

13th November 2018

Our Ref: C03689

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Dear Mr Sutherland,

**Re: Response to the Belfast City Council Draft Plan Strategy (DPS)
Former Laburnum Playing Fields, Prince Regent Road, Belfast**

This letter is submitted on behalf of our client, Adam Armstrong, and relates to the publication of the Draft Plan Strategy (DPS), the second stage in Belfast City Council's Local Development Plan process. It highlights how some draft policies are not sound and proposes how such policies could be amended to become sound.

Development Plan Practice Note 6 sets out 3 main tests of soundness for Local Development Plans, with each test having a number of criteria, as follows:

Procedural Tests

- P1 *Has the DPD been prepared in accordance with the council's timetable and the Statement of Community Involvement?*
- P2 *Has the council prepared its Preferred Options Paper and taken into account any representations made?*
- P3 *Has the DPD been subject to sustainability appraisal including Strategic Environmental Assessment?*
- P4 *Did the council comply with the regulations on the form and content of its DPD and procedure for preparing the DPD?*

Consistency Tests

- C1 *Did the council take account of the Regional Development Strategy?*
- C2 *Did the council take account of its Community Plan?*
- C3 *Did the council take account of policy and guidance issued by the Department?*
- C4 *Has the plan had regard to other relevant plans, policies and strategies relating to the council's district or to any adjoining council's district?*

Coherence and Effectiveness Tests

- CE1 *The DPD sets out a coherent strategy from which its policies and allocations logically flow and where cross boundary issues are relevant it is not in conflict with the DPDs of neighbouring councils;*
- CE2 *The strategy, policies and allocations are realistic and appropriate having considered the relevant alternatives and are founded on a robust evidence base;*
- CE3 *There are clear mechanisms for implementation and monitoring; and*
- CE4 *It is reasonably flexible to enable it to deal with changing circumstances.*

POP Summary

We previously highlighted in our POP representation concerning these lands that our client was in full agreement with the ambitious economic and housing growth aspirations set out by the council. We stated that in order to fulfil these objectives, that an up to date review of existing zoned open space must be carried out to remove open space sites of low amenity value in strategic locations that would be better served contributing to the housing and economic growth aspirations of the city without detriment to the Green and Active Plan aims and objectives contained within the POP. The subject lands are located in one such strategic location.

Belfast City LDP 2035

We are pleased to read on para 1.2.3, p4 of the strategy that Belfast City understand the role of the Local Development Plan in facilitating growth by coordinating public and private investment to encourage development where it can be of most benefit to the wellbeing of the community. Lands such as the subject lands at Laburnum Park are presently neglected and vulnerable to vandalism and anti-social behaviour. As such, it has limited public value and the landowner has taken measures to secure the site, thus further reducing the public value of the lands. This is clearly a location that, if developed, could be of exceptional benefit to the wellbeing of the community as it would prevent the land from falling into further disrepair whilst providing a range of uses and development that is well connected to green infrastructure.

Strategic Aims

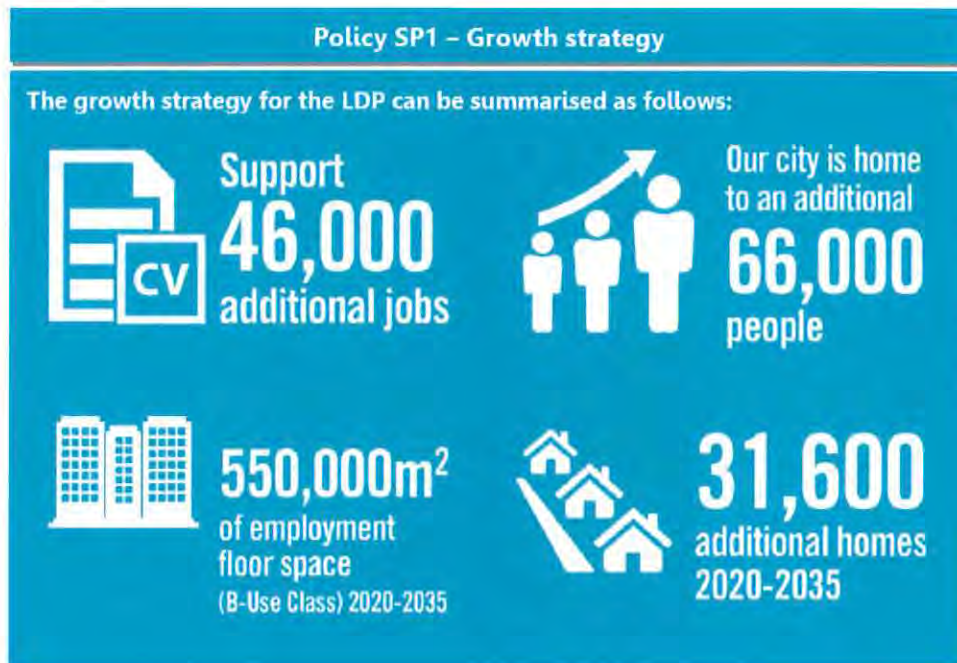
On p25, the Draft Plan Strategy sets out four strategic aims to help meet the vision for the city in 2035:

- Shaping a Liveable Place
- Building a smart connected and resilient place
- Creating a vibrant economy
- Promoting a green and active place

We support these aims.

Starting at page 34 the Draft Plan Strategy sets out eight strategic policies for the Local Development Plan. Comments are provided below in respect of SP1 & SP8.

Policy SP1 - Growth Strategy



Belfast City Council propose ambitious economic growth plans, which seek to add a further 46,000 jobs to the economy over the period 2020-2035 in line with the city's objective to enable it to compete with similar cities elsewhere in the UK in terms of attracting investment, creating jobs and driving the regional economy (Policy SP1, Belfast City Council Draft Plan Strategy, January 2017, p34-35). This proposed economic growth therefore influences the growth of the population and in turn the level of residential development required to support this growth. Belfast City Council therefore proposes to grow the population by 66,000 which in turn will require the development of an additional 31,600 homes over the plan period 2020 - 2035.

