

# GGA



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# Planning Design & Access Statement

Land off School Lane

<b>CLIENT</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>PROJECT TITLE:</b>	<b>Land off School Lane</b>
<b>DOCUMENT REF:</b>	<b>GA3020-PS</b>

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## 1.0 Executive summary

- 1.1 The proposal would provide up to 41 new homes, including around 12 affordable homes. The most up to date evidence shows that Wyre can now only demonstrate a 4.94 years supply of housing engaging the titled balance. The 5-year requirement is a baseline and not a ceiling. Relevant to this application, is Wyre's commitment to an early plan review to directly consider housing supply, in line with the expectations of the Development Plan, for both market and affordable housing. In light of the identified shortfall, and the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes (Framework paragraph 59), it is considered that housing delivery should carry significant weight. The proposal would provide funding for the community facilities that are proposed for Forton, which attracts significant weight in favour. There would be economic benefits provided by the construction of the homes and from the new residents, which attract weight. Improvements to existing public rights of way, footway connections and biodiversity benefits each attract moderate weight in favour.
- 1.2 Overall, it is deemed that the material considerations in this case indicate a decision which is not in line with the Development Plan. Accordingly, the application should be allowed and planning permission granted, subject to conditions.

## 2.0 The Case Background

- 2.1 This Statement has been prepared by GA Associates on behalf of Mr Whittingham (the Applicant) to accompany an outline application for up to 41 dwellings (30% affordable), public open space and associated infrastructure with access applied for off School Lane (all other matters reserved).
- 2.2 This revised application has been submitted following the information provided in the Annual Position Statement which is considered to create materially different circumstances from those previously encountered. Wyre Council benefited from the grace period provided by the same mechanism during the previous year 2019-20. However, based on the Inspectorates assessment of the latest findings, Wyre can only demonstrate a 4.94 years supply of housing. In the absence of a 5-year supply of housing land, paragraph 14 of the Framework states that planning permission should be granted unless (a) any adverse impacts of doing so significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against policies in the Framework as a whole, or (b) specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted.
- 2.3 The Wyre Local Plan 2011-2031 (WLP31) was adopted on 28 February 2019 and contained within it, Policy LPR1. Policy LPR1 required the early partial review of the WLP31 with the objective of meeting the full objectively assessed housing needs over the plan period. Clearly the allocations are not delivering on the homes necessary and suitable sites should be incorporated into the development plan to bolster supply.

## 3.0 The Site Location

- 3.1 This site is located directly adjacent to the settlement boundary of Forton, to the south side of School Lane and forms a wedge of farm land juxtaposed between the Sports Ground to the north and the now allocated Forton Extension Ref: SA3/4 to the south. As well as the site's evident infill characteristics, the land also forms an extension to the now completed affordable housing scheme that provides an extant established access point onto School Lane (APP/U2370/A/14/2228110).
- 3.2 The roughly rectangular parcel of land, subject of this application, amounts to approximately 2.3 hectares of agricultural land. The site is not subject to any local or national landscape

designations and is subsequently considered a section of insipid farmland that is commonplace within rural Wyre.

- 3.3 GA Associates are aware that a 1050mm diameter Gas pipeline runs 60 meters off the site's western boundary, however, following dialog with the National Grid it was established that this pipe is thick walled. Therefore, this safety hazard has no bearing on the outcome of this application.

## 4.0 Main Issues

### Borough-wide Housing Land Supply

- 4.1 Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph: 004 Reference ID: 68-004-20190722) states that, for decision-taking purposes, an authority will need to be able to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply when dealing with applications and appeals. They can do this in one of two ways including 'confirming' the 5-year land supply using a recently adopted plan or through a subsequent annual position statement (as set out in paragraph 74 of the National Planning Policy Framework).
- 4.2 The Council's annual position statement, dated 27 October 2020, represents the "*most up to date*" evidence, and results in a "*material change*" relevant to the application. Based on the Planning Inspectorate's assessment, Wyre can now only demonstrate a 4.94 years supply of housing, engaging the tilted balance set out at paragraph 11 of the Framework and attracting substantial weight in favour of the proposal. It is also important to reference that a supply of housing land above five years, is a baseline and not a ceiling figure.

### The Pandemic

- 4.3 It is wholly unpractical to disregard the impacts that the pandemic will have on housing delivery, at least in the short to medium term. Evidently, build out rates are directly related to sales and the ability of the industry to practically deliver them. The Pandemic will affect sales in two key areas. Firstly, it will impact upon construction activity and secondly it will impact upon buyer/ developer confidence and investment.

