-J1 which aims to maximise the potential of key growth

locations to deliver inclusive growth. However, a number of changes are required to the policy, reasoned justification and Picture 4.2 to ensure soundness [MM4.19, MM4.20 and MM4.21].

108. The first paragraph needs to clarify that the corridor, which includes the Atom Valley Mayoral Development Zone, will be a location for nationally significant economic activity supported by a significant increase in the residential offer. Clarification is required that the major sites referred to are the three relevant allocations included in chapter 11 of the Plan (JPA1.1, JPA1.2 and JPA2).
109. The paragraph referring to the “High Crompton Broad Location” having the potential for “further expansion of the economic and residential offer” should be deleted. This is because it is not clear why this particular location, which is in the Green Belt, is singled out as having this potential, or how it would relate to other reasonable alternative locations for housing and economic development to be considered through a future review of the Plan or through local plans for Oldham or, indeed, other parts of Greater Manchester. We are not therefore persuaded that this element of policy JP-Strat7 is justified or would provide an effective framework for local plans. A consequential modification is required to paragraph 1.34 [MM1.4].
110. Finally, for the reasons set out earlier, the references to the number of new homes and amount of employment floorspace in the corridor need to be updated and moved from the policy to the reasoned justification.

### **Policy JP-Strat8 Wigan Bolton Growth Corridor**

111. The Wigan-Bolton Growth Corridor is located in the north-west of Greater Manchester. Policy JP-Strat8 aims to deliver a regionally significant area of economic and residential development.
112. Five development sites are proposed. Although these are smaller in scale in general than the sites in the North East Growth Corridor they would all nevertheless support the long term economic prosperity of the area, consistent with the aims of policy JP-Strat6 and policy JP-J1: JPA4 Bewshill Farm; JPA5 Chequerbent North; JPA6 West of Wingates/M61 Junction 6; JPA34 M6 Junction 25; and JPA37 West of Gibfield.
113. This growth corridor is also focused on improving transport links, but the second paragraph needs to clarify that new highway infrastructure is intended to connect junction 26 of the M6 and junction 5 of the M61 as this is not yet in place. Measures also include public transport provision, although some of the rail improvements are also only at the planned stage, requiring a modification to this part of paragraph 2. The strategy and changes brought about by the main modifications have a consequential effect on Figure 4.6.
114. For the reasons set out earlier, the references to the number of new homes and amount of employment floorspace in the corridor need to be updated and

moved from the policy to the reasoned justification. As noted elsewhere, HS2 is no longer being delivered in this area and as drafted the reasoned justification makes a reference to the effect of HS2 on journey times. A modification will however be necessary to reflect the change in circumstances and delete the reference.

115. The final paragraph of policy JP-Strat8 refers to supporting the restoration of Hulton Park, and the provision of a Ryder Cup standard golf course and associated leisure and tourism facilities, and the development of land at Royal Bolton Hospital, including a health village. Given the nature and scale of these sites, these have a role to play in the wider conurbation, as well as in the economy of the area, and their inclusion in the policy is justified. However, the wording of the fifth paragraph relating to what development is intended for land at Royal Bolton Hospital is not in line with the emerging proposals for a health innovation cluster. Clarification is also needed in the reasoned justification that land for further development at this site would need to be brought forward through local plans and modifications to the policy and reasoned justification are needed to ensure the policy is effective [MM4.22, MM4.23 and MM4.24]. These modifications will ensure the policy is effective and justified.

### **Policies JP-Strat9 to JP-Strat11 - Sustaining Southern Competitiveness**

116. Policy JP-Strat9 refers to the southern areas, which is made up of Manchester and Trafford. Policies JP-Strat10 and JP-Strat11 refer to two specific areas of anticipated investment and growth.

#### **Policy JP-Strat9 Southern Areas**

117. Policy JP-Strat9 aims to protect and enhance the competitiveness of the southern areas. In this regard, it identifies Altrincham, Trafford's main town centre and Manchester Airport as being particularly important locations for investment. Notwithstanding the objective of prioritising the re-use of brownfield land, the policy also acknowledges the need to release land in the Green Belt.
118. The policy is broadly consistent with the spatial strategy. However, several modifications are needed. The reference to "prioritising the re-use of brownfield land" in both policy and reasoned justification needs to be replaced by "making as much use as possible of suitable previously developed land" so that it is unambiguous and consistent with NPPF 119. For effectiveness, an amendment is needed to clarify that the allocations referred to in the policy are all of the relevant sites included in chapter 11 of the Plan and to avoid ambiguity about whether further changes to the Green Belt are being proposed [MM4.25].
119. Generic references to design quality, infrastructure provision, protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment, the mix of housing types, transport infrastructure connectivity and local character need to be deleted to avoid inconsistency with more detailed thematic and allocation policies [MM4.25].

120. The reasoned justification for the policy refers to the opportunities that HS2 would have created. The cancellation of HS2 does not have any effect on the interpretation or implementation of the policy, which seeks to protect and enhance competitiveness. There is no reason why this objective would have changed because of the Government's cancellation of the project. As referred to elsewhere, it is also intended for further investment in rail to be made despite the recent announcement that should also bring associated social, economic and environmental benefits. Nevertheless, to be justified, modifications to reflect the factual change are necessary [MM4.33, MM4.34].

### **Policy JP-Strat10 Manchester Airport**

121. The intention of policy JP-Strat10 is to seek to maximise the benefits of the continued operation and sustainable growth of Manchester Airport and the surrounding locality. The economic importance of the airport to the region is acknowledged. In supporting this growth, the policy identifies a range of existing schemes and projects. Other than the allocations, the Plan does not identify any new specific proposals for growth at the airport or surrounding area, including any specific targets for passenger numbers.

122. There is nothing unsound in the Plan establishing the principle of growth in this location. Any specific environmental implications of individual proposals relating to this growth would still need to be assessed against specific policies in the development plan. The policy would not override such considerations. It should also be noted that there is capacity for passenger growth at the airport without any additional development and thus, in some respects, the policy is merely reflecting the reality that growth in passenger numbers is likely with or without the Plan in place.

123. The policy refers to Manchester Airport Group's Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy. As submitted, development that is "in line" with this policy would be supported. This effectively elevates the Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy to the status of development plan policy, which is not justified as this document has not been subject to formal examination and does not form part of the development plan. In any event, the requirements of the Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy are all properly addressed by other policies in the Plan. Reference to the Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy should therefore be deleted from the policy and reasoned justification [MM4.26, MM4.27].

124. We do not believe that the changes relating to the HS2 project have any material impact on the overall strategy or aims of this policy. The policy establishes no targets for growth, either in terms of passengers or development and thus the cancellation of HS2 has no effect in this regard. There is also still an expectation of growth at and around the airport and it remains highly likely that there will be public transport improvements in its vicinity. In this regard, it is noted that parts B and 5 of the policy already refer to Northern Powerhouse Rail and thus the strategy for this area was already predicated on its delivery. The

policy also refers to a range of other factors which are unrelated to HS2, further illustrating that the strategy is not dependent on this project.

125. There are references to HS2 within the policy which, in effect, are statements of fact or relate to allocations. The policy itself does not seek to propose any development associated with the project, rather it merely seeks to highlight the potential benefits that may have existed.
126. For effectiveness and to ensure clarity, the policy would also benefit from cross referencing the relevant allocation policies in criteria 1-4. These references should also be updated to reflect the change in the plan period. The policy and Figure 4.7 should also be updated to remove reference to JPA10 – Global Logistics, as this is to be deleted from the Plan, and changes relating to HS2 [MM4.26, MM4.27, MM4.28].

### **Policy JP-Strat11 New Carrington**

127. Policy JP-Strat11 seeks to establish the principle of development at New Carrington. This area represents the largest proposed development in the Plan, both in terms of area and number of new dwellings. The development will also deliver a substantial amount of new employment floorspace.
128. The New Carrington site is challenging. It contains a mix of greenfield and previously developed land, the latter of which also contains areas of likely contamination, and constraints associated with the existing and previous uses. A large proportion of the area is also currently Green Belt and within the 'Carrington Moss' area of deep peaty soils. We deal with these issues in more detail in relation to Policy JPA33.
129. The purpose of this policy is to set the New Carrington site within the wider spatial strategy of the Plan. As set out below, with suitable mitigation in place we consider the benefits associated with the delivery of New Carrington would outweigh any potential harm. On this basis, it will make a substantial contribution to meeting Trafford's housing and employment needs which, in turn, will contribute to the strategy of maintaining the competitiveness of the southern areas.
130. Nevertheless, to be effective the policy should be updated to be clear about the full scale of development expected on the site. It is misleading for this strategic policy to only identify what might be expected during the plan period. The figure of 4,300 dwellings is also not based on any particular justification and was not seen as a limit. Removing this figure would have no impact on delivery. Indeed, it would remove any suggested limit on what could be bought forward during the plan period, thus providing comfort to developers [MM4.29].
131. References to good quality design and green infrastructure should also be deleted as they do not reflect the full range of expectations as set out in Policy JPA33 or thematic policies. Removing these references will reduce scope for inconsistency and confusion and are necessary for effectiveness. Figure 4.8

also needs to be modified to reflect the changes to JPA33, particularly in relation to transport measures [MM4.30].

## Conclusion

132. Subject to the main modifications described above, we are satisfied that policies JP-Strat1 to JP-Strat11 represent an appropriate spatial strategy, taking into account reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence.

## Issue 3 – Is the distribution of housing development set out in Table 7.2 justified and will it be effective in helping to deliver the spatial strategy?

### Introduction

133. In accordance with national policy and guidance relating to local housing need and joint plans<sup>31</sup>, policy JP-H1 and Table 7.2 distribute the total minimum housing requirement of 164,881 net additional dwellings between 2021 and 2037 (average 10,305 per year) between the nine local planning authorities that make up the plan area.

### Determining the housing distribution proposed in the Plan

134. The reasoned justification<sup>32</sup> for the distribution of new homes proposed in Table 7.2 of the Plan refers to projected demographic changes; inequalities between northern and southern areas; regeneration; economic success; access to public transport, employment and leisure opportunities; and the availability of suitable sites. The proposed distribution was primarily influenced by the existing (non Green Belt) land supply and the Plan's vision, objectives and overall spatial strategy which seek to achieve inclusive growth, rather than allow past trends to continue unchecked<sup>33</sup>. Thus, whilst market signals were taken into account as required by national policy<sup>34</sup>, these were given less weight than the two primary influences referred to.

135. The proposed distribution of new homes is based on planning judgement. A number of principles were used to help guide that judgement, including that all districts aim to meet at least 70% of their local housing need; no single district should exceed its local housing need by more than 125%; the northern districts should collectively meet around 100% of their local housing need; and the southern districts should collectively meet a significant amount of their local housing need. Therefore, whilst the numbers in Table 7.2 were not determined by a mathematical formula, numerical parameters were used intended to ensure that the proposed distribution of new homes between the nine authorities reflect

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<sup>31</sup> PPG ID: 2a-013-20201216.

<sup>32</sup> Plan paragraphs 7.14 and 7.15.

<sup>33</sup> Plan paragraph 4.19.

<sup>34</sup> NPPF 31.

and deliver the Plan's vision, objectives and spatial strategy whilst minimising the loss of Green Belt.

136. We are, therefore, satisfied that the proposed distribution of new homes between the nine local planning authorities set out in Table 7.2 was determined on a rational basis having regard to relevant considerations.

137. We turn now to consider how the proposed distribution of new homes actually relates to the Plan's spatial strategy.

### **Housing distribution and spatial strategy**

138. As already discussed, the overall spatial strategy aims to achieve core growth and inner area regeneration in the parts of Manchester, Salford and Trafford in and around the city centre; sustain the competitiveness of the southern areas comprising south Manchester and most of Trafford; and boost the competitiveness of the northern areas comprising Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, west Salford, Tameside and Wigan. We now consider whether the minimum housing requirement figures for each district in Table 7.2 will help to achieve those objectives.

#### **Core, Inner and Southern Areas**

139. The minimum requirement figures for Manchester, Salford and Trafford collectively amount to 6,313 homes per year which is slightly above total local housing need for those three areas calculated using the standard method, and significantly greater than completions over the last 20 years (4,383 homes per year<sup>35</sup>). Whilst Trafford's figure (average 1,122 per year) is around 20% below local housing need, it is significantly above past completions in the district which averaged 501 per year between 2001 and 2021.

140. The minimum housing requirement figures for Manchester, Salford and Trafford should therefore, when applied in accordance with relevant policies in the Plan, help to facilitate core growth and inner area regeneration, and sustain southern competitiveness. Specifically, the figures are consistent with policies JP-Strat1, JP-Strat5 and JP-Strat9 which respectively, amongst other things, aim for a significant increase in the number and range of new homes in the core growth area; high levels of new development in the inner areas; and an increase in the mix, type, quality and range of residential offer of the southern areas.

#### **Northern Areas**

141. The sum total of the minimum requirement figures for Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, Tameside and Wigan (3,992 homes per year) is just under (therefore "around") 100% of those districts' collective local housing need. However, it is

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<sup>35</sup> GMCA11 Table AP7.1.

significantly greater (+25%) than past completions in those districts taken as a whole which averaged around 3,199 per year between 2001 and 2021<sup>36</sup>.

142. The requirement figure for Wigan (972 homes per year) is slightly lower than completions over the last 20 years (1,041 homes per year), and the figures for Bury and Tameside are both 25% below their local housing need figures. However, we are satisfied that collectively the minimum housing requirements for those six districts will help to boost northern competitiveness by facilitating the diversification of the residential offer and supporting inclusive growth in accordance with policy JP-Strat6, and by significantly increasing the number of new homes compared to provision over the last 20 years in this part of the city region. Furthermore, the two allocations in Salford that we consider to be sound have capacity for a total of 700 homes<sup>37</sup> in the western part of that district meaning that they will also contribute towards diversifying the housing offer in the northern areas.

## Conclusion

143. We are therefore satisfied that, subject to our recommended modifications relating to the plan period, the distribution of housing development set out in Table 7.2 is justified and will be effective in helping to deliver the spatial strategy.

## Issue 4 – Is there a strategic justification for removing land from the Green Belt to allocate sites for development?

### Introduction

144. The Greater Manchester Green Belt was originally designated in full in 1984 and was subsequently subject to a series of minor changes through individual districts' local plans. Almost half of the Plan area is currently designated Green Belt in adopted local plans.

145. The Plan proposes to remove a total of 2,430 hectares from the Green Belt to facilitate the allocation of the sites proposed in chapter 11<sup>38</sup>. All but 4 of the 38 allocations in the Plan are currently wholly or partially in the Green Belt.

146. National policy advises that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Therefore, once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified through the preparation or updating of plans.

147. This issue is concerned with the strategic reasons why the Plan removes land from the Green Belt. We will consider site specific issues related to each

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<sup>36</sup> GMCA11 Table AP7.1.

<sup>37</sup> JPA26 400 homes and JPA27 300 homes.

<sup>38</sup> GMCA response to PQ31 [GMCA3.1].

allocation, including the impacts on Green Belt purposes, the proposed Green Belt boundaries and proposals for compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt, later in this report. We will then reach conclusions on whether there are exceptional circumstances to justify removing each of the sites from the Green Belt following all of those considerations.

### **Accommodating development on non-Green Belt land**

148. The main strategic issue in the consideration of whether there are exceptional circumstances for removing land from the Green Belt is whether it can be demonstrated that all other reasonable options for meeting the identified need for development have been examined fully. We consider the potential capacity of the existing land supply that is not in the Green Belt for accommodating housing and employment development shortly. However, before that, there are a number of other matters that we need to address in accordance with national policy<sup>39</sup>.

### **Making use of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land**

149. The suitability of all brownfield and underutilised land that is not in the Green Belt was considered as part of the assessment of the existing urban land supply, safeguarded land and protected open land that we turn to below. The suitability of brownfield and underutilised land that is currently in the Green Belt was assessed through the site selection process that we consider under issue 5.

### **Optimising the density of development**

150. In considering the capacity of the existing urban land supply, higher densities were assumed in town centres and other accessible locations<sup>40</sup>. This is a matter that will need to be looked at further in detail by individual local planning authorities through future housing land availability assessments and during the preparation of local plans. We are satisfied that the approach taken was proportionate and adequate for the purposes of informing the preparation of this Plan.

### **Safeguarded land and protected open land**

151. There is a total of approximately 2,500 hectares on around 100 areas that are designated as safeguarded land or protected open land in adopted local plans<sup>41</sup>. If the relevant local plan policy relating to those designations allows development of the land within the current plan period, and it is considered appropriate in principle for development, it has been included within the existing land supply (around 900 hectares). However, where a site is considered

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<sup>39</sup> NPPF 141.

<sup>40</sup> Plan paragraph 1.41.

<sup>41</sup> GMCA3.1 response to PQ34.

suitable but development would be contrary to an adopted local plan policy, it is included as an allocation in the Plan (five allocations). All other safeguarded land or protected open land has either been developed or has been assessed and considered unsuitable for development at the current time. Some of that land has been added to the Green Belt in the Plan; that is considered later in this report (issue 52).

152. We are therefore satisfied that all reasonable opportunities for meeting the need for housing and industrial and warehousing development on existing safeguarded land and protected open land has been fully examined.

### **Neighbouring authorities**

153. During the preparation of the Plan neighbouring authorities outside Greater Manchester responsible for local plan preparation were asked if they could accommodate any of Greater Manchester's housing or employment development needs. The responses indicate that no neighbouring authority could accommodate such development, and that a number of neighbouring authorities have either released or are proposing Green Belt release to accommodate their own growth requirements<sup>42</sup>. There is no substantive evidence to indicate that any of the development proposed in the Plan could be accommodated outside Greater Manchester.

### **Meeting the need for additional industrial and warehouse floorspace**

154. The submitted Plan identifies an existing industrial and warehousing land supply, without allocations, of just over 1,900,000 sqm between 2021 and 2037. The updated supply figures suggest this would be around 2,074,000 sqm between 2022 and 2039. This is in comparison to the modified requirement in policy JP-J4 of 3,538,000 sqm. There is therefore a quantitative shortfall in supply which the Green Belt allocations will help to meet. With allocations, the overall quantitative supply in the Plan is around 4,075,000 sqm expected during the plan period. This provides a buffer of around 15%. The requirement for industrial and warehousing floorspace already includes a margin of around 31% to provide flexibility and mitigation for any uncertainties. Accordingly, the overall supply, including Green Belt allocations, is substantially higher than the base take-up rates. A number of the allocations are also expected to deliver additional employment land after the end of the plan period.

155. However, much of the demand for floorspace is in the logistics sector. While innovations may be happening in how warehouses are delivered, the reality is that such uses often require substantial amounts of land. It would therefore be unrealistic to consider that this demand could be met entirely within previously developed land or from the existing land supply. This is not only in quantitative terms but also qualitative, where sites in the existing supply may not meet the

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<sup>42</sup> SD7 paragraphs 10.14 and 11.14.

specific requirements of the operators either in terms of space, configuration, quality or accessibility.

156. Evidence<sup>43</sup> was put to us which suggested there were only 8 sites in the existing supply that were capable of delivering development of 50,000 sqm or over, that only 13 sites would be able to accommodate development of between 20,000 to 50,000 sqm, with the remaining 225 sites able to deliver schemes of less than 20,000 sqm, with around 91 of these being less than 1,000 sqm. We have no persuasive evidence which contradicts this assessment. While it is recognised that smaller sites will still be valuable in delivering economic growth, including those in the existing urban areas, there is a clear mismatch between the existing supply and the qualitative needs of some sectors of the economy. Much of this existing supply is also not in locations with good access to the strategic road network or other transport infrastructure, which would make it unsuitable for logistics use.
157. Meeting a significant proportion of the need for new floorspace in the northern areas, particularly the North East Growth and Wigan and Bolton corridors, which accounts for around 1,500,000 sqm of allocated floorspace, is also consistent with the strategy of boosting northern competitiveness. This could not be achieved without strategic allocations in the Green Belt.
158. There are Green Belt sites, such as JPA30 Ashton Moss West, where the policy does not include scope for logistics, or JPA33 New Carrington, where the scale of individual units might be constrained. These sites will still help to meet the quantitative and qualitative needs of those specific districts and provide some variety and flexibility into the supply, thus helping to meet the needs that still exist for smaller units and other forms of business activity.
159. The submitted Plan identifies an existing office floorspace supply of 3,275,000 sqm<sup>44</sup> between 2021 and 2037. The updated supply figure suggests this would be around 2,815,000 sqm for the 2022 to 2039 period. This compares to an updated requirement of 2,019,000 sqm. However, the only sites identified in the Plan with a specific significant office requirement are located at Medipark (JPA3.1) and Timperley Wedge (JPA3.2). While there is no clear quantitative need for additional office space in the Green Belt, these sites will also provide additional choice and are well related to existing growth hubs, including the airport. These provide specific locational advantages that cannot be provided elsewhere in the existing potential supply. This will bolster existing economic activity, thus helping to sustain southern competitiveness. Timperley Wedge also allows for the delivery of new homes. Delivering new housing in proximity to employment of all types provides significant sustainability advantages, consistent with NPPF 105, that add to the justification for Green Belt release.

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<sup>43</sup> Examination Document M4.27

<sup>44</sup> Plan Table 6.1

160. In this context, we conclude that for both quantitative and qualitative reasons the removal of allocated land from the Green Belt to meet future economic needs in the broad locations proposed is justified in strategic terms as all other reasonable options for meeting the identified need for development have been fully examined. We will consider the specific implications of individual sites later in the report.

### **Meeting the need for housing development**

161. The submitted Plan identifies an existing land supply (without allocations in the Plan) sufficient to accommodate just over 170,000 new homes between 2021 and 2037<sup>45</sup>. The supply is based on strategic housing land availability assessments carried out by each of the nine authorities<sup>46</sup> in accordance with national guidance<sup>47</sup>. It is not necessary for us to consider the detailed content of those assessments (or their subsequent updates) as that will be a matter for individual local plans. However, in principle, we consider such assessments to be relevant, adequate and proportionate evidence for the purpose of informing the Plan's spatial strategy and considering at a strategic level whether exceptional circumstances exist to justify altering Green Belt boundaries in the context of national policy. The assumed existing supply of just over 170,000 compares to the requirement in policy JP-H1 to deliver at least 164,880 net additional dwellings between 2021 and 2037.

162. Therefore, in purely quantitative terms, there is more than sufficient land within the existing urban areas to meet identified housing requirements based on the figures in the submitted Plan without releasing land from the Green Belt. However, the distribution of that existing supply would not allow local housing needs to be met in all districts, particularly in Bury, Tameside and Trafford<sup>48</sup>, or the spatial strategy as set out in the JP-Strat policies and Table 7.2 to be achieved. Furthermore, the location and nature of the existing supply (80% of which is brownfield, much within central urban areas) means that there are significant uncertainties about when some of it will be available and capable of being viably developed. Less than 70% of the existing supply may be viable, even on the basis of 100% market housing<sup>49</sup>. Finally, the total existing supply identified for 2021 to 2037 exceeds the minimum requirement by just over 5,500 dwellings. That represents less than 4%, providing limited flexibility.

163. Overall, therefore, the available evidence clearly indicates that the existing land supply assumed in the submitted Plan would fail to provide opportunities for local plans to identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites, taking account of

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<sup>45</sup> Plan Table 7.1 (190,752 – 20,367 = 170,385).

<sup>46</sup> Housing Topic Paper Appendix A [06.01.03].

<sup>47</sup> PPG ID:3 (2019).

<sup>48</sup> The existing housing land supply figures in Table 7.1 of the submitted Plan for Bury, Tameside and Trafford are 41%, 64% and 72% of local housing need respectively.

<sup>49</sup> Strategic Viability Assessment Stage 1 Report Addendum: Table 5.1 [03.01.02].

availability, suitability and viability, to ensure that the need for new market and affordable homes is met in accordance with the spatial strategy.

164. The updated figures for the existing housing land supply provided during the examination indicate capacity for nearly 179,000 homes for the modified plan period 2022 to 2039<sup>50</sup>. This compares to a minimum requirement of 175,185 additional homes for that period; in other words a surplus of fewer than 3,600 homes or around 2%. The modification to the plan period required to ensure consistency with national policy therefore reinforces the need to remove land from the Green Belt to ensure that housing needs can be met.
165. The allocations in the Plan would mean that there would be an overall total supply surplus of just under 26,000 dwellings compared to the minimum requirement for 2021 to 2037 in the submitted Plan<sup>51</sup>. This represents a flexibility allowance of around 16% for the Plan area as a whole. Based on the updated supply and requirement figures for the modified plan period of 2022 to 2039, the surplus would be around 23,700 (approximately 14%)<sup>52</sup>. There is no prescribed flexibility allowance set out in national policy, and we are satisfied that a figure in the region of 15% is reasonable given the nature, location and viability of the existing supply, and the need to provide additional opportunities to deliver new market and affordable housing in accordance with the spatial strategy whilst having regard to the implications for the Green Belt.
166. Furthermore, whilst the Plan removes land from the Green Belt in both Salford and Wigan, where the existing supply exceeds local housing needs, this is part of the overall spatial strategy for the northern areas<sup>53</sup>. We deal with whether each of the allocations made in the Plan is justified later in this report but, overall, we conclude that for both quantitative and qualitative reasons the removal of land from the Green Belt to allocate sites to accommodate a total of around 18,500 new homes in the broad locations proposed is justified in strategic terms as all other reasonable options for meeting the identified need for development have been fully examined.

## Conclusion

167. We are, therefore, satisfied that there is a strategic justification for removing around 2,400 hectares of land from the Green Belt to allocate for development.

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<sup>50</sup> GMCA11 Table 7.1 (198,888 – 20,122 = 178,766).

<sup>51</sup> 190,752 (Table 7.1 in submitted Plan) minus 164,881 (Table 7.2 in submitted Plan) = 25,871.

<sup>52</sup> 198,888 (Table 7.1 as modified) minus 175,185 (Table 7.2 as modified) = 23,703.

<sup>53</sup> The allocations removed from the Green Belt in Salford are in the western part of that district meaning that they are within the northern areas as defined in paragraph 4.21 of the Plan.

## **Issue 5 – Were the allocations in the Plan selected using an appropriate methodology based on adequate, relevant, up-to-date and proportionate evidence?**

### **Introduction**

168. Paragraph 11.5 in the Plan explains that having taken account of the existing supply of land for housing, offices, and industry and warehousing, some additional development sites outside the urban area are required. 38 sites are allocated in the Plan: 23 for housing, 9 for employment, and 6 for a mix of housing and employment development. Paragraph 11.6 advises that the allocations in the Plan reflect the spatial strategy set out in chapter 4 and aim to make the most of existing locations and assets whilst providing opportunities across the Plan area that help address current disparities.
169. The Site Selection Background Paper<sup>54</sup> summarises the four-stage process that was used to select the 38 allocations in the Plan. As described under issue 4 above, stage 1 assessed all safeguarded land and protected open land designated in adopted local plans. This resulted in some of the allocations in the Plan being identified.
170. Following stage 1, a call for sites was introduced before stage 2 to ensure sufficient land could be identified for both housing and employment needs. This was a pragmatic approach to undertake it at that point in time.
171. Seven criteria were used at stage 2 to help identify Areas of Search based on an assessment of all potential sites. These criteria related to previously developed land and public transport accessibility; key assets (Manchester Airport and Port Salford); areas with capacity for transformational change; proximity to town centres; proximity to areas of high deprivation; opportunities for significant transport improvements; and opportunities to deliver significant local benefits by addressing a major local issue. All of the criteria are, therefore, well related to the spatial strategy and consistent with national planning policy relating to the achievement of sustainable development.
172. Five of the criteria could be geographically defined, and Areas of Search were drawn around these where call for sites fitted most readily with the spatial strategy and the criteria. A total of 115 Areas of Search were identified containing around 400 sites in 2016, and approximately 30 more sites that fell within Areas of Search were assessed following the GMSF 2019 stage<sup>55</sup>. Digital mapping data assisted in this part of the process. Sites that fell outside the Areas of Search were not considered further as they were not deemed to be reasonable alternatives for meeting the overall vision, strategy and objectives.

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<sup>54</sup> [03.04.01]

<sup>55</sup> Topic Paper [03.04.01] paragraph 6.42.

173. There are some criticisms of the criteria including, amongst other things, that thresholds for some were ambiguous or incorrect; they were missing consideration of some other aspect, such as assessing capacity in urban areas; they did not extend sufficiently widely to include sites; they failed to incorporate local knowledge on sites and their surroundings; or that a site may be suitable for housing but not for employment use. Not all of the objectives of the Plan were linked to the criteria, nor do the criteria include every single aspect relating to that topic. The thresholds for some of the criteria could have been developed based on different considerations. However, to our minds, this does not point to serious flaws in the criteria but rather a matter of judgement on what was appropriate to use in the context of the production of a Plan for a large city region.
174. The methodology does not require sites or Areas of Search to meet more than one of the seven criteria. Whilst meeting several criteria may indicate that a development in that location has the potential to deliver a wider range of benefits, there is no logical reason why development in a location meeting a single criterion could not lead to substantial benefits consistent with the spatial strategy and national policy. Furthermore, stage 2 was not the end of the selection process; all potential sites were subsequently assessed in more detail against a wider range of considerations as we describe below. We are satisfied, therefore, that the criteria-based assessment at stage 2 was reasonable.
175. Stage 3 involved an assessment of planning constraints for housing and employment sites. Constraints covered a wide range of matters such as health and wellbeing, social infrastructure, carbon emissions, ecological designations, flood risk, landscape character, heritage, Green Belt and agricultural land. The methodology ensured that compatibility with the Integrated Appraisal framework was incorporated at this stage. A wide range of data sources and digital mapping information contributed towards the evidence for constraints.
176. This stage also included an element of separate considerations for the different uses. For housing and mixed-use sites this was an assessment of site suitability and addressing objectives of the spatial strategy, and for employment an assessment against the strategy and objectives. If a housing or mixed-use site progressed to Stage 3 (Assessment of Sites within Areas of Search), site suitability was considered separately from constraints although there is some overlap. We deal with the implications of site selection methodology for employment allocations in the following section.
177. If sites were not considered to be appropriate at stage 3, they did not progress any further. These are set out in Appendix 7 of the Background Paper<sup>56</sup>, with an explanation of why they did not progress. These were essentially reasonable alternatives to allocation boundaries but were considered less suitable for allocation. This explanation is sufficient to understand why sites were not

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<sup>56</sup> 03.04.09

progressed. The Integrated Appraisal framework was used to help score sites and the methodology is explained in Appendix 6<sup>57</sup> of the Site Selection background paper. It also included data from sources such as Transport for Greater Manchester, the Environment Agency or reasonable proxy measurements where necessary.

178. Stage 4 was a detailed analysis of the sites that remained having been through the preceding stages. Whilst there was criticism of this part of the process being where the Green Belt harm assessments were undertaken, we consider this was an appropriate time to do this once site boundaries were known. Constraints were also re-assessed, and master planning and policy requirements were considered. Finally, sites were considered against the spatial strategy and objectives. Some sites did not progress beyond this stage and are also included in Appendix 7 of the background paper, again with an explanation sufficient to understand why.
179. Some housing and mixed-use sites that were originally within allocations in earlier versions of the Plan were now excluded by this process. However, given that these changes were made as a result of a combination of factors such as responses to consultation, new evidence and consideration against the most up to date spatial strategy, this is justified.

### **Employment allocations**

180. The broad process for employment sites mirrors that for housing. The same seven selection criteria were used. However, at stages 3 and 4, the consideration of site suitability focussed on whether the locations would support the strategy of supporting growth in the core growth area, boosting the economic competitiveness of the northern areas and sustaining the competitiveness of the southern areas.
181. Inevitably, as well as the spatial strategy, the results of the call for sites, land availability and the prevailing demand for certain types of business activity and their specific locational requirements have also had a significant influence on the selection of sites and their distribution. This has resulted in allocations in the northern areas accounting for around 80% of new allocated floorspace. This compares to an existing supply of industrial and warehouse space of 60% of the existing supply. However, when this is compared to the overall supply of employment floorspace, which includes the very large amount of potential office floorspace in Manchester, this goes down to around 30%. When considering the spatial strategy's aim of boosting northern competitiveness, there is therefore a clear logic in the distribution of industrial and warehousing floorspace toward the northern regions of the Plan area.

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<sup>57</sup> 03.04.08

## Ecology

182. Matters relating to peat are covered under main issue 6 below. NPPF paragraph 31 sets out that plans should be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence. This should be adequate and proportionate, focused tightly on supporting and justifying the policies concerned.
183. The site selection methodology involved assessing planning constraints on sites which included ecology and biodiversity. This took place once the areas of search had been selected. Each site allocation topic paper provided as evidence includes information relating to ecology and biodiversity.
184. These highlight any relevant international and national designations and local sites, habitats and species likely to be affected including Local Wildlife Sites, Wetland Nature Improvement Areas, Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs) and also extensions to SBIs. References are also made to some individual key habitats and protected and notable species where relevant.
185. Paragraph 175 of the NPPF sets out amongst other things that plans should allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in the Framework. None of the allocated sites contain international or national designations for biodiversity. However, some sites do contain designations of local importance for biodiversity, and many include or support priority habitats and species. We consider the implications of this further in Issue 6.
186. Information has been provided to the GMCA by the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit and supplemented by that provided by developers/site promoters to inform whether a site would be suitable for allocation. Some sites have a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, produced by the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit. These can be produced to inform site allocations at the plan making stage as suggested by guidance produced by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management<sup>58</sup>. Evidence was submitted with the Plan for most of the sites with either a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal or other information, which is additional to the ecology sections in individual topic papers.
187. As part of the examination there has been significant criticism of the evidence provided by developers and the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit including in relation to some of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisals produced by the Unit. However, Greater Manchester Ecology Unit host the Local Biological Records Centre with access to a very wide range of habitat and species data for the Greater Manchester area, including that provided by local ecologists and residents groups on an on-going basis. The Greater Manchester Ecology Unit have been involved in discussions on the potential site allocations for some years and we consider they have sufficient expertise and knowledge to support proper consideration of ecology and biodiversity for the site allocations in the

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<sup>58</sup> Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisals, Second Edition 2017, CIEEM

Plan. It was not unreasonable for the GMCA to also take account of evidence provided by developers/site promoters.

188. Data on species and habitats can change and is being provided to the unit on a regular basis and information has been provided to the examination by local residents and ecologists, but in the context of the time scale taken in producing the Plan and timing of the submission of the Plan, the evidence at the point of submission is up-to date.
189. There are no outstanding objections to individual allocations on general ecological matters from the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit or Natural England. Alternative approaches including looking at ecology first before anything else in the site selection methodology have been suggested. Nevertheless, the GMCA method of looking at planning constraints after the areas of search stage was undertaken consistently for sites and to our minds the stage at which they were addressed is not unreasonable. We are satisfied with the approach to considering ecology and biodiversity of the sites in relation to the site selection methodology and subsequent allocations in the Plan is based on relevant and up-to date evidence in the context of the plan making process. It is proportionate and it is adequate given the strategic nature of the Plan.

## **Conclusion**

190. Although there are many ways that potential sites could be assessed and allocations chosen, this does not necessarily render the process chosen invalid or unsound. Overall, we are satisfied that, in the context of the complexities associated with a joint plan for such a large area covering nine districts and the extremely large number of potential sites that had to be considered, the approach was proportionate and adequate as it used a consistent, systematic and evidence-based methodology. Furthermore, subject to our main modifications, we conclude that all but two of the allocations chosen are sound, and collectively they make a significant contribution to delivering the Plan's spatial strategy.
191. We therefore conclude on this issue that the allocations in the Plan were selected using an appropriate methodology based on adequate, relevant, up-to-date and proportionate evidence.

## **Issue 6 – General issues relevant to allocation policies JPA1.1 to JPA37**

### **Introduction**

192. Policies JPA1.1 to JPA37 relate to the 38 sites outside the existing urban areas that are allocated in the Plan for development. All but 4 of the sites<sup>59</sup> involve the removal of land from the Green Belt. 23 are allocated for housing, 9 for employment, and 6 for a mix of housing and employment development. The allocations are listed in Table 11.1 in the Plan, defined on the Policies Map, and each is subject to a policy in chapter 11 which sets out the development proposed and various requirements to be met.

193. We have already concluded that the spatial strategy described in chapter 4 of the Plan is an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence including about the amount of housing and employment development needed during the plan period. Furthermore, we have also concluded that the removal of around 2,400 hectares of land from the Green Belt to meet the identified need for development in locations that accord with the spatial strategy is, in principle, justified for quantitative and qualitative reasons. Finally, for the reasons set out above, we are satisfied that the methodology used to identify suitable and available development sites, and to decide which should be included as allocations in the Plan, was adequate, proportionate and consistent with national policy.

194. However, before we reach a conclusion about whether each allocation in the Plan is justified, including where relevant having regard to national policy relating to Green Belt, we need to consider whether policies JPA1.1 to JPA37 would be effective in achieving sustainable development having regard to site specific issues in relation to the site's location and the impact development would have on the Green Belt and in other respects.

195. Before we look at each allocation in turn, we address a number of issues that are relevant to all or many of the sites. This is to minimise repetition throughout the subsequent sections relating to individual allocations.

### **Location and viability of the allocations**

196. Where necessary, we set out our site-specific findings about whether individual allocations are suitably located and have a reasonable prospect of being available and could be viably developed during the plan period in subsequent sections of this report.

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<sup>59</sup> JPA16 (Cowlshaw, Oldham), JPA24 (Roch Valley, Rochdale), JPA25 (Trows Farm, Rochdale) and JPA36 (Pocket Nook, Wigan).

197. However, in summary, we are satisfied that each of the sites removed from the Green Belt meets at least one of the site selection criteria and that the type of development proposed in the particular location would be in accordance with the spatial strategy and help to deliver the Plan's objectives. The four other (non-Green Belt) sites are also suitably located for the development proposed.
198. The viability assessments carried out during the preparation of the Plan<sup>60</sup> were proportionate and consistent with national policy and guidance. Costs associated with meeting all relevant policy requirements and mitigations were factored in. The approach was generally precautionary, for example using a worst-case scenario for transport interventions and conservative estimates of development values, and sensitivity tests were applied.
199. The original evidence indicates that the viability of the allocations varies, with some being shown to be viable, some marginal and some unviable. Sensitivity tests indicate that viability would be significantly improved if higher sales values than assumed in the assessment were achieved. However, updated evidence indicates that the average price of new build homes in Greater Manchester has increased by around 41% since 2019 (the date of the assessment) whereas build costs have increased by around 9% over the same period<sup>61</sup>. Some of the larger allocations may benefit from public funding to assist in infrastructure delivery. Further evidence about site availability, viability and the expected timing of development is available from the promoters of most of the allocations.
200. Overall, we are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that each of the allocations will be available and could be viably developed during the plan period (continuing, in some cases, beyond 2039).

### **Flood risk**

201. The Plan is supported by evidence relating to flood risk, including level 1 and level 2 strategic flood risk assessments and a Flood Risk Sequential Test and Exception Test Evidence Paper<sup>62</sup>. This indicates that five of the site allocations in the Plan are each partly within flood zones 2 and/or 3. We deal with flood risk issues where relevant in subsequent sections of the report relating to relevant allocations. However, in summary, we are satisfied that the development proposed on the allocations can be accommodated on areas with the lowest risk of flooding, or where the sequential and exceptions tests have been met, consistent with national policy.

### **Green Belt issues**

202. Whilst the design and layout of development on each allocation has not been determined it is clear that the openness of each site would be significantly

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<sup>60</sup> Strategic Viability Assessment Stage 1 and Stage 2 Reports [03.01.01 to 03.01.04].

<sup>61</sup> Market Changes in House Prices and Costs, November 2022 [OD5.3 Appendix B].

<sup>62</sup> 04.02.01 to 04.02.20.

reduced as a result of the proposals in the Plan. The role that each allocation serves in checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, preventing neighbouring towns merging into one another and preserving the setting and special character of historic towns, along with the impact that the proposed development would have on those Green Belt purposes<sup>63</sup>, was assessed during the preparation of the Plan in a consistent and systematic manner<sup>64</sup>.

203. The potential impact of removing any particular site from the Green Belt on urban regeneration is difficult to assess<sup>65</sup>. Various policies in the Plan aim to make as much use as possible of previously developed land, and this will be taken forward through individual local plans and planning decisions. Part of the justification for removing many of the allocations from the Green Belt is that, because of their location and/or scale, they provide opportunities for different types of development to that which could be attracted to urban brownfield sites. Overall, we are satisfied that the development proposed on the 38 allocations in the Plan would not have any significant impact on urban regeneration, and that the assessment of the impact on Green Belt purposes represents adequate and proportionate evidence.
204. That evidence indicates that development on each allocation would cause harm to one or more Green Belt purpose, and that the overall harm in each case would vary from low to very high. Whilst the assessments are judgement-based, we are satisfied that the approach taken was informed and consistent. Unless otherwise specified below in relation to a particular site, we agree with the level of harm to Green Belt purposes identified.
205. Currently, around 47% of the plan area is designated as Green Belt. The proposals in the Plan would reduce this to around 45%<sup>66</sup>. Whilst localised impacts on Green Belt purposes would vary from low to very high, overall the remaining Green Belt would continue to play an important strategic role both within the plan area and in relation to surrounding settlements outside the city region.
206. In many cases, the proposed Green Belt boundaries around the allocations are clearly defined by physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent as required by national policy<sup>67</sup>. However, the boundaries to some sites need to be defined or strengthened in certain places to ensure that this is so. Generally, this can be achieved by appropriate layout and landscaping of development, although in some cases it may take many years to be fully achieved. Due to the nature and location of the allocations, provided that the

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<sup>63</sup> NPPF 138.

<sup>64</sup> Stage 1 and stage 2 Green Belt studies 2016 to 2021 [07.01.04, 07.01.05, 07.01.07 to 07.01.10 and 07.01.22 and 07.01.23].

<sup>65</sup> Stage 1 Green Belt study 2016 paragraphs 3.57 to 3.61 [07.01.04].

