

SUMMARY PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF MARK SAUNDERS

MA(HONS) MRTPI

LAND SOUTH OF LONGSIGHT ROAD, LANGHO

PINS REF: 6002485

HALLAM LAND MANAGEMENT LIMITED

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- 1.1 I am Mark Saunders, a Chartered Town Planner with 21 years' experience in private practice having previously worked in Local Government. I am a Director of NJL Consulting ("NJL") operating from offices in Manchester and Leeds. I hold a degree and a Masters in Town Planning and am a Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.
- 1.2 I have significant experience in representing clients across the North West in relation to residential development working on behalf of housebuilders, affordable housing providers, developer and landowners/promoters.
- 1.3 I have been instructed by the Appellant to provide planning advice since 2023 in relation to this Appeal Site. I am therefore very familiar with the Appeal Site and surrounding area and have visited on multiple occasions since that time.
- 1.4 I understand my duty to the inquiry and have complied, and will continue to comply, with that duty. In accordance with the guidance of my professional institution, I can confirm that the evidence which I have prepared and provide to this appeal is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and identifies all matters which I regard as being relevant to the opinion that I have expressed.

Introduction

- 1.1 My evidence has been prepared in support of the appeal by Hallam Land Management against the decision of Ribble Valley Borough Council to refuse planning application (Ref. 3/2025/0196):

"Outline planning application for up to 300 residential dwellings, associated access, rail station car park, green infrastructure and sustainable drainage systems (all matters reserved except for access)."

- 1.2 At the time of issuing the refusal the Council attached five reasons for refusal. To address these reasons for refusal, this planning appeal was submitted in December 2025 and included a Statement of Case supported by evidence in relation to housing supply, affordable housing, landscape, ecology and highways (sustainability and accessibility).
- 1.3 Subsequently, the Council conceded that it could no longer demonstrate a 5 year supply of housing land, in recognition of an appeal decision issued for a proposals in Chatburn in January 2026. It has been our consistent case since the time of originally

submitting the outline planning application that the Council could not demonstrate such a supply.

- 1.4 The Inspector's position on the matter is unequivocal and leads the Council to a severe deficit of housing land which has repercussions for policies of the adopted development plan as well as the weight attached to the benefit of housing delivery against this backdrop.
- 1.5 The Council have confirmed in their Statement of Case that they are no longer seeking to defend RfR1 owing to the confirmed lack of a 5 year housing land supply. Accordingly no further evidence is submitted to this inquiry on housing supply matters and a Statement of Common Ground has been signed between the parties.
- 1.6 My proof of evidence is submitted along with that of Mr Blair (Sustainability and Accessibility), Mr Goodman (Ecology), Mr Cook (Landscape) as well as that of Mr Tracey (Affordable Housing). The latter to contextualise the pressing need for affordable housing relying primarily on evidence submitted with the appeal.

Housing Supply

- 1.7 Whilst it is agreed between the parties that the Council cannot demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, there is a difference between the parties of the actual level of supply owing to some methodological differences in calculating future supply from known sites or assumed rates of delivery. Regardless on which evidence on the matter of 5YHLS is accepted, there is evidently a significant shortfall in the Borough ranging between **3.04 years to 3.45 years** supply – equivalent to a shortfall of some **503 to 638 dwellings**.
- 1.8 The materiality of the shortfall is subject of evidence by both parties, but fundamentally as a result of the shortfall, those policies which seek to set development boundaries or a perpetuating restrictive approach to housing delivery are rendered out of date.

Compliance with the Development Plan

- 1.9 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 provides that determination must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 1.10 NPPF paragraphs 11 and 12 translates this legislative requirement into national policy in reinforcing that the development plan is the starting point for decision making and

it is necessary to consider if a planning application conflicts with an up to date development plan, before considering whether material considerations are capable of supporting a departure.

- 1.11 The first issue that the Council's lack of housing supply presents is the status of the development plan and the most important policies in relation to the appeal proposals. It is common ground that Key Statement H1 and Policies DMG2 and DMH3 are out of date.
- 1.12 I however do not believe Key Statement DS1 is necessarily out of date. It continues to provide the most appropriate basis to guide development spatially within the Borough to promote the most sustainable patterns of development. I have shown that the policy has been successful across the plan period and the proposals do not undermine its intentions.