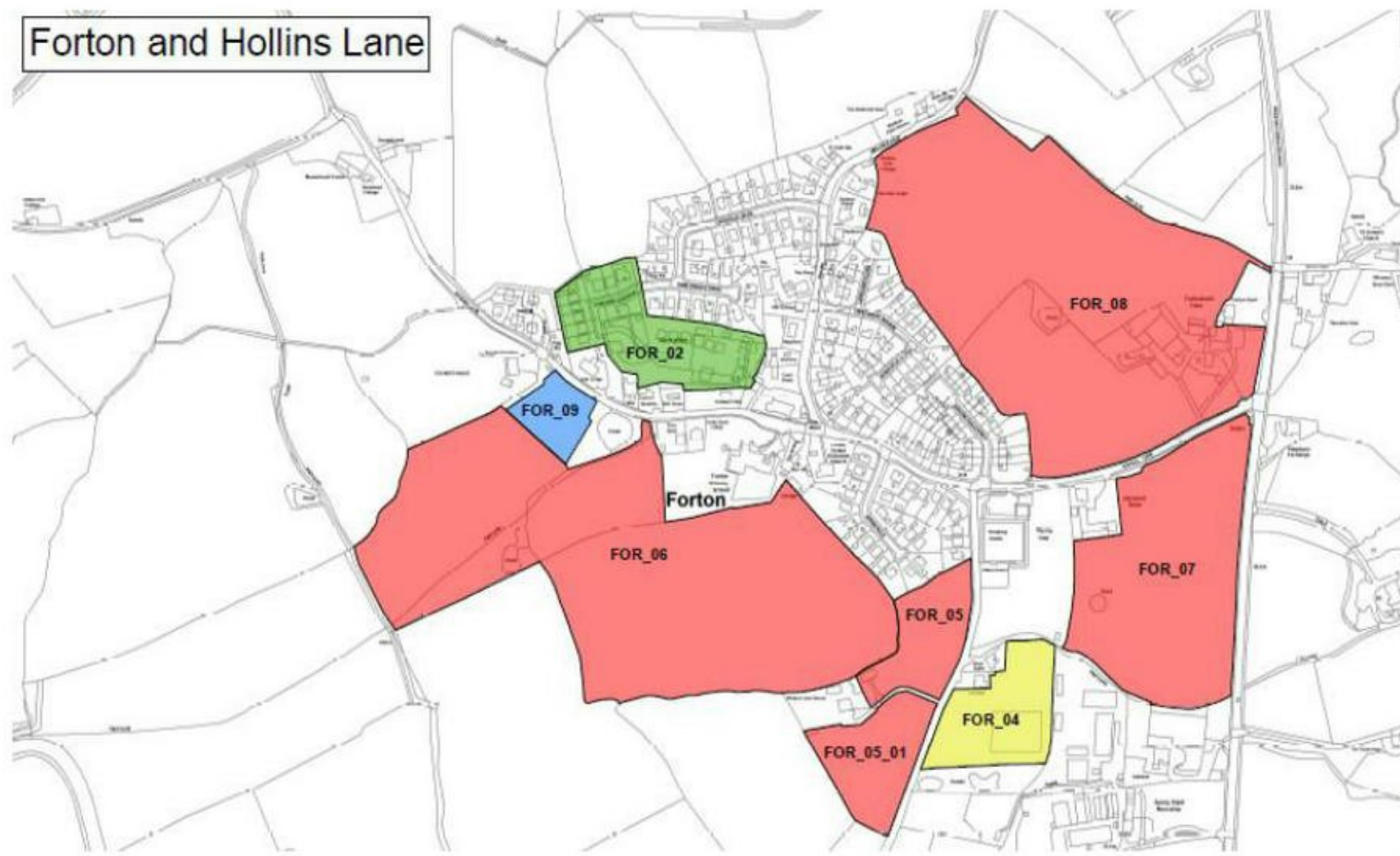
- 4.4 Whilst construction has been allowed to continue despite lockdown measures, operations are difficult. This is due to a significant number of critical third parties essential to house building who have either closed or have changed their policies and servicing arrangements. This difficulty combined with concerns for customer and employee welfare, led to the majority of House Building firms reducing build out rates during the initial lockdown.
- 4.5 The gathering of field-based evidence such as traffic surveys, ecology, landscape and archaeology will be affected due to 'lock-down' measures as will local authority site visits. The gathering of this evidence will therefore be stalled for some months, dependent upon the duration of the restrictions.
- 4.6 The house-building industry, including the Home Builders Federation (HBF), suggests the majority of builders will slow supply for the foreseeable future to protect demand within the market, and attention will evidently focus on existing construction sites.
- 4.7 The initial lockdown created almost four months of inactivity, with the government preventing persons from moving home which severely affected the chain system that facilitates house buying. The government has introduced measures including a Stamp Duty Holiday (8th July 2020), but Mortgage delays have become a pertinent issue for property buyers. The delays come as banks struggling to operate as normal during the pandemic and demand for loans rising. The backlog of mortgages and other supply issues is resulting in buyers waiting weeks or months to receive the finance they need to complete a transaction.
- 4.8 Whilst a potential vaccine has been identified, experts are predicting that it will likely be a full 12 months before the virus is under control and life can return to normal. The evident physical implication including staff isolations and distancing requirements, combined with the need to re-instate disrupted supply chains, means construction activity will be heavily disrupted for further 12 months. This has created a scenario from which the whole supply chain, not limited to build out rates, will be significantly reduced over a 2-year period. In the longer-term, developer confidence is likely to be low due to the inevitable economic impacts of the pandemic including concerns over job security.
- 4.9 Clearly an effective way to combat such a slow-down is to diversify the supply by providing further sites which can bolster the delivery and supply within the borough.

