



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**ST HELENS BOROUGH
LOCAL PLAN 2020-2035**

**ST HELENS BOROUGH COUNCIL'S RESPONSE
TO INSPECTORS MATTERS ISSUES AND
QUESTIONS**

**Matter 4 – Allocations, Safeguarded Land and
Green belt Boundaries
Parkside and Newton-le-Willows/Earlestown**

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Matter 4: Allocations, Safeguarded Land and Green Belt Boundaries – Parkside and Newton-le-Willows/Earlestown

(Policies Covered: LPA04, LPA04.1, LPA05, LPA05.1, LPA06, LPA10)

Issue 1: Parkside East (7EA) and Parkside West (8EA), Newton-le-Willows

- 1. Do the Green Belt assessments support the allocation of Sites 7EA and 8EA and demonstrate exceptional circumstances for the removal of the land from the Green Belt?*

Site 7EA (Parkside East) comprises parcel GBP_039 in the Green Belt Review (SD020). The Stage 1B assessment in relation to purposes of the Green Belt found the parcel to score “high” in terms of its contribution to checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, “low” in terms of preventing neighbouring towns merging into one another and “high” in terms of assisting the safeguarding of countryside from encroachment. The assessment concluded that the overall significance of the parcel’s contribution to Green Belt purposes as “high+”. In doing so, it acknowledged the significant size of the parcel, the lack of enclosure to the east, as well as the strong countryside character, with little inappropriate development.

On that basis, the assessment acknowledges that ordinarily, the parcel would not be recommended to progress to the stage 2 assessment. However, the GBR recognises that the parcel forms part of the wider Parkside site, straddling the M6, for which there is a long history of developer interest. This includes planning applications for a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI), the area being highlighted as a potential location for an inter-modal freight terminal in the previous North West RSS and the Core Strategy (LOC001) identifying the site as a strategic location for a SRFI.

Further evidence (particularly EMP005) found the site to be of national and regional significance in relation to national and regional policy, market demand and the need to deliver new and improved SRFIs. It found the site’s opportunity for rail access to be second to none in the North West.

Therefore, whilst the GBR acknowledges that development of this parcel could have a high impact on the Green Belt, it concludes that there are exceptional circumstances to justify its assessment at Stage 2. The subsequent stage 2B assessment found the site to have “good development potential”. The site was given an overall score of 3.

The commentary in Table 5.2 of the GBR recognises the locational advantages of this parcel in relation to the delivery of an SRFI, including accessibility by rail from north-south and east-west routes immediately adjacent, as well as proximity to the M6 Junction 22. Furthermore, the evidence indicates that the site is of a sufficiently large scale and layout to provide the necessary operational requirements of an SRFI. The development of the parcel for this use would support the Government’s policy to move freight from road to rail.

The commentary refers to the Sustainability Assessment (SA), which found that development of the parcel would likely have a mixed impact on achieving SA objectives. For example, likely negative impact on air quality and biodiversity due to additional HGV

movement generation within an existing Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), and relative proximity to a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). However, development would assist in reducing poverty and social exclusion; it is located close to a number of areas of identified as deprived.

Therefore, whilst the GBR acknowledges the impact the development of site 7EA would have on the contribution to the Green Belt, it sets out the exceptional circumstances required for the removal of this site from the Green Belt.

Site 8EA (Parkside West) comprises parcel GBP_041 in the GBR. The Stage 1B assessment against the purposes of the Green Belt found the parcel to score “medium” in terms of its contribution to checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, “low” in terms of preventing neighbouring towns merging into one another and “medium” in terms of assisting the safeguarding of countryside from encroachment. The assessment concluded the overall significance of the parcel’s contribution to Green Belt purposes as “medium”. This was influenced by the relatively high degree of enclosure, brownfield status of part of the site (former colliery and brownfield uses) and that it did not have a strong sense of openness or countryside character.

The Stage 2B assessment found the parcel to have “good development potential”, providing an overall Green Belt assessment score of 5. The commentary in Table 5.2 acknowledges the identification of the land in this parcel in the Core Strategy as being suitable for the development of a SRFI and finds the designation of part of this site as a Historic Battlefield is not considered to be an over-riding constraint (and has not been in the recent Parkside West Phase 1 application).

The commentary refers to the conclusion in the SA which found that the development of this parcel would likely have a mixed impact on the achievement of SA objectives. The SA concluded that it would likely have a negative effect on air quality and biodiversity, as development could generate additional HGV movements within an AQMA. The parcel also overlaps a Local Wildlife Site and there are Tree Preservation Orders. However, development would benefit the local economy given its proximity to areas of deprivation, helping to reduce poverty and exclusion. Through careful masterplanning, any negative effects could be mitigated.

In addition, National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 138 is of relevance. It states that “Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and/or is well-served by public transport”. The Council evidence shows that there is a strategic need to release Green Belt to meet identified needs. A significant part of site 8EA is previously development, such that development would align with the NPPF in this respect.

The GBR supports the allocation of both sites 7EA and 8EA, and demonstrate exceptional circumstances to justify their removal from the Green Belt.

2. If exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated have these been clearly articulated in the Plan?

The GBR (paragraph 1.18) explains that Green Belt sites are needed to deliver the identified employment needs over the plan period, and that no neighbouring councils can assist in meeting the need. Therefore, the land has to be released from the Green Belt in St Helens.

Paragraph 4.12.13 of the Plan explains that the dominant employment sector in St Helens Borough is logistics and distribution, driven by the locational advantages in relation to the road and rail network. The market needs for this sector are specific and focus on sites of 5ha or more. It explains that this is reflected in the sites selected to be released from the Green Belt.