We are generally supportive with Belfast City Councils Policy SP1 Growth Strategy for supporting economic growth as enhancing Belfast's economic prosperity will raise the growth of the region as a whole, ultimately encouraging more individuals to work and live within the city, strengthening the role of the Belfast as the regional capital of Northern Ireland. However, we are disappointed to see the target number for additional homes required within the Council area being downsized from 37,000, as set out in the Preferred Options Paper, to 31,600 as set out within the Draft Plan Strategy. The 31,600 additional homes target for the 15 years of the plan period does not provide a 5 year over supply to ensure there is no shortfall in the supply of housing over the plan period. The original housing growth figure of 37,000 is therefore a much more robust figure for housing growth across the district and would allow for unexpected growth during the plan period. Therefore, we would encourage the council to revert back to their original figure of 37, 000 additional homes for the district by 2035 as set out in the Preferred Options Paper.

Soundness Test

- The Growth Strategy (Policy SP1) is not sound as it is not reasonably flexible to enable it to deal with changing circumstances (Test C4). The reduction in the projected housing growth, from 37,000 to 31,660, limits the flexibility of this policy's ability to deal with unexpected growth.

Remedy

- Return to original projected housing figure (37,000) from the Preferred Options Paper.

Policy SP8 – Green and blue infrastructure

Policy SP8 – Green and blue infrastructure network

The council will support the development of a green and blue infrastructure network, designating and safeguarding sites and accesses required for the green and blue infrastructure network across the plan area.

We **support** this strategic policy. As a society, we now face the challenge of poor health resulting from inactive lifestyles, poor connectivity, air pollution and climate change. Developing a green and blue network and planning development where it can connect directly into this network will encourage more active lifestyles where walking and cycling could become a viable alternative to the private car for commuting. The benefits of developing and encouraging the use of a green and blue infrastructure network include: a reduction in traffic and congestion, improvements in air quality and at the same time improve the health and well-being of those living within the district. The subject lands are suitably located adjacent to the Connswater Greenway which is identified as a key green and blue infrastructure connector in Fig 5.5 on page 43 of the DPS, and future development of the site could tie in and enhance this key linkage. The Connswater Community Greenway has been a great success with the project seeing £40 million being invested in East Belfast through the creation of a 9km linear park following the course of the Connswater, Knock and Loop Rivers, connecting the open and green spaces. The project also has seen 5km of the rivers cleaned and the creation of C.S. Lewis Square, a space used for events and activities. The subject site is perfectly placed to integrate into this green infrastructure and become a new destination along the Greenway, rather than remain as sterile land.

Settlement Hierarchy

On page 47, the Draft Plan Strategy sets out the spatial development strategy for the plan, including a proposed Settlement Hierarchy (Policy SD 1). The hierarchy proposes Belfast City as the Principle City with Edenderry, Hannahstown and Loughview identified as Small Settlements. We support this hierarchy of the settlements, with the majority of population and economic growth being directed to Belfast as the principle city. The proposed settlement hierarchy encourages sustainable development by reducing the need to travel with the population concentrated close to employment and key public transport corridors.

Policy SD1 – Settlement hierarchy		
The Belfast district consists of four settlements.		
Classification	Role and function	Settlement
Principal City	The regional centre for administration, specialised high order services and cultural amenities. It is the regional gateway with links to other European cities, and provides the largest transport hub for NI.	Belfast City
Small Settlements	Distinct rural settlements in the countryside. They provide a focal point for the rural community, and have a number of local community facilities and services.	Edenderry Hannahstown Loughview

Policy GB1 – Green and Blue Infrastructure Network**Policy GB1 – Green and blue infrastructure network**

Planning permission will be granted for proposals that protect, augment, complement and/or improve the network and connectivity of green and blue infrastructure across the district. This includes the development of a network of community paths and greenways across the district, including those designated in the LDP, as well as the provision and improvement of public access to open space and other green and blue infrastructure resources, where this does not conflict with natural heritage interests or other matters, including amenity and public safety.

New development should incorporate green infrastructure features as part of the design, including green roofs and walls, SuDS, tree and hedgerow planting, and creating safe accessible links with neighbouring open space, in addition to providing open space on site, where appropriate.

The LDP will seek to secure improvements and expansion of the green and blue infrastructure network, including those identified in the LDP and/or the council's GBIP and associated strategies/action plans, as a result of new development. This may include the carrying out of agreed works by the developer or a financial contribution from the developer in lieu, having regard to the scale, nature and location of the proposed development and to the terms of supplementary guidance on these matters as published by the council.

The LDP will seek to safeguard designated and potential sites and corridors that form part of the network of green and blue infrastructure across the district and will only permit development either within or adjacent to such sites and corridors where it does not prejudice the retention, use, enhancement or further development of the network. Such development proposals should, where appropriate, incorporate access to the green and blue infrastructure network.

We **support** this proposed policy as it recognises the importance of protecting and augmenting the green and blue infrastructure network across the district and is permissive of development that complements and improves public access to open space. The policy is also permissive of development either within or adjacent to the network of green and blue infrastructure. The subject lands are located adjacent to the Connswater Greenway but are positioned as such that it would not prejudice further development of the network and, if developed, the lands could incorporate access to the green and blue infrastructure network.

The subject site could enhance the overall network by becoming a new destination along the greenway. Developing the site would also improve the natural surveillance of this section of the network and therefore deter crime and anti-social behaviour. At present the land does not offer any amenity value and is not accessible to the public. Removing the existing zoning or rezoning the site for an alternative use would ensure that the potential of the lands are realised. In doing so, this would greatly benefit the community by providing a range of uses on the site and enhancing this section of the Connswater Community Greenway.

Policy OS 1 – Protecting of Open Space

Policy OS1 – Protection of open space

The council will support the retention and improvement of existing open space throughout the district area. There will be a general presumption in favour of retaining all such lands and uses, including protecting any character and amenity value, whether specifically identified in the LDP or not, unless the lands are identified in the LDP for an alternative use.

