



Policy JPA37

West of Gibfield, Atherton

Topic Paper

PfE 2021

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Section A – Background

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In November 2014, the AGMA Executive Board recommended to the 10 Greater Manchester local authorities that they agree to prepare a joint Development Plan Document (“Joint DPD”), called the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (“GMSF”) and that AGMA be appointed by the 10 authorities to prepare the GMSF on their behalf.
- 1.2 The first draft of the GMSF DPD was published for consultation on 31 October 2016, ending on 16 January 2017. Following substantial re-drafting, a further consultation on the Revised Draft GMSF took place between January and March 2019.
- 1.3 On 30 October 2020, the AGMA Executive Board unanimously agreed to recommend GMSF 2020 to the 10 Greater Manchester Councils for approval for consultation at their Executives/Cabinets, and approval for submission to the Secretary of State following the period for representations at their Council meetings.
- 1.4 At its Council meeting on 3 December Stockport Council resolved not to submit the GMSF 2020 following the consultation period and at its Cabinet meeting on 4 December, it resolved not to publish the GMSF 2020 for consultation.
- 1.5 As a joint DPD of the 10 Greater Manchester authorities, the GMSF 2020 required the approval of all 10 local authorities to proceed. The decisions of Stockport Council/Cabinet therefore signalled the end of the GMSF as a joint plan of the 10.
- 1.6 Notwithstanding the decision of Stockport Council, the nine remaining districts considered that the rationale for the preparation of a Joint DPD remained. Consequently, at its meeting on 11 December 2020, Members of the AGMA Executive Committee agreed in principle to producing a joint DPD of the nine remaining Greater Manchester (GM) districts. Subsequent to this meeting, each district formally approved the establishment of a Joint Committee for the preparation of a joint Development Plan Document of the nine districts.
- 1.7 Section 28 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and Regulation 32 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 enable a joint plan to continue to progress in the event of one of the local authorities withdrawing, provided that the plan has ‘substantially the same effect’ on the remaining authorities as the original joint plan. The joint plan of the nine GM districts has been prepared on this basis.
- 1.8 In view of this, it follows that PfE should be considered as, in effect, the same Plan as the GMSF, albeit without one of the districts (Stockport). Therefore “the plan” and its proposals are in effect one and the same. Its content has

changed over time through the iterative process of plan making, but its purpose has not. Consequently, the Plan is proceeding directly to Publication stage under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) England Regulations 2012.

- 1.9 Four consultations took place in relation to the GMSF. The first, in November 2014 was on the scope of the plan and the initial evidence base, the second in November 2015, was on the vision, strategy and strategic growth options, and the third, on a Draft Plan in October 2016.
- 1.10 The fourth and most recent consultation on The Greater Manchester Plan for Homes, Jobs and the Environment: the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework Revised Draft 2019 (GMSF 2019) took place in 2019. It received over 17,000 responses. The responses received informed the production of GMSF 2020. The withdrawal of Stockport Council in December 2020 prevented GMSF 2020 proceeding to Regulation 19 Publication stage and instead work was undertaken to prepare PfE 2021.
- 1.11 Where a local planning authority withdraws from a joint plan and that plan continues to have substantially the same effect as the original joint plan on the remaining authorities, s28(7) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 provides that any step taken in relation to the plan must be treated as a step taken by the remaining authorities for the purposes of the joint plan. On this basis, it is proposed to proceed directly to Publication stage under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) England Regulations 2012.
- 1.12 A comprehensive evidence base was assembled to support the policies and proposals in the GMSF 2020. Given the basis on which the Plan has been prepared, this evidence base remains the fundamental basis for the PfE 2021 and has remained available on the GMCA's website since October 2020. That said, this evidence base has been reviewed and updated in the light of the change from GMSF 2020 to the PfE2021 and, where appropriate, addendum reports have been produced and should be read in conjunction with evidence base made available in October 2020. The evidence documents which have informed the plan are available via the GMCA's website.

2 West of Gibfield Overview

- 2.1 The West of Gibfield strategic area provides an opportunity for a substantial housing and employment development, including new green infrastructure and a country park serving Atherton, Daisy Hill and Westhoughton.
- 2.2 The M61 corridor is a strategic opportunity for Greater Manchester but while Atherton, Hindley and Leigh are close to the M61, existing routes to the motorway are constrained and not conducive to attracting economic development. Improved road infrastructure between Gibfield Park Way to Junction 5 of the M61, via the Chequerbent junction on the A6, will be transformative for the area. This development is therefore required to make highway improvement measures at the junction of the A577 and Gibfield Park Way, extend Gibfield Park Way northwards as far as possible within the

allocation and safeguard sufficient land to allow for a potential future extension to the M61. Contributions towards capacity improvements at the Chequerbent junction and potentially at the junction of Platt Lane and A58 Manchester Road will also be required.

- 2.3 There is also a need for strategic improvements to services along the Atherton railway line between Wigan and Manchester, via Daisy Hill station, specifically to increase capacity at peak times, and increase service frequencies and extent. The increased use of the existing rail line could include its conversion to tram-train use, enabling greater frequency of services. This development is required to ensure good access to Daisy Hill and Hag Fold stations for pedestrians and cyclists and contribute appropriately to passenger improvements at those stations.
- 2.4 The green infrastructure requirement will need to be delivered alongside the housing development and should provide effectively for a country park with wildlife habitats and recreational space. Appropriate provision should be made to mitigate the impact of the development on great crested newts that are present in the area. The ongoing maintenance of the country park will need to be agreed with the Council.
- 2.5 In order to make the site attractive to potential occupiers and to safeguard the amenity of existing and future residents, high quality landscaping is required within the site and along sensitive site boundaries, including the provision of appropriate screening from the employment development. Street trees and other strategic landscaping will be required along Gibfield Park Way, which is the key route through the site.

3 Site Details

- 3.1 As shown in Appendix 1, the site allocation is located within the Green Belt to the west of Atherton adjacent to the established Gibfield Park employment area on the edge of the borough boundary with Bolton. The main access to the site is along Gibfield Park Way which runs north-south through the allocation connecting into the A577 Wigan Road and A579 Atherleigh Way to the south and into Gibfield Park Drive to the east. The urban area of Westhoughton in Bolton lies to the west separated from the allocation by Green Belt. The Atherton rail line runs east-west to the north of the allocation.
- 3.2 The site allocation is 70.63 hectares in size, including 25.36 hectares that is proposed to remain within the Green Belt as a country park. A total of 49.03 hectares is proposed to be removed from the Green Belt, including 3.76 hectares outside the site allocation boundary. The greenfield site has an industrial legacy having been the subject of historic coal mining, and contains areas of former mining land that has been poorly restored for agricultural use, as well as some mining features, such as highwalls which represent constraints to development. Consequently, the farmland is generally of low quality having limited agricultural yield, with the Agricultural Land Classification revealing the site does not contain “Best and Most Versatile” Farmland (Grade 1, 2, 3a). It is likely to be Grade 3b farmland given its historical use for coal extraction.

- 3.3 Despite this, the site is generally open, undulating, and green in character, sloping gently southwards with a land cover comprising areas of reclaimed land, wetland, small paddocks, arable fields, and areas of amenity grassland. The GMSF Landscape Character and Sensitivity Assessment identifies the site as reclaimed land / wetlands reflecting the historic use of this area for mineral extraction.
- 3.4 The scheme will also provide a substantive accessible green corridor and country park on land to the west of the development, providing wildlife habitats and recreational space for existing and future residents to enjoy. The country park will help to offset ecological harm and enable the achievement of at least a 10% biodiversity net gain, as well as improving access from the site to Daisy Hill railway station by walking and cycling.
- 3.5 The proposed site allocation policy is included at Appendix 2.

4 Proposed Development

- 4.1 The proposed development at West of Gibfield in PfE 2021 remains the same as that proposed in GMSF 2020. A substantial mixed-use development of the site is proposed, comprising around 500 homes and 45,500 sqm of employment floorspace. The development will be required to make highway improvement measures at the junction of the A577 and Gibfield Park Way, extend Gibfield Park Way northwards and contribute effectively towards the provision of appropriate highway mitigation measures to provide enhanced access to/from the A6 and Junction 5 of the M61. This includes safeguarding land within the allocation so as not to jeopardise the potential future delivery of a strategic link road connecting Gibfield Park Way to the A6 and M61.
- 4.2 It is envisaged that the new housing will be delivered across two discrete portions in the north and south west of the allocation, and be of a suburban character consisting of a mix of tenures, types and sizes to contribute towards meeting a range of housing needs. Housing density is likely to be around 35 dwellings per hectare.
- 4.3 The employment development will be delivered in the south east of the allocation as a logical extension to the existing employment area at Gibfield Park. It is envisaged that this will consist predominantly of light industrial uses, with the potential of creating in the region of 500-1,000 new jobs (full-time equivalent).

5 Site Selection

- 5.1 West of Gibfield is located within an Area of Search (WI-AS-7) derived from the site selection criteria, within which potential allocations in the Green Belt can be identified. It is considered that allocations within them will represent the best fit with delivering the PfE Spatial Strategy. The site is considered to be free of significant constraints.

