



Proof of Evidence: Planning

Evidence of Megan Wilson BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI CIHCM

In Respect of the S. 78 Appeal at Land at Patshull Road, Albrighton
On behalf of Boningale Developments Limited

Appeal Reference: 6007402

LPA Reference: 24/02108/OUT

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0. Preamble

Qualification and Experience

- 0.1. My name is Megan Wilson. I hold a Bachelor of Science Degree with Honours in Human Geography, together with a Master of Science Degree in Urban Regeneration. I am a Chartered Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Chartered Institute of Housing. I am employed as a Planning Director at Marrons and lead the Sheffield Office.
- 0.2. I have over 10 years' experience working in a variety of planning roles and have previously worked for a national strategic land promoter, a regional housebuilder and in planning consultancy. I have advised a range of clients in relation to the promotion of land through the Local Plan process and the submission of planning applications. I have appeared at Local Plan Examination hearings and planning appeals as a witness. I provided expert witness evidence (at an Inquiry) in respect of an Appeal against the non-determination of an application by Shropshire Council in November 2025 (APP/L3245/W/25/3362414).
- 0.3. The evidence I have prepared and provide to this Inquiry on behalf of Boningale Developments Limited is true and given in accordance with the code of conduct of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

Involvement in the Planning Application

- 0.4. I have provided strategic planning advice to Boningale Developments on this site since 2023, having submitted the application in May 2024.
- 0.5. I have visited the site and Albrighton on multiple occasions and was in attendance for the full duration of all public exhibitions detailed in the Statement of Community Involvement **[CD5.4]**.
- 0.6. I am fully aware of and understand the planning and related issues involved in this Appeal.



Scope of Evidence

- 0.7. My Proof of Evidence relates principally to matters of planning policy, Green Belt, grey belt, sustainability and the overall planning balance in respect of the Appeal proposal.
- 0.8. Additional Proofs of Evidence/written statements are provided under separate cover with regard to the following matters:
- a) Five Year Housing Land supply matters prepared by Mr Ben Pycroft of Emery Planning.
 - b) Highways and Transport matters prepared by Miss Anna Meer of Marrons.
 - c) Urban Design matters prepared by Mr Luke Hillson of Marrons.
 - d) Landscape and Openness matters prepared by Mr Neil Furber of Pegasus.
 - e) Heritage matters prepared by Ms Gail Stoten of Pegasus.
 - f) Ecology matters prepared by Mr Daniel Ross of Beamsley Ecology.
 - g) Arboricultural matters prepared by Ms Helen Kirk of FPCR.
 - h) Flood Risk & Drainage matters prepared by Mr Matt Travis of Enzygo.
 - i) Education matters prepared by Ms Kerrie Norman of Flinders Chase.
- 0.9. I refer in this Proof of Evidence to documents that are listed in the agreed Core Documents list, using the abbreviations stylised '[CDX.XX]'.
- 0.10. My evidence has been compiled having regard to the December 2024 version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) [CD2.1].

1. Introduction & Context

Introduction

- 1.1. This Proof of Evidence has been prepared on behalf of Boningale Developments Limited (“the Appellant”), in respect of an Appeal made pursuant to section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) (“TCPA 1990”). This Appeal has been made against the refusal by Shropshire Council (‘the Council’) of an outline application to include access for a mixed-use development comprising up to 800 no dwellings, a care home of up to 80 units, a secondary school and local centre with associated access, infrastructure, landscaping and drainage
- 1.2. The site and site context are as agreed in the Planning Statement of Common Ground (“SoCG”), signed 23rd June 2025 between the Appellant and the Council **[CD4.1]**. Further to the Case Management Conference, at the request of the Inspector a Planning Statement of Common Ground Addendum was agreed and signed by the Appellant and the Council on 10th July 2026 **[CD4.3]**. A Statement of Common Ground was agreed and signed between the Appellant and the Rule 6 Party on 10th July 2026 **[CD4.12]**. An Accessibility Statement of Common Ground was signed between the Appellant, the Council and the Rule 6 Party on 10th July 2026 **[CD4.13]**.

The Site and Context

- 1.3. The Site subject of this Appeal and the associated context is detailed and agreed at chapter 3 of the Planning Statement of Common Ground **[CD4.1]**.
- 1.4. The Site occupies 48.04 hectares of land to the South of Albrighton. The Site comprises Green Belt land, presently in agricultural use.
- 1.5. The Site boundaries are defined by trees and hedgerows, as are the internal field boundaries. Albrighton lies to the north of the Site, together with an area of land that was proposed to be safeguarded for future development in the now withdrawn Draft Shropshire Local Plan.
- 1.6. The northwestern boundary of the Site is defined by Cross Road, whilst the southern boundary is defined by the A464 Holyhead Road and the village of Boningale. Newhouse Lane forms the eastern Site boundary. Surrounding land to the southeast and west is primarily agricultural, interspersed with clusters of development.

- 1.7. Two vehicular access points are proposed onto Holyhead Road to the south, alongside a vehicular access onto Cross Road to the north. There are existing public rights of way in the southeast of the Site and linking into Newhouse Lane.

Planning History

- 1.8. There is no known planning history associated with the Appeal site before the submission of the application to which this Appeal relates.

The Appeal Application

- 1.9. The planning application was submitted to the Council on 31st May 2024 under reference 24/02108/OUT.
- 1.10. The description of development read as follows;
“Outline application to include access for a mixed-use development comprising up to 800 no dwellings, a care home of up to 80 units, a secondary school and local centre with associated access, infrastructure, landscaping and drainage.”
- 1.11. The application was supported by a suite of documents and plans, all of which are detailed at paragraph 2.1 of the Statement of Common Ground **[CD4.1]**.
- 1.12. The application was reported to the Southern Planning Committee on 16 December 2025, with an Officer’s recommendation for refusal, and the decision notice refusing the application was issued the same day.
- 1.13. Table 1 below details the application plans for which permission is being sought.
- 1.14. Table 2 details the plans that have been updated, consulted upon, and which the Appellant invites the Inspector to have regard to in determining the application. For reference, those marked with an asterisk are plans for which permission is being sought subject to the Inspector’s decision.
- 1.15. Table 3 details the plans produced in response to the Inspector’s post-CMC note.

Table 1: Plans Under Consideration

Plan Reference	Plan Title	CD Reference
2503212.24-01 REV A	Site Location Plan	CD6.3
2503213.24.03	Illustrative Framework Plan	CD6.5
SHF.710.011.HY.R.002.A Parts 1 to 3	Drainage Strategy	CD8.8 – CD8.13
2503213.24.PP01	Phasing Plan	CD6.7

Table 2: Updated Plans

Original Plan Reference	Updated Plan Reference	Plan Title	CD Reference
SH5034-4PD-001 Rev B to SH5034- 4PD-007 Rev B	2530067.61.01 to 2530067.61.07 *	Proposed Site Access Strategy	CD7.15
12322-T-01	12322-T-02 *	Tree Survey	CD10.1
P24_0225_EN_009A	P24_0225_EN_009D	Illustrative Landscape Masterplan	CD11.19
SH5034_SK004	2503213.24_09 *	Parameter Plan	CD6.7

Table 3: Plans prepared to address Inspector's Post CMC Note

Plan Reference	Plan Title	CD Reference
2530067.101	Key Amenities / Facilities within Albrighton	CD7.16
2530067.102	Walking Route Audit	CD7.17

The Main Issues

1.16. As discussed in the Case Management Conference held on 5th June 2026, and detailed within the Inspector's Post Conference Note, the main issues in this case are:

- 1) whether the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework);
- 2) if the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, its effect on the openness of the Green Belt;

- 3) whether the proposal would accord with the spatial strategy in the development plan;
- 4) the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area;
- 5) whether future occupiers of the proposed development would have adequate access to a range of facilities and services;
- 6) the effect of the proposal on best and most versatile (BMV) land;
- 7) the effect of the proposal on the Boningale Conservation Area (CA) and the Grade II listed buildings of Lea Hall and Barn;
- 8) whether the proposal would make adequate provision for affordable housing, sports and playing pitch facilities, highway improvement works, sustainable transport, education, healthcare, open space, ecology, sustainable drainage systems and biodiversity net gain (BNG); and
- 9) if the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

1.17. The below table identifies which of the Appellant's witnesses address each of the above listed main issues through evidence;

Table 4: Schedule of Appellant Witnesses Against Main Issues

Main Issue	Witness	Evidence Reference
1	Megan Wilson – Planning	CD1.10
2	Neil Furber – Landscape	CD1.13
3	Megan Wilson – Planning	CD1.10
4	Neil Furber – Landscape	CD1.13
5	Anna Meer – Highways Luke Hillson – Masterplanning Megan Wilson - Planning	CD1.11 CD1.12 CD1.10
6	Megan Wilson – Planning	CD1.10
7	Gail Stoten – Heritage Megan Wilson – Planning	CD1.16 CD1.10
8	Megan Wilson – Planning Anna Meer – Highways Luke Hillson – Masterplanning Matt Travis – Flood Risk Daniel Ross – Ecology Kerrie Norman - Education	CD1.10 CD1.11 CD1.12 CD1.19 CD1.17 CD1.18
9	Megan Wilson – Planning	CD1.10



1.18 As detailed and confirmed during the CMC, I understand that matters pertaining to heritage, flood risk and ecology are now agreed between the Appellant and Council.

2. Statement(s) of Common Ground

- 2.1. A series of Statements of Common Ground have been prepared and are listed in the table below for ease;

Table 5: Schedule of Statements of Common Ground

SoCG Title	Parties	Date Signed
Planning [CD4.1]	Appellant & Council	18/05/2026
Planning Addendum [CD4.3]	Appellant & Council	10/07/2026
Accessibility [CD4.13]	Appellant, Council & R6	23/07/2026
Rule 6 Party [CD4.12]	Appellant & R6	10/07/2026
Planning Obligations [CD4.15]	Appellant & Council	10/07/2026
Highways [CD4.2]	Appellant & Council	10/07/2026
Neighboring Highways [CD4.14]	Appellant & Staffordshire Highways	03/07/2026
Landscape [CD4.9]	Appellant & Council	13/07/2026
Heritage [CD4.10]	Appellant & Council	09/07/2026
Masterplanning [CD4.11]	Appellant & Council	*Pending
Housing Land Supply [CD4.8]	Appellant & Council	10/07/2026
Flood Risk [CD4.7]	Appellant & Council	*Pending
Education [CD4.4]	Appellant & Council	05/08/2026
Arboriculture [CD4.6]	Appellant & Council	*Pending
Additional Plans [CD4.19]	Appellant, Council & R6	*Pending

- 2.2. Paragraphs 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4 of the Planning Statement of Common Ground list out the key documents and plans that form part of the evidence underpinning the development proposals.

3. Main Issues & Reasons for Refusal

- 3.1. This section addresses the Main Issues identified by the Inspector alongside the Reasons for Refusal (RfR) detailed within the Council's Statement of Case **[CD3.2]** and Addendum Note prepared following the CMC, including my views on the issues and the extent to which impact concerns can be addressed. This is in addition to compliance with relevant Development Plan and NPPF policies and the weight to be attached to the plan and material considerations in the planning balance.
- 3.2. I consider the formulation of the Reasons for Refusal to be unhelpful, disjointed, repetitive and complex to follow, noting that there is significant overlap between urban design, landscape, highways and planning matters raised.
- 3.3. RfR #1 & 2 is detailed at paragraph 4.1.1 and 4.2.1 of the Appellant's Statement of Case **[CD3.1]**.
- 3.4. The RfR's can be broken down into the following elements;
 - 1) The site is in the Green Belt countryside and is not safeguarded or allocated for development and is not regarded as being grey belt.
 - 2) Development would be incompatible with the principle of sustainable development which seek to facilitate residential development within a sustainable settlement hierarchy,
 - 3) Development would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area.
 - 4) It has not been demonstrated that development of the site is necessary in preference to poorer quality agricultural land.
 - 5) It has not been demonstrated that land outside the Green Belt could have been used.
 - 6) Less than Substantial harm to the significance of the Boningale Conservation Area and Grade II Listed Lea Hall and Barn has been identified.
 - 7) Wider local community benefits beyond the site have not been identified as responding to a local need.
 - 8) The adverse impacts of this unsustainable location would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposed development contrary to the presumption in favour of sustainable development.
- 3.5. The Appellant's team have sought to address and respond to what we believe to be the Council's case based on the latest information available to us, but for ease, the below seeks to follow the Inspector's identified Main Issues structure as detailed in the post-CMC note.

Main Issue 1: Whether the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework

- 3.6. The planning application was supported by a detailed Green Belt Assessment **[CD11.15]** and associated Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment **[CD11.13]**.
- 3.7. It is noted that in regard to Green Belt, significant changes to national policy have occurred between the submission and determination of the application. Following the publication of the December 2024 NPPF, a Grey Belt & Golden Rules Statement was prepared **[CD5.9]**.

