

APPLICATION NO:	15/00263/FUL
LOCATION:	Land to the East of Castlefields Avenue East, Runcorn
PROPOSAL:	Proposed development of 79 no. dwellings together with associated highway and landscaping infrastructure.
WARD:	Halton Castle
PARISH:	N/A
CASE OFFICER:	Glen Henry
AGENT(S) / APPLICANT(S):	Keepmoat Homes Ltd
DEVELOPMENT PLAN ALLOCATION:	
Halton Unitary Development Plan (2005)	RG6 Action Area 6 Castlefields and Norton Priory
DEPARTURE REPRESENTATIONS:	Yes 2
RECOMMENDATION:	Approve subject to Conditions.
SITE MAP	

1. APPLICATION SITE

1.1 The Site and Surroundings

Site of approximately 2.89Ha located within the Lakeside Development area within the Castlefields SPD. The site is essentially triangular in shape fronting Castlefields Avenue East with Town Park Lake to the north, The Barge Phase 1 to the north east and Phoenix Park to the west.

1.2 Planning History

Outline Planning Permission was previously approved (07/00122/OUT) for a much wider development of up to 355 dwellings incorporating a significant majority of the site. That planning permission has now lapsed. A subsequent planning permission (ref 12/00238/FUL) was approved for residential development consisting of 87 no. dwellings, roads and ancillary development on land at the adjoining site of the former Barge Public House which is nearing completion.

1.3 Background

This scheme forms part of the wider regeneration proposals for Castlefields which seeks to replace existing deck access and outdated dwellings with new build and refurbished dwellings and to widen the tenure mix within the area. The regeneration strategy for the Castlefields area sets out to deliver a broader based community in the area. This requires the radical restructuring of housing provision, including the demolition of a significant number of properties, predominantly those comprising unpopular deck access blocks. Redevelopment has delivered more popular styles of modern social housing and together with the introduction of private sector housing stock as part of an overall masterplan. Given the high density of the original deck access blocks the scope to provide adequate redevelopment within the existing built form was limited. In order to secure a balance of new housing, areas of undeveloped land were identified through the masterplan to accommodate new development. This principle was translated into the Supplementary Planning Document for the Castlefields and Norton Priory Action Area adopted by the Council in 2005.

This site is identified as forming part of the 'Lakeside' neighbourhood extension within the Masterplan. The purpose of Lakeside was to introduce private sector led open market housing to diversify the tenure mix (away from predominantly social rented) to create a mixed and balanced sustainable community within the neighbourhood. This proposal is as a continuation, and second phase, to the successful development on the former Barge Public House site, which is nearing completion.

2. THE APPLICATION

2.1 Proposal Description

The scheme proposes residential development consisting of 79 dwellings (a mix of 2 and 3 bed dwellings at 2 and 2.5 storeys), roads, and ancillary development arranged in a detached, semi-detached and mews format.

2.2 Documentation

The planning application is supported by a Design and Access Statement, Tree Survey, Ecology Survey, Flood Risk Assessment, Transport Assessment, Travel Plan and Site/ Ground Investigation Report.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012 to set out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied.

Paragraph 196 states that the planning system is plan led. Applications for planning permission should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, as per the requirements of legislation, but that the NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions. Paragraph 197 states that in assessing and determining development proposals, local planning authorities should apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Paragraph 14 states that this presumption in favour of sustainable development means that development proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Where a development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out of date, planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the NPPF; or specific policies within the NPPF indicate that development should be restricted.

3.2 Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP) (2005)

The site lies entirely within Action Area 6 Castlefields and Norton Priory and is also designated as greenspace, together with an Area of Special Landscape Value designation in the Halton Unitary Development Plan. The application has been advertised as a departure from the development plan.

The site is identified as a Proposed Housing Site (ref 8076/14) in the adopted Supplementary Planning Document for Castlefields and Norton Priory Action Area. Land use allocations for such sites cannot be made through Supplementary Planning Documents and the Unitary Development Plan is the development plan. Such documents and the previous grant of outline planning permission for residential development on part of the site are however a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

The following National and Council Unitary Development Plan policies and policy documents are of particular relevance: -

- RG6 Action Area 6 Castlefields and Norton Priory
- BE1 General Requirements for Development
- BE2 Quality of Design
- GE10 Protection of Linkages in Greenspace Systems
- GE6 Protection of Designated Greenspace
- GE23 Protection of Areas of Special Landscape Value