Development resulting in the loss of open space on lands specifically identified for these uses in the LDP and/or the council's Open Spaces Strategy and/or GBIP will only be considered in exceptional circumstances where it is clearly shown that redevelopment will bring substantial community benefits that decisively outweigh the loss of the open space.

An exception may also be permitted where it is demonstrated that the loss of open space will have no significant detrimental impact on the amenity, character or biodiversity of an area and where either of the following circumstances occur:

- a. In the case of an area of open space of 2 hectares or less, alternative provision is made by the developer which is at least as accessible to current users and at least equivalent in terms of size, usefulness, attractiveness, safety and quality; or
- b. In the case of playing fields and sports pitches within settlement limits, it is demonstrated by the developer that the retention and enhancement of the facility can only be achieved by the development of a small part of the existing space - limited to a maximum of 10% of the overall area - and this will have no adverse effect on the sporting potential of the facility. This exception will be exercised only once.

In all circumstances, the council must be satisfied that the loss of any open space would not result in detriment to the overall green infrastructure provision.

The presumption against the loss of existing open space will apply irrespective of ownership, public access, physical condition or appearance.

We **do not support** the above policy as currently worded and would suggest that the last paragraph of the policy is amended:

"The presumption against the loss of existing open space will apply irrespective of ownership, public access, physical condition or appearance."

It should be amended to read as follows:

"The presumption against the loss of existing open space will apply irrespective of ownership."

Whether or not open space is publicly accessible and in a good or poor physical condition is key to determining the amenity value of the land. Land such as the subject lands that is fenced off to prevent public access and lies in a relatively poor physical condition does not offer any amenity value

to the local community or environmental benefit. In such cases, where land identified as existing open space is of limited or low amenity value provision should be made for the review of such zonings.

It is not clear whether the recommendation of the Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation topic paper published at the same time as the POP to review/assess of existing open space to enable the development of the LDP has been undertaken. This significant omission is in direct contrast to the review which was undertaken into existing strategic employment sites to aid preparation of the policies contained within the 'Creating a Vibrant Economy' section of the DPS.

This is particularly relevant given the limited land supply within the existing settlement limit of Belfast to accommodate the 37,000 extra homes (based our suggestion to revert back the original POP figure) and 46,000 extra jobs the DPS seeks to provide over the plan period. **There is therefore a clear and obvious need in the preparation of the Local Policies Plan to review the existing open space zonings for the purpose of de-zoning those derelict or unused parcels of open space land with little or no amenity value or quality, which are in strategic locations (such as the subject lands) where their rezoning as development opportunity sites would contribute to the strategic housing and economic growth objectives of DPS without compromising the objectives of 'Promoting a green and active place' (p29).** It could be demonstrated that redevelopment of the subject lands as a mixed use type scheme with associated amenities could bring about substantial benefit to the local community that would outweigh the loss of open space.

Removing the current open space zoning will not affect the functionality or integrity of the Connswater Greenway. In fact, it will only serve to enhance it's function by providing improving access to it and by creating a new destination along the network. Development of the site could also improve the security of the greenway through improved natural surveillance of this section of the network.

Soundness Test

- Policy OS 1 is not 'sound' as the policy is not realistic or appropriate (Test CE2). There is a need to assess and de-zone unsuitable open space areas, as protection of such areas with limited or no public value, is not appropriate.
- In addition, this policy fails Test CE3 & CE4, as there is no monitoring provision to consider the value of zoned open space areas and no flexibility in policy to allow alternative uses where zoned open spaces no longer have any amenity value.

Remedy

- Undertake a full review & qualitative assessment of existing zoned open space areas.
- Re-word policy to allow flexibility to allow development where zonings have no amenity value.

Policy HOU1 – Accommodating new homes

Policy HOU1 – Accommodating new homes

There is a requirement for 31,660 new homes in Belfast over the period 2020-2035. This will be delivered in accordance with the requirements set out in the following table.

Settlement / Area		Net additional dwellings (2020-2035)
Belfast city	Belfast city centre	8,000
	Belfast Harbour estate	3,500
	Rest of Belfast city	18,100
	<i>Belfast city Total</i>	<i>29,600</i>
Small Settlements	Edenderry	40
	Hannahstown	0
	Loughview	20
	<i>Small settlements total</i>	<i>60</i>
Windfall		2,000

The housing requirement will be delivered in accordance with the following indicative average annual rates:

- 2020/21–2024/25 – an average of 1,100-1,300 dwellings completed per annum
- 2025/26–2029/30 – an average of 2,100-2,300 dwellings completed per annum
- 2030/31–2034/35 – an average of 2,700-2,900 dwellings completed per annum

We would encourage the council to reconsider the provisions of this policy. At present there is a disproportionate lack of sites zoned for housing in East Belfast with the vast majority of existing housing zonings now built out. In addition, we would argue that it may be difficult to achieve the majority of the allocation within Belfast City as a city centre location is unlikely to yield family sized homes, which are the most in demand housing types.

In para 7.1.9, page 61, the council allude to the potential that land may be phased to ensure the alignment of housing delivery with planned infrastructure investment and development lead-times. We would strongly object to the introduction of the phasing of housing land and firmly believe that the market is best placed to decide which sites are developed first.