NPPF Glossary Definition of grey belt

- 3.8. The grey belt definition, set out in the Glossary to the NPPF, is as follows:
- “For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, ‘grey belt’ is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. ‘Grey belt’ excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.”*
- 3.9. As is detailed below, I consider that the Appeal site comprises grey belt land in that it does not strongly contribute to purposes (a), (b) or (d) and as is a matter of common ground between all parties in the Planning SoCG **[CD4.1]** and Rule 6 Party SoCG **[CD4.12]**, the application of policies relating to assets covered by footnote 7 do not provide a strong reason for refusing the development.

NPPF Paragraph 143

- 3.10. Green Belt purposes (a), (b) and (d) are set out in Paragraph 143 of the NPPF as follows:
- a) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - b) To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; and
 - d) To preserve the setting and historic character of historic towns.

Purpose A

- 3.11. The PPG (Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 64-005-20250225) helpfully provides some additional detail in respect of how different degrees of contribution to the purpose is defined.
- 3.12. To perform a strong contribution to Purpose (a), illustrative features are defined as;

*“Assessment areas that contribute strongly are likely to be free of existing development, and **lack physical feature(s) in reasonable proximity that could restrict and contain development**.*

They are also likely to include all of the following features:

- *be adjacent or near to a large built up area*
- *if developed, result in an incongruous pattern of development (such as an extended “finger” of development into the Green Belt).” **[my emphasis added]***

3.13. Significantly, to perform a moderate contribution to Purpose (a), illustrative features are defined as;

“Assessment areas that contribute moderately are likely to be adjacent or near to a large built up area, but include one or more features that weaken the land’s contribution to this purpose a, such as (but not limited to):

- **having physical feature(s) in reasonable proximity that could restrict and contain development**
- *be partially enclosed by existing development, such that new development would not result in an incongruous pattern of development*
- *contain existing development*
- *being subject to other urbanising influences.” **[my emphasis added]***

3.14. The Appeal site is well contained by existing built form and substantial, permanent features. Established development extends along the northern edge of the Site, providing an immediate relationship with Albrighton. Newhouse Lane forms a clear boundary to the east, whilst Cross Road performs the same function to the west. To the south, the Site is bounded by the A464 which is a substantial strategic highway.

3.15. Importantly, these features do considerably more than simply define the extent of the Site. In combination, they would restrict and contain development on the site.

3.16. The Site sits within a clearly defined envelope, with built development to the north and substantial highway infrastructure defining each of its remaining boundaries.

3.17. As such, the Appeal site does not contribute strongly to Purpose (a). At most, the contribution it makes is moderate.

3.18. Notwithstanding the above, I also consider that Albrighton is a village. If so, then in line with the PPG¹, **purpose (a)** of the Green Belt would not apply to it.

3.19. The present contention by the Council and Rule 6 Party that Albrighton constitutes a “large built-up area” (LBUA) and is not a ‘village’ sits uneasily with the manner in

¹ PPG Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 64-005-20250225

which the settlement has historically been described and understood. Locally, and throughout the planning process, Albrighton has consistently been referred to as a village.

- 3.20. That apparent shift in terminology is reflected most profoundly within the local debate. Indeed, the action group which now comprises the Rule 6 Party was, for a number of years, expressly known as the Albrighton Village Action Group (AVAG). Following the introduction of the grey belt provisions, however, the group changed its name to the Albrighton Development Action Group (ADAG). Likewise, material subsequently circulated by the Action Group and local elected representatives has actively encouraged residents to cease referring to Albrighton as a 'village'.
- 3.21. It is governed by a Parish Council rather than a Town Council and the Officer's Committee Report **[CD1.6]** itself reproduces consultation responses which repeatedly refer to the settlement as a village.
- 3.22. The timing and wider context of these changes cannot simply be ignored. For many years, those now opposing the Appeal proposals appear to have been entirely comfortable describing Albrighton as a village. It is only following the introduction of national policy in which the distinction between a 'large built-up area' and a 'village' has assumed particular significance to the assessment of Green Belt purposes that there appears to have been a concerted move away from that terminology. In my view, that materially reduces the weight which can reasonably be attached to the suggestion that Albrighton has consistently been understood, locally or otherwise, as a LBUA rather than a village.
- 3.23. The Council, as detailed within their Statement of Case **[CD3.2]**, state that they consider Albrighton to be a LBUA following assessment of the site by LUC in a Green Belt Assessment produced in September 2025 and discussed further below **[CD5.11]**.
- 3.24. In respect of the Development Plan, I acknowledge that the terminology used historically has not been entirely consistent. Within the adopted Core Strategy **[CD2.2]**, Albrighton is variously referred to as both a 'town' and a 'village'. However, it is referred to as a village in the associated Sustainability Appraisal **[CD5.10]**. The adopted Development Plan does not, therefore, provide a consistent basis upon which it could reasonably be concluded that Albrighton has historically and unequivocally been regarded as a LBUA/Town. Indeed, the Inspectors' appointed to examine the SAMDev Plan expressly referred to Albrighton as a 'village' within their Report² **[CD5.12]**.

² SAMDev Inspector's Report October 2015 paragraph 182

- 3.25. More significantly, however, the Council's considerably more recent evidence is much clearer. The now withdrawn Local Plan³, together with the substantial evidence base prepared to support it, consistently identifies Albrighton as a 'large village'. Whilst that Plan was ultimately withdrawn, the Council itself considers its supporting evidence to remain a material consideration. It would therefore be wrong, in my view, to simply disregard the manner in which the Council characterised Albrighton through that process, particularly given the recency and extent of the evidence which underpinned it.
- 3.26. This is not simply terminology carried forward from an historic document. The Housing and Employment Topic Paper [CD5.13] and Updated Green Belt Topic Paper [CD5.14], both prepared by the Council in April 2024, identify Albrighton as a large village.
- 3.27. Paragraph 16.63 of the Housing and Employment Topic Paper [CD5.13] of April 2024 states of Albrighton;
- "Whilst a Key Centre, it is functionally a **larger village** with a corresponding range of services and infrastructure supporting that role" [my emphasis added].*
- 3.28. Chapter 6 within the April 2024 Updated Green Belt Topic Paper [CD5.14] states at paragraph 6.1;
- "Albrighton is a **large urban village** located within the M54/A5 corridor, a key road and rail transport corridor, linking Shropshire to the West Midlands". [my emphasis added].*
- 3.29. These documents are particularly relevant given that they formed part of the Council's recent assessment of the settlement and, in the case of the Green Belt Topic Paper, were prepared specifically in the context of considering Green Belt matters. They also considerably post-date the adopted Core Strategy and SAMDev and represent some of the most recent substantive evidence prepared by the Council concerning Albrighton prior to the changes to national Green Belt policy.
- 3.30. There is, therefore, a clear and important chronology. The older adopted Development Plan is inconsistent in its terminology; the SAMDev Inspectors' referred to Albrighton as a village; and, most importantly, the Council's own latest Local Plan evidence continued to identify Albrighton as a large village as recently as 2024. That position persisted right up until the introduction of grey belt into national policy and guidance, at which point whether Albrighton is properly regarded as a town or a village assumed a particular significance to the assessment of Green Belt.

³ Withdrawn Policy S1 Albrighton Place Plan Area at S1.1
Regulation 19: Pre-Submission Draft of the Shropshire Local Plan Section 5

- 3.31. I consider that the above detailed chronology is difficult to reconcile with any suggestion that Albrighton has consistently, or even recently, been understood by the Council to constitute a town for planning purposes. Quite the opposite. The most recent substantive evidence prepared by the Council before that distinction acquired significance under national Green Belt policy expressly identifies Albrighton as a large village. I consider that evidence to be particularly compelling when determining how the settlement should properly be characterised for the purposes of this assessment.
- 3.32. It is also pertinent to note that the Council published a Green Belt Assessment, prepared by LUC **[CD5.11]** to support the now withdrawn Local Plan, which, significantly, was prepared prior to the 2024 NPPF. The site was contained within a larger parcel, identified as parcel 36 and LUC concluded within this report that the parcel was found to make no contribution to Purpose (a) and a weak contribution to Purpose (b). The assessment did consider that the wider parcel played a significant role in the setting and special character of heritage assets (Purpose (d)). However, I note that this conclusion was reached owing to more sensitive areas of the wider parcel being in close proximity to said assets. This is evidently not applicable to the Appeal site as is a matter of common ground detailed within the Planning SoCG **[CD4.1]**.
- 3.33. The Council have commissioned the same consultants, LUC to undertake a specific grey belt study for the Appeal site having argued that the study prepared for the Local Plan is now out-of-date.
- 3.34. Within the Study, LUC correctly reproduces the relevant PPG test but, in applying it, appears to introduce a number of additional considerations which do not form part of that test. By way of example, LUC considers that main roads accompanied by strong boundary vegetation may represent containing features, but that where such vegetation is absent, or where a road “*emanates out of a LBUA*”, it is not treated as providing containment. Neither qualification is found within the PPG.
- 3.35. The test established by the PPG is materially simpler. It requires consideration of whether there are physical features in reasonable proximity which could restrict and contain development. It does not prescribe the type of physical feature which may provide that containment, nor does it require a road to be accompanied by substantial vegetation. Equally, there is no qualification within the PPG which suggests that the containing function of an otherwise substantial and permanent physical feature is diminished simply because it emanates from a large built-up area.
- 3.36. I consider that the approach adopted by LUC therefore goes beyond the application of the PPG and introduces additional criteria into the assessment which national

guidance does not require. The relevant exercise is to consider, as a matter of planning judgement, whether the physical features present are capable of restricting and containing development. Whether those features satisfy additional characteristics devised through the LUC methodology is not the test set by national guidance.

- 3.37. The A464 is a substantial road that is forming the outer boundary of the assessment area and is plainly capable, as a matter of physical fact, of restricting the outward sprawl of development.
- 3.38. I fully acknowledge that the PPG provides an opportunity for Green Belt assessments to be revisited and, where appropriate, for previously reached conclusions to change in light of updated evidence and the application of the current policy and guidance. There is therefore nothing inherently problematic in LUC reconsidering its earlier assessment. What is considerably more difficult to reconcile, however, is the markedly different conclusion now reached in respect of Purpose (a), notwithstanding that both assessments have been undertaken by the same consultant on behalf of the same Council and concern largely the same parcel of land and its relationship with the same surrounding physical features.
- 3.39. The difference between the two assessments is substantial. Yet, in my view, the latest assessment does not provide sufficiently clear or compelling evidence to explain why such a significant change in professional judgement has occurred. In addition to the changed approach to the status and characterisation of Albrighton, and in particular the proposition that it should no longer be regarded as a village, there is little substantive explanation for why the contribution of the Site to Purpose A is now assessed so differently.

Purpose B

- 3.40. The same principle applies with respect of purpose (b). The PPG again states that in order to perform a strong function against purpose b, land must;
- *“forming a substantial part of a gap between towns*
 - *the development of which would be likely to result in the loss of visual separation of towns.”*
- 3.41. As is confirmed in the Planning Addendum SoCG **[CD4.3]** it is agreed that the Appeal Site does not make a strong contribution to Purpose (b).
- 3.42. The Appeal Site plainly does not form a substantial part of a gap between towns.
- 3.43. For the reasons I have already explained, I consider Albrighton to be a village and, on that basis alone, Purpose (b) is not engaged by development extending from Albrighton.

- 3.44. The nearest towns are Wolverhampton to the east and Shifnal to the west. From the eastern most edge of the Site, Wolverhampton is 5.867km away and from the western most edge of the Site, Shifnal is 5.772 km away. The Appeal Site does not lie within, still less form a substantial part of, the gap between Albrighton and either of those settlements in any sense.
- 3.45. Development of the Appeal Site would not extend the built form of Albrighton materially closer towards either Wolverhampton or Shifnal. The Site lies to the south of the existing settlement. Its development would therefore not narrow the east-west separation between Albrighton and those towns. The gap between the existing eastern most part of Albrighton and Wolverhampton is 5.282 km. The gap between the existing western most part of Albrighton and Shifnal is 5.273 km.
- 3.46. Secondly, there is no evidence that development of the Appeal Site would result in the loss of visual separation between towns. The evidence of Mr Furber **[CD1.13]**, read alongside the Green Belt Assessment **[CD1.15]**, demonstrates that the visual separation between the relevant settlements would be maintained. There is no location from which development of the Appeal Site would cause Albrighton and either Wolverhampton or Shifnal to be perceived as merging, or where the existing visual distinction between those settlements would be materially diminished.
- 3.47. Accordingly, whichever way the status of Albrighton is approached, the conclusion is the same. If Albrighton is properly regarded as a village, Purpose (b) is not engaged in respect of development extending from it. Even if, contrary to my evidence, it were treated as a town for the purposes of the assessment, the Appeal Site does not form a substantial part of a gap between towns and its development would not result in the loss of visual separation between them. On the application of the PPG test, I therefore conclude that the Appeal Site makes no contribution to Green Belt Purpose (b).

Purpose D

- 3.48. As is confirmed in the Planning Addendum SoCG **[CD4.3]** it is agreed that the Appeal Site does not make a strong contribution to Purpose (d).
- 3.49. Albrighton is not a historic town. The site therefore does not form part of the setting of a historic town, nor does it have any physical, visual or experiential connection to a historic town.
- 3.50. The Site makes no contribution to Purpose (d).

