

Golborne and Lowton West Neighbourhood Development Plan 2023-2035

**A report to Wigan Council on the Golborne and
Lowton West Neighbourhood Development Plan**

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Executive Summary

- 1 I was appointed by Wigan Council in November 2022 to carry out the independent examination of the Golborne and Lowton West Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2 The examination was undertaken by way of written representations. I visited the neighbourhood area on 13 February 2023.
- 3 The Plan includes a variety of policies and seeks to bring forward positive and sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. It has a focus on economic growth and regeneration.
- 4 The Plan has been underpinned by community support and engagement. All sections of the community have been engaged in its preparation.
- 5 Subject to a series of recommended modifications set out in this report, I have concluded that the Plan meets all the necessary legal requirements and should proceed to referendum.
- 6 I recommend that the referendum should be held within the neighbourhood area.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
26 April 2023

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the independent examination of the Golborne and Lowton West Neighbourhood Development Plan 2023-2035 ('the Plan').
- 1.2 The Plan was submitted to Wigan Council (WC) by the Golborne and Lowton West Neighbourhood Forum (GLWNF) in its capacity as the qualifying body responsible for preparing the neighbourhood plan.
- 1.3 Neighbourhood plans were introduced into the planning process by the Localism Act 2011. They aim to allow local communities to take responsibility for guiding development in their area. This approach was subsequently embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2012, 2018, 2019 and 2021. The NPPF continues to be the principal element of national planning policy.
- 1.4 The role of an independent examiner is clearly defined in the legislation. I have been appointed to examine whether the submitted Plan meets the basic conditions and Convention Rights and other statutory requirements. It is not within my remit to examine or to propose an alternative plan, or a potentially more sustainable plan except where this arises as a result of my recommended modifications to ensure that the plan meets the basic conditions and the other relevant requirements.
- 1.5 A neighbourhood plan can be narrow or broad in scope and can include whatever range of policies it sees as appropriate to its designated neighbourhood area. The submitted Plan has been designed to be distinctive in general terms, and to be complementary to the existing development plan. It has a focus on promoting economic growth whilst sustaining the built and natural environment of the neighbourhood area.
- 1.6 Within the context set out above, this report assesses whether the Plan is legally compliant and meets the basic conditions that apply to neighbourhood plans. It also considers the content of the Plan and, where necessary, recommends changes to its policies and supporting text.
- 1.7 This report also provides a recommendation as to whether the Plan should proceed to referendum. If this is the case and that referendum results in a positive outcome the Plan would then be used to determine planning applications within the neighbourhood area and will sit as part of the wider development plan.

2 The Role of the Independent Examiner

- 2.1 The examiner's role is to ensure that any submitted neighbourhood plan meets the relevant legislative and procedural requirements.
- 2.2 I was appointed by WC, with the consent of GLWNF, to conduct the examination of the Plan and to prepare this report. I am independent of both WC and GLWNF. I do not have any interest in any land that may be affected by the Plan.
- 2.3 I possess the appropriate qualifications and experience to undertake this role. I am a Director of Andrew Ashcroft Planning Limited. In previous roles, I have over 35 years' experience in various local authorities at either Head of Planning or Service Director level. I am a chartered town planner and have significant experience of undertaking other neighbourhood plan examinations and health checks. I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral System.

Examination Outcomes

- 2.4 In my role as the independent examiner of the Plan I am required to recommend one of the following outcomes of the examination:
- (a) that the Plan as submitted should proceed to a referendum; or
 - (b) that the Plan should proceed to referendum as modified (based on my recommendations); or
 - (c) that the Plan does not proceed to referendum on the basis that it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.
- 2.5 The outcome of the examination is set out in Section 8 of this report.

Other examination matters

- 2.6 In examining the Plan, I am required to check whether:
- the policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood plan area; and
 - the Plan meets the requirements of Section 38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the Plan must specify the period to which it has effect, must not include provision about development that is excluded development, and must not relate to more than one neighbourhood area); and
 - the Plan has been prepared for an area that has been designated under Section 61G of the Localism Act and has been developed and submitted for examination by a qualifying body.
- 2.7 I have addressed the matters identified in paragraph 2.6 of this report and am satisfied that they have been met.

3 Procedural Matters

3.1 In undertaking this examination I have considered the following documents:

- the submitted Plan.
- the Basic Conditions Statement.
- the Consultation Statement.
- the SEA/HRA Screening report (November 2021).
- the Local Green Space study.
- the representations made to the Plan.
- GLWNF's responses to the clarification note.
- WC's response to the clarification note.
- the adopted Wigan Core Strategy Development Plan Document 2013.
- the National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021).
- Planning Practice Guidance.
- relevant Ministerial Statements.