<sup>66</sup> Plan paragraph 1.51.

<sup>67</sup> NPPF 143.

Green Belt boundaries around them are clearly defined, there is nothing to indicate that those particular boundaries will need to be altered again (although we recognise that individual local plans may in the future consider changes to Green Belt elsewhere as that is allowed for in national policy).

207. An assessment of potential opportunities to achieve compensatory improvements on remaining Green Belt land within 2km of every allocation was carried out during the preparation of the Plan<sup>68</sup>. Those opportunities relate to walking and cycling routes; recreation facilities; biodiversity and wildlife corridors; and landscape and visual amenity. Compensatory improvements will be required for allocations in the Plan where development would involve the removal of land from the Green Belt.

### **General issues associated with the development requirements set out in policies JPA1.1 to JPA37**

208. We will deal with specific requirements in each allocation policy in subsequent sections of this report. However, we firstly deal with some issues relevant to the soundness of many or most of the allocation policies.

#### **Avoiding ambiguity and inconsistency**

209. Modifications are required to parts of the allocation policies to ensure that they are clearly written and unambiguous, for example by identifying specific features on or close to the site that requirements relate to. Modifications are also needed to achieve succinctness<sup>69</sup> and avoid inconsistency or ambiguity, for example by deleting parts that attempt to summarise more lengthy thematic policies in the Plan but do not add any site-specific requirements. Examples of the latter are parts of policies referring to open space, sport and recreation facilities; public rights of way; self-build housing; community facilities; good design; air and noise pollution; drainage; and flood risk where these do not refer to anything specific to the site in question.

210. These modifications do not serve to weaken the requirements of the policies. The Plan must be read as a whole, and all relevant thematic policies will remain relevant to the consideration of any planning application. The issues these criteria were seeking to address will still have to be dealt with by any planning application.

211. In some instances, where there are site specific issues relating to such matters, the policies need to be modified to ensure they are unambiguous and consistent with the relevant thematic policy. This includes providing a cross-reference to the relevant thematic policy.

#### **Amount of development expected in the plan period**

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<sup>68</sup> 07.01.12 to 07.01.21

<sup>69</sup> NPPF 15.

212. Development on some of the larger allocations is expected to continue after the end of the plan period, and the relevant policies indicate where this is so by reference to the relevant amount of homes or floorspace. Modifications are required to those references as a result of the extension to the plan period that we recommend earlier in this report, and to move them to the reasoned justification as they are not intended to control the timing of development or set out any other policy requirement.
213. To ensure effectiveness, a further main modification is required to paragraph 11.12 to clarify that the figures for the number of new homes and/or employment floorspace in the allocation policies are indicative only. This is because the amounts of development will be determined through the masterplanning and planning application processes, and because the policies are not intended to prevent the completion of any of the proposed developments during the plan period [MM11.1].

### **Masterplans, design codes, and phasing and delivery strategies**

214. Many allocation policies require a comprehensive masterplan and design code to be submitted and/or agreed by the local planning authority. Modifications are needed to ensure an unambiguous and consistent approach in this regard, and also to clarify whether an infrastructure phasing and delivery strategy will be required for the particular site in accordance with policy JP-D1.
215. Several allocations also refer to the potential production of supplementary planning documents. However, there is no definitive commitment or timetable by any of the Councils to produce such documents and so any reference to them is not justified or effective and are removed.

### **Affordable homes**

216. Some allocation policies include a specific requirement relating to the provision of affordable homes. To avoid ambiguity, policies that are silent on that issue need to be modified to clarify what is required, for example by reference to providing affordable homes in accordance with relevant local plan policies.

### **School places**

217. The delivery of additional homes is likely to require additional school places, either in the form of new schools or expansion of existing facilities. Even where there may be existing school capacity issues, there is no substantive evidence which suggests these cannot be satisfactorily mitigated or that this would render development unviable. Most of the allocation policies need modifying to ensure the requirement relating to school provision on or off the site is clear, refers to policy JP-P5, and is consistent with national policy relation to planning obligations.

## **Agricultural Land**

218. A number of allocations contain land classed as the best and most versatile agricultural land. NPPF footnote 58 states that where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality should be preferred to those of a higher quality. We have had regard to the effect on agricultural land provision. However, we also recognise that there is a significant need for new housing and employment development in the area and meeting those needs in otherwise appropriate locations means there will be tensions between different land uses and policies. The NPPF provides no blanket protection for this type of land and there is no substantive evidence that the effects from individual sites or the Plan would have an unacceptable effect on agricultural production. We have therefore concluded that the benefits of development would outweigh any impacts on best and most versatile agricultural land.

## **Transport infrastructure**

219. All of the allocation policies refer to the provision of and/or improvement to transport infrastructure either on- or off-site. Some references are specific in nature, whereas others are generic or thematic. There are inconsistencies both between the approaches taken in relation to different allocations, and with the references to transport infrastructure provision and improvement in JP-Strat policies. The policies therefore need to be modified to ensure the requirements are clear and justified, based on the transport assessments carried out to inform the preparation of the Plan which represent proportionate and adequate evidence<sup>70</sup>.

220. Those transport assessments identify interventions that may be required to ensure that the residual cumulative impacts on the road network associated with the allocations in the Plan (along with other development proposed in the plan period) would not be severe. We recommend later in this report a modification to ensure that policy JP-C7 sets out a clear approach for site specific transport assessments, having regard to that evidence. The approach would firstly consider interventions to maximise opportunities for sustainable travel and then, if necessary, determine which of the identified highway improvements are required. We also recommend the inclusion of an additional Appendix D in the Plan that lists all of the potential transport interventions for each allocation identified in the supporting evidence [MM10.14].

221. Therefore, to be effective and justified, the allocation policies need to be modified to require the provision of new and improved sustainable transport and highways infrastructure having regard to the indicative interventions set out in Appendix D in accordance with policy JP-C7. Some allocation policies also need to be modified to include reference to site-specific interventions where

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<sup>70</sup> Transport Locality Assessments 2020 and 2021 [09.01.07 to 09.01.28], and Strategic Road Network reports 2022 [OD5 to OD5.2].

these are known to be necessary at this stage, for example providing access from a particular road or improving walking and cycling routes to specified locations.

222. Subject to our recommended main modifications relating to policy JP-C7 and each of the allocation policies, we are satisfied that opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport will be promoted; each allocation can be provided with safe and suitable access; the development proposed in the Plan will not have an unacceptable impact on highway safety; and that the residual cumulative impacts on the road network will not be severe.

### **Green Belt boundaries**

223. For the reasons set out above, where necessary, allocation policies need to be modified to require Green Belt boundaries (in specified locations) to be created or strengthened so that they will be clearly defined by physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.

### **Compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt**

224. For the reasons set out above, the policies relating to the allocations removed from the Green Belt need to be modified to include a clear requirement to provide compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt in accordance with policy JP-G2.

### **Landscape character**

225. The nature and location of some of the allocations are such that development needs to be specifically designed to minimise visual impacts on the adjoining rural landscape. Modifications are needed to the relevant allocation policies so that they are effective in ensuring development reflects and responds to the special qualities and sensitivities of the key characteristics of the relevant character type (which are indicated on Figure 8.1 of the Plan) in accordance with policy JP-G1.

### **Biodiversity**

226. As we have already found, none of the allocations are designated as being of international or national importance for biodiversity. However, some contain areas that are designated as being of local importance for biodiversity, and many include, or support, protected or priority habitats and species. These are referred to in the policy requirements where relevant. We recommend later in this report a modification to ensure that policy JP-G9 sets out a clear approach for proposals being informed by biodiversity/ecological assessments, having regard to that evidence.
227. Any impacts on those areas, habitats and species will need to be addressed through masterplanning and planning applications in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy set out in policy JP-G9. Furthermore, all development will

need to achieve a net gain in biodiversity of no less than 10% and comply with relevant legal requirements relating to habitats and species. Modifications are required to ensure that the relevant allocation policies are effective in that regard.

## **Peat**

228. Lowland wetlands and mosslands cover substantial parts of the Plan area, particularly within Wigan, west Salford and south-west Trafford where they form part of the Great Manchester Wetlands Nature Improvement Area (NIA). There are also smaller areas elsewhere, including Unsworth Moss in Bury and Ashton Moss in Tameside.
229. The mosslands were originally typified by lowland raised bog, which supports a unique range of wildlife. Human activities, particularly from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, including peat extraction, agriculture, drainage, deposition of various materials, infrastructure provision and development, have left only small areas of undamaged peat deposits. Lowland raised bog is now one of Western Europe's rarest and most threatened habitats. Several restoration projects are underway within the plan area which will not only have major nature conservation benefits but could also make a considerable contribution to carbon targets by reducing a significant source of emissions and locking in additional carbon.
230. Due to their high ecological and landscape value, and their potential for making a significant contribution to helping the city region achieve its climate change ambitions, policy JP-G4 aims to protect, enhance, and restore the lowland wetlands and mosslands. Notwithstanding that overall approach, some of the allocations in the Plan contain areas of undeveloped deep peat which the Councils contend are justified due to their location and the contribution that the proposed development would make to delivering the Plan's objectives and spatial strategy.
231. In total, six allocations in the Plan<sup>71</sup> contain deep peaty soils as classified by Natural England<sup>72</sup>. On some of these allocations, it is likely that there is peat in only a small part of the site, whereas on others it is known to exist within a substantial proportion of the area. Information about the condition of the peat on each site varies, but much of it is known to have been substantially affected by the sorts of human activities described above such that it is severely degraded and emitting carbon. Notwithstanding that, there is little doubt that given sufficient resources and time it would be technically possible to restore much of the deep peaty soil within the allocations to wetland habitats such as fen and

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<sup>71</sup> JPA1.1 Heywood / Pilsworth; JPA27 East of Boothstown; JPA28 North of Irlam Station; JPA29 Port Salford Extension; JPA30 Ashton Moss West; and JPA33 New Carrington.

<sup>72</sup> Natural England Deep Peaty Soils Layer (England) published July 2021.

wet woodland with some areas potentially transitioning to active bog in future decades<sup>73</sup>.

232. The Government considers peat to be one of the country's most important natural assets and is committed to addressing peat degradation and reducing the significant carbon that is emitted as a result<sup>74</sup>. The England Peat Action Plan (May 2021) includes a commitment to consider how the protection afforded to peatlands in national planning policy could be strengthened. We are also aware that Natural England have proposed that peat be protected from development as part of their consultation response to national planning policy reforms<sup>75</sup>. However, we have considered whether the allocations are sound, having regard to peat issues, in the context of NPPF 2021, particularly sections 14 and 15 relating to meeting the challenge of climate change and conserving and enhancing the natural environment.
233. The NPPF does not rule out development on land containing peat. However, it does expect plans to take a proactive approach to mitigating climate change and contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions<sup>76</sup>. Furthermore, it expects plans to allocate land with the least environmental value, and provides strong protection for "irreplaceable habitats"<sup>77</sup>. Such habitats are defined as those that would be technically very difficult (or take a very significant time) to restore, recreate or replace once destroyed, taking into account their age, uniqueness, species diversity or rarity<sup>78</sup>. The non-exhaustive list of irreplaceable habitats in the NPPF includes blanket bog and lowland fen, but does not refer to mosslands, lowland raised bog, or deep peaty soils.
234. However, deep peat has taken many thousands of years to form, and the particular deep peat in Greater Manchester is rare nationally due to its extent, depth, proximity to urban areas and lowland context. In principle, therefore, we agree with Natural England that deep peat that is capable of being restored with human intervention (ie that which has not been "destroyed") within the allocations can meet the NPPF definition of an irreplaceable habitat due to its age and rarity. We are aware of the definition of "degraded raised bog still capable of natural regeneration" in Annex I of the Habitats Directive, and of the definition of "irreplaceable habitat" in recently published regulations relating to biodiversity net gain requirements<sup>79</sup>. However, those definitions are specific to those pieces of legislation and they do not alter our conclusion on this matter in the context of the NPPF definition.

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<sup>73</sup> Statements of Common Ground [GMCA89 to GMCA93].

<sup>74</sup> Lowland Agricultural Peat Task Force Chair's Report: Government Response, 29 June 2023 [OD41].

<sup>75</sup> Natural England letter 10 February 2023 [OD23].

<sup>76</sup> NPPF 153 and 154.

<sup>77</sup> NPPF 175 and 180.

<sup>78</sup> NPPF Glossary.

<sup>79</sup> The Biodiversity Net Gain Requirements (Irreplaceable Habitat) Regulations 2024.

235. NPPF 180c states that development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats should be refused unless there are wholly exceptional reasons, where the public benefit would clearly outweigh the loss or deterioration of habitat<sup>80</sup>, and a suitable compensation strategy exists. Whilst that national policy specifically relates to the determination of planning applications, we consider it is relevant to apply it in our consideration of whether the allocations in the Plan are sound. This is because national policy expects the planning system to be genuinely plan-led, and for local plans to contain policies that are unambiguous. Failing to consider whether development of the allocations is capable of complying with the policy set out in NPPF 180c would not represent a plan-led approach and would create ambiguity at the planning application stage. Furthermore, the application of the policy in NPPF 180c could provide a strong reason to restrict the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the Plan in accordance with NPPF 11b meaning that it is necessary to address this issue at the plan-making stage.
236. National policy does not define what a suitable compensation strategy might include. Within its definition of irreplaceable habitats, the NPPF specifically identifies blanket bog. It stands to reason therefore that the Government is content that there are forms of compensation for effects on this type of habitat that can be acceptable in principle. There are some clear similarities in context with the habitats in question here.
237. Albeit in relation to ancient woodland and veteran trees, the PPG<sup>81</sup> states that appropriate compensation can include the restoration or improvement of other nearby woodland. We consider this to be analogous to the situation here. In circumstances where wholly exceptional reasons exist, we are satisfied that the potential to facilitate the restoration of currently degraded peatlands either within an allocation or elsewhere could, in principle, form part of a suitable compensation strategy. Whether or not such a strategy is acceptable in practice would be dependent on the detail of any planning application and the scale of harm likely to be caused. This can be assessed at the masterplanning and planning application stage of any development.
238. In coming to our conclusions on this matter, we have considered the nature and quality of the peat, and the opportunities for restoration, on each site in subsequent sections of this report. Where relevant, we have assessed the potential and likelihood of restoration taking place if the site in question were to be protected from development, but also whether the Plan's policies would be effective in securing peat restoration if the site were to be allocated as proposed. In this context, we also consider whether the development proposed on each relevant allocation would result in the loss or deterioration of an irreplaceable habitat having regard to the site-specific information we have

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<sup>80</sup> NPPF footnote 63.

<sup>81</sup> PPG ID: 8-034

about deep peaty soils in each case and, if so, whether the NPPF 180c tests would be met in principle.

### **Historic environment**

239. The Plan is supported by historic environment assessments for each district<sup>82</sup> and a Historic Environment Assessment Screening report<sup>83</sup>. Individual site allocations are also supported by evidence produced by developers on the historic environment where relevant. There are no outstanding objections to policy JP-P2 (Heritage) from Historic England. Site allocation policies include reference to the historic environment where this is a matter for consideration.
240. Where relevant, modifications are required to allocation policies to clarify that development will need to take appropriate account of relevant heritage assets and their settings in accordance with policy JP-P2, and to refer to specific designated assets that are on or close to the site.
241. Policy JP-P2 includes a requirement that proposals should be informed by the findings and recommendations of the appropriate heritage assessments in the development plan evidence base and/or any updated heritage assessment submitted as part of the planning application process. Where relevant, each allocation refers to policy JP-P2. Therefore, there is no need to add specific references to the evidence base for each site as this is adequately covered in that policy. Subject to our modifications to the relevant thematic and allocation policies, the Plan will be effective in preventing unacceptable harm to heritage assets consistent with national policy and relevant legislation.

### **Minerals safeguarding areas**

242. The majority of the allocations are within a minerals safeguarding area (MSA) identified in the Greater Manchester Joint Minerals Development Plan meaning that consideration would need to be given to prior extraction of any viable mineral resources in accordance with policy 8 of that plan. There is no substantive evidence to suggest that the delivery of any site would be prejudiced by this or that they would sterilise opportunities for mineral extraction. Whether or not development would constrain potential use for mineral working can be assessed at the planning application stage. To ensure effectiveness, the relevant allocation policies need to be modified to refer to Joint Minerals Development Plan.

### **Conclusion**

243. In summary, therefore, main modifications are required to address a number of general issues associated with allocation policies JPA1.1 to JPA37. Where

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<sup>82</sup> 08.01.02-08.01.12

<sup>83</sup> 08.01.01

relevant to the site in question, these are identified in the following sections of this report.

### **Issue 7 - Is policy JPA1.1 Heywood / Pilsworth (Northern Gateway) justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

244. Together, allocations JPA1.1 and JPA1.2 (see below) are described as the Northern Gateway: an extensive area around M60 junction 18 that straddles the districts of Bury and Rochdale and forms part of the North East Growth Corridor referred to in policy JP-Strat7.
245. Policy JPA1.1 relates to one of the largest allocations in the Plan (641 hectares). The site is located immediately east of the M66 and north of the M62 and comprises mainly agricultural land along with equestrian uses, a golf course, playing fields, an existing industrial estate, a motorway service area, and various other buildings including two grade II listed farmhouses.
246. Around 1,200,000 sqm of industrial and warehousing floorspace, 1,200 new homes and a primary school are proposed on the site. The eastern part of the allocation (south of Heywood) has planning permission for up to 1,000 homes, 135,000 sqm of employment floorspace, community facilities and a link road from M62 junction 19 which was constructed in 2022. The remaining 200 new homes are proposed on the western part of the site with access from Castle Road, Unsworth.
247. The site meets four of the seven site selection criteria and has the potential to make a highly significant contribution to boosting northern competitiveness in accordance with policy JP-Strat6, both through facilitating a substantial amount of new economic activity and job creation as well as providing good quality market and affordable homes. It is a very large, developable site with good motorway access, close to existing industrial and warehouse developments and a large residential population in an area with significant pockets of deprivation, low skills and worklessness. Its scale and location mean that it is of regional and national significance, attractive to investors, and that it provides opportunities to improve public transport and walking and cycling infrastructure in the area. The site's significance is reflected in the fact that it forms part of the recently designated Atom Valley Mayoral Development Zone.
248. The strategic viability assessment indicates that the development expected to take place during the plan period would not be viable, mainly due to significant costs associated with transport infrastructure improvements (including to motorway junctions) that may be required. However, sensitivity tests show that if all of the proposed development is taken into account, it would be viable. A considerable amount of work has been undertaken to bring the site forward, there is evidence of strong market demand, and part of the site has planning permission. As the identified transport mitigations reflect a worst-case scenario,

actual transport infrastructure costs may be lower than assumed. Furthermore, the Mayoral Development Zone provides a mechanism to align private sector investment with public funding which is expected to be available to help meet up-front infrastructure costs if necessary. Overall, we are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that site could be viably developed during the plan period, continuing into the 2040s as assumed in the Plan.

249. However, the proposal would lead to the loss of a significant amount of agricultural land and the removal of 636 hectares from the Green Belt. The development would cause harm to Green Belt purposes relating to the merging of Heywood in Rochdale and Unsworth in Bury; checking the unrestricted sprawl of the large built up areas of Rochdale and Bury; and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Overall, the harm to the Green Belt would be very high.

250. Furthermore, such a scale of development, particularly that which is likely to include very large industrial and warehouse buildings in a prominent location, will significantly change the character and appearance of an extensive area of land. The allocation does not contain any international, national or locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity. However, it adjoins the Pilsworth SBI and contains priority habitats, including woodland, hedgerows, semi-improved grassland, watercourses and mossland, along with protected and priority species including invertebrates, great crested newts, reptiles, bats, farmland and wintering birds, badger, otter, brown hare and hedgehog<sup>84</sup>. Farmland, watercourses, ponds, trees, hedgerows and other habitats and features of the natural environment will be lost or otherwise affected with adverse consequences for protected species and other wildlife. The settings of two listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets will be affected. Public footpaths and bridleways that cross the site, whilst being retained, will be within an urban and industrial, rather than rural, environment which will substantially reduce their recreational value. A considerable amount of additional traffic, including heavy goods vehicles, will be generated on local roads as well as the motorway network.

251. However, subject to the modifications we describe below, we are satisfied that policy JPA1.1, applied along with relevant thematic policies in the Plan and in the Bury and Rochdale local plans, will be effective in mitigating the impacts of development to an acceptable degree. This can be achieved through the comprehensive masterplanning process which should ensure that the design, layout and landscaping of the development takes appropriate account of important features on and around the site, the visual impact on the surrounding area, and air and noise pollution from the adjoining motorways. Importantly, mitigation can also be achieved by the developers making provision for necessary physical, social and green infrastructure; improvements to the

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<sup>84</sup> Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2020 [10.01.11], Ecological Report 2020 [10.01.03], and oral evidence from David Bentley at the hearing session on 17 January 2023.

accessibility and environmental quality of nearby Green Belt land; and applying the mitigation hierarchy and achieving biodiversity net gain of no less than 10% in accordance with policy JP-G9.

252. In order to ensure that policy JPA1.1 is effective in those and other respects, and justified, modifications are required. For the reasons set out above under issue 6, changes are needed to the requirements relating to a comprehensive masterplan, design code and infrastructure phasing and delivery strategy (all of which are particularly important for a development of such scale that will take place over many years in various phases); the amount of development expected to take place during the plan period; transport infrastructure; schools provision; green infrastructure and biodiversity; compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt; strengthening Green Belt boundaries to the north of the site around Pilsworth Cottages, Brightly Brook, and Pilsworth Fisheries; drainage and flood risk; listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets; and safeguarding minerals.
253. The requirement relating to the provision of plots for custom- and self-build housing needs to refer to this being subject to local demand so that it is justified. Reference to providing supporting services and facilities needs to be clarified to ensure effectiveness. Part 9 needs to specify the existing recreational facilities (a playing field and golf course) that are required to be retained and enhanced or replaced in a manner consistent with national policy. Part 15 relating to a project specific HRA needs to be deleted as the most recent evidence shows that not to be necessary<sup>85</sup>. The opening paragraph should also be deleted as it summarises other parts of the policy or thematic policies using different language meaning that it creates ambiguity and potential inconsistency.
254. According to Natural England's evidence, the allocation contains three areas of deep peaty soils. Together, they make up around 11% of the total site<sup>86</sup>. One area of peat, on the eastern part of the allocation, is almost wholly within the land that is now under development. An additional criterion needs to be added to policy JPA1.1 to ensure that the two areas on the south-western part of the allocation are appropriately investigated and taken into account in the masterplanning exercise to ensure that the loss or deterioration of any restorable peat identified is avoided. This will not prevent the amount of development proposed being accommodated on the site, and will ensure consistency with NPPF 180c.
255. The economic and residential development proposed in policy JPA1.1 forms a critical element of the Plan's overall spatial strategy, in particular policies JP-Strat6 and JP-Strat7, and wider initiatives for the city region. It would deliver considerable economic and social benefits during the plan period and beyond, thereby helping to boost northern competitiveness. We agree with the

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<sup>85</sup> OD7.1 and OD7.2.

<sup>86</sup> Statement of Common Ground GMCA92.

judgement of the local planning authorities that those benefits would outweigh the very high harm that would be caused to the Green Belt and other harms as summarised above, provided that they are appropriately mitigated. We are, therefore, satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances to justify removing the site from the Green Belt and that policy JPA1.1 can be made sound by the main modifications that we recommend [**MMCB2** and **MMCB3**].

## Conclusion

256. Subject to the main modifications referred to above, we conclude that policy JPA1.1 Heywood / Pilsworth (Northern Gateway) is justified, consistent with national policy, and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

### **Issue 8 - Is policy JPA1.2 Simister and Bowlee (Northern Gateway) justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

257. JPA1.2 is located between the settlements of Prestwich and Middleton and covers a total area of 96 hectares. The majority of its western boundary borders on the M60, the southern boundary abuts the edge of the village of Rhodes, and the allocation's eastern boundary wraps around the western and northern edges of Middleton. The site currently comprises agricultural land and several residential, employment and agricultural properties.

258. Approximately 1,550 homes are proposed within the allocation. Around 1,350 homes will be in Bury and a further 200 will be in Rochdale. The development is expected to start in 2024/2025 and completed in 2037.

259. The strategic viability assessment considered the allocation would be viable including accounting for affordable housing, transport and other costs, having regard to the differences between the different policy requirements for Rochdale and Bury. The development would be phased with potentially four different outlets and there is developer interest. We are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect development could take place within the plan period.

260. The site is partly within the Green Belt. The site was split into a number of parcels for the purposes of the Green Belt assessment with harm overall to Green Belt purposes being high<sup>87</sup> including relating to urban sprawl and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The Green Belt boundary to the north-west of the site would need to be strengthened as it currently does not follow well defined or permanent features.

261. The allocation meets 5 of the 7 site selection criteria and is located within an area which contains pockets of deprivation. It will make a contribution to boosting northern competitiveness in accordance with policy JP-Strat6

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<sup>87</sup> JPA1.2 Simister and Bowlee (Northern Gateway) Topic Paper [10.01.55]

particularly in providing good quality market and affordable homes and with the potential for improved linkages to the employment opportunities which would be available at JPA1.1.

262. It would be a large-scale development in an area which is semi-rural and the character and setting of the small villages such as Simister (excluded from the allocation) will need to be respected. Panoramic views are available to the north and south and the undulating nature of the area is another key feature. New homes and community buildings would replace countryside causing harm to the character and appearance of the area.
263. The allocation does not contain any international or national designated sites of importance for biodiversity. Bradley Hall Farm (Streams and Flushes) SBI is located in the east part of the allocation. Watercourses, ponds, woodland, modified grassland and hedgerows would be affected by the proposal, with implications for wildlife and protected species present on the site. Heaton Park which is a Registered Park and Garden is close by, with development having the potential to affect its setting. There would be a significant amount of extra traffic generated on both the nearby motorway junctions and local roads, some of which are narrow and rural in character.
264. However, subject to our recommended modifications, we are satisfied that the potential adverse impacts arising from the proposal could be effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree both in terms of the design, layout and landscaping of development but also through developer contributions towards on and off site infrastructure provision and improvement (including sustainable transport, road improvements, additional school places and other public services) coordinated through a phasing and delivery strategy. Impacts on priority habitats and species would need to be addressed in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy set out in policy JP-G9, and the development would need to achieve a net gain in biodiversity of no less than 10%.
265. For the reasons set out above under issue 6, policy JPA1.2 needs to be modified to ensure that it is sound in relation to an infrastructure phasing and delivery strategy, particularly as the site is being promoted by different developers; self-build homes; heritage assets including Heaton Park; compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt in the vicinity of the site; Green Belt boundaries in the north west; transport infrastructure; biodiversity including Bradley Hall Farm SBI; social infrastructure; and safeguarding minerals.
266. In addition to those modifications, in relation to transport infrastructure due to the nature of Simister Lane, it is necessary to make provision for it to only have public transport access. Part of the policy relating to flood risk is not necessary as there are no named sources of flooding in the area. The allocation is shown in Picture 11.5 as being two separate sites, separated by Heywood Old Road. However, the boundary should be amended to incorporate both parts into a

single site to ensure clarity and effectiveness of the policy and as a consequence a modification is needed to Picture 11.3.

267. The new homes proposed in policy JPA1.2 will deliver significant social and economic benefits on a well-located site in accordance with the Plan's overall spatial strategy. We are satisfied that those benefits would outweigh the high harm that would be caused to the Green Belt and the other harms that we have identified above, provided that they are appropriately mitigated. On balance, therefore, we conclude that there are exceptional circumstances to justify removing land from the Green Belt and that policy JPA1.2 can be made sound by the modifications that we recommend [**MMCB1, MMCB4, MMCB5 and MMCB6**].

## **Conclusion**

268. Subject to the main modifications described above, policy JPA1.2 Simister and Bowlee is justified and consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 9 - Is policy JPA2 Stakehill justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

269. Policy JPA2 relates to a greenfield site of 202 hectares within the North East Growth Corridor referred to in policy JP-Strat7. It is located immediately south of the M62 and west of the A627(M). The A627(M) spur road and Thornham Lane run east-west through the centre of the site, and the existing Stakehill Industrial Estate adjoins the part of the allocation to the south.

270. Around 1,680 new homes and 150,000 sqm of industrial and warehousing floorspace are proposed. The reasoned justification advises that the residential development will be focussed to the north of Thornham Lane and to the south of the A627(M) spur, whilst the employment development will be located to the south and east of the existing industrial estate.

271. The Stakehill allocation meets two of the seven site selection criteria. It has the potential to generate significant additional economic activity and provide a large number of high-quality new homes, including affordable housing, due to the site's size and location adjacent to a successful industrial estate with good access to the motorway network and close to large residential populations, and areas of deprivation, in Oldham and Rochdale. The strategic viability assessment indicates that the development is likely to be viable, and there is active developer interest in both parts of the site. We are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that the new homes and employment floorspace will be completed during the plan period. The proposed economic and residential development would, therefore, make a significant contribution to boosting northern competitiveness in line with policies JP-Strat6 and JP-Strat7.

272. However, the proposal involves the removal of 168 hectares from the Green Belt. The development proposed in policy JPA2 would cause harm to Green Belt purposes relating to the merging of Chadderton in Oldham and Castleton in Rochdale; checking the unrestricted sprawl of the large built-up areas of Oldham and Rochdale; and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Overall, the harm to the Green Belt would be high.
273. The allocation does not contain any international, national or locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity. However, it is close to the Rochdale Canal SAC, contains priority habitats including hedgerows and ponds, and is likely to support priority species including farmland birds, badgers, bats and toads<sup>88</sup>. Farmland, trees and hedgerows would be lost or otherwise affected by the proposal, with implications for wildlife.
274. Furthermore, despite the site being largely surrounded by existing buildings and busy roads, the development would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area as new homes and large industrial and warehouse buildings would replace attractive, sloping agricultural fields. Development would be clearly visible from various vantage points in the surrounding area, including Tandle Hill Country Park to the east. There are numerous well used public rights of way that cross the site, meaning that its current recreational value would be largely lost. The setting of St John's Church and war memorial would be affected. A significant amount of additional traffic, including heavy goods vehicles, would be generated on existing congested roads.
275. However, subject to our recommended modifications, we are satisfied that the potential adverse impacts arising from the proposal could be effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree both in terms of the design, layout and landscaping of development but also through developer contributions towards on and off site infrastructure provision and improvement (including sustainable transport, road improvements, additional school places and other public services) coordinated through a phasing and delivery strategy. Impacts on priority habitats and species would need to be addressed in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy set out in policy JP-G9, and the development would need to achieve a net gain in biodiversity of no less than 10%
276. For the reasons set out above under issue 6, policy JPA2 needs to be modified to ensure that it is sound in relation to affordable homes; an infrastructure phasing and delivery strategy, particularly as different parts of the site are being promoted by different developers; heritage assets; landscape character; compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt, including that to be retained within the central and southern parts of the allocation; Green Belt boundaries; transport infrastructure; biodiversity; social infrastructure; and safeguarding minerals.

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<sup>88</sup> Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Addendum 2020 [10.01.44 and 10.01.45] and Ecology Report [10.01.28].

277. In addition to those modifications, policy JPA2 part 1 needs to clarify that the “employment” floorspace is for industrial and warehouse uses with a focus on prime sectors (which are defined in policy JP-J1) without priority being given to advanced manufacturing (because such a specific requirement is not justified). Part 17 needs to state that a site-specific HRA is required in relation to the nearby Rochdale Canal. Part 18 needs to clarify that land is to be provided to allow the expansion of the existing primary school and that the residential development will also need to make financial contributions towards the provision of additional places in existing primary and secondary school places. Those modifications will ensure that the relevant parts of the policy are justified and effective.
278. The new homes and industrial and warehousing floorspace proposed in policy JPA2 will deliver significant social and economic benefits on a well-located site in accordance with the Plan’s overall spatial strategy. We are satisfied that those benefits would outweigh the high harm that would be caused to the Green Belt and the other harms that we have identified above, provided that they are appropriately mitigated. On balance, therefore, we conclude that there are exceptional circumstances to justify removing land at Stakehill from the Green Belt and that policy JPA2 can be made sound by the modifications that we recommend [**MMCB7** and **MMCB8**].

## **Conclusion**

279. Subject to the main modifications described above, policy JPA2 Stakehill is justified and consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 10 - Is policy JPA3.1 Medipark justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

280. Policy JPA3.1 relates to a site of 21.4 hectares which is allocated for about 86,000 sqm of employment floorspace. It is located on the boundary between Manchester and Trafford and forms a close physical relationship with the JPA3.2 Timperley Wedge allocation. The whole site would be removed from the Green Belt. The allocation would also result in the consequential release of Green Belt land outside the site. This would involve a narrow sliver of land that would become disconnected from the main body of the Green Belt. The site is currently made up of open fields and school playing fields.
281. The allocation meets three of the site selection criteria. Primarily, it is close to Wythenshawe Hospital, which is home to the Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust and the wider Roundthorn Medipark Enterprise Zone. The development would benefit nearby deprived communities and take advantage of planned public transport improvements in the area, including the Metrolink Western Leg Extension. The evidence, and reasoned justification, refer to the

proximity of the proposed HS2 station. The Government has announced that HS2 will no longer be delivered. However, as set out above, there is still the intention for significant rail investment in relation to NPR in this area. Irrespective of HS2, the site is still well related to important employment locations and other public transport opportunities. As such, we do not believe that the cancellation of HS2 critically weakens the justification for this allocation. It would continue to meet the selection criteria in any event. Modifications will however be necessary to reflect the change in circumstances.

282. The intention is to attract investment from knowledge-based industries, which differs to the predominant focus on industry and/or logistics in the majority of the employment allocations. Not only is the site well located in this respect, the site would also offer a different type of location for office-based industries than that in the existing supply, which is focussed on the City Centre. In this respect, the allocation is clearly consistent with policies JP-Strat9 and JP-Strat10 in terms of protecting and enhancing southern competitiveness.
283. The strategic viability assessment considered JPA3.1 and JPA3.2 together. This concluded that in combination the two proposals would be viable. However, the assessment also found that due to necessary transport mitigation measures, Medipark would not be viable on its own. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that JPA3.2 will be delivered in advance of Medipark and thus it is probable that infrastructure necessary to deliver that site will also facilitate delivery here, thus reducing overall costs. The site is also expected to be highly attractive to the market and capable of attracting high values. On balance, we are content that there is a reasonable prospect that development will proceed toward the end of the plan period as expected.
284. The allocation will have a moderately harmful overall impact on the Green Belt, particularly in terms of checking unrestricted sprawl and the purpose of preventing the merging of Hale and Wythenshawe. Notwithstanding the existing high degree of built form in the vicinity of the site, the development would still appear as encroachment into the countryside. While the policy requires development to take appropriate account of historic landscape features and provide high quality landscaping, there will be an obvious change in the character of the site and an associated degree of harm.
285. The allocation does not contain any international, national or locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity. The policy does however recognise the presence of Fairywell Brook and existing landscape features that are likely to have some biodiversity interest. A small part of the site around Dobbinets Lane also falls within Flood Zone 3. The site also sits in the setting of listed buildings at Newall Green Farm. All such features are at some risk of harm associated with the development of this site.
286. However, we are satisfied that policy JPA3.1, applied with relevant thematic policies, will be effective in mitigating the impacts of development to an acceptable degree. Under policy JP-G9 any impacts on habitats and species

would need to be addressed in accordance with the established mitigation hierarchy and development would be required to provide a net gain in biodiversity. There should be ample space within the site to ensure there would be no unacceptable harm to biodiversity features or the settings of nearby heritage assets.

287. There is also recognition of the need for more vulnerable uses to avoid areas of higher flood risk and to have regard to historic landscape features. The requirement to provide additional green infrastructure, along with other measures outlined above, will help to minimise the inevitable harm to the character of the area. The policy seeks to ensure appropriate transport mitigations and improvements to public transport, pedestrian access and cycling are implemented. There is no clear evidence that the allocation would lead to unacceptable transport impacts.
288. For the reasons set out above under issue 6, policy JPA3.1 needs to be modified to ensure that it is internally consistent with other policies and effective in relation to transport mitigation, including reference to contributing to the Metrolink extension, provision of compensatory improvements to the remaining Green Belt. Heritage and flood risk.
289. Other modifications are also necessary to ensure the policy and reasoned justification reflects the current Use Class Order and clarifies that development will be limited to Class E(g). This is important in ensuring the development fulfils its strategic aims. Reference to the school playing fields needs to be modified to ensure consistency with local and national policy on development affecting open spaces. For the avoidance of doubt, the policy should also be amended to make it clear that the new spline road is intended to connect to the JPA3.2 Timperley Wedge allocation.
290. Overall, the new employment floorspace proposed in policy JPA3.1 will deliver significant social and economic benefits and will support the Plan's overall spatial strategy. Subject to suitable mitigation, we are satisfied that the benefits of development would outweigh the moderate harm that would be caused to the Green Belt and any other likely impacts identified above. There are therefore exceptional circumstances to justify removing land at Medipark from the Green Belt and policy JPA3.1 can be made sound by the recommended modifications as set out above [**MMCB9, MMCB10, MMCB11, MMCB16, MMCB17**].

## **Conclusion**

291. Subject to the main modifications set out above, we are satisfied that policy JPA3.1 is justified, consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 11 - Is policy JPA3.2 Timperley Wedge justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

292. Policy JPA3.2 proposes 2,500 new homes, 1,700 of which are intended to be within the plan period, 60,000 sqm of employment floorspace and a new local centre which is intended to deliver services and facilities for the new population. The allocation would result in the release of around 100 hectares of Green Belt. Around 90 hectares of 'retained' Green Belt is within the allocation area. This is intended to become a large rural park. The allocation would result in a consequential change to the Green Belt outside the site. This relates to an area of land which effectively washes over the M56 that would become disconnected from the remainder of the Green Belt. The allocation also identifies an area of 'safeguarded' land associated with the previously anticipated HS2 station.
293. The allocation meets four of the site selection criteria. It is close to Manchester Airport, it has the potential to have a positive impact on deprived communities to the east and is well related to, and may help facilitate, planned transport improvements such as the Metrolink Western Leg extension and wider east/west improvements to the Airport, Altrincham and Stockport. Development would also clearly be able to make a significant contribution to the housing and employment land supply of Trafford, providing scope for family housing in particular. There is clear consistency between the allocation and the spatial strategy as set out in policies JP-Strat9 and JP-Strat10.
294. As with Medipark, we do not consider the Government's announcement relating to HS2 alters the overall justification for the allocation. It would still meet the same selection criteria. Moreover, even if the specific benefits of HS2 are removed, the other benefits would still exist, including any associated with NPR. It is also important to note that the reasoned justification for the policy states that delivery of the site is not dependent on HS2 and thus this change does not alter the overall justification for allocating the site. Neither would it render the allocation unviable.
295. The allocation covers several Green Belt parcels and would result in a generally moderate to high degree of overall harm. This is particularly in relation to preventing unrestricted sprawl, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and maintaining the separation of Wythenshawe/Timperley and Hale. There would also be some weakening of existing Green Belt boundaries.
296. Development of the scale envisaged will clearly have negative impacts on the existing character of the area and will be seen as a significant encroachment into the countryside. Nevertheless, the policy seeks to minimise any impacts by setting out requirements for a masterplan, development to be of a high quality, delivery of enhanced green infrastructure and setting out guidelines for how development is expected to respond to features within and on the edge of the site.

297. For the reasons set out above under issue 6, the policy and reasoned justification need to be modified to ensure internal consistency and soundness in relation to masterplanning, infrastructure phasing and delivery strategy (parts 1, 4, 9, 11, 12, 34, 42) heritage assets (parts 36, 37), green infrastructure (parts 23, 24), compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt (part 21), including that to be retained within the central and southern parts of the allocation, strengthening Green Belt boundaries (part 22) and flooding and drainage (parts 42, 43, 44, 45). As well as these modifications, the policy should be modified to remove superfluous elements relating to employment and training (part 10), energy efficiency, renewable energy (parts 38, 39, 40) and broadband provision (part 41) which are more properly addressed elsewhere in the Plan.
298. The updated plan period necessitates modifications to the amount of housing and employment floorspace expected to come forward in the plan period. To be effective the policy and reasoned justification also need to be updated to reflect changes to the Use Class Order that introduced Class E.
299. Part 7 relates to self-build and custom build plots. As submitted, the policy requires "specific" provision for such development. However, as this is to be guided by the Council's self-build register at the time of any application, this should be modified to making "appropriate" provision.
300. The development will generate significant levels of additional traffic. However, neither the Highway Authority nor National Highways raised any concerns about the principle of development. The policy also requires any proposals to assess and mitigate for any transport impacts and deliver public transport, walking and cycling improvements. The policy identifies a number of potential road improvements. For reasons explained elsewhere, these shall be moved from part 17 to Appendix D and part 13 modified to cross refer to this and policy JP-C7. We are content that there is sufficient scope to address these matters at the application stage and development should not result in severe cumulative transport impacts.
301. It is not currently anticipated that the development would be required to contribute to the delivery of the Manchester Airport Metrolink. Therefore, part 15 should be modified to remove this reference. If contributions were to be considered necessary to mitigate impacts, this could be picked up through the masterplanning/application process in the normal way.
302. To be effective, the references to the local centre in part 18 should be modified to be clear about what is expected in terms of land uses. The reference to 3,000 sqm of floorspace is also not based on robust evidence of need and should be deleted. The appropriate scale of provision can be assessed at the application stage. The policy and reasoned justification do however need to be clear about the function of any centre to ensure it would not unacceptably harm the vitality and viability of other centres in the area.