NPPF Paragraph 155

- 3.51. For the proposal to be considered as ‘appropriate’ (as in not “inappropriate”) development, it is necessary to satisfy all the criteria (a) to (d), listed in Paragraph 155 of the NPPF, specifying that the development of homes, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should not be regarded as inappropriate where:
- a. *“The development would utilise Grey Belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;*
 - b. *There is a demonstrable need for the type of development proposed;*
 - c. *The development would be in a sustainable location with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this framework; and*
 - d. *Where applicable the development proposed meets the ‘Golden Rules’ requirements set out in paragraphs 156-157 below.”*

Green Belt across the Plan Area

- 3.52. Development of the site would not fundamentally undermine the Green Belt in Shropshire as a whole.
- 3.53. As is detailed in the Planning SoCG **[CD4.1]** it is agreed that in accordance with paragraph 155a. of the NPPF that the development would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan. The proposal would cover only 0.2% of the Green Belt within Shropshire and could not conceivably fundamentally undermine it.
- 3.54. I therefore conclude that development of the Appeal Site would not undermine the function of the Green Belt as a whole.

Need

Housing

- 3.55. As is detailed in the Statement of Common Ground **[CD4.1]** all parties agree that the Council cannot demonstrate a sufficient supply of deliverable housing and that there is an unmet need for housing accordingly.
- 3.56. Whilst it is common ground that the Council cannot demonstrate a sufficient supply of deliverable housing, the degree of shortfall is a matter of dispute between the Appellant and the Council. However, I note that as defined in footnote 56, cited in criterion b of paragraph 156 of the Framework **[CD2.1]** in relation to grey belt the degree of shortfall is immaterial. The absence of a five-year housing land supply constitutes a demonstrable unmet need in and of itself.

- 3.57. Notwithstanding this, I rely on the evidence of Mr Pycroft **[CD1.14]** in regard to Housing Land Supply. As is detailed in his Proof of Evidence, the Appellant considers that the Council can only demonstrate a 3.25 year supply of deliverable housing. A summary of the difference between parties is set out in the table below;

Table 6: Summary Housing Land Supply Position

	Requirement	Council	Appellant
A	Annual local housing need	2,046	2,046
B	5YHLS requirement without buffer (A X 5)	10,230	10,230
C	5% buffer (5% of B)	512	512
D	5YHLS requirement including buffer (B + C)	10,742	10,742
E	Annual 5YHLS requirement including buffer (D / 5)	2,148	2,148
	Supply		
F	Deliverable supply at 1 st April 2025	9,616	6,972
G	Supply in years (F / E)	4.48	3.25
H	Undersupply against the 5YHLS requirement including buffer (F – D)	-1,126	-3,770

- 3.58. It is confirmed in the Planning Statement of Common Ground **[CD4.1]** that the Tilted Balance is engaged in this case.

Care

- 3.59. The Council's Independent Living and Specialist Accommodation Strategy 2023–2028 **[CD2.37]**, adopted by Cabinet in September 2024, identifies a need over the Local Plan period for approximately 3,500 additional specialist older-person accommodation units and 2,500 additional units of residential care provision. This is reinforced by the Council's Social Care Market Position Statement 2024–2027 **[CD2.38]** which records increasing demand and complexity within the care system and acknowledges that, for some complex needs, placements may increasingly have to be secured further from home where appropriate local provision is unavailable. More recently, the Council's June 2026 Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy 2026–2031 **[CD2.39]** records that provider numbers are not increasing significantly, that provision in some areas is already struggling to meet demand, particularly for people with complex needs, and expressly identifies the need for targeted growth in areas of

unmet need. Taken together, the Council's own evidence demonstrates that specialist care need is not presently met in full and that the deficiency is expected to increase, adding significant weight to proposals capable of increasing the supply and choice of appropriate care accommodation.

Sustainability

- 3.60. I rely on the evidence of Miss Meer **[CD1.11]** in respect of paragraphs 110 and 115 of the NPPF **[CD2.1]**.
- 3.61. Albrighton is a highly sustainable village.
- 3.62. The full details of the services and facilities found in Albrighton are detailed in the Accessibility SoCG **[CD4.13]**.
- 3.63. It has a train station, providing regular services to Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Shrewsbury and Telford. It has regular bus services and a range of services and facilities, including a Primary School, local shops, restaurants, community centres and sporting provision. Albrighton is physically the closest sustainable settlement in Shropshire to neighbouring Wolverhampton and the Black Country, from which unmet housing and employment need is being generated.
- 3.64. Albrighton is identified as a Key Centre within policies CS1 and CS3 of the Core Strategy, and is recognised as a key location for growth in the County.
- 3.65. Turning to sustainability of the site, the evidence of Miss Meer **[CD1.11]** demonstrates that the settlement has a range of services and facilities which are within a reasonable walking and cycling distance of the Appeal site. Additionally, it is proposed to divert and enhance the bus service through the site, and provide a shuttle service initially. The proposals further provide an EV car club and land for the delivery of a Secondary School, a local centre, and a Care Facility. These are all easily accessible through and via the site.
- 3.66. Building on the brief overview relating to sustainability listed above in response to the requirements set out in paragraph 155 of the Framework, the below considers wider sustainability matters and seeks to address the Council's submissions in their Statement of Case **[CD3.2]** relating to development outside of the defined settlement limit for Albrighton.
- 3.67. I note that in response to clarification from the Inspector, the Council have sought to expand upon their sustainability argument, and suggest that a principal strand of their argument relates to the distance from the site, and in particular from the south-western edge of the site, to the services and facilities within Albrighton. This appears to be the single substantive point also raised by the Rule 6 Party.

- 3.68. The Accessibility Statement of Common Ground **[CD4.13]** details a comprehensive list of services and facilities within Albrighton. Parties have jointly approved plan (2530067.61) within the SoCG, which maps the services and facilities in relation to the site and provides walking and cycling distance isochrones.
- 3.69. I principally rely on the evidence of Miss Meer **[CD1.11]** in regard to matters of accessibility and sustainability in the context of walking, cycling and sustainable transport options.
- 3.70. Within her evidence, Miss Meer confirms that in accordance with Paragraph 110 of the NPPF, there are 'genuine' choices of travel for future residents of the site. All the key facilities within Albrighton Village (including Albrighton Railway Station) are within a 2km distance from the centre of the site, which she considers to be an acceptable walking distance for most able-bodied people.
- 3.71. She has also assessed the quality of the routes (for both pedestrians and cyclists) between the site and the facilities in Albrighton, highlighting how she agrees with the findings of ATE that the proposed improvements would offer an attractive alternative to the private car.
- 3.72. She wholly accepts that not all future residents would choose walking as a preferred mode of travel. The scheme also offers the opportunity for residents to use public transport, with all future residents being within a 400m walking distance of a proposed bus stop. The bus journey to the rail station would be circa 2 minutes, with residents then having opportunities for onward travel to Birmingham, Telford, Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury.
- 3.73. I agree with the conclusions of Miss Meer in regard to this and further note the attractive provisions of a number of new services through the provision of land for a secondary school, care home, local centre comprising a medical centre, supermarket and flexible workspace within the site.
- 3.74. Additionally, the site proposes to provide an EV car club. A proposal has been prepared, following market testing, by Enterprise **[Appendix MW1]** to operate the Car Club. The provision of EV's for the use of new and existing Albrighton residents will add a further option for sustainable transport as defined in national policy.
- 3.75. In respect of paragraph 115 of the NPPF as is detailed within the evidence of Miss Meer **[CD1.11]** in considering criterion a, priority has been given to a vision-led approach, with significant pedestrian and cycle infrastructure improvements being proposed and secured through the Section 106 and condition, along with upgrades and improvements to public transport serving Albrighton.
- 3.76. In consideration of criterion b of paragraph 115, Shropshire Developing Highways as the local highway authority have raised no concerns with respect of safe and suitable

access to the site for all users (subject to appropriate mitigation). The same is true of criterion d of paragraph 115 with Shropshire Developing Highways raising no issues in respect of highway safety.

- 3.77. Owing to the outline nature of the application, criterion c of paragraph 115 is not considered relevant to the Appeal proposals.
- 3.78. Accordingly, I conclude that Albrighton is a sustainable location for growth and note that the Council, in recently refusing a planning application (25/04584/OUT)⁴ on land directly adjacent to the Appeal site, conclude within the Officer's Report **[CD1.6]** that the northern portion of the site is capable of being considered grey belt land and thus consider that Albrighton is a sustainable settlement.

NPPF Paragraph 156 & 157

- 3.79. Paragraph 156 of the NPPF 2024 states;

"Where major development involving the provision of housing is proposed on land released from the Green Belt through plan preparation or review, or on sites in the Green Belt subject to a planning application, the following contributions ('Golden Rules') should be made:

- a. affordable housing which reflects either: (i) development plan policies produced in accordance with paragraphs 67-68 of this Framework; or*
- (ii) until such policies are in place, the policy set out in paragraph 157 below;
- b. necessary improvements to local or national infrastructure; and*
- c. the provision of new, or improvements to existing, green spaces that are accessible to the public. New residents should be able to access good quality green spaces within a short walk of their home, whether through onsite provision or through access to offsite spaces".*

- 3.80. Paragraph 157 goes on to state;

"Before development plan policies for affordable housing are updated in line with paragraphs 67-68 of this Framework, the affordable housing contribution required to satisfy the Golden Rules is 15 percentage points above the highest existing affordable housing requirement which would otherwise apply to the development, subject to a cap of 50%"

⁴ CD1.625/04584/OUT Officer's Report

Affordable Housing

- 3.81. The Appeal proposals deliver 35% affordable housing (15 percentage points above the policy requirement). This meets the requirements of paragraph 157 of the Framework.
- 3.82. Importantly, the Appellant has already secured expressions of interest from Registered Providers in acquiring and managing the affordable housing, providing confidence that this important element of the development is both deliverable and capable of early implementation.

Local Infrastructure

- 3.83. The Appeal proposal provides land for a new secondary school and new medical centre (within the Local Centre) together with significant highway and transport infrastructure, including the delivery of a new spine road and a new means of access into Albrighton. The latter is particularly important in the local context, providing an alternative route which would reduce the need for existing residents to rely upon roads through the village which are regularly identified locally as presenting highway and safety concerns⁵.
- 3.84. In respect of education, I rely upon the evidence of Ms Norman **[CD1.18]**, which identifies and considers the evidenced requirement for land to facilitate the future provision of a new secondary school. The Appeal Proposal provides the opportunity to secure that land as an integral part of the development and, importantly, to facilitate infrastructure which responds not simply to the needs generated by the Appeal Proposal but to an identified wider requirement.
- 3.85. The transport/highway benefits are similarly substantial. I rely upon the evidence of Miss Meer **[CD1.11]**, and particularly Section 5 of her Proof, which identifies the comprehensive package of off-site highway works to be delivered alongside the Appeal Proposal. These measures are supplemented by significant improvements to public transport provision and connectivity. Again, these are not measures which should be viewed solely as mitigation for the effects of the development; they represent tangible improvements to existing infrastructure and would provide benefits to the wider community.
- 3.86. Taken together, these represent substantial infrastructure improvements which respond directly to identified local needs. Their importance extends materially beyond making the Appeal proposal acceptable in planning terms. The development provides a realistic mechanism through which land for the future secondary school can be

⁵ Note that no case has been made that improvements to national infrastructure are necessary

secured and significant improvements to the local highway and public transport network delivered.

Useable Public Open Space

- 3.87. Having regard to the additional detail provided in paragraph 159 of the Framework, the evidence of Mr Furber **[CD1.13]** and Mr Hillson **[CD1.12]** demonstrate that the green space provided on site contributes positively to the landscape setting of the development and exceeds nationally set standards for the provision of open space on development sites.
- 3.88. As is shown on the Usable Public Open Space Plan, shown at Image 6.1 of Mr Hillson's evidence **[CD1.12]**, approximately 12.35ha of the development site comprises usable open space. This represents 25.4% of the site area.
- 3.89. Mr Hillson demonstrates within his evidence that all of the proposed residential dwellings are well within 400m of usable public open space, including LAP's, LEAP's, a NEAP and informal play on the way trim trail opportunities.

Golden Rules Conclusion

- 3.90. Further to a detailed assessment of the Appeal site, I have concluded that the site is grey belt and more than sufficiently delivers on all three of the Golden Rules set out in national policy.

NPPF Paragraph 158

- 3.91. Paragraph 158 of the Framework states that development which complies with the Golden Rules should be given significant weight in favour of the grant of planning permission.

Grey belt Conclusion

- 3.92. Taking all of the above into consideration, it is my professional opinion that the site comprises grey belt land and the criteria in NPPF 155 are met in full and as such the Appeal proposals do not constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

NPPF Paragraph 11(d) – Planning Balance

- 3.93. A conclusion that the proposed development is not "inappropriate" leads in the circumstances of this appeal to a consideration of paragraph 11 d of the NPPF which is engaged in this case as the Council cannot demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, which in turn means that the development plan policies which are most important for determining the application are deemed to be out of date. It is agreed by

the Council and the Rule 6 Party that paragraph 11 d i. does not apply as there are no footnote 7 policies which would provide a strong reason for refusal.

