

URBANA

PLANNING STATEMENT

Former Willowgarth High School Site
Grimethorpe, Barnsley



Statement prepared by: MB
Client: Saul Construction Limited
Date: January 2023
Submitted to: Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT ON LAND AT FORMER WILLOWGARTH HIGH SCHOOL, BRIERLEY ROAD, BARNSLEY

Willow Mews, Grimethorpe, Barnsley, S72 7FQ

1.0 Introduction

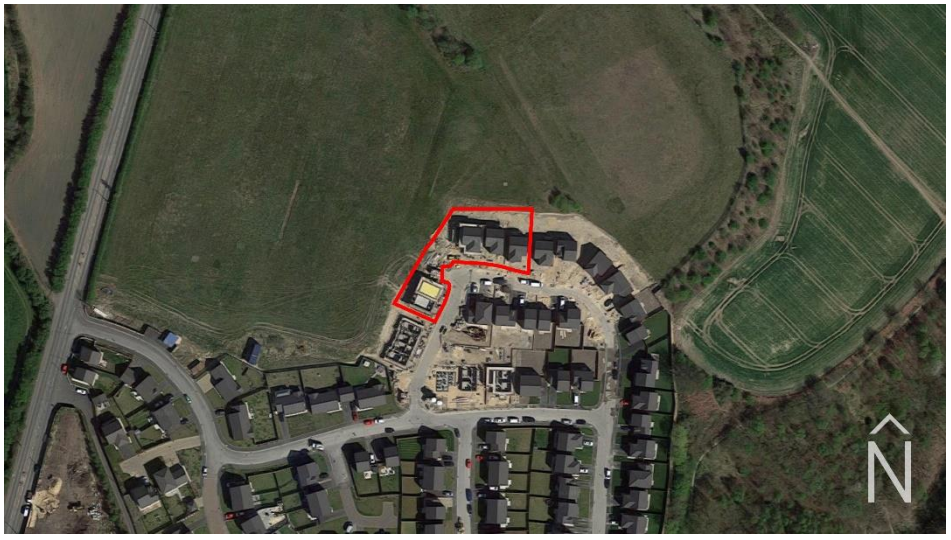
1.1 This statement has been prepared by Urbana on behalf of the applicant, Saul Construction Limited, in support of an application to approve plots built as part of the ongoing redevelopment of the former Willowgarth High School in Grimethorpe, Barnsley.

1.2 This statement sets out the site location and planning context, including available details of the agreement between Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (hereafter referred to as BMBC or LPA).

1.3 Particular focus within the statement is given to the site's proximity to the Green Belt and its potential impact on the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. Additionally, local and national Green Belt policy is analysed to establish the appropriateness of the development undertaken on the site in question as part of the wider redevelopment of the former school site.

2.0 Site Location and Planning and Development Context

2.1 The development in question concerns five plots on Willow Mews at the north of the development site, which abuts a large expanse of former playing fields associated with the high school and which ownership has been retained by BMBC. Satellite imagery of the site, taken from Google Maps, is shown below (note that the development has advanced from that shown in the image and is shown for illustrative purposes only).



2.2 The wider development site represents the northernmost part of the settlement of Grimethorpe, which along with Shafton is part of the principal town of Cudworth (in accordance with the established settlement hierarchy as per paragraph 5.9 of the 2019 BMBC Local Plan).

2.3 Surrounding the boundary of the part of the development subject to this application is banking that rises approximately 2-2.5 metres in height to the former playing fields beyond. The result of this banking is that the scheme, when viewed from the former playing fields, is partially screened and sits notably below this expanse of open space. This has a bearing on the visual impact of the development on the wider locality, as will be discussed in further detail in the assessment of the proposals in section 6 of this statement.





2.4 As stated in paragraph 5.24 of the Local Plan, Cudworth (including Grimethorpe) is part of an arc of settlements close to the eastern side of the built-up area of Urban Barnsley which cumulatively provide significant housing and employment opportunities. This is reflected in the substantial redevelopment of the former school site, effectively utilising previously developed land to deliver sustainable development in appropriately sized settlement.