Policy LPA02 explains that land will be released from the Green Belt to meet identified housing and employment needs in full over the plan period in the most sustainable locations. The reasoned justification to this policy (in paragraphs 4.6.4-4.6.6) explains there is insufficient employment land in the Borough, and paragraphs 4.6.9-4.6.12 explain the justification to remove sites from the Green Belt.

Policy LPA010 and the reasoned justification set out in detail the exceptional circumstances for the release of site 7EA from the Green Belt. Indeed, paragraphs 4.36.14-4.36.16 specifically explain it. This includes the support that development of the site would give to the Government's aims of building a robust northern economy, promoting the use of national rail infrastructure and reducing carbon emissions and congestion by reducing road freight (ie. promoting the shift of freight from road to rail).

On this basis, the exceptional circumstances are clearly articulated within the Plan, and more detailed information is provided within the Green Belt Review.

3. Is the configuration and scale of the allocations and safeguarded land justified taking into account development needs and the Green Belt assessments?

a. Is the allocation of a SRFI of the scale proposed in the Plan justified?

The history of the SRFI proposal is outlined in the Parkside SRFI Background Paper (SD024) and in the Council's response to the Inspectors' preliminary questions (SHBC005). The history of the site gives an appreciation of the iterative process and evolution of the SRFI proposal and associated employment land allocations and thereby why the scale and location of the SFRI is as proposed.

Policy support for the development of an SRFI at Parkside is longstanding and flows from the identification of the Parkside location as being suitable for an SRFI in the Merseyside

Regional Spatial Strategy (2008)¹ (“RSS”). The policies of the RSS were reflected in the Core Strategy² (“CS”), consistent with the statutory tests which prevailed in 2012. Both the RSS and CS recognised Parkside’s unique location adjacent to the axis of the West Coast Main Line (“WCML”) and the Chat Moss (Liverpool to Manchester) railway line, as well as proximity to the strategic road network (especially the M6, M62 and A580 East Lancs Road). This made the site of regional significance.

In 2006, a planning application was submitted by Astral (now known as ProLogis), for the development of 272 hectares of land to the west and east of the M6 at Parkside for an SRFI³. This application predated the adoption of the RSS and CS. The proposal included up to 715,000 square metres of rail served warehouse and distribution buildings; train assembly area; and a container depot within a perimeter landscape setting. This application was withdrawn in the Summer of 2010 due to prevailing economic circumstances at that time. The Astral application provided significant development on either side of M6 and a new junction with direct access to the M6 (including a new bridge, 4 new roundabouts and alterations to J22).

Regeneration was at the heart of the CS Vision and Strategic Objectives (SO 1.1). Policy CAS 3.2 was a key policy mechanism to deliver that regeneration. Core Strategy, Policy CAS 3.2: Development of a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI) at the Former Parkside Colliery was supported at the EiP by a bespoke Background Paper⁴, which demonstrated the SRFI’s compliance with national, regional, and local planning and transport policy (see section 4). It provided an analysis of:

- (i) the UK rail freight market (4.3);
- (ii) the NW distribution market (4.4);
- (iii) the regeneration/socio-economic need for the proposal (4.3);
- (iv) the significant benefits of the SRFI (4.5.10), especially in the light of the Economic Land and Skills Study Review 2009 (4.5.9).

In the context of the CS, the LPA considered a minimum scenario (west of the M6) and a maximum scenario (west and east of the M6). The evidence available to the LPA in 2010 demonstrated that a viable SRFI could be developed on the west of the M6 alone (with direct access onto the M6) but that land east of the M6 may be required for operational and/or viability reasons⁵. In the light of this evidence and the objections of local residents, the EiP Inspector concluded that policy CAS 3.2 was sound and that an SRFI was demonstrably

¹ See RSS Policy RT8: Inter-Modal Freight Terminals which identifies Newton-le-Willows (with access to the west Coast Main Line and Chat Moss rail route as a broad location: Parkside/Haydock Point Core Document List CD 2.11 [Parkside and Haydock Point – Core List of Documents - St Helens Council](#)

² See Core Strategy Policies CSS1; CAS 3.1; CAS 3.2; and CE1. LOC001

³ Planning application reference P/2006/1296

⁴ Core Strategy Background Paper, Parkside Rail Freight Interchange 2010 - Parkside/Haydock Point Core Document List CD 5.93 [Parkside and Haydock Point – Core List of Documents - St Helens Council](#).

⁵ Parkside/Haydock Point Core Document List CD 5.93, pages 2-3

capable of complying with Green Belt policy, acknowledging the harm that would necessarily be a consequence of development⁶.

CS Policy CAS 3.2 applies to “the site of the former Parkside Colliery and immediately adjacent land”, which is identified as “a strategic location which has the potential to facilitate the transfer of freight between road and rail”. The SRFI site designated spans the west and east of the M6 (see Fig 9.2). Consistent with the analysis in the CS Background Paper, the Policy states that: “The Council believes a deliverable and viable SRFI can be developed on the western side of the M6 with an operational area of approximately 85ha, as shown indicatively on Fig 9.2.” This is consistent with the minimum scale scenario. However, the Policy also expressly recognises that: “It is understood, however, that for operational, viability and commercial reasons a larger area of land extending to the east of the M6 motorway may also be required to accommodate an enlarged SRFI”, subject to 2 additional criteria:

- (14) *That the area of land to the western side of the M6 is developed first; and*
- (15) *That the SRFI is proven to be not deliverable without the additional eastern land area.*

Since the adoption of the Core Strategy, the LPA has undertaken significant further technical work to understand how a SRFI might be developed at Parkside. Aecom were commissioned by the LPA to investigate the feasibility of delivery options for a road and rail-linked logistics development on land at Parkside (EMP005), (the “Aecom 2016 Study”).