Accordingly, the “tilted balance” in 11 d ii applies.

- 3.94. Paragraph 11 d ii, through footnote 9 identifies key policies within the Framework that direct growth to sustainable locations. Namely these are paragraphs 66, 84, 91, 110, 115, 129, 135 and 139. I below, take each of these key policies in turn;

Paragraph 66

- 3.95. The Appeal proposals deliver 35% affordable housing, equating to up to 280 dwellings. The detailed tenure mix can be secured through condition to ensure that provision responds to identified local needs across Social Rent, other affordable housing for rent and affordable home ownership. I therefore consider that the proposal accords with paragraph 66.

Paragraph 84

- 3.96. The Appeal proposal comprises an extension to Albrighton and does not involve isolated homes in the countryside. Paragraph 84 is therefore not engaged.

Paragraph 91

- 3.97. The Appeal proposal includes a small local centre comprising a supermarket, medical facility and flexible workspace, intended to meet the day-to-day needs of future residents and to complement, rather than compete with, the existing centre of Albrighton. I therefore consider that the proposal accords with paragraph 91.

Paragraph 110

- 3.98. As is considered below and within the evidence of Miss Meer **[CD1.11]**, the Appeal proposal is located in a sustainable location. The mixed-use nature of the scheme would limit the need to travel, whilst safe walking and cycling routes, enhanced bus provision and access to Albrighton railway station would provide future residents with a genuine choice of transport modes. I therefore consider that the proposal accords with paragraph 110.

Paragraph 115

- 3.99. As is considered below and within the evidence of Miss Meer **[CD1.11]**, sustainable transport modes have been prioritised through a vision-led approach, including significant pedestrian, cycle and public transport improvements. The detailed design

of streets, parking areas and other transport elements can be secured at Reserved Matters stage in accordance with national guidance.

- 3.100. It is a matter of common ground between the Appellant and Council that safe and suitable access can be achieved for all users and that the proposed development would not give rise to significant impacts on the transport network. I therefore consider that each of the criteria within paragraph 115 is satisfied.

Paragraph 129

- 3.101. The Appeal proposal makes efficient use of the Site, responding to identified housing and care needs in the context of an acknowledged housing land shortfall. The proposed scale and density have regard to existing and proposed infrastructure, opportunities for sustainable travel and the character and landscape setting of Albrighton, whilst providing substantial green infrastructure and open space. There is no evidence that local market conditions or viability weigh against the proposed use of the Site. I therefore consider that the proposal accords with paragraph 129.

Paragraph 135

- 3.102. Whilst detailed design is reserved, the submitted parameters and design principles establish a framework for development which would function well and be visually attractive; respond appropriately to local character and the landscape setting; create a strong sense of place; optimise the Site through an appropriate mix of development, facilities and public open space; and provide safe, inclusive and accessible routes and spaces with a high standard of amenity. I therefore consider that the criteria within paragraph 135 are satisfied.

Paragraph 139

- 3.103. The Appeal proposal has been designed having regard to national and local design policy, with detailed consideration given to the character and local distinctiveness of Albrighton. I therefore consider paragraph 139(a) to be satisfied and that significant weight should be afforded to the design approach. I do not rely upon paragraph 139(b).
- 3.104. Having considered above that the proposed development does not conflict with any of the key policies listed under footnote 9 of paragraph 11 d ii, I below consider the planning balance.
- 3.105. As is confirmed in the Planning SoCG **[CD4.1]** and the Rule 6 SoCG **[CD4.12]** all parties agree that the tilted balance is engaged in this case.

- 3.106. In coming to my conclusion on the outcome of applying 11(d)ii, I have used the following scale to express my opinion of the weight that different matters carry: very substantial, substantial, significant, moderate, limited, and neutral.
- 3.107. The below table lists out the benefits and harms that I have identified, along with the weight I have ascribed to each of these identified harms and benefits. Below the table, I provide additional detail in respect of the benefits and harms identified;

Table 7: Planning Benefits and Harms

Identified Benefits	Weight	Identified Harms	Weight
Affordable Homes	Very Substantial	Adverse Landscape Impact	Moderate
Market Homes	Very Substantial	Development Plan Conflict	Limited
Education Land	Substantial	Heritage Impact	Limited
Care Land	Substantial	Loss of BMV	Limited
Golden Rules	Significant		
BNG	Significant		
Local Centre Land	Moderate		
Economic Benefits	Moderate		
Public Transport	Moderate		
Highway Infrastructure	Moderate		
EV Car Club	Limited		
Other contributions	Limited		

- 3.108. In respect of public benefits, I afford very substantial weight to the provision of 280 affordable dwellings given the acknowledged local affordable housing need (and lack of supply) outlined in this proof of evidence, and very substantial weight to the provision of 520 market dwellings given the substantial shortfall in housing land supply.
- 3.109. I afford significant weight to a 15.50% (habitats) and 10.92% (hedgerow) net gain in biodiversity units.
- 3.110. I afford substantial weight to the provision of land for a secondary school in a settlement that doesn't have an existing facility and which transports over 400 pupils a day to Shifnal to access secondary education.
- 3.111. I afford substantial weight to the provision of a care facility, to meet the needs of an aging population, particularly those with dementia, in Shropshire;
- 3.112. I afford moderate weight to the provision of land for a local centre comprising land for a medical facility and supermarket.

- 3.113. I afford moderate weight to enhancement of the local bus service and highway improvement works, providing a more regular connection to Albrighton train station and improving safe and suitable access to and from the site.
- 3.114. I afford limited weight to the provision of an EV car club.
- 3.115. I afford limited weight to the other contributions which will be made towards community infrastructure, to the extent that they will provide benefits for existing members of the community alongside new residents.
- 3.116. As discussed later on in my evidence, I have identified that the Appeal proposals conflict with the Development Plan as a whole, but consider that the most important policies are deemed to be out-of-date and in some instances are substantively out-of-date too, so afford this conflict limited weight.
- 3.117. I have also concluded (on the basis of other evidence) that there would be adverse visual impact and landscape harms, albeit note that this can be mitigated to some extent by condition. I afford moderate weight to the visual impact and landscape harms.
- 3.118. It has been concluded that harm would be caused to the Boningale Conservation Area⁶ and the Grade II Listed Barn in both instances due to harm to the setting of the assets in question. This harm has been assessed as being less than substantial. I acknowledge that case law indicates that considerable importance and weight should be attached to harm here, to the setting of the listed building (the case law does not apply to development in the setting of a conservation area) but as I understand matters, this does not dictate a mandatory weighting in a planning balance exercise. I attached limited weight to the identified heritage harms. In response to Matter 7 below I provide detail of the exercise I have undertaken in respect to heritage harm in line with paragraph 215 of the NPPF.
- 3.119. I have concluded that there would be harm arising from the loss of Best and Most Versatile land but noting that much of Shropshire falls within the same category and that planning permission has been granted on multiple schemes located on Best and Most Versatile land, I afford limited weight to the said loss.

Paragraph 11(d) Conclusion

- 3.120. In my view, the identified harm does not come close to significantly and demonstrably outweighing the benefits of the provision of up to 800 homes, including 35% affordable housing, with a range of infrastructure and services to be provided, in a County with a significant shortfall in housing land supply, with no credible strategy to

⁶ The site is not located within the Boningale Conservation Area

meet the shortfall in the short to medium or long term, and in a sustainable location close to day-to-day services and facilities. The Reasons for Refusal in respect of the Appeal can therefore not be substantiated and the application of the tilted balance decisively falls in favour of the grant of planning permission.

Main Issue 2: If the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, its effect on the openness of the Green Belt

- 3.121. I rely on the evidence of Mr Furber **[CD1.13]** in respect of the impact on the openness of the Green Belt, were it to be concluded that the development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Main Issue 3: Whether the proposal would accord with the spatial strategy in the development plan

- 3.122. I address compliance with the Development Plan policies in further detail in Section 4 below.
- 3.123. Notwithstanding this, Core Policy CS1: outlines Shropshire's strategic strategy for development from 2006-2026.
- 3.124. Within this strategy, Albrighton is identified as a Key Centre. Within Policy CS1 and CS3, Market Towns and Key Centres are grouped together and are treated equally within the respective policies. The Market Towns are identified as Oswestry, Market Drayton, Whitchurch, Ludlow and Bridgnorth. The same grouping applies within Policy MD1 of the SamDev. Shrewsbury is the sole settlement in the highest tier of the hierarchy, followed by the grouped Market Towns and Key Centres.
- 3.125. Shrewsbury, as the most sustainable settlement, is expected to accommodate 25% of the overall growth target of 27,500 new dwellings. The combined Market Towns and Key Centres tier are anticipated to deliver 40% of the growth target, with the remaining Rural Areas accommodating 35%.
- 3.126. The data contained within Tables 11, 12 and 13 of the Council's Five Year Housing Land Supply Statement 2025 **[CD2.24]** provides a breakdown of completions by tier of the settlement hierarchy and identifies that completions in Shrewsbury have accounted for 29% of all growth, completions in Market Towns and Key Centres account for 37% of completions with 34% of completions being in rural areas including community hubs and clusters. This demonstrates that development within

the combined Market Town and Key Centre group sits below that detailed within the policy, but significantly the tables further detail sites with planning permission. This shows that only 20% of pipeline sites are located within Shrewsbury, 54% are within the Market Towns and Key Centres and 26% are within rural areas.

- 3.127. This demonstrates that inevitably given the date of the spatial strategy, circumstances have materially changed and the apportionment of growth, whilst notably not a limit on growth within the policy, has been superseded by new housing requirements, infrastructure capacity issues and new national planning policy and guidance.
- 3.128. Table 1 of the Core Strategy confirms that within East Shropshire, Albrighton, sitting within the grouped Market Towns and Key Centres, sits within the top tier relevant for the area alongside Bridgnorth.
- 3.129. Notwithstanding the above, the Core Strategy is clear in recognising that Key Centres will have a vital role in meeting local need and providing services as the focus for sustainable growth for areas not easily served by Oswestry, Whitchurch, Market Drayton, Bridgnorth and Ludlow.
- 3.130. Indeed, the text within the Core Strategy at paragraph 4.30 states of key centres;
“They are, and could be stronger, focal points for local transport networks, employment opportunities and services. They provide sustainable places in which development can contribute to a “virtuous circle” of greater self-sufficiency within the towns, reducing the need to travel”.
- 3.131. Accordingly, it is acknowledged that development in the Market Towns and Key Centres provides a robust basis for meeting the future needs of Shropshire.
- 3.132. I consider below the weight to be afforded to the spatial strategy, however I consider that the proposed development accords with the principles of the identified spatial strategy in directing growth to a settlement that was always intended to accommodate growth to meet the needs of a wider local area.

Main Issue 4: The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area

- 3.133. I rely on the evidence of Mr Furber **[CD1.13]** in respect of the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area.
- 3.134. Mr Furber **[CD1.13]** acknowledges that the landscape assessment identifies that the proposed development would result in a substantial change within the Site itself, giving rise to a major adverse effect on landscape character. This outcome is

recognised as an inevitable consequence of greenfield development of a similar scale and is not uncommon in such cases.

- 3.135. In respect of effects on the appearance of the area, Mr Furber's evidence identifies that views towards the Site from much of the village are limited by the existing built form of the settlement and intervening vegetation. This includes the ribbon development along Cross Lane, comprising residential properties which lie outside the defined settlement boundary. It is acknowledged that there would be occasional and partially filtered views of the proposed residential development; however, the built form would be set back within the Site beyond the proposed community open space.
- 3.136. Mr Furber concludes that, from publicly accessible locations along the settlement edge, including the area of open space and picnic tables to the south of Cross Road, the magnitude of change would be Low, giving rise to a Moderate Adverse effect. That effect would reduce further as the proposed mitigation planting establishes and matures. This would be particularly evident in views from the footway close to the mini-roundabout at the junction of Cross Road and Patshull Road, where intervening planting would increasingly screen and soften views of the proposed development.