3.2 I visited the neighbourhood area on 13 February 2023. I looked at its overall character and appearance and at those areas affected by policies in the Plan in particular.

3.3 It is a general rule that neighbourhood plan examinations should be held by written representations only. Having considered all the information before me, including the representations, I concluded that the Plan could be examined by way of written representations and that a hearing was not required.

4 Consultation

Consultation Process

- 4.1 Policies in made neighbourhood plans become the basis for local planning and development control decisions. As such, the regulations require neighbourhood plans to be supported and underpinned by public consultation.
- 4.2 In accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) GLWNF has prepared a Consultation Statement. It is proportionate to the neighbourhood area and its policies.
- 4.3 The Statement records the various activities that were held to engage the local community and the feedback from each event. It also provides specific details on the consultation processes that took place on the pre-submission version of the Plan (January to March 2022). The Statement helpfully highlights the following key elements of engagement as follows:
- the community Survey undertaken in July 2019, based on nine specific questions;
 - the Christmas Market 2019 used for informal meet and greet, aimed at explaining to people the purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan;
 - a more in-depth survey undertaken in 2020 and which produced 284 responses;
 - the use of Facebook to explain the neighbourhood plan through comic strips and this provided regular feedback; and
 - the production of a printed monthly Newsletter until March 2021 which was distributed to 10,500 homes.
- 4.4 The Statement sets out details of the engagement with specific organisations. The range of organisations involved was both comprehensive and diverse.
- 4.5 Section 4 of the Statement sets out the comments on the pre-submission Plan and how the Forum responded to those comments. This helps to describe the evolution of the Plan.
- 4.6 Consultation has been an important element of the Plan's production. Advice on the neighbourhood planning process has been made available to the community in a positive and direct way by those responsible for the Plan's preparation. From all the evidence provided to me as part of the examination, I can see that the Plan has promoted an inclusive approach to seeking the opinions of all concerned throughout the process. WC has carried out its own assessment that the consultation process has complied with the requirements of the Regulations.

Consultation Responses

4.7 Consultation on the submitted Plan was undertaken by WC. This exercise generated representations from the following organisations:

- Canal and River Trust
- Sport England
- Historic England
- Natural England
- The Coal Authority
- National Grid
- Environment Agency
- Wigan Council
- The Murphy Group

4.8 I have taken account of all the representations in preparing this report. Where it is appropriate to do so, I refer to specific representations on a policy-by-policy basis.

5 The Neighbourhood Area and the Development Plan Context

The Neighbourhood Area

- 5.1 The neighbourhood area is located to the immediate north of the A580. The A573 and the B5207 run through the area. It was designated as a neighbourhood area on 4 October 2019.
- 5.2 The neighbourhood area includes a complex mixture of urban and rural elements. The land uses in the area include Golborne Town Centre, Slag Lane local centre, commercial and industrial areas, housing estates, retail sites, and green and wooded areas.
- 5.3 Parts of the neighbourhood area are within the North West Green Belt.

Development Plan Context

- 5.4 The development plan for the area is the Wigan Core Strategy Development Plan Document 2013. Policy SP1 sets the scene in commenting that development will be directed primarily towards the east-west core of the borough, notably the towns of Wigan, Ince, Hindley, Platt Bridge, Leigh, Atherton, Tyldesley, Astley and Ashton-in-Makerfield, in order to achieve transformational regeneration and create attractive places for people to live and businesses to locate and thrive. Beyond the east-west core, development will be focused on Golborne and Lowton and Standish. Policy CP2 consolidates this approach in identifying Atherton, Golborne, Hindley, Pemberton, Standish and Tyldesley as smaller town centres which will be maintained and enhanced as the focus for a range of uses serving their respective communities
- 5.5 The submitted Plan has sought to provide local value to several of the strategic policies in the Core Strategy. In addition to the two policies highlighted in paragraph 5.4 above, the following policies have influenced the preparation of the submitted Plan:
- CP6 Housing;
 - CP8 Green Belt and safeguarded land;
 - CP10 Design;
 - CP11 Historic Environment; and
 - CP12 Wildlife Habitats and species.
- 5.6 WC consulted on an initial draft of an Allocations Plan which would have supplemented the Core Strategy. However, it decided not to progress that Plan to allow work to proceed on the Places for Everyone Plan.
- 5.7 WC is currently working with surrounding councils in Greater Manchester to prepare the Places for Everyone Plan. It has been designed to meet the needs of the city-region up to 2037. Once adopted it will replace the existing development plan. It was submitted for examination in February 2022. The hearing sessions for that Plan ended in March 2023.