2.5 As will be discussed in further detail in this statement, the entirety of the wider development site was formerly designated as Green Belt land prior to a Green Belt review which supported the adoption of the new Local Plan in 2019.

2.6 As has been recently highlighted to the applicant in the process of the development, proportions of the plots subject to this application encroach into Green Belt land, and as such justification is required to establish that the development does not represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

3.0 Planning History and Agreement with Local Authority

3.1 The site was previously occupied by Willowgarth High School. The school was built in the 1950s and operated until 2011 when Shafton Advanced Learning Centre (a merger of the High School and Priory School and Sports College) relocated to new premises.

3.2 This new application follows previously approved outline and reserved matters applications which have facilitated the redevelopment of the former school premises.

3.3 Following the closure of the school, as owners of the land, BMBC brought forward redevelopment proposals through outline application 2012/0537, which was approved in 2013. Matters of appearance, landscape, layout and scale were reserved for assessment in the follow-up application.

3.4 The subsequent reserved matters application (reference 2015/1134), providing detail of the aforementioned outstanding aspects of the scheme, was submitted in September 2015 and approved in April 2017.

3.5 Following approval of the reserved matters application, the former school site was acquired by Saul Homes and the development of the scheme commenced. At present, the wider scheme is now nearing completion, with the majority of the plots across the site now being sold and occupied.

3.6 Also agreed with BMBC is the purchase of a small parcel of additional land which adjoins the applicant's existing landholding and predominantly forms part of the private garden amenity space for Plot 16, as shown on the plans to support the proposals in this application. The purchase of the additional land is subject to approval of this application.

3.7 Of some pertinence to this application, it should also be noted that in the course of the sale of the land to the applicant, including that which extends beyond the approved red-line boundary, no reference was made by BMBC to the exact extent of land that was still subject to Green Belt designation, with the approved development site having been removed from the Green Belt on the adoption of the 2019 Local Plan (the site having been allocated for housing development and specified within the Local Plan (Site HS41)).

3.8 The lack of any disclosure in respect of the additional land's designations and constraints should therefore be taken into account to provide context to the development's subsequent encroachment into the revised Green Belt boundary which abuts the north and northwest boundaries of the scheme. Full analysis and discussion of the appropriateness of the development that has been undertaken, insofar as its Green Belt impact, is provided in section 6 of this statement.

4.0 Proposals

4.1 The proposals reflect the development that has been undertaken to date, which can be seen in the accompanying plans submitted with this application.

4.2 Specifically, Plots 14 to 18 include land utilised as rear garden private amenity space that is outside of the red-line boundary previously approved in reserved matters application

2015/1134; a small parcel of open green space between Plots 15 and 16 also extends beyond the previously agreed site boundary.

4.3 Also forming a proportion of the private garden amenity space for Plot 16 (approximately 38 square metres), and a minimal section of the open green space between Plots 15 and 16 (approximately 0.8 square metres), is land beyond the previously approved red-line boundary that is presently not within the applicant's ownership.

4.4 The total of the additional land utilised for development is bounded by a close board timber fence which tops a low brick wall, totalling an approximate height of two metres.

4.5 Included within the additional land of Plot 16 (beyond the red-line boundary but within the applicant's existing ownership) is a small section of dwellinghouse which equates to a footprint of approximately 8.7 square metres.

5.0 Planning Policy

5.1 In terms of relevant national and local planning policy, the site and its proposals have been assessed against the following documents:

National Policy

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (updated July 2021)
  The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. The document provides a framework to which local plans should be consistent, and as such local plans should be kept up-to-date so as to not diverge from the direction of national policy and universal development objectives.

Local Policy (including supplementary guidance)

- Barnsley Local Plan (adopted January 2019)
  The Barnsley Local Plan provides policy and direction for development in Barnsley to the year 2033. The Plan sets out the key elements of the planning framework for Barnsley, and the approach to its long term physical development to achieve the Council's vision of what sort of place Barnsley wants to become. The document reflects the council's hopes and aims for the people who live, work, run businesses and enjoy leisure in Barnsley.