303. Part 19 should be modified to ensure internal consistency relating to education provision, including a cross-reference to policy JP-P5. This should be clear that contributions would only be needed where justified. The policy would ensure provision of a new primary school. The expectation is that this should be located near to the local centre. This is logical but the policy needs to be modified to make this clear. There is no specific justification for the policy to require healthcare facilities in this location. Any such contributions would need to be considered in line with thematic policies. The requirement in part 20 should therefore be deleted.
304. A modification is needed to part 26 in relation to Manor Farm. As submitted it is not clear what is required or whether new access and parking is justified. The modification therefore provides clarity that the intention is to enhance sports facilities that meet local needs. What form this takes can be considered through the masterplan. To be effective, part 27 requires further clarity in relation to expectations for development associated with Hale Country Club. The reasoned justification also establishes the potential to redevelop the Bowdon Rugby Club site and relocate it elsewhere within the site. This is not reflected in policy and thus a new criterion is needed to remedy this omission.
305. The allocation does not contain any internationally designated sites of importance for biodiversity. There are however, two sites of biological importance within the allocation. The Ponds at Davenport Green are mostly within the area identified as being retained as Green Belt. The ponds support a large population of Great Crested Newts and other amphibians, invertebrates and plant species. The Davenport Green SBI, which is designated as ancient woodland, is located within the 'safeguarded land' area of the allocation. Any development proposals for that area of land would be considered under a review of the Plan. There is sufficient space in the allocation to ensure these areas are adequately protected. As modified, both the site and thematic policies would provide an appropriate framework for assessing the effect of development. There is no reason to conclude that there would be any undue impact on either SBI in principle.
306. However, as submitted, the revised Green Belt boundary cuts through the Davenport Green SBI. Importantly, this area is not intended to form part of the developable area of the site. As such, there is no need to release this land from the Green Belt to deliver the housing or employment benefits. The existing SBI boundary can also meet the requirements of NPPF 143f. On this basis, there are no exceptional circumstances to remove this part of the SBI from the Green Belt and thus it is not justified. The Green Belt boundary on Pictures 11.7, 11.9 and 11.10 should therefore be redrawn to reflect the SBI boundary, with associated changes made to the Policies Map. This modification would also provide further comfort in terms of any potential harmful effects on the SBI.
307. There is some potential for other biodiversity assets to be present across the site, including in relation to Fairywell and Timperley Brooks. It is not unusual for development of this scale to have to address such matters. Local and national

policy provide sufficient comfort that any issues that arise at the application stage can be adequately addressed. This includes parts 31 and 32 which require retention of existing landscape features and creation of landscape buffers. There is nothing to suggest that the potential effects on biodiversity should render the site unsound in principle. Nevertheless, a modification is necessary to parts 28 and 29 to cross-refer to policy JP-G9. This will ensure the approach is internally consistent and consistent with national policy.

308. There is no reason to conclude that matters relating to drainage and noise and air quality cannot be adequately addressed through the masterplanning process. Some parts of the site are within flood Zones 2 and 3. However, we are content that the site selection process considered this issue satisfactorily and that the allocation is of sufficient scale to allow development to proceed without unduly impinging on these areas and/or ensure appropriate mitigation. We are satisfied that the policy as modified, including the need for a comprehensive drainage strategy, will be effective in this regard. Part 46 does not need to refer to Environmental (Noise) Regulations and this should therefore be deleted.
309. Picture 11.10 is identified as the 'Allocation Policy Plan'. This illustrates broadly where different land uses are expected to be delivered. Given there is to be a detailed masterplan, it would not be effective or justified for this inset map to dictate the extent of different uses. This might also lead to the masterplan, which will be of a much finer grain of detail and analysis, being inconsistent with the inset map and thus with the policy. To avoid this unintended consequence, modifications are needed to various parts to make it clear that Picture 11.10 is indicative only.
310. Paragraph 143c of the NPPF indicates that, where necessary, areas of 'safeguarded land' can be identified between the urban area and Green Belt to meet longer-term development needs.
311. The area of safeguarded land was originally intended to provide longer term opportunities to deliver growth associated with HS2. As noted elsewhere, this project is no longer being delivered in this area. The reasoned justification refers to the exceptional circumstances for taking the land out of the Green Belt being directly related to the economic benefits associated with HS2. However, it also states that, in the longer term, this area may also benefit from Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) or an equivalent project. The Government have announced an intention to deliver NPR. The economic argument for safeguarding this land may still therefore exist. There may also be other opportunities that could be delivered through the Government's 'Network North' proposals that may be relevant to this area in time. It therefore remains likely that there is significant scope for transport infrastructure investment in this area. In turn, there remains the potential for development to come forward in this vicinity that can benefit from such investment.

312. Importantly, the designation of 'safeguarded land' means that no development will take place until a review of this, or other relevant district local plan, has taken place. This process will be able to assess the situation at the time and determine whether it would be appropriate to identify the land for development.
313. We cannot ignore the fact that the changes to HS2 have clearly altered and perhaps weakened the justification to safeguard this land to an extent. Nevertheless, based on the evidence before us, we still consider that the potential for other infrastructure development in the area provides a justification for safeguarding the land and providing an opportunity to see how such issues resolve themselves. We consider this to be a logical and pragmatic approach in the circumstances.
314. The safeguarding of land is therefore justified in principle. As well as modifications to reflect changes to HS2, the policy needs to be amended to ensure consistency with national policy. In particular, it should provide clarity that development of the site would only be permitted following an update of the Plan and removing the unjustified caveat that development could only occur once the whole of JPA3.2 and any station has been implemented. This is pre-judging the outcome of any review and should be removed. As any changes to Green Belt boundaries must demonstrate 'exceptional circumstances' it is not possible for this Plan to dictate that it definitely would return to Green Belt in the event the anticipated infrastructure development is not delivered. While this may be an option, it would have to be assessed through a review of the Plan. Accordingly, this criterion should be deleted. Finally, the cross-reference to policy JP-G11 is made defunct by the deletion of that policy, as set out in issue 48 and thus should be removed. We have also altered the modification to Picture 11.46 to properly identify the safeguarded land; previously it was simply identified for housing which is not accurate **[MMTr1]**.
315. The allocation will provide substantial social and economic benefits and support the overall spatial strategy of the area. Subject to the mitigation measures set out in the policy, as modified, we are satisfied that these benefits significantly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm that would be likely to be caused. There are therefore exceptional circumstances to justify the release of Green Belt to allocate JPA3.2. The policy can also be made sound through the main modifications set out above **[MMCB12, MMCB13, MMCB14, MMCB15]**.

## Conclusion

316. Subject to the main modifications set out above we are satisfied that Policy JPA3.2 Timperley Wedge is justified, consistent with national policy and will be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 12 - Is policy JPA4 Bewshill Farm justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

317. Policy JPA4 Bewshill Farm is a site of 5.6 hectares located in the south of Bolton, close to the border with Salford. It is within the M61 Corridor adjacent to an existing industrial and warehouse location known as Logistics North, which is currently experiencing pressure for additional development.
318. The site would be a modest extension to Logistics North, and it would provide for around 21,000 sqm of industrial and warehousing floorspace, which would complement the uses at Logistics North, and from which access would be taken.
319. The strategic viability assessment found the site to be viable and it is being actively promoted. We are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that the site would be completed within the plan period.
320. The site is entirely within the Green Belt and the development would cause low harm overall to Green Belt purposes<sup>89</sup> including relating to urban sprawl and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
321. The site has a prominent frontage with the A6, and high-quality landscaping along this boundary would be required. As the site is relatively small, masterplanning is not necessary.
322. For the reasons set out in issue 6, changes are needed to policy JPA4 including the reasoned justification in relation to the requirements for transport infrastructure, compensatory improvements to the Green Belt and minerals safeguarding areas.
323. The site has good access to public transport and is close to the M61. The allocation is within the Wigan-Bolton Growth Corridor (policy JP-Strat8) which refers to a regionally significant area of economic and residential development. The allocation would provide additional employment floorspace contributing towards boosting northern competitiveness in accordance with JP-Strat6. It would provide economic and social benefits on a well-located site. We are satisfied that those benefits would outweigh the low harm that would be caused to the Green Belt and the other harms that we have identified above, provided that they are appropriately mitigated. We conclude that there are exceptional circumstances to remove land from the Green Belt and that the allocation is justified [**MMBo2, MMBo3**].

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<sup>89</sup> JPA4 Bewshill Farm Allocation Topic Paper [10.02.05]

## Conclusion

324. Subject to the main modifications set out above we are satisfied that Policy JPA4 Bewshill Farm is justified, consistent with national policy and will be effective in achieving sustainable development.

### **Issue 13 - Is policy JPA5 Chequerbent North justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

325. Policy JPA5 Chequerbent North is a site of 16.3 hectares comprised partly of previously developed land with greenfield land enclosed by hedgerows around most of the site. There is an industrial development located to the south of the site. The site is approximately 4.5km southwest of Bolton town centre.

326. There is strong demand for employment uses in the area and the site can accommodate around 25,000sqm of industrial and warehousing uses. Access would be from the A6 with a potential additional access via Snydale Way. The site is close to Junction 5 of the M61.

327. The strategic viability assessment found the site to be viable and the site is being actively promoted. We are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that it would be completed within the plan period.

328. The site is entirely within the Green Belt. A small area of housing which is additional land outside the allocation is also to be removed from the Green Belt. The development in its entirety would cause high harm overall to Green Belt purposes<sup>90</sup> including relating to urban sprawl and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The site plays an important role in preventing Westhoughton and Hunger Hill/Bolton from merging.

329. For the reasons set out in issue 6, changes are needed to policy JPA5 Chequerbent North including the reasoned justification in relation to the requirements for transport infrastructure, compensatory improvements to the Green Belt and minerals safeguarding areas.

330. As well as the general requirement for transport infrastructure, changes are needed to part 4 of the policy in respect of the Highway Network, improvements to Chequerbent roundabout and other improvements. Part 5 of the policy indicates the need for landscaping along Snydale Way and to the north along the M61; a change to this element of the policy is required. The site has trees and hedgerows along the eastern boundary which provide screening and will need to be retained.

331. Chequerbent Embankment was designated as a Scheduled Monument in February 2022. A new policy requirement relating to this is therefore necessary. A modification additional to those consulted on removes the word ancient to

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<sup>90</sup> JPA5 Chequerbent North Allocation Topic Paper [10.02.06]

ensure the correct term is used. The changes will ensure that these parts of policy JPA5 Chequerbent North are effective and justified.

332. The allocation is within the Wigan-Bolton Growth Corridor (policy JP-Strat8) which refers to a regionally significant area of economic and residential development. The allocation would provide additional employment floorspace contributing towards boosting northern competitiveness in accordance with JP-Strat6. It would provide economic and social benefits on a well-located site. We are satisfied that those benefits would outweigh the high harm that would be caused to the Green Belt and the other harms that we have identified above, provided that they are appropriately mitigated. We conclude that there are exceptional circumstances to remove land from the Green Belt and that the allocation is justified [MMBo4 and MMBo5].

## Conclusion

333. Subject to the main modifications set out above we are satisfied that policy JPA5 Chequerbent North is justified, consistent with national policy and will be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## Issue 14 - Is policy JPA6 West of Wingates/M61 Junction 6 justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?

334. Policy JPA6 West of Wingates/M61 Junction 6 is 184 hectares and is located in the west of Bolton. It is immediately adjacent to the existing Wingates Industrial Estate and is close to the Borough of Wigan.
335. During the examination the GMCA confirmed that the site can accommodate around 440,000 sq.m of industrial and warehousing floorspace, rather than large scale warehousing and advanced manufacturing.
336. The strategic viability assessment found the allocation to be viable and it is being actively promoted. Part of the site has planning permission for employment floorspace and development would come forward on a phased basis of approximately 50,000 sq.m per year<sup>91</sup>. We are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that the development could take place within the plan period.
337. The allocation is entirely within the Green Belt, additional land outside the allocation is also to be removed from the Green Belt as a consequence of the allocation. This is an area of mainly already built development. The site is split into two parcels for the purposes of the Green Belt assessment with harm overall to Green Belt purposes being moderate to high and high<sup>92</sup> including relating to urban sprawl and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

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<sup>91</sup> JPA6 West of Wingates/M61 Junction 6 Topic Paper [10.02.07]

<sup>92</sup> JPA6 West of Wingates/M61 Junction 6 Topic Paper [10.02.07]

338. The allocation does not contain any international or national sites of importance for biodiversity. However, Four Gates SBI is within the site, and it contains priority habitats comprising woodland, hedgerows and ponds. It is located within an area of undulating landscape and the site is sloping. Development of this scale and type is likely to be prominent in views including from the extensive network of rights of way running through the site. The rights of way network would need to be protected to ensure its integrity is retained. The Green Belt boundary at Westhoughton Golf Course would require further reinforcement. Development of this nature is likely to have some impact in terms of light pollution and it will be necessary to ensure the effects are properly mitigated.
339. Various changes to policy JPA6 are required to ensure it is justified and effective in securing appropriate mitigation. For the reasons set out in issue 6, changes are needed to policy JPA6 West of Wingates/M61 Junction 6 including the reasoned justification, in relation to masterplanning, transport infrastructure, landscaping, biodiversity, Green Belt boundaries, compensatory improvements to the Green Belt and minerals safeguarding areas. A modification is required to Picture 11.11, the District Overview map, as a consequence of changes elsewhere in the Plan. We have also made an amendment to the main modification of Picture 11.11 to reflect changes in planning permission on the site.
340. It is also necessary to reflect the proposed types of uses with a change to part 1. In relation to transport infrastructure, a change to the reasoned justification at paragraph 11.103 explains that where practicable development should protect the alignment of a sustainable transport corridor which runs across the site from Westhoughton to junction 6 of the M61. The changes will ensure that these parts of policy JPA6 West of Wingates/M61 Junction 6 are effective and justified.
341. The allocation is within the Wigan-Bolton Growth Corridor (policy JP-Strat8) which refers to a regionally significant area of economic and residential development. The allocation would provide a significant amount of employment floorspace contributing towards boosting northern competitiveness in accordance with JP-Strat6. It would provide economic and social benefits on a well-located site. We are satisfied that those benefits would outweigh the moderate to high harm that would be caused to the Green Belt and the other harms that we have identified above, provided that they are appropriately mitigated. We conclude that there are exceptional circumstances to remove land from the Green Belt and that the allocation is justified [**MMBo1**, **MMBo6** and **MMBo7**].

## Conclusion

342. Subject to the main modifications set out above we are satisfied that Policy JPA6 West of Wingates/M61 Junction 6 is justified, consistent with national policy and will be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 15 - Is policy JPA7 Elton Reservoir justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

343. Policy JPA7 Elton Reservoir is a site of 251.6 hectares located in Bury. Radcliffe is to the south and Bury to the northeast. The site includes reservoirs, agricultural land and several residential, employment and agricultural properties.
344. The allocation would deliver around 3,500 homes in total. The strategic viability assessment found the site to be viable and the site is being actively promoted. However, there is significant infrastructure required particularly in the early phases of development including a link road. This may need some element of 'forward funding'<sup>93</sup> but there is no evidence to suggest that this would result in any delays to development coming forward. Development would come forward on a phased basis. As part of the examination, it was clarified that around 2,100 homes are expected to be delivered within the plan period. We are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that this would be achieved, with the rest of the development coming forward after 2039.
345. The allocation contains land which is mostly within the Green Belt. However, around 114 hectares will remain in the Green Belt. The allocation was in several parcels for the purposes of the Green Belt assessment. Overall, the site would cause high harm to Green Belt purposes relating to urban sprawl, preventing towns from merging, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and in preserving the setting and special character of historic towns.
346. The area to be retained within the Green Belt will provide a significant green corridor. However, the boundary of the area to be developed with that of the retained Green Belt would need to be defined or strengthened to ensure it would comprise recognisable physical features which are likely to be permanent.
347. The allocation would deliver a significant number of market and also affordable homes in accordance with part 5 of the policy. However, it would have a significant impact on traffic in the area with some capacity constraints already identified at peak periods. The allocation would need to deliver key infrastructure including a strategic north-south spine road connecting the A58 to Bury Road, Radcliffe, and a route suitable for buses which would connect to Spring Lane, Radcliffe. This part of the route would contribute towards the regeneration of Radcliffe town centre by providing direct public transport access to the facilities and services there. Active travel routes and highway improvement works would also be required. The rate of housing development

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<sup>93</sup> JPA7 Elton Reservoir Topic Paper [10.03.43]

will also need to be controlled to ensure it is coordinated with infrastructure delivery.

348. The site includes Elton Reservoir, and this would need structural upgrades. The scale of development would create additional demand for school places for primary provision and a secondary school should that not be delivered in an alternative way. The scale of development would also facilitate the need for local centres to be provided.
349. The allocation would be largely bounded by existing development but contains landscape features such as the river valley, the reservoirs, and the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal, as well as open fields. The development of the site would cause considerable harm to the character and appearance of the area. However, the policy seeks to minimise any impacts by setting out requirements for a masterplan, and the policy would ensure the design and layout would be integrated with the surrounding communities. The retained Green Belt area would provide significant parkland and the development would enhance and integrate this and the main landscape assets.
350. Some parts of the site are at risk of fluvial and/or surface water flooding including the River Irwell, Elton and Withins Reservoirs, and additional flooding elsewhere such as Crow Trees Farm Brook. However, there is sufficient land at low flood risk appropriately located within the allocation to accommodate all of the development proposed. Part 14 of the policy adequately addresses this issue. Old Hall Farmhouse is a Grade II Listed Building within the site with development having the potential to affect its setting and there are other heritage assets nearby.
351. The allocation does not contain any international or national sites of importance for biodiversity. However, there are several SBIs including Elton Reservoir; Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal (East); Elton Goit; Withins Reservoir; Black Lane Marl Pits and Radcliffe Wetlands, and the site is mainly within the Irwell Valley wildlife corridor. There are priority habitats on the site including ponds, hedgerows, semi-improved grassland and wetlands. There are a significant number of species including great crested newts, jack snipe, water rail, fungus, grasses, mammals, invertebrates and vascular plants, as well as many other notable species that are supported on the site during the seasons. Habitats and features of the natural environment will be lost or otherwise affected with adverse consequences for protected species and other wildlife.
352. Information has been provided to the examination by local residents and ecologists undertaking regular surveys in relation to this site. There is also evidence provided by the developer. As set out in Issue 5 we are satisfied with the GMCA approach to considering ecology and biodiversity of the sites in relation to the site selection methodology and subsequent allocations in the Plan.

353. Within this allocation, the retained Green Belt area would also address ecology and biodiversity, including habitats, as well as balancing this with recreation for the local communities and any working agricultural holdings. It is necessary to modify the boundary of the retained area of the Green Belt to include the whole of Elton Goit SBI, this would significantly reduce the impact of development on the SBI. We are satisfied that policy JPA7, applied with relevant thematic policies, will be effective in mitigating the impacts of development to an acceptable degree. Impacts on priority habitats and species would need to be addressed in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy set out in policy JP-G9, and the development would need to achieve a net gain in biodiversity of no less than 10%.
354. In order to ensure that policy JPA7 is effective, including in terms of addressing the issues identified above, modifications are required. For the reasons set out under issue 6, changes are needed to the policy and reasoned justification in relation to masterplanning and a phasing and delivery strategy including when residential development will come forward; self-build homes; transport infrastructure; education, heritage assets including Old Hall Farmhouse; boundary to the Green Belt; compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt; flood risk; biodiversity; and minerals safeguarding areas.
355. For reasons set out above, part 1 of the policy needs amending to indicate the 2,100 homes would be delivered in the plan period instead of 1,900. Part 2 needs modifying to ensure housing delivery in controlled in line with the implementation of infrastructure. Part 3 of the policy relates to secondary school provision, should this not be delivered locally elsewhere the policy needs a modification to reflect a requirement for it to be provided including in accordance with policy JP-P5.
356. As submitted, part 8 of the policy does not provide clarity as to how many local centres would be required. The policy needs modifying to state two centres are to be provided and these are to serve purely local needs. Part 11 relates to the provision of recreational facilities. However, it was intended that this should specifically apply to the replacement of existing recreation space at Warth Fold. The policy needs modification to clarify this, and to ensure a suitable equivalent is provided. The boundary of the retained Green Belt area of the site also needs to reflect the changes around Elton Goit SBI and Pictures 11.15 and 11.16 need modifying accordingly. We have made a further change to the name of Elton Goyt to Elton Goit to ensure it is correctly named. These changes are needed for effectiveness.
357. The new homes proposed in policy JPA7 Elton Reservoir will deliver significant housing and highway improvements on a well-located site in accordance with the Plan's overall spatial strategy. We are satisfied that those benefits would outweigh the high harm that would be caused to the Green Belt and the other harms that we have identified above, provided that they are appropriately mitigated. On balance, therefore, we conclude that there are exceptional

circumstances to justify removing land from the Green Belt and that policy JPA7 can be made sound by the modifications that we recommend [MMBu1, MMBu2, MMBu3 and MMBu4].

## Conclusion

358. Subject to the main modifications set out above we are satisfied that Policy JPA7 Elton Reservoir is justified, consistent with national policy and will be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## Issue 16 - Is policy JPA8 Seedfield justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?

359. Policy JPA8 Seedfield is a site of 5.15 hectares and was formerly occupied by Seedfield High School before more recently being used as a training centre. The site is well-connected to the existing urban area with development on three sides and is less than 2 kilometres from Bury town centre. It has an approximate developable area of 3.46 ha. Around 50% of the allocation is previously developed.
360. The site would deliver around 140 homes. The strategic viability assessment found the allocation to be viable and it is being actively promoted. We are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that the development could take place within the plan period.
361. The site is wholly within the Green Belt. There is a single parcel of land for the Green Belt assessment which would cause very low harm to Green Belt purposes overall including relating to urban sprawl and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment as it is bounded on three sides by development. The boundary of the Green Belt would follow recognisable features.
362. Part of the site is in use as playing fields. There is an opportunity to retain and enhance existing recreation facilities or provide suitable replacement facilities should this be necessary if this part of the site is developed. There is also an opportunity to include active travel links to Burrs Country Park and employment opportunities in Bury town centre. The allocation does not contain any international or national sites of importance for biodiversity. However, there are wildlife corridors to the west and south of the site.
363. Various changes to policy JPA8 Seedfield are required to ensure it is justified and effective in securing appropriate mitigation. For the reasons set out in issue 6, changes are needed to the policy and reasoned justification, in relation to the requirements for transport infrastructure, flood risk and utilities, biodiversity, Green Belt boundaries, compensatory improvements to the Green Belt and minerals safeguarding areas.

364. It is also necessary to ensure that the policy is consistent with national policy and sufficiently flexible if the existing playing fields are lost to development, and that a suitable replacement should be made. The policy includes reference to the retention and enhancement of the wildlife corridors to the west and south relating to health benefits. However, it is not necessary to include this as it would not be effective, and the policy also referred to JP-G8 which has been deleted, so it is necessary to remove this.
365. The significant benefits of housing development here would outweigh the very low harm to the Green Belt. Given the importance of diversifying the supply of housing in Bury which this site would contribute to, we are therefore satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances to justify removing the land at Seedfield from the Green Belt. We are content that policy JPA8 can be made sound by the modifications identified above and that any adverse impacts of development can be adequately mitigated [MMBu5, MMBu6].

## **Conclusion**

366. Subject to the main modifications set out above we are satisfied that Policy JPA8 Seedfield is justified, consistent with national policy and will be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 17 - Is policy JPA9 Walshaw justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

367. During the examination, the GMCA proposed that allocation JPA9 Walshaw should be deleted from the Plan as they considered it was no longer needed due to updated evidence about housing land supply in Bury. However, for reasons set out elsewhere in this report, we are satisfied that the overall number and distribution of new homes proposed in policy JP-H1 Table 7.2 (as modified) is justified. Furthermore, the modification to the plan period that we recommend results in a reduced flexibility allowance in the overall housing land supply for the plan area. This reinforces the need for the allocation to help deliver the spatial strategy. Therefore, we consider the allocation of the site is justified in principle as it makes an important contribution to meeting housing needs in Bury, the northern areas, and the city region as a whole.
368. Allocation JPA9 is 64 hectares in total. It lies in the west of the Borough, 1.6 km from Bury town centre. The land is bounded by the urban areas of Tottington to the north, Woolfold and Elton to the east, Lowercroft to the south and Walshaw to the west. The site is mainly agricultural in use and contains three reservoirs fed by Walshaw Brook. The River Irwell lies approximately 1.5 km to the east of the allocation.

369. The site would deliver around 1,250 homes. The strategic viability assessment indicates that development would not be viable in relation to contributions to strategic transport. However, the evidence indicates that if sales values were 5% higher than assumed in the 2019 assessment the site would be viable. For the reasons set out earlier, more recent evidence indicates that house prices have increased significantly more than build costs since 2019. The site is being actively promoted. We are therefore satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that development could take place during the plan period.
370. The amount of Green Belt to be removed is 60.91 hectares. The allocation is in a single Green Belt parcel for the purposes of the Green Belt assessment. Overall, the site would cause moderate harm to Green Belt purposes relating to urban sprawl, preventing towns from merging, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and in preserving the setting and special character of historic towns. The boundary with the Green Belt to the southeast of the allocation would need strengthening to ensure it would comprise recognisable physical features which are likely to be permanent.
371. The allocation would be largely bounded by existing development. The development of the site would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area, but with the visibility of the allocation relating predominately to the adjacent built-up area. The policy would ensure the design and layout would be integrated with the surrounding communities. The site would deliver a significant number of market and affordable homes.
372. The site contains watercourses but is located all within Flood Zone 1. The allocation does not contain any international or national sites of importance for biodiversity. However, there are woodland areas, scrub, rivers and lakes and other wetlands, grassland and hedgerows with links to green infrastructure corridors in the area. Impacts on priority habitats and species would need to be addressed in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy set out in policy JP-G9, and the development would need to achieve a net gain in biodiversity of no less than 10%. Christ Church, Walshaw a grade II Listed building is close by, with development having the potential to affect its setting.
373. There would be a considerable increase in extra traffic generated on local roads. However, the allocation would include a strategic through road, which would also incorporate active travel and public transport. These would deliver significant highway improvements in the area. The policy also includes provision for active travel links to recreation areas and Walshaw village and Bury town centre. The scale of development would create additional demand for school places.
374. In order to ensure that policy JPA9 is effective, including in terms of addressing the issues identified above, modifications are required. For the reasons set out under issue 6, changes are needed to the policy and reasoned justification in relation to masterplanning and a phasing and delivery strategy; self-build

homes; transport infrastructure including in relation to the strategic through road and linking the allocation to neighbourhoods with key destinations; education, boundary to the Green Belt; compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt; flood risk; biodiversity; and minerals safeguarding areas.

375. Part 11 of the policy includes reference to blue and green infrastructure relating to health benefits. However, it is not necessary to include this in order to be effective, and the policy also referred to JP-G8 which has been deleted so it is necessary to remove this. Part 8 currently refers to retail, health and community facilities. However, as it is not intended that these facilities serve the wider community, the policy needs to clarify this would be for purely local needs.

376. The new homes proposed in policy JPA9 Walshaw will deliver significant housing on a well-located site in accordance with the Plan's overall spatial strategy and it would provide a new link road to help resolve some existing traffic issues. We are satisfied that those benefits would outweigh the moderate harm that would be caused to the Green Belt and the other harms that we have identified above, provided that they are appropriately mitigated. On balance, therefore, we conclude that there are exceptional circumstances to justify removing land from the Green Belt and that policy JPA9 can be made sound by the modifications that we recommend [MMBu7, MMBu8].

## Conclusion

377. Subject to the main modifications set out above we are satisfied that Policy JPA9 Walshaw is justified, consistent with national policy and will be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## Issue 18 - Is policy JPA10 Global Logistics justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?

378. Policy JPA10 relates to a 19.9 hectare site which is proposed to deliver around 25,000 sqm of employment floorspace. It was clarified during the examination that this is intended to be primarily for logistics and warehousing.

379. The site is adjacent to the recently developed Global Logistics park. Parts of JPA10 were identified as providing the land to accommodate environmental mitigation for that development. This included providing habitats for Great Crested Newts. This was secured through the permission for the existing site. It also adjoins the Cotterill Clough SSSI and a designated SBI. Part of the SBI is also within the allocation, though the GMCA proposed to remove this<sup>94</sup> from the allocation prior to the hearings.

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<sup>94</sup> GMCA69

380. The allocation would result in the loss of around 12 hectares of Green Belt, though this would be reduced if the SBI were to be excluded from the allocation. The overall harm to the Green Belt would be moderate. It would, however, result in discernible encroachment into the countryside and appear as additional sprawl of the existing built-up area. The presence of the SBI and SSSI would nevertheless provide a relatively strong visual boundary and limit to encroachment.
381. The Topic Paper<sup>95</sup> highlights a number of risks associated with biodiversity which would need further assessment. The policy expects development to minimise any impact on nationally and locally designated assets of conservation, including any existing landscape mitigation affected by the development. However, the shape and nature of the site, as well as the location of biodiversity assets within it, suggest that accommodating the amount of floorspace expected would not be straight forward. This is particularly the case when considering the location of areas identified to provide mitigation for the existing development, the likely access point, the need for an internal distributor road or roads and the resulting limited space into which new units could be accommodated.
382. We are not persuaded that there would be a reasonable prospect of development being able to meet the necessary policy requirements. Indeed, the GMCA themselves acknowledged that delivering the intended floorspace without affecting the existing mitigation measures would be “challenging”. Given the constrained nature of the site, the proximity of both the SSSI and SBI and lack of space to provide decent separation or buffers, we concur with this conclusion.
383. It was put to us that there may be land elsewhere where the existing mitigation measures could be relocated. This land would also presumably need to accommodate any additional mitigation that might be needed from the allocation itself. However, even if alternative locations were to exist, we cannot be certain that such land or any scheme would be acceptable in terms of the mitigation hierarchy set out in NPPF 180 or policy JP-G9. This only adds to the lack of certainty regarding the potential impact of development and the ability to provide suitable mitigation.
384. The allocation would provide a relatively small amount of employment floorspace, both in its own right and in comparison to the overall requirement. The main benefits would be qualitative and derived from the relative proximity of the site to the airport, the associated Enterprise Zone and the adjacent development. Even in this respect, around 25,000 sqm of floorspace, delivered as either a single unit or several smaller units, would not deliver significant benefits. These would contribute to the spatial strategy and maintaining southern competitiveness. Nevertheless, this floorspace does not appear critical

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<sup>95</sup> 10.04.03

to the delivery of this strategy or the economic needs of Manchester. We have therefore given only moderate weight to the economic benefits of the allocation.

385. Again, we note the site promoter has suggested the site could accommodate additional floorspace within the site. There is no clear evidence before us that this is achievable. Regardless, at the scales proposed, this would also not outweigh the likely risks associated with the development in any event.
386. The limited benefits of any development do not therefore result in the exceptional circumstances needed to justify the release of Green Belt in this location, even accounting for the proposed boundary changes. The allocation therefore conflicts with NPPF 140. While this would not affect the whole site, what would remain would be even more constrained and unlikely to be able to accommodate the amount of floorspace envisaged. It would also not address our concerns relating to the potential impacts on biodiversity assets. Indeed, any reduction in the size of the site would only serve to exacerbate the issue by increasing the likely density of development. In this regard, the allocation would also conflict with NPPF 174.

## Conclusion

387. For the reasons given above, we conclude that JPA10 Global Logistics is not justified, consistent with national policy or effective in achieving sustainable development. Accordingly, the allocation should be deleted from the Plan and consequential modifications made to other policies, inset maps and the Policies Map [MMM1, MMM2].

## **Issue 19 - Are policies JPA12 Beal Valley and JPA14 Broadbent Moss justified and consistent with national policy, and would they be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

388. Policies JPA12 and JPA14 relate to two adjoining allocations between Shaw, Sholver, Oldham and Royton.
389. The JPA12 Beal Valley allocation comprises 51 hectares of mainly agricultural land between Shaw centre to the north; urban development along Oldham Road to the west; a Metrolink line in the valley bottom to the east; and Bullcote Lane to the south. The site also contains woodland, wet grassland and a cricket ground.
390. The JPA14 Broadbent Moss allocation comprises 82 hectares of mainly open land. Part of the site is immediately to the south of allocation JPA12 and Bullcote Lane, adjoining an existing industrial estate and the Metrolink line. This land is partially under development<sup>96</sup>. The larger part of JPA14, much of which has been quarried and used for landfill, lies to the east of the Metrolink line, rising up to Ripponden Road (A672) to the east.

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<sup>96</sup> Land at Hebron Street has planning permission for 77 dwellings.

391. Policy JPA12 proposes around 480 new homes served by a new spine road from Oldham Road which would connect to allocation JPA14 to the south. Policy JPA14 proposes around 1,450 new homes, a local centre, a new Metrolink stop and around 21,000 sqm of employment floorspace as an extension to the existing industrial estate. Whilst the detailed alignment of the spine road will be determined through the masterplanning process, it will be extended from JPA12 across JPA14, with a new bridge over the Metrolink line, to join Ripponden Road. Extensive areas of green and blue infrastructure would be provided on both allocations, particularly alongside the river and Metrolink line.
392. Both sites are largely contained by existing urban development and transport infrastructure. The northern part of JPA12 is within 800 metres of Shaw centre and Metrolink stop, and JPA14 is close to deprived areas in Sholver. Together they would deliver a new through route between Oldham Road and Ripponden Road and contribute towards a new Metrolink stop, thereby helping to address existing traffic congestion in the area. Both sites would deliver a significant number of market and affordable homes, including larger family houses. Policy JPA14 would also provide additional industrial and warehouse floorspace and therefore facilitate economic activity and new job opportunities.
393. The strategic viability assessment indicates that the Beal Valley development would not be viable whereas Broadbent Moss would be marginally viable. However, the evidence indicates that if sales values were 15% higher than assumed in the 2019 assessment both sites would be viable. For the reasons set out earlier, more recent evidence indicates that house prices have increased significantly more than build costs since 2019. Furthermore, both sites are being actively promoted. We are therefore satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that the proposed developments could take place during the plan period with the larger allocation continuing to be built out into the 2040s as assumed in the Plan.
394. However, most of the land in both allocations is currently in the Green Belt and the developments would cause harm to Green Belt purposes including in relation to urban sprawl, safeguarding the countryside, and preventing the merging of Shaw, Sholver and Royton. Taken together, the developments would cause high harm to the Green Belt<sup>97</sup>.
395. The Beal Valley development would significantly alter the character and appearance of the greenfield land on the western side of the valley sloping down to the river and Metrolink line. Agricultural land would be lost, and the settings of two listed buildings would be affected. Around 20% of the site is at risk of flooding<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>97</sup> The Green Belt assessment found that JPA12 would cause high harm, and JPA14 would cause moderate-high harm.

<sup>98</sup> JPA12 Beal Valley Allocation Topic Paper section 11 [10.05.32].

396. The industrial and housing development on the western part of the Broadbent Moss allocation would be contained by roads, the Metrolink line and existing development. However, the new homes on the larger eastern part of the site would represent a significant extension of the urban area into the open land on that side of the valley. The development would be prominent when viewed from various vantage points, including the Green Belt to the north and Ripponden Road to the east. Around 12% of the site is at risk of flooding<sup>99</sup>.
397. The allocations do not contain any international or national sites of importance for biodiversity. However, the locally designated Shaw Side and Royton Moss SBIs are located within the allocations, and both sites contain priority habitats including wet grassland, broadleaved woodland, ponds, watercourses and hedgerows. The land has the potential to support priority species including bats, badgers, farmland birds and water vole, along with many other types of wildlife<sup>100</sup>. The recreational value of the various public rights of way that cross the open land on both sides of the valley would be considerably reduced as a result of the proposals. The developments could generate additional traffic on the local road network, parts of which are already congested, with consequential impacts on air quality.
398. Whilst parts of both sites are at risk of fluvial and/or surface water flooding, there is sufficient land at low flood risk appropriately located within the allocations to accommodate all of the development proposed. The flood risk areas could be incorporated into the proposed multi-functional green and blue infrastructure network.
399. In order to ensure that policies JPA12 and JPA14 are effective, including in terms of addressing the issues identified above, modifications are required. For the reasons set out elsewhere in this report, changes are needed to the requirements in both policies relating to masterplanning and a phasing and delivery strategy; affordable housing; transport infrastructure; compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt; landscape character; biodiversity; open space, sport and recreation; the South Pennine Moors; and minerals safeguarding areas.
400. In addition to the above, further changes are required to policy JPA12 parts 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19, and reasoned justification, relating to the main points of vehicular access; pedestrian and cyclist access to Shaw centre; a contribution towards the proposed new Metrolink stop; multi-functional green infrastructure network; water quality; expansion and/or improvement of the existing cricket club; additional school places; community facilities; heritage assets; and flood risk. We have amended the detailed wording of the modification to paragraph 11.133 to refer to access being from the adjoining local road network rather than Greenfield Lane as the latter is unnecessarily

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<sup>99</sup> GMCA response to PQ41 [GMCA3.1].

<sup>100</sup> Preliminary Ecological Appraisals 2020 [10.05.04 and 10.05.12], and evidence from Gillian Holden including at the hearing session on 25 January 2023.

specific and not justified by the available evidence. These changes will ensure that those parts of policy JPA12 are justified and effective.

401. Similarly, further changes are required to policy JPA14 parts 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19 and reasoned justification, relating to the density of housing development close to the proposed Metrolink stop; the employment floorspace being for industrial and warehouse uses; the main points of access into the site, including the spine road from JPA12 Beal Valley and directly to Ripponden Road (rather than via Vulcan Street); safeguarding land for and making a financial contribution towards the Metrolink stop; the type of development in the proposed local centre; cycling and walking connections; defining and strengthening the proposed Green Belt boundaries; school places; community facilities; and heritage assets. We have amended the detailed wording of the modification to part 2 to ensure consistency with policy JP-H4 (density of new housing). Finally, Picture 11.24 needs to be modified to show a Green Belt boundary on the eastern part of the site that reflects the proposed main point of access to Ripponden Road such that it will be clearly defined by a readily recognisable physical feature (the policies map will need to be changed accordingly). These changes will ensure that those parts of policy JPA14 are effective and justified.
402. The two allocations, individually and collectively, would deliver a significant number of new homes and an extension to an existing industrial estate in a location well related to existing urban areas, services and facilities in accordance with the spatial strategy. New road and public transport infrastructure would be provided, benefiting existing as well as new residents and businesses. The modified requirements relating to vehicular access ensure clarity whilst providing sufficient flexibility to allow the details of the access points and alignment and design of the spine road to be determined through the masterplanning process, including having regard to biodiversity. The developments would make a significant contribution towards boosting northern competitiveness in accordance with policy JP-Strat6.
403. Overall, we are satisfied that the social and economic benefits would outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and other harms identified above, provided that policies JPA12 and JPA14, and associated reasoned justification, are modified as recommended [**MMO2**, **MMO3**, **MMO6**, **MMO7** and **MMO8**]. We conclude, therefore, that there are exceptional circumstances to remove land from the Green Belt and that the two allocations are justified.

## Conclusion

404. Subject to the main modifications described above, policies JPA12 Beal Valley and JPA14 Broadbent Moss are justified and consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 20 - Is policy JPA13 Bottom Field Farm justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

405. Policy JPA13 proposes the development of around 30 homes on a site of one hectare which is currently in the Green Belt. It comprises a row of terraced houses and a number of utilitarian farm buildings located in a field adjoining the village of Woodhouses between Failsworth and Ashton under Lyne. All of the existing buildings would be cleared and the site redeveloped<sup>101</sup>.
406. The site is close to an area of deprivation and is capable of delivering high quality market and affordable homes that will help to diversify the housing mix in the local area. Whilst the strategic viability assessment found the development to be unviable, it also shows that a 10% increase in sales values would make it viable. For the reasons set out earlier, this is likely to be achievable meaning that there is a reasonable prospect that the site would be developed during the plan period.
407. The proposal would cause moderate harm to Green Belt purposes, although this could be mitigated by strengthening the boundary around the allocation. The existing buildings on the site, whilst modest in scale, do not contribute positively to the character and appearance of the area. A well designed and landscaped redevelopment would not appear unduly prominent or intrusive despite it being physically separate from the built-up part of the village.
408. The allocation does not contain any international, national or locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity. However, it is close to priority habitats including ponds and woodland, and supports priority species including bats, barn owls and great crested newts<sup>102</sup>.
409. For the reasons set out under issue 6, changes are needed to the requirements in policy JPA13 relating to affordable homes; transport infrastructure; green infrastructure; landscape character; biodiversity; public rights of way; open space, sport and recreational facilities; Green Belt boundaries; compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt; school places; community facilities; historic environment; flood risk; and minerals safeguarding. This will ensure that the policy avoids inconsistency with thematic policies and includes site-specific requirements as appropriate, thereby ensuring effectiveness.
410. On balance, the social and economic benefits associated with around 30 high quality market and affordable homes in this location, consistent with the Plan's spatial strategy, would outweigh the less than moderate harm to the Green Belt and character and appearance of the area that the development would be likely to cause, provided that policy JPA13 and associated reasoned justification are

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<sup>101</sup> Oral evidence on behalf of GMCA at the hearing session on 25 January 2023.

<sup>102</sup> Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2020 [10.05.08].

modified as described above [MMO4 and MMO5]. There are, therefore, exceptional circumstances to justify removing the land from the Green Belt.

## Conclusion

411. Subject to the main modifications described above, policy JPA13 Bottom Field Farm is justified and consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## Issue 21 - Is policy JPA15 Chew Brook Vale justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?

412. Policy JPA15 proposes the development of around 90 homes along with up to 6,000 sqm of commercial, leisure and retail facilities to support tourism on this 5 hectare site outside the village of Greenfield and close to Dove Stone Reservoir and the Peak District National Park. The site is a disused mill complex and comprises buildings of various age, size and style. Access from the A635/A669 needs to be improved, including the crossing over Chew Brook. Around half of the site is at risk of flooding<sup>103</sup>.

413. The proposal would utilise previously developed land and provide high quality homes in a highly attractive rural location thereby helping to diversify the housing offer in the northern part of the plan area. It would also represent an opportunity to secure the conservation and long-term use of a number of historic stone buildings, which have been disused for many years, and provide small scale commercial facilities such as a cafe and shop for future residents and visitors to the reservoir thereby supporting the rural economy.