Main Issue 5: Whether future occupiers of the proposed development would have adequate access to a range of facilities and services

- 3.137. The evidence of Miss Meer **[CD1.11]** should be read in conjunction with the below response to Main Issue 5.
- 3.138. As is a matter of agreement between all parties, and as detailed within the Accessibility SoCG, there are 57 services / facilities in Albrighton that are accessible within 2,000m from the approximate centre of the proposed development site . A range of these amenities are set out in Tables 5 & 6 below which is taken from the agreed and signed SoCG (Tables 1 & 2);

Table 8: Indicative cycling distances and journey times to services and facilities

Facility	Cycling Distance and Time (at 7.5m/s)					
	Centre of Site		Closest Parcel		Furthest Parcel	
	Metres	Mins	Metres	Mins	Metres	Mins
Albrighton Table Tennis Club	830	2	500	1	1480	4
Albert Road Play Park	880	2	550	1	1530	4
Albrighton Primary School & District Swimming Club	920	2	450	1	1570	4
Nearest Bus Stops (Located on High Street)	1140	3	810	2	1790	4
The Red House (Village Hall)	1150	3	820	2	1800	4
Albrighton Library	1210	3	880	2	1860	4
Albrighton High Street (Co-op, Post Office, Chemist)	1250	3	920	2	1900	5
Albrighton Dental Surgery	1250	3	920	2	1900	5
Albrighton Bowling & Football Clubs	1280	3	950	2	1930	5
Albrighton Tennis & Cricket Clubs	1430	3	730	2	1900	5
Saint Mary's C of E Primary School	1780	4	1450	3	2430	6
Albrighton Medical Practice	1830	4	1500	4	2480	6
Albrighton Railway Station	1840	4	1510	4	2490	6
1st Albrighton Scout Group	1870	4	1540	4	2520	6
Cosford	3350	8	3000	7	3700	9
Codsall	7600	18	7250	17	7950	19
Shifnal	7800	19	7450	18	8150	19

Table 9: Indicative walking distances and journey times to services and facilities

Facility	Walking Distance and Time (at 1.5m/s)					
	Centre of Site		Closest Parcel		Furthest Parcel	
	Metres	Mins	Metres	Mins	Metres	Mins
Albrighton Table Tennis Club	830	9	500	6	1480	16
Albert Road Play Park	880	10	550	6	1530	17
Albrighton Primary School & District Swimming Club	920	10	450	5	1570	17
Nearest Bus Stops (Located on High Street)	1140	13	810	9	1790	20
The Red House (Village Hall)	1150	13	820	9	1800	20
Albrighton Library	1210	13	880	10	1860	21
Albrighton High Street (Co-op, Post Office, Chemist)	1250	14	920	10	1900	21
Albrighton Dental Surgery	1250	14	920	10	1900	21
Albrighton Bowling & Football Clubs	1280	14	950	11	1930	21
Albrighton Tennis & Cricket Clubs	1430	16	730	8	1900	21
Saint Mary's C of E Primary School	1780	20	1450	16	2430	27
Albrighton Medical Practice	1830	20	1500	17	2480	28
Albrighton Railway Station	1840	20	1510	17	2490	28
1st Albrighton Scout Group	1870	21	1540	17	2520	28

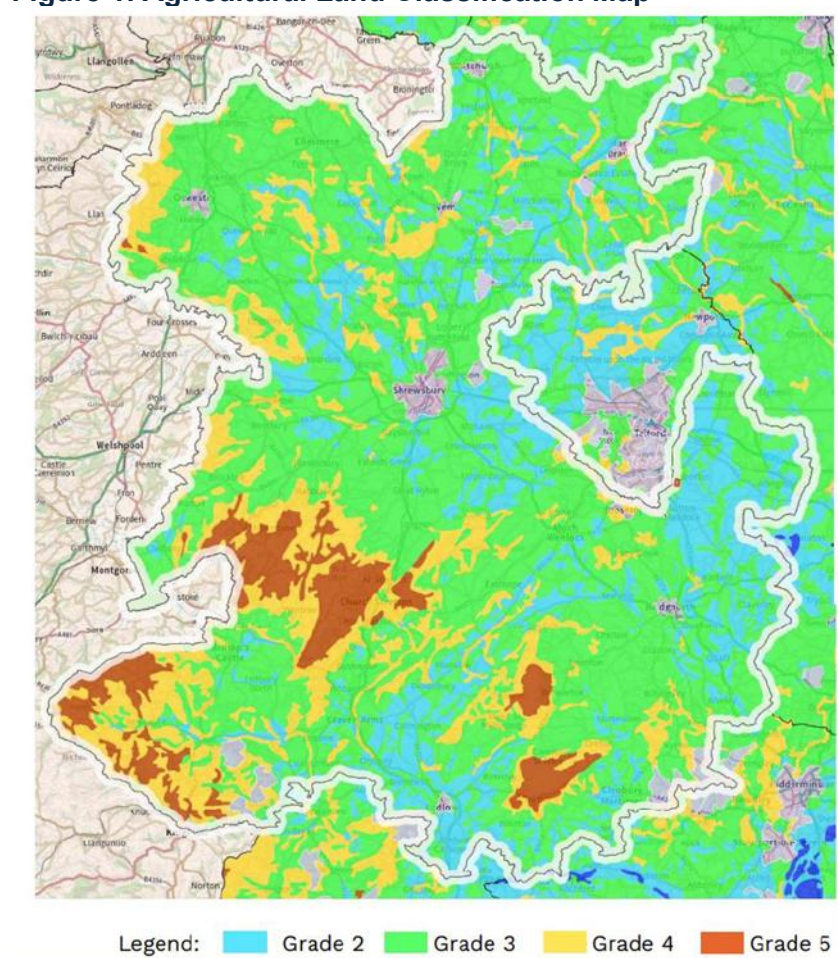
- 3.139. In respect of public transport, existing eastbound and westbound bus stops on Albrighton High Street are located 810m walking distance from the closest development parcel, and 1140m from the centre of the site.
- 3.140. The existing 891 Bus Service between Wolverhampton and Telford currently travels via the Albrighton High Street bus stops every 60 minutes in each direction on weekdays, and every 120 minutes on Saturdays.
- 3.141. I consider that Albrighton is a sustainable settlement with a range of facilities that more than accommodate the day-to-day needs of residents. The sustainability credentials of Albrighton as a settlement are acknowledged by the Council, with the village sitting within the Key Centres tier of the adopted spatial strategy and through the allocation of land within Albrighton.

- 3.142. In addition to the existing services and facilities within Albrighton, the Appeal proposals would provide land for a new Secondary School and Local Centre, further enhancing the available services and facilities for existing and new residents.
- 3.143. Beyond considering the presence of services and facilities within Albrighton, it is necessary to consider how residents of the Appeal scheme would access the identified services and facilities. In this respect I rely on the evidence of Miss Meer **[CD1.11]** and Mr Hillson **[CD1.12]**.
- 3.144. Within her evidence Miss Meer concludes that in accordance with Paragraph 110 of the NPPF, there are 'genuine' choices of travel for future residents of the site. All the key facilities within Albrighton Village (including Albrighton Railway Station) are within a 2km distance from the centre of the site, which she considers to be an acceptable walking distance. The scheme also offers the opportunity for residents to use public transport, with all future residents being within a 400m walking distance of a proposed bus stop as part of the proposed bus strategy. The bus journey to the rail station would be circa 2 minutes, with residents then having opportunities for onward travel to Birmingham, Telford, Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury.
- 3.145. In respect of internal accessibility and connectivity, Mr Hillson concludes that the Appeal scheme provides excellent accessibility and connectivity to usable public open space and proposed facilities including the Secondary School, local centre and play areas.
- 3.146. All homes are well within 400m of usable public open space including LAPs, LEAP's, a NEAP and informal 'play on the way' trim trail opportunities.
- 3.147. All proposed homes are within an 800m radius of the Local Centre, Care Home and School.
- 3.148. Accordingly, I consider that future occupiers of the proposed development would have adequate access to a range of facilities and services.

Main Issue 6: The effect of the proposal on best and most versatile (BMV) land

- 3.149. As a matter of principle, I acknowledge that development of the site would result in the loss of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land (BMV).
- 3.150. The County of Shropshire varies in soil grade with the majority being either Grade 2 or 3 soils with some lower Grade 4 areas and Grade 5 land which makes up the Shropshire hills in the South West of the County. The below map shows the Agricultural Land Classification across the whole of Shropshire.

Figure 1: Agricultural Land Classification Map



3.151. Building on this, the below shows the area and percentages of the County which fall within each Grade;

Table 10: Agricultural Land Classification Breakdown

ALC	Ha
Grade 1	10
Grade 2	55,304
Grade 3	180,521
Grade 4	57,009
Grade 5	18,887
Non Agricultural	4,224
Urban	3,697

Source: Landstack 2026

- 3.152. As is demonstrated above, the vast majority of Shropshire comprises BMV, including the sites within Albrighton that have come forward for development as part of the blanket 'settlement guidelines'.
- 3.153. Taking a precautionary approach and assuming that all of the Appeal Site is Grade 2, the loss of 48ha would amount to the loss of only 0.87% of Grade 2 land in Shropshire.

Main Issue 7: The effect of the proposal on the Boningale Conservation Area (CA) and the Grade II listed buildings of Lea Hall and Barn

- 3.154. I rely on the evidence of Ms Stoten [CD1.16] in respect of the effect of the proposal on the above listed heritage assets and note that within her assessment it is acknowledged that harm would occur but that said harm is clearly less than substantial, and low-moderate within that scale at most, as the physical form of the assets (from which their significance is largely derived) would not be altered by the proposed development, and in each case only part of the setting would be altered.
- 3.155. Paragraph 215 of the NPPF 2024 states:
- "Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use."*
- 3.156. Accordingly, I am required to undertake a planning balance of the public benefits of the proposal against the identified harm to heritage assets. I understand that the caselaw which requires considerable importance and weight to be given to heritage harm applies to development within the setting of a listed building but not to development within the setting of (as opposed to being within) a conservation area. I am mindful of the more general terms of paragraph 193 of the Framework.
- 3.157. Applying the statutory duty to afford considerable weight to the preservation of heritage assets, in this case with regards the listed buildings, and the more general policy set out in paragraph 193 of the NPPF, I consider that any harm to the Boningale Conservation Area (CA) and the Grade II listed buildings of Lea Hall and Barns would plainly be far outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal listed above in response to Matter 1.

Main Issue 8: Whether the proposal would make adequate provision for affordable housing, sports and playing pitch facilities, highways improvement works, sustainable transport, education, healthcare, open space, ecology, sustainable drainage systems and biodiversity net gain (BNG)

Affordable Housing

- 3.158. The Appeal proposals deliver 35% affordable housing (15 percentage points above the policy requirement) secured through the Section 106 agreement.
- 3.159. This amounts to 280 affordable dwellings being provided.

Sports & Playing Pitch Facilities

- 3.160. A contribution of £1,795,653.00 for sports provision has been requested by the Council and is secured through the Section 106 agreement.
- 3.161. In addition to this, if the Inspector were to be minded to allow the Appeal and conclude that land for the provision of a new Secondary School were justified, additional sports and playing pitch facilities would be provided within the land identified for the Secondary School, which could be made available outside of term time.

Highway Improvement Works

- 3.162. Miss Meer addresses the proposed highway improvement works at Section 5 of her evidence **[CD1.11]**.
- 3.163. For ease, the below list details the improvements proposed;
- Patshull Road and Newhouse Lane being restricted for vehicle through movements and the roads forming green corridor routes;
 - A continuous 3m shared footway cycleway on Cross Road from the development to the Cross Road / Albert Road junction;
 - A new parallel crossing on Cross Road immediately east of the junction with Patshull Road;
 - A package of traffic calming features on Cross Road from the development to the junction with High Street;
 - A new signalised crossing on High Street immediately northwest of the staggered crossroads with Cross Road and Station Road;

- A kerb build-out and dropped kerb and tactile paving crossing on High Street circa 45m southeast of the staggered crossroads with Cross Road and Station Road;
- Upgraded footway along Albrighton Rail Station internal access road.
- A kerb build-out and dropped kerb and tactile paving crossing on Station Road at the Albrighton Railway Station access; and
- All junction crossings between the development and Albrighton Railway Station provided with new dropped kerb crossings with tactile paving (12 in total).

3.164. An implementation and delivery mechanism table is contained within Miss Meer's evidence at Appendix AM.3 and confirms that all of the above will be implemented prior to first occupation.

3.165. The above listed highway infrastructure improvements form part of the Section 106 agreement as detailed at Part 5.

Sustainable Transport

3.166. Miss Meer addresses the proposed sustainable transport improvements at Section 5 of her evidence **[CD1.11]**.

3.167. In addition to the above listed improvements for walking and cycling, detailed consideration of enhancements to public transport is also considered within Miss Meer's evidence.

3.168. The proposed public transport strategy has been set out into two phases:

- Early phases of the development (from initial occupation up to occupation of 250th dwelling) whereby a 20-minute shuttle bus would be provided in the first instance between the development site, Albrighton High Street and Albrighton Railway Station. This would be funded by the developer outside of the bus service contribution listed below.
- Longer term strategy (after occupation of 250th dwelling) whereby a new bus route would enter the development site and travel to Albrighton Rail Station, Cosford, Shifnal, Telford and Wolverhampton at a 60-minute frequency.

3.169. A bus service contribution of £1,100 per dwelling has been identified by the Council and forms part of the Section 106 agreement as detailed at Part 5.