- 5.2 As a site within the Green Belt, exceptional circumstances need to be demonstrated for it to be brought forward as an allocation in the PfE. These exceptional circumstances are considered to significantly outweigh any harm to the Green Belt identified from the site's release. Section 14 of this Topic Paper provides a summary of the Green Belt harm assessment for this site. The exceptional circumstances case takes the form of:
- A strategic level case: high level factors that have influenced and framed the decision to alter boundaries; and
 - A local level case: specific factors relevant to the proposed release that complement the strategic case.
- 5.3 The October 2020 paper on the case for exceptional circumstances to amend the Green Belt boundary sets out the strategic level case for Green Belt release. It also sets out the headline issues that make up the local level case for each allocation. The local level case for West of Gibfield is summarised below.
- 5.4 This allocation is considered to satisfy three of the seven site selection criteria for justifying release from the Green Belt, as follows:
- Criterion 3 – Land that can maximise existing economic opportunities which have significant capacity to deliver transformational change and / or boost the competitiveness and connectivity of Greater Manchester and genuinely deliver inclusive growth**
- 5.5 The site is located within the Wigan-Bolton Growth Corridor, as set out in Policy GM-Strat 8, which will deliver a regionally significant area of economic and residential development in the north west of Greater Manchester. The corridor will complement the North-East Growth Corridor ensuring that there are significant investment opportunities across the northern areas, helping to boost the competitiveness of all parts of the north, delivering inclusive growth and supporting long-term economic prosperity. This site forms a key component of this growth corridor, with the delivery of high quality residential and economic development, strategic green infrastructure, and effective contributions towards highway improvement measures to enhance the borough's connections with the A6 and M61 motorway.
- 5.6 Improved connectivity to the A6 and Junction 5 of the M61, will reduce congestion and bring economic and social benefits to the east of the borough by making the area more attractive as a location for both existing and new employment development, and a more desirable residential market. This is in accordance with the commitment of the NPPF for planning, at paragraph 81, to support economic growth and in particular for planning policies to recognise and seek to address potential barriers to investment, such as inadequate infrastructure, services or housing, or a poor environment.
- 5.7 Whilst a new link road from Gibfield Park Way to Junction 5 of the M61 is not currently secured following the unsuccessful joint Housing Infrastructure Fund

bid in 2020, this remains a firm aspiration of both Wigan and Bolton Councils and is identified in Transport for Greater Manchester's 2040 Delivery Plan. Development at West of Gibfield will deliver part of this infrastructure by extending Gibfield Park Way northwards within the allocation and safeguarding a route for its continuation further northwards to connect into potential future road infrastructure to be provided in Bolton. To the north, within Bolton, the route needed for the road is within Protected Open Land.

- 5.8 The site's allocation and removal from the Green Belt will strengthen the viability and deliverability of this strategic route, which will support the Councils in taking advantage of any future capital funding opportunities. The remainder of the route being outside the Green Belt in Bolton supplements this case.

Criterion 6 – Land where transport investment (by the developer) and the creation of significant new demand (through appropriate development densities), would support the delivery of long-term viable sustainable travel options and delivers significant wider community benefits.

- 5.9 The allocation has good access to Daisy Hill rail station which provides regular services between Wigan and Manchester on the Atherton line. It also provides good access to Hag Fold station on the same line with hourly services. The proposed policy requires the development to ensure convenient and safe access for pedestrians and cyclists to both stations and contribute appropriately to improved passenger facilities.
- 5.10 Whilst the site, in isolation, will not generate additional significant transport investment or the creation of sufficient demand to justify additional transport services for the wider community, there are already service improvements being implemented. Increased use of the existing rail line could include its conversion to tram-train use, as identified as an aspiration in TfGM's 2040 Delivery Plan, enabling greater frequency of services as well as increased capacity and more stops. This would provide much improved sustainable travel options in the area. Development at West of Gibfield would therefore contribute cumulatively to the case for such improvements in the locality satisfying criterion 6.
- 5.11 In addition, with a proportion of the site within 800 metres of Daisy Hill Station, the northern part of the allocation also satisfies criterion 1 - Land which has been previously developed and/or land which is well served by public transport.

Criterion 7 – Land that would deliver significant local benefits by addressing a major local problem/issue

- 5.12 In line with criterion 7, the delivery of a high-quality housing offer in this relatively deprived part of the sub-region would deliver significant local benefits by diversifying the local housing market, contributing to the competitiveness of the north. With much improved accessibility to the A6 and M61 Junction 5, strong connections to regular rail services into Manchester and Wigan and a new country park on its doorstep the site will provide an attractive residential offer to many, particularly those commuting into Manchester for work who

want to live outside the city for more space and access to the countryside. Improved connectivity will bring economic and social benefits by making the area more attractive as a location for both existing and new employment development, and a more desirable residential market.

5.13 Release of this site from the Green Belt will also provide the following benefits:

- A valuable contribution towards housing and employment land provision in the area through the provision of around 500 homes and around 45,500 sqm of B1, B2 and/or B8 employment floorspace.
- The provision of a mix of housing including high quality market housing and affordable housing to meet local needs. In accordance with current Local Plan Core Strategy Policy, the Council will seek the provision of 25% affordable housing where viable. This would equate to around 125 affordable homes, which would make a valuable contribution towards meeting the significant affordable housing need that exists, as evidenced by the 2020 Wigan Housing Needs Assessment.
- The proposed employment development will form a logical extension to the existing Gibfield Park Employment Area, which will also benefit economically from improved connectivity to the A6 and Junction 5 of the M61.

5.14 In summary, this allocation accords with the PfE spatial strategy, it provides a wide range of benefits and it is being actively promoted for residential and employment development.

6 Planning History

6.1 The site was previously part of Gibfield Colliery which dates back to the 1820s. It has a history of mine shafts together with open cast coal extraction and associated mining spoil tips. Up until the closure of the mine in 1963 when the site was cleared there was a network of railway sidings, buildings, and structures across the site. Following site clearance, the land has been the subject of limited restoration schemes which have seen some parts re-naturalised and other parts used for agriculture.

6.2 The planning history is relatively complex but relevant applications within the site allocation since 2000 include:

- **A/01/55018 (approved 2002):** This was for the reclamation of the former Gibfield Colliery Site, Gadbury Fold and the Bag Lane Open Cast Coal Mine; and the reuse of Bag Lane Coal Mine for amenity and agricultural uses. It also permitted the reuse of Gadbury Fold for housing and a district centre, and the development of the existing Gibfield Park Employment Area, which are both outside the proposed site allocation and have been developed.

- **A/04/62474 (approved 2004):** This was for the extraction of sandstone, siltstone, shale and clay from a mound of overburden in the northern part of the proposed allocation, and the restoration of the land for the purposes of amenity including grassland and woodland planting.

6.3 Adjoining the allocation to the east is an approved mixed-use development for 224 homes and 16,500 square metres of employment floorspace on land at Gibfield Park Drive (A/16/83188 and A/14/79259). As at May 2021, the housing element of the site is nearing completion (Keepmoat), with the employment development not started.

7 GMSF 2019 Consultation Responses

7.1 The site allocation is supported by the majority landowner Peel Investments Ltd (Peel), who are actively promoting the site. In response to the consultation, Peel have submitted supporting material, including a range of technical reports and a detailed development framework demonstrating the site's suitability and deliverability. These are referenced throughout this Topic Paper.

7.2 In addition to Peel's submission, a total of 70 representations were received in relation to the site allocation, primarily from local residents. These covered a range of planning themes most notably regarding the impact on traffic and the loss of Green Belt.

7.3 In terms of highways, many are concerned that the development would exacerbate congestion at peak times on already busy roads including at Chequerbent; Schofield Lane; Wigan Road; Atherleigh Way; Lovers Lane; Leigh Road; and Newbrook Road. It was felt that the impact could be widespread and as far as the A580, M60 and M61.

7.4 Some questioned how the proposed link road would resolve congestion claiming that it would likely attract more vehicles to the area. Others raised that Chequerbent Roundabout would need to be upgraded to accommodate increased traffic flows from this development and other sites, including Hulton Park.

7.5 In terms of public transport, people raised that the trains are already full at peak times due to a lack of carriages and that the car parks at both Atherton and Westhoughton rail stations need to be expanded.

7.6 Many respondents claimed that a disproportionate number of homes are being proposed in the Atherton area and that brownfield sites and vacant properties should be used before developing Green Belt sites for housing and employment uses.

7.7 Other issues raised included the impact of the development on the environment; wildlife and habitats; flood risk; residential amenity; and infrastructure capacity; the loss of valuable open space used for recreation;

and the suitability of the site due to ground conditions associated with past industrial activities.

7.8 A more detailed summary of the issues raised, together with the Council's response, is set out in the GMSF Statement of Consultation 2020.

8. GMSF 2019 Integrated Assessment

8.1 The Integrated Assessment (IA) of GMSF 2019 identified many positive impacts in relation to this allocation policy, with very positive effects identified in relation to:

- Ensuring housing land is well-connected with employment land, centres and green space
- Providing sufficient employment land in locations that are well connected and well served by infrastructure
- Ensuring the transport network can support and enable the anticipated scale and spatial distribution of development
- Improving transport connectivity
- Ensuring that utilities/digital infrastructure can support and enable development
- Supporting healthier lifestyles and supporting improvements in determinants of health
- Promoting access to green spaces
- Promoting sustainable modes of transport
- Conserving and enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure and geodiversity assets

8.2 The 2019 IA also made some recommendations in terms of enhancement and mitigation measures. In response to the IA recommendations the policy was amended to refer to the need for a masterplan to be agreed with the Council (clause 1 of the revised policy). Other recommendations are addressed when the allocation policy is read in conjunction with plan thematic policies.

8.3 In addition, in response to the 2019 IA, a change has been made to the thematic policy on supporting long term economic growth (JP-J 1) which now requires local labour and training agreements to be secured through planning obligations or other mechanisms, in line with the IA objective to help ensure sustainable economic growth and job creation.

9. GMSF 2020 Integrated Assessment

- 9.1 The 2020 IA assessed the GMSF 2020. It provided a narrative detailing how the recommendations from the 2019 IA were considered in the development of the 2020 draft. It concluded that when the plan was read as a whole, no further changes were necessary to the allocation policy.
- 9.2 The 2020 IA addendum report provided a broad consideration of the impacts of final changes to policies. It concluded that, as recommended mitigation measures were addressed by changes to thematic policies and no changes made to this allocation policy, it would not score differently in relation to the IA Framework.
- 9.3 A 2021 PfE IA Addendum has been produced and has reviewed the changes made between GMSF 2020 and PfE 2021. As there have been no substantial changes to this specific allocation between GMSF 2020 and PfE 2021 there has been no change to the assessment of this policy in relation to the IA Framework since 2020.