414. However, the strategic viability assessment indicates that the proposed development would not be viable mainly due to costs associated with site remediation and highway improvements. During the examination further evidence was submitted which demonstrates that flood risk could be effectively mitigated through the replacement of an existing culvert with an open channel watercourse across the site<sup>104</sup>. This would mean that a greater proportion of the allocation could be developed, increasing the capacity to around 138 new homes<sup>105</sup>, which would make the site economically viable.

415. The limited size of the site, its distance from the urban edge, and the fact that it is currently occupied by a number of substantial buildings mean that the proposal would cause low-moderate harm to Green Belt purposes.

416. The allocation does not contain any international, national or locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity. However, it contains trees and hedgerows,

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<sup>103</sup> Level 2 SFRA Addendum [10.05.19]

<sup>104</sup> OD21 to OD21c [8 February 2023]

<sup>105</sup> SD21a and SD21b [9 February 2023]

is close to other priority habitats including watercourses, ponds and woodland, and has potential to support priority species including bats and other wildlife<sup>106</sup>.

417. In order to ensure that policy JPA15 is effective and justified, modifications are required. For the reasons set out elsewhere in this report, changes are needed to the requirements relating to a masterplan, design code and infrastructure phasing and delivery strategy; affordable housing; transport infrastructure; Green Belt boundaries; compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt; landscape character; biodiversity; the South Pennine Moors; open space, sport and recreation facilities; school places; community facilities; and design.
418. In addition to the above, further changes are required to various other parts of policy JPA15 and reasoned justification. Part 3 needs to refer to around 138 homes and a range of dwelling types including high quality family housing. Part 2 should refer to 3,000 sqm, rather than 6,000 sqm, of commercial floorspace to reflect the revised capacity study and the rural location. Part 6, relating to a visitor management plan, should be deleted and paragraph 11.176 amended to refer to the statutory duty of care for the National Park. Part 7 needs to clarify that pedestrian and cycling links are required to Greenfield village and the reservoir. Parts 12 and 13 need to be combined to clarify the requirements relating to watercourses, green infrastructure and water quality. Part 19 needs to clarify what is required in relation to designated heritage assets close to the site, and the non-designated heritage assets on the site. Finally, part 21 needs to be modified to reflect the latest flood risk evidence and clarify the mitigation measures that are required.
419. The proposal would deliver a significant number of high-quality market and affordable homes in an attractive setting, make good use of previously developed land, and protect and enhance heritage assets. It would help to boost northern competitiveness and support the rural economy. Flood risk and impacts on the road network, ecology and rural character could all be effectively mitigated, subject to the main modifications that we recommend [**MMO9** and **MMO10**]. The social, economic and environmental benefits would outweigh the low-moderate harm to Green Belt purposes and other residual impacts of development. There are, therefore, exceptional circumstances to remove the site from the Green Belt and the allocation is justified.

## Conclusion

420. Subject to the main modifications described above, policy JPA15 Chew Brook Vale is justified and consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

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<sup>106</sup> Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2020 and Addendum 2021 [10.05.17 and 10.05.18]

## **Issue 22 - Is policy JPA16 Cowlshaw justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

421. Policy JPA16 relates to a site of 32 hectares on the south-west edge of Shaw that is currently designated as Other Protected Open Land in the Oldham Local Plan. It is largely contained by existing housing development to the north, east and south.
422. A total of around 460 new homes are proposed with access from Kings Road to the east, Cocker Mill Lane to the south, and Denbigh Drive to the north. The strategic viability assessment indicates that a 10% increase in market values would be required to make the site viable. For the reasons set out earlier, this is likely to be achievable. Furthermore, development on the southern and northern parts of the site commenced in 2022. We are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that the whole development could take place during the plan period.
423. The allocation does not contain any international or national sites of importance for biodiversity. However, the provision of access from Kings Road to serve development on the central part of the site would involve a road being built through an area of semi mature woodland that is a priority habitat and public open space. There are also other priority habitats within the allocation, including ponds, wet grassland, hedgerows and broadleaved woodland some of which are locally designated as SBIs. The land supports priority species including bats, great crested newts and farmland birds along with other wildlife<sup>107</sup>. The development would affect these habitats and species, as well as significantly alter the character and appearance of the site and this part of the rural landscape between Shaw and Royton. The recreational value of the public rights of way that cross the site would be considerably reduced.
424. However, the number of new homes proposed can be accommodated on the parts of the site that are not woodland or identified for their particular ecological value. Any impacts on priority habitats and species would need to be addressed in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy set out in policy JP-G9, and the development would need to achieve a net gain in biodiversity of no less than 10%. Furthermore, a well-designed and landscaped development would relate well to the existing urban area and minimise the visual impact on the wider landscape. Overall, we are satisfied that the impacts of development can be mitigated to an acceptable degree, subject to the following modifications to policy JPA16, and the reasoned justification; these are required to ensure it is effective and justified.
425. For the reasons set out elsewhere in this report, changes are needed to the requirements relating to affordable housing; transport infrastructure; landscape character; biodiversity; the South Pennine Moors; school places; community

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<sup>107</sup> Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2020 [10.05.23]

facilities; heritage assets and flood risk. To ensure effectiveness, part 4 needs to be modified to ensure the access from Kings Road minimises the impact on the woodland and clarifies that a secondary access will be required from Cowlshaw. Part 6 needs to refer specifically to the priority habitats, sites of biological importance and woodlands that need to be incorporated into the proposed green infrastructure. Part 10 needs to clarify that the existing play area off Kings Road is either to be retained or relocated elsewhere on the site.

426. Overall, we are satisfied that the social and economic benefits that around 460 new homes would bring in this location, consistent with the spatial strategy, would outweigh the harm that would be caused by building on this greenfield site. The allocation is, therefore, justified subject to the modifications to policy JPA16 and reasoned justification described above [**MMO11** and **MMO12**].

## **Conclusion**

427. Subject to the main modifications we recommend, policy JPA16 Cowlshaw is justified and consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 23 - Is policy JPA17 South of Coal Pit Lane justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

428. Policy JPA17 relates to a site of 20 hectares, 19 of which would be removed from the Green Belt. It is located on the southern edge of Oldham to the west of Ashton Road (A627). Parts of the site have previously been mined for coal, and parts are currently used for agriculture. There are areas of woodland, some of which are identified as priority habitats.

429. The site is allocated on the basis that it provides an opportunity to diversify and improve the housing stock in the local area. Its location on Ashton Road means that future residents would have reasonable access to frequent bus services.

430. Around 175 new homes are proposed. The strategic viability assessment indicated that, to be viable, sale values would have to be 17.5% higher than assumed in the base scenario. For the reasons set out earlier, it would not be unrealistic for that to be achieved, and there is evidence of significant interest from a number of housebuilders<sup>108</sup>. There is, therefore, a reasonable prospect of the development taking place during the plan period.

431. However, the proposal would harm Green Belt purposes relating to safeguarding the countryside, checking urban sprawl and preventing the further merging of Oldham and Failsworth. Overall, the harm to the Green Belt would be high.

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<sup>108</sup> Oral evidence from representors of the site promoters at the hearing session on 26 January 2023.

432. The allocation does not contain any international, national or locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity. However, it contains priority habitats including ponds, woodland and hedgerows, and supports priority species including badgers, bats and great crested newts<sup>109</sup>. Development would lead to the loss of farmland, affect ecology, and significantly change the character and appearance of the site and wider landscape. Additional traffic would be generated on the local roads, including Coal Pit Lane which is of restricted width and poor alignment in places.
433. In order to ensure that policy JPA17 is justified and effective in securing appropriate mitigations, various changes are required. For the reasons set out under issue 6 above, modifications are needed in relation to an infrastructure phasing and delivery strategy; affordable housing; transport improvements; landscape character; Green Belt boundaries; compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt; biodiversity; school places; community facilities; open space, sport and recreation; heritage assets; flood risk; and safeguarding minerals. In addition, part 4 needs to state that the main point of access will be from Ashton Road, and to clarify the requirement relating to the route of a potential future link road to Limeside to the west of the site. Part 6 relating to landscaping and green infrastructure needs to refer specifically to the priority habitats on the site, including deciduous woodland. Finally, the requirement for remediation measures in part 18 needs to clarify that it relates to areas affected by previous coal mining as well as landfill.
434. Subject to the above modifications [**MMO13** and **MMO14**], policy JPA17 will be justified and effective in mitigating the impacts of development such that the social and economic benefits associated with around 175 new homes in a location that accords with the spatial strategy would outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and other harms referred to above. There are, therefore, exceptional circumstances to justify the removal of the site from the Green Belt.

## Conclusion

435. Subject to our recommended main modifications, policy JPA17 South of Coal Pit Lane is justified and consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 24 - Is policy JPA18 South of Rosary Road justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

436. Policy JPA18 proposes around 60 homes on a 3 hectare site which is currently in the Green Belt. It is located on the southern edge of Oldham, east of Ashton Road (A62), within one of the 10% most deprived areas of Greater Manchester. It is suitable for high quality homes and would therefore help to improve the

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<sup>109</sup> Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2020 and Addendum 2021 [10.05.28 and 10.05.29].

housing stock in the northern area of the city region. Its location close to Ashton Road means that future residents would have reasonable access to frequent bus services.

437. The strategic viability assessment shows that to be viable an increase of more than 15% in sales values would have to be achieved compared to that assumed in the base scenario. For the reasons set out earlier, this is not unrealistic. Furthermore, there are a number of other developments and environmental improvements taking place nearby which are likely to increase the attractiveness of the area. There is developer interest in the site. We are therefore satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that development could take place during the plan period.
438. The development would cause low-moderate harm to Green Belt purposes. The allocation does not contain any international or national sites of importance for biodiversity. However, it includes part of Bankfield Clough SBI and supports priority species including bats and badgers along with other wildlife<sup>110</sup>.
439. In order to ensure that policy JPA18 is justified and effective in securing appropriate mitigations, various changes are required. For the reasons set out under issue 6 above, modifications are needed in relation to transport improvements; landscape character; biodiversity; Green Belt boundaries; compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt; open space, sport and recreation facilities; school places; community facilities; heritage assets; flood risk; and safeguarding minerals.
440. In addition, reference to secondary emergency access needs to be deleted from JPA18 part 2 as that is not justified. Parts 4 and 6 need to be combined and modified to clarify the requirements relating to green infrastructure including the provision of landscaping between the development and Bankfield Clough. Picture 11.8 needs to be modified to exclude all of the SBI from the allocation boundary, and the policies map amended accordingly. This, along with the modification to part 7, will ensure the policy is effective in protecting and enhancing the ecology of the area in accordance with policy JP-G9.
441. Subject to the above modifications [**MMO15**, **MMO16** and **MMO17**], policy JPA18 will be justified and effective in mitigating the impacts of development such that the social and economic benefits associated with around 60 new homes in a location that accords with the spatial strategy would outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and character and appearance of the area. There are, therefore, exceptional circumstances to justify the removal of the site from the Green Belt.

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<sup>110</sup> Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2020 [10.05.31].

## Conclusion

442. Subject to our recommended main modifications, policy JPA18 South of Rosary Road is justified and consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

### **Issue 25 - Is policy JPA19 Bamford / Norden justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

443. Policy JPA19 relates to a site of 36 hectares, all of which are removed from the Green Belt. It is located on the western edge of Rochdale and comprises mainly agricultural land but also playing fields, a cricket ground and tennis courts and is crossed by various public rights of way that provide access to the countryside to the west including the attractive and popular Ashworth Valley. Around 450 new homes, along with improved facilities to create a high quality recreational and sports hub, are proposed.

444. The site provides an opportunity to expand an area of larger, higher value homes which are in relatively short supply in Rochdale<sup>111</sup> and elsewhere in the northern areas, along with a significant number of affordable homes on site. Future residents would have reasonable access to an existing local convenience store, and to bus services to Bury, Rochdale and, early in the morning and evening, Manchester city centre.

445. The allocation is in an area of strong market demand, and the strategic viability assessment shows the development to be viable. The site is being actively promoted and a planning application prepared. Whilst the owner of a significant part of the site stated during the preparation of the Plan that they were not intending to sell their land, those circumstances could change. On balance, we are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that the site will be developed during the plan period if it is allocated.

446. However, the development would cause harm to Green Belt purposes relating to urban sprawl, safeguarding the countryside and, to a lesser extent, preventing neighbouring towns from merging. The GMCA assessment is that, overall, the harm to the Green Belt would be moderate. However, in this particular instance, we consider the harm could be greater than that due to the encroachment into the countryside. Furthermore, the character and appearance of the rural fringe site would be significantly affected, the recreational value of the well-used public footpaths and bridleways that cross the land would be substantially reduced, and additional traffic would use local roads some of which are congested at peak times.

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<sup>111</sup> There is a low proportion of homes in Council Tax Band E and above in Rochdale compared to Greater Manchester as a whole (8.2%) or nationally (18.9%).

447. Whilst the allocation does not contain any international, national or locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, it does contain priority habitats including woodland, hedgerows and species-rich grassland, and supports priority species including badgers, bats, hedgehogs and farmland birds along with other wildlife<sup>112</sup>. However, any impacts on those habitats and species would need to be addressed in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy set out in policy JP-G9, and the development would need to achieve a net gain in biodiversity of no less than 10%.
448. In order to ensure that policy JPA19 is justified and effective in securing appropriate mitigations, various changes are required. For the reasons set out under issue 6 above, modifications are needed in relation to an infrastructure phasing and delivery strategy; affordable housing; transport improvements; landscape character; compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt; heritage assets; school places; and safeguarding minerals.
449. In addition, part 1 needs to be modified to clarify what is meant by “larger higher value family housing”, and to delete reference to the homes being located on the western and southern parts of the site as that is not justified and is a matter that can be determined through the masterplanning process. Parts 2 and 12 should be combined and amended to clarify that the existing public rights of way are to be incorporated into high quality green infrastructure linking to the wider countryside beyond the site, and that development will need to provide contributions towards improving the existing sport and recreation facilities.
450. Subject to the above modifications [**MMR2** and **MMR3**], policy JPA19 will be justified and effective in mitigating the impacts of development such that the social and economic benefits associated with around 450 market and affordable homes in accordance with the spatial strategy would outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and other harms identified above. There are, therefore, exceptional circumstances to justify the removal of the site from the Green Belt.

## Conclusion

451. Subject to our recommended main modifications, policy JPA19 Bamford / Norden is justified and consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 26 - Is policy JPA20 Castleton Sidings justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

452. Policy JPA20 relates to a site of 12 hectares, 5 of which are removed from the Green Belt. It comprises former railway sidings and is located on the south west edge of Rochdale. Vehicular access would be provided from the adjoining

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<sup>112</sup> Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2020 [10.06.05] and Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2017 [10.06.02]

residential area to the north. Around 125 new homes are proposed on the eastern part of the site, with the western part retained in the Green Belt and landscaped for open space and nature conservation. The north eastern part of the site would accommodate a temporary rail halt and associated parking to facilitate the extension of the East Lancashire Railway and potentially a tram-train trial project on the main railway line.

453. The site is previously developed land with good public transport access due to it being close to Castleton railway station and bus stops. The proposal would provide a significant number of new homes, create new green infrastructure, and facilitate the extension of the East Lancashire Railway from Heywood to Castleton which will provide a convenient link between the heritage line and mainline passenger services at Castleton Station. The new homes would be contained between a row of trees along the boundary with a golf course to the north, and woodland to the south.
454. The strategic viability assessment indicates that higher sales values and reduced affordable housing provision would be required to make the development viable. However, the site is being actively promoted by a developer who specialises in brownfield sites and they advise that a scheme meeting all policy requirements would be viable<sup>113</sup>. We are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that the site will be viably developed during the plan period.
455. The development would harm Green Belt purposes relating to preventing the merging of Castleton and Heywood and checking the unrestricted sprawl of the large built-up area of Rochdale. Overall, the Green Belt harm would be moderate. This, and the impact on the character and appearance of the area, could be mitigated to some degree by the design and layout of development, including through the provision of high quality green infrastructure on the western part of the site and a well landscaped Green Belt boundary to separate that from the new homes.
456. The allocation does not contain any international, national or locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity. However, it is within 100 metres of the Rochdale Canal SAC and contains priority habitats including broadleaved woodland and species-rich grassland, and supports priority species including badgers, bats, and common lizards along with other wildlife<sup>114</sup>.
457. In order to ensure that policy JPA20 is justified and effective in securing appropriate mitigations, various changes are required. For the reasons set out under issue 6 above, modifications are needed in relation to affordable housing; flood risk; transport improvements; schools provision; establishing a Green Belt boundary; providing compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt; and safeguarding minerals.

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<sup>113</sup> Oral evidence on behalf of Kellen Homes at the hearing session on 4 February 2023.

<sup>114</sup> Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2020 [10.06.08]

458. In addition, part 1 needs to be modified to clarify what is meant by “larger higher value family housing”. Parts 2 and 11 should be combined to clarify the requirement relating to the creation of open space on the western part of the site and a new Green Belt boundary. Part 3 needs to make clear that land is to be provided within the site to facilitate the railway extension and potential tram-train scheme. Part 7 needs to clarify that the proposed pedestrian and cycle routes should connect to the existing public rights of way on the adjoining golf course and to Heywood Road / Manchester Road. Part 10 should make clear that the requirement for a site specific HRA relates to the Rochdale Canal SAC.
459. Subject to the above modifications [**MMR4** and **MMR5**], policy JPA20 will be justified and effective in mitigating the impacts of development such that the benefits of providing around 125 new homes, green infrastructure and land to facilitate rail improvements on a brownfield site in an accessible location would outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and other harms identified above. There are, therefore, exceptional circumstances to justify the removal of the site from the Green Belt.

## Conclusion

460. Subject to our recommended main modifications, policy JPA20 Castleton Sidings is justified and consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 27 - Is policy JPA21 Crimble Mill justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

461. Policy JPA21 relates to a site of 17 hectares on the northern edge of Heywood. Most of the allocation is immediately south of the River Roch. The proposal involves the removal of 14 hectares from the Green Belt, mostly within the allocation but also the site of the adjoining All Souls Church of England Primary School. The allocation includes the grade II\* listed buildings at Crimble Mill, on the north side of the river, which would be retained in the Green Belt. Around 250 new homes are proposed, including some within the Crimble Mill buildings.
462. The site would deliver a significant number of larger family homes, which are in short supply in Heywood and the northern part of the Plan area as a whole, as well as affordable housing. The proposal also presents an opportunity to secure the long term future of the grade II\* listed mill buildings which are at immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric.
463. The strategic viability assessment indicates that higher sales values and a reduced financial contribution for school places would be required to make the proposal viable. The former are likely to be achievable given the increase in the price of new homes in recent years. With regard to the latter, policy JPA21 requires land to be provided to allow the adjoining primary school to expand meaning that a reduced financial contribution may be appropriate. Furthermore,

the site is being actively promoted, and is subject to a current planning application. Overall, we are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect of the development taking place during the plan period.

464. However, the proposal would harm Green Belt purposes relating to preventing the merging of Rochdale and Heywood, checking the unrestricted sprawl of Heywood, and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Overall, the harm to the Green Belt would be high, although the river and Crimble Lane provide clear, readily recognisable boundaries that are likely to be permanent. The development would significantly alter the existing rural character and appearance of the land to the south of the river and detract from the recreational value of the public rights of way that run around its west, north and east boundaries.
465. Furthermore, the proposal would entail traffic from the development using Crimble Lane and local residential streets to the south of the site to gain access to the A58 and wider road network. Crimble Lane is a narrow, steep, twisting, poorly-surfaced track used by walkers, cyclists and horseriders as well as vehicles accessing the mill complex and various houses. The junction of Crimble Lane with the A58 would require improvement. The roads to the south of the site serve a number of businesses and the primary school, as well as residential properties, and are narrow with street parking. However, the local highway authority is satisfied that safe and suitable access can be provided to serve all parts of the proposed development subject to various mitigations being implemented. Despite the nature of the roads involved and serious concerns of local residents, there is no substantive evidence to indicate that the judgement of the local highway authority is unreasonable or that the necessary road improvements could not be made.
466. The allocation does not contain any international, national or locally designated biodiversity sites, although Plumpton Wood and Queen's Park Lake SBIs are nearby to the north and west of the river. Furthermore, the allocation does contain priority habitats including woodland and hedgerows, and supports priority species including badgers and bats along with other wildlife<sup>115</sup>. Any impacts on those habitats and species would need to be addressed in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy set out in policy JP-G9, and the development would need to achieve a net gain in biodiversity of no less than 10%.
467. Around 30% of the site, including the existing mill buildings, is in flood zones 2 and 3. Around 60 homes are expected to be provided in and around the mill building, and a flood risk mitigation strategy has been prepared. The remaining homes can be accommodated on land outside flood zones 2 and 3. This is reflected in part 8 of policy JPA21 which should be effective in ensuring flood risk is appropriately taken into account and mitigated.

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<sup>115</sup> Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2020 [10.06.11]

468. Various changes to other parts of policy, and the reasoned justification, are required to ensure it is justified and effective in securing appropriate mitigations, including with regard to the matters described above. For the reasons set out under issue 6, modifications are needed in relation to affordable housing; landscape character; compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt; transport improvements; and safeguarding minerals.
469. In addition, part 1 needs to clarify what is meant by “higher value family housing” and that the provision of new homes on land adjoining the listed mill buildings would be in accordance with national policy relating to redevelopment of previously developed land in the Green Belt. Parts 2 and 4 need to make clear that the conversion and long term future of the listed mill buildings should be secured through a phasing and delivery strategy and that their significance must be protected and enhanced. Part 7 needs to clarify that vehicular access will be from an improved Crimble Lane from the A58<sup>116</sup>, as well as from Mutual Street and/or Woodland Road. Part 11 needs to clarify that land must be provided to allow the primary school to expand and that financial contributions towards additional school places would be in accordance with policy JP-P5.
470. Subject to the above modifications [**MMR6** and **MMR7**], policy JPA21 will be justified and effective in mitigating the impacts of development such that the benefits of providing around 250 market and affordable homes and securing the long term future of the listed mill buildings would outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and other harms identified above. There are, therefore, exceptional circumstances to justify the removal of the site from the Green Belt.

## Conclusion

471. Subject to our recommended main modifications, policy JPA21 Crimble Mill is justified and consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 28 - Is policy JPA22 Land north of Smithy Bridge justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

472. Policy JPA22 proposes the development of around 300 homes and a primary school on a greenfield site of 20 hectares, 18 of which are removed from the Green Belt. It adjoins the north east edge of Smithy Bridge a short distance south of Littleborough and contains a prominent ridgeline with land falling towards both Rochdale Canal to the north and Hollingworth Lake to the south. Part of the site is used as a visitor car park for Hollingworth Lake Country Park. Residential development is taking place on land adjoining to the north east.

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<sup>116</sup> Appendix D modification refers to necessary improvements to Crimble Lane including widening, footway provision, traffic calming and improved visibility splays at the junction with the A58.

473. The site is an area with strong market demand, and provides an opportunity to deliver additional larger family homes, as well as affordable housing and a new primary school, within 800 metres of Littleborough and Smithy Bridge railway stations and bus services and other facilities in Littleborough town centre. The strategic viability assessment indicates that a 10% increase in development value would be required to make the site viable. As we have previously found, that is likely to be achievable. Furthermore, a housebuilder has control of the whole site and undertaken extensive work to bring a scheme forward. We are therefore satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that the site could be viably developed during the plan period.
474. The proposal would harm Green Belt purposes relating to preventing the merging of Smithy Bridge and Littleborough, safeguarding the countryside, checking urban sprawl, and preserving the setting and special character of Littleborough. However, the GMCA assessment concludes that the overall harm to the Green Belt would be low to moderate as the site is defined by strong physical features.
475. Notwithstanding that conclusion, development would significantly change the character and appearance of the rural fringe site which is prominently located in the Pennine foothills and close to the Country Park which is a popular tourist attraction. It would substantially reduce the recreational value of the public rights of way that cross the site. Additional traffic would be generated on local roads, including Lake Bank, Hollingworth Road / Canal Street (B6225) and the junction with the A58 in Littleborough, which are frequently heavily congested.
476. The allocation does not contain any international, national or locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity. However, it is within 7km of the South Pennine Moors protected sites; close to the Rochdale Canal SAC and Hollingworth Lakes SBI; contains priority habitats including hedgerows and ponds; and supports priority species including badgers, bats, barn owls, great crested newts and water voles along with other wildlife<sup>117</sup>.
477. Various changes to policy JPA22, and reasoned justification, are required to ensure it is justified and effective in securing appropriate mitigations, including with regard to the matters described above. For the reasons set out elsewhere in this report, modifications are needed in relation to affordable housing; landscape character; providing compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt; transport improvements; the South Pennine Moors protected sites; and safeguarding minerals.
478. In addition, part 1 needs to clarify what is meant by “higher value family housing”. Part 4, which requires development to complement existing and proposed housing on adjoining land, should be deleted as it is ambiguous and not justified. Part 9 needs to clarify that a site specific HRA will be required in relation to the Rochdale Canal SAC. The reference in part 10 to the proposed

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<sup>117</sup> Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2020 [10.06.20] and Ecology Technical Note 2018 [10.06.13]

primary school being located on the southern end of the site should be deleted as it is unduly specific and not justified, and the reference to financial contributions needs to be amended to refer to secondary school places only. Finally, part 11 needs to clarify that the existing visitor car parking spaces on the site should either be retained and enhanced, or replaced in a suitable location nearby.

479. Subject to the above modifications [**MMR8** and **MMR9**], policy JPA22 will be justified and effective in mitigating the impacts of development such that the benefits of providing around 300 market and affordable homes along with a new primary school would outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and other harms identified above. There are, therefore, exceptional circumstances to justify the removal of the site from the Green Belt.

## **Conclusion**

480. Subject to our recommended main modifications, policy JPA22 Smithy Bridge is justified and consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 29 - Is policy JPA23 Newhey Quarry justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

481. Policy JPA23 proposes around 250 homes and a public car park to serve a nearby Metrolink stop in a disused quarry on the north east edge of Newhey a short distance south of the M62 and Milnrow. The central part of the site comprises the quarry floor which adjoins woodland sloping steeply down to houses on Huddersfield Road to the south and a 40-50 metre high quarry face to the north. It amounts to 15 hectares, 11 hectares of which would be removed from the Green Belt with the quarry face and an area of woodland retained in the Green Belt.
482. The allocation meets both elements of site selection criteria 1 as it is previously developed land in a location well served by public transport. Car parking spaces near to the Metrolink stop are limited in number, and additional provision within the allocation along with improved pedestrian and cycling links would provide public benefits. The strategic viability assessment found the proposal to be viable, and we are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that it could be developed during the plan period.
483. The proposal would harm Green Belt purposes relating to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, checking urban sprawl and preventing the neighbouring towns of Newhey and Milnrow from merging. Overall, the assessment found the Green Belt harm to be moderate-high. However, the development would be largely enclosed and we consider that the harm to the Green Belt, and to the character and appearance of the area, could be mitigated by an appropriately designed and landscaped scheme. This would entail the

new homes being located on the former quarry floor, the adjoining woodland being retained and enhanced, and the quarry face re-profiled and landscaped.

484. The allocation does not contain any international, national or locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity. However, it does contain priority habitats including woodland, heathland, acid grassland and ponds, and supports priority species including great crested newts, common lizards and badgers along with other wildlife<sup>118</sup>.
485. Various changes to policy JPA23, and reasoned justification, are required to ensure it is justified and effective in securing appropriate mitigations. For the reasons set out elsewhere in this report, modifications are needed in relation to affordable housing; defining Green Belt boundaries; providing compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt; heritage assets; transport improvements; schools provision; the South Pennine Moors protected sites; and safeguarding minerals. In addition, part 1 needs to clarify what is meant by "higher value family housing". Parts 4 and 5 need to be combined and amended to clarify the requirements relating to landscaping, including the re-profiling of the quarry face. We have amended the detailed wording of the modification to parts 4 and 5 combined to provide greater clarity with regard to the incorporation of water features.
486. Subject to the above modifications [**MMR10** and **MMR11**], policy JPA23 will be justified and effective in mitigating the impacts of development such that the benefits of providing around 250 market and affordable homes along with a new public car park would outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and other harms identified above. There are, therefore, exceptional circumstances to justify the removal of land from the Green Belt and the allocation of the site for development.

## Conclusion

487. Subject to our recommended main modifications, policy JPA23 Newhey Quarry is justified and consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## Issue 30 - Is policy JPA24 Roch Valley justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?

488. Policy JPA24 relates to a site of 14 hectares all of which are currently designated as Protected Open Land. It is on the southern edge of Littleborough with the River Roch running along the southern boundary. Around 200 new homes are proposed, mainly on the northern part of the site adjoining existing residential areas. The southern part of the site would be safeguarded to deliver

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<sup>118</sup> Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2020 [10.06.28]

flood alleviation benefits for the River Roch between Littleborough and Rochdale town centre.

489. As none of the land within the allocation is in the existing Green Belt, it was assessed at stage 1 of the site selection process. We agree that the development would be suitably located being well related to existing residential areas and not far from local facilities and services including shops and public transport. The site is being promoted by a housebuilder and is subject to a planning application supported by viability evidence meaning that there is a reasonable prospect that it could be developed within the plan period.
490. The proposal would significantly alter the character and appearance of the site which is in a prominent location on the valley side. The recreational value of the public rights of way that cross the land would be substantially reduced. Additional traffic would be generated on local roads, including Smith Bridge Road and the congested A58. Around 17% of the site is in flood zones 2 and 3, although all of the new homes could be accommodated on higher ground above that land.
491. The allocation does not contain any international, national or locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity. However, it does contain priority habitats including hedgerows and ponds, and supports priority species including badgers, bats, and water voles along with other wildlife<sup>119</sup>.
492. Various changes to policy JPA24, and reasoned justification, are required to ensure it is justified and effective in securing appropriate mitigations. For the reasons set out elsewhere in this report, modifications are needed in relation to affordable housing; landscape character; heritage assets; transport improvements; schools provision; the South Pennine Moors protected sites; and safeguarding minerals. In addition, part 1 needs to clarify what is meant by "higher value family housing. References in part 3 to appropriate water management and sustainable drainage infrastructure should be deleted as they are ambiguous and unnecessary. Part 9 needs to be amended to clarify that the layout of development should not preclude the future delivery of a potential relief road from Smithy Bridge Road to Albert Royds Street to the west of the site (rather than require the construction of part of that road, which is not justified).
493. Subject to the above modifications [**MMR12** and **MMR13**], policy JPA24 will be justified and effective in mitigating the impacts of development such that the benefits of providing around 200 market and affordable homes would outweigh any residual harms, including harms associated with the issues identified above.

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<sup>119</sup> Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2020 [10.06.31]

## Conclusion

494. Subject to our recommended main modifications, policy JPA24 Roch Valley is justified and consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

### **Issue 31 - Is policy JPA25 Trows Farm justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

495. Policy JPA25 relates to a greenfield site of 21 hectares all of which are currently designated as Protected Open Land. It is located on the southern edge of Rochdale and comprises mainly rough grassland and scrub on steeply undulating land with various trees and hedgerows along with a group of agricultural/commercial buildings. It is bordered by residential areas of Castleton to the west, a business park to the north, the A627(M) to the east, and M62 to the south. Around 550 new homes are proposed with vehicular access from Cowm Top Lane through the business park to the north.

496. As none of the land within the allocation is in the existing Green Belt, it was assessed at stage 1 of the site selection process. It provides an opportunity to deliver a significant number of larger market and affordable homes on land that is well related to the existing urban area of Rochdale, not far from the centre of Castleton and contained to the east and south by motorways. The strategic viability assessment shows that higher development values, along with reduced affordable housing provision and developer profit, would be required to make a scheme marginally viable. However, an outline planning application has been submitted which does not raise any viability issues and we are therefore satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that site could be viably developed during the plan period.

497. Development would be visible from the public rights of way that run along the site's west and north boundaries as well as from the adjoining motorways and further afield including. Whilst it would clearly alter the character and appearance of the site, it would be strongly contained by the existing urban form and motorways meaning that the impact on the wider landscape would be limited. The allocation does not include any international, national or locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity. However, it does contain priority habitats including woodland and species-rich grassland, and supports priority species including badgers, bats, and amphibians along with other wildlife<sup>120</sup>.

498. Various changes to policy JPA25, and the reasoned justification, are required to ensure it is justified and effective in securing appropriate mitigations. For the reasons set out under issue 6, modifications are needed in relation to an

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<sup>120</sup> Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2020 [10.06.34] and WSP Technical Summary Report 2020 [10.06.29]

infrastructure phasing and delivery strategy; affordable housing; landscape character; transport improvements; schools provision; and safeguarding minerals. In addition, part 1 needs to clarify what is meant by "higher value family housing". Parts 6 and 9 need to be combined and amended to clearly require a well-designed scheme which incorporates good quality green infrastructure and responds to the urban fringe farmland landscape, the topography of the site, and its prominent location next to the motorways. Part 7, requiring a site specific HRA, should be deleted as it is unnecessary and not justified.

499. Subject to the above modifications [**MMR14** and **MMR15**], policy JPA25 will be justified and effective in mitigating the impacts of development such that the benefits of providing around 550 family homes would outweigh any residual harms, including harms associated with the issues identified above.

## **Conclusion**

500. Subject to our recommended main modifications, policy JPA25 Trows Farm is justified and consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 32 – Is policy JPA26 Land at Hazelhurst Farm justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

501. Policy JPA26 relates to a site of around 17 hectares, all of which is currently Green Belt. The allocation would also sever an area of open space from the remainder of the Green Belt, leading to its consequential removal from the designation. Around 400 dwellings are proposed. The policy requires provision of at least 50% affordable housing, though some of this may be off-site and, if necessary, for land to be provided for a school.

502. The site is well related to the Leigh-Salford-Manchester Busway. This is a guided busway that runs along the A580 East Lancashire Road to the north of the site. There was some suggestion that this bus route is oversubscribed and thus would not provide an adequate or suitable service for future occupants. It would be somewhat illogical to suggest a site is unsuitable in principle because public transport in the vicinity is too popular. It would be reasonable to assume that, as well as providing good access to public transport, development along the length of a designated busway would have the potential to lead to improved services over time. While the site is a short distance from the stops serving the busway, this is still likely to be an attractive service for future occupants.

503. The scale and nature of the housing proposed would also help to diversify supply in the district, particularly the delivery of family homes and affordable housing. This is consistent with other Salford allocations and the evidence suggests that there is justification for this approach.

504. The allocation would result in low to moderate harm to Green Belt purposes. The site is well contained by existing housing and road infrastructure around and near to it. The woodland to the west would also constitute a clear and distinct boundary. The development would still inevitably be seen as sprawl and encroachment into the countryside. There would be little effect however on the merging of settlements, with areas of Worsley and Swinton already linked to an extent.
505. During the examination, the GMCA proposed a change to the Green Belt and allocation boundary for this site. This relates to an area between the edge of the allocation and the A580. This area had been retained as Green Belt as it purported to be required for a road improvement scheme and had been identified as priority habitat by Defra. Subsequent investigations by the GMCA determined that neither of these assertions were accurate.
506. It is clear therefore that the allocation boundary as submitted was not justified by robust evidence, nor does it follow any physical features on the ground which are readily recognisable or likely to be permanent. We acknowledge that there are other allocations where new defensible Green Belt boundaries would have to be created where none currently exist. However, given the relative proximity of the road, it would be preferable in this case to utilise this existing physical feature.
507. The alteration would not lead to any change to the scale of development proposed and the land affected is most likely to be utilised as open space or landscaping. Should any development be proposed in this area then the same policies would apply, including the need to make provision for biodiversity in accordance with policy JP-G9. The change would not result in any additional harm to the purposes of the Green Belt, nor should it result in any other unacceptable harm. To ensure consistency with NPPF 143f, the allocation and Green Belt boundary should be modified, with consequential amendments to Pictures 11.37, 11.38 and the Policies Map.
508. As well as market housing, the allocation also provides an opportunity to deliver a high proportion of affordable housing. The policy requires at least 50%, though expects some of these to be off-site. NPPF 63 is clear that affordable housing provision should be on-site unless off-site provision or a financial contribution can be robustly justified. The argument made here is that the need for affordable housing is mainly centred on 1- and 2-bedroom dwellings, whereas the site would be particularly suitable for larger homes. In meeting the strategic justification for the allocation, this site may not therefore necessarily deliver the type of affordable housing that is needed. There may therefore be some justification for some off-site provision to help meet wider needs. The precise level would be determined through the masterplanning/planning application process. The allocation would therefore still contribute to NPPF 63's objective of creating mixed and balanced communities. The strategic viability assessment concluded that the site would be deliverable even with this level of affordable housing.

509. A modification is however necessary to part 2 to remove unnecessary references to the split of affordable housing tenures as this is not effective. Insofar as the reference is intended to be indicative, this is likely to cause some confusion and potential conflict with other development plan policies, including those in the Salford Local Plan. The policies of that recently adopted plan are better placed to deal this issue.
510. There are no international, national or locally designated sites of biodiversity importance within the allocation. The Worsley Woods SBI borders the site to the west and the site has the potential to contain priority habitats and protected species in several ponds and 'swampy' areas of the site, as well as in the hedgerows which run through it. The site is also within the Great Manchester Wetlands Nature Improvement Area (NIA).
511. As such, this is a relatively sensitive site and development will need to have regard to the constraints that exist. Necessarily, the policy requires development to retain and enhance important landscape features and the SBI, protect watercourses and support the objectives of the NIA. Given the scale of the site and the density of development proposed, there is no reason to conclude that harm to biodiversity assets cannot either be avoided or satisfactorily mitigated. As submitted, the policy refers to "avoiding harm to protected species". This does not properly reflect either local or national policy relating to biodiversity. A modification is therefore needed to provide a cross-reference to policy JP-G9. This will make it clear how the effects on biodiversity, and biodiversity net gain, will be assessed and mitigated where necessary.
512. The Salford Local Plan includes specific policies relating to the NIA which would be relevant. A modification clarifying that the objectives of the NIA are set out in other local planning policies is therefore necessary for effectiveness.
513. For the reasons set out under issue 6, the policy and reasoned justification needs to be modified to ensure it is sound in relation to infrastructure phasing and masterplanning, compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt, transport infrastructure and mitigation, flooding and drainage and safeguarding minerals. There is an air quality management area (AQMA) along the A580. To be effective, part 13 should therefore be modified to include the need to consider air pollution from nearby roads.
514. The policy requires provision of new allotment spaces to meet local standards. However, there is no clear justification as to why allotment space is a necessary requirement over and above any other form of open space. Rather than be unnecessarily prescriptive here, it would be more logical to defer to policies and standards set out in the Salford Local Plan. This would not necessarily rule out allotments but would ensure that needs can be properly assessed.
515. Finally, part 12 requires a buffer zone to the overhead power lines that run across the site. This is logical, but reference to this being 'in accordance with National Grid requirements' is unnecessary in policy and should be removed.

516. The significant benefits of housing development here would outweigh the low to moderate harm the Green Belt. Given the importance of diversifying the supply of housing in Salford, we are therefore satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances to justify removing the land at Hazelhurst Farm from the Green Belt. We are content that policy JPA26 can be made sound by the modifications identified above and that any adverse impacts of development can be adequately mitigated [**MMS1, MMS2, MMS3, MMS4**].

## **Conclusion**

517. Subject to the main modifications set out above, we are satisfied that policy JPA26 is justified, consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 33 – Is policy JPA27 East of Boothstown justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

518. Policy JPA27 relates to a 30-hectare site which is proposed to deliver around 300 dwellings. The entire site would be removed from the Green Belt. The allocation would also result in the consequential removal of additional Green Belt outside the site. This is mainly washed over road, but also covers a small area associated with an existing use which would otherwise become detached from the Green Belt because of the allocation. The site is located off Leigh Road and sits between the edge of Boothstown and RHS Bridgewater.

519. The site meets site selection criterion 7. In this case, the local problem to be addressed is the diversification of the housing market, particularly in relation to the provision of large family homes. The allocation would provide 50% affordable housing but, as with JPA26, the intention is for some of this to be provided off-site. For the same reasons as JPA26, we are content that this is acceptable in principle, but the policy would also need to be amended to remove unnecessary and unclear references to type and tenure. These matters are better addressed through Salford's Local Plan policies.

520. At worst, the development would result in moderate harm to the purposes of the Green Belt. It would inevitably be seen as encroachment into the countryside and sprawl. It would also narrow the gap that separates Boothstown and Ellenbrook from Worsley. Although the policy calls for low-density, high-quality housing, there would also be some harm to local character. However, the impression of sprawl would be reduced by the presence of existing housing directly opposite the site and the large RHS Bridgewater facility immediately to the east. The policy includes provision for a landscaped buffer along the eastern boundary of the site. Nevertheless, the development will result in loss of an important green space which is used by local residents for informal recreation.

521. There are no international, national or local biodiversity designations within the site. It is however within the NIA, which covers large parts of Salford and Wigan.

The nature of the site means that there is likely to be biodiversity interest within it, including through mature woodland, ponds, watercourses and hedgerows. All of this provides potential for the presence of priority habitats. The policy reflects this and makes it clear that Alder Wood and other mature or protected trees should be protected and that opportunities should be taken to enhance the ecological value of Shaw Brook.