The Aecom 2016 Study identified 4 options:

- A small RFI (1-3 trains per day)⁷;
- A medium SRFI (4-8 trains per day)
- Two options for large SRFIs (over 9 trains per day)

Option 1 (small RFI), could be accommodated on Parkside West, handling 3 trains per day. There would be a single rail access from the west. This Option could support circa 70,000 sqm (750,000 sqft), of associated employment floorspace. This Option was considered not to be viable economically because of the high capital costs of trackwork and the restricted flexibility because of the single rail access. There would be no direct access to the motorway⁸.

Option 2 (medium SRFI), could also be accommodated on Parkside West, handling up to 8 trains per day. Rail access is provided from the Chat Moss line and, in this option, rail access is available from both west and east facing junctions which effectively offers a four-directional approach network. This maximises the flexibility of the site. The Option anticipated a new road access under the M6 from the A573. It anticipated some 93,000 sqm

⁶ CS Inspector’s EiP Report - Parkside/Haydock Point Core Document List CD 2.10

⁷ Less than 4 trains per day would not function as a strategic rail freight interchange

⁸ Aecom Study 2016, Section 8.2

of associated employment floorspace. The Option has only marginally increased infrastructure costs over Option 1 and annual income derived from 8 trains per day was anticipated to exceed the annual operating costs of the terminal, ensuring long-term viability. However, the high capital costs still result in a deficit, although it is estimated that this would be cleared by 2046⁹.

Option 3 (a large SRFI) is to handle 10 trains per day. The main element of the SRFI would be located at Parkside West with a 500m handling track siding located to the east of the M6. This provides the flexibility of Option 2 with capacity to accommodate additional trains. This Option also anticipated a new road access under the M6 from the A573. It anticipated some 116,000 sqm (1,250,000 sqft) of associated employment floorspace, all of which is located at Parkside West. Aecom note that this Option is economically sound in terms of its operation. However, with the considerably higher initial capital costs it takes a long time to pay off. As such the terminal will not have paid off its capital costs entirely until 2057. This is 11 years later than option 2.

Option 4 (large SRFI) is to handle 12 trains per day. The main element of the SRFI would be to the east of the M6, with a siding to the west. Rail access flexibility is maximised. In this option the two reception sidings directly before the core intermodal terminal (east of the M6) will be used to accept trains approaching from the south and west. These reception sidings are capable of holding a 775m train clear of the points accessing the site. In this option, the core handling area is able to serve four full length 775m trains at one time with one of the handling tracks left clear to allow locomotives to run around where required. This provides an operational benefit and saves time as trains do not need to be split for handling. The Option also anticipated a new road access under the M6 from the A573 and improvements to the A573. It anticipated about 418,000 sqm (4,500,000 sqft) of associated employment floorspace provided across Parkside East and West. Aecom note that the large terminal is economically sound, with the higher throughput making better use of the terminal equipment. As such the terminal will have paid off its capital costs entirely by 2044, 2 years earlier than the option 2.

Aecom concluded *inter alia* that:¹⁰

- A small RFI would not be viable;
- A medium or large scale SRFI (as defined) is appropriate for this area;
- Both the east and west side of the Parkside strategic site will be required;
- 8 trains per day could be serviced by Parkside in the medium term and 12 trains in the longer term.

The ability to cater for 12 trains per day would be dependent on the viability of paths to forecast destinations, in a pre and post HS2 environment and future passenger franchises¹¹.

⁹ Aecom Study 2016, Section 8.3

¹⁰ See the Executive Summary, in particular page10

¹¹ Parkside Background Paper SD024, para.2.8

At the Parkside Phase 1 inquiry a document produced by Arup was produced by the Applicant to explain the chronology of their work on behalf of Parkside Regeneration¹². The summary identifies technical issues in relation to an operationally viable SRFI at the former Parkside Colliery, on land to the west of the M6. The key point is that in engineering terms an SRFI capable of accepting trains up to 775m in length cannot be delivered on land at Parkside West (i.e. west of the M6).

Key requirements and characteristics of an SRFI are reiterated in the CBRE SRFI Note at paragraph 2.2.2¹³ within the Parkside Background Paper (SD024). iSec, the promoter/developer, has secured the support of an established rail freight operating company (FOC). Based on the FOC's requirements to create an open-access interchange around which to consolidate operations in the region, the masterplan envisages an interchange covering over 20 hectares, plus reception sidings. The rail access arrangements are also designed to interface with the separate proposals for Site 8EA, allowing maximum rail accessibility into both sites.

In summary, the proposed SRFI requires a critical mass, with the scale being determined by the viability of the proposal and the need to justify and recover initial investment in necessary infrastructure.

There is also a direct relationship to the focus of the Plan on regeneration and tackling the issues of multiple deprivation in the Borough. The creation of jobs and training opportunities to address problems of worklessness, low skills, low educational opportunities and attainment, and low incomes are of crucial importance. Newton le Willows and Earlestown have some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the Borough, in close proximity to the proposed allocation. Maximising the opportunities for employment and training at Parkside will help to secure a step-change in the prospects of local people. It is for these reasons that the redevelopment of the Parkside area for a SRFI has been a strategic priority in St Helens for the last decade.

In summary, the scale of the SRFI is justified by the viability analysis undertaken by Aecom combined with the subsequent technical work undertaken by Arup and most recent work by iSec and Intermodality. Justification also arises from the objectives to maximise the potential for rail freight to facilitate a modal shift in haulage; and to maximise the employment generation, education and skills training to impact on regeneration and the problems of multiple deprivation.