6.0 Assessment of Proposals

6.0.1 The following sections discuss all material matters pertinent to the site and its proposed development, with particular regard to how the proposals seek to accord with the relevant policies set out in the above planning policy documents.

6.1.0 Principle of Development

6.1.1 The principle of development in this application is the development of land, a small proportion of which is designated as Green Belt, for the positive regeneration of a derelict site that adjoins a long-established settlement within a principal town of Barnsley, delivering high quality sought-after housing.

6.1.2 It is considered that the principle of the development has effectively been established by the previous approval for the redevelopment of the entirety of the former school site, which was supported whilst taking into account the whole site's Green Belt designation at the time of the respective applications.

6.1.3 On the basis of the completed development's utilisation of a small section of Green Belt land adjoining the land under the applicant's ownership, further analysis and discussion of the potential Green Belt impact is provided below in section 6.2. However, it is considered pertinent that the relevant team within BMBC has already stated their willingness to sell to the applicant the land in question that is located in the Green Belt. This willingness from the Local Authority evidences an implicit understanding that the use of this small parcel of Green Belt land for development does not stand to have any negative bearing on the surrounding land within BMBC's ownership, in the context of both the purposes of including land in the Green Belt (discussed in paragraph 6.2.4 of this statement), and of the Local Authority's aspirations for their site in the future.

6.1.4 As such, in line with the Green Belt justification discussed below, it is asserted that the acceptability of the principle of the development in question is established, thus providing a sound case for the LPA to support the proposed development.

6.2.0 Green Belt Impact

6.2.1 National policy regarding Green Belts, contained within the NPPF, makes clear that there is a general presumption against development within the Green Belt by virtue of most new development being considered inappropriate and likely to undermine the purpose of Green Belt designation. Local policy echoes the objectives set out in the NPPF, with Local Plan policy GB1 stating that Green Belt land will be protected from inappropriate development in accordance national policy.

6.2.2 Notwithstanding the aforementioned presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt, the NPPF sets out in paragraph 149 circumstances where development in the Green Belt would not be inappropriate. Of pertinence to this application, and the applications previously approved in 2013 and 2017, is clause G of paragraph 149 which states that an exception to in appropriate development would be:

> *Limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development.*

6.2.3 In consideration of the above exception, it is clear that it is applicable to the site in question, being a redundant previously developed site. Furthermore, with reference to the areas and volume of built development that previously existed on the site prior to the commencement of its redevelopment, the development undertaken (including the specific plots subject to this application) represent a notable improvement insofar as its impact on the openness of the Green Belt compared to the previous school buildings and ancillary playgrounds and boundary treatments. Therefore, it is asserted that the plots subject to this application, as part of the wider development (allocated by the LPA), are acceptable development in the Green Belt in that they are utilising previously developed land.

6.2.4 With specific regard to the developed plots in question, and their being located on Green Belt land, the technical encroachment of the development into the Green Belt cannot be viewed as

having an adverse impact on the Green Belt or the purposes of including land within it. Indeed, with reference to the five purposes that Green Belt land serves, the following assertions can be made:

- **Check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas**
  It is acknowledged that the playing fields denote a reasonable new settlement development limit to Grimethorpe, having ceased being ancillary to the former high school. However, the extent to which the development has exceeded the previously approved development boundary has no material impact on the Green Belt in this regard. Rather, the development undertaken forms part of the wider allocated housing development that has positively regenerated this part of Grimethorpe.

- **Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another**
  Similarly, the development does not result in the merging of two towns or settlements, in this case Grimethorpe and Brierley. The wider development is utilising previously developed land, of which the former playing fields were ancillary to the previous use of the site. The degree to which the development has extended beyond the previously approved site boundary does not risk causing any merging between the two settlements.