522. Part 9 also seeks to ensure that the objectives of the NIA are supported and harm to protected species is avoided. However, in this last respect a modification is needed to delete the existing reference to protected species and replace it with a new criterion cross-referencing to policy JP-G9. This will ensure effectiveness in terms of appropriate protection or mitigation and consistency with national policy. A cross-reference to local planning policies in relation to the NIA will also provide greater clarity as to what is expected. The recently adopted Salford Local Plan contains specific policies for this designation.
523. The site clearly contains biodiversity constraints and care will be needed in drawing up the masterplan and delivering the housing. Nevertheless, there is nothing in principle which suggests that development would not be capable of meeting local and national biodiversity policies, including the requirement for biodiversity net gain.
524. There is the potential for pockets of deep peat to be present at the southern end of the site. Elsewhere we have described the implications of this in terms of the impact on irreplaceable habitats. Here, we are confident that development should be able to avoid any areas of peat and so this does not affect the principle of the allocation. Modifications are however necessary to both the policy and reasoned justification to ensure that this issue will be properly assessed and addressed through the masterplan and planning application process. These will achieve consistency with NPPF 180c.
525. Part 14 sets out a specific requirement for allotments as part of the open space provision. However, there is no clear evidence to justify this specific requirement. Part 13 also seeks to “retain or replace” existing playing fields. This provides no clarity to developers or decision makers about what is expected. For clarity and effectiveness, these criteria should be deleted and replaced by a general requirement for development to contribute to recreation space standards, in accordance with local planning policies. Any loss of open space would still need to satisfy relevant local and national policies. This is likely to include the need to carry out an assessment of local need. There is no need to include this specific requirement in this policy to ensure it is effective.
526. The Level 2 SFRA indicates that up to 50% of the site is within flood zones 2 or 3. Some of this is expected to be within the developable area. The site accords with the sequential approach and exception test required by national policy. The policy also contains requirements relating to the provision of a detailed drainage and flood risk management strategy that ensures the risk of flooding does not increase elsewhere, that sustainable drainage systems are

incorporated into any scheme and the quality of watercourses are protected. We are content from the evidence presented that there are likely to be technical solutions that will remove or minimise any risks associated with flooding and drainage on the site, including those relating to sewer flooding. The allocation is therefore justified and consistent with national policy in terms of flooding.

527. For the reasons set out under issue 6, the policy and reasoned justification need to be modified to ensure it is sound in relation to infrastructure phasing and masterplanning, compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt, safeguarding minerals and transport infrastructure. With regard to this last issue, there is already a good access into the site from Occupation Road, which serves the RHS site. While Leigh Road, and the signals-controlled junction may be busy at times, there is no clear evidence to suggest that the development would have an unacceptable impact on highway safety or that the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.
528. To be consistent with other policies, a new criterion is needed to make it clear that contributions to off-site primary and secondary school provision to meet the needs generated by the development. In terms of heritage, part 18 should be modified for the reasons set out under issue 6. This modification should include specific reference to the heritage assets that are at most risk, namely Worsley Hall Garden Cottage, the Bothy and Worsley Park. We are content that development need not cause unacceptable harm to the settings of these assets.
529. An AQMA runs along parts of Leigh Road. There is nothing to suggest this should render the site unacceptable in principle. The housing should be able to be located away from any affected areas. The evidence also suggests that the air quality problems are likely to be addressed through other measures and are decreasing. The policy also seeks to encourage sustainable transport modes, which ought to assist in minimising emissions from the site. Nevertheless, any effects on air quality would need to be assessed in line with relevant thematic policies. There would also be the need to prepare an air quality impact assessment with any planning application. This is not highlighted by the allocation policy nor any main modifications.
530. **MMS3** in relation to JPA26 included an additional reference to air quality in the modification of Part 13. In the interests of consistency, we consider it necessary to add a further modification to Part 17 to include reference to air pollution. This will not add any burden to applicants, as such issues would need to be addressed in any event. Nevertheless, highlighting a specific issue relating to the site would be consistent with the approach we have taken elsewhere.
531. Overall, we are satisfied that the benefits of development, in particular the ability to deliver a different type of housing in the district, would outweigh the harm to Green Belt purposes. There are therefore exceptional circumstances to justify removing the allocation from the Green Belt.

532. The site obviously contains a number of other constraints that will need to be carefully considered through the development of the masterplan, including biodiversity, drainage, heritage and the presence of existing infrastructure running through the site. However, the policy is clear that all these issues need to be adequately addressed for development to proceed. We are satisfied with the modifications set out above, the policy will be an effective framework for guiding development. The main modifications set out above will ensure the policy is effective [MMS5, MMS6]. Given the nature and density of development proposed, there is a reasonable prospect that a satisfactory form of development will be achievable.

## Conclusion

533. Subject to the main modifications set out above, we are satisfied that policy JPA27 East of Boothstown is justified, consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## Issue 34 – Is policy JPA28 North of Irlam Station justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?

534. Policy JPA28 relates to a 30 hectare site. It is mainly in agricultural use, though some is in use as a nursery and landscaping business. The entire site is within the Green Belt.

535. The allocation also lies within the Chat Moss. This is a large area of lowland peatland which covers around 20% of Salford's area. The quality of the peat has been degraded through intensive agriculture, peat extraction, the deposition of nightsoil and other industrial waste and various infrastructure works, including the M62 motorway and Manchester-Liverpool railway. It is generally accepted that the peat here is emitting carbon and will continue to do so without intervention. The DEFRA Peat Pilot Project<sup>121</sup> concluded that the carbon storage function of the peat could be depleted within the next 60 years.

536. The evidence suggests the peat on the site is typically somewhere between 1 metre and 2 metres in depth. Although degraded, for the reasons given under Issue 6, we find it necessary for us to consider the allocation against NPPF 180c.

537. There is dispute between various parties about the potential effects of development on peat. With or without development, it is clear from the evidence that the peat is not active bog and this is a significant consideration. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that it would result in some degree of loss or deterioration of the habitat, possibly through exacerbating existing issues. The likely scale and extent of this impact is, of course, dependent on the

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<sup>121</sup> England Peat Strategy: Greater Manchester Peat Pilot Report for Defra - OD36

nature and layout of any development and the construction techniques that would be utilised. Nevertheless, the likelihood of loss or deterioration is sufficient to trigger the relevant policy tests and there is certainly no firm or undisputed evidence that there would be no detrimental effects. Any consideration of harm must however be set in the context of the degraded state of the peat, the on-going effects of this on its carbon storage function and the fact that it will continue to emit carbon without intervention.

538. The delivery of 800 dwellings in an accessible location, including 25% affordable housing and the potential for housing for older people would provide clear public benefits in terms of helping to meet Salford's housing needs and those of the northern area. This would contribute to the strategy of boosting northern competitiveness, as set out in policy JP-Strat6. Although the policy requires higher density housing near to the station, replicating to an extent that found in the existing Salford supply, it would still provide some scope for the diversification of the housing supply through provision of larger family homes. This carries substantial weight in favour of the allocation. We also acknowledge that parts of the site are well related to the railway station and nearby school, which would provide sustainability benefits.
539. Notwithstanding these benefits, Salford would still be able to comfortably meet their housing requirement without the site and it would not need to be replaced if deleted from the Plan. While there would not be as much 'diversification' of the housing market as previously envisaged, removal of the site would not prejudice the delivery of the overall spatial strategy or Salford's part in it. The scale of delivery is also not 'transformational', neither would the nature of development lead to any long-term economic benefits in terms of job growth and/or supporting of the regional economy. This sets the site apart from others in similar situations.
540. With sufficient resources in place, it would be theoretically possible to restore this peatland habitat to active bog. This would obviously take significant time to achieve. There is also potential for restoration to other peatland habitats such as fen, or other similar measures such as paludiculture, that could be taken to re-wet the area, arrest the degradation of the peatland environment and 'lock' the carbon in place. There is also clear evidence of restoration activities taking place on Chat Moss by both Natural England and Lancashire Wildlife Trust / Carbon Landscape Partnership. This includes both organisations buying land from willing landowners to carry out restoration projects.
541. There is no clear evidence that the technical constraints to restoration on this site are significantly different to those on other parts of Chat Moss where restoration projects are underway. No specific evidence on ground conditions or hydrology of the area has been provided which suggests that restoration of one kind or another would be any more technically difficult or resource intensive than in those areas.

542. The site is not within the 'biodiversity heartland' identified in Policy GI2 of the Salford Local Plan. This is an area where priority will be given to restoration projects. However, this does not suggest that restoration here would be any less important or supported in principle. Moreover, while the reasoned justification for Policy GI2 states that there may be potential for land to be allocated for development within Chat Moss, the policy itself only stipulates that any development should be consistent with the policies' priorities and should not affect the capacity of the area to support bog restoration. The policy does not refer to the potential for allocations, nor does it say what form of development might be proposed. There is also nothing to suggest that the Inspector examining the Salford Local Plan was required to consider the merits of any potential allocation. Policy GI2 therefore provides no specific justification for the allocation of the site for housing, though neither would it preclude development that could meet its requirements.
543. GMCA also noted that this area has not been identified in the Defra Peat Pilot report as being necessary to restore to meet objectives of restoring 50-75% of peat on Chat Moss. However, this is not a prescriptive set of proposals for restoration and thus is similarly not determinative. We acknowledge however that while the allocation would reduce the amount of land available for restoration, it would not prevent the ambition to restore 50-75% of the peat on Chat Moss in itself. Moreover, we have considered that no specific resources have been identified relating to the restoration of this site. However, as recent evidence suggests there is developer interest only in part of the site, then there remains no clear evidence that the remaining landowners would be unwilling to release their land to other uses if the site were to remain in the Green Belt. There may therefore be some prospect of restoration of some form, at least on part of the site, if it is retained in the Green Belt.
544. We acknowledge that the proposed housing would provide substantial public benefits. However, in this instance we are not persuaded that they would clearly outweigh the potential loss or deterioration of an irreplaceable habitat. The wholly exceptional reasons needed to meet the requirements of NPPF 180c have therefore not been demonstrated. In this context, whether or not a suitable compensation package exists is not a factor which needs to be considered. We therefore consider the allocation would conflict with national policy and would not be justified.
545. Irrespective of whether or not the site is considered an irreplaceable habitat under NPPF 180c, there is clearly a strong local policy context for the protection and restoration of Chat Moss. The totality of the evidence considered also demonstrates the environmental importance of the land and importance the Government places on this type of habitat, particularly in terms of its carbon storage function. While there are substantial benefits associated with the allocation, in the context of this site, we do not consider they would be sufficient to outweigh the harms that we have identified meaning that the exceptional circumstances needed to release the land from the Green Belt have not been fully evidenced and justified.

546. On this basis, the allocation of the site is not justified and is inconsistent with national policy. There are no modifications we feel could address these concerns. Therefore, for the Plan to be sound, the allocation should be deleted.

## **Conclusion**

547. JPA28 Land North of Irlam is not justified, consistent with national policy or effective in achieving sustainable development. Accordingly, the allocation should be deleted from the Plan and consequential modifications made to other policies, maps and changes to the Policies Map [**MMS1, MMS7**].

## **Issue 35 – Is policy JPA29 Port Salford Extension justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

548. Site JPA29 is approximately 109 hectares in size, all of which is currently in Green Belt. An additional 15.6 hectares of Green Belt outside the site would also be released because of the allocation. This area, which covers the Barton Aerodrome and the Foxhill Glen SBI, would be severed from the remainder of the Green Belt and would thus no longer serve those purposes. Much of the site is considered by GMCA to be Grade 1 agricultural land.

549. The site is allocated for around 320,000 sqm of new employment floorspace, focussing on the logistics sector. It would represent an expansion of the permitted Port Salford tri-modal freight facility. The intention is that this development would only come forward once Port Salford itself is operational and associated infrastructure projects are complete. There is no persuasive evidence that Port Salford itself will not be completed or that the necessary infrastructure referred to by the policy, in particular part 3, will not be delivered.

550. The allocation meets three of the site selection criteria. Primarily, it meets criterion 2 in that it is able to take advantage of the Port Salford tri-modal scheme. This is a unique facility that provides opportunities to move freight by rail, road or water. This is entirely consistent with NPPF 106e in terms of providing for large scale transport facilities and the wider development needed to support their operation and expansion. It is also consistent with NPPF 110a which encourages the promotion of sustainable transport modes. In this regard, it is fair to say that Port Salford genuinely distinguishes Greater Manchester from its competitors. The scale and location of development means that it has the potential to generate a large number of jobs which, in turn, can have direct benefits for nearby areas of high deprivation (criterion 5). Development here would also assist in the business case for extending the Trafford Park metrolink (criterion 6). However, as this is not currently a commitment, this carries less weight than the other criteria. Nevertheless, there is a clear synergy between the allocation and Plan's spatial and economic strategy.

551. Development would have a moderate overall impact on Green Belt purposes. The allocation would inevitably lead to increased sprawl and encroachment into

open agricultural land. It would not, however, have a significant detrimental effect on the merging of neighbouring towns. The M62, rail line and route of the proposed A57 to M62 link road scheme would also create a clear boundary to the west and north which means that there would be a clear and definitive Green Belt boundary, limiting the scope for further encroachment.

552. The site forms part of Chat Moss and is within the Great Manchester NIA. We have rehearsed many of the issues relating to the development of deep peat above and do not need to repeat them in detail here. Much of the discussion in relation to JPA28 remains relevant here. For the avoidance of doubt, we have considered the allocation in the context of NPPF 180c. In coming to our conclusion, we have had regard to the quality of the peat and the potential and likelihood for restoration to take place.
553. There is much dispute about the extent, depth and quality of the peat on site, the likely effects of development, whether restoration is possible, what form that restoration may take and whether it is likely in any event. It is however generally common ground that the peat is in a degraded state with high levels of carbon emissions. Again, this state is likely to persist without some form of intervention. While there is agreement that it would be theoretically possible to restore a peatland habitat, significant potential technical constraints have been put to us which relate specifically to this location, including geological, hydrogeological and engineering issues, including relating to the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal and proximity of the M60, the nature of the deposits on the land and effects of agricultural use, particularly on drainage. The former Boysnope Golf Course covers part of the site which means that any peat could be under large volumes of inert material.
554. Even if theoretically possible to overcome these constraints, there is no indication of there being any realistic prospect of intervention taking place on this site, either in terms of a willingness from the landowner to release the land or any resources that have been identified to purchase it (perhaps through compulsory purchase) or carry out the restoration itself. We acknowledge that additional forms of funding may be identified in time, just as they may for facilitating delivery of the development as a whole. As with JPA28, there is no clear evidence to suggest that this allocation would prejudice GMCA's objectives of restoring 50-75% of Chat Moss nor that there was any expectation this land would be needed to meet this aim.
555. Development here has the potential to meet demand for large-scale logistics and manufacturing floorspace, in a location that make use of the tri-modal freight facility. There is no other location where this can be realistically or sustainably be achieved. The development will also generate a significant number of jobs. As a whole, the site is fundamental to the economic strategy of the area and will be critical in facilitating the expected sustainability benefits of the tri-modal facility. The Port is of wider importance than simply providing additional employment floorspace in Salford; it will provide benefits for the whole of the Greater Manchester area and will be of national importance.

Consolidating floorspace in this location will help to ensure the success of the port and facilitate the associated benefits.

556. Taking the above into account, we are satisfied that the GMCA have been justified in concluding that, if the allocation includes irreplaceable habitat, then the considerable public benefits associated with it would clearly outweigh any potential loss or deterioration. On this basis, wholly exceptional reasons exist, in principle, to justify the allocation in terms of NPPF 180c.
557. The scale of development provides scope for a suitable compensation strategy to be delivered. This could either be through on-site measures to restore areas of peat to some degree, where possible. Contributions could also be made to restore peat off-site elsewhere within the Chat Moss area, thus facilitating the overall strategy of restoration. A modification is needed to the policy to ensure this occurs. Other modifications are also necessary to ensure further assessment of the extent and quality of the peat is carried out and that the consideration of peat deposits is embedded into the masterplanning process. The aim should be to minimise any potential impact on peat. The modifications will ensure effectiveness in this regard.
558. For the reasons given under issue 6, to be effective modifications are also needed to ensure the policy and reasoned justification is effective in relation to infrastructure phasing and masterplanning, compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt, flooding and safeguarding minerals. These will ensure effectiveness and consistency across allocation policies.
559. A modification is also needed to provide clarity about which employment use classes are being sought. There is no need for this policy to refer to a specific HRA and thus this reference should be deleted. Similarly, reference to "giving consideration to" renewable and low carbon infrastructure is inconsistent with policies JP-S2 and JP-S3 and thus should also be deleted.
560. Notwithstanding its presence within Chat Moss, there are no other international, national or local biodiversity designations within the site. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests it supports a wide range of biodiversity assets, including the potential for protected species within woodland, grassland, wetlands and hedgerows. The site is also adjacent to the Foxhill Glen SBI. Given the scale of the site, there is no reason in principle why national and local policies relating to biodiversity cannot be met and there is nothing to suggest that these constraints make the site unsuitable for allocation in principle. Nonetheless, modifications are necessary to ensure the policy is consistent with policy JP-G9 and Salford Local Plan policies relating to the NIA. A modification is also necessary to remove superfluous requirements about surveys in relation to the protection of birds. In effect, this is a validation requirement and would be adequately addressed by relevant policies.
561. These modifications would retain reference to the need to provide off-site improvements to the Foxhill Glen SBI. Any concerns about the current condition

of the SBI are outside the scope of the examination and does not affect the expectations of the policy.

562. Development of this scale will inevitably result in significant numbers of road-based trips by cars and lorries. Nevertheless, the Plan identifies potential schemes to address this and provides scope to consider further mitigation as necessary at the application stage. The policy is also explicit about the phasing of development and the need for other infrastructure to be in place before work on this site commences. There is no clear evidence that, with suitable mitigation in place, development here would inevitably result in severe transport problems. A modification relating to transport mitigation is necessary for clarity, internal consistency and effectiveness. As elsewhere, the list of potential transport measures will be moved into Appendix D and a cross-reference made to relevant transport policies.
563. Given the location and nature of development proposed, it is appropriate for the policy to continue to highlight the need for transport mitigation to be compatible with proposals for enhancement of the motorway network, include provision for HGV parking and facilities, the need to provide high quality walking and cycling routes and maximise links to public transport.
564. With particular regard to heritage, any development would need to have particular regard to the Barton Aerodrome and associated listed buildings. This can be adequately addressed through the masterplanning process and would not be a reason to find the site unsound in principle. As submitted, part 10 is overly prescriptive and not entirely consistent with the provisions of either national policy or JP-P2. To be justified and effective the policy should be modified to reflect the importance of the aerodrome but also provide a cross-reference to the thematic policy.
565. Part of the site includes a former golf course. However, part 11 of the policy requires the loss of open space to be fully justified and compensated for. As the site has been allocated for development, it would be reasonable to assume that the local authority had considered whether its loss would be justified as part of the site selection process. On this basis, we do not consider part 11 as submitted to be justified. It may still however be necessary for there to be some consideration of the former open space and so a cross reference to relevant local policies would ensure effectiveness.
566. With regard to the golf course, we are content that the boundary as submitted is justified. However, a modification will be needed to ensure development defines or strengthens the boundary both here and to the north of the site. This will ensure effectiveness and is consistent with modifications made elsewhere.
567. The viability evidence for JPA29 suggests there could be a substantial funding gap, largely stemming from transport mitigation. There is some dispute between the GMCA and site promoter about the costs associated with this and the values likely to be achieved. It is likely that the mitigation requirements, the

associated costs and sales values will evolve as detailed proposals are worked up and considered. Nevertheless, a worst-case scenario would suggest that development here would not be viable without other sources of funding.

568. GMCA have expressed confidence that a scheme of this magnitude and importance would attract public money from various sources. Evidence of this already exists in relation to the existing Port Salford scheme where associated infrastructure was delivered through a combination of private and public finance. There seems no reason why JPA29 could not benefit from similar sources of funding over time. Given the expected phasing of the site, we are content that there is sufficient time for costs to be finalised and avenues of funding explored such that development could still be achieved within the lifetime of the Plan.
569. Development of the scale and nature envisaged here will have significant effects on the character of the area, the provision of agricultural land, the transport network and the Green Belt. It will need to be carefully designed, implemented and managed to avoid, minimise or mitigate the potential impacts on the natural and built environment. However, the scale of development and its association with Port Salford are such that we see no reason to disagree with the GMCA's conclusions that the benefits of development would clearly outweigh the harm caused, including in relation to the Green Belt. We are therefore satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances to remove the allocation from the Green Belt. With the modifications described above, we are also content that the policy can be made an effective framework for considering the detailed proposals as they come forward and ensuring an acceptable form of development is delivered [MMS8, MMS9].

## Conclusion

570. Subject to the main modifications set out above, we are satisfied that policy JPA29 Port Salford Extension is justified, consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 36 – Is policy JPA30 Ashton Moss West justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

571. JPA30 relates to a site of around 58 hectares, all of which would be removed from the Green Belt. It is allocated for around 160,000 sqm of employment floorspace, focussed on light and general industrial uses. The site is bounded by existing housing to the south and west, Lord Sheldon Way and the Metrolink to the east and the Manchester to Leeds railway line to the north.
572. The site is well related to existing public transport, with much of the site within 800 metres of the Metrolink station. It is also within 800 metres of a town centre, which also includes a railway station. The development would help meet the employment floorspace needs of Tameside, while also supporting the wider economic strategy including helping to boost northern competitiveness.

573. At present, the Green Belt penetrates south from the railway line and creates separation between existing residential and commercial areas. Development of the site would narrow the gap between Ashton and Droylsden, particularly in the northern part of the site. However, the area around the site is already significantly urbanised and largely contains the site. The allocation would therefore cause only low to moderate overall harm to the Green Belt. Inevitably, it would result in some harm to the open and undeveloped character of the site.
574. Development would be limited primarily to research and development, light industrial and general industrial uses. This reflects the demand for such floorspace in Tameside and provides an alternative to predominantly B8 logistics and warehousing schemes elsewhere. GMCA have indicated that the existing employment land supply in Tameside is limited and existing businesses have little scope to expand. This has apparently resulted in some businesses leaving Tameside. The site therefore provides an opportunity to both attract new investment and retain existing employers in non-B8 uses. A good supply of land for B8 uses has been identified elsewhere and thus this site would complement and help diversify the supply. We are therefore content that the decision to restrict other types of employment development is justified.
575. Nevertheless, reference to development being 'primarily' within these uses is likely to lead to a degree of ambiguity about what use classes might also be permitted or the amount of floorspace that could be dedicated to them. This reference should therefore be deleted to ensure effectiveness.
576. The site is entirely within an area identified as deep peat. However, the vast majority of this is under large amounts of placed earth deposited on the site following construction of the M60. This is up to 18 metres deep in places. Notwithstanding the relatively small area of exposed peat, there is consensus between the GMCA, site promoter and Natural England<sup>122</sup> that there is no realistic chance that this area of peat could be restored. We have no reason to come to a different conclusion.
577. Nevertheless, development should still have regard to the peat that is present. For effectiveness, a modification as suggested by Natural England is necessary to require the use of suitable construction techniques to minimise any potential residual impacts.
578. There are no international, national or local biodiversity designations within the site and thus no known ecological constraints which would preclude development in principle. There are some features on the site, such as pockets of trees and ponds, which may provide opportunities for habitats and additional survey work would be needed with any proposal. Nevertheless, local and national policy sets out requirements for their protection and there is no clear evidence that a suitable form of development could not be achieved.

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<sup>122</sup> GMCA90

579. For the reasons given in issue 6, modifications are needed to the policy and reasoned justification in relation to infrastructure phasing and masterplanning, design, transport mitigation and accessibility, compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt, flooding, biodiversity, archaeology and safeguarding minerals. There is no need for this policy to refer to local education and training opportunities as such things are addressed more effectively through policy JP-J1.
580. Reference to development being informed by a detailed earthwork and remediation strategy in part 3 is no more than a validation requirement for a planning application and provides no guidance for a decision maker. This is ineffective and should be deleted.
581. There is a long-standing aspiration to deliver a new railway station on the Manchester to Leeds line that could serve the allocation and the Droylsden and Audenshaw areas. While this is not currently committed, there is justification to seek to ensure the potential for a station is not stymied. To be effective, a modification is needed to part 11 to provide some flexibility in terms of the siting of any station and expand consideration of layout beyond highways.
582. Requirements in the policy relating to enhancing connectivity and setting aside land for a range of public spaces can adequately be addressed through the requirement for a masterplan, the transport mitigation requirements and thematic policies relating to open space. As above, the relevant thematic policies, particularly in relation to open space, will be more effective than the potentially contradictory and inconsistent approaches set out here. Parts 17 and 18 should therefore be deleted to ensure effectiveness.
583. The allocation will deliver a substantial amount of new employment floorspace, helping to meet overall need and diversifying the local supply. It will therefore help to implement the overall spatial strategy as set out in policy JP-Strat6. Subject to appropriate mitigation, we are therefore content with the GMCA's judgement that the benefits of development would outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt and other potential impacts set out above. The policy, as modified, should ensure an appropriate form of development is achievable [MMTa2, MMTa3]. We are, therefore, satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances to justify removing the site from the Green Belt and that policy JPA30 can be made sound by main modifications.

## Conclusion

584. Subject to the main modifications set out above, we are satisfied that policy JPA30 Ashton Moss West is justified, consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

### **Issue 37 – Is policy JPA31 Godley Green Garden Village justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

585. Policy JPA31 allocates around 124 hectares of land currently within the Green Belt for around 2350 dwellings, a substantial proportion of which may be beyond the end of the plan period. Any development would also be expected to deliver supporting retail and community facilities. It is located between the neighbourhoods of Hyde, Godley and Hattersley. It is largely agricultural and open countryside, with sporadic pockets of existing development scattered across the area. The allocation would result in the entire area being removed from the Green Belt.
586. Parts of the site lie within 800 metres of the Godley and Hattersley rail stations, albeit a new bridge would be required for residents to access the Hattersley station directly. The development would deliver regeneration benefits, complementing existing programmes associated with Hattersley in particular. The development would also help to strengthen the business case for other transport improvements in the area, including the potential provision of tram-train services on the Glossop line.
587. The Green Belt here plays a strong role in checking the unrestricted sprawl of larger built-up areas and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The harm to the Green Belt in these respects would therefore be high. The Green Belt Assessment argues that there would only be moderate harm in terms of the merging of neighbouring settlements. In this regard, it states that the site forms part of the gap between Hyde and Broadbottom but is not critical to the separation of either settlement.
588. We feel the assessment of harm in this respect has been underestimated. Whether or not Hattersley is considered to be part of Hyde, the area in question still manifests itself as a gap in the built form, allowing the countryside to penetrate the barrier of the A560 from the south. The strong boundaries formed by physical features and housing to the west, north and east contain this gap thus emphasising its countryside character. While there is sporadic development within the allocated area, this is all low density and scattered housing, farms and stables, with associated paraphernalia. None of this detracts from the generally open and undeveloped rural character of the area. Indeed, they generally add to it, as do the areas of woodland and hedgerows that are prevalent across the site.
589. The policy requires development to be sensitively designed and enshrine Garden City principles, which includes an expectation of beautiful and imaginatively designed homes and development that enhances the natural environment. Nevertheless, development will appear as additional urban sprawl encroaching into the countryside that will lead to some merging of the built form north of the A560. It will also undoubtedly have some effect on the existing agricultural activity and that relating to other features, such as land used for

equestrian and recreational purposes. Notwithstanding the effect on local character and appearance, the allocation will result in an overall very high degree of harm to the Green Belt. The A560 will however create a clear and strong southern boundary that will contain the new built form.

590. The main modifications consulted on included an additional criterion requiring the creation of a strong boundary along the A560 comprising physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent. This was included to be consistent with the approach taken on other sites. However, on reflection, this is not necessary to make the Plan sound, as the A560 itself will perform the role required by NPPF 143f. This additional criterion has therefore been removed from the schedule. This does not alter the need for development to be of a high quality of design, provide landscaping, or open spaces.
591. The allocation is under multiple ownerships, but we understand the majority of land is in the control of willing landowners who are working together on a masterplan. This includes Tameside Council. The evidence suggests there are some landowners in the area who do not wish to sell their land. However, development here is intended to take place over a prolonged period and there is reasonable potential for this situation to change over time. With the Council being a significant landowner, there is clear public sector commitment to delivery.
592. The Whole Plan Viability Assessment concluded that development here would be viable. There has however been a change in circumstance, namely that a specific source of funding that had been secured from Homes England would no longer be available. This alters the viability assessment and GMCA have indicated it would leave a shortfall of around £4.2m. However, a significant amount of public sector funding has already been provided and Homes England have indicated a general willingness to continue to work with Councils on the delivery of allocations. Given the scale of this site, the role of Tameside Council in terms of ownership and delivery, the benefits it will deliver and that it has previously attracted significant funding, it would be reasonable to assume that there would be other opportunities to address any shortfall. Delivery will take place over a number of years and thus there is ample time for the Council to address this issue. We do not therefore consider the change in current funding context is fatal to either the long-term delivery of the housing or justification for its allocation.
593. For the reasons given under issue 6, modifications are needed to ensure the policy and reasoned justification is effective in relation to infrastructure phasing and masterplanning, compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt, open space provision, training opportunities, archaeology and safeguarding minerals.
594. It is not justified for the policy to require adherence to the Council's Housing Needs Assessment, as that is not part of the development plan. Part 2 needs to be amended so that this is something to 'have regard' to instead. In addition, the

policy is silent on affordable housing provision. To be effective, and consistent with other allocations, it should be made clear that affordable housing will be delivered in accordance with local plan policies.

595. The policy includes no specific provision for older people's housing, custom or self-build dwellings. The reasoned justification does however refer to the potential for these to be part of the housing mix. As both originally drafted and modified, this could be read as a policy requirement which, given the arguments provided by the GMCA, would not necessarily be justified. The policy requires regard to be had to the Housing Needs Assessment which may indeed identify a need for such housing in the fullness of time. Some reference to this potential is therefore acceptable. We have however altered the modification consulted on to provide a clearer link to the wording of the policy. This does not alter the intent of the policy.
596. In terms of housing density, it is logical for the policy to indicate higher densities will be required near to the train station. However, to be effective part 10 should provide a cross-reference to JP-H4.
597. The policy expects adherence to the 'Garden City' principles. Given the scale and nature of development proposed, including the provision of jobs in the 'local hubs', this is justified. However, to aid effectiveness, the reasoned justification should be modified to set out what those principles are. This will clarify expectations and assist in the preparation of the comprehensive masterplan. This requirement, and the clarification this modification provide mean that the somewhat generic references to design and architecture elsewhere in the policy are not necessary and/or are more appropriately covered by thematic policies. To ensure effectiveness, these should be deleted. This would not undermine the expectation of high-quality development enshrined within the Garden City Principles.
598. An overarching principle of development here will be the creation of two distinct but connected villages, each with their own village centre or 'hub'. This is an appropriate approach to the delivery of the site. However, to be effective and consistent with national policy, part 9 should be modified to make it clear that the 'hubs' should be of a scale and nature to meet local needs only. This is important in ensuring they would not harm the vitality and viability of any existing centres.
599. As submitted the policy requires land to be set aside for additional school education provision, unless it can be demonstrated there are sufficient school places can be accommodated off-site. There have been changes in school capacity since the Plan was submitted and it may now be that land for a school is not an absolute necessity and thus not justified. Parts 11 and 13 should therefore be replaced with a new criterion which prioritises contributions for additional off-site primary and/or secondary school provision in line with thematic policies. This will still provide scope for development to provide land to expand Alder High School if circumstances dictate it. There is no suggestion

that development here would not be capable of delivering sufficient education provision and the policy framework will ensure this is the case.

600. The site is near to the M67/A57 roundabout which is known to have capacity issues, particularly in Mottram. To help alleviate this, National Highways have proposed to deliver a new bypass. At the time of writing, this had received consent but was subject to legal challenge. This, along with other measures identified, would be expected to mitigate the impact of development here. Nevertheless, the allocation is not contingent on the delivery of the bypass. If this should not happen for any reason, then an alternative scheme for the roundabout has been identified which could address transport issues resulting from the development. The policy also allows for further assessment and mitigation to be identified if necessary. Importantly, National Highways have not objected to the allocation in terms of its potential impact on the Strategic Road Network.
601. There is no clear evidence that the development would cause a severe residual cumulative impact on the road network. Even if mitigation measures would not entirely remove the problems associated with the junction, they should at least ensure the situation is not materially worse than now. To be effective and consistent with other allocations, the issues covered by parts 11, 14 and 15 should be subsumed into a new criterion which directs applicants to Appendix D and JP-C7. This will still ensure access is taken from the A560 and any necessary mitigation provided.
602. Part 16 requires provision of a new bridge to Hattersley. This is necessary to provide improved access to Hattersley train station. As submitted, the policy requires this to be delivered in 'the' early phase of development. While not entirely clear in itself, it could be inferred that this would be in the earliest phase of development, wherever this might take place. Depending on the outcome of the masterplanning process, this might not be justified. Altering this to 'an' early phase still provides comfort that the bridge would be delivered early in the scheme but provides some flexibility.
603. Parts 17 and 18 do not add anything specific about cycling and walking in the area and thus for the reasons given in issue 6 should be deleted. Again, such matters would be picked up though other parts of this policy, including part 19. Parts 19 and 20 largely cover the same issues and should be combined.
604. The allocation encompasses the Brookfold Wood and Werneth Brook SBIs. The evidence identifies potential constraints relating to protected species, including great crested newts and badgers. It is also within 10km of the South Pennine Moors SAC and SPA and within 1km of Werneth Low Country Park. These types of constraint are not unusual for a site of this scale and nature. The allocation is of a sufficient size to be able to accommodate the development while having proper regard to these features and biodiversity assets. There is nothing to suggest that the constraints are such that the allocation is unsound in principle on this basis.

605. Modifications are still necessary in relation to biodiversity to make the policy effective. A new criterion is necessary which combines several existing requirements and provides a cross-reference to JP-G9. This will ensure internal consistency on biodiversity protection, while still ensuring that the importance of Werneth Brook and Brookfold Wood, as well as other priority habitats, are suitably protected. An additional criterion is also needed to ensure mitigation is provided in relation to the South Pennine Moors SAC/SPA, as set out in paragraph 40, along with associated changes to the reasoned justification.
606. Godley Green Garden Village is a very large and significant scheme which will clearly result in substantial change to the character and nature of the area. There are a number of physical and environmental constraints that will need to be overcome. However, the benefits associated with the scale of development envisaged are substantial in terms of meeting the area's long-term housing needs, diversifying the housing supply and facilitating infrastructure improvements that may benefit both new and existing residents. The allocation also provides scope for Garden City Principles to be adhered to which means the expectation of high-quality development. The allocation is also consistent with the spatial strategy. Subject to the modifications set out above [MMTa4, MMTa5], we are satisfied that the impacts of development would be able to be satisfactorily mitigated and that quality of development achieved.
607. Accordingly, we are content with the GMCA's conclusions that the benefits of development would outweigh the high degree of harm to the Green Belt and other issues identified above. The exceptional circumstances needed to justify removing this allocation from the Green Belt exist and policy JPA31 can be made sound.

## **Conclusion**

608. Subject to the main modifications set out above, we are satisfied that policy JPA31 Godley Green Garden Village is justified, consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 38 – Is policy JPA32 South of Hyde justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

609. Policy JPA32 relates to a site of around 33 hectares, which is split across two parcels of land to the north and south of the A560. It is allocated for around 440 dwellings. The site, except for a small area in the southern parcel, is within the Green Belt.
610. The site provides an opportunity to meet local housing need and diversify the current stock in the Hyde area, which is currently predominantly terraces and dwellings within the A and B Council Tax bands. Parts of the site are within 800 metres of the rail station at Woodley and it is on a high frequency bus route between Stockport and Ashton-under-Lyne. The policy requires the restoration

and re-use of the Grade II\* listed Apethorn Farmhouse. Apethorn Farmhouse is currently on the Heritage at Risk Register.

611. The allocation would result in moderate to high harm to the Green Belt. In particular, it would weaken the gap between Hyde and Woodley. The role of the areas in checking the unrestricted sprawl of Gee Cross, Greave and Woodley would also be diminished to an extent.
612. The allocation includes part of the Pole Bank North SBI. This area is at the edge of the site and would not form part of the developable area. Indeed, the allocation boundary straddles that of the SBI and thus makes little sense. Moreover, the woodland character of the SBI means that the boundary of the SBI would be able to meet the requirements of NPPF 143f. Accordingly, for the policy to be justified and effective, the boundary should be modified to remove the SBI from the allocation and retain it within the Green Belt.
613. For the reasons given in issue 6, modifications are also needed to ensure the policy is effective in relation to infrastructure, phasing and masterplanning, design, generic open space requirements, flooding and drainage, compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt, archaeology and safeguarding minerals.
614. As with JPA31, it is not justified for the policy to require adherence to the Council's Housing Needs Assessment, as that is not part of the development plan. The policy needs to be amended so that this is something to 'have regard' to. The same modifications as for JPA31 are also needed in relation to affordable housing provision and changes to the reasoned justification in relation to older people's housing, self-build and custom build.
615. This policy also requires development to abide by the Garden City principles. However, several of the principles do not apply to this site. For example, the development would not generate long term jobs. Therefore, this requirement is not justified and should be deleted. Those principles which might apply, such as those relating to tenure mix, design and the natural environment, would all be adequately addressed by other criteria and/or generic thematic policies.
616. The southern part of the site slopes sharply to the east, terminating at Lord Derby Road. Development rising up the slope here would be highly prominent. However, a similar pattern of development exists immediately to the north of the site. The policy seeks to mitigate this by requiring lower density development as the elevation increases. It also seeks to ensure that the edges of any development successfully integrate into the adjoining landscape. Housing here would still represent a distinct change in character from open rolling countryside, though the policy should be successful in minimising any harm. The northern plot is contained by ribbon development to the north and east, and woodland to south and west. While development here might not be as prominent, it would still appear as an encroachment into the open countryside.
617. To reflect the particular landscape sensitivities of the site, particularly the eastern extent, a modification to part 9 is necessary to highlight the importance

of the Landscape Character and Sensitivity Assessment. This provides guidance for the preparation of the masterplan and will thus ensure the policy is effective. Parts 7 and 8 will also help ensure a high quality of design is required, though there would still be an obvious change in character.

618. The evidence does not suggest that development of the scale proposed is necessary to secure the future of the Apethorn Farmhouse. Nevertheless, there is no reason why the policy should not seek this outcome as part of the overall vision for the site. This will not undermine the viability of the development and will be a beneficial outcome. The requirement is therefore justified. There are other heritage assets in the vicinity of the site, which the policy notes and there is no reason to conclude that development would have an unacceptable effect on their significance.
619. For internal consistency and effectiveness, a modification is however needed to part 10 to provide a cross-reference to policy JP-P2 and incorporate relevant elements from part 12, which covers the same issue. Part 11 does not need to refer to evidence submitted as part of any application, as this is addressed through the thematic policy.
620. To be effective and consistent with other policies, part 13 needs to be modified in relation to education provision. This will provide clarity regarding the need for development to contribute to primary and/or secondary provision. There is no need for part 14, as issues relating to training opportunities are properly addressed in policy JP-J1.
621. Both parcels will be accessed from the A560, as will the Godley Green Garden Village (JPA31). Together these are likely to generate a substantial number of additional trips. However, the cumulative effects of both allocations have been assessed and, subject to the mitigation identified being in place, the development is not expected to result in severe residual cumulative impacts on the road network. For effectiveness, a new criterion is needed which combines the various transport mitigation references in parts 13 and 15, cross refers to Appendix D and JP-C7. Parts 16 and 17 are generic in nature and add nothing specific and thus should be deleted. Such matters would be picked up through thematic policies. Parts 18 and 19, which are specific to the features within, or near to, the allocation cover similar issues and thus should be combined for effectiveness.
622. Subject to the above modification to the site boundary, there are no international, national or local biodiversity designations within the allocation. There is potential for the site to contain priority habitats and species including badgers, water voles, hedges and species-rich grasslands. Nevertheless, we are satisfied that in principle development would be capable of satisfactorily avoiding or mitigating any potential impacts in line with local and national policies. A modification would however be needed to ensure that the site-specific policy refers to policy JP-G9. As elsewhere, this will ensure that biodiversity assets are considered in-line with national policy. For the sake of

consistency, this replaces several individual criteria, but the overall level of protection is not diminished.

623. The Whole Plan Viability Assessment concluded this site would be deliverable and there is nothing before us to suggest otherwise. The allocation is sensitive from a landscape and environmental perspective and development will alter the character of the area. Nevertheless, it is still well-related to the existing built form and the policies will seek to ensure any harm is minimised or mitigated. Overall, we are satisfied that the benefits of development here would clearly outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt and other potential harm referred to above. The modifications set out above will ensure the policy can be made effective in delivering an acceptable form of development [**MMTa1, MMTa6, MMTa7, MMTa8**].

## **Conclusion**

624. Subject to the main modifications set out above, we are satisfied that policy JPA32 South of Hyde is justified, consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 39 – Is policy JPA33 New Carrington justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

### **General Matters**

625. Policy JPA33 relates to the allocation of around 1,153 hectares for a mix of housing, employment and supporting services. It is expected that the site will deliver around 5,000 dwellings, with some likely to be delivered beyond 2039, and 350,000 sqm of industrial and warehousing floorspace. A new local centre and two neighbourhood centres are expected to be provided to serve the new communities. Some development has already taken place on the site, is under construction or has planning permission. These will contribute to the overall requirements set out for the allocation.

626. The site comprises a mix of previously developed land and open countryside, not all of which is Green Belt. Nevertheless, around 169 hectares of Green Belt would still be released, including a small area on the edge of Partington outside the site boundary. The allocation also includes a significant area of retained Green Belt, which is expected to be a 'green corridor' running through the development. A significant proportion of the site, including within the developable area is within the area of peatland known as Carrington Moss. The site is also subject to Health and Safety Executive (HSE) COMAH zones which may affect development in certain parts of the site. Some of the allocation also covers Grade 2 and 3a agricultural land.

627. The site meets 6 of the 7 site selection criteria. It is partly previously developed land and thus meets criterion 1. It is relatively close to the key asset of Port

Salford, and though there are no new freight links being provided between the two sites, new businesses may still be able to benefit from relatively close access to the tri-modal port. Accordingly, criterion 2 is broadly satisfied. The scale of development proposed is of a scale where it would constitute transformational change and deliver substantial economic benefits. Criterion 3 is therefore satisfied. Similarly, the regeneration of brownfield land and providing new jobs and homes meet criterion 5. The scale of development is such that it will need to provide new transport infrastructure to serve the new community, as well as providing new community services and facilities. This helps to meet criterion 6. The site will also help to meet the housing and employment needs of Trafford and contribute to the overall spatial strategy for Greater Manchester, thus meeting criterion 7.