Section B – Physical

10. Transport

- 10.1 Transport modelling work has been undertaken using the Greater Manchester Variable Demand Model (GMVDM) to understand the transport implications and requirements of West of Gibfield and all other PfE allocations.
- 10.2 The GMVDM, a multi-modal transport model, provides estimates of future transport demand, including projected travel behaviour changes and new patterns that the PfE is likely to produce. These include changes in choices of routes, mode and time of travel and changes in journey destinations for some activities such as work and shopping.
- 10.3 The transport modelling work includes:
 - A ‘Reference Case’ scenario, in which the transport model accounts for background growth in addition to baseline housing and employment sites provided by the districts.
 - A ‘with PfE’ scenario, in which the ‘Reference Case’ scenario is supplemented by the West of Gibfield and all other PfE allocations
- 10.4 Review of the existing capacity of the highway network in the vicinity of the allocation has revealed that Chequerbent roundabout currently suffers from queues and delays in the evening peak hour.
- 10.5 The overall approach of the transport study has been to identify mitigation that will accommodate the full PfE traffic flows, where West of Gibfield has a potential impact. Various other allocations and general growth in travel demands contribute to impacts and some locations already experience capacity issues. As such, any mitigation identified at this stage is not solely attributable to the West of Gibfield.
- 10.6 The GMVDM traffic flows indicate that mitigation will be required at Chequerbent roundabout, the A577/A579/Gibfield Park Way roundabout and the A579/B5235 Lovers’ Lane junction to accommodate the full PfE traffic flows.
- 10.7 Further traffic assessments then confirm that these mitigation schemes will accommodate the full PfE traffic flows, confirming there is no impediment to the delivery of GMSF sites in the area, including the West of Gibfield. It is stressed that the interventions are to accommodate all of the PfE traffic flows including development and growth identified in the reference case and deal with potential constraints on the highway network that will exist irrespective of the allocation.
- 10.8 Access to the allocation can be provided from Gibfield Park Way and the landowner controls the land around the road such that there are no

insurmountable constraints. Traffic capacity assessments demonstrate that access junctions will operate within capacity and will provide safe and satisfactory access to the allocation.

- 10.9 A dedicated traffic-free cycle route runs along Gibfield Park Way, effectively through the middle of the allocation. Residential roads can then be used to access the Sustrans national cycle route 55 providing connections to Hindley, Tyldesley, Eccles, Salford and Manchester.
- 10.10 Three railway stations can be reached on foot or by bike (the distance from the edge of the allocation to the stations is: Daisy Hill – 0.8km Hag Fold – 1.3km; Atherton – 2.2km) and all can be accessed using existing footways. The proposed Bee Network in the area will provide connections to Hag Fold and Atherton stations. The former can also be accessed by the quiet residential street network between Bag Lane and Norfolk Road / Dorset Road.
- 10.11 The design of the allocation will include high quality footways and cycleways to focus movement towards the most appropriate locations to leave (or access) the site, connecting with existing provision to facilitate longer distance journeys. There are walking routes to bus stops, all three railway stations (which are within the vicinity of the site) and to a range of destinations within nearby Atherton. Pedestrian improvements to Schofield Lane/Lower Leigh Road will also be investigated to improve accessibility to Daisy Hill Railway Station
- 10.12 Both workers and residents on the site will be able to access existing bus services which provide frequent services to a range of destinations within both the local area and beyond to Wigan, Leigh, and Bolton. The V2 service from Atherton provides frequent and fast services to Manchester city centre. Much of the allocation is within an easy walking distance of existing bus stops. The need for any diversions or improvements to existing bus services can be determined at the time the proposals are brought forward for development.
- 10.13 Existing bus routes and services provide connections to several destinations including Westhoughton and Atherton town centres, and rail services available from Daisy Hill, Hag Fold and Atherton railway stations provide suitable access to a range of additional facilities and services including further afield in Manchester and Wigan.
- 10.14 Following a further round of modelling work undertaken as part of the transition from the GMSF to the PfE Plan, a number of junctions were re-assessed to check the validity of conclusions reached in the initial Locality Assessment. The updated assessment has not identified any significant changes and on this basis, the conclusions arrived at in the Locality Assessment is still considered to be valid.
- 10.15 Overall, it is concluded that the development of the West of Gibfield allocation for residential and employment uses will be in accordance with the NPPF in transport terms and will enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the Framework.

11. Flood Risk and Drainage

- 11.1 A Statement of Flood Risk (March 2019) has been prepared by AECOM on behalf of the site promoter Peel Investments (North) Ltd. The report contains a high level review of the potential flood risk at the site, highlights major constraints to development and determines whether the site is suitable for housing and commercial uses in principle from a flood risk perspective.
- 11.2 It considers the majority of the site to be at:
- low risk of fluvial flooding;
 - very low risk from surface water flooding;
 - medium risk of groundwater flooding, based on the adoption of appropriate mitigation measures; and
 - Low risk from sewers and drainage infrastructure.
- 11.3 In order to de-risk the site, the independent study recommends the undertaking of a detailed site-specific Flood Risk Assessment to ensure compliancy with the NPPF. It also recommends a more detailed review of the surface water and groundwater flood risk see if the current risk can be mitigated so that it can be demonstrated that the development will remain safe for the lifetime of the development and not increase flood risk elsewhere. This will be required at the masterplanning stage in accordance with clause 1 of the site allocation policy.
- 11.4 The findings of the AECOM study are consistent with the Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for Greater Manchester - Update (March 2019) which did not identify any strategic flood risk concerns as a result of the proposed allocation.

12. Ground Conditions

- 12.1 This area has a long history of coal mining dating back to the 1820s which has had implications for the ground conditions on the site. The site has 10 mine entries, a large colliery spoil heap, known as Gibfield Tip, to the south and open cast coal mines to the north.
- 12.2 The site promoters (Peel) commissioned LK Consult Ltd (LKC) to undertake a preliminary risk assessment of the site. This split the site into a number of different areas of higher and lower risk with features such as the open cast coal mines, former buildings, colliery spoil tips, and known and possible areas of infilled ground.
- 12.3 The LKC assessment indicates that the open cast coal mines to the north were backfilled and re-profiled during the early 2000s but no evidence is available as to how the backfilling was carried out. It also states that Gibfield Tip is unlikely to have been placed in a manner which is considered suitable for the founding of future buildings.

- 12.4 Due to the presence of potentially combustible coal seams, and the significant thickness of colliery spoil within the site boundary, the assessment confirms a high gas risk is present across the entire site, therefore requiring gas monitoring prior to its development.
- 12.5 The assessment also found a moderate to low risk of:
- contaminants via dermal contact, ingestion and inhalation which would require intrusive investigation;
 - mobile contamination impacting on controlled waters via the migration through permeable strata, requiring groundwater and surface water monitoring
 - Organic contaminants posing a risk to water pipes, requiring sampling if made ground is present at pipeline installation depths.
- 12.6 Despite these risks, LKC considered that the assessment provided sufficient information on the potential contaminative status of the site to allow the validation of any future planning application and for conditional planning approval to be granted. Such conditional approval will likely include standard prescriptive conditions requiring a site investigation, risk assessment and, if appropriate, a remedial strategy are completed to the satisfaction of the council prior to the commencement of any development.
- 12.7 LKC state that a Phase 2 intrusive survey should be carried out across the site to investigate the identified potential pollutant linkages further. LKC would recommend this can be undertaken at the pre-planning stage or once conditional planning approval is granted.
- 12.8 Taking account of the mining history of the site and the information provided in the LKC assessment, the Council would recommend the submission of a preliminary risk assessment (Contaminated Land Report 11 - Model Procedures for the management of land contamination) in support of any development proposals at the planning application stage. Should there be issues of contamination, ground instability or other ground condition challenges these would need to be addressed by the application or by planning condition. It is likely that a standard contamination condition would be recommended.

13. Utilities

- 13.1 The site is immediately adjacent to an established urban area where a range of services are available. This includes water, gas and electricity mains, alongside telecommunications infrastructure. The development can therefore be connected to key utilities. Any upgrades required to accommodate new homes can be made alongside the delivery of the development.
- 13.2 Five electricity pylons are located within the allocation with high voltage overhead power lines running north-south to the west of Gibfield Park Way.

Two of the pylons are within the land to be retained within the Green Belt. A gas pipeline also crosses the southern part of the site in a broadly east-west alignment from the A577/Gibfield Park Way roundabout to Schofield Lane. Appropriate easements for these significant utilities infrastructure will therefore be required as set out in clause 10 of the allocation policy. These will be able to be accommodated within any development as part of high quality green corridors and open spaces, which will form part of the comprehensive green infrastructure network.

- 13.3 With regard to water, United Utilities recognise that they have a duty to connect all new homes to the network. However, they would urge early engagement with prospective developers requiring the need for masterplanning, including a holistic drainage strategy for the entire site.
- 13.4 There is a water main following the road network in the eastern part of the allocation and United Utilities state that consideration should be given to establish points of connection as early as possible. There is a sewer network towards the eastern point of the allocation following the road network and a large sewer at the north eastern point. United Utilities state that it will be important to make use of the potential for SUDs on site, as land naturally drains from north to south.
- 13.5 With regard to electricity, National Grid state that specific development proposals within Wigan are unlikely to have a significant direct effect upon their electricity transmission system. Improvements to the system to provide supplies to the local distribution network are generally as a result of overall regional demand growth, rather than site specific developments. It is the role of local distribution companies to distribute electricity to homes and businesses.
- 13.6 With regard to gas, National Grid owns and operates the high-power gas transmission system in England. Gas leaves this system and enters the distribution networks and is delivered to sites and networks. Cadent are the gas network operator and they indicate that a medium pressure gas main with sufficient capacity to serve this allocation is located 20 metres from the site boundary.