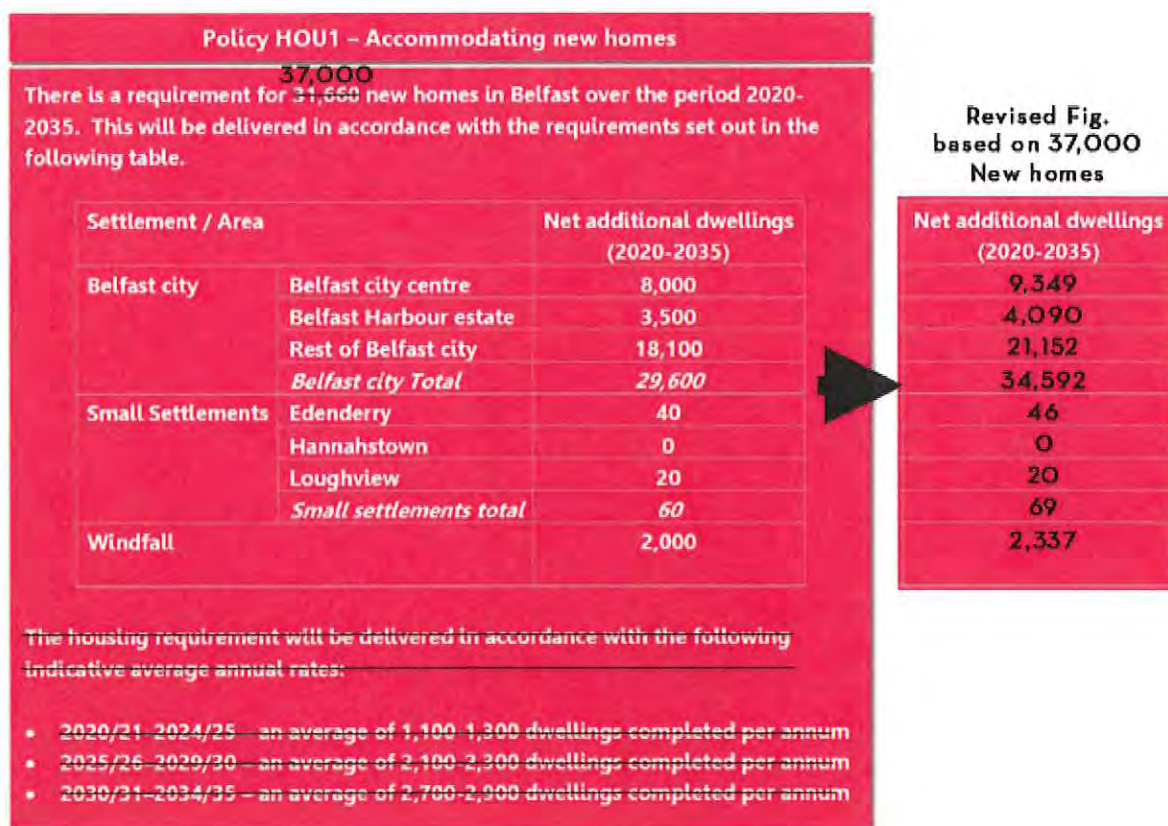
The table below highlights the remaining housing zonings within the vicinity of the subject site. All of these zonings are now built out, committed housing sites or there is no evidence of intention by the landowner to develop the site. There is clearly a lack of current zoned land available within this part of the city and therefore a need to zone additional land suitable for family sized dwellings in order to meet the demand in this area for housing during the plan period.

Table 1 – Existing Housing Zonings (BMAP 2015) within the vicinity of the subject site

Ref	Site	Size	Status
MCH 04/01	Land adjacent to 111 Lower Braniel Road	0.19 ha	No evidence of appetite to develop
MCH 04/03	1 Gilbourne Court, Tullycarnet	0.28 ha	Committed - Permission Y/2005/0344/RM - 15 Apartments - Commenced
MCH 04/04	Land to the rear of 106-118 Knockbreda Road, Lisnasharragh Park	0.34 ha	No evidence of appetite to develop
MCH 04/06	Land to the rear of 6-10 Glenview Park, Ballygowan Road	0.46 ha	No evidence of appetite to develop
MCH 04/07	Land at Church Road/Ballygowan Road	1.03 ha	Built out
MCH 04/14	Land at Lower Braniel Road	6.54 ha	Committed - Planning Permission - LA04/2017/0510/RM

In some cases, zoned sites may never be developed, as demonstrated by the table above. A phased approach to development could prevent other, more suitable and viable sites from being developed.

The policy should also be updated to reflect the original target for new additional homes (37,000) as set out in the Preferred Options Paper. The 37,000 new homes target should be redistributed on a pro rata basis to the various settlements/areas (see below). The housing requirement rate element of the policy should be removed from the policy, as recent land uptake in this area coupled with the land of available zonings could actually mean higher demand with the first 5 years of the plan. These 5-yearly targets could still be kept to monitor the performance of the plan in delivering housing but it should be removed from the policy itself.



Soundness Test

- This policy is contrary to soundness test CE4 in that it is not flexible. The proposed housing allocation figure of 31,660 in the DPS does not include a 5 year over supply of housing and is therefore not flexible and able to respond to unexpected growth during the plan period.
- In addition, the policy sets out what the delivery of housing will be on a 5-yearly basis, with delivery increasing towards the end of the plan period. This is also an inflexible approach. Especially, in the event, as stated previously, of the council area experiencing a higher than anticipated level of growth in the first 5 years of the plan.

Remedy

- The council should revert back to the housing growth figure of 37,000 as set out in the Preferred Options Paper.
- The council should remove the section of the policy which stipulates average annual figures for the delivery the housing requirement.

Policy HOU4 – Density

Policy HOU4 – Density of residential development		
Planning permission will be granted for residential development proposals which are brought forward in accordance with the following density bands:		
Settlement / character area	Average density band (dwellings per hectare)	Locational criteria
Tall buildings within city centre	> 350	Locations to be identified
Belfast city Centre	150-350	Within the defined city centre boundary
Inner city Belfast	75-150	As defined within the settlement strategy
Outer Belfast	25-125	Remainder of Belfast city between inner city Belfast and the settlement development limit
District centres	100-200	Within 200m of a district centre
Local centres	75-150	Within 100m of a local centre
City corridor	100 -175 within inner city	50m either side of a designated city corridor
Rail stations and halts	50-150 within outer Belfast	Within 100m of a rail station or halt
Small settlements	25-50	Within the settlement development limits of the small settlements
<p>The above density bands are to be used as a guide to inform proposed developments within the relevant settlement areas and development proposals outside of these broad bands will be considered on their merits. This will be subject to meeting all other policy requirements.</p>		

We **support** this policy and commend the council on proposing a policy that provides flexibility in terms of the range of housing densities that would be acceptable across the district.