628. The release of Green Belt would be in two broad areas and would result in moderate to very high degree of harm. It would result in an obvious encroachment into the open countryside from both eastern and western directions, narrowing the existing gap between Sale and Carrington.
629. The Whole Plan Viability Assessment concluded that viability here was marginal. Various sensitivity tests were considered. With affordable housing reduced to 15% and assumptions made about house price increases, the assessment identified a surplus. This assessment considered various costs associated with highways and other mitigation. Inevitably, as the masterplan progresses, the nature and costs associated with these projects and mitigation are likely to change. Similarly, the values associated with the development will alter. Any assessment of viability can only be a snapshot in time. However, this is a long-term project which is likely to progress beyond the end of the plan period. This provides time to allow any viability issues that arise to be addressed, including the potential to secure public funding. We are satisfied that given the scale and importance placed in this scheme, the significant level of developer interest which exists, and the timescales involved there is a reasonable prospect of the allocation being able to be delivered at the point envisaged.

## **Peat**

630. The site includes the Carrington Moss area of peatland, part of which falls within the retained Green Belt and part within the area identified for development. This is severed from other areas of peatland by the River Mersey, Manchester Ship Canal and M62 Motorway to the north and River Glaze to the west. Although distinct to Chat Moss, many of the issues and considerations identified under JPA28 and JPA29 remain relevant here and are not repeated. Much of the area has been highly modified by agricultural and industrial activity. It was also used for the deposition of nightsoil from around 1880. The area is criss-crossed with drainage ditches over a metre in depth, with smaller field drains at regular intervals across the site. There are also other features which affect the peat in the area, including potential contamination, proximity to the former petrochemical site and the presence of utilities infrastructure.

631. As with Chat Moss, previous industrial and agricultural activity has likely caused the degradation of the majority of the peat within the site. This has been largely drained and is currently likely to be emitting carbon dioxide. The formation of new peat has largely ceased, and it is not considered to be an active bog. There may be some areas within the site where there are higher quality areas of peat including within some SBIs. There is no evidence to suggest that these areas are extensive.
632. The situation here is therefore similar to that described for other sites. With sufficient resources and time, it may be technically possible to restore the deep peaty soils within New Carrington to wetland fen or wetland woodland habitat. However, there are significant and reasonable doubts as to whether this is likely to be realistic across the area as a whole. These relate to the technical issues, including the need to remove the nutrient-rich nightsoil, significant engineering works relating to groundwater levels, drainage, issues relating to contamination and issues associated with the existing infrastructure operation and maintenance.
633. We acknowledge that these issues are disputed by various parties, including Natural England. Nevertheless, even if restoration projects of the nature referred to by these parties are technically possible, there is no evidence of any resources, intent or ability to carry out such extensive projects at this time, or any time in the future. While funding streams may become available in time, we have nevertheless had regard to the potential for there to be no intervention or restoration and that the effects of existing deterioration may continue to go unchecked.
634. The developable area of the allocation does not cover the whole extent of the likely peat deposits. Areas outside the Green Belt which might be of a higher quality are also most likely to be within SBIs and thus protected from development. The masterplanning process, suitably bolstered by the modifications referred to below, will allow the assessment and consideration of the extent and quality of peat to be taken into account in determining the precise location of development. It remains likely that development would result in some degree of further loss or deterioration of the deep peaty soils in the area. This is, however, in the context of the peat already being degraded and, without intervention, continuing to lose its carbon storage function. There is no reason to believe development would affect the best areas of remaining peat. The peat within the retained Green Belt would also be protected and may provide scope for restoration.
635. The allocation would make a very significant contribution to Trafford's housing and employment needs, as well as contributing to the strategy of sustaining the competitiveness of the southern areas. It would also involve substantial regeneration of previously developed land, bringing with it associated social and environmental benefits. This is all consistent with the strategic objectives set out in policies JP-Strat9 and JP-Strat11. While some of these benefits are not derived from the peatland areas, and some development is already committed,

there is still a significant amount of development still to come forward. In considering the allocation as a whole, and the need for comprehensive masterplanning and phasing of delivery, GMCA's judgement is that these benefits would clearly outweigh the loss or deterioration of an irreplaceable habitat. This is a judgement they are entitled to make and, on balance, we are content that this is justified. Consequently, the wholly exceptional reasons required by NPPF 180c exist.

636. There is scope within the allocation for the restoration of peat habitats. We are therefore satisfied that, in principle, it should be possible to deliver a suitable compensation strategy in the context described under Issue 6. A modification will be needed to the policy to introduce a new criterion which sets out the requirement for such a strategy to be provided. As above, this will provide the Council with the opportunity to fully assess the degree of harm caused and the effectiveness of any compensation strategy identified. This will ensure the policy is effective.

### **Modifications – consistency and ambiguity**

637. As well as being the largest development in the Plan, it is also the longest policy. Several criteria serve only to repeat what is covered more appropriately or accurately in thematic policies, addressed under the blanket of the masterplan requirement or by other parts of the policy. This is not a clear or effective approach and so parts 3, 10 and 41 (matters relating to design and layout), 5 (type and tenure of housing), 11 (training agreements), 12 and 13 (phasing), 24 (community facilities), 29 (biodiversity) and 45-48 (energy efficiency and broadband requirements), 50 and 51 (flooding and drainage) are all superfluous and should be deleted or their requirements subsumed within other criteria. Part 53 needs to be modified to remove the superfluous reference to HS2. There is no suggestion that New Carrington is in any way reliant on HS2 coming forward. As elsewhere, a new criterion is needed to reflect the fact the site is in a minerals safeguarding area.

### **Picture 11.48**

638. Picture 11.48 identifies an area as 'Local Plan'. This is not directly referred to in the policy and does not form one of the character areas referenced in the policy. Therefore, it is not clear what uses would be permitted in this area or how proposals would be considered. GMCA explained that this area would be covered by both JPA33 and Trafford Core Strategy policy SL5<sup>123</sup>. They also indicated it had been left out of JPA33 as it was not anticipated that it would deliver significant levels of development. We do not consider this to be a clear or unambiguous approach, not least as Table A.8 suggests policy SL5 is to be superseded. Modifications are necessary to the policy and inset map to clarify the status of this area of land and that it will be suitable for mixed residential and employment use.

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<sup>123</sup> GMCA67

639. Picture 11.48 is also identified as a 'policy' map. As with JPA3.2, requiring adherence to this 'picture' could lead to unhelpful unintended consequences when the more finely grained and detailed masterplan is being considered. It should be made clear, therefore, that this plan is indicative only so not to prejudice the masterplan. A consequential modification is needed to part 6 to reflect this.

### **Masterplan, phasing and comprehensive development**

640. Any development would be subject to an agreed masterplan covering the whole site. The Council contends that delivery of the site should be considered in a comprehensive manner. There are several individual parcels of development, spread over a wide area. Nevertheless, the scale of delivery and the scope of mitigation measures needed within the policy, including infrastructure provision, justify this type of comprehensive and co-ordinated approach.

641. It was put to us that the policy should allow for masterplans for individual parcels, but we feel that this would undermine the overall intentions of the allocation. For the same reason, it is not appropriate for the policy to allow for certain parts of the site to come forward in advance of any masterplan. It is also appropriate for the policy to expect infrastructure and other contributions to be considered at an allocation-wide scale, rather than a piecemeal approach which might affect overall viability and delivery. Even in this policy context, statutory protections exist which will ensure developers would not be required to make unjustified infrastructure contributions.

642. Modifications to part 1 are however necessary to ensure consistency and effectiveness in terms of the masterplanning and the phasing and delivery of the site. To ensure a comprehensive approach to development, the policy should also be modified to make it clear that developers will need to provide proportionate contributions to fund necessary infrastructure. With regard to the discussion about peat, part 1 also needs to recognise the particular requirement to manage the hydrological and carbon implications of development and consider opportunities to restore habitats and strengthen ecological networks. These changes will set the context for the remainder of the policy and establish an effective policy framework for delivery.

643. Since submission of the Plan, proposals for the HyNet North West Hydrogen pipeline have progressed. This is a proposal for a hydrogen pipeline that is currently proposed to go through part of the site. This scheme does not have consent and is outside the scope of the Plan. There is no suggestion that it would prejudice any of the development. Nevertheless, it would be prudent to refer to it in the policy such that any proposals have regard to this potential scheme should it come forward.

644. The COMAH zones referred to above should also not have any prejudicial effect on the delivery of development. While these may affect the scale and nature of development in certain areas, this has been factored into the allocation and the

illustrative 'policy plan'. Nevertheless, to be effective, a new criterion is needed to highlight the zones' existence and need to have regard to advice from the HSE. This will also assist in the preparation of the masterplan.

### **Residential development**

645. Part 2 sets out the requirements for 5,000 dwellings across the site. There is no restriction on how many of these can come forward in the plan period. It is therefore neither justified nor effective for the policy to refer to 4,300 being delivered in the plan period. The split of expected delivery across the different character areas is also meant to be indicative only and thus inclusion in the policy could be misleading. For clarity, this should be removed from policy and placed in the reasoned justification.
646. Part 4 refers to specific heritage constraints on land west of Warburton Lane. At the hearing, GMCA confirmed that it was not intended for this to be any more onerous than consideration of any heritage asset. On this basis, the strict requirements within the criterion are not justified or consistent with national policy. Part 4 should therefore be deleted and reference to the Warburton Deer Park subsumed within the general historic environment requirements in part 43. The policy as modified expects development to take "appropriate account" of these heritage assets in the context of policy JP-P2. Any dispute about the significance of these assets, and harm likely to be caused, can be assessed through the masterplanning and planning application process. Reference to them in the policy does not prejudice development taking place. Nevertheless, we see no reason why development would result in unacceptable harm to the setting of any heritage asset in principle.
647. Part 7 sets out the requirement for affordable housing. Following sensitivity testing, the Whole Plan Viability Assessment concluded that 15% delivery would be achievable across the site as a whole. The GMCA suggested a modification during the examination to remove this figure and instead rely on their local plan to determine the requirement on a site-by-site basis. The argument was that to deliver the 15% as a whole, some areas would need to deliver a higher level than others. This may be the case. However, given the findings of the viability assessment, there is nothing inherently unsound about using the 15% figure as a guide for the whole allocation and thus no need to amend the policy in this regard. Moreover, the intention is to have a comprehensive masterplan and approach to phasing and delivery. As part of this, it should be possible to ensure the 15% minimum is delivered across the allocation; indeed, it is for matters such as this that the argument was made for the allocation and mitigation to be considered as a whole, rather than as separate pockets of development.
648. Removing the 15% figure would mean there would be no way of determining what level of affordable housing would be expected across the site, or assessing how each parcel would need to contribute to reach this figure. The viability assessment however provides no justification for setting a figure higher than 15% which might be the consequence of the Council's revised approach.

649. Part 7 and associated reasoned justification does, however, need some modification. As submitted, it implies that in determining appropriate affordable housing provision regard would be had to the distinct character areas, the masterplan or SPD (the latter of which is no longer intended to be produced) and the Trafford Local Plan. In the context of the policy already stipulating a requirement of 15% affordable housing across the site, this additional 'guidance' is unhelpful and creates an unwelcome degree of ambiguity. In line with other policies, it is sufficient for the policy to state that the affordable housing will be provided in accordance with local policy requirements. This will address matters such as type and tenure.
650. A further modification to this is therefore necessary to ensure effectiveness in this regard. The modified policy refers to the affordable housing being "*provided* in accordance with local policy requirements". It should be clear therefore that this relates to how the affordable housing will be delivered in terms of type and tenure, rather than application of policies which may derive a different overall requirement figure. To ensure there is no ambiguity, we have amended the modifications to policy and reasoned justification to clarify that this refers to housing type and tenure. This does not alter the intention of the modification but removes any lingering potential for ambiguity. We have also removed reference to viability from the modified reasoned justification as this could be read in the same way as the policy we previously considered unjustified.
651. Nevertheless, it remains an important principle of the comprehensive development of the site to ensure that 15% is delivered across the allocation. This is why it is important for development to be considered comprehensively. It is therefore justified for the reasoned justification to highlight the potential for different areas to deliver different proportions of affordable housing in order to meet this overarching policy requirement.
652. Part 8 relates to self-build and custom build plots. As submitted, the policy requires "specific" provision for such development. However, as this is to be guided by the Council's self-build register, it would be more accurate, and effective, to refer to making "appropriate" provision. A modification is recommended on this basis.

### **Employment development**

653. The scale of employment floorspace proposed under part 9 is justified. The COMAH zones may have some effect on the scale of any individual units that may be delivered. Nevertheless, there is no reason why this should stop the allocation coming forward or mean that Trafford cannot meet demand. Moreover, the Plan caters well for larger logistics users and thus there is no need to allocate more floorspace in Trafford to meet such needs. In this regard, the allocation will provide a degree of variety in the supply, including logistics providers who require smaller units, and not prejudice the spatial strategy's objectives. However, part 9 still needs to be modified to remove any ambiguity about the employment use classes being proposed.

## **Transport and accessibility**

654. Part 14 to 20 deal with different aspects of the transport network and accessibility. Development of the scale envisaged will bring significant additional trips into the area and mitigation will be needed. Neither the highway authority or National Highways have objected to the allocation based on its impact on the local or wider road network. We are therefore content that appropriate and adequate mitigation measures have been identified for the site, or can be through the masterplanning process, and development need not lead to severe cumulative impacts on the road network.
655. For reasons set out under issue 6, modifications are necessary to parts 14, with consequential changes to 19 and 20. This will place specific measures into Appendix D to be considered through the masterplanning and planning application process. This provides adequate safeguards to ensure development does not lead to unacceptable impacts. It also allows for the consideration of additional transport mitigation to be considered if need be. In this context, that the policy does not include certain measures some would wish to see, particularly in relation to freight, is not a reason for the allocation to be unsound.
656. To clarify the Plan's intentions and requirements with regard to accessibility within the site, part 15 should be modified to make it clear that safe cycling and walking routes should link to surrounding areas as well as through the site. Part 16 should be modified to provide additional examples of where GMCA may be concerned. We acknowledge that Red Brook has not been identified as a 'barrier' to development in a previous appeal decision. However, the aim of the policy is to "deliver connected neighbourhoods". Provided the masterplan demonstrates this is being achieved then we see no reason why this should be seen as a significant issue. There is no soundness issue in this respect.
657. Part 17 refers to use of the disused railway line as a strategic sustainable transport corridor and the reinstatement of the Cadishead viaduct. Restricting any sustainable transport corridor to the disused railway line would be unnecessarily prescriptive. A modification to provide some flexibility is therefore necessary. This would not rule out use of the railway line but may provide opportunities for alternatives that provide similar benefits. Reference to linkage with the wider Carrington Greenway scheme would also assist in maximising the benefits and effectiveness of the policy in terms of promoting sustainable travel. It is legitimate for the GMCA to identify accessibility features it wishes to see form part of the overall vision for the site. The creation of an east/west corridor seems like a logical objective which fits into the wider vision for the area, rather than simply a transport mitigation measure. The modified criterion provides more flexibility in how this can be achieved. As such we are content this element of policy is justified.
658. Part 18 should be modified to provide flexibility about the provision of bus priority infrastructure and/or routes. As per the changes to part 14, what is required will be subject to assessment and so it may be that 'enhancement' is

preferable to delivery of new infrastructure or bus routes. In any event, the modifications would not limit the requirement to deliver improved public transport modes.

659. As set out above, the specific transport measures listed in part 19 should be moved to Appendix D. This part also refers to delivery of the Carrington Relief Road (CRR). While the relief road will facilitate the delivery of the development by providing additional road capacity and mitigation, it is a long-standing and separate project that is not solely dependent on the allocation. While a route for CRR is identified on Picture 11.48, this is indicative only and it is not the intention of the policy to allocate land for the road. The CRR has not just been identified as a means of delivering the New Carrington development, it is also seen as providing accessibility improvements for existing residents, including those in Partington. It is identified in the Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2040 and has been identified in the Transport Locality Assessment and Addendum as being a necessary part of the transport mitigation for the area. The intention is also for the road to help deliver public transport improvements. We are content that reference to the road is justified.

660. We acknowledge that changes to the policy and Appendix D mean that final transport mitigation measures will need be assessed as part of the masterplanning/planning application process. This may well revisit the need for the CRR and/or its route. However, given the profile of the project and its wider relevance, it remains referenced in the policy rather than just in Appendix D. It is not intended that the New Carrington development would deliver the road in its entirety. As such, the requirement in part 19 for development to 'deliver' the road is misleading and not justified. Rather, the policy should be modified to clarify that the road be 'facilitated' by development. This may mean contributions in the normal way, where necessary, but also relates to the need for any masterplan to recognise and reflect the delivery of the road in terms of layout.

### **Community facilities**

661. It is logical and justified for the development to provide new local centres to meet the needs of the new communities. However, to ensure the provisions are effective, parts 21 and 22 should be modified to be clear about what form and purpose these centres should provide. In this regard, reference to 2,500 sqm of floorspace for the new Local Centre in Partington East is not justified by any evidence of need or impact. It would therefore be preferable to assess any application on whether the floorspace provided would meet the needs of local people, rather than an arbitrary requirement.

662. The development will be expected to deliver additional primary and secondary school places. As submitted, the policy suggests this would be through extensions to schools in Partington and Sale West. Changes to school capacity figures now suggest there may be a need for a new on-site primary school as well as off-site financial contributions. On this basis, part 23 needs to be

modified to better reflect the current position but also to provide a cross-reference to policy JP-P5. This will allow needs to be properly assessed and addressed at the time of any application.

### **Green Belt and green infrastructure**

663. We are content that the submitted Green Belt boundary is broadly consistent with NPPF 143f or can be made so. There are a number of locations in the Plan where there are currently no physical features but where development can strengthen the boundary. The same applies here, particularly in the east of the site. Consistent with other allocations, a modification is needed to part 26 to ensure boundaries are defensible. Part 27 also needs to be modified in line with other policies to ensure compensatory improvements are provided to remaining Green Belt, in accordance with NPPF 142.
664. Parts 25 and 28 need to be modified for to provide clarity to the meaning of accessible green infrastructure and green space, respectively. Part 30 is unnecessarily prescriptive in determining open space need be on-site only. It should therefore be modified to ensure it is consistent with local policies. Part 31 allows the provision of 'strategic green spaces' within the Sale West part of the allocation. These are also identified on Picture 11.48. Given there is a requirement to prepare a detailed masterplan, requiring adherence to this 'picture' is not justified nor effective. This criterion therefore needs to be modified to make it clear that the open spaces, which are justified in principle, are to be provided 'broadly' in the locations identified. This will allow proposals to be refined through the masterplanning process. There is also no need for policy to refer to applicants "demonstrating" how they will deliver improved green infrastructure; rather it is only necessary to ensure such improvements are delivered.

### **Natural environment**

665. The allocation includes eight SBIs. The Brookheys Covert SSSI is also located directly to the south of the site. The scale and nature of the site also dictates that there are likely to be other areas of biodiversity value within the site, including ancient woodland, wildlife corridors including the River Mersey, Manchester Ship Canal, Sinderland Brook and the disused railway. There is no suggestion that development is intended to encroach into the SBIs. Moreover, the scale of the site is such that there would be ample scope to assess the effects of development through the masterplanning and planning applications processes and appropriately avoid, minimise or mitigate any potential impacts on biodiversity features within the site in line with relevant policies.
666. General matters relating to ecological evidence are covered under Issue 6. There is no single ecological assessment which covers the whole site. However, the Council has been able to consider evidence submitted by site promoters

and the advice of the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit. There is no reason to assume that this evidence is not valid. The Topic Paper<sup>124</sup> for the site highlights the range of features referred to above and thus there is a clear understanding that there are areas of constraint and sensitivity on the site which must be addressed through the masterplanning/planning application process. The allocation policy, the relevant thematic policies and any statutory protections would ensure that any effects on biodiversity will be fully addressed through this process.

667. Parts 32, 33 and 35 require the protection of designated features, wildlife corridors and the restoration and creation of areas of wetland within the site. This is sound in principle. For the reasons given elsewhere, part 32 should however be modified to be consistent with national policy and provide a cross-reference to JP-G9. To ensure internal consistency and effectiveness, particularly in relation to issues relating to wetlands, part 33 should be modified to include reference to wildlife corridors, steppingstone habitats, a cross reference to policy JP-G2 and reference to the Great Manchester Wetlands Nature Improvement Area. The reference in part 35 to the North West River Basin Management Plan (NWRBMP) is unjustifiably more onerous with the general approach to water quality set out in policy JP-S5. This should therefore be deleted.
668. A new criterion is also needed to ensure proposals are consistent with NPPF 180c. As with JPA29, this should set out the need to carry out hydrological and ground investigations as part of the masterplanning of the site, encourage the use of any construction techniques that might minimise the impact to the peat and identify a suitable compensation strategy. There is no need for this policy to refer to a project specific HRA and thus part 36 should be deleted.

### **Landscape, design and historic environment**

669. Parts 37 to 39 set out requirements to minimise the inevitable impacts on landscape character. It is unrealistic to expect all development to be able to conserve or enhance existing landscape character. Rather, part 38 should be modified to ensure proposals properly reflect and respond to landscape character, set out which characteristics are considered important and provide a cross-reference to policy JP-G1 for completeness. To properly reflect its local importance, Warburton Village should also be added to the list of specific locations. These modifications will ensure part 38 is effective.
670. While clearly the policy should seek to ensure development respects local character, part 40 should be modified to include heritage as a key design factor. This will ensure consistency with other parts of the policy. Other unclear and ambiguous elements of part 40 should also be removed.

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<sup>124</sup> 10.09.07

671. In line with other policies, part 43 needs to be modified itself to provide a cross-reference to JP-P2 and the need to take appropriate account of heritage assets. This modification renders part 44, which referred to archaeological assessment, moot. In any event, part 44 is little more than a validation requirement and should not be in the policy in any event. As noted above, there is nothing in principle to suggest development would not be able to proceed on the basis of unacceptable harm to heritage assets, including areas of higher sensitivity toward the west of the allocation.

### **Environmental protection**

672. The majority of the site is in flood zone 1. There are areas that are in flood zones 2 and 3 but are not expected to form part of the developable area. The allocation is large enough to ensure these areas are avoided and appropriate mitigation provided. While it is necessary to draw developers' attention to the need to address flooding and drainage issues, part 49 includes too much detail and prescription to be an effective policy, not least when such issues are adequately addressed through thematic policies. A modification is therefore needed to remove redundant information relating to the content of any drainage strategy. These are matters that can be adequately dealt with at the time of any planning application.

673. In conclusion, it is clear that the delivery of New Carrington will not be without some degree of harm to the character of the area and there are a significant number of constraints to overcome. This is to be expected for a development of this scale and extent. Nevertheless, on balance we have no reason to disagree with the judgement of the GMCA that the benefits associated with the comprehensive development of the area would outweigh the harm that would be caused to the Green Belt and other harms as summarised above, including those relating to peat. This is provided they are appropriately minimised or mitigated in line with this and other relevant policies. We are, therefore, satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances to justify removing the site from the Green Belt and that policy JPA33 can be made sound by the main modifications set out above [MMTr1, MMTr2, MMTr3, MMTr4].

### **Conclusion**

674. Subject to the main modifications set out above, we are satisfied that policy JPA33 New Carrington is justified, consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

### **Issue 40 - Is policy JPA34 M6 Junction 25 justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

675. Policy JPA34 M6 Junction 25 relates to a site of 64.51 hectares in Wigan. It is located to the north of the M6 spur road at Junction 25 and west of A49 Warrington Road. The site was previously mined but has been reclaimed and is

predominantly arable farmland. There are two existing vehicular accesses to the site, Brocstedes Road to the south, which extends northwards into the site; and a private agricultural road High Brooks located to the north of the A49 Warrington Road roundabout to the east of the site, this extends to the west across the northern boundary of the site towards the Cranberry Lea Farm complex.

676. The site would deliver around 140,000 sqm of B2 and B8 floorspace. The site has hybrid planning permission granted in June 2021 for 133,966 sqm of storage and distribution floorspace on most of the site, comprising 27,871 sqm with full planning permission, and up to 106,095 sqm with outline planning permission.
677. The strategic viability assessment found the site to be viable and the site is being actively promoted. Development would come forward on a phased basis. The site is large, relatively unconstrained and directly accessible to the M6, where there is a high demand for logistics and manufacturing activity, which should make the site attractive to the market. We are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that the development could take place within the plan period.
678. The site is entirely within the Green Belt and was a single parcel for the purposes of the Green Belt assessment with very high harm overall to Green Belt purposes, including relating to preventing towns from merging in relation to Wigan and Ashton and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
679. The allocation does not contain any international, national or local sites of importance for biodiversity. However, it contains woodland, hedgerows, grassland and marshy grassland and ponds. Whilst the M6 has a significant influence on the character of the area, the site is located within an urban fringe farmland landscape with development likely to have a considerable impact on the landscape. Part 5 of the policy would insure high quality landscape within the site and along sensitive boundaries.
680. Several public rights of way are located on the site, mostly within the northern and western areas, and there are fishing ponds to the south adjoining the M6 spur road. Part 6 of the policy relates to the provision of a green infrastructure corridor and to ensure suitable diversions of rights of way and links to the footbridge over the M6. The allocation will generate additional traffic and part of the site includes land which has the potential to accommodate an all-ways junction at M6 Junction 25.
681. Various changes to policy JPA34 are required to ensure it is justified and effective in securing appropriate mitigation. For the reasons set out in issue 6, changes are needed including the reasoned justification, in relation to the requirements for masterplanning, transport infrastructure (including the deletion of part 4 and inclusion of Appendix D and policy JP-C7, landscaping,

biodiversity, compensatory improvements to the Green Belt and minerals safeguarding areas.

682. Part 7 of the policy sets out that the allocation should provide an internal road connection with the Wheatlea Industrial Estate. However, the need for a connection as part of this development is not fully demonstrated, but it should be ensured that the site layout does not preclude a future road connection. For clarity, part 7 needs modifying accordingly. For the reasons given above, part 9 of the policy refers to the all-ways junction as well as more direct access from the motorway. However, the policy currently refers to allowing for this, this is not justified and the policy needs modifying to safeguard land for the junction.
683. The allocation is within the Wigan-Bolton Growth Corridor (policy JP-Strat8) which refers to a regionally significant area of economic and residential development. The allocation would provide a significant amount of employment floorspace contributing towards boosting northern competitiveness in accordance with JP-Strat6. It would provide significant economic and social benefits on a well-located site, particularly as Wigan has very few of these types of sites. We conclude that there are exceptional circumstances to remove land from the Green Belt and that the allocation is justified. [MMW2, MMW3].

## Conclusion

684. Subject to the main modifications set out above, we are satisfied that policy JPA34 M6 Junction 25 is justified, consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 41 - Is policy JPA35 North of Mosely Common justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

685. Policy JPA35 North of Mosely Common relates to a site of 61.26 hectares, all of which is in the Green Belt. It is predominantly greenfield in nature. A busway runs through the site splitting it into northern and southern areas. There are two small, isolated areas of Grade 3a agricultural land in the northern area.
686. The allocation would deliver around 1,100 homes in total. The strategic viability assessment found the site to be viable, the site is being actively promoted and a masterplan has been prepared. We are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that the development could take place within the plan period.
687. The allocation was in a single parcel for the purposes of the Green Belt assessment. Overall, the site would cause between moderate-low and up to high harm to Green Belt purposes relating to urban sprawl of Tyldesley and Worsley; preventing towns from merging in respect of Tyldesley, Walkden and Worsley; safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and in preserving the setting and special character of historic towns.

688. The site is bounded by existing development to the east and west. The east boundary also contains woodland, trees, playing fields and a cemetery. The northern part of the allocation does not currently have a well-defined boundary with the Green Belt beyond. Part 10 of the policy addresses the need to provide one. The landscape within the site is fairly flat and comprises fields and hedgerows, with public rights of way running through. Although the existing urban edge can be seen in views, development of the site would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. Higher density development would need to be closer to the bus route as set out in part 2 of the policy.
689. The allocation does not contain any international, national or local sites of importance for biodiversity. However, it does contain areas of priority habitat including watercourses such as Honksford Brook, ponds, hedgerows and areas of deciduous woodland and species such as bats and newts may be present. The environs of Honksford Brook would need to be protected and enhanced and this would be done through the creation of a green infrastructure corridor. The site is mainly in Flood Zone 1, although there is some Flood Zone 3 around Honksford Brook, with some risk of surface water flooding here too. The policy includes safeguarding land for a flood storage area in part 9.
690. There would be a considerable increase in traffic generated on local roads, and some of the roads, for example City Road, are narrow in places. Any access to the site would need to be of good quality. The existing guided busway runs through the site, with the significant potential for residents to use this. An additional stop in the allocation would improve access to this, with the potential for contributions to improve services subject to a full detailed busway service analysis. The scale of development would also create additional demand for school places.
691. In order to ensure that policy JPA35 is effective, including in terms of addressing the issues identified above, modifications are required. For the reasons set out under issue 6, changes are needed to the requirements the policy relating to masterplanning and a phasing and delivery strategy; affordable homes; transport infrastructure; education; compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt; biodiversity; and minerals safeguarding areas.
692. In addition to the modifications above, part 3 of the policy needs to be modified to reflect the need to provide an additional stop on the busway and how an assessment of contributions to increased passenger capacity would be made. For the reasons set out above, part 4 of the policy refers to good quality access into the site. However, it currently does not refer to City Road and in relation to Silk Mill Street access arrangements should ensure provision of good quality pedestrian and cycle links. The policy needs modifying accordingly.
693. Part 7 deals with provision of community facilities on the site and currently this includes health facilities. However, sufficient new medical facilities have recently

been provided nearby and so it is no longer necessary for the policy to refer to this. In addition, facilities would need to be suitably located close to a future busway stop. In respect of education, as the requirement at part 8 does not refer to secondary school contributions a modification is required for this to be effective.

694. The new homes proposed in policy JPA35 North of Mosley Common will deliver significant housing on a well-located site in accordance with the Plan's overall spatial strategy and the opportunities relating to the busway will help to support viable sustainable travel into Manchester and Leigh. We are satisfied that those benefits would outweigh the moderate-low to high harm that would be caused to the Green Belt and the other harms that we have identified above, provided that they are appropriately mitigated. On balance, therefore, we conclude that there are exceptional circumstances to justify removing land from the Green Belt and that policy JPA35 can be made sound by the modifications that we recommend [MMW4, MMW5].

## **Conclusion**

695. Subject to the main modifications set out above, we are satisfied that policy JPA35 North of Mosley Common is justified, consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 42 – Is policy JPA36 Pocket Nook justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

696. Policy JPA36 Pocket Nook is a site of 44.78 hectares, none of which is in the Green Belt. It is a greenfield site in an urban fringe location and predominantly consists of farmland, farmsteads and ponds.

697. As the Pocket Nook allocation is not within the existing Green Belt, the site selection criteria were not applied but it was assessed at Stage 1 of the site selection process. However, the site was designated as part of a broad location for new development in Golborne and Lowton for approximately 1,000 new homes in Policy SP4 of the Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy. As of July 2021, around 1,300 homes have been approved elsewhere within the broad location, outside of the proposed site allocation.

698. The allocation would be for around 600 homes and 15,000 sqm of employment floorspace. The strategic viability assessment found the site to be marginal when strategic transport costs are added for a road bridge across HS2, without this the site is viable. As noted elsewhere, HS2 is no longer being delivered in this area. Part of the site is being actively promoted although this is not the case for the whole site. Nevertheless, we are satisfied that there is still a reasonable prospect that the development could take place within the plan period subject to

issues being resolved on landownership. The implications of HS2 in relation to the allocation policy are set out below.

699. The site is bounded by the A580 to the south, with a residential edge to the north of the site. The land includes fields, and some hedgerows and Carr Brook runs through the site. The allocation does not contain any international, national or local sites of importance for biodiversity. However, it does contain areas of priority habitat including watercourses including Carr Brook, ponds, hedgerows and areas of broad-leaved woodland and these will support species. The site contains Flood Zones 2 and 3, however this is within the area of the brook and would be outside of where development would be located. The policy incorporates protection and enhancement of Carr Brook as a green infrastructure corridor.
700. Three Groundwater Source Protection Zones are within or adjacent to the site and the policy at part 8 would ensure that these are not jeopardised during construction or after development is completed. Fair House Farmhouse is a Grade II Listed Building on Pocket Nook Lane with development having the potential to affect its setting.
701. In order to ensure that policy JPA36 is effective, including in terms of addressing the issues identified above, modifications are required. For the reasons set out under issue 6, changes are needed to the requirements the policy relating to masterplanning and a phasing and delivery strategy; affordable homes; transport infrastructure; education; heritage including in respect of Fair House Farmhouse; and biodiversity.
702. Part 2 of the policy refers to land within the site being safeguarded for HS2. The formal Safeguarding Directions which protect land for construction of HS2 currently remain in place. For this reason, we do not think it appropriate or necessary to delete part 2 as this still has some relevance. Development on this site is not predicated on HS2 being delivered, and so cancellation does not affect the principle of the allocation. The term set out in part 2 does not have the same meaning as in policy JPA3.2 relating to the Green Belt, and it would be possible to review the position on the site and include any released land in the allocation within the plan period.
703. Subject to the additional wording in a modification relating to potential construction and the addition of a footnote explaining the position on Safeguarding Directions which we have added following consultation on main modifications, we consider this to be a logical and pragmatic approach towards this site in the circumstances.
704. Parts 3, 4 and 5 also refer to HS2 and its implications for around 75 homes and the employment floorspace to the west of HS2 which needs to indicate it is safeguarded rather than proposed. Here as well, development would not be prevented from going ahead should the Safeguarding Directions be removed.

However, modifications are therefore necessary to these elements of the policy. Consequential amendments to the reasoned justification are also needed.

705. Part 4 does not define which type of use would be appropriate in relation to the employment floorspace. A modification is needed to clarify this would be for E(g), B2 and/or B8 uses. The allocation would increase traffic on local roads, the site would therefore need to deliver a new road through the site from the A579 to the A572 rather than make contributions to this, and a modification is necessary to part 5 accordingly.
706. The new homes and employment floorspace proposed in policy JPA36 Pocket Nook will deliver housing and employment opportunities on a well-located site in accordance with the Plan's overall spatial strategy. We are satisfied that those benefits would outweigh harms that we have identified above, provided that they are appropriately mitigated. On balance, therefore, we conclude that the allocation is justified and that policy JPA36 can be made sound by the modifications that we recommend [MMW6, MMW7].

## Conclusion

707. Subject to the main modifications set out above, we are satisfied that policy JPA36 Pocket Nook is justified, consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 43 – Is policy JPA37 West of Gibfield justified and consistent with national policy, and would it be effective in achieving sustainable development?**

708. Policy JPA37 West of Gibfield relates to a site of 70.63 hectares in total. The site is to the west of Atherton adjacent to the established Gibfield Park employment area on the edge of the borough boundary with Bolton. The main access to the site is along Gibfield Park Way which runs north-south through the allocation connecting into the A577 Wigan Road and A579 Atherleigh Way to the south and into Gibfield Park Drive to the east. The urban area of Westhoughton in Bolton lies to the west separated from the allocation by Green Belt. The Atherton rail line runs east-west to the north of the allocation.
709. The allocation would deliver around 500 homes and 45,500 sqm of employment floorspace in total. The strategic viability assessment found the site to be marginally viable including all necessary mitigation with potential monitoring on delivery. Nevertheless, the site is being actively promoted. Although there is some anecdotal evidence of nearby employment development being vacant, there is nothing to suggest that the proposed employment uses would not be taken up. We are satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect that this would be achieved, with the rest of the development coming forward outside of the plan period.

710. The allocation contains 45.27 hectares of land within the Green Belt. An additional area of around 3.76 hectares of land outside of the allocation will also be lost from the Green Belt made up of three small areas. The removal of these from the Green Belt would allow for better defined Green Belt boundaries in these locations. 25.36 hectares would remain in the Green Belt as a country park/green infrastructure corridor. The allocation was in three parcels for the purposes of the Green Belt assessment, north, centre and south. Overall, the site would have very high harm in the north, moderate to high in the central parcel and moderate harm in the south. These relate to the Green Belt purposes for urban sprawl, preventing towns from merging which would be Atherton and Westhoughton, and from safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. There are strong boundaries of to the east, west and south of the site. However, the boundary of the north part of the allocation with the Green Belt runs partly through open fields.
711. The landscape of the site is defined as reclaimed land / wetlands reflecting the historic use of this area for mineral extraction. The site is sloping in parts, particularly up towards the east, and contains fields in the southern part of the site that are visible from Schofield Lane and the A577. The northern part of the site is scrubbier and more treed. Whilst the existing industrial and residential buildings have an impact on the area, development on this site would still cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. Gibfield Park Way also provides some views into the site during winter months, and it would need to be ensured that the development includes landscaping of high quality, particularly in this area.
712. The allocation does not contain any international or national sites of importance for biodiversity. However, there are the Gibfield Park SBIs in the site. The site contains a number of habitats including woodland, ditches and hedgerows, ponds. There is dry heath/acid grassland across the central part of the site which is a particularly rare habitat. This should be retained as part of the allocation. The site also supports protected species including great crested newts and common toad and bats. Habitats and features of the natural environment will be lost, including ponds or will be otherwise affected with adverse consequences for protected species and other wildlife. The retained Green Belt area would help address ecology and biodiversity, including habitats, as well as balancing this with recreation for the local communities.
713. Development for homes and employment uses would have a considerable impact on traffic in the area, with some roads and roundabouts such as the one at Gibfield Park Way already congested at times. Existing bus routes and rail connections do provide access to Wigan, Leigh and Bolton. Development on the site would need to ensure safe and convenient access for pedestrians and cyclists to access these. Good quality access to the site will be needed. Gibfield Park Way has the potential to be connected to potential road infrastructure in Bolton and land within the allocation will need to be safeguarded accordingly.

714. In order to ensure that policy JPA37 is effective, including in terms of addressing the issues identified above, modifications are required. For the reasons set out under issue 6, changes are needed to the requirements in the policy relating to masterplanning and a phasing and delivery strategy; affordable housing; transport infrastructure including the safeguarded land for Gibfield Park Way and pedestrian/cyclist access; education; boundary to the Green Belt; compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt; flood risk; biodiversity; and minerals safeguarding areas.
715. For the reasons set out above part 7 refers to landscaping along Gibfield Park Way, this should include the extension northwards within the allocation and a modification is needed accordingly. Part 8 referred to a substantive accessible green corridor, this should be changed to mean substantial for clarity. Part 9 relates to great crested newts, the policy as worded is not sufficiently clear and it needs modifying to ensure appropriate provision is made to mitigate the impact of development on this species. Part 3 does not define which type of use would be appropriate in relation to the employment floorspace and as part of the examination it was confirmed that employment development would be in the southern and not southeast part of the site. A modification is needed to clarify these matters.
716. The new homes and employment proposed in policy JPA37 West of Gibfield will deliver significant housing and employment on a well-located site in accordance with the Plan's overall spatial strategy including policy JP-Strat8 (Wigan/Bolton corridor) and would deliver significant local benefits by diversifying the local housing market. We are satisfied that those benefits would outweigh the high harm that would be caused to the Green Belt and the other harms that we have identified above, provided that they are appropriately mitigated. On balance, therefore, we conclude that there are exceptional circumstances to justify removing land from the Green Belt and that policy JPA37 can be made sound by the modifications that we recommend [MMW8, MMW9].

## Conclusion

717. Subject to the main modifications set out above, we are satisfied that policy JPA37 West of Gibfield is justified, consistent with national policy and would be effective in achieving sustainable development.

## **Issue 44 – Are policies JP-S1 to JP-S7, relating to sustainable and resilient places, justified, effective and consistent with national policy?**

### **Policy JP-S1 – Sustainable Development**

718. Policy JP-S1 establishes some broad principles for tackling climate change, which are elaborated upon in subsequent policies. It also sets out the Plan's approach to development on previously developed land. Notwithstanding the

policy's title, it does not purport to cover the whole gamut of issues that may be attributed to 'sustainable development'. Given these are picked up elsewhere in the Plan, there is no need for it to do so and no modifications are needed on this basis. The overarching aim of tackling climate change, maximising the benefits of development while minimising their adverse impacts is a logical expectation of any plan and is thus broadly consistent with national policy.

719. The policy states that "preference will be given to using previously developed (brownfield) land...". This does not properly reflect NPPF 119 which requires policies to set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs in a way that makes as "much use as possible of previously developed or brownfield land". There is a subtle but important difference between the two statements insofar as national policy does not denote any 'preference' for brownfield land or exclusion of greenfield land on this basis.

720. A modification is therefore needed to the second paragraph to ensure consistency with national policy [MM5.1]. Consequential modifications are also needed elsewhere to reflect this change [MM4.1]. The main modification consulted on did however retain reference to a 'preference' for local authorities. This does not fully reflect NPPF 119 and thus we have removed this wording from the modification. We do not consider the further change to the modification materially alters the meaning of the policy, which is to ensure Councils follow the advice in the NPPF. If anything, this removes any lingering ambiguity about provisions relating to brownfield land are a 'preference' rather than necessity. This change will also ensure consistency with other similar modifications elsewhere.

## **Policy JP-S2 – Carbon and Energy**

### **Context**

721. On 13 December 2023, the Government published a Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) relating to local energy efficiency standards. This sets out their expectations in respect of planning policies that deal with local energy efficiency standards for buildings. In summary, this states that the Government does not expect plan-makers to set local energy efficiency standards that go beyond current or planned building regulations. This is to avoid the proliferation of local standards which can add complexity and costs. Where there are policies which are proposed to go beyond these standards, the WMS states that they should be rejected at examination if they do not have a well-reasoned and robustly costed rationale that ensures the development remains viable and the impact on housing supply and affordability is considered in accordance with the NPPF. Furthermore, any additional requirements should be expressed as a percentage uplift of a dwelling's Target Emissions Rate using a specified version of the Standard Assessment Procedure.