Section C – Environmental

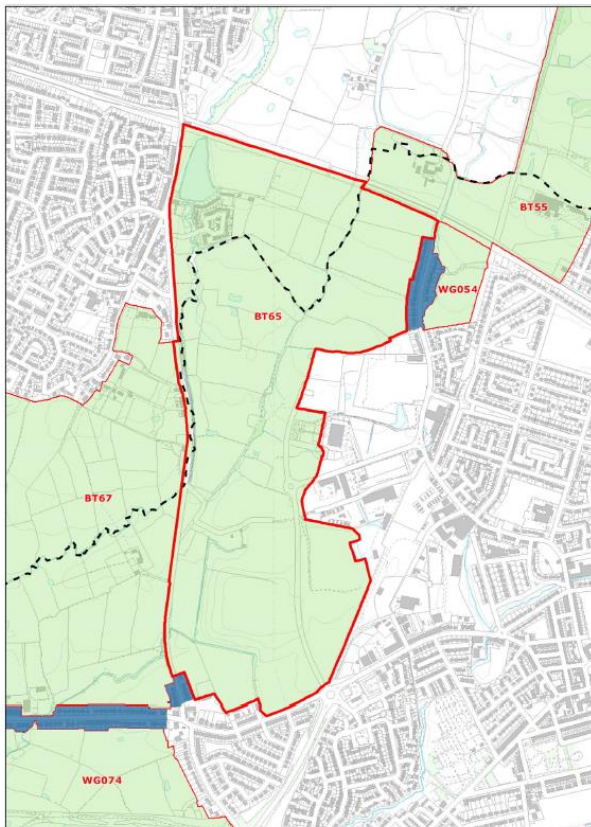
14. Green Belt Assessment

14.1 The proposed allocation lies entirely within the Green Belt and its development would result in the loss of 49.05 hectares of Green Belt land. This includes 45.46 hectares within the site allocation boundary and an additional 3.6 hectares as incidental Green Belt loss outside of the allocation. The site allocation is 70.95 hectares in total, but 25.59 hectares is proposed to be retained as Green Belt to allow for the creation of a country park. The site allocation is located within a wider swathe of Green Belt which:

- provides a physical break in development between the settlements of Hindley, Westhoughton and Atherton
- prevents urban sprawl and coalescence of Hindley, Westhoughton and Atherton
- provides a green setting to the settlements of Hindley, Westhoughton and Atherton

14.2 The Stage 1 Green Belt Study, undertaken by LUC in 2016, assessed the whole of the Green Belt in Greater Manchester in terms of its contribution to the five purposes of the Green Belt, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The West of Gibfield allocation forms part of Green Belt parcel BT65 as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Green Belt parcel BT65



- 14.3 The study concludes that this parcel plays an important role in checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas; protects an important parcel of open land from urban sprawl; plays an important role in preventing neighbouring towns from merging; has moderate value for its rural character; and makes little contribution to the setting and 'special character' of a historic town(s).
- 14.4 The 2020 Green Belt Harm Assessment, also published by LUC, forms Stage 2 of the Green Belt assessment process, and assesses the harm to the Green Belt purposes of releasing the site allocation from the Green Belt for development. This initially assessed the harm of the site allocation boundary proposed in the 2019 GMSF. However, this has been reassessed in the addendum to the report to reflect site allocation boundary changes proposed by the council to reduce the Green Belt harm.
- 14.5 The addendum finds that the overall harm to Green Belt purposes from the release of this allocation varies from 'moderate' on the southern part of the site, 'moderate-high' on the central part of the site to 'very high' on the northern part of the site. The impact on adjacent Green Belt varies from 'moderate' to 'no/negligible'. Whilst the level of harm in the northern parcel remains very high, the amended allocation boundary, which retains a wider strip of land to the north within the Green Belt, results in the narrowing of the Green Belt gap between Atherton and Westhoughton rather than effectively merging the two settlements.
- 14.6 The Cumulative Harm Assessment states that the release of the allocation would narrow the gap between Westhoughton and Atherton and that the area of Green Belt left would make a weaker contribution to preventing urban sprawl (Purposes 1 & 2). It would also increase containment of the remaining strip of Green Belt to the east, although this area is already well contained (Purpose 3).
- 14.7 In 2021 a further review of the overall harm to Green Belts was undertaken in an addendum report showing changes to allocation boundaries proposed in PfE 2021. In the case of West of Gibfield no boundary changes were made and the allocation proposed within PfE 2021 remains the same as in GMSF 2020, as presented in Appendix 4.
- 14.8 National policy states that plans should set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land. The 2020 Stage 2 Green Belt Study – Identification of Opportunities to Enhance the Beneficial Use of the Green Belt identifies opportunities to enhance green infrastructure on remaining Green Belt within 2km of the allocation sites.
- 14.9 At West of Gibfield the assessment identifies opportunities and projects in relation to:
- Improvements to public rights of way and cycle routes

- Youth play provision
- Enhancements to habitat connectivity
- The creation of a country park and improvements to planting

14.10 Detailed proposals will be worked up at the appropriate stage in the development process, supported by the proposed allocation policy and relevant thematic policies, such as Policy JP-G 9 of PfE 2021 which seeks to achieve biodiversity net gain. In addition, the proposed allocation policy requires the provision of a substantive accessible green infrastructure corridor and country park on land remaining in the Green Belt within the allocation, which should be very beneficial in terms of Green Belt use.

14.11 Further information in relation to green infrastructure, recreation, landscape and biodiversity is found in the relevant sections of this Topic Paper.

14.12 Whilst the assessment concludes that its release would result in harm to the Green Belt, particularly in the northern part of the allocation, the Council considers that the benefits of the proposed allocation significantly outweigh its overall harm, including its Green Belt harm, representing exceptional circumstances in accordance with national planning policy.

15. Green Infrastructure

15.1 The allocation proposes the creation of a north-south linear country park between Westhoughton and Atherton, on land remaining in the Green Belt but within the site allocation boundary. Together with a network of residential green spaces, this will provide an attractive green setting to the proposed mixed-use development and will be an accessible recreational and ecological asset for existing and future residents to enjoy.

15.2 The country park will include ponds, plantings, and footpaths, together with new features and focal points to create a natural but accessible space capable of sustaining a rich and diverse eco-system. This space will be managed and maintained and will be available for the quiet enjoyment of the local community.

15.3 The country park will make a notable contribution to the requirement for achieving at least a 10% biodiversity net gain from the development, as required by Policy JP-G 9 of PfE.

15.4 This will also be supplemented by new and enhanced green infrastructure within the part of the site to be released from the Green Belt. This may include high quality landscaping around the new employment park; safe and accessible amenity green space; tree lined and grassed highway verges; and accessible natural spaces with wildlife habitat importance. Clause 7 of the policy requires the provision of a high quality, landscaped corridor along Gibfield Park Way, through the planting of street trees and other strategic landscaping.

- 15.5 Established hedgerows currently follow Schofield Lane and Colliery Lane, and along the field boundary of a parcel of land to the rear of North Road and part of Gibfield Way. The southern parcel of land has few trees, with small, scattered groups of early mature trees in the southern parcels. Large areas of established natural regeneration grows around Arondale and north of Colliery Lane.
- 15.6 The most important hedgerows are those that border the original historic roads of Schofield Lane and Colliery Lane. However, the long boundary hedge to the rear of North Road is made up of Hawthorn planted along an early 20th century field boundary. All affected hedgerows over 20 metres in length should be surveyed to determine if they meet the criteria of 'important' hedgerows under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997. There are currently no hedgerow retention notices in place.
- 15.7 A small woodland has been created north of the site and groups planted along the East side of Gibfield Park Way. It is unlikely that any of the trees within proposed development parcels are original to the setting. Currently the small groups and scattered individual trees are not significant to the setting or important amenity features. The proposed creation of well-designed green corridors will provide an ideal opportunity to plant new native trees and hedgerows which will improve links from the surrounding green infrastructure to the country park and significantly increase the percentage canopy cover for the area. There are currently no tree preservation orders affecting any of the parcels of land.

16. Recreation

- 16.1 The delivery of the country park will provide enhanced and accessible recreation opportunities within the area, benefitting the health and wellbeing of local residents. The country park is proposed to be well integrated into the new development to maximise sustainable access for people and wildlife. Walking and cycling connections into existing residential areas nearby will also be required to ensure safe and convenient access for existing residents.
- 16.2 The development will also be required to provide new amenity green space and play facilities on-site to meet the needs of new and existing residents, in line with local planning policy.

17. Landscape

- 17.1 The 2009 Landscape Assessment of Wigan identifies this area (including the allocation) as being undulating lowland. This is generally poor quality and poorly drained land with a high density of ponds as a result of mining subsidence. It is mainly used for grazing and for cereal crops, though the soil is often poor and stony with sub-soil contamination.
- 17.2 The 2018 Greater Manchester Landscape Character and Sensitivity Assessment (LUC) identifies the allocation within the Reclaimed Land / Wetlands landscape character type and within the Westhoughton to Marsland

Green landscape character area. The overall sensitivity assessment concludes that residential development within this character area would have low to moderate harm on the landscape, with industrial development having a moderate harm.

18. Ecological/Biodiversity Assessment

18.1 There are no nationally or internationally designated wildlife sites within 1km of the site, and the proposed development would not pose a risk to any Natural England Impact Risk Zones for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

18.2 The site promoters (Peel) commissioned ecological consultants TEP in March 2017 to provide an ecological assessment of the site, outlining potential ecological constraints and opportunities in relation to its development for housing and employment uses. This included an extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey, undertaken in November 2017, which identified areas of high, medium, and low ecological constraints that will need to be carefully considered in order to enable the sustainable development of the land.

18.3 The assessment confirms that the site comprises a number of different habitats, varying in quality. The southern part of the site comprises lower quality habitats including horse-grazed semi improved grassland fields (west of Gibfield Park Avenue) and arable fields cut for silage (east of Gibfield Park Avenue). The northern part of the site, which includes the Gibfield Park (North) and Gibfield Park (South) SBI's, is dominated by tussocky, largely unmanaged grassland and broadleaved trees, with the easternmost section cut for silage.

18.4 Areas of high constraint within the site include:

- **Wildlife corridors:** These comprise numerous ditches and hedgerows across the site, which the assessment concludes should be retained and protected by habitat buffers. A sensitive lighting strategy is also recommended to maintain their potential as bat commuting corridors.
- **Ponds:** There are 29 ponds within the site, of which 14 have records of great crested newt. Common toad, another protected species, is also known to be present. The site will need to be carefully designed to retain these ponds that are important to great crested newts. A Natural England mitigation licence will be required to ensure the continued Favourable Conservation Status of the species. Yet, given the extent of the site, there will be an opportunity to mitigate or compensate for losses of great crested newt terrestrial habitat within the development.
- **Dry heath / acid grassland:** This has developed on an area of colliery spoil crossing the central part of the site. It is a rare habitat in this area, and one which local authorities have a duty to have regard to under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006). It is important that this habitat is retained as part of the development.