¹² The Arup SRFI Note is at Appendix 15 to the evidence of David Rolinson on behalf of Parkside Regeneration (Applicant) for the Parkside Phase 1 inquiry: Parkside/Haydock Point Core Document List CD 7.31 - <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/media/330812/731-appendices-to-final-proof-of-evidence-dave-rolinson.pdf>

¹³ Appended to the CBRE Delivery Statement within the Parkside Background Paper (SD024)

- b. Would a facility of a smaller scale (for example handling up to 8 to 10 trains daily) achieve similar benefits whilst minimising potential impacts (for example a reduced amount of Green Belt land needing to be released as these smaller options would only utilise land to the east of the M6 for road and rail infrastructure)?*

For the reasons explained, an SRFI cannot be delivered on land at Parkside West. A small RFI (Aecom's Option 1) would not be viable. Aecom's Option 2 would support up to 8 trains daily and it anticipated that an SRFI would be confined to Parkside West. Aecom identified a problem with the high capital cost and the period over which any SRFI would operate at a deficit. However, the subsequent work undertaken by Arup demonstrates that Parkside West would not be capable of accommodating 775m trains which is a prerequisite for a functional SRFI. Consequently, irrespective of financial viability, an operationally viable SRFI cannot be delivered on Parkside West in engineering terms.

The requirement to identify suitable land to meet the specific needs of the logistics industry is also relevant in the context of this question (see NPPF 80-82 and accompanying PPG). Parkside is an excellent location for the development of logistics because of the potential for transporting goods by rail and the proximity of the Motorway. If the scale of the associated employment development were reduced, the ability to maximise a modal shift from road-based transport to rail would be compromised (contrary to national policy and guidance).

In summary, a smaller SRFI confined to Parkside West is not viable or deliverable. An SRFI capable of accepting trains up to 775m in length cannot be delivered. In any event, a smaller scheme would be a compromise in terms of the flexibility for rail operation, the potential jobs creation would be less in a location where there is the potential to impact positively on deprivation in the Borough, and a smaller scheme would not maximise the transfer of freight from road based transport to rail, consistent with Government Policy.

- c. Could the Plan's aim of seeking to maximise the opportunities of delivering an SRFI of regional and national significance still be achieved?*

The aim of maximising the opportunity to deliver an SRFI is dependent on securing a scheme to deliver optimum flexibility and capacity from a rail operational perspective; a new link road to provide necessary connection to the motorway network; and a critical mass of associated and related logistics development to support infrastructure investment.

The design and configuration of an SRFI has been evolving since before the adoption of the Core Strategy, as part of an iterative process informed by independent expert third party involvement, with consultation from relevant industry experts and operators. Presently iSec are actively engaged in preparing a scheme which is a further evolution of the approach outlined in the principles of Aecom Option 4. There are no ownership constraints and the site is available. The PLR is deliverable in that the necessary land (in St Helens and Warrington) is assembled and funding is available. The PLR will be delivered so long as planning permission is granted by the Secretary of State (the Inquiry concluded in Jan/Feb 2021).

There is strong demand from the logistics sector generally and the availability of a rail freight option and proximity to the motorway network make Parkside a particularly attractive location.

Generally, conditions have never been as favourable as the present to deliver an SRFI of regional and national significance at Parkside. The LPA consider the proposal to be aspirational but realistic. The trajectory for the employment allocations assumes the rail terminal opening in 2026-2028, site operational in 2030, and by the end of the Plan period it is operational and site development is ongoing¹⁴. It is an opportunity of regional significance and must be grasped, particularly given the imperative to decarbonise transport to meet the Climate Emergency.

4. Would the adverse impacts of developing Sites 7EA and 8EA (Green Belt impacts, landscape impacts, highway safety, flood risk, agricultural land, air quality) outweigh the benefits?

The benefits arising from an SRFI at Parkside are formidable and are summarised as follows:

- Support from National Policy which promotes economic development and sustainable transport, as critical infrastructure¹⁵. The provision of a choice of transport modes which can help to reduce congestion and emissions and improve air quality and public health. It states that policies should identify and protect sites and routes which could be critical in developing infrastructure to widen transport choice and realise opportunities for large scale development.
- The DfT National Policy Statement which states that SRFIs are a key in facilitating the transfer of freight from road to rail, thereby reducing trip mileage of freight movements on both the national and local road networks. It states that the Government has concluded that there is a compelling need for an expanded network of SRFIs. It adds that due to the locational requirements and the need for effective connections for both rail and road, the number of locations suitable for SRFIs will be limited.
- There is longstanding and consistent policy support for the development of an SRFI at Parkside at a strategic level, most notably in the RSS¹⁶ and currently by the LCR.
- The locational benefits of the site for an SRFI to maximise connectivity by rail and road. There are no other locations that can satisfy the requirement for an SRFI with north, south, east, and west rail and road access in the north west of the country.

¹⁴ See Appendix 1 of the employment background paper (SD022)

¹⁵ NPPF Chapters 6 and 9

¹⁶ The significance of Parkside being identified in the RSS has been translated directly into Local Strategic Policy in the CS.

- The substantial socio-economic benefits arising from the creation of employment of a significant scale, in a location where there is a particular need. Newton-le-Willows and Earlestown have some of the most deprived areas ranked in the National Indices of Multiple Deprivation. An SRFI would unlock job opportunities. Parkside is accessible from the most deprived areas. Developments at Parkside are likely therefore to contribute towards tackling deprivation in the Borough that are either direct, indirect, or catalytic economic impacts.

The potential harm caused by an SRFI has been considered in the context of the Core Strategy. It is inevitable that an SRFI at Parkside will cause harm to the Green Belt that will be significant, particularly in respect of Site 7EA. With regard to other matters, there is no overriding constraint that would prohibit development, and issues will be addressed through an Environmental Statement, careful and considerate design, and mitigation.