Policy HOU5 – Affordable Housing

Policy HOU5 – Affordable housing
<p>Planning permission will be granted for residential development on sites greater than 0.1 hectares and/or containing 5 or more dwelling units where a minimum of 20% of units are provided as affordable housing.</p> <p>Affordable housing should consist of social rented housing and/or intermediate housing. In determining the appropriate mix of affordable housing in terms of size, type and tenure, regard will be had to an up to date analysis of demand, including housing stress and prevailing housing need.</p> <p>The affordable housing should be provided as an integral part of mixed tenure development, integrated with general needs housing and not readily distinguishable in terms of external design, materials and finishes.</p> <p>Where it can be demonstrated that it is not sustainable or viable for a proposed development to meet the requirements of this policy in full, the council will consider suitable alternatives on a case-by-case basis.</p> <p>Affordable housing will be secured by way of section 76 planning agreement, which should be in place in advance of planning permission being granted.</p> <p>Any proposal for housing that is considered to be artificially dividing a larger site to circumvent the affordable housing requirement will not be permitted. Where a concept masterplan is provided to demonstrate the comprehensive planning of such a site and how the full affordable housing obligations will be met, partial development may be permitted if the affordable housing element can be secured by way of s76 planning agreement. This will also allow for the phased development of larger sites.</p>

We do not support this policy in its present form.

We consider that the thresholds of a 0.1ha site size and 5 no. units are set too low and that the site size and unit numbers where the affordable housing provision is applicable should be increased. In addition, the expectation that a minimum of 20% of units should be provided as affordable housing is excessive. On page 69, para 7.1.26, the council states that “where it can be demonstrated that it is necessary and viable to provide a higher proportion of affordable housing, the council will expect developments to do so”. This statement undermines the above set thresholds. If this policy is to be retained, the opposite should also apply, i.e. where no need exists then the council should not expect any affordable housing provision within a scheme.

Though the policy has been designed with the aim of delivering affordable housing through the planning process, it will actually only serve to inflate the overall price of the remaining market housing within schemes. Developers will be forced to pass the burden of providing affordable housing within a scheme onto the purchasers of the remaining market housing through increased house prices, to ensure that a scheme remains viable. This, in turn, will also have implications for land values, causing price inflation and this will be to the detriment of the housing market.

This policy, if taken forward, could see developers reducing residential development in general, resulting in fewer housing projects being brought forward and result in affordable housing not being delivered in the volume that was anticipated. This non-delivery of housing development could undermine LDP targets.

The policy will not necessarily deliver affordable housing in the locations where those in need of affordable housing would wish to live. Those seeking affordable housing will often wish to remain within the close knit community where they have grown up and where family ties are strong. The policy in its current form would seek to provide affordable housing on a blanket basis, whether needed or not, spread across the district. There is therefore a need for a more targeted approach, based on NIHE areas of demand.

The policy does not explicitly state that the affordable housing requirement could be delivered off-site as an alternative to providing it on-site and such an approach would create more certainty regarding delivery and alternatives. Another approach could be the payment, by developers, of a fixed commuted sum, that is used to fund affordable housing provision within the district. Either of these approaches would ensure that affordable housing is provided within the district but on a more flexible basis that would allow the council to better respond to ever-changing need.

The policy does not differentiate between site types: greenfield, brownfield, inner city and edge of city sites. The land values associated with these site types vary and has implications for development costs of projects. Therefore, the policy could differentiate between site types by using a banding system such as that used by the City of York or Leeds (see page 9 &10) where the level of provision required is based on zones.

In addition, consideration should be given to discounting the amount of social housing provision required for residential schemes that utilises vacant/derelict buildings such as old mills and other buildings of architectural merit. This can be justified as the development costs of these types of schemes tend to be higher than new build projects on a 'shovel ready' site and not only would discounting the affordable housing requirement on such sites ease the burden on developers, it would also encourage sustainable development and regeneration of existing buildings across the district.

We would suggest that it would be cumbersome and time-consuming to put in place Section 76 planning agreements in order to secure an affordable housing element within a residential scheme. This would ultimately delay the delivery of the schemes as planning permission would be withheld until the legal agreement was in place and a developer would not be able to commence works until such times as the consent has been issued. Therefore, we would urge the council to remove any reference to the need for section 76 planning agreements. It would be more appropriate and efficient to deal with these matters through an appropriately worded planning condition.

We would respectfully suggest that Policy HOU 5 is revised to read as follows:

“Planning permission will be granted for residential development that provides affordable housing, where it can be demonstrated that there is need.”

Affordable housing should consist of social rented housing and/or intermediate housing. In determining the appropriate mix of affordable housing in terms of size, type and tenure, regard will be had to an up to date analysis of demand, including housing stress and prevailing housing need.

The affordable housing should be provided as an integral part of mixed tenure development, integrated with general needs housing and not readily distinguishable in terms of external design, materials and finishes.

Where it can be demonstrated that it is not sustainable or viable for a proposed development to meet the requirements of this policy in full, the council will consider suitable alternatives on a case-by-case basis, such as commuted sums”

Examples of Affordable Housing Planning Policy in other UK cities – York, Leeds and Manchester

City of York

On page 115 of City of York's Local Plan Draft Publication, Policy H10 – Affordable Housing is proposed as a planning policy to ensure appropriate provision of affordable housing in new residential schemes. The plan was been submitted to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on Friday 25 May 2018 for independent examination.