- 5.8 The submitted Plan has been prepared within this development plan context. In doing so, it has relied on up-to-date information and research that has underpinned existing planning policy documents. This is good practice and reflects key elements in Planning Practice Guidance on this matter. The submitted Plan seeks to add value to the different components of the development plan and to give a local dimension to the delivery of its policies. This is captured in the Basic Conditions Statement

Visit to the neighbourhood area

- 5.9 I visited the neighbourhood area on 13 February 2023. I approached from the East Lancashire Road (A580) to the south. This helped me to understand the position of the neighbourhood area in the wider landscape and its accessibility to the strategic road network.
- 5.10 I took the opportunity to look at the southern part of Golborne. I saw the concentrated nature of the Park Road Conservation Area and The Great War Monument at the junction of Barn Lane and Legh Street.
- 5.11 I then looked at the town centre. I saw the range of independent shops and the significance of Peter Kane Square. I walked to the south up to the Lidl store.
- 5.12 I then looked at the area off Railway Road so that I could understand Policy GLW R6 which seeks to safeguard land for the potential reopening of a railway station. I saw the remaining railway-related building and the extensive car park for the town centre.
- 5.13 I then drove along the Wigan Road (A573) to Abram. This highlighted the significance of the Green Belt in this part of the neighbourhood area.
- 5.14 I then drove along Slag Lane to Pennington.
- 5.15 I then looked at the shops at the junction of Slag Lane and Church Lane. Their significance to the local community was self-evident.
- 5.16 I then looked at industrial estates to the south of Golborne Town Centre (and to the east of the A573).

6 The Neighbourhood Plan and the Basic Conditions

- 6.1 This section of the report deals with the submitted neighbourhood plan as a whole and the extent to which it meets the basic conditions. The submitted Basic Conditions Statement has helped in the preparation of this section of the report. It is an informative and well-presented document.
- 6.2 As part of this process, I must consider whether the submitted Plan meets the basic conditions as set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. To comply with the basic conditions, the Plan must:
- have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
 - contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
 - be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan in the area;
 - be compatible with European Union (EU) obligations and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR); and
 - not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

I assess the Plan against the basic conditions under the following headings:

National Planning Policies and Guidance

- 6.3 For the purposes of this examination the key elements of national policy relating to planning matters are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF).
- 6.4 The NPPF sets out a range of land-use planning principles to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. The following are of specific relevance to the Golborne and Lowton West Neighbourhood Development Plan:
- a plan-led system - in this case the relationship between the neighbourhood plan and the adopted Wigan Core Strategy Development Plan Document 2013;
 - building a strong, competitive economy;
 - recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving local communities;
 - taking account of the different roles and characters of different areas;
 - highlighting the importance of high-quality design and good standards of amenity for all future occupants of land and buildings; and
 - conserving heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.
- 6.5 Neighbourhood plans sit within this wider context both generally, and within the more specific presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 13 of the NPPF indicates that neighbourhoods should both develop plans that support the strategic needs set out in local plans and plan positively to support local development that is outside the strategic elements of the development plan.

- 6.6 In addition to the NPPF, I have also taken account of other elements of national planning policy including Planning Practice Guidance and the recent ministerial statements.
- 6.7 Having considered all the evidence and representations available as part of the examination, I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to national planning policies and guidance subject to the recommended modifications in this report. It sets out a positive vision for the future of the neighbourhood area. It includes a series of policies that address a range of development and environmental matters. It has a focus on promoting economic development and regeneration whilst safeguarding its natural and historical features.
- 6.8 At a more practical level, the NPPF indicates that plans should provide a clear framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made and that they should give a clear indication of how a decision-maker should react to a development proposal (paragraph 16d). This was reinforced with the publication of Planning Practice Guidance. Paragraph ID:41-041-20140306 indicates that policies in neighbourhood plans should be drafted with sufficient clarity so that a decision-maker can apply them consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. Policies should also be concise, precise, and supported by appropriate evidence.
- 6.9 As submitted the Plan does not fully accord with this range of practical issues. Most of my recommended modifications in Section 7 relate to matters of clarity and precision. They are designed to ensure that the Plan fully accords with national policy.