H3 Provision of Recreational Greenspace
TP6 Cycling Provision as part of New Development
TP7 Pedestrian Provision as Part of New Development
TP12 Car Parking
PR14 Contaminated Land
TP17 Safe Travel for All
PR16 Development and Flood Risk

3.3 Halton Core Strategy (2012)

CS2 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
CS12 Housing Mix
CS13 Affordable Housing is of particular relevance
CS18 High Quality Design
CS19 Sustainable Development and Climate Change
CS21 Green Infrastructure
CS23 Managing Pollution and Risk
CS24 Waste

3.4 Relevant SPDs

Castlefields and Norton Priory Action Area; New Residential Development SPD; Designing for Community Safety SPD; Draft Open Space Provision SPD are of particular relevance

4. **CONSULTATIONS**

- 4.1 HBC Highways– No objection in principle
- 4.2 HBC Open Spaces – No objection in principle
- 4.3 HBC Contaminated Land – No objection in principle
- 4.4 United Utilities - No objection in principle
- 4.5 Environment Agency – No Objection in principle
- 4.6 HBC Major Projects - No objection in principle

5. **REPRESENTATIONS**

5.1 Two letters of representation have been received raising the following issues:

- Stating that this appears to be another attack on the park area shared between Windmill Hill and Castlefields and should be resisted
- Development proposals should be considered very carefully. Castlefields has already endured major developments with a vast removal of high rise flats identified in the Councils unitary development plan. I would question if building on the above site is proposed simply as a “discounted”

option to trying to develop the real problem areas identified as “not commercially viable”. It is important to protect the visual appeal of Castlefields and removing areas of greenery will not have a positive impact on environmental concerns of its residents. The Landscape map within the unitary development plan which suggests this area is either an Area of Special Landscape Value or has Important Landscape Features. The new houses developed within Castlefields are entirely different in look and material and do not integrate well. There is a clear “New/Old” sectioning and this is not a look that should continue down the remainder of Castlefields Avenue East. Loss of view from which is desirable and a major factor when we chose to purchase our property, loss of property value and loss of an area in which children use the fields to play in and people are able to cycle and walk. Impact on trees and wildlife. Would an equal number of trees be replaced in another locale to compensate their destruction? Where would they be sited? Increase of litter seen in the Bridgewater Canal, further loss of view along the canal from previous developments.

5. ASSESSMENT

5.1 Principle, Loss of Greenspace and Impact on Area of Special Landscape Value

The site lies within Action Area 6 Castlefields and Norton Priory in the Halton Unitary Development Plan. Within that wider designation the site is designated as Green Space and as within Area of Special Landscape Value. A number of Proposed Greenways bound the site.

The Castlefields and Norton Priory Supplementary Planning Document (SPD - adopted September 2005) provides a planning framework for Action Area RG6. The SPD identifies the site as suitable for housing development (site ref 8076/14). The overall policy aim is to facilitate a prosperous and sustainable community within the residential neighbourhood of Castlefields. Redevelopment of green space and areas of undeveloped land to provide housing in lieu of demolished outdated dwellings and re-balancing the tenure mix forms an integral part of the Castlefields regeneration strategy. Reflecting the Masterplan desire for encouraging open market housing, SPD para 8.2.2 identifies the release of the Lakeside sites for residential development as an opportunity for encouraging diversification of tenure and different forms of home ownership.

Development on Greenspace

SPD para 8.2.5 which states “in order to provide an element of compensation for loss of open space... the site of the former Norton Priory School is proposed to be used for formal open space.” This work has been implemented and continues to be improved on an ongoing basis. Both the Castlefields Masterplan and SPD justify the need to release Lakeside for open market ‘step up’ housing. It is also important to recognise that the development of Lakeside has been off-set and compensated by enabling works highlighted here:

1. Creation of Phoenix Park

The site chosen for Phoenix Park covers 8 hectares and incorporates the remediation and 'greening' of a 5 hectare brownfield site previously occupied by a redundant secondary school and leisure centre. The site was derelict waste ground that attracted anti-social behaviour and was a general nuisance and eyesore. The selected location has the added benefit of serving and 'connecting' the two neighbourhoods of Castlefields and Windmill Hill. This is set out in Masterplan Projects HD18 & I11. Since opening in 2006, the Park has been successful and contributed to revitalising the local area, reducing incidences of antisocial behaviour, encouraging physical activity and improving the appearance of the general environment. The park is now an established and valued local amenity and forms parts of the wider Town Park green lung.