- 18.5 Areas of medium constraint within the site include plantation woodland and scrub, and grassland within the SBIs to the north of the site.
- 18.6 The plantation woodland and scrub are predominantly in the north west of the allocation on land to be retained in the Green Belt. These provide valuable habitat for a wide range of species and prior to development of this area a wide range of surveys will need to be required to ascertain its importance for any particular species and to identify appropriate mitigation.
- 18.7 The areas of grassland within the SBIs provide good terrestrial habitat for a wide range of species, including great crested newts. Any development within these areas will require careful planning and a range of surveys would be required.
- 18.8 The grassland and arable habitats in the south of the allocation (outside of the SBI) only provide low quality terrestrial habitat and represent a low constraint to development.
- 18.9 The TEP assessment concludes that opportunities within the site to integrate new and existing green infrastructure into the new development should be taken to protect, enhance and expand the green infrastructure network in accordance with Policy GM-G 2 'Green Infrastructure Network'. Where new or improved green infrastructure is delivered as part of a development, the developer will also be required to make appropriate provision for its long-term management and maintenance.

19. Habitats Regulation Assessment

- 19.1 The Habitats Regulation Assessment of the GMSF Thematic Policies and Strategic Sites (December 2018) forms stage 1 and part of stage 2 of the HRA process – screening and Appropriate Assessment. The West of Gibfield site allocation was 'screened in' given its proximity to the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) at Manchester Mosses.
- 19.2 The assessment confirmed that although there is no direct pathway to the SAC, potential effects could occur through increased recreational pressure and through diffuse air pollution. However, it is noted that the part of the Mosses closest to the site is not developed for recreational use and that there is a significant degree of separation between the allocation and the European site. Increased recreational use arising as a result of the development is therefore considered unlikely.
- 19.3 The assessment concludes that sufficient safeguards exist such that there is no justification for removing the site from consideration as a potential development site. However, a more detailed assessment may be required when a detailed planning application is submitted.
- 19.4 The GMCA and TfGM are responding to Natural England's comments on the draft HRA (2020) by commissioning additional air quality modelling to more accurately assess the implications of changes in air quality on European sites

that could potentially be affected by changes to nitrogen levels arising from changes in vehicle movements in Greater Manchester or within close proximity of the Greater Manchester boundary.

19.5 A Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) has been undertaken and supported by an assessment of air quality impacts on designated sites. The following sites have been screened out at Stage 1 HRA:

- Rixton Clay Pits (SAC)
- Midland Meres & Mosses – Phase 1 Ramsar
- Rostherne Mere (Ramsar)

19.6 The following sites require Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment:

- Manchester Mosses (SAC)
- Peak District Moors (South Pennine Moors Phase 1) (SPA)
- Rochdale Canal (SAC)
- South Pennine Moors (SAC)
- South Pennine Moors Phase 2 (SPA)

20. Historic Environment Assessment

20.1 A heritage impact screening assessment undertaken by GMAAS in 2019 suggested that the allocation is screened in. It concluded that there are no designated heritage assets contained within the sites, however there is at least one located further afield (St James Church, Grade II*) which may be indirectly impacted. There appears to be little potential for archaeological remains due to coal mining and tipping activities, however some areas have been identified for further work. There also appears to be little potential for historic hedgerows. The screening assessment recommended the further assessment of the impact upon designated heritage assets outside the site, and a targeted survey and, depending on the results, intrusive work to the south of Colliery Lane, focusing on the early 19th century coal mining activity and associated cottages, Moons and the earthwork site. This will be a requirement at the masterplanning stage in accordance with clause 1 of the site allocation policy.

20.2 Further to the screening assessment, the site promoters Peel commissioned consultants Nexus Heritage in 2019 to undertake a high level archaeological assessment of the site.

20.3 Based on the information available, this confirmed that suitably configured development within the site allocation would not have an adverse impact upon the significance or the settings of designated heritage assets in the vicinity, due to its location and orientation with respect to the assets, and sufficient screening provided by the landscape form, tree-cover and characteristics of the built environment.

20.4 The assessment also identified some known and predicted non-designated heritage assets of low heritage significance within and adjacent to the site. It concluded that their significance is unlikely to result in a presumption in favour

of their preservation. However, a planning application may need to be supported by one or more reports on the heritage assets (or potential heritage assets) and any planning permission may be qualified by a condition requiring the implementation of a programme of heritage attendances such as archaeological investigations, which would also apply for the settings of non-designated heritage assets in the vicinity of the site.

21. Air Quality

- 21.1 The site promoter (Peel) commissioned Air Quality Consultants Ltd to undertake baseline air quality assessment of the site. This was completed in March 2019 based on a development comprising 750 homes and 45,500 sqm of employment floorspace, which is larger than the proposed scheme.
- 21.2 The assessment concludes that existing conditions within the study area show acceptable air quality, with background concentrations of nitrogen dioxide below the annual mean objective. The main air quality constraints associated with the site allocation relate to future residents of new properties at the site, which will be subject to the impact of traffic emissions from the adjacent road network and railway line, therefore the masterplan of the site will need to consider the location of new properties with respect to these roads and rail.
- 21.3 To support future planning applications, it will be necessary to carry out a detailed air quality assessment which considers both the impact of the proposed development on existing local air quality conditions (in terms of human and ecological health), as well as the impact of existing pollution sources on the proposed development itself. With appropriate mitigation measures implemented as required, there should be no air quality constraints to the development of the site allocation for residential use.

22. Noise

- 22.1 Peel commissioned Cundall to undertake a desktop review of noise issues and considerations for the allocation site. This was finalised in March 2019.
- 22.2 The assessment identifies the existing industrial uses to the east, the A577 to the south, the B5235 to the west, the railway line to the north and the proposed through road within the site as key noise sources that could affect the site. However, based on DEFRA predicted noise mapping, the study concludes that the majority of the site is expected to be subject to prevailing average traffic noise levels of less than 55 dBA (decibels). A review of the adjacent areas has also confirmed that the noise impact of the rail line would also be below 55 dBA. This provides a positive indication that the site is appropriate for residential use, although it is noted that this excludes contributions from the employment floorspace proposed within the allocation.
- 22.3 If the site is allocated for residential and employment development in principle, detailed acoustic assessments would be prepared and submitted alongside any future applications, demonstrating that any noise impacts can be adequately controlled.

22.4 It is considered that any noise impacts could be adequately controlled using appropriate mitigation measures such as green corridors and buffer zones, green barriers such as bunds and living walls, building massing and orientation, and appropriate glazing.

Section D – Social

23. Education

- 23.1 Using established general assumptions, the development of 500 homes in this location would likely generate in the region of an additional 21 pupils per year group from Reception to Year 11. Analysis of school places and capacity in the area concludes that this would likely result in a shortfall of around 58 primary and 84 secondary places if developed in the short term.
- 23.2 The Council's Education service have confirmed that this does not generate the need for a new school within the site. Therefore, the development would be required to make a financial contribution towards the provision of additional school places off-site based on an assessment of need at the planning application stage, in accordance with PfE Policy JP-P 5.

24. Health

- 24.1 Future planning applications on the site will need to be supported, where appropriate, by a Health Impact Assessment in accordance with PfE Policy JP-P 6. The submission of a Health Impact Assessment will help ensure that the effects of development on both health and wellbeing are considered and responded to during the planning process. They should aim to enhance the potential positive aspects of a proposal while avoiding or minimising any negative impacts, with particular emphasis on disadvantaged sections of communities that may be affected.
- 24.2 On-site health facilities are not envisaged as part of the development and are not a specific requirement of the site allocation policy. However, future planning applications within the allocation will need to consider health capacity in accordance with PfE Policy JP-P 6 and provide new or improved health facilities, or an appropriate financial contribution, where they would significantly increase demand.

Section E – Deliverability

25. Viability

- 25.1 The Viability Assessment, undertaken by Three Dragons, concludes that the proposed development at West of Gibfield, including all necessary mitigation, has a scheme residual value of £260,000. This equates to within 10% above the benchmark land value with a ‘headroom’ of 15%. Headroom is what is left after all the known costs have been taken away from the total value of the scheme.
- 25.2 On this basis, the assessment deems the scheme to be viable and able to proceed, but that viability is marginal and therefore should be monitored for any early signs of significant change.

26. Phasing

- 26.1 It is envisaged that the site will be delivered fully within the plan period. This has considered the availability of the site, prevailing residential delivery rates in the area, and the aspiration of the site promoter and landowner. The delivery of the site will be dependent on the timely provision of highway improvement measures at the junction of the A577 and Gibfield Park Way, and at Platt Lane and/or Chequerbent roundabout / Junction 5 of the M61, some of which are dependent on contributions from other schemes.

27. Indicative Masterplanning

- 27.1 An indicative concept plan of the development is shown in Appendix 3. This shows residential development to the north and south west of the allocation, employment development in the south east as a logical extension to the existing Gibfield Park employment area and the large country park to the west between the settlements of Atherton and Westhoughton. It also shows areas of green infrastructure across the development connecting development parcels, which will contribute to the local environment and walking and cycling connectivity including into the country park.
- 27.2 The concept plan also shows the extension of Gibfield Park Way northwards and the junction capacity improvements required at the A577/Gibfield Park Way junction. The other highway improvement measures necessary to mitigate the development re off-site, including at Platt Lane and/or Chequerbent roundabout / Junction 5 of the M61 in Bolton, and are therefore not shown on the concept plan.

Section F – Conclusion

28. The Sustainability Appraisal

- 28.1 Sustainability Appraisal (SA) has been incorporated into the IA of PfE and has informed plan preparation. The IA identified many positive impacts in terms of this allocation policy, but also made some recommendations in terms of enhancement and mitigation measures. These recommendations have been addressed through revisions to the policy, as set out in section 8 of this Topic Paper or are addressed when the policy is read in conjunction with the PfE thematic policies, because the plan should be read as whole. Taking account of the IA findings, this allocation is considered to accord with relevant economic, social and environmental objectives.