722. The WMS was published after the examination hearings on this matter and the consultation on main modifications was complete. We do not consider it would

be appropriate or pragmatic to prolong the examination to consider the implications of the WMS. Further delays to adoption to address this single issue would create uncertainty and frustrate the delivery of much needed new housing and employment floorspace in Greater Manchester. It would also delay the preparation of district local plans. The Plan provides these plans with their strategic context and thus certainty is needed to enable them to progress in a timely manner. This Plan has already taken a significant amount of time to prepare; further delay is not to be welcomed. Moreover, the WMS is clear about what national policy should apply in the determination of planning applications in this regard.

723. Following the main modifications consultation, the GMCA set out a series of further modifications they thought could ensure consistency with the WMS. In our view, these would materially alter the implementation of the policy and go beyond the changes that could be made without further discussion and/or consultation. For the reasons given above, we do not consider this to be an appropriate course of action and so we have not sought to make those changes.

724. We consider that if there is any uncertainty about whether or not elements of policy JP-S2, as modified, is consistent with the WMS then this is something that will need to be considered by decision makers through the development management process. To ensure this is clear, we have made a further main modification to the reasoned justification which states that the modifications do not take account of the WMS on Local Energy Efficiency Standards published on 13 December 2023 as this was after the consultation on modifications had ended.

## **Part 8**

725. The following is therefore based on the consideration of the policy against the prevailing national policy and guidance at the time of the main modifications consultation.

726. Policy JP-S2 establishes a target of delivering a carbon neutral Greater Manchester no later than 2038. While this is more ambitious than the Climate Change Act's date of 2050, there is nothing in national planning policy, guidance or legislation which suggests the GMCA cannot work to a different timescale. We are therefore content with the target set out in the policy.

727. The policy sets out 8 criteria for achieving the aim of carbon neutrality. These include actions for the Councils to take and those which are requirements of development. Part 8a seeks development to be net zero from 2028 onwards. The policy establishes the use of the 'energy hierarchy' to deliver this target; this first requires measures to minimise energy demand, followed by maximising energy efficiency, then using renewable energy, then low carbon energy and only then other energy sources.

728. Although not referred to in the NPPF or PPG, the energy hierarchy is nevertheless a well-known and understood concept which clearly fits into the overarching national policy of adaptation and mitigation. Other criteria and policy establish some of the ways in which the requirements of the hierarchy can be met, including through connection to renewable energy/heating/cooling networks (8c), energy demand reduction (8d) and promotion of the use of PV installations as a priority. Criterion 8f requires the submission of a detailed energy statement which would outline what measures have been taken to meet the policy's requirements. This is all acceptable in principle.
729. However, the policy and reasoned justification are unclear, as they hint at potentially different requirements up to 2025 and between 2025 and 2028. This was explained as relating primarily to how carbon emissions are expected to be assessed. From the plan's adoption to 2025, the expectation is that the 'net zero' assessment will take account of 'regulated' emissions only. These are the emissions which relate to things such as lighting, heating and hot water and are covered by Part L of the Building Regulations.
730. From 2025 onwards, the expectation is that any assessment of emissions would include unregulated emissions relating to the use of things such as household appliances. From 2028 onwards, the expectation is that the assessment would include all emissions 'in construction'. Any residual emissions would then be 'offset' through financial contributions to a fund. The overall policy is also set within the context of the Future Homes Standard, which is expected to come into force in 2025. The policy is meant to 'future proof' the Plan by setting out carbon reduction targets which reflect what is expected through this standard. Nevertheless, the policy, footnotes and reasoned justification have been modified to make the requirements and distinctions between time periods clear and to explain how any carbon offsetting scheme would work in practice.
731. The submitted policy also establishes an 'interim requirement' that all new dwellings should seek a minimum 19% carbon reduction against Part L of the 2013 Building Regulations. The 19% reduction in carbon emissions against Part L of the Building Regulations 2013 reflects the now superseded WMS dated 25 March 2015. New Building Regulations came into force on 15 June 2022 which already require a 31% reduction in emissions in comparison to the 2013 version. On that basis, while we considered setting out an interim measure up to 2025 appropriate, it should be modified to require adherence to the 2022 Building Regulations. The policy should also allow Councils to consider alternatives to this through their local plans if these can be justified. This will ensure clarity and effectiveness.
732. Part 8b requires the provision of 'adequate' electric vehicle charging points. There is a lack of clarity in both policy and reasoned justification as to what 'adequate' would mean in practice. This issue has also been overtaken by the 2021 Building Regulations. Part S of these sets out what should be provided and there is no justification in this case for departing from these regulations. A modification is therefore necessary to reflect this to avoid any scope for

confusion. To provide a degree of strategic direction to local authorities, it is appropriate for this modification to highlight the possibility of each Council assessing this issue further through their own local plans.

733. The reasoned justification has been modified to provide an explanation of what adequate might mean in practice. The intention was to reflect that in considering what would be 'adequate' there may be more to consider than simply the number of electric charging points provided. This includes matters relating to the location of charging points within a development. We acknowledge that these considerations will not be relevant to every development. Moreover, these measures are not intended to constitute or override the policy or building regulations. We have therefore revised the modification to ensure this is clear.
734. Part 8c encourages connections to renewable energy/heating/cooling networks where practicable. Although the onus will be on applicants to demonstrate this is not practicable, the policy still provides sufficient scope for flexibility so as not to be unduly prescriptive.
735. Part 8d states the targets for space heat demand, hot water energy and delivery of on-site renewables. A cross reference to Table 5.1, which includes targets for energy demand reduction, is necessary for clarity. Table 5.1 establishes targets for each of the three categories. The targets for hot water heating refer to the now out of date Part L Building Regulations. These need to be modified to bring the table up to date and consistent with other elements of the policy.
736. The Whole Plan Viability Assessment includes some of the costs associated with meeting the Future Homes Standards and provision of electric vehicle charging points. These are broadly consistent with elements of the policy. The costs for these were taken from the Carbon and Energy Policy Implementation Study 2020<sup>125</sup> and were acceptable figures to be used to give some indication of the likely effects on viability. The GMCA acknowledge that it did not consider some aspects of the requirements in the assessment. We agree that there is likely to be some uncertainty relating to the costs and that not all development would be subject to them.
737. Nevertheless, while no party put forward any clear evidence to demonstrate that the policy would render development unviable, we consider there to be a need for modifications in this regard. To provide a degree of comfort and flexibility it would be appropriate to include a viability or practicability clause into part 8. This would allow applicants to make a specific case to set the policy aside where circumstances dictate it. We do not consider this to be a weakening of the policy. This is also consistent with the approach set out in policy JP-D2 in terms of the submission of viability assessments. Some elements of policy are also subject to Building Regulations and are thus not negotiable.

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<sup>125</sup> 04.01.01

## Parts 1-4 and 7

738. Turning to the other elements of the policy, parts 1 to 3 largely set out the positive approach the GMCA expects to take and are consistent with national policy. Part 4 refers to keeping fossil fuels in the ground. Matters relating to minerals are outside the scope of the Plan and are dealt with through the Joint Minerals Development Plan Document (JMDDP). Moreover, part 4 effectively pre-judges any applications relating to fossil fuel extraction, which is inconsistent with NPPF 211. This criterion, and the related reasoned justification, is neither justified nor consistent with national policy and should therefore be deleted. There are other consequential modifications because of this [MM1.9].
739. Part 7 refers to the development of Local Area Energy Plans. However, these have already been prepared and thus there is no need, or justification, to refer to them in policy. A modification is therefore needed to remove this reference from the policy and make consequential changes to the reasoned justification which explain the situation. Criterion 5 effectively repeats what is in criterion 7 and thus is also not justified or effective. This criterion and associated footnote should also be deleted.
740. The policy concludes by providing scope for district local plans to set out different carbon emission reduction targets. Given the fast-moving nature of this area of policy, this is a sensible precaution. Local Plans also provide an opportunity for Councils to address any issues relating to the publication of the December 2023 WMS. The policy as a whole refers to more than just carbon emissions and therefore in the interests of effectiveness, it should be made clear that this also relates to energy demand targets. The superfluous discursive elements speculating as to when this may be necessary serve no particular purpose and should be deleted.
741. We consider the modifications set out above [MM5.2, MM5.3] are necessary to make the policy sound in the context of national policy at the time of the main modifications consultation.

## Policy JP-S3 – Heat and Energy Networks

742. Policy JP-S3 seeks to encourage the provision and use of decentralised energy infrastructure, in particular the use of heat and energy networks. The policy firstly supports and encouragement for the delivery of decentralised energy networks in areas identified as 'Heat and Energy Network Opportunity Areas' (HENOA).
743. It also sets out criteria for development within the HENOA. Part 2 is unclear and inconsistent in its approach to the consideration of viability and practicability. As such, part 2 should be modified to be effective to ensure a consistent approach and make it clear that all measures listed will be required unless it can be demonstrated there are more effective alternatives for minimising carbon emissions or such connections are not practicable or financially viable. To

ensure consistency and clarity, consequential modifications are also necessary to parts 2a,b,c and d [MM5.5].

744. These modifications are important as the costs associated with applying this policy were not fully factored into the Whole Plan Viability Assessment. Given that these costs would not necessarily be relevant to all development and may be dependent on the availability of appropriate infrastructure, we do not consider this need render the policy unsound in principle. We are also aware that some of the data on which Figure 5.1 is based is of some age. While there is nothing to suggest the data is no longer inaccurate, this also means that it would be prudent to allow exceptions in certain circumstances. Altering the policy to allow consideration of viability or practicability on a case-by-case basis is a pragmatic way of continuing to seek to promote decentralised energy, which is consistent with national policy as set out in NPPF 155, and the Plan's climate change objectives.
745. Part 3 of the policy includes a checklist of requirements for any viability assessment. While possibly helpful guidance, this list does not constitute policy and should be moved to the reasoned justification [MM5.4, MM5.5].
746. Figure 5.1 seeks to illustrate the extent of the opportunity areas that have previously been identified. This shows both the allocations and HENOA separately. GMCA clarified that the intent of the policy is for the allocations to *also* be considered as HENOA for the purposes of the policy. The map is therefore ambiguous. To be effective this should be modified to make it clear that allocations are included in the policy's requirements [MM5.6].

#### **Policy JP-S4 – Resilience**

747. Policy JP-S4 ostensibly seeks to reflect the Greater Manchester objective of being one of the “most resilient places in the world”. To that end it lists 13 key measures which would help achieve this aim. In the main, these measures are statements of intent rather than clear or effective planning policies and it would not be clear to a decision maker how they should be used in the determination of a planning application. Moreover, most of the measures are addressed in more detail and/or with greater clarity in other policies.
748. An exception to this is criterion 1 which relates to ensuring development makes appropriate provision for response and evacuation in the case of emergency. This is not covered elsewhere but would be better addressed through policy JP-P1 which deals with matters of design and layout.
749. This policy serves no clear planning purpose and is only likely to create ambiguity and confusion. In the interests of effectiveness, the policy and associated reasoned justification should be deleted, with criterion 1 moved to policy JP-P1 [MM5.7, MM5.8, MM9.1, MM9.2]. Consequential modifications are also necessary to paragraph 5.7 to remove reference to this policy [MM5.2]. This will not undermine the overall ‘resilience’ objective as the issues covered by the policy would continue to run through the Plan in any event.

## Policy JP-S5 – Flood Risk and the Water Environment

750. Policy JP-S5 sets out the broad policy for dealing with flood risk and water. This is a high-level strategic policy and thus focusses on the overall approach to managing flood risk, rather than detailed development management matters such as the sequential or exception tests set out in the NPPF. The policy does not need to repeat this however and in all other aspects it is broadly consistent with national policy. The modifications set out below are however necessary to ensure effectiveness [MM5.9, MM5.10].
751. The policy highlights the importance of the North West River Basin Management Plan. The GMCA's intention is for all relevant decisions relating to water management to have regard to this document. This is a sensible approach given the importance of the role of the management plan. For this to take effect, the reference to the management plan should be moved from criterion 1 to the opening paragraph.
752. While it is acceptable to seek to achieve greenfield run-off rates in principle, there may be circumstances in which this will not be possible to achieve. Part 4 should therefore be modified to provide a degree of flexibility. Modifications are also needed to clarify the role of district local plans in identifying more detailed policies on surface water drainage and surface water discharge rates. The intention of the modification was that greenfield run-off rates should be achieved unless circumstances dictated otherwise. However, the main modification consulted on referred to this being an 'aim'. While we are confident this would not lead to any significant confusion, to remove any chance of ambiguity, we have removed 'aim' from the main modifications. This does not alter the intent or the implementation of the policy but ensures absolute clarity. We have also modified the reasoned justification to ensure consistency with the policy.
753. Part 7 refers to securing investment in wastewater treatment. However, it is not clear how this would relate to decision making or if there is any expectation of development being required to make contributions toward such investment. As infrastructure requirements are more properly addressed through policy JP-D1, this criterion serves no particular purpose, is ambiguous in its intent and should be deleted.
754. Part 8 states that development must conserve water and 'maximise water efficiency in new development'. However, what this means in practice is unclear, particularly in the context of the Government's optional standards on water efficiency.
755. Current Building Regulations set a water efficiency standard of 125 litres per person per day. The optional standard is for 110 litres per day, where a clear local need has been established. Unaltered, it would be reasonable to assume that in 'maximising water efficiency' the policy was expecting the higher standard to be applied. However, the GMCA have confirmed that it is not their intention for the P/E to establish the use of the more stringent standard.

Furthermore, no specific evidence has been provided by the GMCA which would justify its application either on a plan-wide or on a district-by-district basis.

756. A modification is therefore necessary to remove any ambiguity about what is expected in terms of water efficiency. Given the potential for confusion about which standards are to be used, it is acceptable in this case to refer to the current building standards. It is also appropriate for this Plan to give authorities a steer in how this issue should be considered through their own local plans.

### **Policy JP-S6 – Clean Air**

757. Policy JP-S6 sets out the Plan's expectations in relation to air quality and how they will be achieved. It contains a mixture of policies which establish the actions GMCA and the local authorities intend to take to achieve improved air quality but also what it will expect from developers. Again, the overall intentions of the policy are reasonable but the following modifications to policy and reasoned justification are necessary to ensure it is justified and effective [MM5.11, MM5.12].

758. Part 2 is not justified in expecting development to be in accordance with guidance published by the Institute of Air Quality Management and Environmental Protection UK. These documents are not part of the development plan and therefore cannot act as policy. A modification is needed to make it clear that applicants should have regard to the documents only.

759. As submitted part 3 only requires the submission of an air quality impact assessment. However, this provides no further guidance on how such an assessment may be used to determine a planning application. A modification is needed to make it clear that development which result in unacceptable air quality impacts that cannot be mitigated will not be permitted.

760. Part 4 refers to 'regulating' development that would generate significant source pollution. While 'restricting' such development would fall within the scope of the Plan when considering the potential impacts of development, the Plan has no role in regulating pollution. This is made clear by NPPF 188. This reference should therefore be deleted.

761. Part 5 relates to the provision of electric vehicle charging points. It was made clear during the hearings that the intention of this policy is not to repeat the requirements of policy JP-S2 and/or the Building Regulations. Those relate to what is necessary to provide with new development. Rather, criterion 5 is intended to support the provision of commercial charging points. A modification to the policy and reasoned justification is necessary to make this clear.

762. Part 6 refers to the implementation of a Clean Air Zone. However, it has been determined by the Government that this scheme will not go ahead. There is therefore no justification in referring to it in the policy and thus it should be deleted, along with consequential amendments to the reasoned justification and to introductory text to Chapter 10 [MM10.1]. It remains appropriate however to

highlight the GMCA's intention to implement the Clean Air Plan. An additional modification is also necessary to paragraph 5.44 to correct the reference to WHO guidelines on air quality.

763. Part 9 refers to controlling traffic and parking within and around schools and early years sites. However, these are not the only areas which are likely to be sensitive to air quality and a modification is needed to allow other locations to be considered to ensure effectiveness.

### **Policy JP-S7 – Resource Efficiency**

764. Policy JP-S7 sets out the objective of achieving a circular and zero waste economy, all as part of the GMCA's wider environmental objectives. Again, the policy primary signals what actions the District Councils will undertake to achieve this aim. This includes the production and implementation of a Zero Waste Strategy. This is also referred to as a 'Resource Strategy' in the policy and so a modification is needed to remove any ambiguity.

765. Part 2 refers to ensuring the design of all new development incorporates storage space to facilitate efficient recycling and where appropriate, process all waste on-site. There is no justification to require the processing of waste on site, or clarity about the circumstances in which it would be appropriate to process waste on site. Moreover, the issue of space for recycling is adequately addressed under policy JP-P1 and there is no need to repeat the requirements here. In the interests of effectiveness, this criterion should be deleted [MM5.13].

### **Conclusion**

766. Subject to the main modifications set out above, we are satisfied that policies JP-S1, JP-S3 and JP-S5 to JP-S7 are justified, effective and consistent with national policy. The modifications set out above are necessary to ensure policy JP-S2 is sound when considered against national policy in place at the time of the examination. For the reasons given above, policy JP-S4 is not sound and should be deleted.

### **Issue 45 – Are policies JP-J1 to JP-J4, relating to economic growth and employment development, positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy?**

767. Matters relating to the employment land requirement are dealt with under Issues 1 and 4. This section considers all remaining aspects of policies JP-J1-JP-J4.

### **Policy JP-J1 – Supporting Long Term Economic Growth**

768. Policy JP-J1 is a high-level policy which establishes the overarching approach to supporting growth in Greater Manchester. This is a high-level policy that will be of use for local authorities in drafting district local plans. This is particularly in relation to identifying appropriate locations for employment development, but also the types of use that should be sought to meet the spatial strategy. It will

also be useful in assessing whether applications for employment development are consistent with the Plan's overall objectives. Parts A-F all reflect and serve to support the delivery of the spatial strategy and are thus sound.

769. Part G lists some specific locations where development is to be encouraged. However, while not intended to be exhaustive, it is not clear why some locations highlighted elsewhere in the Plan as suitable for employment, including allocations, have not been included. This creates an element of unhelpful ambiguity and would not be effective. For the avoidance of doubt, a modification is necessary to remove the detailed list and replace with a cross-reference to the strategy policies set out in JP-Strat1 to JP-Strat12. For clarity, additional modifications are needed to Figure 6.1 to accurately illustrate the strategic locations set out in these policies. Subject to these modifications, the policy is effective, justified and consistent with national policy. A modification is also necessary to reflect the cancellation of HS2 [**MM6.1, MM6.2, MM6.14**]

### **Policy JP-J2 – Employment Sites and Premises**

770. Policy JP-J2 refers to the principle of releasing land from Green Belt or previously safeguarded land for new employment land to meet needs. The intention is that this should only refer to the allocations in this Plan and thus a modification to part 2 is needed to remove any ambiguity. For the same reason, a modification is also needed to delete reference in the second paragraph to working with Government to increase use of previously developed land and minimise release of Green Belt in the future. This could be read as implying district local plans will be expected to make further releases, which is not the intention [**MM6.4**]. These modifications will ensure effectiveness.

771. The policy also seeks to protect existing employment land where necessary to maintain a strong and diverse economy. There is nothing inherently unsound in this and it is expected the district local plans will establish more detailed policies for identifying the areas and scope of any protection. However, the policy gives examples of where the policy might apply. This is unhelpful as it is not clear why these have been identified or why other locations excluded. To make the policy effective, these examples should be deleted and moved into reasoned justification [**MM6.3, MM6.4**].

### **Policy JP-J3 – Office Development**

772. As well as setting out the overall office floorspace requirement, JP-J3 also identifies the broad locations where office development should be focussed. These are the City Centre, The Quays, the area around the Airport and town centres. These are all consistent with the spatial strategy policies set out in JP-Strat1-JP-Strat14 and national policy relating to office development. The policy therefore provides a sound steer for the production of district local plans. The modifications set out under issue 1 and below are however needed to ensure the policy is justified and effective [**MM6.5, MM6.6, MM6.7, MM6.8, MM6.9**]

773. Other than updating the figures as set out above, the policy also needs to be modified to ensure effectiveness. Firstly, there is a reference to improving standards of accessibility. References to access and accessibility have been clarified throughout the Plan to avoid ambiguity. In this case, the policy's intention is to encourage the improvement of physical access to office buildings. It is therefore necessary to amend the policy to make this clear by reference to Part M (Volume 2) of the Building Regulations.
774. The policy encourages local authorities to consider restricting the use of office space to non-employment uses, both through Local Plans or other mechanisms. The reasoning for this clearly relates to resisting residential development in certain circumstances. In many circumstances, the change of use from office to residential is permitted development and thus outside the scope of the development plan. An Article 4 Direction restricting permitted development rights also cannot be imposed through a Local Plan. As such, reference to the use of 'alternative mechanisms' serves no purpose and is thus neither justified nor effective. There is nothing to stop Councils from seeking to impose Article 4 directions irrespective of this policy and so deletion, while necessary to make the Plan sound, would have no prejudicial effect.
775. As elsewhere, the reasoned justification will need to be updated to take account of the changes to HS2 [MM6.15].

#### **Policy JP-J4 – Industry and Warehousing Development**

776. Policy JP-J4 sets the overall floorspace requirement for industry and warehousing. It also seeks to set out guidance on where this should be located. The modifications set out under issue 1 and below are necessary to ensure the policy is effective [MM6.10, MM6.11, MM6.12, MM6.13].
777. Criteria 1-3 do not serve any practical purpose in that they are not clearly expressed and simply repeat what is set out in other policies. In addition, because of recommended modifications to policy JP-J1, part 3 would no longer be relevant. These criteria should be deleted to ensure the policy is clear and effective.
778. Criteria A-D relate to development of over 100,000 sqm. They set out requirements for incorporating advanced manufacturing, units for small and medium enterprises, overnight parking for HGVs and promoting access by sustainable modes of transport. There is no clear justification for requiring development to provide units for advanced manufacturing or small and medium units. As such, parts A and B should be deleted. Part C, which relates to HGV parking, is better addressed under policy JP-C6. This criterion should therefore be deleted and moved to that policy. Part D, which seeks to promote access by sustainable modes of travel, is already a requirement of Policy JP-C1 and thus serves no purpose here. Moreover, there appears to be no justification for why parts A-D would only apply to development over 100,000 sqm. Matters relating to parking and sustainable transport should apply to all scales of development

and thus these criteria are only likely to lead to some ambiguity and internal inconsistency. These criteria should therefore also be deleted in the interests of consistency and effectiveness.

## **Conclusion**

779. Subject to the main modifications set out above, we are satisfied that policies JP-J1 to JP-J4 are positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

## **Issue 46 - Are policies JP-H1 to JP-H4, relating to housing delivery, affordability, design and density, justified, effective and consistent with national policy?**

### **Policy JP-H1 – delivery and phasing of housing development**

780. We have already concluded under issues 1 and 3 that the minimum housing requirement of 10,305 additional homes per year is justified and consistent with national policy, and that the distribution between the nine local planning authorities set out in Table 7.2 is justified and will be effective in helping to deliver the spatial strategy set out in policies JP-Strat1 to JP-Stat11.

781. We consider now other aspects of policy JP-H1, including the proposed phasing of housing development and the approach to demonstrating a five year supply of deliverable sites. With regard to the latter issue, whilst revised NPPF published in December 2023 does not apply to plan-making, it is relevant to what the Plan requires local planning authorities to do in the future in terms of identifying and updating annually a supply of deliverable sites; we therefore deal with that below.

### **Delivery Rates**

782. Policy JP-H1 refers to the figures in Table 7.2 as being “delivery rates”. However, to be consistent with national policy and unambiguous (therefore effective), policy JP-H1 needs to be modified to make clear that the delivery rates are the minimum number of net additional dwellings each district is expected to identify a sufficient supply of sites for in their local plans [MM7.3]. Paragraph 1.57 needs to be modified to clarify that, in the event that a local plan looks ahead beyond 2039, the annual average figure 2022-2039 in policy JP-H1 Table 7.2 should be treated as a minimum requirement for each year after 2039 [MM1.10]. We have amended this modification to add a footnote to ensure the approach is clear and unambiguous.

### **Phasing of housing development**

783. Policy JP-H1 sets out a phased approach to housing development with annual rates in the Plan area as a whole rising from 8,732 in 2021-25 to 10,305 in 2025-30 and 11,204 in 2030-37. All districts, apart from Manchester and

Salford, have rates that increase between those different periods. The figures for the first phase apply a 35% discount to the supply assumed in each district for 2021 to 2025 based on the authority's housing land availability assessment. It is then proposed that each district delivers the annual average for the plan period as a whole in the second phase 2025 to 2030, with the residual requirement being met in the final phase 2030 to 2037.

784. In most cases this is justified and consistent with national policy guidance<sup>126</sup> based on evidence showing that the proposed annual average delivery rate for each district would represent a significant increase (over 30%) compared to previous policies, and/or that a large proportion of supply (over 30%) is expected to come from strategic allocations in the Plan and/or large sites identified through its housing land availability assessment<sup>127</sup>.
785. However, a phased approach is not justified in Bolton as the proposed annual delivery rate represents an increase of under 15% compared to previous policies; there are no strategic housing allocations in the Plan; and around 75% of supply is expected to come from sites of fewer than 250 homes.
786. The Plan assumes that the average annual delivery rates for the plan period as a whole can be achieved in each district by 2025. To be consistent with this, and with our modification to alter the plan period to 2022 to 2039, Table 7.2 needs to be modified to include a phased approach to housing delivery in Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan relating to the periods 2022-2025, 2025-2030, and 2030-2039. The total figures for the whole plan area for those periods are 9,063, 10,305 and 10,719 respectively. This modification will ensure that the Plan is justified and consistent with national policy. We have amended the detailed wording of the modification to paragraph 7.19 to avoid any suggestion that the figures referred to are anything other than minimum net additional requirements.

### **Five year housing requirement and supply**

787. Policy JP-H1 requires each local authority to monitor the delivery rates for their area set out in Table 7.2 and take action to ensure that they are maintained. It goes on to state that any shortfall or surplus will be distributed over the remainder of the full plan period when calculating five year supply. Paragraph 7.19 indicates that this is due to uncertainties with the trajectory set out in Table 7.2, and to avoid local planning authorities being adversely affected when it comes to calculating their five year housing land supply.
788. However, we are not persuaded that those reasons represent an adequate case to justify distributing any shortfalls in delivery over the full plan period, rather than over the next five years as expected by national policy guidance<sup>128</sup>. This is

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<sup>126</sup> PPG ID:68-021-20190722.

<sup>127</sup> GMCA response to Q8.3 [M8.1].

<sup>128</sup> PPG ID:68-031-20190722.

because the phased approach in Table 7.2 already includes a 35% discount to each district's supply for the first phase to reflect uncertainties with the trajectory. Distributing any shortfalls over the full plan period would cause further delay in meeting housing needs. To ensure consistency with national policy and that the Plan is justified and effective, the sentence referring to shortfalls being met over the remainder of the full plan period should therefore be deleted.

789. Furthermore, to avoid ambiguity and to clarify the relationship between the Plan and individual local plans, thereby ensuring effectiveness, policy JP-H1 should clearly state that each local planning authority will, where required by national policy, need to identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites against the minimum delivery rates for the district set out in Table 7.2, irrespective of any shortfalls or surpluses in other districts and in the Plan area overall. We have amended the detailed wording of this modification to avoid inconsistency with paragraphs 76 and 77 of revised NPPF published in December 2023.

#### **Table 7.1 Sources of housing land supply 2021-2037**

790. Table 7.1, which forms part of the reasoned justification for policy JP-H1, summarises the supply identified in each district's housing land availability assessment, along with allowances for windfalls and demolitions and the assumed capacity of allocations in the Plan. Total supply from those sources is stated to be 190,752 dwellings for the period 2021-2037, 20,367 of which would be provided on the Plan's allocations. However, the other sources of supply identified in Table 7.1, amounting to a total of around 170,000 dwellings, are not proposals in the Plan but rather existing commitments and potential opportunities that will be considered by individual local planning authorities through local plans. Modifications are required to relevant parts of the Plan, including paragraph 11.2 (existing land supply), to make this clear.

791. Furthermore, policy JP-H1 needs to be modified to delete the references to Table 7.1 defining the land supply and brownfield land being the predominant source of land over the plan period. This is because it is not a statement of policy, but rather an explanation of what Table 7.1 indicates. The reasoned justification should therefore be modified to include a similar form of words.

792. Finally, to be consistent with the main modification to the plan period, the land supply figures in Table 7.1 need to be updated to 2022 to 2039. These include an overall supply of 198,888 dwellings for that period, including 20,122 dwellings on allocations in the Plan. We have amended the total allocation and therefore overall total figures for Oldham (and consequently the total allocation and overall total figures for the Plan area as a whole) in Table 7.1 to correct a mathematical error in the main modifications published for consultation.

793. These modifications [**MM7.1**, **MM7.2**, **MM7.3** and **MM11.1**] are necessary to ensure the Plan is effective and justified.

## **Policy JP-H2 – Housing affordability**

794. Policy JP-H2 sets out various measures aimed at improving the ability of people to access housing at a price they can afford. The reasoned justification refers to the Greater Manchester Housing Strategy and notes that the planning system alone cannot fix the housing crisis but has a key role to play. Policy JP-H2 does not set targets for the provision of affordable homes by developers of market housing as that is done by individual local planning authorities through their local plans. There is no national policy requirement for a joint plan to set affordable housing targets for districts or any soundness reason why the Plan needs to be modified to do so.

795. However, in order to be effective and justified, policy JP-H2 and paragraph 7.23 need to be modified to clarify the requirements relating to the preparation of local plans and determination of planning applications, including by distinguishing them from the broader range of initiatives that are being addressed through the Greater Manchester Housing Strategy. To achieve that, the reference to delivering “our share of 50,000 affordable homes across Greater Manchester with at least 60% being for social rent or affordable rent” should be replaced with a clear statement that the delivery of affordable homes should be maximised including through local plans setting targets for the provision of affordable housing for sale and rent as part of market-led developments based on evidence relating to need and viability. To avoid ambiguity and conflict with national policy, the reference in part 3 to affordable housing being provided “either on- or off-site” should be deleted [MM7.4 and MM7.5].

## **Policy JP-H3 – Housing type, size and design**

796. Policy JP-H3 aims to ensure that development across the plan area incorporates a range of dwelling types and sizes including for self-build, community-led projects, and specialist housing for older households and vulnerable people.

797. To ensure clarity and consistency with national policy, the second paragraph of JP-H3 needs to be modified to refer to development providing an appropriate mix of dwelling types and sizes reflecting local plan policies, and having regard to masterplans, guidance and relevant local evidence [MM7.7]. As the Plan does not set targets for the mix of dwelling types and sizes, Table 7.3 (which indicates proportions of houses and apartments in each district based on the existing land supply) should be deleted [MM7.6]. This is to avoid ambiguity, and because it does not provide reasoned justification for any policies in the Plan.

798. Policy JP-H3 requires all dwellings to comply with nationally described space standards and to be built to the accessible and adaptable standard in part M4(2) of the building regulations unless specific site conditions make this impracticable.

799. Evidence indicates that around 45% of new homes recently built in the Plan area did not meet the nationally described space standards, and that the average sizes of new homes are smaller than national averages. The evidence also indicates an ageing population; higher levels of disability, and lower healthy and disability-free life expectancy, compared to regional and national averages; and that a high proportion of new homes are expected to be apartments, which are more difficult to adapt and make accessible at a later stage<sup>129</sup>. The viability assessment undertaken to inform the preparation of the Plan assumed unit sizes consistent with the nationally described space standards and included a reasonable allowance of £1,500 per dwelling to meet the M4(2) standard<sup>130</sup>.
800. We are therefore satisfied that both requirements are justified by proportionate evidence relating to need and viability. As the requirement to meet the space standards had been included in various drafts of the Plan since 2016, we do not consider it necessary to modify policy JP-H3 to include a transitional period following adoption.
801. NPPF 62 states that the size, type and tenure of housing need for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies. This includes meeting the needs of students, older people and Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. The Plan does not do this directly. However, policy JP-H3 establishes the principle of provision to meet the needs of specific groups through district local plans.
802. The Plan does not, and was not intended to, address all housing needs. As we have already found, there is no requirement for a joint plan such as this to deal with all matters that might be relevant to a development plan. There has always been a role for subsequent local plans in meeting housing needs and therefore it is justified in this context for such matters to be deferred to those plans.
803. We are also mindful that the most recent Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showperson Accommodation Assessment was published in 2018<sup>131</sup>. This would need to be updated because of its age and to reflect the recent Court of Appeal<sup>132</sup> judgement on the definition of travellers, which has since been incorporated in the updated Planning Policy for Traveller Sites<sup>133</sup>. Given the fact the Plan establishes a mechanism for dealing with such issues through subsequent local plans, we do not consider it necessary or appropriate to significantly prolong the examination to require GMCA to prepare the new evidence that would be needed.
804. We are therefore content that the approach to meeting the needs of different groups of people is justified in the context and scope of this Plan.

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<sup>129</sup> GMCA5.2 Housing Technical Standards Report (June 2022).

<sup>130</sup> 03.01.01 to 03.01.04 Strategic Viability Assessments stages 1 and 2.

<sup>131</sup> 06.01.01

<sup>132</sup> Smith v SSLUHC & Ors [2022] EWCA Civ 1391

<sup>133</sup> Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (19 December 2023).

## **Policy JP-H4 – Housing density**

805. Policy JP-H4 seeks to ensure that new homes are built at a density appropriate to their location, and specifies minimum standards ranging from 35 dwellings per hectare to 200 dwellings per hectare. The standards take account of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport; character of the area; past delivery; and the nature of housing land supply. We are satisfied that in general such an approach is justified and consistent with national policy which refers to minimum density standards seeking a significant uplift in the average density of residential development in city and town centres and other locations well served by public transport.

806. However, the detailed wording of policy JP-H4 needs to be modified to refer to developments having regard to, rather than being in accordance with, the standards, and to achieving high quality design as well as efficient use of land. The reference to not compromising the overall delivery of new homes is ambiguous and should be deleted. The policy also needs to make clear that the specified mix of houses and apartments within the different densities is indicative, and the last part relating to definitions and interpretation should be moved to the reasoned justification [MM7.8 and MM7.9]. These changes will ensure that the policy is justified and effective.

## **Conclusion**

807. Subject to the main modifications described above, policies JP-H1 to JP-H4 are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

## **Issue 47 – Are the green infrastructure policies JP-Strat13 and JP-G1 to JP-G9 justified, effective and consistent with national policy?**

### **Policy JP-G1 Landscape**

808. NPPF 174 states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscape amongst other things. Policy JP-G1 aims to ensure that development reflects and responds to the special qualities and sensitivities of key landscape characteristics in the area it is located.

809. The policy and reasoned justification currently refer to valuing important landscapes. However, it is not intended to mean landscapes as defined in NPPF 174(a). Therefore, and to be effective and for clarity, this needs to be modified to ensure that the policy is not interpreted in that way.

810. The policy includes a list of elements of special qualities and sensitivities of key landscape characteristics which is justified. However, paragraph 8.4 of the Plan refers to landscape character types, which are also shown on Figure 8.1. These

are taken from the Greater Manchester Landscape Character and Sensitivity Assessment<sup>134</sup> which is up-to-date and robust evidence. The policy is intended to apply to these landscape character types and therefore this needs to be made clear within the policy itself. The policy also makes reference to the interface of new development and also transitional areas. These have the same meaning and the policy needs modifying to clarify this. [MM8.1, MM8.2]. These changes will ensure that the policy is consistent with national policy and justified and effective.

### **Policies JP-Strat13 Strategic Green Infrastructure, JP-G2 Green Infrastructure Network and JP-G8 Standards for Greener Places**

811. Policies JP-Strat13 and the thematic policies in Chapter 8 provide a strategic framework for local plans and informing the preparation and determination of planning applications. The inclusion of a strategic policy setting out which green infrastructure assets will be protected and enhanced as key features is consistent with NPPF 20.
812. Policy JP-G2 aims to ensure that a strategic approach to the protection, management and enhancement of green infrastructure is taken. Policy JP-G2 lists 13 Green Infrastructure Opportunity Areas which are identified as having potential to deliver improvements to the Green Infrastructure Network. To ensure clarity and effectiveness, new paragraphs are required in the reasoned justification to explain the role of the Green Infrastructure Opportunity Areas, including that they are not a constraint to development, and how development and the allocations within the Plan may be affected by the presence of the areas. Figure 8.3 shows these as broad areas but for clarity the Figure needs to be located within the reasoned justification in the new paragraphs that provide the explanation to the Opportunity Areas. To ensure consistency a further modification is necessary to the list of Opportunity Areas in the reasoned justification to ensure it corresponds with that in the policy [MM8.3, MM8.4 and MM8.5].
813. Policy JP-G8 sets out that it aims to develop standards in relation to access to natural green space and a 'green factor' and how development would contribute to achieving such standards. However, the policy itself does not include any standards in relation to plan making or planning applications and it would not be effective or justified. The policy and reasoned justification should therefore be deleted. Nevertheless, the GMCA are committed to developing standards to ensure that sufficient quantity and quality of green infrastructure is delivered, including how this would affect plan making and how it would affect development proposals. As a consequence, it is necessary to explain how this would be achieved as part of the reasoned justification for policy JP-G2.

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<sup>134</sup> 07.01.06

814. National policy advises that local plans should set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land<sup>135</sup>. To ensure consistency with national policy, a new requirement for this is necessary in policy JP-G2 which would be relevant for new development and allocations in the Plan. The reasoned justification for the policy needs to be modified to refer development proposals considering the outcomes of the potential opportunities identified in the Greater Manchester Green Belt Study carried out to inform the Plan<sup>136</sup>. We also deal with compensatory improvements under issue 6 in respect of site allocations.
815. Policy JP-G2 also refers to a Local Nature Recovery Network. However, it is intended that the Local Nature Recovery Strategy feeds into the development of the Network. In order to avoid any ambiguity between these two, a modification to the policy is needed. These changes will ensure that the policies are consistent with national policy and justified and effective. [**MM8.3, MM8.4, MM8.5, MM8.13 and MM8.14**].

#### **Policies JP-G3 River Valleys and Waterways, JP-G4 Lowland Wetlands and Mosslands, JP-G5 Uplands and JP-G7 Trees and Woodlands**

816. Policies JP-G3 River Valleys and Waterways, JP-G4 Lowland Wetlands and Mosslands, JP-G5 Uplands and JP-G7 Trees and Woodlands relate to the strategic green infrastructure assets highlighted in policy Strat-13. These policies aim to deliver a set of priorities for these features in relation to planning decisions, plan making and other activities in Greater Manchester which relate to the planning process. They are consistent with NPPF 20.
817. In relation to policy JP-G3, this aims to protect river valleys and waterways. Part 8 of the policy seeks to increase the use of canals and watercourses for active travel. However, several of the waterways in the area (particularly Manchester Ship Canal) have on-going commercial and freight use. The policy needs to be modified to confirm there should be no conflict between this and any increased recreational and travel use [**MM8.6**] in order for the policy to be effective and justified.
818. Policy JP-G4 aims to protect the flat, open landscape and networks of wetlands and mosslands in the area. However, there is a specific landscape character type identified in Figure 8.1 of the Plan. Therefore, the policy needs a modification to ensure there is no ambiguity as to what type of landscape this policy applies to [**MM8.7**]. This is needed for effectiveness.
819. Policy JP-G7 aims to increase tree cover, protect and enhance woodland and connect people to trees and woodland around them. A Greater Manchester

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<sup>135</sup> NPPF 142.

<sup>136</sup> 07.01.12 to 07.01.21

Tree and Woodland Strategy has now been produced and the policy and reasoned justification need modifying to reflect this and to clarify which elements of the policy are relevant to local plans and development management. Part 12 of the policy refers to replacement of one tree with two trees. However, this is not consistent with the recently adopted Salford Local Plan and the requirement would not always ensure replacement trees being of the same value. It is therefore necessary for consistency and effectiveness to modify the policy to refer to other potential measures that would result in an enhancement to the treescape [MM8.11, MM8.12]. These changes will ensure that the policies are consistent with national policy and justified and effective.

820. Policy JP-G5 seeks to protect Greater Manchester's upland areas, including moorland habitats such as the South Pennines Moors SAC and SPA. However, there is a specific landscape character type identified in Figure 8.1 of the Plan. Therefore, the policy needs a modification to ensure there is no ambiguity as to what type of landscape this policy applies to.

821. In accordance with the conclusions of the HRA the policy and reasoned justification needs modifying to ensure that new development does not have an adverse impact on the South Pennines Moors SAC, Peak District Moors SPA and the South Pennine Moors Phase 2 SPA including functionally linked land. This sets out how it will be implemented in accordance with three impact zones, within 400m of the boundaries, within 2.5km and within 7km. Each of these zones require a different approach and these are set out in the new criterion. The policy also needs modifying to indicate which site allocations this applies to (JPA12, JPA14, JPA14, JPA16, JPA22, JPA23, JPA24 and JPA31). [MM8.8, MM8.9]. These changes will ensure that the policy is consistent with national policy and justified and effective.

### **Policy JP-G6 Urban Green Space**

822. Policy JP-G6 aims to ensure that there is an appropriate scale, type, quality and distribution of urban green space. The second bullet in the policy refers to working with developers and other stakeholders in relation to urban green spaces that meet accessibility standards. However, to ensure consistency within the Plan and to address any ambiguity in relation to the meaning of accessibility, the reference to accessibility standards needs to be deleted [MM8.10]. These changes will ensure that the policy is consistent with national policy and justified and effective.