Contributing to sustainable development

- 6.10 There are clear overlaps between national policy and the contribution that the submitted Plan makes to achieving sustainable development. Sustainable development has three principal dimensions – economic, social, and environmental. I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has set out to achieve sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. In the economic dimension, the Plan includes a series of policies for urban regeneration and growth (Policies R1-7). In the social role, it includes policies on community facilities (Policy C2), on sustainable travel (Policy I1), and on broadband (Policy I2). In the environmental dimension, the Plan positively seeks to protect its natural, built, and historic environment. It includes policies on local green spaces (Policy D6), parks (Policy D5) and conservation areas (Policy D3).

General conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan

- 6.11 I have already commented in detail on the local development plan context in paragraphs 5.4 to 5.8 of this report.
- 6.12 I consider that the submitted Plan delivers a local dimension to this strategic context and supplements the detail already included in the adopted development plan in Wigan. Subject to the recommended modifications in this report, I am satisfied that the submitted Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 6.13 The Neighbourhood Plan (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 require a qualifying body either to submit an environmental report prepared in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 or a statement of reasons why an environmental report is not required.
- 6.14 In order to comply with this requirement, GLWNF commissioned a screening exercise in September 2021 on the need or otherwise for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to be prepared for the Plan. The report is thorough and well-constructed. It concludes that it is unlikely that the Plan will have any significant effects on the environment and that a full SEA is not required.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

- 6.15 The screening exercise also included a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Plan. It identifies that no protected sites are located within the neighbourhood area.
- 6.16 The HRA concludes that the Plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects on protected sites. This includes consideration of any in-combination effects. As such an Appropriate Assessment for the Plan is not required.
- 6.17 Having reviewed the information provided to me as part of the examination, I am satisfied that a proportionate process has been undertaken in accordance with the various regulations. None of the statutory consultees have raised any concerns about either neighbourhood plan or nature conservation regulations. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I am entirely satisfied that the submitted Plan is compatible with this aspect of the basic conditions.

Human Rights

- 6.18 In a similar fashion I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and that it complies with the Human Rights Act. There is no evidence that has been submitted to me to suggest otherwise. There has been full and adequate opportunity for all interested parties to take part in the preparation of the Plan and to make their comments known. On this basis, I conclude that the submitted Plan does not breach, nor is in any way incompatible with the ECHR.

Summary

- 6.19 On the basis of my assessment of the Plan in this section of my report, I am satisfied that it meets the basic conditions subject to the incorporation of the recommended modifications contained in this report.

7 The Neighbourhood Plan policies

- 7.1 This section of the report comments on the policies in the Plan. It makes a series of recommended modifications to ensure that the various policies have the necessary precision to meet the basic conditions.
- 7.2 The recommendations focus on the policies in the Plan given that the basic conditions relate primarily to this aspect of neighbourhood plans. In some cases, I have also recommended changes to the associated supporting text.
- 7.3 I am satisfied that the content and the form of the Plan is fit for purpose. It is distinctive and proportionate to the Plan area. The wider community and GLWNF have spent time and energy in identifying the issues and objectives that they wish to be included in their Plan. This sits at the heart of the localism agenda.
- 7.4 The Plan has been designed to reflect Planning Practice Guidance (Section 41-004-20190509) which indicates that neighbourhood plans must address the development and use of land.
- 7.5 I have addressed the policies in the order that they appear in the submitted Plan.
- 7.6 For clarity, this section of the report comments on all policies
- 7.7 Where modifications are recommended to policies they are highlighted in bold print. Any associated or free-standing changes to the text of the Plan are set out in italic print.

The initial parts of the Plan (Sections 1 to 5)

- 7.8 The Plan is well-organised and presented. It makes an appropriate distinction between the policies and their supporting text.
- 7.9 The initial elements of the Plan set the scene for the policies. They are proportionate to the neighbourhood area and the subsequent policies. The Introduction comments about the way in which the Plan was prepared and when the neighbourhood area was designated. It properly identifies the neighbourhood area (Plan 1). The Plan period is defined in 1.2. Section 1 also includes helpful background on the neighbourhood area and how its history influences the current situation. For clarity I recommend that the Plan period is included on the front cover of the Plan.

Include details of the Plan period on the front cover of the Plan.

- 7.10 Section 2 sets out the vision for the Plan and how it will be achieved. It makes a strong functional relationship between the various issues. The Vision neatly summarises the approach taken as follows:

‘To create a range of local economic opportunities, housing, and community facilities, to meet the diverse local needs of the communities of Golborne and Lowton West, and a high quality and sustainable local environment, restoring local pride and dignity.’

- 7.11 Section 3 comments about the local context and the issues which have underpinned the production of the Plan.
- 7.12 Section 4 sets out how the community was engaged in the preparation of the Plan. It overlaps with the Consultation Statement.
- 7.13 Section 5 introduces the concept of sustainable development and identifies how the Plan is structured.
- 7.14 The remainder of this section of the report addresses each policy in turn in the context set out in paragraphs 7.5 to 7.7 of this report.