A Sustainable Development in an Accessible Location

- 1.13 Whilst Key Statement DS1 was not cited in respect of RfR2, it is considered with sustainable development and patterns of growth. It is common ground that the policy looks to 'focus' development towards Tier 1 settlements such as Langho. It is also common ground that Langho is one of the more sustainable settlements within the development plan strategy.
- 1.14 Along with the evidence of Mr Blair, my evidence we detail at great length how this statement is true. It is a statement accepted by the Highways Authority and the Council's own evidence base over a prolonged period. The appeal site is well located to tap into the settlement's credentials and accessibility to local services and facilities as well as the public transport network. Indeed this Council as I highlight consider other sites with the same or less credentials to be sustainable and so to argue the contrary is both contradictory and ignoring the evidence.
- 1.15 My case is that the appeal site and the proposed development is both sustainable and accessible, representing one of the most sustainable locations in the Borough to locate housing in light of an accepted pressing need to deliver more housing. The appellant's view on Langho's sustainability is shared by LCC Highways as statutory consultee and the Council's own evidence base informing its plan preparation both existing and proposed. Officers do not agree even in light of their own evidence base.

- 1.16 Officers also do not agree that the site itself is well located to benefit from access to local services and facilities as well as public transport links. I believe this to be an inconsistent view when considering other proposals both in other settlements of the Borough as well as adjacent to the appeal site more pertinently.
- 1.17 Furthermore, owing to the location of the appeal proposals and proposed development benefits and off site highways works, I believe that positive weight in favour of the proposals can be drawn from Policy DMG3.

RfR 3 - Landscape

- 1.18 With regards the allegation proposals will lead to unacceptable landscape harm (RfR 3), the evidence of Mr Cook provides a full assessment of the appeal proposals in relation to potential harms to landscape elements, character as well as views and amenity. The appeal site is not covered by any statutory designations for character or quality comprising arable land with no particular landscape value and has semi urban characteristics noting its location and surroundings.
- 1.19 Whilst the appeal proposals will inevitably give rise to a degree of harm, this is isolated in terms of how the site is experienced in a highly localised way. Other harms or impacts are largely negligible owing to its self contained nature and lack of public viewpoints.
- 1.20 I therefore consider that the proposals do represent a sympathetic form of development in relation to its context and accords therefore with relevant policies. Further, I do not consider there are material considerations as contained within the NPPF which affect my conclusions.

RfR 4&5 – Ecology and Biodiversity

- 1.21 RfR4 and 5 relate to biodiversity and arboricultural matters. In relation to RfR4 with the submission of additional surveys it is now agreed that there is no objection to the appeal proposals with regards impact to protected and notable species.
- 1.22 However, the Council now allege there will be unacceptable harm to ancient woodland and a veteran tree. The appeal proposals will no lead to any incursion within the root protection areas, with retention of adequate buffers and long term management which will address its current poor condition.
- 1.23 To develop the site fully there will need to be infrastructure provided in the location of the existing area of lowland meadow. Translocation of the lowland meadow within

the site avoids damage and fragmentation through the implementation of the site infrastructure and is an acceptable form of mitigation for a habitat that is likely to be lost through lack of appropriate management leading to an enhancement. This accords with Key Statement EN4 and Policy DME3 which also allow for mitigation which is also proposed by the appellant.

- 1.24 Now the Council also allege the proposals undermine the recently published LNRS. As Mr Goodman evidences, the proposals retains and manages existing ecological features and delivers enhancements. Mr Goodman firmly believes the proposals should be seen as supporting the objectives of the LNRS.
- 1.25 In relation to RfR5, the appellant has expended significant efforts and resources to setting out a robust and coherent biodiversity net gain strategy. The development proposals require the provision of mitigation within the site and the provision of offsite compensation at a strategic level habitat bank identified in the LNRS. Through these onsite and offsite provisions, the updated metric submitted to this appeal confirms a net gain in habitat units equivalent to 12.15%. In terms of hedgerows, the scheme provides a net gain of 24.37% and an uplift of 13.3% in watercourse units. The proposals accord with both the requirements of the NPPF, local planning policy, and Part 6 of the Environment Act.
- 1.26 In conclusion, I disagree that there are conflicts with policies cited in relation to RfR2-5 and my evidence highlights how policies also pull in favour of the appeal proposals. In addition, as is common ground, the appeal proposals accord with all other policies within the development plan.
- 1.27 Overall, I therefore believe that the proposals by virtue of their location, scale and composition accord with the development plan as a whole. Accordingly under terms of Key Statement DS2 planning permission should be granted without delay as there are no material considerations which indicate otherwise.

The Planning Balance

- 1.28 Should my evidence that the proposals accord with the development plan as a whole not be accepted as a result of Key Statement DS1 being considered out of date, then under the terms of Key Statement DS2 a balancing exercise against the tilted balance whereby it is required to consider whether there are any adverse impacts of granting permission which would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the development. This is the same balancing exercise required to address NPPF paragraph 11d) if deemed necessary.