The LPA therefore consider that the benefits very significantly outweigh any identified harm. This is a proposal which is strongly supported by longstanding national and local policy to deliver a SRFI.

5. *Are the requirements for Sites 7EA and 8EA within Policies LPA04, LPA04.1 and LPA010 (Site 7EA) and Appendix 5 (Site Profiles) positively prepared and effective?*

Policy LPA04 identifies land allocated for employment purposes which are set out in Table 4.1. The policy protects the sites allocated by identifying considerations that must be satisfied before planning permission for an alternative use would be permitted. Sites 7EA and 8EA are removed from the Green Belt in order to meet a specific requirement for an SRFI and associated development that can not be met elsewhere and where large-scale employment provision would be of particular benefit to help tackle the issues of multiple deprivation locally. It is therefore critical that the sites are developed as anticipated by the Plan. Otherwise, the exceptional circumstances that justify the release of the sites from the Green Belt would be undermined, the ability to develop an SRFI may be compromised, and the regeneration benefits anticipated may be lost.

Policy LPA04.1 identifies the Strategic Employment Sites which include Sites 7EA and 8EA. The policy requires *inter alia*:

- A requirement for applications to be supported by a masterplan to ensure *inter alia* that the site can be developed comprehensively and coherently; ensure a quality development including the provision of green infrastructure; provide an accessible and permeable development;
- The provision of a comprehensive package of training schemes aimed at local people to ensure that development has a positive impact on the regeneration of the Borough and addresses the issues of multiple deprivation; and
- The provision of a financial contribution towards transport infrastructure to maximise the accessibility and availability of employment opportunities;

Policy LPA10: Parkside East (Site 7EA) indicates that the site is to be developed for the primary purpose of an SRFI and associated development. The policy indicates that at least 60ha should be available for the development of an SRFI or other rail served employment development including any necessary road and rail infrastructure, buildings, and landscaping. The area of 60ha is to qualify as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project in accordance with Section 26 of the planning Act 2008.

Policy LPA10 sets out criteria to ensure that development contributes to the regeneration objectives of the Plan and the development is rail served and that it would not compromise the development of an SRFI. The Policy precludes uses and development that would not accord with underlying objectives of regeneration and delivery of an SRFI.

The Site Profile within Appendix 5 for Site 8EA sets out requirements which have been considered by the Parkside Phase 1 and PLR planning applications. An application for Parkside Phase 2 (the northern part of the proposed allocation) will require the PLR to be in place and address the matters identified. These requirements are necessary because of the proximity of housing to the west of the WCML; the presence of listed buildings and the need to ensure that development does not prejudice a rail siding if required as a component of the SRFI.

Collectively Policies LPA04; LPA04.1 and LPA10 (and the Site Profiles) recognise the opportunity for an SRFI and the contribution it would make to the regeneration of the Borough. The suite of policies aim to protect the sites for the purposes for which they were removed from the Green Belt and to maximise the impacts of development on areas of multiple deprivation through jobs, training and ensuring that development is accessible.

The suite of policies and requirements applying to Sites 7EA and 8EA are positively prepared because they promote the delivery of an SRFI, necessary infrastructure and employment development in accordance with longstanding regional policy which is currently embodied in the CS; the strategy for the LCR; National Policy (especially NPPF Chapters 9 and 6); it contributes to meeting the Borough's OAN for employment land; and it contributes to the regeneration strategy and addressing the issues of multiple deprivation arising in the Borough.

The requirements for Sites 7EA and 8EA are effective because they create the conditions for the delivery of an SRFI and employment land to meet requirements over the Plan period. They are also effective because of the contribution of the development of these allocations to the regeneration imperative within St Helens and the need to tackle the issues causing multiple deprivation.

6. Are the indicative site areas, appropriate uses, net developable areas, minimum densities and indicative site capacities within Table 4.1 justified and effective?

Table 4.1 sets out indicative site areas. In respect of Site 7EA a footnote indicates that the indicative area is net of the approximate area of land required for the SRFI and 5.58 ha to

the west of the M6 (within Site 8EA) to ensure rail access from the north. The footnote for Site 8EA refers to the 5.58 ha and to a spoil heap which is not deliverable. No densities or indicative site capacities are included in the policy.

The indicative areas and uses identified in Table 4.1 are justified because they reflect the developable areas having regard to the requirement for an SRFI; the need to safeguard the potential for Site 8EA to accommodate a rail access and the area of Site 8EA which is considered not to be developable due to the presence of a spoil heap.

The areas and uses are effective because they protect the quantum of land required to deliver an SRFI on Site 7EA and enable Site 8EA to accommodate a supporting rail access, and they set out the quantum of land available for B2 and B8 development to meet identified needs.

7. Will infrastructure to support the allocations be delivered at the right time and in the right place?

There are no constraints to the delivery of Parkside Phase 1, which comprises a substantial part of Site 8EA. There is a highway constraint on the balance of Site 8EA. The PLR resolves this highway constraint and satisfies the requirement of Policy LPA 010 (3b) to provide safe and convenient access from Junction 22 of the M6 for HGVs and other vehicles. The PLR is the subject of a planning application which is presently before the Secretary of State, pending a decision. Funding is in place to deliver the road in the event that planning permission is granted. Therefore, infrastructure will be delivered in the right place and at the right time.

8. Would there be delivery implication for sites 7EA and 8EA if a suitable connection to J22 (whether via the proposed Link road or an alternative link) is not delivered during the Plan period?