Impact on local character

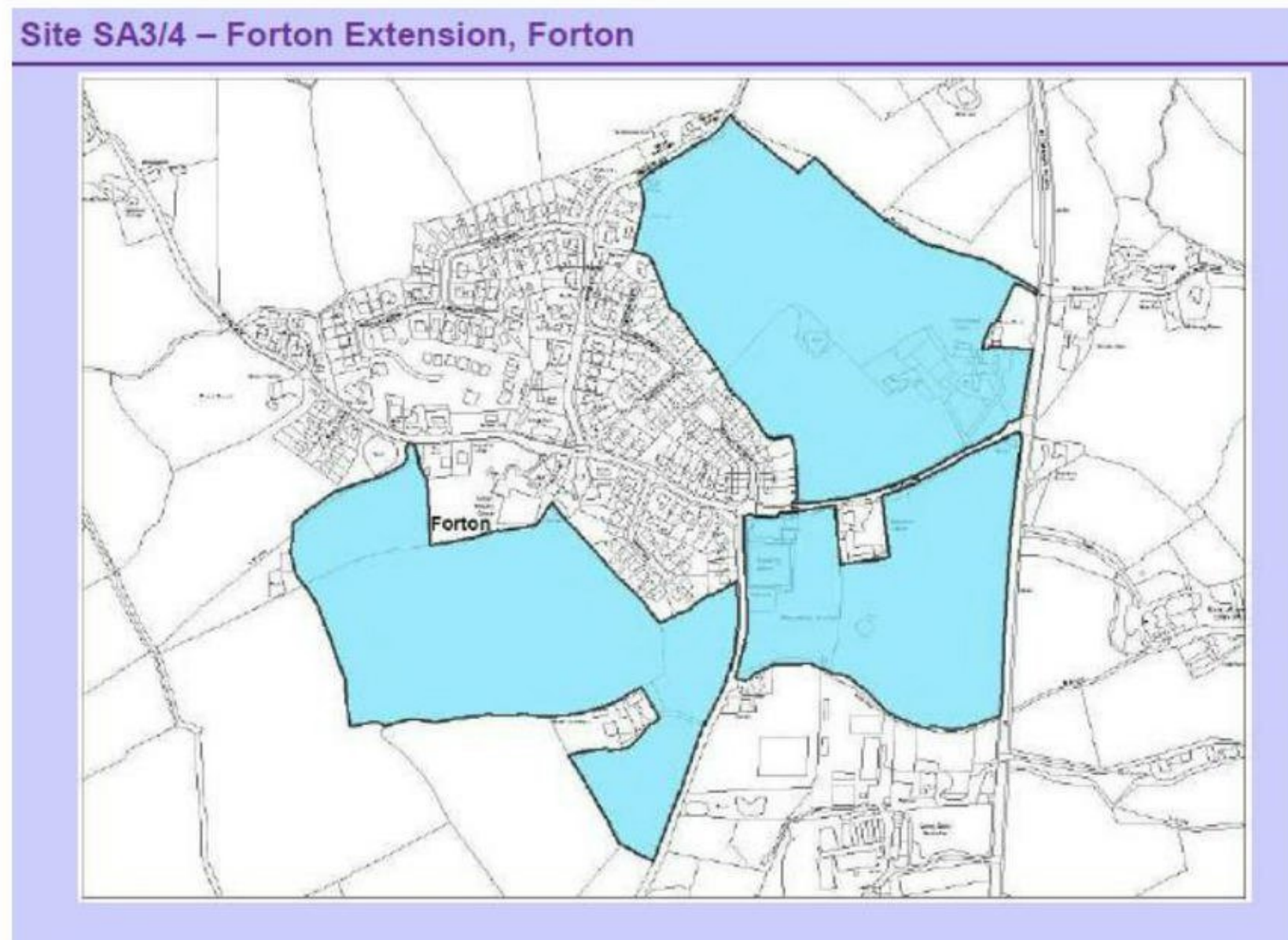
- 4.10 It is noted that during the original application the Council raised concerns that the proposed development by reason of its scale, density and domestic built form would introduce residential development to the locality which would result in an unacceptable and unnecessary encroachment/projection into the Countryside Area, to the detriment of its intrinsic rural character and appearance.
- 4.11 The setting of the site is mainly experienced by those using School Lane which already contains domestic built development. Persons would also experience the site through public footpath Ref: 2-11-FP-8 which runs along the site's south western boundary. However, as part of the application this footpath would be upgraded and any negative impacts on views/ vistas would be limited to local concerns that could be mitigated through a detailed landscaping scheme.
- 4.12 In the first instance, it can be recognised that the proposal is an outline application so issues of scale and density are not fixed criterion and would only become so at the reserved matters stage. That said, the development of up-to 41 dwellings on site would create a density of approximately 20 dwellings per hectare, thus if approved the development would not be out of kilter with other recently approved schemes within Wyre. Considering scale in isolation, it should be recognised that the Council have just allocated over 18.5 HA of agricultural land for housing under Site SA3/4 – (Forton Extension) as shown in Figure:2. Therefore, in contrast to the wider allocation, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest mixed use allocation by dwelling number in the entire Development Plan, this site could hardly be considered unacceptable due to scale.
- 4.13 In the interests of prudence, it is worth recognising that the site was assessed as part of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (July 2017) and was considered a Final Site. Therefore, it is reasonable to assert that the site has no greater level of landscape sensitivity than any of the other parcels that were assessed in 2017 and now form the part of allocation SA3/4. The land subject of this application was only removed from the allocation following receipt of incorrect information from the HSE regarding a high-pressure gas main.
- 4.14 The application is also supported by a Landscape Assessment which confirms that the site is not designated nationally or locally for its intrinsic landscape character and any impacts will be contained locally. Considering the site practically the agricultural land forming this