Education

3.170. The proposed development includes land for the provision of a new Secondary School.

- 3.171. I rely on the evidence of Ms Norman **[CD1.18]** in regard to the need and justification of the provision of land for a new Secondary School.
- 3.172. Notwithstanding the evidence presented by Ms Norman, the Council's Statement of Case confirms that it does not consider the provision of land for a new secondary school to be necessary. Instead, the Local Education Authority has requested financial contributions towards primary school places, secondary school places, post-16 education, SEND provision and SEND transport.
- 3.173. As set out in Table 5 of the Statement of Common Ground on Section 106 Obligations, all education-related contributions, with the exception of SEND transport, would be secured through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The contribution towards SEND transport would be secured through the Section 106 Agreement.
- 3.174. The Appellant is content that a financial contribution is being sought in respect of SEND Transport and is justified and compliant with Regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- 3.175. In respect of Secondary Education, the Local Education Authority has identified a capacity shortfall at Idsall School, which currently serves Albrighton. However, as explained in detail within Ms Norman's evidence, the Appellant does not consider that Idsall School has sufficient land within its control, nor is it as an Academy Trust required, to facilitate an expansion capable of accommodating the scale of planned growth across the wider area, including that arising from the Appeal proposal.
- 3.176. Should the Inspector ultimately conclude that the safeguarding of land for a new Secondary School is not necessary, the land identified for that purpose would simply remain in agricultural use. Given the scale of the parcel and its existing lawful use, the landowner would continue to farm the site unless and until any alternative proposal came forward, which would in turn be subject to a separate planning application and determined on its own planning merits.

Healthcare

- 3.177. The proposed development comprises land for the provision of a new Local Centre. Within this Local Centre there is capacity to accommodate a new GP Practice / Neighbourhood Medical Facility.
- 3.178. Through ongoing dialogue with the ICB in respect of the CIL Compliance Statement, a shortfall in the provision of medical facilities in Albrighton has been identified. The ICB have confirmed that expansion plans for the existing GP Practice have been identified, but are unclear if the identified expansion incorporates recent and planned growth in Albrighton, along with the patients that would be likely generated through the Appeal Site.

3.179. A financial contribution of £777,027.00 has been requested to increase Primary Healthcare Capacity.

Open Space

3.180. As is shown on the Usable Public Open Space Plan, shown at Image 6.1 of Mr Hillson's evidence **[CD1.12]**, approximately 12.35ha of the development site comprise usable open space. This represents 25.4% of the site area.

3.181. Mr Hillson demonstrates within his evidence that all of the proposed residential dwellings are well within walking and cycling distance of usable public open space including LAP's, LEAP's, a NEAP and informal play on the way trim trail opportunities.

3.182. Open Space provision is addressed and secured at Part 3 of the Section 106 agreement.

Ecology

3.183. I rely on the evidence of Mr Ross **[CD1.17]** in respect of matters pertaining to ecology.

3.184. The provision of land for Skylark mitigation is secured through a suitably worded planning condition and is expanded upon in the Section 106 Agreement.

Sustainable Drainage Systems

3.185. I rely on the evidence of Mr Travis **[CD1.19]** in respect of matters pertaining to flood risk.

3.186. The Section 106 agreement secures the requirement for the provision of SuDS Management Plan which details a plan for the long-term management, maintenance and operation of the SuDS, approved in writing by the Council.

Biodiversity Net Gain

3.187. I rely on the evidence of Mr Ross **[CD1.17]** in respect of matters pertaining to BNG and note that revised BNG assessment produced during the Appeal identifies anticipated gains of 15.50% in area habitat units, 10.92% in hedgerow units and 23.06% in watercourse units. The proposals are therefore capable of meeting the statutory requirement for a minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain across each relevant unit type and satisfying the trading rules.

3.188. The provision of a net gain in BNG, along with the requirement to produce and agree Habitat Management Plans is secured through a suitably worded planning condition and is expanded upon in the Section 106 Agreement at Part 4.

Main Issue 9: If the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to very special circumstances necessary to justify the development

3.189. Whilst in my professional opinion the site meets the definition of Grey Belt as set out in Annex 2 of the NPPF 2024, if the decision maker, in this instance, the Inspector, is minded to disagree, as is detailed within the Planning Statement [CD5.1] submitted alongside the application (and pre-dating the introduction of Grey Belt), I below address the test of Very Special Circumstance as set out of paragraph 153 of the NPPF 2024.

3.190. Paragraph 153 states;

“When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. ‘Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations”.

3.191. I accept that harm to the Green Belt is afforded substantial weight by definition.

3.192. In having regard to the paragraph 11(d) exercise undertaken above in response to Matter 1, I have identified adverse impacts and identified harms associated with the Appeal proposal, along with the weight afforded to each identified harm comprising the below;

Table 11: Identified Harms

Identified Harms	Weight
Harm to the Green Belt	Substantial
Adverse Landscape Impact	Moderate
Development Plan Conflict	Limited
Heritage Impact	Limited
Loss of BMV	Limited

3.193. In respect of the benefits associated with the Appeal proposal, constituting some of the other considerations, I have identified the below;

Table 12: Identified Benefits

Identified Benefits	Weight
Affordable Homes	Very Substantial
Market Homes	Very Substantial
Education Land	Substantial
Care Land	Substantial
BNG	Significant
Local Centre Land	Moderate
Economic Benefits	Moderate
Public Transport	Moderate
Highway Infrastructure	Moderate
EV Car Club	Limited
Other contributions	Limited

3.194. I conclude that harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and the other identified harms listed above from the proposal, are clearly outweighed by the identified benefits/other considerations listed above.

3.195. For the avoidance of doubt, if the Inspector were minded to conclude that the land for the secondary school was not justified and the substantial weight afforded to this benefit were removed from the exercise, my conclusion would remain the same in that the identified benefits clearly outweigh the harms including the harm to the Green Belt.

3.196. Accordingly, I consider that Very Special Circumstances exist in this case.

4. Development Plan

- 4.1. For the purposes of this Appeal, the Development Plan comprises the Core Strategy Development Plan Document 2006-2026 (adopted 24th February 2011) **[CD2.2]** and SAMDev Plan 2006-2026 (adopted 17th December 2015) **[CD2.3]** The Council have failed to review the policies contained in the Development Plan within the last five years, or indeed at any point since adoption, as required by Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and detailed at paragraph 34 of the NPPF 2024.
- 4.2. It is noted that the introduction of development boundaries as a concept is set out in the Core Strategy, but that the actual boundaries were not defined until adoption of the SAMDev **[CD2.3]**.
- 4.3. For the purpose of this Appeal, I consider the most important policies for determination are as follows;
- Policy CS1: Strategic Approach
 - Policy CS3: The Market Towns and Other Key Centres
 - Policy CS5: Countryside and Green Belt
 - Policy CS6: Sustainable Design and Development Principles
 - Policy CS7: Communications and Transport
 - Policy CS8: Facilities, Services and Infrastructure Provision
 - Policy CS9: Infrastructure Contributions
 - Policy CS11: Type And Affordability Of Housing
 - Policy CS15: Town and Rural Centres
 - Policy CS17: Environmental Networks
 - Policy CS18: Sustainable Water Management
 - Policy MD1: Scale and Distribution of development
 - Policy MD2: Sustainable Design
 - Policy MD3: Delivery Of Housing Development
 - Policy MD6: Green Belt And Safeguarded Land
 - Policy MD7a: Managing Housing Development In The Countryside
 - Policy MD8: Infrastructure Provision
 - Policy MD12: Natural Environment
 - Policy MD13: Historic Environment
 - Policy S1: Albrighton
- 4.4. I note the Council's Decision Notice alleges that the Appeal proposals will give rise to conflict with the following adopted Core Strategy and SAMDev policies only;

- Policy CS1: Strategic Approach
- Policy CS3: The Market Towns and Other Key Centres
- Policy CS5: Countryside and Green Belt
- Policy CS6: Sustainable Design and Development Principles
- Policy CS17: Environmental Networks
- Policy MD1: Scale and Distribution of development
- Policy MD3: Delivery Of Housing Development
- Policy MD6: Green Belt And Safeguarded Land
- Policy MD7a: Managing Housing Development In The Countryside
- Policy S1: Albrighton

CS1: Strategic Approach

- 4.5. I consider Core Strategy Policy 1 to be one of the most important policies in determining this Appeal.
- 4.6. I do not consider, that the Appeal proposals conflict with CS1 and indeed consider that the proposed development will, as required by policy focus development in a settlement identified within the spatial strategy that is expected to accommodate meaningful levels of growth.
- 4.7. I consider CS1 to be out-of-date. My conclusion in this regard is formed on the basis that the Council cannot demonstrate a sufficient supply of housing, along with changes to national policy through the introduction of the standard method of calculating local housing need and the associated significant uplift in the minimum number of houses that Shropshire is now required to deliver (2,046 local housing need requirement against the planned for figure of just 1,375 dpa)
- 4.8. Additionally, as is demonstrated in Tables 12 through to 14 of the February 2025 Five Year Housing Land Supply Statement **[CD2.4]** development that has been permitted in Shropshire over the plan period has failed to follow the prescribed spatial strategy, with more than 40% of the growth achieved across the plan period (through completions and sites with planning permission), being in rural areas (comprising Community Hubs, Community Clusters and Rural Areas), which Policy CS1 clearly limits to 35%.
- 4.9. In addition to being out of date by virtue of a lack of a five-year housing land supply, I also consider that in rigidly applying the policy, and seeking to avoid deviating from the prescribed percentages associated within the policy, the policy has been

fundamentally superseded by events, namely the significant increase in the housing delivery required across Shropshire through the application of Local Housing Need.

- 4.10. The spatial strategy, approach to housing delivery and the definition of limits to development each and collectively reflected the lower housing requirement at the time of adoption of the Core Strategy back in 2011. Plainly, the spatial strategy within the Core Strategy no longer reflects the position up-to-date requirements and fails to take account of or allow for the ability to meet an up-to-date assessment of need.

Policy CS3 – The Market Towns and Other Key Centres

- 4.11. As a matter of principle, I acknowledge that the proposed development conflicts with Policy CS3 but attach very limited weight to this conflict.
- 4.12. I acknowledge that the proposed development lies outside of the defined development limit for Albrighton. As is stated above, I consider that policies that seek to restrict development to that within defined settlement boundaries are out-of-date by virtue of the absence of a housing land supply and as a result of the significant uplift in minimum housing requirement in Shropshire. This principle is supported by the Council who have recognised the need to allocate housing land beyond the defined settlement boundaries in the now withdrawn Local Plan.

Policy CS5 – Countryside and Green Belt

- 4.13. National policy has evolved beyond the adopted policy position, with the introduction of grey belt. Consequently, whilst there is conflict with the wording of CS5, the weight to be afforded to that conflict is materially reduced.
- 4.14. I attach very limited weight to the conflict with Policy CS5 which I consider to be out-of-date.

Policy CS6 – Sustainable Design and Development Principles

- 4.15. I consider that there is no conflict with CS6 and that the proposal accords with the policy which I consider to be broadly consistent with the NPPF.
- 4.16. As is detailed below and within the evidence of Miss Meer **[CD1.11]**, I consider that the Appeal proposals are located within a sustainable and accessible location, where

opportunities exist for residents to safely walk and cycle and where there is a regular bus service and a train station.

- 4.17. As is detailed below and within the evidence of Mr Hillson **[CD1.12]** and Mr Furber **[CD1.13]**, I consider the proposed development to be of an appropriate scale, density and design having regard to national and local policy and upon review of recent developments within the settlement.
- 4.18. Albrighton is an inherently sustainable location with a range of facilities and services as detailed in the Accessibility Statement of Common Ground **[CD4.13]**. I consider that the services and facilities within Albrighton, save for the existing medical centre, can accommodate the scale of development proposed with appropriate financial contributions and through the provision of land for a Secondary School, a local centre comprising a supermarket and new medical facility alongside opportunities for flexible workspace.

Policy CS7 – Communication and Transport

- 4.19. I consider that the proposals comply with Policy CS7 and I consider that the policy is broadly consistent with national policy.
- 4.20. The evidence of Miss Meer **[CD1.11]** considers in detail how the development promotes sustainable patterns of transport and movement.
- 4.21. The proposal delivers substantial transport improvements including a new roundabout and spine road, enhanced bus services, carefully designed active travel routes and wider highway mitigation.
- 4.22. Importantly, no technical highway objection remains, and Active Travel England supports the proposal.

Policy CS8 – Facilities, Services and Infrastructure Provision

- 4.23. The proposal complies with Policy CS8 which I consider to be broadly consistent with the NPPF.
- 4.24. The proposal provides land for a secondary school, a local centre, a care home (with expression of interest received **[Appendix MW2]**), extensive green infrastructure and associated infrastructure improvements. These benefits would be secured through planning obligations and conditions.

Policy CS9 – Infrastructure Contributions

- 4.25. The proposal complies with Policy CS9 which I consider to be broadly consistent with the NPPF.
- 4.26. The Section 106 Agreement secures the necessary infrastructure and financial contributions required to mitigate the impacts of the development.

Policy CS11 – Type and Affordability of Housing

- 4.27. The scheme accords with Policy CS11 which I consider to be broadly consistent with the NPPF.
- 4.28. The proposal provides golden rules compliant affordable housing alongside a range of housing types capable of meeting identified needs, albeit noting the application before the Inspector is in outline only at this stage.