Benefits

- 1.29 As set out in Section 10 of my proof of evidence, it is my case that the proposed development constitutes sustainable development and provides weighty benefits which represent substantial material considerations in the determination of this appeal. These key benefits are primarily linked around the Council's failure of the housing land supply in numerical terms to meet identified needs, with the absence of a meaningful strategy to address this acute issue.
- 1.30 Importantly, this will lead to the failure to adequately meet not only general market housing requirements, but the needs arising for other demographics including affordable housing and those of older persons. Both are identified as a priority for delivery by this Council and on the Council's own evidence the need for both is ever increasing. The appeal proposals will provide a significant contribution towards these needs as part of the creation of a mixed tenure community itself a benefit as advocated by NPPF. The Councils position conversely is to accept that these demonstrable needs will not be met within the Borough and will only worsen.
- 1.31 Additionally, the proposals will provide extensive on site open space provision capable of wider community use as well as promoting sustainable travel both in terms of commitments to the surface level car park to service Langho train station but also the package of off site measures agreed. Furthermore, ecological enhancements and management regimes will be brought into place to arrest decline of existing habitats and also lead to above mandatory level BNG within the Borough.

Adverse Impacts

- 1.32 The Appellant acknowledges conflict with development plan policy insofar as the site is not allocated for housing development and is located outside of the settlement boundary for Langho. The proposal conflicts with Policy DMG2 and DMH3 of the RVCS, insofar as the Appeal Site is located beyond the settlement boundary of Langho and in the open countryside. For reasons I have explained, this conflict relates to out-of-date policies and therefore should only be attributed **limited weight** in the planning balance (see *Basingstoke v Secretary of State* [2024] EWHC 1916 (Admin))¹.
- 1.33 The Appeal proposal represents sustainable development which is a view shared within the Council's own evidence base and the view of the local Highways Authority. Langho is a sustainable settlement and the Appeal Site located so as to adequately

¹ CD7.8 - *Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council v Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities & Anor* [2024] EWHC 1916 (Admin)

access services and facilities in the village and local area. It should be a priority location for future growth as part of an updated development strategy. It is not the Appellant's case that there is harm to the spatial strategy for growth as contained within Key Statement DS1, however if that were not accepted then the weight to that conflict is diminishing in recognition the closer we are to the end of the RVCS plan period.

- 1.34 With regard to other adverse impacts of the proposals, it is my view that these are more limited in comparison to the benefits. It is acknowledged that there will be some landscape harm as the proposals involve built development on a greenfield site, however the site is not designated and is not considered to fall within a valued landscape and as such, it should receive the lowest level of protection. Mr Cook's evidence² demonstrates that the site has the ability to accommodate development of the scale and nature proposed without a significant adverse landscape character or visual impact. I therefore attach **moderate weight** to the landscape harm.
- 1.35 No other technical harm is apparent of a magnitude that would constitute an 'adverse impact' which cannot be adequately mitigated as has been outlined in the basis of the Appellant's case to the cited RfR's. Mr Goodman's evidence³ demonstrates that the site has the ability to accommodate the proposed development without a significant adverse impact to ecology and biodiversity. Contrary to the Council's case, the appeal proposal will facilitate wider betterment within the Borough in terms of biodiversity net gains to prior habitat such as lowland meadow.
- 1.36 I therefore attach **very limited weight** to the ecological harm.
- 1.37 My planning balance is summarised below:

Table 1. Benefits and attributed weight

Benefits	Positive Weight	Harms arising from any policy conflicts	Negative Weight
Market Housing - up to 210 dwellings	Substantial	Conflict with Policies DMH3 and DMG2 on open countryside	Limited

² CD9.2 – Proof of Evidence on Landscape

³ CD9.4 – Proof of Evidence on Ecology

Affordable Housing - up to 90 affordable dwellings on site	Substantial	Landscape and Visual	Moderate
Older Persons Housing - Over 55s Retirement) – up to 45 market/affordable dwellings on site	Substantial	Ecological harm - translocation of lowland meadow	Very limited
Surface Level car Park	Significant		
Public Open Space	Significant		
Biodiversity Net Gain and Ecological Management	Moderate		
Off-site Highways Improvements	Moderate		
Economic Benefits	Moderate		

Conclusion

- 1.1 In conclusion I have followed the process required by NPPF paragraph 12 that the development plan is the starting point for decision making. It is my primary case that the development accords with the development plan as a whole and so planning permission should be granted.
- 1.2 In the event the Inspector concludes that the proposals do conflict with the development plan as a whole, it is necessary to carry out a balancing exercise in line with Key Statement DS2 which reflects the 'tilted balance' of NPPF paragraph 11d.
- 1.3 In the context of the engagement of the tilted balance I have emphatically concluded that there are no adverse impacts which would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the substantial benefits of the appeal proposals.
- 1.4 Taken as a whole, the proposed development clearly constitutes 'sustainable development' and delivers on all three strands of economic, social and environmental objectives. Subject to appropriate conditions and obligations, I respectfully invite that the Appeal is allowed and planning permission be granted.