GLW-R1: Employment and Enterprise

- 7.15 The policy sets out sustainable locations for employment and enterprise development. The policy seeks to enable business and light industrial uses on brownfield sites, but recognising that it would be harmful to allow other Use Class E activities outside of the existing centres.
- 7.16 In general terms the policy takes an appropriate approach to this matter. I recommend that the second part of the policy is modified so that its role and purpose have the clarity required by the NPPF. I recommend that the third part of the policy is deleted and repositioned into the supporting text. It helps to explain the broader application of development plan policies rather than operating as a policy in its own right. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the economic dimension of sustainable development.

Replace part 2 of the policy with:

‘The use of brown field sites outside of the existing centres for business and light industry uses will be supported where the scope for change of use to other Use Class E activities is controlled by condition or by other mechanisms where such uses would have the ability to harm the Town Centre and the Slag Lane Local Centre.’

Delete the third part of the policy.

At the end of the Interpretation add: ‘This policy should be considered in the round and in relation to other development plan policies. Whilst regeneration is an important matter, proposals should be compatible with other uses in their immediate locality and not have an unacceptable impact on the amenities of any nearby residential properties.’

GLW-R2: Industry, Storage and Distribution

- 7.17 The policy comments about industrial development. It seeks to respond to harm caused to the town centre in the past by industrial, storage and distribution and so seeks to ensure that impacts are given full consideration in future proposals. Stone Cross Park is identified as the preferred location for such development given its good access to the A580.

- 7.18 The criteria in the policy are both appropriate and distinctive to the neighbourhood area. The policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the economic dimension of sustainable development.

GLW-R3: Town Centre

- 7.19 The policy focuses on Golborne Town Centre. It supports diversification within the town centre, but seeks to ensure that complementary uses with active frontages are maintained for ground floor High Street frontages given its importance in maintaining economic vitality and character. It also supports non-retail uses on the upper floors of properties.
- 7.20 I looked carefully at the town centre during the visit. I saw that it had a range of uses and was well-used.
- 7.21 In general terms the policy takes a positive approach to this important matter. I recommend that the Interpretation clarifies the use of 'active frontages' in the policy. Otherwise, it meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

At the end of the Interpretation add: 'The policy comments about the need for active frontages in the town centre. This would include the provision of prominent and attractive shopfronts, and window displays which demonstrate the uses contained in the premises and present a welcoming and safe environment'

GLW-R4: Local Retail centre

- 7.22 The policy focuses on the Slag Lane local shopping centre. It is based on a similar approach to Policy GLW-R3 and recognises the importance of this local centre.
- 7.23 I looked carefully at the Slag Lane retail centre during the visit. I saw that it had a range of uses and was well-used.
- 7.24 In general terms the policy takes a positive approach to this important matter. I recommend that the Interpretation clarifies the use of 'active frontages' in the policy. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

At the end of the Interpretation add: 'The policy comments about the need for active frontages in the Local Centre. This would include the provision of prominent and attractive shopfronts, and window displays which demonstrate the uses contained in the premises and present a welcoming and safe environment'

GLW-R5: Millingford Industrial Estate

- 7.25 The policy identifies a key site for regeneration based on mixed use development. It provides an opportunity to increase the residential population, in close proximity to Town Centre, but also supporting employment uses. The proposed uses identified in the policy include apartments or other residential development, residential schemes suitable for older people, employment uses (Use Class E), live/work units, and community facilities.

- 7.26 A planning application (A/22/93633/MAJOR) for the redevelopment of Millingford Industrial Estate was submitted in April 2022. It remains undetermined.
- 7.27 In the round the policy takes a positive approach to this important site. I recommend modifications to the third part of the policy so that it recognises that its ambitions may not always be practicable. Otherwise, it meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace part 3 of the policy with: ‘Wherever practicable development proposals should include active frontages (containing windows and doors), on or close to the site’s street frontage.’