The policy directs a differing level of provision based on the site type and units numbers as set out below:

Table 5.4: Affordable Housing Site Thresholds

Threshold	Target
Brownfield sites = > 15 dwellings	20%
Greenfield sites = > 15 dwellings	30%
Urban, Suburban and Rural sites 11-14 dwellings	20% ¹
Urban brownfield sites 5-10 dwellings ²	15% ¹
Urban greenfield sites 5-10 dwellings ²	19% ¹
Urban brownfield sites 2-4 dwellings ²	6% ¹
Urban greenfield sites 2-4 dwellings ²	10% ¹
Sub-urban brownfield sites 5-10 dwellings ²	10% ¹
Sub-urban greenfield sites 5-10 dwellings ²	15% ¹
Sub-urban brownfield sites 2-4 dwellings ²	2% ¹
Sub-urban greenfield sites 2-4 dwellings ²	7% ¹
Rural brownfield sites 5-10 dwellings ²	11% ¹
Rural brownfield sites 2-4 dwellings ² that	3% ¹
Rural greenfield sites 5-10 dwellings ²	17% ¹
Rural greenfield sites 2-4 dwellings ²	8% ¹
Notes to Table	
1	This is the target percentage to be used in the off-site financial contribution calculation following sub-clause (iii) below
2	For sites that have a maximum combined gross floorspace of more than 1,000sqm

Belfast City Council could introduce a similar banding that differentiates between the each site type where new housing is proposed.

Manchester City Council

In Manchester's Core Strategy, p116, Policy H8 relates to Affordable Housing.

Within this policy, the threshold is set at sites of 0.3ha or greater or where a scheme proposes 15 units or greater that affordable housing provision (20%) will be expected.

It also states that an exemption from providing affordable housing or a lower proportion may be acceptable in some circumstances, such as where it would financially undermine significant development proposals critical to economic growth within the City.

This threshold in terms of unit numbers and site size is much less onerous and stringent than that proposed in Belfast City Council's Draft Plan Strategy. We would encourage the council to review and relax the thresholds for the requirement to provide affordable housing within new residential developments.

Soundness Test

- The policy is contrary to soundness test CE2 as it is not realistic or appropriate to require 20% for Affordable Housing on sites of 0.1ha or 5 no. units or more.
- It is also contrary to soundness test CE3 in that there is no suitable mechanism for implementation i.e. Section 76 Agreements are not suitable means to deliver the affordable housing provision within a scheme.
- Finally, the policy is contrary to soundness test CE4 in that it is not flexible and lacks alternatives such as the payment of a fixed commuted sum by developers.

Remedy

- The policy should be re-worded so that affordable housing provision is linked to demand/need. It should also be updated to allow for alternatives such as the payment of a fixed commuted sum by developers.

Policy HOU8 – Specialist Residential Accommodation

Policy HOU8 – Specialist residential accommodation

Planning permission will be granted for specialist residential accommodation, including retirement villages and care-related facilities, where the following criteria are met:

- a. The homes and/or bed spaces to be provided meet community needs demonstrated through a statement of specialist housing need; and
- b. The proposals will deliver convenient access to relevant local services and facilities, including local shops, public transport routes and health facilities.

Proposals for the improvement of existing specialist accommodation, including sheltered housing, extra care housing, nursing homes and residential care homes shall also be supported where these criteria are met. This will be subject to meeting all other policy requirements.

We **support** this policy. As a population we continue to live for longer and consequently there will be a growing need to provide supported housing including retirement villages and care-related facilities throughout the plan period.

The subject lands are suitably located to provide convenient access to local shops, public transport routes and health facilities.

In particular, it is pleasing to note that on page 79, para 7.1.56, the council recognise that specialist residential accommodation does not meet the needs of the general population and will therefore will be exempt from affordable housing obligations.

Policy HC1 – Promoting Healthy Communities

Policy HC1 – Promoting healthy communities

The council will seek to ensure that all new developments maximise opportunities to promote healthy and active lifestyles. New developments should be designed, constructed and managed in ways that improve health and promote healthy lifestyles. This will include supporting active travel options, improving accessibility to local service centres, reducing the use of private car travel, adequate provision of public open space, leisure and recreation facilities, high quality design and promoting balanced communities and sustainable neighbourhoods.

Planning permission will be granted for proposals that help to sustain and improve neighbourhoods in all parts of the city.

Health and wellbeing is an important consideration during the development management process and significant development proposals will require to demonstrate how they contribute towards promoting healthy communities. The council will require the submission of a HIA¹⁴ as part of major residential, commercial and industrial developments or other proposals with potential to have a significant adverse effect on public health and wellbeing.

The council may seek to secure health and wellbeing improvement measures by way of s76 planning agreement. This may be by way of agreed works carried out by the developer or a financial contribution from the developer in lieu of such provision.

We **support** this policy. The LDP has the potential to promote healthy and active lifestyles by providing policy which encourages and supports new developments that incorporate active travel options and reduce the reliance on the private car. This policy is permissive of proposals that help to sustain and improve neighbourhoods and is therefore particularly relevant in the case of the subject lands, where an amenity value no longer exists and if developed could improve the local neighbourhood. Development of the site would also provide a direct link onto the Connswater Greenway and encourage active travel options and reduce reliance on the private car.

We would however suggest that it would be cumbersome and time-consuming to seek Section 76 planning agreements in order to secure health and well-being improvements linked to developments. This would ultimately delay the delivery of the schemes as planning permission would be withheld until the legal agreement was in place and a developer would not be able to commence works until such times as consent has been granted. Therefore, we would urge the council to remove the final paragraph of this policy removing the need for section 76 planning agreements and instead deal with this issue via an appropriately worded planning condition.

Policy CI1 – Community Infrastructure**Policy CI1 – Community infrastructure**

The council will seek to protect and provide development opportunities for community, health, leisure, nurseries and educational facilities based on local need in line with the projected population growth over the plan period.

Planning permission will be granted for the provision of new and improved community infrastructure at appropriate and accessible locations within the urban area, subject to consideration of the nature and location of any proposals. All proposals shall ensure that there is no unacceptable impact on residential amenity or natural/built heritage and satisfactory arrangements are provided for access for all, including for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. Where proposals affect lands specifically zoned for development for particular uses, such proposals will only be considered where they do not prejudice the proper planning and sustainable development of the zoned lands.