2. Town Park Lake Enhancement

In advance of the development of Lakeside, since 2008, the Council has been undertaking a series of enhancement works to Town Park Lake to improve this environmental asset for the benefit of all users and integrate it into Phoenix Park. These measures include:

- Using mud track desire lines to create a new formal footpath that circumnavigates the Lake edge;
- Lake edge bank stabilisation works;
- Wetland aquatic planting and lake edge habitat restoration work;
- New fishing pegs (in partnership with Warrington Anglers);
- Creating a Lake Conservation Area comprising a no fishing zone, dipping platform, interpretation board and outdoor classroom.

These works have helped transform the lake from a magnet for anti-social behaviour into a safer, accessible and well-used amenity. It has also helped develop a strong partnership with Warrington Anglers who through their local bailiff team act as custodians for the Lake.

Whilst this scheme will result in temporary closure of access to a section of the Lake edge, during the construction period, it will deliver a reinstated and widened Lake edge footpath. The Lake edge green corridor will remain in public ownership and provide continued access to this amenity.

3. Town Brook Habitat Corridor

As part of this application, the developer will undertake a package of enhancements to the existing landscape and watercourse of Town Park Brook which runs along the South-eastern boundary of the development site and feeds into the Lake. This area is currently overgrown and suffers from fly tipping. These works are aimed at improving the aesthetic and habitat value of this corridor and includes improving the pedestrian bridge and revealing a sandstone haha wall feature. This area will be retained as a public asset. The

physical works will be safeguarded by an establishment period and longer term management plan to guide on-going maintenance by the Council.

The site also falls within the wider area of Norton wooded parkland defined as an Area of Special Landscape Value in the Halton Unitary Development Plan. The Halton Landscape Character Appraisal (2008) provides an assessment of the landscape and visual character of the Borough and will provide part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework (LDF). It is also intended to be used by the planning authority to aid development control decisions on planning applications and to guide landscape enhancement where funding and opportunities allow. Norton wooded parkland is defined as a central band of land set between high points at Halton Village/ Halton Castle and Windmill Hill. With a high proportion of woodland it forms a continuous network of formal and informal open space and provides a buffer between areas of housing.

The development of this site at Lakeside must however be viewed in the wider context of the Castlefields Regeneration. The development site is located on the edge of the designated Area of Special Landscape Value adjoining existing schemes of residential development. Phoenix Park, which covers 8 hectares, and incorporates a remediated and 'greened' 5 hectare brownfield site (previously occupied by a redundant secondary school and leisure centre) is located much more prominently within the central open part of the designated area. The park is now an established and valued local amenity and forms parts of the wider Town Park green lung. By greening the redundant brownfield site, and creating a new high quality and useable green space it is considered that the development of green field land to deliver the 'Lakeside' residential scheme can be argued to have been appropriately mitigated by such an extensive programme of compensation and overall improvement to the designated area.

Planning permission has previously been approved in outline for residential development on the site and the site has been identified for development through the adopted Supplementary Planning Document. The area designated as green space is informal rough grassland only with groups of trees and whilst it does provide some amenity value it is considered, on balance, that the loss of the greenspace would not be significantly harmful to the wider area, and must also be considered in the context of the wider open space strategy for the area, which has included substantial investment in the nearby Phoenix Park. It is also considered that any harm resulting from its loss would be far outweighed by the contribution of the scheme to the wider area regeneration strategy.

Any application for residential development at such a site would normally require developer contributions to compensate for the loss of open space, provision of off-site open space in accordance with adopted UDP Policy and the SPD. Given the wider open space strategy and the role of the scheme in the wider regeneration of the area it is considered that an exception to policy can be justified in this case. Such an approach was also agreed at the grant of outline planning permission which included part of the site. The developer's

contribution to the localised improvements to the lakeside edge and footpath and to the Town Brook Corridor must also be taken into account.

5.2 Design Character and Amenity

The scheme proposes residential development consisting of 79 no. dwellings, roads plus ancillary development, arranged as a mix of 2 and 3 bed dwellings at 2 and 2.5 storeys and designed as detached, semi-detached and mews format. The houses will be constructed predominantly of a mix of traditional brick with contrasting render detail with traditional ridged tiled roofs taking reference from the adjoining Barge site and comparable with similar properties in earlier schemes across the Castlefields regeneration area.