GLW-R6: Railway Station Goods Yard

- 7.28 The policy protects an identified parcel of land to support the reopening of the railway station. However, it provides an opportunity in the short to medium term to complement the range of business and commercial uses in and around the Town Centre.
- 7.29 The reopening of the railway station is an interesting and ambitious proposal. In its response to the clarification note, GLWNF advised that at a recent meeting led by the Mayor of Greater Manchester, it was indicated that the reopening would go ahead and funding is in place.
- 7.30 I recommend a detailed modification to the wording of the second part of the policy to bring the clarity and precision required by the NPPF. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

In part 2 of the policy replace ‘significant adverse’ with ‘unacceptable’

GLW-R7: Heritage-led Regeneration

- 7.31 The policy sets out an approach for heritage-led regeneration. It applies to both designated and non-designated heritage assets. It supports contemporary design interventions. It is recognised that more traditional approaches will also be used, especially for more minor alterations.
- 7.32 The policy takes a positive approach to this matter which has regard to Section 16 of the NPPF.
- 7.33 I recommend a modification to the wording of the second part of the policy so that it has the clarity and precision required by the NPPF. I also recommend that the matter is addressed in the Interpretation. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

Replace the first sentence of part 2 of the policy with:

‘Where appropriate, a flexible approach will be taken to parking and other requirements to ensure that proposals for the sensitive reuse of historic buildings is commercially-viable.’

At the end of the Interpretation add: 'Part 2 of the policy provides a degree of flexibility on car parking and other detailed matters where it would make development proposals commercially viable. Any such proposals should be accompanied by a proportionate analysis of the costs and viability of the proposed scheme to allow Wigan Council to make an informed and evidence-based determination of the planning application.'

GLW-D1: Sustainable Design

- 7.34 This is a wide-ranging policy on sustainable design. In the round it has been well-considered. It is a good local response to Section 12 of the NPPF.
- 7.35 I recommend a series of modifications to bring the clarity and precision required by the NPPF. I recommend that the second and third parts of the policy are recast. As submitted the second part of the policy is unclear about the way in which it would relate to the development management process and land within the control of an applicant. The recommended modification remedies this matter. As submitted the third part of the policy applies unreasonable expectations on the development of flat or apartments by requiring them to have access to public green spaces in close proximity. Plainly the location and accessibility of public green space is beyond an applicant's control. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

Replace the second part of the policy with: 'Wherever practicable development proposals should take opportunities to enhance the character or appearance of the site concerned and its relationship with the immediate locality.'

Replace the third part of the policy with: 'Development proposals for flats or apartments should provide a high standard of amenity, including access to private/shared amenity space and/or the inclusion of balconies with space for planting.'

In part 4 delete 'in principle'.

In part 5 of the policy replace 'must' with 'should'.

GLW-D2: Natural and Green Environment

- 7.36 This is a wide-ranging policy on the natural environment.
- 7.37 Its first part comments that development proposals should cause no overall harm and take opportunities to enhance the area's natural and green environments, including its ecology and wildlife habitats. The second part comments that negative impacts of development should be offset by incorporating features into the design to minimise carbon use and to support wildlife and ecology. The third part comments that development should help to achieve net gain in biodiversity. Other parts of the policy set out the Plan's approach to detailed development management issues.
- 7.38 In general terms the policy takes a positive approach to this matter which has regard to Section 15 of the NPPF. I recommend a series of detailed modifications to ensure that the policy has the clarity and precision required by the NPPF. I recommend that the first part of the policy is recast so that it requires development proposals to respond

positively to the natural environment and to take opportunities to enhance their character and integrity wherever practicable. I also recommend that the fifth and sixth parts of the policy are combined given that the latter clarifies the effect of the former. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

Replace the first part of the policy with:

‘Development proposals should respond positively to natural and green environments, including ecology and wildlife habitats within the sites concerned and take opportunities to enhance their character and integrity wherever practicable.’

In part 2 of the policy replace ‘Negative’ with ‘Any negative’.

In part 4 of the policy replace ‘adverse’ with ‘unacceptable’.

Combine parts 5 and 6 of the policy.

In part 9 of the policy replace ‘must’ with ‘should’.

GLW-D3: Conservation Areas

- 7.39 This policy sets out a very specific approach to the two conservation areas. I looked at them during the visit and saw their very distinctive and different characters.
- 7.40 The policy recognises that the areas are architecturally diverse, but also sets out their key characteristics.
- 7.41 I am satisfied that the policy has regard to national policy on this important matter. Moreover, the policy has been carefully prepared so that brings a clear and distinctive local dimension to preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the two conservation areas. It meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

GLW-D4: Coalescence

- 7.42 This policy comments that development proposals must maintain an open landscape gap and avoid creating coalescence between Golborne and Ashton and Hindley (Plan 10). The policy comments that the gap between Golborne and Ashton is within the Green Belt.
- 7.43 The relationship between the policy and the North West Green Belt has attracted objections from WC and the Murphy Group.
- 7.44 I have considered GLWNF’s response to the clarification note very carefully. However, paragraph 16f of the NPPF advises that states that plans should avoid unnecessary duplication of policies including those in the NPPF. In any event the Plan’s ambition to avoid creating coalescence between Golborne and Ashton and Hindley is already addressed by the key principles of Green Belt policy. In all the circumstances I recommend the deletion of the policy.