In exceptional circumstances where there is no suitable land available in a designated village settlement boundary, favourable consideration may be given to a community use associated with the settlement which is located next to the settlement limits.

There is a presumption against the development of existing community infrastructure or lands identified for such use for alternative uses. Proposals for alternative uses will require to demonstrate that the existing facility/designated site is no longer required and that alternative arrangements are in place to ensure no significant diminution of community infrastructure provision.

Where appropriate, new developments should be required to provide or contribute towards any new community infrastructure requirements arising as a result of development and should ensure good accessibility to existing services and facilities intended to serve future residents. The council may seek to secure the provision or improvement of community facilities, or improved access to such facilities, by way of s76 planning agreement. This may be by way of agreed works carried out by the developer or a financial contribution from the developer in lieu of such works.

We are **supportive** of this policy. The policy contributes to the council's aim of improving the health and well-being of the citizens living within the city by ensuring that adequate provision is made for community infrastructure facilities placed at highly accessible location. The subject lands are one such location.

As previously stated in relation to Policy HOU5 & Policy HC1, we do not believe that Section 76 Agreements are appropriate and that appropriately worded planning conditions would be a much more efficient method of securing the associated benefits of a scheme. Therefore, we would urge the council to remove this element of the policy.

Policy EC3 - Major Employment and Strategic Employment Locations**Policy EC3 – Major employment and strategic employment locations**

Light industrial, general industrial, storage or distribution and other appropriate sui generis employment uses will be directed towards Major Employment Locations (MEL) and Strategic Employment Locations (SEL).

Use class B1(a) shall only be permitted in a MEL or SEL where it cannot be accommodated in a city centre location and it would otherwise result in the loss of significant inward investment.

Use Class B1(b) call centres and B1(c) research and development will be supported in an existing employment area.

Planning permission will be granted for proposals complementary to the primary employment use, providing a small scale-ancillary service to meet the day-to-day needs of local employees, subject to compliance with other plan policies;

Zoned employment areas will be retained in employment use and will be the focus of economic regeneration and development opportunities likely to come forward during the plan period. Only in exceptional circumstances, as outlined in policy EC4: loss of zoned employment land, will the loss of employment land to alternatives uses be considered.

The council aspire to create 46,000 additional jobs throughout the plan period. In doing so, Policy EC3 proposes that zoned employment areas will be retained in employment use and will be the focus of economic regeneration and development opportunities likely to come forward during the plan period. The Castlereagh Industrial Estate (located next to our client's lands) is one such zoned employment area and we would therefore fully **support** this approach.

The subject site could accommodate further growth of this zoning and provide a direct link into the existing Connswater Community Greenway. Those employed by businesses in this zone could benefit from a key linkage into the green infrastructure network and would offer a sustainable mode of travel to and work. In addition, it is well documented the health and well-being benefits that individuals can experience from having good access to green open spaces by providing an escape from the stresses of the urban environment. The subject site could provide a direct link from this employment zone to the greenway and allow workers to connect to and enjoy open spaces.

Proposed Site for Development within the Settlement Limits of Belfast

The subject lands at Laburnum Park measure approximately 4.95ha and cover a redundant area of overgrown land last used as rugby pitches by Grosvenor High School in the 1990s. The site is identified as an area of existing open space in draft BMAP 2015. The Connswater Community Greenway also runs around the site though is an entirely separate entity and not part of it. The existing multi-sports playing pitches of the school are located to the north-west. The redundant pitches have not been used for recreational purposes since the late 1990s at which point they were annexed and sold off. The pavilion has been demolished resulting in an undeveloped parcel of land in a highly accessible strategic location on the A55 outer ring.



Draft BMAP 2015 zoning of subject lands (outlined in red)

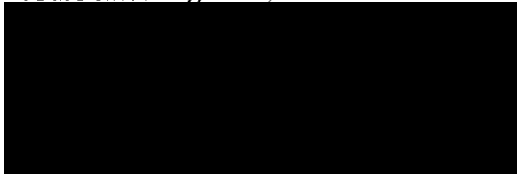
As a population we are living for longer and therefore appropriate provision should be made through the identification in the LDP of suitable lands for retirement type villages that will allow the elderly to enjoy independent living in a safe, secure and accessible location. The subject lands present such an opportunity for this form of development and would clearly provide great benefit to the community given the lack of amenity value this site currently holds. Other associated amenities could be developed on the site such as bowling greens, tennis courts and a multi-purpose hall.

Therefore, when the Council come to consider the appropriateness of existing zonings, this site should be considered first for re-zoning as:

- The lands are low lying and relatively flat throughout, ensuring any future development will not appear prominent;
- The site lies adjacent to the existing Connswater Greenway and connects directly to existing green infrastructure which will ensure;
- It is clear that the lands no longer hold any amenity value in their present state and have been fenced off preventing public access (see appendix 2).
- The site lies adjacent to existing employment;
- The lands are highly accessible given their strategic location on the A55 outer ring;
- An existing residential area lies to the north east and there are no incompatible land uses surrounding the site that would prevent the land from being developed as a mixed use scheme.

We look forward to receiving an acknowledgement of receipt of this submission and engaging further with the Council as the LDP progresses.