The PLR is necessary to ensure the delivery of land within Site 8EA not forming part of Parkside Phase 1 and would facilitate the delivery of Site 7EA including an SRFI. There will be delivery implications if the PLR “call-in” application is not approved by the Secretary of State. There would need to be an alternative solution. However, no detailed work has gone into resolving what that alternative solution may be at the current time because the proposal before the SoS is considered to be the optimum solution (after a detailed optioneering exercise) and acceptable. That is the view of the LPA and the LCR CA, who have resolved to provide funding for it.

9. In terms of feasibility and deliverability, will the future capacity of the rail network be capable of facilitating the delivery of an SRFI at Parkside?

A Delivery Statement for the SRFI is appended to the Parkside Background Paper (SD024). This refers to advice from Network Rail that feasibility work should be undertaken to understand the availability of space on the rail network to accommodate the SRFI¹⁷. The Parkside Strategic Rail Freight Interchange Capacity Study (EMP012) (the “Steer Report”), states that existing rail infrastructure can support a minimum of 4 trains per day at Parkside, albeit there are acknowledged challenges currently with access to the east coast ports¹⁸. The Key Findings¹⁹ indicate that at present a minimum of 19 single paths are available to and from the north, south and east. Consequently, the reality is that significantly more than the minimum 4 trains a day can be supported. Rail infrastructure improvements, undertaken as a national strategy to improve rail infrastructure for freight traffic will over time, address constraints on the network, serving to improve capacity further.

10. What level of certainty is there that there will be sufficient capacity and is that sufficient to demonstrate that the proposed facility will be deliverable during the Plan period?

There is evidence of strong interest from rail freight operators, the Steer Study has demonstrated available capacity on the rail network²⁰ and there is strong market demand from the logistics sector. The Council takes the view there is a high level of certainty an SRFI will be delivered and that there is capacity for it.

11. Are there any barriers to Sites 7EA and 8EA coming forward as anticipated?

There are no barriers to these sites coming forward as anticipated, subject to the approval of the PLR by the Secretary of State.

¹⁷ Paragraph 6.4

¹⁸ 4 trains per day is a criterion for a rail freight NSIP set by Section 26 Planning Act 2008. The issue with east coast ports concerns congestion around Manchester because of passenger traffic and the limitations of a Victorian railway infrastructure on trans-Pennine routes. The problems are not specific to the Parkside location.

¹⁹ Steer Report, Page 5

²⁰ Key Findings of the Steer Report (EMP012)

Issue 2: Newton-le-Willows/ Earlestown (7HA, 2HS, 4HS, 5HS)

12. Do the Green Belt assessments support the allocation of Site 7HA and the safeguarding of Sites 2HS, 4HS and 5HS and demonstrate exceptional circumstances for the removal of the land from the Green Belt?

Site 7HA forms part of parcel GBP_042 in the GBR. The Stage 1B Green Belt assessment found this site to score “low” in terms of the significance of its contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt. This was influenced by the site’s high level of enclosure it has, brownfield nature and lack of a sense of openness or countryside character. The Stage 2B assessment of the site found it to have good development potential, giving it an overall score of 6 in the assessment.

The commentary in Table 5.2 in the GBR states that the parcel benefits from strong boundaries on all sides, is in a sustainable location, within convenient walking distance of services employment provision, and public transport facilities. Noise from the adjacent trainline was identified as a constraint, but this can be mitigated. An area of land within flood zone 3 on the southern boundary of the parcel was also identified, likely reducing the net developable area (NDA). However, the GBR concludes that the site has many positive attributes to justify its allocation in the Plan, and associated removal from the Green Belt.

Site 2HS forms part of sub-parcel GBP_053C in the GBR. The Stage 1B Green Belt assessment found this parcel to score “medium” in terms of the significance of its contribution to the Green Belt purposes. It was found to have very little built development and plays a moderate role in checking unrestricted sprawl and preventing settlements merging. The Stage 2B assessment found it to have good development potential, and it was given an overall score of 5 in the assessment.

The site commentary in Table 5.2 notes that a larger part of this sub-parcel was allocated for development at the Local Plan Preferred Options stage. However, the proposal would have extended beyond the northern edge of the built up area and consequently narrowed the strategic Green Belt gap between Earlestown / Newton-le-Willows and Haydock. There is also no strong, permanent boundary features along the northern edge. As there has been reduction in the housing requirement since this time, these issues mean that the site as a whole would not be acceptable as an allocation. However, the GBR considered that reducing the site area by limiting development to the southern part of the parcel would address these issues. The northern boundary of the land now proposed to be safeguarded sits within a notable indentation in the existing urban edge, and benefits from clearly defined boundaries. The development of this parcel would still need to address the identified constraints, such as the potential impact on M6 J23. It is therefore appropriate and justified to safeguard this site for longer term needs.

Site 4HS forms part of parcel GBP_044 in the GBR. The Stage 1B assessment found this parcel to score “low” in terms of the significance of its contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt. This was influenced by the parcel not falling within a strategic gap between two towns and the presence of some strong permanent boundaries to the west and east and limited openness to the north and south. The Stage 2B assessment found it to have medium development potential, and the parcel was given an overall score of 5.

The site commentary in Table 5.2 found the parcel benefits from strong boundaries on all sides and is in a sustainable location, within walking distance of retail facilities and public transport links. The NDA of the parcel has been reduced to address concerns about the impact of development on the Vulcan Village Conservation Area. The GBR sets out that highways constraints affect the parcel, with further work required before the extent of the development potential can be confirmed. The SA found that development of the parcel would have a mixed impact on the achievement of SA objectives, including many positive effects. Therefore, it is considered that the part of the parcel proposed for safeguarding is justified and allows for the further investigation and resolution of highway constraints prior to the potential allocation of this site in a future Local Plan.