Delete the policy

GLW-D5: Parks

- 7.45 The policy seeks to protect key parks in the neighbourhood area as key green and recreational spaces. It allows small-scale operational development within Golborne Park, to support its recreational use. It also has a specific component on the Legh Street Park.
- 7.46 The policy properly recognises the role and importance of parks in the neighbourhood area.
- 7.47 I recommend a modification to the wording of the third part of the policy to bring the clarity and precision required by the NPPF. As submitted the policy simply refers to the retention of existing uses which is not development and cannot therefore be controlled by a planning policy.
- 7.48 I also recommend other modifications to the wording of other elements of the policy to bring the clarity and precision required by the NPPF. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

In part 1 of the policy replace ‘adverse’ with ‘unacceptable’

In part 2 of the policy replace ‘allowed’ with ‘supported’

Replace part 3 of the policy with: ‘Proposals for built development in Legh Street Park will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that the existing sports and recreational uses of the Park are no longer needed.’

In part 4 of the policy replace ‘must have no significant adverse impact’ with ‘should not have an unacceptable impact’

GLW-D6: Local Green Space

- 7.49 This policy proposes the designation of a local green space (LGS) at Copse Field (Lightshaw Meadows).
- 7.50 Information about the way in which the proposed designation of the site conforms to guidance in the NPPF is set out in a separate appendix. The error in the size of the proposed LGS was explained in GLWNF’s response to the clarification note. I am satisfied that it has had no material bearing on the assessment of the Field’s suitability for LGS designation. Its location in the neighbourhood area is clear and the clarification of its size provides assurance that it is local in character and not an extensive tract of land (paragraph 102 c) of the NPPF.
- 7.51 On the basis of all the information available to me, including my own observations, I am satisfied that the proposed LGS complies with the three tests in the NPPF. In addition, I am satisfied that its proposed designation would accord with the more general elements of paragraph 101 of the NPPF. Firstly, I am satisfied that its designation is consistent with the local planning of sustainable development. It does

not otherwise prevent sustainable development coming forward in the neighbourhood area and no such development has been promoted or suggested. Secondly, I am satisfied that the LGS is capable of enduring beyond the end of the Plan period. In addition, no evidence was brought forward during the examination that would suggest that the proposed local green space would not endure beyond the end of the Plan period.

- 7.52 The policy sets out how any planning applications will be determined within the proposed LGS. Whilst it generally follows the approach taken in paragraph 103 of the NPPF it addresses a series of amenity and community value matters. Whilst this is intended to be helpful, it may detract from the expected simplicity of the approach to LGSs as set out in the NPPF. As such, I recommend a modification so that the policy directly explains the policy implications of LGS designation and in doing so takes the matter-of-fact approach in the NPPF.
- 7.53 I also recommend that the supporting text is expanded so that it sets out the way in which development proposals affecting the LGS would be assessed on a case-by-case basis by WC. In this context it will be able to make an informed judgement on the extent to which the proposal concerned demonstrates the ‘very special circumstances’ required by the policy.
- 7.54 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will do much to contribute to the delivery of the environmental and the social dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the second part of the policy with: ‘Development proposals within the designated local green space will only be supported in very special circumstances’

At the end of the Interpretation add: ‘The policy follows the matter-of-fact approach in the NPPF. If development proposals come forward on the local green space within the Plan period, they can be assessed on a case-by-case basis by Wigan Council. In particular, it will be able to make an informed judgement on the extent to which the proposal concerned demonstrates the ‘very special circumstances’ required by the policy’

GLW-C1: Housing

- 7.55 This policy sets out a very comprehensive approach towards housing in the neighbourhood area.
- 7.56 It does not set out actual proportions or different numbers of bedrooms. Nevertheless, it does highlight the need to address the shortfall of smaller housing and need for more affordable housing to reduce the strain on the current market. A Green Development Guidance Note is included in the Plan and may be useful in achieving compliance with this policy, including Clause For houses, the requirement for secure covered storage for cycles would include a facility within the curtilage of every dwelling and could include space within garages. For apartments, a shared facility may be provided. First

Homes are encouraged as part of affordable housing provision. The policy ensures that proper facilities for bins and cycles are provided.