Policy CS15 – Town and Rural Centres

- 4.29. The proposal complies with Policy CS15 which I consider to be broadly consistent with the NPPF.
- 4.30. The proposed local centre is intended to meet the day-to-day needs of existing and future residents and complements, rather than competes with, Albrighton's existing centre.
- 4.31. The provision of a small supermarket will enhance the retail offering in the village core, as is demonstrated through the letters of interest from the Co-operative Group and Sainsbury's **[Appendix MW3]** which confirms interest in the land for a local supermarket, to work alongside their existing smaller retail unit in the village centre.

Policy CS13 – Economic Development, Enterprise and Employment

- 4.32. I consider that the Appeal proposal is in accordance with Policy CS13 which I consider to be broadly consistent with the NPPF.
- 4.33. The proposal provides significant economic investment and associated benefits to Albrighton and Shropshire.

Policy CS17 – Environmental Networks

- 4.34. I acknowledge as a matter of principle that the proposed development conflicts with part of Policy CS17, in so far as it gives rise to some landscape harm. This is detailed within my 11(d) exercise set out in response to Main Issue 1 above.
- 4.35. Whilst the development inevitably changes the existing agricultural landscape, it also delivers significant ecological enhancement, biodiversity net gain, structural landscaping and habitat creation.

Policy CS18 – Sustainable Water Management

- 4.36. The proposal complies with Policy CS18.
- 4.37. Surface water management has been comprehensively assessed, and appropriate drainage measures are proposed.
- 4.38. No technical objection remains.

Policy MD1 – Scale and Distribution of Development

- 4.39. I consider that there is no conflict with MD1.
- 4.40. It is a matter of common ground that Albrighton is a Key Centre and that Key Centres are identified as being suitable locations for development.
- 4.41. The policy does not refer to development being limited to that within the defined settlement boundaries.

Policy MD2 – Sustainable Design

- 4.42. I consider that there is no conflict with MD2.
- 4.43. As is demonstrated in the submitted Design and Access Statement **[CD6.1]**, Guiding Principles Document **[CD6.4]**, and in the Proofs of Evidence of Mr Hillson **[CD1.12]** and Mr Furber **[CD1.13]**, detailed consideration has been given to the character and local distinctiveness of the village of Albrighton⁷.

⁷ A suitably worded condition will require RM applications to be in [broad] accordance with the Guiding Design Principles and Contextual Responsiveness Document [CD6.4] and the Updated Illustrative Framework Plan [CD6.5]

- 4.44. There is no evidence, as is explored further below, that there are any capacity issues associated with the existing infrastructure, save for concerns relating to the capacity of the existing Medical Centre, which will be mitigated through the provision of land for a new Medical facility and/or a financial contribution.

Policy MD3 – Delivery of Housing Development

- 4.45. I consider that there is no conflict with MD3.
- 4.46. I acknowledge as a matter of principle that the proposed development would exceed the defined settlement housing guidelines for Albrighton. However, having regard to the criterion i-v under paragraph 2 of MD3, I consider that the uplift in supply is proportionate in the context of the minimum housing requirement and the demonstrable absence of an adequate housing land supply. I consider that there is a raft of benefits associated with the proposed development, including the provision of market and affordable housing, land for a secondary school, land for a local centre including a supermarket and medical facility, land for a care facility, an EV car Club, public open space, PRow improvements and wider economic benefits. There is no evidence before the Inquiry to indicate that the cumulative impacts of a number of developments coming forward is unsustainable.

Policy MD6 – Green Belt and Safeguarded Land

- 4.47. I acknowledge that the proposed development conflicts with Policy MD6, but given I conclude that the Policy is inconsistent with national policy and is out-of-date, I attach very limited weight to the identified conflict.
- Via the introduction of grey belt, national policy has materially evolved beyond the wording of the adopted policy detail here. It is also relevant with regards the extent of the defined green belt that the Council through their work on the now withdrawn Local Plan proposed a number of sites for release from the designated Green Belt having concluded that in light of the evidence that in order to meet housing needs exceptional circumstances existed to justify release of Green Belt sites.

Policy MD7a – Managing Housing Development in the Countryside

- 4.48. It is my professional opinion that the level of planning harm which would result in this case from conflict with Policy MD7a would be very limited including considering that

the policy is out-of-date, and it follows logically therefore that I attach only limited weight to that policy conflict.

- 4.49. The Policy does not explicitly state that development outside of, but directly adjacent to the defined settlements boundary will be considered to be located in the open countryside, but unlike with CS5 above, a settlement boundary for Albrighton was established alongside Policy MD7a through the SAMDev, following amendments to the Green Belt boundaries to accommodate additional growth in the village, so reasonably, it is assumed that development beyond the fixed boundary would be located in the open countryside in policy terms.
- 4.50. As a matter of principle, I accept that the Appeal proposals conflict with Policy MD7a with the Appeal site being located beyond, but directly adjoining the settlement boundary of Albrighton, which is an identified Key Centre. However, in order to assess the weight to be afforded to this conflict, it is important to consider the degree of harm that would be caused to the countryside protection policy if the Appeal proposal were to be allowed and further consider the degree to which the policy has been effectively superseded by events since adoption of the Core Strategy back in 2011.
- 4.51. I note that in order to maintain a supply at points between adoption of the Development Plan and the current time, the Council or the Planning Inspectorate have granted planning permission for sites outside the defined settlement boundaries and have further granted permission for more dwellings within the rural areas of the County than the spatial strategy, which informed Policy MD7a.
- 4.52. I have undertaken a search of planning permission granted by the Council in the last five years (major applications only) and those set out below all fall outside of the defined boundaries;

Table 13: Planning Permissions Granted Outside of Defined Boundaries

Reference	Settlement	Dwellings	Date
19/02385/FUL	Stoke Heath	38	05/04/2022
23/00087/FUL	Oswestry	15	16/11/2023
24/04470/REM	Wem	100	Appeal decision 28/01/2022
24/02808/OUT	Shrewsbury	400	07/07/2025
24/02662/OUT	Albrighton	150	30/05/2025
24/02828/FUL	Ditton Priors	44	31/01/2025
24/02260/FUL	Whittington	61	25/11/2024
22/05744/FUL	Bomere Heath	62	15/05/2024
21/00666/FUL	Baschurch	34	14/10/2021
3362414	Tilstock	70	Appeal Decision

- 4.53. The Council cannot reasonably expect, and again by virtue of the significant increase in the minimum local housing need, that land within the defined settlement boundaries of the settlements identified for growth within the spatial strategy will collectively have sufficient scope to accommodate anywhere near 2,046 dwellings per annum.
- 4.54. Very evidently, the Council have permitted multiple schemes that conflict with Policy MD7a and at no point in granting these planning permissions did the Council consider that doing so would fundamentally undermine the countryside protection measures set out within the policy so as to render the policy ineffective.

Policy MD8 – Infrastructure Provision

- 4.55. I consider that Policy MD8 is broadly consistent with the NPPF and as such is considered up-to-date.
- 4.56. The development is supported by appropriate infrastructure and complies with Policy MD8.
- 4.57. The proposal incorporates land for a secondary school, a local centre, a care home, substantial green infrastructure and transport improvements, together with financial contributions secured through the Section 106 Agreement.

Policy MD12 – The Natural Environment

- 4.58. I consider that Policy MD12 is broadly consistent with the NPPF and as such is considered up-to-date.
- 4.59. I acknowledge that the proposal therefore partially conflicts with Policy MD12 in relation to landscape change but accords with the wider objectives of enhancing the natural environment.
- 4.60. The proposal as is expected with a development of this nature, changes the character of agricultural land through development. However, it also delivers significant biodiversity net gain, habitat creation, strategic landscaping, ecological enhancement and long-term environmental management.
- 4.61. Heritage impacts are agreed to amount to less than substantial harm and ecological matters have been appropriately addressed through mitigation.
- 4.62. I attach very limited weight to the policy conflict.

Policy MD13 – Historic Environment

- 4.63. I consider that Policy MD13 is out-of-date in-so-far as it doesn't require decision makers to undertake a balancing exercise as required within the Framework. The policy is also absent of a weighing process as required within the Framework.
- 4.64. The Council accepts that the proposal would result in less than substantial harm to designated heritage assets. That harm is capable of being assessed through the balancing exercise under the Framework and does not amount to a policy prohibition.
- 4.65. In light of the agreed heritage position and the substantial public benefits delivered by the proposal, the development is considered to accord with the overall objectives of Policy MD13.

Policy S1 – Albrighton

- 4.66. The proposal lies outside the adopted development boundary and exceeds the scale of development envisaged by the adopted Development Plan. Accordingly, the proposal partially conflicts with Policy S1.
- 4.67. Nevertheless, the weight attributed to that conflict is substantially reduced by the Council's housing land supply position and the application of the tilted balance under paragraph 11(d) of the Framework. I attach very limited weight to the conflict with policy S1.

- 4.68. The Appeal proposal would deliver a significant level of housing together with strategic infrastructure, including land for a secondary school, local centre, care home and extensive green infrastructure, thereby reinforcing Albrighton's role as a Key Centre.

The Development Plan as a Whole

- 4.69. I acknowledge that the proposed development lies beyond the defined settlement boundary of Albrighton and that the delivery of 800 dwellings would exceed the defined settlement guidelines and conflicts with Policy CS3, MD7a and Policy S1. I further acknowledge conflict with Policies CS5 and MD6, along with Policies CS17 and MD12 in respect of landscape harm only.
- 4.70. As these are relevant Development Plan policies for determining the principle of the development proposed, I accept therefore that the Appeal proposals conflict with the Plan when read as a whole. However, for the reasons I have stated above, I consider that Policies CS3, CS5, MD7a, MD6 and S1 are out-of-date and conflict with them should be afforded no more than limited weight in determining the Appeal. Also, as discussed above, all the most important policies for determining the appeal are deemed to be out of date by virtue of NPPF 11 d.



5. Other Material Considerations

NPPF

- 5.1. Paragraph 2 of the NPPF 2024 sets out that it is an important material consideration of planning applications. I refer to my analysis above with regards compliance with the NPPF.

Planning Practice Guidance

- 5.2. Where necessary, this proof of evidence makes reference to relevant sections of the PPG.

6. Rule 6 Party & Interested Parties

- 6.1. This section of my evidence addresses matters which have been raised by the Rule 6 Party and Interested Parties through their respective representations and evidence, but which do not fall directly within the Main Issues identified by the Inspector.
- 6.2. I have sought to address these matters for completeness and to ensure that the Inspector has before them a clear response to the principal concerns which continue to be advanced in opposition to the Appeal Proposal. The fact that I address them within my evidence should not, however, be taken as an acceptance that each represents a matter of significance to the determination of the Appeal, or that they attract the weight which the Rule 6 Party and Interested Parties seek to place upon them.
- 6.3. Inevitably, given the breadth of representations made in respect of the Appeal Proposal, it would neither be proportionate nor necessary for my evidence to respond individually to every point which has been raised. I have therefore focussed upon those matters which appear to form substantive or recurring elements of the objections to the Appeal Proposal and which, in my view, warrant a response in order to assist the Inspector.

Scale

- 6.4. I note that the Rule 6 Party within their Statement of Case **[CD3.3]** identify scale as a key issue. I consider, however, that this submission conflates the scale of development with planning harm. Whilst the size of a proposal is plainly capable of influencing planning impacts, scale is not, of itself, a harmful planning characteristic.
- 6.5. Against that background, I consider it significant that no statutory consultee has concluded that the proposed scale of development would overwhelm Albrighton or exceed the capacity of its physical infrastructure (taking into account where relevant, financial contributions). The Local Highway Authority has not objected to the proposal on the basis that the quantum of development is incapable of being accommodated on the local highway network. Rather, following detailed assessment, appropriate mitigation has been identified. Likewise, there is no objection from the Lead Local Flood Authority on the basis that the settlement cannot accommodate this level of growth, and no evidence from any infrastructure provider suggesting that the village is physically incapable of supporting the proposed development.

- 6.6. Indeed, the sole statutory body to identify capacity issues is the Integrated Care Board in relation to primary healthcare provision. The Appeal proposal responds directly to that issue through the provision of land for a new medical facility, financial contributions to be secured through the Section 106 Agreement, and ongoing engagement with the ICB. The existence of infrastructure requirements cannot sensibly be characterised as evidence that development should not occur; if that were the case, strategic housing developments would rarely, if ever, be capable of coming forward.
- 6.7. The planning question is not whether 800 dwellings represent a substantial development. Plainly it does. The question is whether that scale produces unacceptable planning consequences.
- 6.8. On the evidence before the Inquiry, I do not consider that it does. Rather the scale of the proposal is proportionate to the scale of the problem of inadequate and worsening supply of market and affordable housing.
- 6.9. This conclusion is reinforced by national planning policy. The revised NPPF represents a clear shift in Government policy towards facilitating sustainable growth on suitable Green Belt land which meets the definition of grey belt. Paragraph 155 confirms that housing development on grey belt land should not be regarded as inappropriate where, amongst other matters, it is located in a sustainable location and satisfies the relevant policy requirements. The Framework therefore positively anticipates substantial residential development in locations which are both sustainable and well connected.
- 6.10. In that regard, Albrighton possesses characteristics which national policy now expressly seeks to capitalise upon. It benefits from a train station providing direct services to Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Shrewsbury, is closely related to the West Midlands conurbation, and contains an established range of day-to-day services and facilities. Paragraphs 110 and 115 of the Framework encourage development in locations where opportunities exist to maximise sustainable transport choices, reduce reliance on the private car and support public transport use. The Appeal Site accords with those objectives.
- 6.11. It is also necessary to recognise the historical planning context. The limited growth experienced by Albrighton over recent decades cannot reasonably be interpreted as evidence that the settlement lacks capacity to accommodate development. Rather, it reflects the longstanding operation of Green Belt policy, which has substantially constrained opportunities for expansion despite the village's inherently sustainable characteristics and its close functional relationship with Wolverhampton. The Government has now recognised, through the introduction of grey belt policy, that

such longstanding Green Belt constraints should not prevent appropriate development where land does not make a strong contribution to the relevant purposes of the Green Belt and where development would be sustainable.