29. The main changes to the Proposed Allocation

- 29.1 In GMSF 2020 the site boundary was amended at the far north of the allocation, where land alongside the rail line was removed to retain a Green Belt gap between the settlements of Atherton and Westhoughton. This allocation boundary was carried forward into PfE 2021. Whilst the Green Belt Harm Assessment still concludes that the northern parcel of the allocation has very high harm to the Green Belt, the allocation now narrows the gap between the two settlements rather than effectively merging them.
- 29.2 It should be noted that an area of Green Belt in the central part of the allocation was shown incorrectly in the version of the 2020 GMSF presented to AGMA Committee. This land was proposed for retention as Green Belt in the 2020 GMSF but was incorrectly shown in the AGMA version of the plan as removed from the Green Belt. This land is correctly identified in Appendices 1 and 4 of this Topic Paper.
- 29.3 Amending the site boundary reduced the capacity of the site from around 700 to 500 homes. This also reflects known site constraints, notably ecological, following the completion of more detailed masterplanning and site assessments. The amount of employment floorspace proposed on the site has not changed.
- 29.4 The site allocation in GMSF 2020 and taken forward in PfE 2021 includes land to be retained within the Green Belt for the purposes of a country park. Whilst the creation of a country park was a requirement in the 2019 GMSF, this land was outside the allocation. Inclusion within the site allocation, strengthens the requirement for its delivery and provides additional clarity as to its location, in accordance with clause 8 of the policy. The creation of the country park will enhance the beneficial use of the remaining Green Belt by providing improved access, opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation, retaining and enhancing landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity in accordance with NPPF paragraph 141.

- 29.5 The policy in GMSF 2020 and PfE 2021 does not require the development to extend Gibfield Park Way as far northwards as the railway line and to contribute effectively to a new road bridge over the rail line. Instead, it requires the development to provide highway improvement measures at the junction of the A577 and Gibfield Park Way, and make effective contributions towards highway improvement measures including at Platt Lane and/or Chequerbent roundabout / Junction 5 of the M61 in Bolton, necessary to mitigate the development. This change from the 2019 GMSF reflects Wigan and Bolton Councils' unsuccessful joint bid for Housing Infrastructure Funding which would have enabled the delivery of the Westhoughton Bypass from the M61 to the A577 through the site. Despite this, the delivery of key east-west infrastructure from M61 Junction 5 to M6 Junction 26 via this site, remains a firm aspiration as set out in PfE Policy JP-Strat 8.
- 29.6 To enable connection into potential future strategic road infrastructure to the M61, a route for the continuation of Gibfield Park Way further northwards to the rail line is now required to be safeguarded.
- 29.7 A new clause 1 was added to GMSF 2020 policy to require the development of the site to be in accordance with a masterplan that has been approved by the Council, and effectively informed by detailed site investigations, an archaeological assessment and other constraints. This has been carried forward into PfE 2021 and will ensure a co-ordinated approach to the development and ensure that the design and layout takes account of key constraints and opportunities presented by the site and incorporates necessary mitigation measures.

30. Conclusion

- 30.1 The proposed site allocation in PfE 2021 is for 500 homes and 45,500 sq. m of employment floorspace. As a site within the Green Belt, exceptional circumstances need to be demonstrated for it to be brought forward as an allocation. The exceptional circumstances case takes the form of a strategic high level case and a local level case and is detailed in the October 2020 paper on the case for exceptional circumstances to amend the Green Belt boundary and section 14 of this Topic Paper. This allocation is considered to satisfy three of the seven site selection criteria for justifying release from the Green Belt and it provides a range of additional benefits. These exceptional circumstances are considered to significantly outweigh any harm to the Green Belt identified from the site's release.
- 30.2 In summary, this allocation accords with the PfE spatial strategy, exceptional circumstances exist to outweigh any harm to the Green Belt from its release, it is being actively promoted for residential development, and it provides a wide range of benefits. The site is considered to be free of significant constraints and its allocation is considered to accord with relevant economic, social and environmental objectives.

Section G – Appendices

Appendix 1: Site allocation boundary

Appendix 2: Proposed policy, PfE 2021

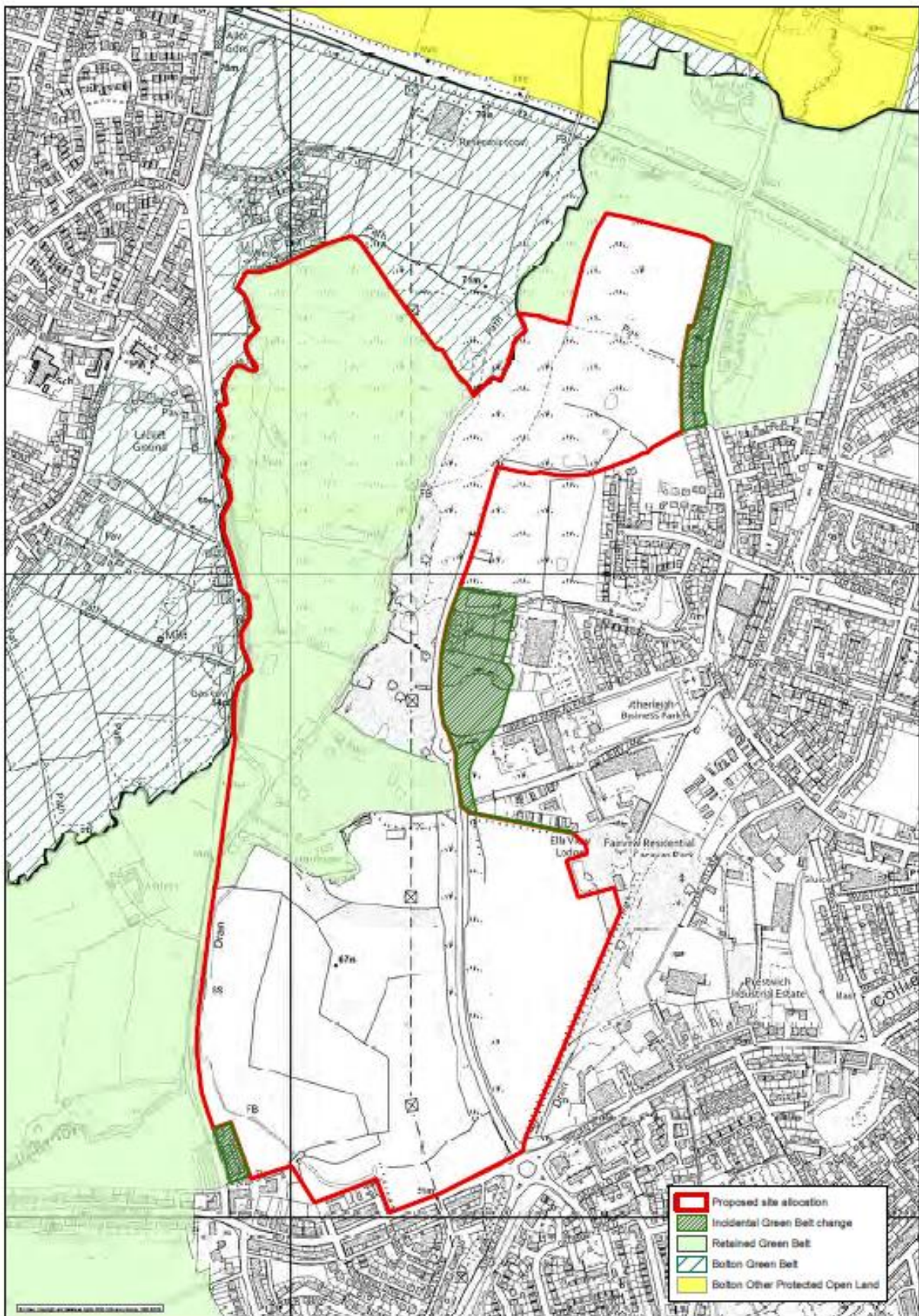
Appendix 3: Indicative concept plan

Appendix 4: Previous draft policy, as proposed in GMSF 2020

Appendix 5: Previous draft policy, as proposed in GMSF 2019

Appendix 6: Bibliography

Appendix 1: Site allocation boundary



Appendix 2: Proposed policy Places for Everyone (2021)

Policy JPA37- West of Gibfield

Development of this site will be required to:

- 1. Be in accordance with a masterplan that is agreed by the Council, and is effectively informed by detailed site investigations, an archaeological assessment and other constraints;**
- 2. Deliver around 500 new homes;**
- 3. Deliver around 45,500 sqm of B1, B2 and/or B8 employment floorspace in the south east of the allocation, as a logical extension to the existing Gibfield Park Industrial Area;**
- 4. Ensure good quality road access is provided into the site, including through an extension of Gibfield Park Way northwards. A route for the continuation of Gibfield Park Way further northwards to the rail line should be safeguarded, to connect into potential future road infrastructure to be provided in Bolton;**
- 5. Provide highway improvement measures at the junction of the A577 and Gibfield Park Way, and make effective contributions towards highway improvement measures including at Platt Lane and/or Chequerbent roundabout / Junction 5 of the M61 in Bolton, necessary to mitigate the development;**
- 6. Ensure convenient and safe access for pedestrians and cyclists to local bus services and to Daisy Hill and Hag Fold rail stations, and contribute appropriately to improved passenger facilities at those rail stations, as applicable;**
- 7. Provide a high quality, landscaped corridor along Gibfield Park Way, through the planting of street trees and other strategic landscaping;**
- 8. Provide a substantive accessible green infrastructure corridor and country park on land remaining in the Green Belt within the allocation, and ensure ongoing arrangements for its maintenance, agreed with the Council;**
- 9. Make appropriate provision for Great Crested Newts sufficient to mitigate the development;**
- 10. Provide easements for the significant utilities infrastructure running through the site; and**
- 11. Safeguard the amenity of existing and future homes from the employment development, through appropriate screening and landscaping.**

The West of Gibfield area provides an opportunity for a substantial housing and employment development to the west of Atherton. The employment development will extend the existing Gibfield Park Industrial Area and is considered suitable for B1, B2 and/or B8 employment floorspace. The development will include new green infrastructure serving Atherton and Daisy Hill, Westhoughton.