- 7.57 In general terms the policy takes a positive approach to the range of types of housing in the neighbourhood area. I recommend a series of modifications to ensure that the various policy elements can be applied on a proportionate basis and taking account of circumstances which may arise on a site-by-site basis. As submitted, some of the elements of the policy are rather matter-of-fact and prescriptive. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

In part 1 of the policy replace ‘must’ with ‘should’.

In part 3 of the policy delete ‘in principle’.

In part 4 of the policy replace the two uses of ‘must’ with ‘should’. At the end of the second sentence add ‘where practicable’.

In parts 5 and 6 of the policy replace ‘must’ with ‘should’.

At the end of part 5 of the policy add ‘where practicable’.

GLW-C2: Community Facilities

- 7.58 This is an enabling policy for the development of new community facilities. Although the policy does not set out sustainable or preferred locations, it advises that the Town Centre should be considered as being particularly accessible and suitable for community facilities.
- 7.59 The policy takes a positive approach towards community facilities. I saw the importance of the existing community facilities to the local community during the visit.
- 7.60 The second part of the policy offers particular support to the creation of a community hub in the town centre, to accommodate meeting space, function room, indoor recreation, fitness, performance and other cultural or community uses. In its response to the clarification note GLWNF indicated this this was a long-standing proposal/project.
- 7.61 I recommend a detailed modification to the wording of the first part of the policy to bring the clarity required by the NPPF. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social environmental dimension of sustainable development.

In part 1b of the policy replace ‘significant adverse’ with ‘unacceptable’.

GLW-I1: Sustainable Travel

- 7.62 This is another wide-ranging policy. In this case it addresses sustainable travel.
- 7.63 It comments that development that generates additional journeys should be supported by a balanced range of transport options, proportionate to the scale and nature of the scheme. It also comments that the layout of development must give priority to

pedestrians and cyclists, including convenient links to surrounding paths, roads, facilities, and public transport routes, whilst also meeting the requirements of Policy GLW-D1.

- 7.64 In general terms the policy sets out a positive approach to this matter which has regard to Section 9 of the NPPF. I recommend a detailed modification to the wording used in the second part of the policy. I also recommend that the fourth part of the policy applies on a proportionate basis. In this context, smaller-scale alterations to existing employment premises would be unlikely to justify the need for the provision of shower facilities for cyclists. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the economic dimensions of sustainable development.

In part 2 of the policy replace ‘must’ with ‘should’.

Replace part 4 of the policy with: ‘As appropriate to their scale, nature and location proposals for employment development should include shower facilities for use by cyclists.’

GLW-I2: Broadband

- 7.65 The policy comments that all new-build development should include high-speed-ready broadband connectivity, to be ready as services are upgraded. It acknowledges that there may be some sites where broadband infrastructure is unlikely to connect within the Plan period, and this would be a material consideration in the application of the policy.
- 7.66 The policy acknowledges the importance of broadband to modern social and business life. I am satisfied that it meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Other Matters - General

- 7.67 This report has recommended a series of modifications both to the policies and to the supporting text in the submitted Plan. Where consequential changes to the text are required directly as a result of my recommended modification to the policy concerned, I have highlighted them in this report. However other changes to the general text may be required elsewhere in the Plan as a result of the recommended modifications to the policies. Similarly, changes may be necessary to paragraph numbers in the Plan or to accommodate other administrative matters. It will be appropriate for WC and GLWNF to have the flexibility to make any necessary consequential changes to the general text. I recommend accordingly.

Modification of general text (where necessary) to achieve consistency with the modified policies and to accommodate any administrative and technical changes.

8 Summary and Conclusions

Summary

- 8.1 The Plan sets out a range of policies to guide and direct development proposals in the period up to 2035. It is distinctive in addressing a specific set of issues that have been identified and refined by the wider community to safeguard the character and setting of the neighbourhood area and to encourage economic development and regeneration.
- 8.2 Following the independent examination of the Plan, I have concluded that the Golborne and Lowton West Neighbourhood Development Plan meets the basic conditions for the preparation of a neighbourhood plan subject to a series of recommended modifications.

Conclusion

- 8.3 On the basis of the findings in this report, I recommend to Wigan Council that subject to the incorporation of the modifications set out in this report that the Golborne and Lowton West Neighbourhood Development Plan should proceed to referendum.

Other Matters

- 8.4 I am required to consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the neighbourhood area. In my view, the neighbourhood area is entirely appropriate for this purpose and no evidence has been submitted to suggest that this is not the case. I therefore recommend that the Plan should proceed to referendum based on the neighbourhood area as approved on 4 October 2019.
- 8.5 I am grateful to everyone who has helped in any way to ensure that this examination has run in a smooth manner.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
26 April 2023