- **Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment**

- **Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns**
  This purpose is not specifically applicable to the site in question, in that it is not located in close proximity to any historic towns. Therefore, by default, the development does not affect this Green Belt purpose.

- **Assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land**
  As part of the principal town of Cudworth, whilst being located outside of Urban Barnsley, the site is still part of a relatively urbanised district of the Metropolitan Borough, and its redevelopment can be considered a suitable recycling of derelict land as part of the sustainable growth aspirations held by BMBC, notwithstanding the Green Belt status of part of the site in question (and previously the entirety of the former school site).

6.2.5 In instances where previously developed sites within the Green Belt have been cleared of built development, it is effectively no longer possible to offset the volume of any replacement development against the buildings previously on the same site. That is, where buildings no longer exist, a new baseline is set for the quantum of built area or volume (zero) against which new development proposals would be assessed. However, an important distinction in the case of the proposals in this application is that the development that has been undertaken forms part of the already consented redevelopment of the former Willowgarth High School. Therefore, the area and volume of development from the former school buildings and ancillary hardstanding remains 'in place' to offset the completed redevelopment of the site.

6.2.6 The area of the land within the Green Belt that has been incorporated into the development is approximately 334 square metres. This is compared to the approximate 60,500 square metres (6.05 hectares) that was released from the Green Belt when the site was allocated for housing development. Furthermore, when considering the 8.7 square metres of area that has actually been built on (i.e. has an actual volumetric presence within the Green Belt), this is negligible when objectively assessed against the scale of the wider development, which it is reiterated

is a substantial reduction in the area and volume of the previous school premises thereby improving the impact on the openness of the Green Belt. Even if assessing in isolation the impact of the development that sits within the Green Belt (i.e. not taking into consideration the previous volume of development from the school), its visual and spatial impact is minimal. Indeed, levels around the site are such that it sits below the surrounding former playing fields, with a backdrop of the remainder of the housing development. From this, it can be categorically said that the plots in question are having no discernible adverse impact on the Green Belt.

6.2.7 From the above, it is asserted that the development represents appropriate development in the Green Belt. As part of the wider redevelopment of the former Willowgarth High School, the development as a whole has been established to have a comparative beneficial impact upon the openness of the Green Belt. Therefore, this merits substantial positive weight in the assessment of the application.

6.3.0 Sustainable Development

6.3.1 As part of the principal town of Cudworth, Grimethorpe has been earmarked in the Local Plan as having significant housing and employment opportunities, as part of achieving a sustainable growth of the arc of principal towns and other settlements that are sited in close proximity to the eastern side of Urban Barnsley. This ties into the objectives set out in policy LG2 of the Local Plan (The Location of Growth).

6.3.2 Previously referenced in section 3 of this statement, the site subject of this application forms part of the housing allocation HS41, which is delivering over 100 homes in Grimethorpe and thus contributing to the sustainable growth of Grimethorpe and Cudworth. The site's proximity to open countryside is also ideal insofar as giving local residents access to an abundance of open green space without the need to travel by car. Both of these points should be afforded substantial positive weight.

7.0 Conclusions

7.1 This application has been produced by Urbana in support of proposals submitted to BMBC by Saul Homes. The development in question, plots associated with the residential redevelopment of the former Willowgarth School site, has been assessed against the relevant national and local planning policy and is asserted to be appropriate in line with the site's location and constraints.

7.2 The marginal degree of development in the Green Belt remains a clear improvement in respect of the openness of the Green Belt, that was previously more substantially affected by the presence of the school buildings as part of the site's former use. Even when considering the specific plots in isolation from the remainder of the development, the actual impact on the Green Belt is minimal from a quantitative perspective and negligible from a qualitative perspective. Being completed as part of the wider development, the proposals also benefit from exceptions to Green Belt development being considered inappropriate.

7.3 The proposed development constitutes sustainable development and is positively contributing to the sustainable growth of a principal town in Barnsley. Accordingly, this application and the proposals therein should be viewed favourably by the Local Planning Authority.