- 6.12. I therefore consider it inappropriate to rely upon the historic absence of growth as evidence that future growth is necessarily unacceptable.
- 6.13. Perhaps most significantly, the Council's own evidence base fundamentally undermines the suggestion that development of this scale is unsuitable in principle. As part of the preparation of the now withdrawn Local Plan, the Council undertook an extensive site assessment and Sustainability Appraisal **[CD5.9]** process to identify reasonable alternatives for accommodating future housing growth.
- 6.14. Through that process, the Appeal Site was identified as being suitable for strategic residential development and performed positively when compared against alternative options. It was not identified for allocation within that Plan, but it was recorded that it could accommodate development at scale in the future.
- 6.15. That conclusion sits uncomfortably alongside the assertions advanced by the Rule 6 Party that the proposal is simply "too large" for Albrighton. If the Council's own evidence base concluded that the site represented an appropriate location for strategic housing growth, it is difficult to reconcile that position with unsupported submissions that the village lacks the capacity to accommodate development of this scale. No technical evidence has been presented to demonstrate that conclusion.
- 6.16. The detailed evidence before the Inquiry demonstrates that where infrastructure improvements are required, those improvements are capable of being delivered through the Appeal proposal itself.

Albrighton Neighbourhood Plan Light

- 6.17. Unlike a statutory Neighbourhood Development Plan prepared under the Localism Act 2011, the Albrighton Neighbourhood Plan Light was not subject to independent examination or referendum and does not form part of the statutory Development Plan.
- 6.18. Policy S1 of the Core Strategy requires regard be had to the Plan. As is detailed above, I consider that Policy S1 is out-of-date.
- 6.19. I consider however that community prepared Plans, that have been subject to public consultation, can be a material consideration.
- 6.20. The Plan was adopted over 13 years ago, in June 2013.
- 6.21. The Plan itself anticipated growth only until 2026 and was prepared before the significant changes to national planning policy, including the revised standard method

for housing need, the Council's current housing land supply position and the introduction of grey belt policy.

6.22. Below, I consider some of the key 'policies' within the Plan;

Policy ALB1 – Housing Mix

6.23. The application was supported by a Housing Mix Statement **[CD5.3]** and subject to an appropriately worded condition, the proposed development provides for a compliant housing mix.

Policy ALB2 – Housing Design

6.24. I consider that the proposed development, in line with the evidence of Mr Hillson **[CD1.12]** accords with this 'policy'.

Policy ALB3 – Green Infrastructure and Open Space

6.25. The Appeal proposal incorporates extensive green infrastructure, structural landscaping, habitat creation and biodiversity enhancement, and is therefore consistent with the objectives of the 'policy'.

Policy ALB4 – Sustainable Transport

6.26. The proposal includes new pedestrian and cycle links, public transport opportunities and significant highway improvements and is consistent with the 'policy'.

Policy ALB5 – Community Infrastructure

6.27. The proposal delivers land for a secondary school, a local centre, a care home, green infrastructure and financial contributions through the Section 106 Agreement and therefore strongly supports the objectives of the 'policy'.

Interested Party Comments

6.28. I have reviewed the received interested party comments and summarise these below, along with details in respect of which of the Appellant's witnesses have addressed said comments within evidence;

Table 14: Summary of Interested Party Comments

Matter	Interested Parties	Appellant Witness Responding to Matter
Green Belt	- Conflicts with the Green Belt functions and purposes (particularly its function to prevent urban sprawl and the coalescence of settlements) - The Site does not comprise grey belt land as it does not meet the criteria set out in national policy - The proposed development would lead to the irreversible loss of land within the Green Belt	Megan Wilson – Addressed above in Section 3
Landscape	- The proposed development would erode the rural character of Albrighton - The proposals would significantly harm existing resident's quality of life due to the loss of green, open space.	Neil Furber
Highways	- Increase in congestion at peak times, particularly along unsuitable rural routes and at pinch points - Existing parking issues associated with the train station and the primary schools will be exacerbated by the proposed development - Increased congestion will create additional safety risks for pedestrians and road users	Anna Meer
Impact on Infrastructure and Services	- Lack of confidence in the delivery of a new GP Surgery as part of the proposals - Lack of evidence to demonstrate the need for a brand-new Care Home - Primary Schools oversubscribed and will be unable to accommodate an influx of families associated with the proposed development - Proposed Secondary School not required and Idsall School will suffer from loss of new students	Megan Wilson Kerrie Norman
Flood Risk and Drainage	- The proposed development area is already susceptible to flooding - Regular flooding along Cross Road, Newhouse Lane and the wider village - Limited reassurance regarding effective solution to the potential drainage and flooding issues	Matt Travis

Ecological Impacts	• Loss of wildlife habitats and wildlife movement corridors (particularly those that support birds) • Irreversible damage to the biodiversity of the countryside	Dan Ross
Sustainability	• There will be a high reliance on cars due to the distance from the Site to the train station and town centre	Anna Meer

- 6.29. In addition to the above identified Interested Party comments that are addressed in evidence elsewhere, there are a couple of broad topics not yet considered.

Previously Developed Land

- 6.30. National planning policy encourages the redevelopment of PDL but not to the exclusion of development which meets the policy tests for greenfield grey belt and the tilted balance, or very special circumstances.

Loss of productive and good quality farming land

- 6.31. Interested Parties have also raised concerns regarding the loss of productive agricultural land. I acknowledge that development of the Appeal Site would inevitably result in the permanent loss of agricultural land and that this is a matter which should properly be taken into account. However, the extent of that loss must be considered in its proper context. The Appeal Site represents a very small proportion of the agricultural land resource available across Shropshire and its development would have no material effect upon the overall availability of agricultural land, or upon agricultural production within the County.
- 6.32. Furthermore, the loss of agricultural land is an inevitable consequence of delivering a significant proportion of the housing required within a predominantly rural authority such as Shropshire, particularly where there is insufficient previously developed land to meet identified development needs. Indeed, the Council's own approach to accommodating growth necessarily relies upon the development of greenfield and agricultural land.

7. Summary & Conclusions

- 7.1. I have considered the Appeal proposal against the Development Plan as a whole, the National Planning Policy Framework, relevant Planning Practice Guidance and the other material considerations identified throughout my evidence. I have also had regard to the evidence presented by the Council, the Rule 6 Party and Interested Parties and, importantly, to the extensive areas of agreement which now exist between the parties.
- 7.2. The starting point is that Shropshire has a substantial and immediate need for housing. It is common ground that the Council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites and that the tilted balance contained within paragraph 11(d)ii of the Framework is engaged. The disagreement between the Appellant and Council as to the precise extent of that shortfall does not alter the fundamental position. There is an unmet need for housing now.
- 7.3. The Appeal proposal would make a very substantial contribution towards addressing that position. It would deliver up to 800 homes, including 280 affordable homes secured at 35%. In a context of acknowledged market and affordable housing need, I afford very substantial weight to both.
- 7.4. Importantly, however, this is not simply an application for housing. The Appeal proposal represents a comprehensive mixed-use development which would deliver land for a new secondary school, a care facility and local centre, alongside substantial highway and public transport improvements, extensive green infrastructure, biodiversity enhancements and approximately 12.35 hectares of usable public open space. These are real and substantial benefits. A number would benefit not only future occupiers of the development but the existing community in Albrighton.
- 7.5. I have considered carefully the principal issue of Green Belt. For the reasons set out in Section 3 of my evidence, I conclude that the Appeal Site does not make a strong contribution to Green Belt Purposes (a), (b) or (d). It is particularly well contained by existing development and substantial permanent physical features; it does not form a substantial part of a gap between towns; its development would not result in the loss of visual separation between towns; and it makes no contribution to the setting or special character of a historic town.
- 7.6. I have also explained why I consider Albrighton to be a village rather than a Large Built-up Area for the purposes of the assessment. That conclusion is supported by the historical and recent planning evidence. The Council's own evidence prepared as

recently as 2024 expressly characterised Albrighton as a large village. The SAMDev Inspectors referred to it as a village. The Council's earlier Green Belt evidence, prepared by the same consultant now relied upon by the Council, reached materially different conclusions regarding the contribution of this land to Green Belt purposes.

- 7.7. Against that background, I find the Council's latest position difficult to reconcile with the evidential history. National policy and guidance have changed. The physical relationship between the Site, Albrighton and the surrounding permanent features has not.
- 7.8. I therefore conclude that the Appeal Site comprises grey belt land for the purposes of the Framework. There is a demonstrable need for the development proposed; the Site is in a sustainable location; development would not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area; and the Appeal Proposal meets the Golden Rules. The development should therefore not be regarded as inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- 7.9. Albrighton is plainly a sustainable settlement. It is identified as a Key Centre within the adopted spatial strategy and benefits from an established range of services and facilities together with a railway station providing direct connections to Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Telford and Shrewsbury. The evidence before the Inquiry demonstrates that future residents would have genuine choices in how they travel, whilst the Appeal Proposal itself would materially improve public transport, walking and cycling opportunities and provide additional services within the Site.
- 7.10. I acknowledge that a development of this scale will result in change. There would be landscape and visual effects, the loss of agricultural and BMV land and a degree of less than substantial harm to designated heritage assets. I have not sought to minimise those matters. They must be placed into the planning balance and afforded appropriate weight.
- 7.11. What is important, however, is that the technical evidence does not demonstrate that those effects, either individually or cumulatively, make the development unacceptable. Matters relating to highways, drainage, ecology, education, accessibility and infrastructure have been comprehensively assessed. Where mitigation or infrastructure is required, it can be secured through the development. The fact that this is a substantial development is not, in itself, a reason for refusal.
- 7.12. The scale of the proposal should also be considered in its proper planning context. Albrighton has experienced relatively limited growth over recent decades, substantially as a consequence of its Green Belt location. That historic constraint should not be confused with an absence of sustainability or an inability to

accommodate growth. Indeed, the Council's own recent Local Plan evidence identified the Appeal Site as capable of accommodating strategic residential development at scale.

- 7.13. I acknowledge that the Appeal proposal conflicts with elements of the adopted Development Plan. However, the Plan was prepared against a materially different housing requirement and national policy context. A number of the policies most important for determining the Appeal are now substantively out-of-date (and all of them are deemed to be out of date) and I have therefore afforded limited weight to the identified conflict. Importantly, the proposal remains consistent with the underlying spatial principle of directing significant growth towards sustainable Market Towns and Key Centres, of which Albrighton is one.
- 7.14. Applying paragraph 11(d) of the Framework, there are no policies relating to areas or assets of particular importance which provide a strong reason for refusing the development. The adverse impacts identified through my evidence would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the Framework taken as a whole. In my professional opinion, they fall a considerable way short of doing so.
- 7.15. In the alternative, should the Inspector disagree with my primary conclusion that the Site comprises grey belt and conclude that the Appeal proposal represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt, I have undertaken the Very Special Circumstances exercise. I attach substantial weight to Green Belt harm as required by the Framework. Even on that basis, however, the combination of very substantial housing and affordable housing benefits, significant infrastructure provision, education and care provision, biodiversity enhancement, sustainable transport improvements and the wider considerations identified in my evidence clearly outweigh the Green Belt harm and the other identified harms.
- 7.16. I therefore conclude that Very Special Circumstances would exist in the alternative.
- 7.17. Ultimately, the Appeal presents an opportunity to deliver a substantial number of market and affordable homes in one of Shropshire's more sustainable settlements, alongside infrastructure and community benefits of a scale which would be difficult to replicate through smaller or more dispersed development. It does so on a well-contained Site which, in my judgement, meets the definition of grey belt and in circumstances where there is an acknowledged and significant need for additional housing.
- 7.18. In this case, I consider the identified harms to be limited and capable of being appropriately weighed and, where necessary, mitigated. The benefits are substantial, immediate and wide-ranging.



7.19. I therefore conclude that the tilted balance weighs decisively in favour of permission. In the alternative, Very Special Circumstances exist. I respectfully invite the Inspector to allow the Appeal and grant planning permission.



Marrons