application site is not unique or materially different from the hundreds of acres of farmland found throughout rural Wyre.

**Figure 1) Final Site Map 2017 – Hollins Lane & Forton**



**Figure 2) Adopted Wye local Plan 2019 – Forton Extension**





## **Accessibility**

4.15 The Framework Paragraph 103 identifies that significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. Given the 'significant development' nature of the SA3/4 allocation it is reasonable to assume that Forton should or is capable of being considered sustainable in accessibility terms. While it is recognised that the wider allocation is accompanied by supplementary employment and other communal facilities, it is reasonable to assume that a suitably worded condition could be attached to ensure development came forward in association with the earmarked infrastructure.

4.16 Nevertheless, as a stand-alone development, the proposal is considered accessible delivering a sense of permeability, providing ease of pedestrian movements with acceptable access to local facilities and public transport services taking into account national guidance. In the respect of bus stops, the existing stops off the A6 would be in the order of an 8-minute walk. These stops provide access to a number of local bus services which operate 7 days a week and provide connections to (list not exhaustive) Lancaster, Garstang, Preston, and Blackpool.

4.17 Local precedent:

- **Application Ref: 17/00233/OUTMAJ**

Gained approval for 43 dwellings off Hollins Lane, on the 23 January 2018 (51 dwellings in total combined with 8 already approved). Paraphrasing from paragraph 9.7 of the officer's report that was completed prior to this application gaining approval it was confirmed that *'The application site lies beyond the limits to development on Hollins Lane, which is identified as a small rural settlement... The more established main rural settlement of Forton lies some 1km to the north west of Hollins Lane on the opposite side of the A6'*. Evidently, by the Council's own admission Forton is a larger more established settlement in comparison to Hollins Lane, thus more sustainable. To put the two settlements into direct comparison Hollins Lane has a fraction of the service provision found within Forton which includes a Primary School, Sports Club, Community Centre, and a Church.