Site 5HS forms part of sub-parcel GBP_045A in the GBR. The Stage 1B assessment found this parcel to score “low” in terms of the significance of its contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt. This is influenced by some strong permanent boundaries to the north and east, causing a high degree of enclosure. The strategic gap between Winwick and Newton-le-Willows would be maintained if the sub-parcel was developed.

The commentary in Table 5.2 found the sub-parcel benefits from strong boundaries and a sustainable location, close to a railway station. Constraints relating to the parcel including the potential need for a second site access and a historic landfill in the southern part of the sub-parcel has caused the recommended NDA of the site to be reduced from the full extent of the sub-parcel. Noise from the railway line to the east would also need to be mitigated. For these reasons, the site is suitable for removal from the Green Belt, but to be safeguarded, in order to allow for further investigations in order to achieve a development that will make efficient use of the land to meet longer term needs.

The proposed allocation of site 7HA and safeguarded status of sites 2HS, 4HS and 5HS is supported by the GBR, with the detailed site specific exceptional circumstances demonstrated, and set within the context that land will need to be released from the Green Belt to meet identified needs both within the Plan period and beyond, as set out in LPA02, paragraph 4 (as explained in paragraph 4.6.9 in the reasoned justification of that policy).

13. If exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated have these been clearly articulated in the Plan?

The exceptional circumstances to justify the release of these sites from the Green Belt is set out at a strategic level in the Plan and the supporting evidence base (including paragraph 1.18 of the GBR, SD020). Essentially, there is not enough non-Green Belt land within the Borough to meet identified development needs, and no neighbouring Council areas are in a position to meet any of St Helens’ need. Therefore, land has to be released from the St Helens Green Belt to ensure identified needs can be met in full over the Plan period, and beyond. This is reflected in Policy LPA02, paragraph 4 and the associated reasoned justification text (particularly paragraphs 4.6.7, and 4.6.8-4.6.10).

Whilst this provides the basis for the exceptional circumstances to release these specific sites, there is potentially scope to provide more detailed justification on an individual site

basis using the reasoning set out in response to question 12. This could be added to the reasoned justification to Policy LPA05, as a main modification.

14. Should Sites 2HS, 4HS and 5HS be allocated rather than safeguarded so that they can contribute to meeting needs in the Plan period?

No, it is not necessary for these sites be allocated to meet needs within the Plan period. SHBC007, Appendix 3 provides an updated and simplified version of Table 4.6 in the LPSD. It provides the latest position in terms of the residual housing need in the Borough as at 31 March 2021, and how this relates to the planned housing supply over the Plan period (including the proposed site allocations).

In summary, Table 5.2 in Appendix 3 of SHBC007 shows that, subject to a plan period that extends up to 2037, there is a residual need for 7,132 dwellings to be provided in the Borough between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2037. Taking account of the SHLAA and proposed Green Belt land supply (Tables 5.3 and 5.4 respectively), Table 5.5 shows that there is an anticipated supply of 7,831 dwellings over this period.

There is sufficient supply as per the allocated sites identified for the Plan period (even taking account of a potentially extended period up to 2037) to meet needs (and with a degree of flexibility) without having to allocate further land. There is no justification to change the proposed status of these sites in the Plan.

15. Is the configuration and scale of allocation 7HA and safeguarded site 4HS justified taking into account development needs, the Green Belt assessments and, in the case of 4HS, the effects on the setting of the Vulcan Village Conservation Area and recreational facilities?

Yes, the proposed scale and configuration of site allocation 7HA and safeguarded site 4HS is justified because they are based on evidence and take account of the known site constraints.

With respect to site 7HA, the configuration and scale of this site has been informed by the evidence, and specifically the presence of flood zone towards the southern boundary of the Green Belt parcel (GBP_042) associated with Newton Brook. On this basis, the southern boundary of the proposed site allocation has been moved a little to the north compared to the parcel boundary in the Green Belt Review, and follows an alternative, justified boundary. This is justified to ensure the site does not include areas of flood zones 2 and 3.

Regarding site 4HS, throughout the plan-making process, continuous liaison between the Council and Historic England has seen the site area revised. Following the Local Plan Preferred Options consultation in 2016, the site area has been reduced to address concerns raised regarding the site's impact on the Vulcan Village Conservation Area and the recreation facilities. The proposed scale and configuration of the site in the Plan and has been informed following the outcomes of a HIA (SD023, Appendix 3, site 12) which

concluded that limiting the extent of development, providing a robust landscaping buffer and applying provisions outlined in policy LPC11 would mitigate impacts on the Conservation area. As a result, the site's configuration and scale address the above concerns, and are considered justified.

16. Would the adverse impacts of developing Site 7HA (Green Belt impacts, highway safety, loss of playing field) outweigh the benefits?

The allocation of site 7HA has a number of benefits, as set out in Table 5.2 of the GBR (for parcel GBP_042), including:

- The re-use of Previously Developed Land, which is included within the site boundary. This reflects the spatial strategy of the Plan, as set out in Policy LPA02 through delivering sustainable regeneration (paragraph 1) and reflecting a key priority of the Plan to re-use Previously Developed Land in Key Settlements (which includes Earlestown and Newton-le-Willows) (paragraph 3)
- The parcel is well contained and makes only a low contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt, so its release would not have a significant impact on the overall function of the Green Belt
- It is within a sustainable location, within walking distance of a local centre, employment opportunities (including the proposed employment sites 7EA and 8EA at Parkside), a railway station and other public transport facilities, as well as having good highway connections.

Whilst the GBR acknowledges the site has some constraints, these can be mitigated through design and layout. These include noise from the railway line to the west, the need to improve access, landscape sensitivity, proximity to a Local Wildlife Site and protected trees. An area of flooding to the south does not fall within the proposed allocation.