The scheme has been amended from that as originally submitted in accordance with officer recommendations. These amendments relate predominantly to detailing within the scheme to agree satisfactory levels, boundary and landscape details having particular regard to the Castlefields Avenue East and Lakeside Frontages. Discussion is also ongoing with respect to detailed drainage design. Whilst detailed submission and consultation are ongoing the scheme as amended is considered to provide an opportunity to provide a quality development suited to the character of the site and in context with earlier residential developments in the area and the wider regeneration initiative.

5.3 Highways, Parking and Servicing

The Council's Highways Engineer has confirmed that no significant highway objections are raised in principle. The scheme as originally submitted for pre-application discussion raised a number of potential issues relating to highway circulation, parking and access for fire and refuse collection. The scheme as submitted is considered to have been amended to provide satisfactory resolution of these issues to ensure that adequate provision can be made for highway circulation, servicing and parking. It is considered necessary to restrict permitted development rights for frontage boundary treatments to allow control to be retained over highway safety matters and to maintain the character of the street scene.

5.4 Contamination

The Council's Contaminated Land Officers have confirmed that, due to the sensitivity of the proposed use, detailed ground investigation should be provided. No objection is raised in principle however and it is considered that this can be adequately secured by condition.

5.5 Conformity with the Castlefields Tree Strategy

In response to residents' concerns about the perceived impact of the Regeneration Programme on the tree population within the neighbourhood, the Council developed a Tree Strategy. Adopted in January 2008, the Castlefields Tree Strategy recognises the importance of trees as part of the

environmental capital of Castlefields and provides a strategy for maintaining a sustainable tree population within the neighbourhood.

In respect of new development, The Strategy seeks to ensure that development schemes make provision for retaining the best of existing trees and provide for new tree planting to compensate for any that have to be felled. Supporting text clarifies that through informed decision making, established trees must be given due regard so that the most important of them are retained within new development sites as far as is practicable. This will be informed by detailed tree surveys and arboricultural implication studies. In respect of replacement tree planting it states that “in cases where tree felling is unavoidable, suitable replacement planting should take place at a minimum rate of two for one”.

Both the established Masterplan and SPD acknowledge that the regeneration of the area can only be realised with the release of some open space for development, which by their nature have a high concentration of trees. As part of the creation of Phoenix Park, 550 new trees were planted within the Park boundary in 2005 and are now maturing. A further planting programme was undertaken in 2014 with an additional 105 trees planted to enhance the existing woodland structure within the Park. This process of new tree planting will continue as the new Park continues to mature and evolve.

The scheme, as amended, identifies approximately 373 trees to be lost from the site. Many of these are however considered to be trees identified within the lower category C groups, are self-seeded or young specimens and/ or within wider groups of trees. Potential for tree retention through the scheme is somewhat limited due to the need to alter site levels. It is not feasible to provide the full tree replacement within the site boundary due to the limited site area, extent of housing and hard surfacing and the position of existing sewers. Trees have been proposed for planting in locations which are suitable for the layout. The detailed planting plans propose 91 new trees, within gardens and the public open space, and a further 750m of new hedgerow. Following consultation with the LPA, the applicant has agreed that further mitigation planting can be undertaken elsewhere within Phoenix Park to deliver the tree planting balance. It is envisaged that this will be in the form of planting up to 325 native feathered trees in locations to be agreed with the Council’s Landscape Officer. The managed retention of existing vegetation, particularly along the Town Brook Habitat Corridor will provide a soft edge to the development, filter views from the park and maintain important wildlife habitat.

Whilst the trees to be lost are considered to have amenity value and the loss of trees is regrettable, it is not considered possible to retain the trees without significantly reducing the numbers of dwellings and it is considered that the wider benefits of the scheme outweigh any harm resulting from the loss especially in the context of the wider regeneration proposals for the Castlefields area.

The Council's Major Projects Officer has confirmed that the provision within the strategy to secure a 2 for 1 replacement for any trees lost as a result of the proposals when considered in the wider context of the Castlefield tree planting programme. It is considered that protection of trees to be retained and replacement planting can be adequately secured by condition.

5.6 Affordable Housing

Policy CS13: Affordable Housing of the emerging Core Strategy seeks to secure 25% of total residential units for affordable housing provision. The scheme proposes 100 per cent open market housing and therefore fails to comply with this policy requirement. It must be noted that an aspiration of the Castlefields regeneration strategy is to provide a broader mix of housing tenure. Reflecting the Masterplan desire for encouraging open market housing, SPD para 8.2.2 identifies the release of the Lakeside sites for residential development as an opportunity for encouraging diversification of tenure and different forms of home ownership. The proposals are considered to make a valuable contribution to this aim and it is therefore considered that an exception to the development plan can be justified in this case.