The M61 corridor is a strategic opportunity for Greater Manchester but while Atherton, Hindley and Leigh are close to the M61, existing routes to the motorway are constrained and not conducive to attracting economic development. Improved road infrastructure between Gibfield Park Way and Junction 5 of the M61, via the Chequerbent Junction on the A6, will be transformative for the area. The development is therefore required to extend Gibfield Park Way northwards as far as possible within the allocation and safeguard sufficient land to allow for a potential future extension to the A6 and M61 in Bolton.

Highway improvement measures will be needed to mitigate the impact of the development, notably at the junction of the A577 and Gibfield Park Way and between the site and the A6 and Junction 5 of the M61 in Bolton. The development will be required to make an effective contribution to the provision of these measures.

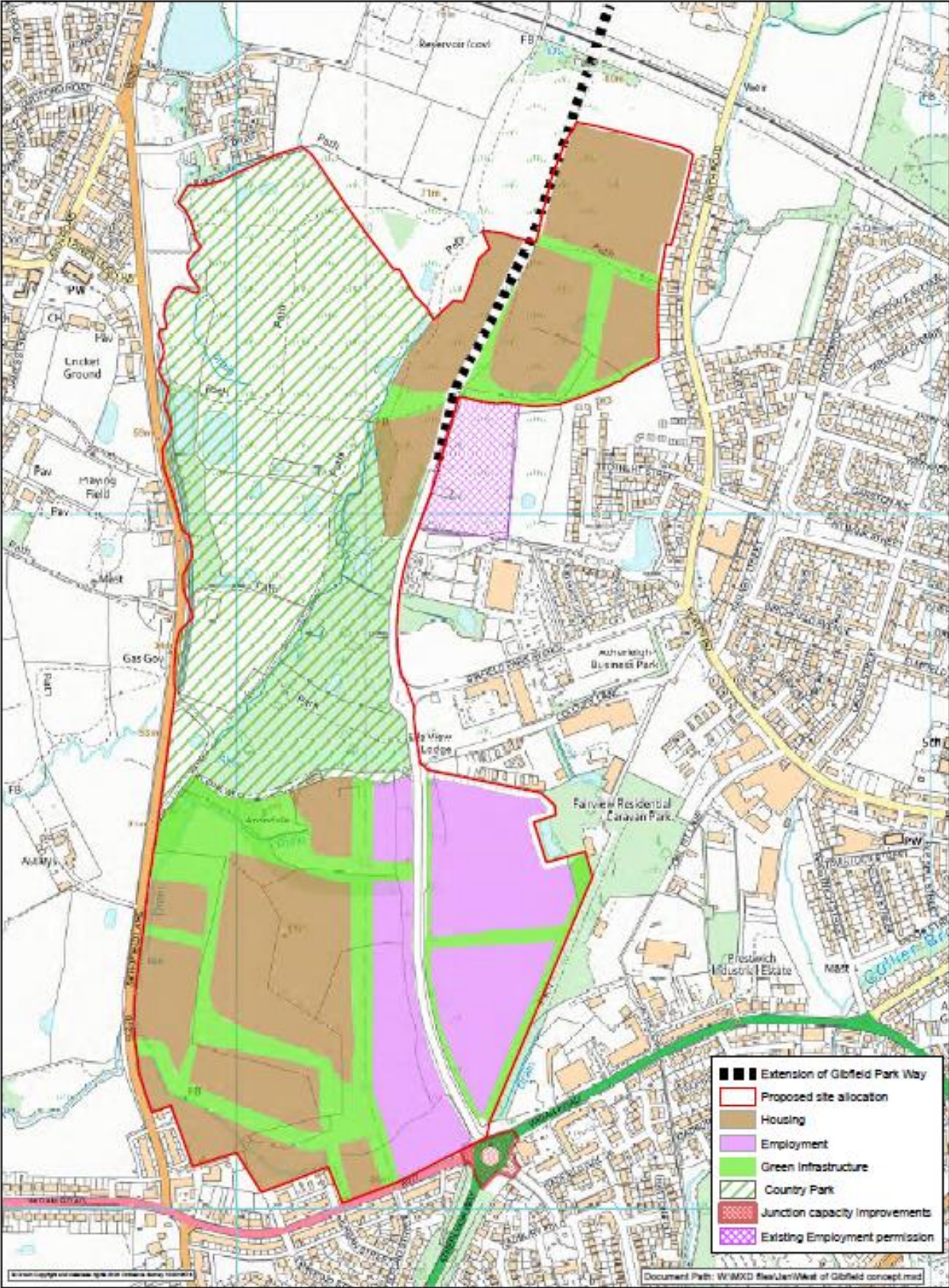
There is also a need for strategic improvements to services along the Atherton railway line between Wigan and Manchester, via Daisy Hill station, specifically to increase capacity at peak times and increase service frequencies and extent. The increased use of the existing rail line could include its conversion to tram-train use, enabling greater frequency of services. This development is required to ensure good access to Daisy Hill and Hag Fold stations for pedestrians and cyclists and contribute appropriately to passenger improvements at those stations.

The green infrastructure requirement will need to be delivered alongside the housing development and should provide effectively for a country park with wildlife habitats and recreational space. Appropriate provision should be made to mitigate the impact of the development on great crested newts that are present in the area. The ongoing maintenance of the country park will need to be agreed with the Council.

In order to make the site attractive to potential occupiers and to safeguard the amenity of existing and future residents, high quality landscaping is required within the site and along sensitive site boundaries, including the provision of appropriate screening from the employment development. Street trees and other strategic landscaping will be required along Gibfield Park Way, which is the key route through the site.

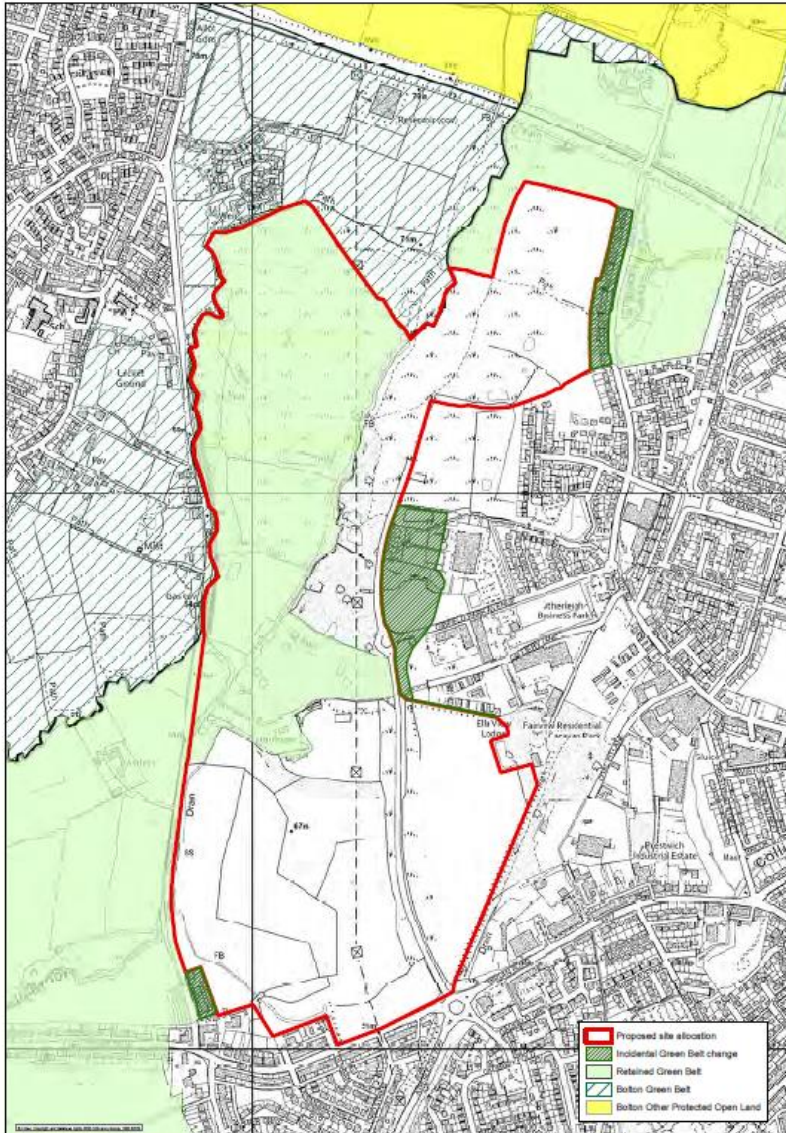
To ensure that a co-ordinated approach is taken to the delivery of this site, a masterplan will need to be prepared and agreed by the Council. The design and layout will need to be informed by site investigations, an archaeological assessment and other constraints and opportunities provided by the site. The development will be also required to provide easements for the significant utilities infrastructure that runs through the site.