### **Policy JP-G9 Biodiversity and Geodiversity**

823. Policy JP-G9 seeks a net enhancement of biodiversity resources through a number of measures. However, the policy is not clear that the first paragraph relates to the development of local plans as well as other activities associated with planning where relevant, and a modification is needed to ensure there is no ambiguity in this respect. Part 4 of the first paragraph of the policy relates to

protection given to international and national designations, it refers to this being in accordance with legislation and national policy. However, this particular element of Part 4 is not necessary, and a modification to delete this reference is required to ensure it is justified.

824. NPPF 180a sets out a series of principles for determining planning applications. In order for the second paragraph of policy JP-G9 (part a) to be consistent with paragraph 180a, modifications are needed to the wording of bullets (i), (ii) and (iii). In respect of a net gain in biodiversity, the policy is ambiguous in relation to which measurement would be used to demonstrate a measurable net gain in biodiversity. In order to be justified, a modification is needed to the reasoned justification to refer to the use of the Defra metric, and also to ensure the policy itself reflects the requirement of no less than 10% gain as is set out in the reasoned justification.
825. The reasoned justification of policy JP-G9 acknowledges the role of agricultural land and part (e) of the second paragraph of the policy relates to best and most versatile agricultural land. However, the role of part (e) of the policy is ambiguous, and the requirements relating to evidence are not consistent with NPPF 174b, and it should be deleted. A consequential modification to the reasoned justification is necessary to refer to robust evidence in accordance with government and other guidance.
826. In accordance with the findings of the HRA as set out earlier in this report, in order for the policy to be effective, a modification is necessary to add a new criterion to require mitigation of the impacts of development on the Manchester Mosses SAC, the South Pennine Moors SAC/SPAs and the Rochdale Canal SAC. A consequential addition to the reasoned justification refers to mitigation in Policies JP-C7, JP-G5, JPA2, JPA20, JPA22 in relation to the Rochdale Canal SAC.
827. A new requirement in policy JP-G9 needs to set out what is expected in terms of how development proposals should be informed by biodiversity/ecological assessments both as part of the evidence base of the Plan or any updated or appropriate new assessments submitted as part of the planning application process [MM8.15, MM8.16]. These changes will ensure that the policy is consistent with national policy and justified and effective.

### **Policy JP-G10 The Green Belt**

828. Strategic matters relating to the Green Belt are covered in Issue 4 and site-specific Green Belt issues are dealt with in Issue 6. Policy JP-G10 aims to afford protection to the Green Belt as amended by the Plan, in accordance with the NPPF. The first paragraph of the policy refers to 'strong protection' which is not a requirement in the NPPF, and a modification is necessary to delete this and to be consistent with the NPPF. Modifications to the first paragraph are also

needed to ensure it is clear that the Green Belt is defined on the Policies Map and illustrated in Figure 8.6.

829. The last paragraph of the policy refers to applying Green Belt policy to land removed from the Green Belt for allocation. This is not justified or consistent with national policy and needs to be deleted accordingly. As a consequence of this, paragraph 11.11 of the Plan also needs to be deleted. This is additional to the modifications which have been consulted on [MM11.1].

830. Consequential amendments are also necessary to the reasoned justification and to Figure 8.6 for these modifications. The reasoned justification also needs modifying to clarify what amendments have been made to the Green Belt boundaries through local plans and the Plan itself, and to ensure consistency with the modifications to policy JP-G1. The first sentence of paragraph 8.57 is inconsistent with paragraph 141a of the NPPF, and a modification is required accordingly. [MM8.17, MM8.19 and MM8.20]. These will ensure the policy is consistent with national policy, effective and justified.

### **Policy JP-G11 Safeguarded land in the Plan**

831. NPPF 143a sets out that safeguarded land can be identified in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period. Although paragraph 8.66 of the reasoned justification refers to a small number of sites being identified as safeguarded land in the Plan. As part of the examination, the GMCA clarified that Policy JP-G11 was intended to identify just one area adjacent to the proposed HS2 Manchester Airport Station. Moreover, site allocation Policy JPA3.2 also covers requirements for this area of safeguarded land. It is not effective to duplicate the requirements of Policy JPA3.2 and a modification is therefore necessary to delete policy JP-G11 and its reasoned justification [MM8.21, MM8.22].

### **Conclusion**

832. Subject to the main modifications described above including the deletion of policies JP-G8 and JP-G11, policies JP-Strat13, JP-G1 to JP-G7, JP-G9 and JP-G10 are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

## **Issue 48 – Are the Places for People policies JP-Strat12 and JP-P1 to JP-P7 justified, effective and consistent with national policy?**

### **Policy JP-P1 Sustainable Places**

833. Policy JP-P1 aims to provide for good design and sustainable development. It provides a set of high-level principles to inform the preparation of local plans, and these can also be used as a set of criteria which can inform the determination of planning applications. The aims are consistent with national policy in relation to design and sustainable development.

834. However, to be effective and consistent with the sustainable development policies, a modification is necessary to ensure the reasoned justification clarifies the links between sustainable development and resilience. To be justified and consistent with national policy relating to the historic environment and policy JP-P2 of the Plan, it is necessary for criterion 1a to refer to conserve and enhance rather than responding to. Other modifications are necessary to ensure the policy is effective, these are to criterion 4 – to remove the word economic; to criterion 8 by adding a reference to responses to emergency and disasters, and to criterion 11 to refer to inclusive rather than accessible [MM9.1, MM9.2]. These will ensure the policy is effective and justified.

### **Policy JP-P2 Heritage**

835. NPPF 189 indicates that there are a range of heritage assets and refers to that these should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. NPPF 190 sets out that plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment and highlights several factors to be taken into account in the strategy. Policy JP-P2 is a high-level strategy for conserving and enhancing the historic environment. It includes a high-level statement of actions that the local authorities and other relevant bodies will take. Other elements of the policy are intended to inform local plans and the preparation and determination of planning applications.

836. The first paragraph of the policy does not currently refer to character and a modification is needed to address this, and to change the emphasis to the GMCA in managing and working with partners for effectiveness. Paragraph 2 and criterion 2 do not reflect the wording in the NPPF and accordingly this needs a modification, it will also ensure the Plan is positively prepared. Paragraphs 4 and 5 provide guidance on how development proposals should be treated in respect of designated heritage assets and archaeological interest. However, as set out they are not consistent with the NPPF and need to be modified accordingly. Other modifications are needed to paragraph 3 for effectiveness, and to paragraph 6 to further explain how proposals relating to heritage at risk will be assessed. [MM9.3]. These modifications will ensure the policy is effective and justified.

### **Policy JP-P3 Cultural Facilities**

837. Policy JP-P3 sets out strategic aims in relation to developing and supporting cultural businesses and attractions. Overall, it is consistent with section 8 of the NPPF in helping to promote healthy and safe communities. Although the policy does not specifically refer to rural areas, the policy is sufficiently wide-ranging to capture all aspects of cultural facilities in the area.

838. The policy and reasoned justification refer to Creative Improvement Districts. These are intended as culture and creative-led regeneration programmes consistent with appropriate local planning frameworks. However,

the Plan does not explain how these were derived and what role they play in the area's response to the pandemic. They are not intended to be formally designated and will be flexibly applied, to ensure there is no impact on viability for development proposals. Modifications to the policy and reasoned justification are needed to address these matters, to ensure the policy is effective and justified [MM9.4, MM9.5].

### **Policy Strat12 Main Town Centres and Policy JP-P4 New Retail and Leisure uses in Town Centres**

839. Policies JP-Strat12 and JP-P4 aim to provide a strategic framework for local plans and informing the preparation and determination of planning applications in relation to retail, and town centre uses.
840. Policy JP-Strat12 is focused on the main town centres, given the strategic nature of the Plan, this is an appropriate approach. The inclusion of a strategic policy is consistent with NPPF 86.
841. However, the policies do not currently acknowledge the status of Salford Quays which is now a town centre following the adoption of the Salford Local Plan: Development Management Policies and Designations. Modifications are therefore needed to the policies and reasoned justification for effectiveness. Policy JP-P4 confirms that it covers the upper levels of the town centre hierarchy and these will be maintained and enhanced. However, the first paragraph is not currently effective, and a modification is needed to address this.
842. The reasoned justification at paragraph 9.21 contains detail on how lower levels of the hierarchy would be dealt with in relation to local plans. In order to provide a clear framework for local plans and to be justified this should be within the policy itself. The reasoned justification also needs modifying in respect of the effects of the application of the policy relating to brownfield land. This modification is additional to those consulted on [MM4.31, MM4.32 and MM9.6]. These modifications will ensure the policies are effective and justified.

### **Policy JP-P5 Education, Skills and Knowledge**

843. NPPF 95 states that it is important that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Overall, the policy sets out a high-level objective in relation to significant enhancements in education, skills and knowledge. It is sufficiently flexible in its requirements including in relation to housing developments, which would be required to make a financial contribution for school places or set land aside in a way which is both proportionate and where appropriate. It is consistent with the NPPF.

## **Policy JP-P6 Health**

844. Policy JP-P6 contains a set of high level aims to help tackle health inequality and supports improvements in health facilities where appropriate, seeking to maximise the contribution the Plan makes to health. The reasoned justification acknowledges the discrepancies of life expectancy and health outcomes both within and when considered against other areas.
845. Paragraph 9.32 (second bullet) refers to accessibility standards. To be consistent with our approach removing any ambiguity over what is meant by this, a modification is needed to the paragraph to clarify that accessibility here is considered in accordance with Part M4 (2) of the Building Regulations for effectiveness.
846. Criterion C of the policy refers to Health Impact Assessments, and as set out this is not clear on the threshold that would apply to proposals or in what circumstances it would be appropriate for proposals to be supported by one. Modifications are needed to the policy and reasoned justification to ensure the policy is justified and effective in that regard. In order for the provision of new or improved facilities as part of new development to be justified, it is necessary to be explicit that this should be proportionate to any additional demand development would generate [MM9.7, MM9.8]. These modifications will ensure the policy is effective and justified.

## **Policy JP-P7 Sport and Recreation**

847. Policy JP-P7 aims to establish a strategic framework for the protection and enhancement of high quality and accessible sports and recreation facilities. The policy aims to provide a framework for local plans and inform decision making.
848. Criterion 2 of the policy refers to developing a 'common standard' for provision of designated play areas. However, as the standard has yet to be developed it would not be effective and a modification is needed to delete this requirement. Criteria 3, 4 and 7 set out requirements for standards in relation to existing and future recreational needs, new and/or improved facilities and sports facilities in education settings. However, in order to reflect the NPPF at paragraph 98 and advice by Sport England, a modification is needed to these to ensure that policies in local plans and decisions should be on an evidence-based approach, including up to date needs assessments. Consequential changes are also necessary to the reasoned justification [MM9.9, MM9.10]. These modifications will ensure the policy is effective and justified.

## **Conclusion**

849. Subject to the main modifications described above, policies JP-Strat12 and JP-P1 to JP-P7 are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

## Issue 49 - Are transport policies JP-Strat14, JP-C1 and JP-C3 to JP-C7 justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

850. Policy JP-Strat14 sets out a high-level objective, consistent with the Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2040<sup>137</sup>, aimed at ensuring 50% of all daily trips can be made by public transport, cycling and walking by 2040, including through an ambitious programme of investment and higher density development in locations with good access to rapid transit connections. In 2017, 39% of daily trips were made by public transport, walking and cycling. Achieving such modal shift would be consistent with national policy which aims to promote sustainable transport. However, to ensure that the Plan is justified, Picture 10.4 needs to be modified to clarify the time period it relates to, and the modal shares indicated [MM10.2].
851. Policies JP-C1 and JP-C3 to JP-C6 set out detailed objectives and requirements relating to the integrated transport network; public transport; street design; walking and cycling; and freight and logistics. Parts of the policies are essentially high level statements of actions that the local authorities and other relevant bodies will take, whereas other parts are intended to inform forthcoming local plans and/or the preparation and determination of planning applications.
852. Generally, those policies are consistent with policy JP-Strat14 and national policy as referred to above. However, a number of modifications are required to ensure that the Plan is effective and justified, including through the removal of policy requirements relating to specific documents or initiatives whose status is unclear or may become out of date during the plan period. These modifications relate to the modal hierarchy and reference to the Global Street Design Guide (policy JP-C1 and paragraph 10.27) [MM10.3 and MM10.4]; improvements to public transport and reference to Our Five Year Delivery Plan (policy JP-C3) [MM10.6]; the approach to designing streets and references to the Bee Network (policies JP-C4 and JP-C5) [MM10.9 and MM10.10]; an additional requirement for the provision of overnight parking and rest areas for heavy goods vehicles in appropriate locations subject to demand (policies JP-C6 and JP-C7 and paragraph 10.71) [MM10.11, MM10.12 and MM10.14]; and amendments to various parts of the reasoned justification to take account of the October 2023 Government announcement about HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail [MM4.35, MM4.36, MM10.15, MM10.16 and MM10.17].
853. Paragraphs 10.54 and 10.55 relate to the strategic road network which includes the M60, M67, M602, A627M, A57T and A663T along with parts of the M56, M6, M61, M62, M66 and A628T<sup>138</sup>. To provide an effective strategic framework for local plans, masterplans and planning applications, an additional policy needs to be added to the Plan relating to the strategic road network. Along with

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<sup>137</sup> 09.01.01 (updated January 2021).

<sup>138</sup> GMCA statement M3.1.1 (October 2022).

other relevant policies, including JP-C7 (see below), this will ensure a coordinated approach to the planning and delivery of interventions on the strategic and local road networks having regard to development proposed over the plan period [**MM10.7** and **MM10.8**].

854. Policy JP-C7 sets out transport requirements for new development aimed at ensuring it is located and designed to enable walking, cycling and public transport use; reducing car dependency; and delivering high quality environments. In other words, an approach that seeks to encourage modal shift in line with the strategic objective set out in policy JP-Strat14. A number of changes are required to ensure effectiveness, including in relation to car parking provision and achieving safe, secure and attractive access to local services for pedestrians, cyclists and people with a disability. The last sentence relating to financial contributions needs to be deleted to avoid potential inconsistency with other policies in the Plan [**MM10.13** and **MM10.14**].
855. The requirement in policy JP-C7 relating to transport assessments and transport statements needs to set out what is expected in terms of taking account of cumulative impacts; prioritising walking, cycling and public transport; testing scenarios; and consulting the relevant highway authority. It also needs to require mitigation in relation to the Manchester Mosses SAC for developments that would result in increased traffic flows of more than 100 vehicles or 20 heavy goods vehicles on the relevant sections of the M62. These changes will ensure that policy JP-C7 is effective, consistent with national policy, and reflects the recommendations of the HRA [**MM10.14**].
856. The Plan is supported by assessments of the potential impacts of the development proposed over the plan period on the local and strategic road network<sup>139</sup>. These identify interventions that may be required to ensure that the residual cumulative impacts on the road network associated with each allocation in the Plan would not be severe. The potential highway improvements relate to a worst-case scenario in terms of the assumptions made about the amount of development, travel behaviour and modal shift. The application of the preceding parts of policy JP-C7 should ensure that priority is given to improving infrastructure for sustainable modes, thereby reducing the need for road improvements to accommodate more cars and lorries. In order to ensure that policy JP-C7 is justified and can be effectively implemented, the potential interventions for each allocation need to be included in a new Appendix to the Plan, and the reasoned justification amended to explain how they are to be taken into account in the application of JP-C7 in the context of the strategic approach aimed at achieving the 50% modal share set out in policy JP-Strat14 [**MM10.13** and **MMApxD.1**].

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<sup>139</sup> 09.01.17 to 09.01.28 (July 2021) and OD5.2 (November 2022).

## Conclusion

857. Subject to the main modifications described above, transport policies JP-Strat14, JP-C1 and JP-C3 to JP-C7 are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

## Issue 50 – Are policies JP-D1 and JP-D2 justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

### Policy JP-D1 – Infrastructure

858. Policy JP-D1 sets out the overarching approach to delivering infrastructure. This includes matters that are not intended to be delivered through the planning system itself, but which nevertheless will facilitate the implementation of the spatial strategy. Modifications are however necessary to clarify what are actions expected by developers and decision makers and what actions will be carried out by the GMCA and Councils to support development [MM12.1].

859. More specifically, it is also necessary to clarify the scope of infrastructure phasing strategies and how they will be agreed. References to strategic and major sites are ambiguous and potentially unnecessarily onerous, particularly if 'major' is interpreted as per the definition in the NPPF. It is sufficient, and clearer, to rely on schemes that will be delivered in phases or by different developers.

860. The policy sets out a raft of requirements relating to energy, water, utilities, fibre, heating and cooling. All of these are covered in more detail, and more accurately, in other thematic policies. There is no need to repeat the requirements here and doing so is only likely to lead to ambiguity. The policy should therefore be modified to remove superfluous repetitive elements as these are not justified. We have also made a further change to the modifications to the opening paragraph of the policy in the interests of clarity.

### Policy JP-D2 – Developers Contributions

861. Policy JP-D2 sets out the requirements for mitigating the impact of development through various mechanisms. Modifications are needed to ensure the policy is effective and consistent with national policy [MM12.2]. As submitted, the second paragraph is not consistent with the approach to viability assessments set out in NPPF 58. In particular, the wording is more restrictive and resistant to the submission of viability assessments and what they should seek to demonstrate. A modification is needed which recognises, as does the NPPF, that there may be changes in circumstance which can have a bearing on viability. Nevertheless, it is justified and consistent with national policy for decision makers to determine how much weight should be given to viability assessment alongside other material considerations.

862. Finally, reference to 'legal contracts' in the opening paragraph is a vague term and should be replaced by specific reference to the types of agreement which are likely to be sought. This will ensure clarity and effectiveness. This also requires a consequential change to the reasoned justification [MM12.3].

## Conclusion

863. Subject to the main modifications set out above, we are satisfied that policies JP-D1 and JP-D2 are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

## Issue 51 – Will the monitoring framework be effective?

864. Paragraph 12.21 of the Plan states that monitoring is a key component of any development plan document and therefore is key to its success. We agree with this and therefore we consider main modifications are needed to ensure the monitoring framework will be an effective tool. The monitoring framework in Table 12.1 needs to be amended to ensure the monitoring indicators cover all key strategic priorities and targets and that they are consistent with the relevant policy requirements. For example, policies on employment set requirements for floorspace and thus the indicators should reflect this. Similarly, indicators should focus on factors that the Plan can influence and are measurable.

865. The Plan covers four different geographical levels; the PfE area as a whole, district level, the spatial strategy areas set out in policies JP-Strat1, 5, 6 and 9 and specific allocations. As such, it is necessary for the monitoring framework to be clear about the scale at which monitoring data will be collected and published. MM12.5 addresses these issues and will ensure the monitoring framework is effective. Additional reasoned justification is also needed to clarify the role of the monitoring framework, particularly in relation to how the strategic policies will be monitored [MM12.4].

866. There are a potentially endless number of monitoring indicators that could be used and it may well be that others could have been identified. We are however content that those identified by MM12.5 provide a reasonable and robust approach to monitoring the effectiveness of the Plan.

## Conclusion

867. Subject to the main modifications set out above, the monitoring framework will be effective.

## Issue 52 - Have exceptional circumstances been fully evidenced and justified for adding a total of 675 hectares on 49 sites to the Green Belt?

868. The Plan proposes that a total of 49 sites be added to the existing Green Belt (total 675 hectares). These are listed in Table B.1, indicated on Picture B.2, and

designated on the Policies Map. A map of each site, showing the change to the Green Belt, is included in Appendix B to the Plan.

869. National policy advises that, once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified through the preparation or updating of plans. The sites were added as they were considered to serve at least one Green Belt purpose set out in NPPF 138 and to meet all five criteria to establish new Green Belt in NPPF 139.

870. However, during the examination GMCA outlined a revised approach to considering whether each of the Green Belt additions made in the Plan is justified based on a Court of Appeal judgment<sup>140</sup>. This approach involves considering whether there are exceptional circumstances for each Green Belt addition, based on whether there has been a fundamental change in circumstances since the extent of the Green Belt was established previously and/or whether a change is needed to correct an anomaly where the existing Green Belt boundary does not follow a readily recognisable physical feature.

871. GMCA applied the revised approach to each of the 49 Green Belt additions in the Plan and the findings are set out in a table in GMCA79. In summary, GMCA concluded that 17 of the additions meet the fundamental change test and/or would resolve an anomalous boundary, whereas the remaining 32 proposed additions did not meet either test.

872. We agree with the GMCA's revised approach based on case law, and therefore most of the additions are not justified or consistent with national policy. However, we set out below the specific sites where we consider the addition to be justified based on the GMCA analysis, where we disagree with the GMCA assessment, or because there are circumstances relating to a site that need addressing.

873. We, therefore, recommend that the Plan be modified to delete the following Green Belt additions as exceptional circumstances have not been fully evidenced and justified: GBA01, GBA03, GBA04, GBA06 to GBA11, GBA13, GBA15 to GBA18, GBA20 to GBA24, GBA27, GBA30, GBA33, GBA36, GBA38, GBA42, and GBA45 to GBA49 [**MMApxB.1** to **MMApxB.4**]. The Policies Map will need to be amended accordingly. Consequential changes are required to reasoned justification that refers to the net amount of land removed from the Green Belt in the Plan [**MM1.8**]

### **GBA02 - Horwich Golf Course/Knowles Farm, Bolton**

874. GBA02 is in the east of Horwich. The parcel of 24.1 hectares of land comprised Horwich Golf Club golf course, agricultural land and woodland. The site is currently designated as Protected Open Land in Bolton's Local Plan (Policy OA1 and CG6AP). Horwich Golf Club buildings and part of the associated car

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<sup>140</sup> GMCA79, GMCA80

park are in the south of the parcel. This part of the site now has planning permission for two schemes for residential development for 13.9 and 16.3 hectares respectively, with a reserved matters application also approved in September 2022. The larger parcel of land is enclosed to the northwest, west, south and southeast by residential developments, a church and educational facilities. The grant of planning permission for the development of that part of the site means that altering the Green Belt boundaries to include it in the Green Belt is not justified.

875. The land to the north beyond the part of the site with planning permission comprises a block of woodland, arable fields and a farmstead in the north. This parcel is 8.3 hectares. This parcel of land lies between Horwich and Bottom O' th' Moor to the northeast, which are within 1 kilometre of each other. The parcel of land performs a strong role in preventing the physical and visual merging of these two settlements and would perform a moderate role in protecting the countryside from encroachment. Although not a historic town as referred to in NPPF138, there are heritage and cultural links of this part of the site with Wallsuches Conservation Area and remaining undeveloped pasture linked to upland areas.

876. The grant of planning permission within GBA02 demonstrates that in this case the existing policy context has not been sufficient to resist residential development in the area. This factor and the permitted change in use to residential development of the golf course does represent a fundamental change in circumstances since the extent of the Green Belt was established previously and the land in question was not included in the Green Belt. It affects the remaining part of the site which would now make an important contribution to protecting the countryside from encroachment and preventing urban sprawl.

877. However, [**MMApxB.5**] is needed to amend the area of GBA02 to be the remaining 8.3 hectares of the site which does not have planning permission, in order for the inclusion of the land in the Green Belt to be effective and justified.

878. Subject to the modification we are therefore satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances to justify adding 8.3 hectares of Horwich Golf Course/Knowles Farm to the Green Belt.

### **GBA05 Pigs Lea Brook 2, Bury**

879. This is a small site located at the northern edge of Bury. It is a grassland field sloping up to the south. A lane defines the northern edge, and it contains no development. The site performs moderate roles in preventing sprawl and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, although it lacks a strong rural character. However, the Green Belt boundary currently runs through open land with no defined boundary. It appears to follow no physical features and thus the proposed addition would address this anomaly. The new boundary would run close against the urban area to the south and to the north would be a road and thus would be clearly discernible.

880. We are therefore content that there are exceptional circumstances which justify adding around 0.6 hectares of land at Pigs Lea Brook 2, Bury to the Green Belt.

#### **GBA12 Woolfold, Bury**

881. The site is to the northwest of Bury and consists of mostly river valley with areas of tree cover. Several public rights of way run across the parcel and in places the Kirklees Trail acts as the northern boundary of the parcel. Woodhill Brook also passes through the parcel. The parcel also contains a number of ponds.

882. The site performs a moderate role in preventing sprawl and in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The Green Belt boundary currently runs through pockets of trees with no defined boundary. It appears to follow no physical features and thus the proposed addition would address this anomaly. The new boundary would run against the urban area to the north and south and thus would be clearly discernible.

883. We are therefore content that there are exceptional circumstances which justify adding around 12.5 hectares of land at Woolfold, Bury to the Green Belt.

#### **GBA14 Chesham, Bury**

884. The site comprises land at the north-eastern edge of Bury. Includes areas of amenity grass land with footpaths, pastoral land and pockets of woodland. The site performs a strong role in preventing sprawl and in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The Green Belt boundary currently runs through fields and woodland with no defined boundary. It appears to follow no physical features and thus the proposed addition would address this anomaly. The new boundary would run against the urban area to the south and thus would be clearly discernible.

885. We are therefore content that there are exceptional circumstances which justify adding around 1.08 hectares of land at Chesham, Bury to the Green Belt.

#### **GBA19 - Land west of Stakehill Business Park, Rochdale**

886. GBA19 lies between Middleton and Stakehill Business Park and comprises around 47 hectares of open pasture fields, Rochdale Canal, woodland, allotments and school sports pitches. The land plays a moderate/strong role in preventing the sprawl of the Middleton urban area, and a moderate role in protecting the countryside from encroachment.

887. The allocation of a 202 hectare site, 168 hectares of which are removed from the Green Belt, for housing and economic development at Stakehill (JPA2) immediately to the east represents a fundamental change in circumstances since GBA19 was excluded from the Green Belt in the 1980s. The development now proposed at Stakehill would cause high harm to Green Belt purposes

meaning that permanently protecting the openness of GBA19 would now make a more important contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and preventing urban sprawl in the remaining open land between Middleton, Heywood, Rochdale, Royton and Chadderton.

888. We are therefore satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances to justify adding 47 hectares of land west of Stakehill Business Park to the Green Belt.

#### **GBA25 - Land at Summit, Heywood, Rochdale**

889. GBA25 (1.4 hectares) forms part of a larger open agricultural field on the north west edge of Heywood. The field, along with adjoining open land, plays strong roles in preventing urban sprawl and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, and a moderate role in preventing the merging of Heywood and Bury. The existing Green Belt boundary to the south of GBA25 is not defined by any physical feature, but rather it runs across the open field and through a pond. Adding GBA25 to the Green Belt would correct that anomaly and mean that the Green Belt boundary would correspond to the readily recognisable physical features defining the edge of the Heywood urban area.

890. We are therefore satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances to justify adding 1.4 hectares of land on the north west edge of Heywood to the Green Belt.

#### **GBA26 - Land South East of Slack Brook, Salford**

891. Policy GBA26 forms part of the Slack Brook open space and forms a gap between the existing Green Belt and HMP Forest Bank. The existing Green Belt boundary appears to relate, at least partly, to the boundary of a power station that was demolished in 1994. The new prison has been built since this demolition which has further altered the character of the area. As a result of the changes, the existing boundary no longer follows any discernible features on the ground. The proposed boundary for the Green Belt addition would run to the edge of the prison and other built form. This would meet the requirements of NPPF 143f.

892. We are therefore content that there has been a fundamental change in circumstance since the Green Belt was originally established, which has resulted in a now anomalous boundary. It is likely that existing local and national policies would be able to keep the land open and undeveloped. Nevertheless, some logic in seeking to bring the whole area of open space under the same designation and ensuring the boundary is consistent with national policy.

893. We are therefore satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances to justify adding 4.1 hectares of Land South East of Slack Brook, Salford to the Green Belt.

## **GBA27 - West Salford Greenway, Salford**

894. The West Salford Greenway Green Belt addition comprises around 185 hectares of land. It includes various components including a country park, golf course, woodland and agricultural fields. There are some buildings within it, but it largely remains open in character. Importantly, the majority of the proposed Green Belt addition has been designated as the 'West Salford Greenway' in the Salford Local Plan. This is a continuation of long-standing policy approach of protecting this area from development. GMCA have indicated that this is an area which has been subject to significant development pressure over a number of years, with at least two unsuccessful appeals for housing development in recent years.
895. The area has been considered for Green Belt in 1984, 1995 and 2006<sup>141</sup>. On each occasion an Inspector has concluded that there was no justification for including the area in the Green Belt. There have been no fundamental changes in circumstance since these decisions were made.
896. The main area of the Greenway would be linked to the main Green Belt by a relatively narrow 'channel' which is, in the main, neither open nor undeveloped. In both 1984 and 1995, the Inspectors noted concern about the relationship between the West Salford Greenway and existing Green Belt. These concerns remain relevant. The only contiguous boundary between the proposed addition and existing Green Belt is in a relatively small area to the west of the site. Some of this 'link' is formed by a motorway junction and a large hotel, which are not part of the West Salford Greenway allocation. The Inspector in 1984 noted these features in determining that the relationship was not wholly acceptable due to the presence of such significant built form. The 1995 Inspector also concluded that the physical link with the existing Green Belt would be "tenuous". Nothing has changed to suggest a different conclusion should be drawn.
897. We acknowledge that there has been significant pressure for development in this area over a prolonged period. However, a planning history of refused applications and appeals do not constitute a change in circumstance since the original decision excluding the land from the Green Belt was made. Indeed, these tend to demonstrate that the existing policy context has been sufficient to resist development in the area. Neither development pressure, nor the Councils' assertion that the area is not suitable for housing development, constitutes an 'exceptional circumstance' in this case.
898. Therefore, there have been no fundamental changes in circumstance since the Green Belt was defined or previously considered. Moreover, we are not persuaded that the area would be sufficiently well related to the existing Green Belt to warrant inclusion in any event. Accordingly, the exceptional circumstances needed to justify a change in the boundary have not been

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<sup>141</sup> 07.01.25

demonstrated and a main modification is needed to delete policy GBA27 from the Plan [MMApxB.3].

### **GBA28 - Part of Logistics North Country Park, Salford**

899. Policy GBA28 relates to an area of around 15.3 hectares that is intended to form part of the Logistics North Country Park. As the name suggests, this country park results from a planning permission for a large logistics estate near to the site in Bolton. Some of the park is already in the Green Belt, whereas the area proposed is not. This also means that the existing Green Belt boundary now follows no discernible logic or feature on the ground. The boundary is therefore anomalous in this regard and inconsistent with the expectations of NPPF 143f.
900. The additional land would exhibit the characteristics of Green Belt and meet the same purposes as the existing area. As open space, local and national policy would provide a degree of protection for the site and ensure it remained open and undeveloped. Nevertheless, there is some logic and benefit in ensuring the newly established country park is under the same designation, while also addressing the boundary issues potentially brought about by the change in circumstance (which also includes Green Belt boundary alterations nearby in Bolton).
901. We are satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances to justify adding around 15.3 hectares at Part of Logistics North Country Park, Salford to the Green Belt.

### **GBA29 - Land West of Burgess Farm, Salford**

902. Policy GBA29 relates to around 25.2 hectares of land located on the border between Wigan and Salford. The existing Green Belt boundary follows the administrative boundary and there are no discernible features on the ground. Adding GBA29 to the Green Belt would correct this anomaly and mean that the boundary would correspond to the readily recognisable physical features defining the edge of the Walkden area.
903. The allocation of JPA35 North of Mosley Common for around 1,100 dwellings would also result in the release of approximately 61 hectares from the Green Belt nearby. This represents a fundamental change in circumstances. The development proposed through JPA35 would cause harm to Green Belt purposes meaning that permanently protecting the openness of GBA29 would now make a more important contribution to preventing further coalescence of Walkden and Tyldesley/Astley and potential urban sprawl from the east.
904. We are therefore satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances that justify the addition of 25.2 hectares of land to the Green Belt at Land West of Burgess Farm.

### **GBA31 - Fox Platt, Mossley**

905. GBA31 relates to an area comprising a mix of open grassland, allotments and woodland located on the edge of Mossley. The site and the area of Green Belt to the west perform a strong role in preventing sprawl and maintaining the gap between Mossley and Stalybridge.
906. The existing Green Belt boundary to the west of GBA31 is not clearly defined by any physical feature on the ground, but rather runs across the open land and wooded area. Adding GBA31 to the Green Belt would correct that anomaly and mean that the Green Belt boundary would correspond to the physical features defining the urban edge of Mossley. We are therefore satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances that justify the addition of 7.9 hectares to the Green Belt at land at Fox Platt, Mossley.

### **GBA32 - Manor Farm Close, Waterloo, Ashton-under-Lyne**

907. GBA32 comprises an area of woodland and open grassland which forms a gap between the edge of Ashton-under-Lyne and existing Green Belt. The site and area of Green Belt to the north perform a strong function in checking urban sprawl and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
908. The existing Green Belt boundary follows a roughly straight line cutting through woodland between Taunton Brook Lane and Ney Street and does not appear to be defined by any physical features on the ground. Adding GBA32 to the Green Belt would correct that anomaly and mean that the Green Belt boundary would correspond to the physical features defining the urban edge of Ashton-under-Lyne.
909. We are therefore satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances that justify the addition of 0.8 hectares to the Green Belt at land at Manor Farm Close, Waterloo, Ashton-under-Lyne.

### **GBA34 – Cowbury Green, Long Row, Carrbrook, Stalybridge**

910. The site forms part of the Stalybridge Country Park and clearly relates well to the existing open countryside which effectively wraps around the housing estate immediately to the south.
911. The GMCA did not include this site amongst those they considered to be justified against the tests outlined above. Although the timeline is not entirely clear, more recent evidence suggests that the site in question had, at one time, been in use for industrial purposes. This may have ceased in the early 1980s, prior to the designation of the Green Belt. However, the circumstances of the buildings' demolition and subsequent clearance, ostensibly resulting from a large chemical explosion, may not have been fully resolved when the Green Belt designation was first considered and adopted. There have also been changes to the land uses immediately adjacent to the site in the form of

relatively modern housing which have significantly altered the character of the area and created a new, clearly defined boundary to the Green.

912. The boundary as currently defined follows some defined features, particularly to the north of the site. However, given how more recent neighbouring housing and existing open space frames the site, the exclusion of this area now appears to be somewhat anomalous. This is particularly the case with the existing western boundary of the Green Belt. The site also forms part of the same country park to the land on three sides of it. We are satisfied that the site would meet the Green Belt purposes of checking unrestricted sprawl and preventing encroachment into the countryside.

913. On this basis, we consider that there are exceptional circumstances that would justify the addition of 1.8 hectares of land at Cowbury Green, Long Row, Carrbrook, Stalybridge. On reflection, there is no need to delete this addition for the Plan to be sound. We have altered the modifications schedule, including Picture B.2 accordingly.

#### **GBA35 - Woodview, South View, Carrbrook, Stalybridge**

914. GBA35 relates to two areas of woodland, separated by an area of open space and footpath. This area forms a small gap between the existing Green Belt to the south and the urban edge of Carrbrook. The proposed addition and Green Belt to the south perform a strong role in preventing sprawl and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

915. The existing Green Belt boundary cuts through the woodland and does not appear to follow any physical features. The proposal would correct this anomaly and create a Green Belt boundary which clearly follows the extent of the built form of Carrbrook.

916. On this basis, we are satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances that would justify the addition of 2.1 hectares of land at Woodview, South View, Carrbrook, Stalybridge.

#### **GBA37, GBA40 and GBA41 - Broadbottom Road, Broadbottom; Hyde Road, Mottram; and Ashworth Lane, Mottram**

917. The areas of GBA37, GBA40 and GBA41 in Tameside are considered together as they are physically linked, and the justification given for all three is the same.

918. The Godley Green Garden Village (JPA31) will lead to the release of around 124 hectares of Green Belt. This will result in a high degree of harm and the closing of the gap between Hattersley and Hyde. This represents a fundamental change in circumstance. Although some distance from the Godley Green Garden Village itself, the combined area would still have a strong role in checking any additional urban sprawl, helping to prevent the merging of Mottram, Broadbottom and Hattersley, Hyde. The importance of this inevitably increases with the changes to the Green Belt to the west. While these additions

would in no way fully mitigate the harm to the Green Belt caused elsewhere, they would provide a degree of comfort about any further coalescence of these settlements.

919. We are therefore content that there are exceptional circumstances which justify the addition of 18.9 hectares of land at Broadbottom Road, Broadbottom, around 4.9 hectares of land at Hyde Road, Mottram and around 1.1 hectares of land at Ashworth Lane, Mottram to the Green Belt.

### **GBA39 - Cemetery Road, Denton**

920. GBA39 relates to a small area of woodland located on the edge of Denton. The plot would contribute to the same strong role that the existing Green Belt has in terms of preventing Denton and Woodley from merging and its moderate role in checking urban sprawl and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

921. The existing Green Belt boundary runs along the edge of the cemetery to the south, but to the east it runs in a straight line from the edge of the housing to a path running through the woodland. It appears to follow no physical features and thus the proposed addition would address this anomaly. The new boundary would run along a public footpath adjacent to an area of open space and thus would be clearly discernible.

922. We are therefore content that there are exceptional circumstances which justify adding around 0.8 hectares of land at Cemetery Road, Denton to the Green Belt.

### **GBA42 – Horses Field, Danebank, Denton**

923. GBA42 relates to an area of protected open space, which sits between residential development on three sides and railway line to the east. The current Green Belt boundary follows the line of the railway and is thus a clear and distinct physical feature.

924. While it appears the site has been considered for designation through earlier plans, it is not clear from the representations that there has been any fundamental change in circumstance since the Green Belt was first established. Similarly, the existing boundary is not anomalous in that it follows a clear physical feature in the railway line. We acknowledge that the housing would also form a clear physical boundary, but this in itself is not sufficient to demonstrate there are exceptional circumstances to extend the Green Belt here. The same conclusion applies to the fact that there may be other areas where the Green Belt straddles the railway line.

925. It has also been suggested that the site is under pressure for development. Again, this is not sufficient on its own to pass the tests established above. Nevertheless, the site is identified as protected open space and thus already carries a degree of protection. The potential for the site to be identified for

development does not constitute an exceptional circumstance which justifies altering the boundary.

926. We are therefore not satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances which justify adding around 6.9 hectares at Horses Field, Danebrook, Denton to the Green Belt. The site should therefore be deleted from the Plan [MMApxB.3].

#### **GBA43 - Land at Midlands Farm, Moss Lane, Trafford**

927. GBA43 is currently identified as safeguarded land in the Trafford Core Strategy. The remainder of the safeguarded land designation is included in the New Carrington allocation (JPA33). This area has ostensibly been omitted from the allocation on the basis that the landowner does not support the development of their land.

928. The allocation of New Carrington clearly represents a fundamental change in circumstance since the Green Belt boundary here was last considered. The Council has concluded the land is not suitable for allocation and, in such circumstances, it is legitimate to consider whether it would be acceptable for the site to revert to the Green Belt. The plot would contribute to checking urban sprawl and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Given the significant impact on the Green Belt from the New Carrington allocation, this gains greater importance.

929. We are therefore content that there are exceptional circumstances that justify adding 2.7 hectares of land at Midlands Farm, Moss Lane, Trafford to the Green Belt.

#### **GBA44 – Land off Fir Tree Street, Wigan**

930. The land is located on the southern edge of Wigan urban area and comprises of part of Widows Fishery. Land within the parcel is relatively flat, comprising of a fishing pond with a wooded island in the centre, and surrounded by woodland. The parcel is bound by woodland to the north, south and west and adjoins the remainder of the Widows Fishery site and woodland to the east.

931. The site and the area of Green Belt adjacent performs a strong role in preventing sprawl and maintaining the gap between Wigan and Platt Bridge. However, the Green Belt boundary currently runs through the pond and open land with no defined boundary. It appears to follow no physical features and thus the proposed addition would address this anomaly. The new boundary would run along against development to the north and west and a road to the south and thus would be clearly discernible.

932. We are therefore content that there are exceptional circumstances which justify adding around 0.8 hectares of land at Land off Fir Tree Street, Ince to the Green Belt.

## Conclusion

933. For the reasons set out above, exceptional circumstances have been fully evidenced and justified for a number of the Green Belt Additions proposed in the Plan. However, in the majority of cases, exceptional circumstances have not been fully evidenced and justified and therefore the Plan needs to be modified to delete those proposed Green Belt Additions as identified above. The policies map will need to be amended accordingly.

## Issue 53 – Other soundness matters

934. The requirements in policy JP-C2 relating to digital connectivity need to be modified to ensure that they are justified and consistent with national policy, taking account of viability and what would be in the control of developers **[MM10.5]**.

935. In order to ensure that various policy requirements throughout the Plan are clear and unambiguous and therefore effective, modifications are required to paragraphs 1.20 and 4.11 to define what is meant by “access”, “accessibility” and “accessible” including with regard to disabled people and others with particular mobility requirements **[MM1.1 and MM4.2]**.

936. The Plan contains a number of district overview maps in Chapter 11 showing allocations, Green Belt, housing/mixed use sites and public transport lines and stations. Consequential modifications are needed to these maps to reflect changes to Green Belt allocations, Green Belt Additions, and other relevant changes. **[MM11.3, MMBo1; MMBu1; MMM1; MMO1; MMR1; MMTa1; MMS1; MMW1]**. Picture C2, which is described as the Policies Map, also needs modifying as a consequence **[MMApxC.1]**. These changes will ensure the Plan is justified and effective.

## Overall Conclusion and Recommendation

937. The Plan has a number of deficiencies in respect of soundness and legal compliance for the reasons set out above which mean that we recommend non-adoption of it as submitted in accordance with section 20(7A) of the 2004 Act.

938. The local planning authorities requested that we recommend main modifications to make the Plan sound and legally compliant, and thereby capable of adoption. We conclude that all legal requirements have been met and that with the recommended main modifications set out in the Appendix the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document for Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan satisfies the requirements referred to in section 20(5)(a) of the 2004 Act and is sound.

*William Fieldhouse Louise Gibbons Steven Lee*

Inspectors

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This report is accompanied by an Appendix containing the Main Modifications.