The potential adverse impacts of developing this site can be mitigated for and are not considered to outweigh the benefits as set out.

17. Are the requirements for Sites 7HA and 2HS, 4HS and 5HS within Appendices 5 and 7 (Site Profiles) positively prepared and effective?

Yes, the requirements in all of these site profiles are reflective of the evidence base, particularly the outcomes in the Green Belt Review, and are therefore necessary to ensure the effective delivery of sites both within and beyond the Plan period.

The requirements in the site profile for site 7HA (and as proposed to be amended in SHBC010, Annex 1) are considered effective as they relate specifically to the site and are required to ensure a high quality development can be delivered on the site. In this respect they are positively prepared.

The requirements set out in Appendix 7 (and as proposed to be amended in SHBC010, Annex 2) are likewise effective as they also relate specifically to the sites and provide a guide to prospective future site developers on what will be required should they be allocated

in a future Local Plan, thereby ensuring that these sites can be successfully delivered beyond the Plan period, to meet identified needs in a future Local Plan, as required. They assist in ensuring high quality development would be delivered on these sites at an appropriate point in the future, and are therefore considered positively prepared.

18. In particular in relation to Site 7HA, will the Plan ensure that any playing fields lost will be replaced by the equivalent or better provision?

Within the proposed SHBLP, there are policy requirements included within policy LPC05: Open Space that ensures the provision of playing pitches. Indeed, policy LPC05 criterion 2b stipulates that were the loss of playing pitches would occur replacement playing pitches of equivalent or better provision is required.

In addition, within Appendix 5, the site profile for 7HA states that, “Appropriate provision of open space must be included in accordance with Policy LPC05 and LPD03.”

To provide consistency (in accordance with the approach taken in the site profile for 10HA in similar circumstances) and assurance that the Plan can secure replacement equivalent or better provision, if required, the Council consider that a main modification could be proposed along the lines of:

- “Appropriate provision of open space must be included in accordance with Policy LPC05 and LPD03. **Any loss of existing playing fields must include replacement provision of an equal (or improved) quantity and quality**”.

This will ensure the Plan is effective in being able to secure the replacement of equivalent or better provision should the play fields on site be lost, in accordance with the policies in the Plan.

19. Are the indicative site areas, net developable areas, minimum densities and indicative site capacities within Tables 4.5 and 4.8 justified and effective?

The Council has applied a net developable area of 75% to all of these sites, as a standard approach applied across the board to all proposed site allocations and safeguarded sites, unless there is evidence to justify deviating from this. There has been no evidence to justify such a deviation for these sites. This is consistent with the approach to NDA used in the evidence base, notably the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) (HOU002) and the Economic Viability Assessment (VIA001), and is therefore justified and effective.

Similarly, the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) 2017 (HOU002) has informed the minimum densities included within Tables 4.5 and 4.8. The rationale for the densities in the SHLAA is explained in paragraph 3.47 within it (HOU002). This has also been applied consistently to the proposed allocations and safeguarded land sites.

Whilst it is acknowledged that densities may vary, they are not expected to fall below those set out in Tables 4.5 and 4.8 (ie. a minimum of 30dph in relation to sites 7HA and 2HS and 35dph for sites 4HS and 5HS. These densities have been applied due to the locational properties of each site, and the access to amenities such a public transport and services. It should also be noted that (as set out in LPSD, paragraph 4.18.14), the capacities are indicative and the actual final capacities will be determined having regard to the acceptability of specific proposals in relation to relevant policies, and taking account of the need to respect local character. This will be done on a case by case basis.

With particular regard to the safeguarded sites, it should be noted that footnote 37 to Table 4.8 clarifies that the stated capacities will be assessed further prior to any decision to allocate them in a future Local Plan.

It should be noted with regard to site 7HA a planning application is currently under consideration on the site for the proposed redevelopment of the unit to facilitate the relocation of Penkford Special School, including extensions to the existing building, new playing fields, new car park and other associated facilities. A decision on the application is expected to be made at the Planning Committee meeting to be held on the 25th May 2021. Whilst this does not impact on the deliverability of the site overall, it could have an impact on the final capacity of the proposed site allocation. However, this would not result in a need to find alternative provision. As illustrated in SHBC007, Appendix 3 (based on a plan period that extends to 2037), there is a residual housing requirement of 7,132 dwellings (2021-2037), and an identified supply over the same period of 7,831. There is therefore sufficient flexibility in the planned supply to accommodate a slight reduction in capacity from this proposed allocation.

20. Will infrastructure to support the allocation be delivered at the right time and in the right place?

Yes, the Council is confident that infrastructure can be provided to support the delivery of site 7HA within the Plan period, and the potential delivery of the proposed safeguarded sites at an appropriate time beyond the end of the current Plan period. There is no evidence that there are any significant infrastructure requirements to support these sites that cannot be delivered in the necessary timescales.

With respect to 2HS in particular, its safeguarded status will allow time for improvements to J23 to be determined and delivered, which is anticipated within the Plan period to support other proposed site allocations in the Plan.

21. Are there any barriers to Site 7HA coming forward as anticipated by the housing trajectory?

Please note the response to question 19 above, and a planning application is currently under consideration. There will be an impact on site capacity compared to that set out in Table 4.5 and used in the trajectory. There are no known barriers to the site coming forward

as anticipated in the trajectory in respect of timing. It remains reasonable to assume that initial completions will come through on site in 2025/2026

Issue 3: Other Green Belt Boundaries

22. Are the Green Belt boundaries elsewhere in Parkside and Newton-le-Willows/Earlestown justified?

Yes, the Green Belt boundaries elsewhere in this area of the Borough reflect the evidence gathered through the Green Belt Review, and are therefore justified.