Appendix 3: Indicative concept plan



Appendix 4: Previous draft policy, as proposed in GMSF 2020

Policy GM Allocation 45 - West of Gibfield



Development of this site will be required to:

1. Be in accordance with a masterplan that is agreed by the Council, and is effectively informed by detailed site investigations, an archaeological assessment and other constraints;
2. Deliver around 500 new homes;
3. Deliver around 45,500 sqm of B1, B2 and/or B8 employment floorspace in the south east of the allocation, as a logical extension to the existing Gibfield Park Industrial Area;
4. Ensure good quality road access is provided into the site, including through an extension of Gibfield Park Way northwards. A route for the continuation of

Gibfield Park Way further northwards to the rail line should be safeguarded, to connect into potential future road infrastructure to be provided in Bolton;

- 5. Provide highway improvement measures at the junction of the A577 and Gibfield Park Way, and make effective contributions towards highway improvement measures including at Platt Lane and/or Chequerbent roundabout / Junction 5 of the M61 in Bolton, necessary to mitigate the development;**
- 6. Ensure convenient and safe access for pedestrians and cyclists to local bus services and to Daisy Hill and Hag Fold rail stations, and contribute appropriately to improved passenger facilities at those rail stations, as applicable;**
- 7. Provide a high quality, landscaped corridor along Gibfield Park Way, through the planting of street trees and other strategic landscaping;**
- 8. Provide a substantive accessible green infrastructure corridor and country park on land remaining in the Green Belt within the allocation, and ensure ongoing arrangements for its maintenance, agreed with the Council;**
- 9. Make appropriate provision for Great Crested Newts sufficient to mitigate the development;**
- 10. Provide easements for the significant utilities infrastructure running through the site; and**
- 11. Safeguard the amenity of existing and future homes from the employment development, through appropriate screening and landscaping.**

The West of Gibfield area provides an opportunity for a substantial housing and employment development to the west of Atherton. The employment development will extend the existing Gibfield Park Industrial Area and is considered suitable for B1, B2 and/or B8 employment floorspace. The development will include new green infrastructure serving Atherton and Daisy Hill, Westhoughton.

The M61 corridor is a strategic opportunity for Greater Manchester but while Atherton, Hindley and Leigh are close to the M61, existing routes to the motorway are constrained and not conducive to attracting economic development. Improved road infrastructure between Gibfield Park Way and Junction 5 of the M61, via the Chequerbent Junction on the A6, will be transformative for the area. The development is therefore required to extend Gibfield Park Way northwards as far as possible within the allocation and safeguard sufficient land to allow for a potential future extension to the A6 and M61 in Bolton.

Highway improvement measures will be needed to mitigate the impact of the development, notably at the junction of the A577 and Gibfield Park Way and between the site and the A6 and Junction 5 of the M61 in Bolton. The development will be required to make an effective contribution to the provision of these measures.

There is also a need for strategic improvements to services along the Atherton railway line between Wigan and Manchester, via Daisy Hill station, specifically to increase capacity at peak times and increase service frequencies and extent. The increased use of the existing rail line could include its conversion to tram-train use, enabling greater frequency of services. This development is required to ensure good access to Daisy Hill and Hag Fold stations for pedestrians and cyclists and contribute appropriately to passenger improvements at those stations.

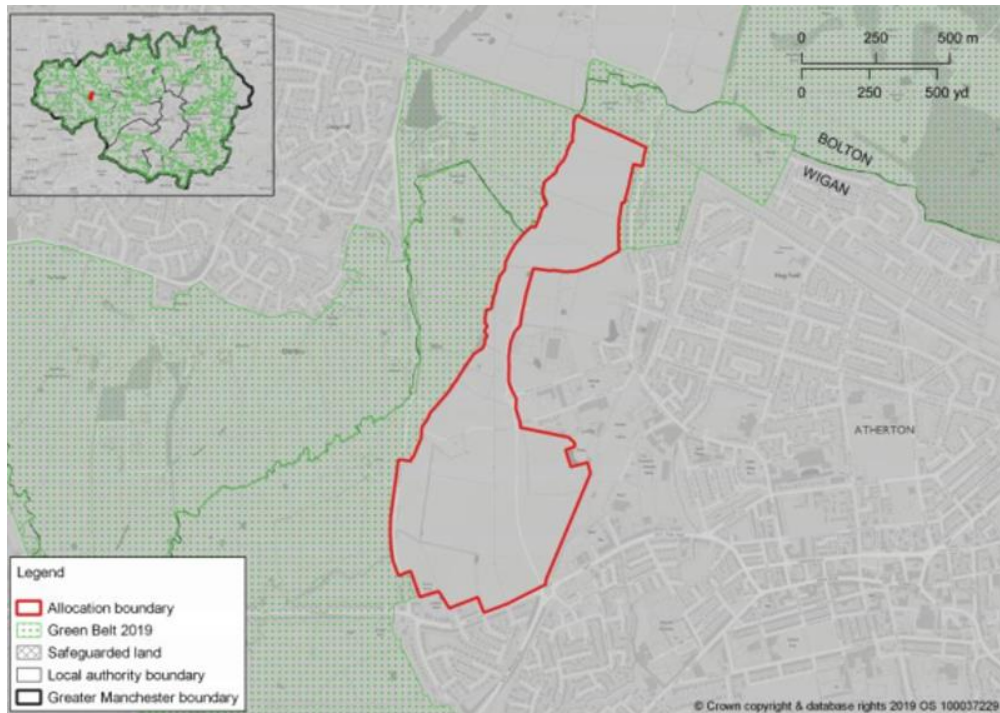
The green infrastructure requirement will need to be delivered alongside the housing development and should provide effectively for a country park with wildlife habitats and recreational space. Appropriate provision should be made to mitigate the impact of the development on great crested newts that are present in the area. The ongoing maintenance of the country park will need to be agreed with the Council.

In order to make the site attractive to potential occupiers and to safeguard the amenity of existing and future residents, high quality landscaping is required within the site and along sensitive site boundaries, including the provision of appropriate screening from the employment development. Street trees and other strategic landscaping will be required along Gibfield Park Way, which is the key route through the site.

To ensure that a co-ordinated approach is taken to the delivery of this site, a masterplan will need to be prepared and agreed by the Council. The design and layout will need to be informed by site investigations, an archaeological assessment and other constraints and opportunities provided by the site. The development will be also required to provide easements for the significant utilities infrastructure that runs through the site.

Appendix 5: Previous draft policy, as proposed in GMSF 2019

Policy GM Allocation 51: West of Gibfield



Development of this site will be required to:

1. Deliver around 700 new homes;
2. Provide a location for around 45,500 sqm of B1, B2 and/or B8 employment floorspace in the south east of the allocation, as a logical extension to the existing Gibfield Park Industrial Area, served primarily from Gibfield Park Way;
3. Extend Gibfield Park Way northwards to the railway and contribute effectively to a new road bridge across the railway in partnership with the Chequerbent development to the north, for access thereafter to the A6 and M61;
4. Provide a new high quality, landscaped gateway into Wigan Borough from the north;
5. Provide a substantive accessible green infrastructure corridor and country park from Wigan Road (Small Brook) in the south across Schofield Lane to the Atherton railway line in the north, east of Daisy Hill, on land remaining in the Green Belt, and ensure ongoing arrangement for maintenance;
6. Make appropriate provision within that green infrastructure for Great Crested Newts sufficient to mitigate the development;
7. Ensure good access for pedestrians and cyclists to Daisy Hill and Hag Fold railway stations and to local bus services;

- 8. Actively support the delivery of strategic improvements to service provision from Daisy Hill station;**
- 9. Provide easements for the significant utilities infrastructure running through the site; and**
- 10. Safeguard the amenity of existing and future homes from the employment development, through appropriate screening and landscaping.**

The West of Gibfield strategic area provides an opportunity for a substantial housing and employment development, including new green infrastructure serving Atherton and Daisy Hill, Westhoughton.

The M61 corridor is a strategic opportunity for Greater Manchester but while Atherton, Hindley and Leigh are close to the M61, existing routes to the motorway are constrained and not conducive to attracting economic development. A new link road from Gibfield Park Way to Junction 5 of the M61, via the Chequerbent junction on the A6, will be transformative for the area. This development is required to extend Gibfield Park Way as far north as the railway and provide for a connection thereafter to a new road within the Chequerbent site northwards to the A6, including the delivery of a new bridge across the railway.

There is also a need for strategic improvements to services along the Atherton railway line between Wigan and Manchester, via Daisy Hill station, specifically to increase capacity at peak times, and increase service frequencies and extent. Improvements of this kind are incorporated within the agreement for the Northern franchise that commenced in 2016. Tram-train service provision may be appropriate. This development is required to ensure good access to Daisy Hill and Hag Fold stations for pedestrians and cyclists and contribute appropriately to service improvements.

The green infrastructure requirement will need to be delivered in advance and alongside the housing development and should provide effectively for a country park with wildlife habitats and recreational space.

Appendix 6: Bibliography

- [2016 GMSF](#)
- [2019 GMSF](#)
- [2020 GMSF](#)
- [National Planning Policy Framework](#)
- [Wigan Landscape Character Assessment 2009](#)

The following documents are found at:

[Supporting documents - Greater Manchester Combined Authority
\(greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk\)](#)

- GMSF Integrated Assessment Report
- GMSF Integrated Assessment Addendum Report
- GMSF Integrated Assessment Report (2021)
- GMSF Landscape Character Assessment (2018)
- GMSF Statement of Consultation (October 2020)
- GMSF Strategic Viability Assessment Stage 1
- GMSF Strategic Viability Assessment Stage 1
- GMSF Strategic Viability Assessment Stage 2 Allocated Sites
- GM Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level 1 Report
- GM Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level 2 Report & Appendices
- Habitats Regulations Assessment of the GMSF
- Site Selection GMSF 2020
- Stage 1 Greater Manchester Green Belt Assessment (2016)
- Stage 1 Greater Manchester Green Belt Assessment Appendices (2016)
- Stage 2 Greater Manchester Green Belt Study – Cumulative Assessment of Proposed 2020 GMSF Allocations and Additions (2020)
- Stage 2 Greater Manchester Green Belt Study – Assessment of Proposed 2019 Allocations (2020)
- Stage 2 Greater Manchester Green Belt Study – Addendum: Assessment of Proposed GMSF Allocations (2020)
- Stage 2 Greater Manchester Green Belt Study – Contribution Assessment of Proposed 2020 GMSF Green Belt Additions (2020)
- Stage 2 Greater Manchester Green Belt Study – Identification of Opportunities to Enhance the Beneficial Use of the Green Belt (2020)
- West of Gibfield Air Quality Assessment (Air Quality Consultants Ltd)
- West of Gibfield Development Framework Masterplan
- West of Gibfield Ecological Assessment (TEP)
- West of Gibfield Locality Assessment
- West of Gibfield Noise Assessment (Cundall)
- West of Gibfield Preliminary Risk Assessment (LKC)
- West of Gibfield Statement of Flood Risk