5.7 Flooding

As the site area is over 1 hectare the application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment. The site itself is considered to be at low risk of flooding but efforts are required to ensure that the proposed development does not impact unduly on drainage and flooding elsewhere. Discussions are ongoing as to the detailed drainage proposals for the scheme which are proposed to include a SUDS scheme incorporating drainage from the phase 1 Barge site and ultimately discharging to Town Lake via a reed bed system. It is however considered that these details can be satisfactorily resolved through ongoing discussion and submission and any outstanding matters resolved through appropriately worded planning condition. The Environment Agency, United Utilities and the Councils Drainage Engineer have confirmed that they raise no objections.

5.8 Ecology

The application is supported by an ecological assessment. This advises that the loss of amenity grassland is not considered to be significant and that the ecological features at the site do not necessarily preclude development of the site for residential use. It does however include detailed advice with respect to pre-commencement site surveys and on methods and timing of site clearance to minimise impacts on birds and water vole. The report also identifies potential for biodiversity and habitat creation opportunities. It is considered that these matters can adequately be secured through planning conditions.

6.7 Waste Prevention/Management

Policies WM8 and WM9 of the Joint Merseyside and Halton Waste Local Plan are applicable to this application. In terms of waste prevention, a construction

management plan will deal with issues of this nature and based on the development cost, the developer would be required to produce a Site Waste Management Plan. In terms of waste management, there is sufficient space for the storage of waste including separated recyclable materials for each property as well as access to enable collection.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The scheme will play an important role in the on-going redevelopment and regeneration of the Castlefields locality. Whilst the scheme as originally submitted raised a number of significant issues with respect to drainage detail, levels, landscaping and frontage treatments to Castlefields Avenue East and Town Lake, these are considered to have been substantially resolved. Discussions are ongoing and final responses on outstanding consultation are awaited but it is considered that these outstanding issues can be resolved and Members will be updated accordingly at Committee. The scheme is considered to offer a high quality of development suited to the character of the site and the wider area and it is considered that the requirements and aspirations of UDP policy, the Castlefields Masterplan, and the SPD can be met.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Approve subject to conditions.

8. CONDITIONS

1. Standard 3 year permission (BE1)
2. Condition specifying approved/ amended plans (BE1)
3. Requiring submission and agreement of a Construction Management Plan including vehicle access routes and construction car parking; (BE1)
4. Materials condition, requiring the submission and approval of the materials to be used (BE2)
5. Landscaping condition, requiring the submission of both hard and soft landscaping to include replacement tree planting. (BE2)
6. Boundary treatments including retaining walls to be submitted and approved in writing. (BE2)
7. Drainage detail requiring details to be submitted and approved including SUDS, ponds details and to be carried out as approved (BE1)
8. Requiring development be carried out in accordance with advice and recommendations of the submitted ecology report (GE21)
9. Wheel cleansing facilities to be submitted and approved in writing. (BE1)
10. Construction and delivery hours to be adhered to throughout the course of the development. (BE1)
11. Vehicle access, parking, servicing etc to be constructed prior to occupation of properties/ commencement of use. (BE1)
12. Submission and agreement of finished floor and site levels. (BE1)
13. Site investigation, including mitigation to be submitted and approved in writing. (PR14)
14. Conditions relating to tree protection during construction (BE1)

15. Restricting Permitted Development Rights for extensions and outbuildings (BE2).
16. Submission and agreement of biodiversity enhancement features including native wildlife friendly planting, bird/ bat nest boxes and insect house (BE1 and GE21)
17. Grampian style condition relating to off-site highway works (TP7)
18. Grampian style condition relating to off-site replacement tree planting (BE1)
19. Requiring development be carried out in accordance the submitted FRA (PR16)
20. Condition securing a scheme of improvements to the Town Brook Habitat Corridor in accordance with details to be submitted to and agreed in writing (GE6)
21. Condition securing a scheme of protective fencing to protect Town Park Lake and Town Brook Habitat Corridor in accordance with details to be submitted to and agreed in writing (GE21)

9. SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT

As required by:

- Paragraph 186 – 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework;
- The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) (Amendment No.2) Order 2012; and
- The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2012.

This statement confirms that the local planning authority has worked proactively with the applicant to secure developments that improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of Halton.