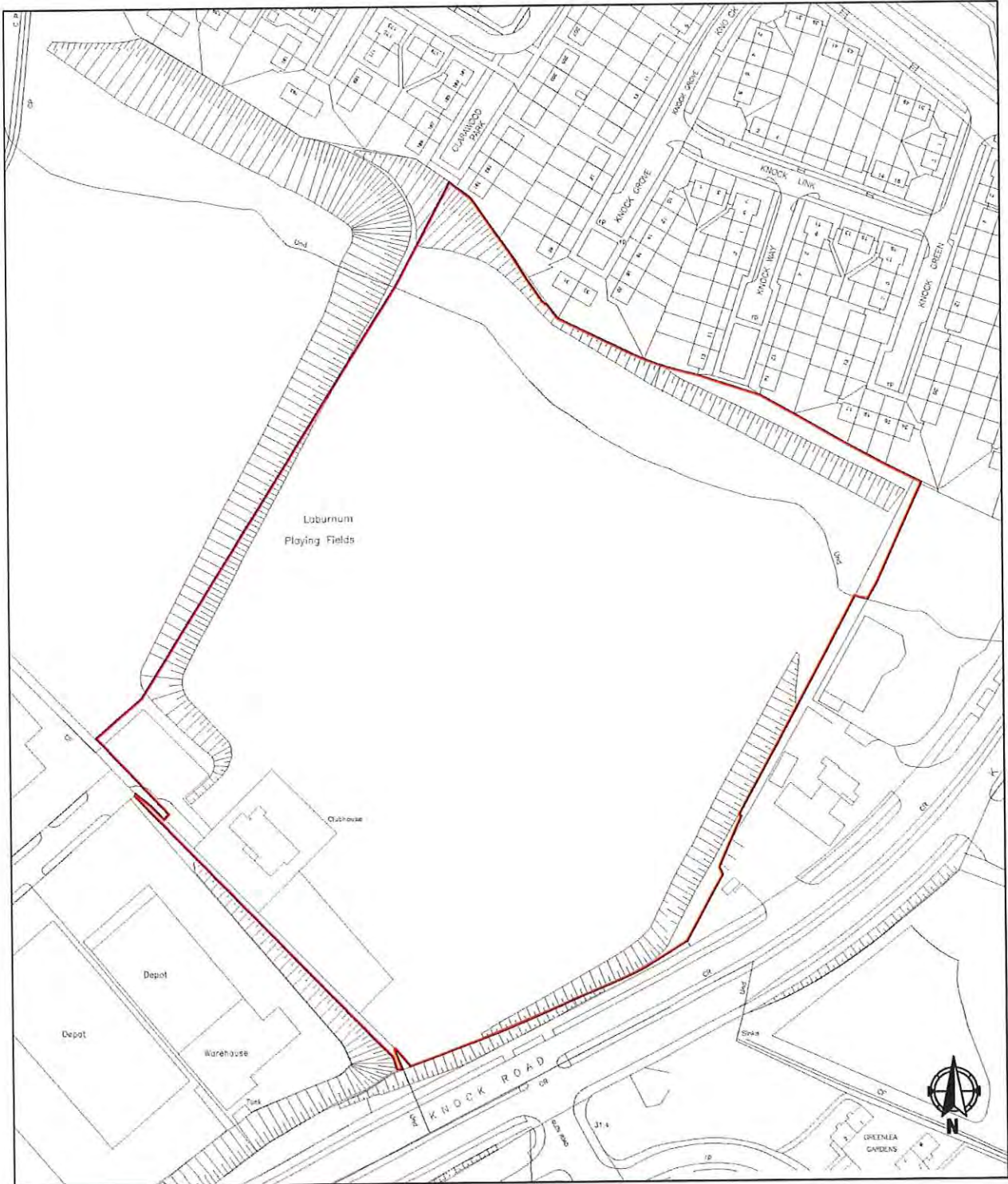
Yours sincerely,



Stuart Clarke
Gravis Planning

Appendix 1

Subject Lands at Laburnum (N.T.S.)



Appendix 2

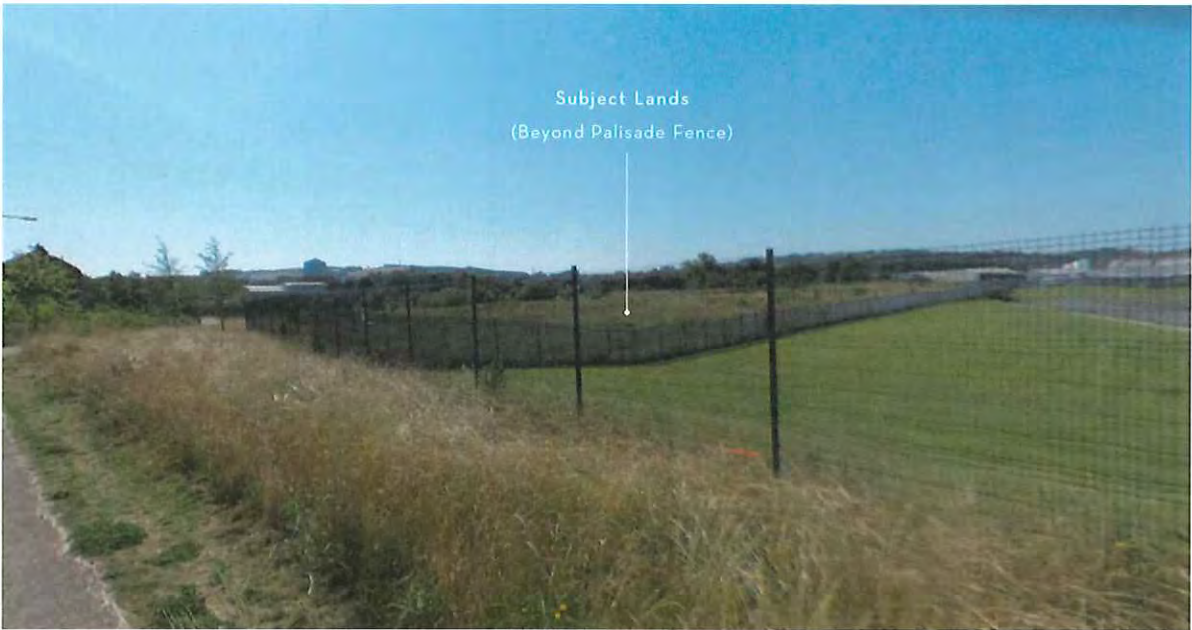
Aerial of site



Appendix 3

View of site from Connswater Greenway

(looking south west)



Appendix 4

View of site from Prince Regent Road

(looking east)