- **Application Ref: 14/00821/OUTMAJ & 16/00062/FULMAJ**

4.18 Gained approval for 10 dwellings off Hollins Lane. Paragraph 9.7 of the officers report confirmed that *'geographically and location wise, the application site is considered to be in a sustainable location, related to the village services and facilities.* Furthermore, quoting paragraph 9.6 of the officer's report, proximity to Forton is used as justification for the site's sustainable status with officers stating that *'2 miles to the north west of the site contained within the main village settlement of Forton there is an **array** of services including 2 village halls, bowling green, primary school, united reformed church and recreational facilities.* The use of the word array which has been included within bold is significant as this word is taken to mean 'an impressive display or range of a particular type of thing'. Therefore, in 2016 the Council quoted that Forton had services that a reasonable person could assume would amount to a standalone sustainable settlement.

### **Removal of Trees**

4.19 It is recognised that the removal of two trees will be required to achieve a section of 2m wide public footpath along School Lane. However, the loss of these trees can be adequately compensated throughout the wider proposal, as shown on the proposed planting scheme submitted in support of this application.

## 5.0 The Principle of Development

5.1 Policy SP1 confirms that meeting the housing needs of all sections of the community will be an overarching aim of the Development Strategy. Nevertheless, the latest APS has confirmed that the Development Plan is failing to deliver on these commitments. The failure of the plan to achieve necessary housing requirements was the exact scenario that Policy LPR1 had been included to counteract. The policy enables the Council a mechanism from which they can review and bolster allocations to ensure that they meet the full Objectively Assessed Housing Need.

5.2 As previously mentioned, if supported, this development would provide the significant public benefit of a 2-meter footpath along a section of School Lane that would support the facilitation of the single largest residential expansion in Forton's history. To emphasise the exceptional nature of the SA3/4 allocation, it constitutes the 2nd largest mixed-use development by dwelling number in the entire Development Plan 2019. Evidently, the construction of an additional 310 dwellings within Forton will notably increase pedestrian footfall along this

section of School Lane, as persons seek to access the village's only extant sports facility. Thus, the evident public benefits combined with the overall demand for housing delivery are considered to clearly and demonstrably weigh against the negligible conflicts with Policies SP4 and SP2.

- 5.3 Within the Settlement hierarchy contained within Policy SP1, Forton is acknowledged as a Main Rural Settlement where housing has been prioritised. While the proposal clearly falls outside the defined settlement boundary the sites allocated within the Development Plan are evidently failing to deliver the number of homes required. Therefore, rigid enforcement of the plans settlement boundaries would be contrary to the NPPF and its commitment to *'boosting significantly the supply of homes'*. The most practical way of protecting the validity of the Development Plan would be to allow modest infill proposals such as this, located adjacent to key service centres, to come forward.
- 5.4 The most up to date evidence demonstrates that the Council cannot demonstrate a five year supply of housing land and that the current level of supply is most likely around 4.94 years. Thus, the development plans policies in respect of the amount and distribution of housing are out of date, and require review in accordance with Policy LPR1. Thus, the tilted balance in paragraph 11 of the Framework is engaged. This attracts substantial weight.
- 5.5 Given the location of the site, which has been previously assessed by the Council as suitable, adjacent to a Main Rural Settlement and the borough wide need for affordable housing, the proposal would in general be in accordance with the spatial strategy. The provision of additional housing, including affordable housing, should attribute significant weight, economic benefits and provision of land for the provision of open space again should attribute significant weight. There would be benefits derived from improvements to public rights of way, and improvements to biodiversity to which weight should be attributed. There are also improvements to the accessibility of the scheme through a new footway connection.
- 5.6 Taken together the conflict with the Development Plan, which is subject to review and the limited harm identified would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the scheme. In my judgement therefore the proposal represents sustainable development as defined in the Framework and planning permission should be granted as other material considerations indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with the Development Plan.

5.7 Negating the five-year supply position, if the decision were taken on a plain balance under section 38 (6) I am satisfied that the minor harm that would result from the development would be outweighed by the significant benefits that would arise from the development.

## 6.0 Conclusion

6.1 The proposal would provide both market and affordable homes. The most up to date evidence demonstrates that the Plan is failing to deliver a supply of housing land above 5 years, this figure is a baseline and not a ceiling. Relevant to this application, there is a need to review the development plan to ensure delivery of both market and affordable housing. In the light of the identified local need, and the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes (Framework paragraph 59), it is considered that the housing delivery should carry significant weight. The proposal would provide land for a new public open space, which attracts significant weight in favour. There would be economic benefits provided by the construction of the homes and from the new residents, which attract weight. Improvements to footway connections are also included attracting some weight in favour.

6.2 Overall, it is considered that the material considerations in this case indicate a decision which is not in line with the development plan. Accordingly, the application should be granted and planning permission granted, subject to conditions.

GRAHAM ANTHONY ASSOCIATES

January 2021