**Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment 2017**

Following discussion of a paper on housing policies at the NDP Steering Group meeting on 26th March, I took Mike Worden’s advice to look at CWaC’s **Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HEELA)**and **Brownfield Land Register.**

The sections relating to Upton, particularly in the former document, are very interesting (and possible somewhat concerning) in the context of the NDP.

The HEELA suggests that a total of 163 new dwellings could be built in Upton over the next 15 years. The sites that are suggested as appropriate for housing development are as follows:

**UPT/0002 Dunham Way, (land adjacent) – 9 dwellings**

This is designated amenity open space associated with the housing estate

**UPT/0010 Land to rear of Marl Heys, Chester – 13 dwellings**

This is informal open space in the ownership of the Parish Council. It is not used as a play area because of the proximity of elderly people’s bungalows but is used for dog walking and other activities. The Parish Council has considered it for development in the past but the proposal was never progressed. Providing vehicle access to it would almost certainly require the demolition of existing dwellings. It does not appear to be designated as open space in the Local Plan.

**UPT/0011 Ivor** *(sic)* **Road / Marina Drive (recreation ground) – 26 dwellings**

This is the “Chemistry Pits” recreation ground which was presented to the people of Upton by Sir John Frost for recreational use by local children. It is in the ownership of the Parish Council who once considered using part of it for sheltered housing in order to enhance and protect the remainder. However, objections from planners and local residents led to the proposal being abandoned. It is designated as open space.

**UPT/0025 Land between Handford Road / Newhall Road – 25 dwellings**

This is designated amenity open space adjacent to St Columba’s RC Church and only partly in the Parish. The area was designated as “Reconciliation Wood” by the former City Council in 1995 to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of WW2.

**UPT/0047 Land at Countess of Chester Health Park, Liverpool Road – 36 and 54 dwellings**

There are two parcels of land in this designation, which are both described as brownfield land. The first is, indeed, formerly developed land for which planning permission has now been granted and is being built on. The second area, however, appears to be part of the Country Park and should, therefore, correctly be designated as open space.

However, before we get too concerned about threats to our open spaces, there is an important caveat in para 4.19 of the HELAA document.

*The site assessments in the HELAA are 'policy off' and do not take account of any relevant development plan policies. These sites will be subject to a separate policy appraisal to inform any potential land allocations in the Local Plan (Part Two). It is likely that further sites will be discounted as a result of this policy assessment process.*

The approved **Local Plan Part 1** includes the following policy on open spaces:

***SOC 6 Open space, sport and recreation***

*Proposals on existing open space, sport and recreation facilities will only be permitted where:*

1. *Equivalent or better replacement quality and quantity open space, sport or recreation facilities will be provided in a suitable location; or*
2. *An assessment has clearly demonstrated the site to be surplus for its current open space, sport or recreation function;*

*And*

1. *It could not fulfil other unsatisfied open space, sport or recreation needs;*

*And*

1. *In circumstances where the open space, sport or recreation facility has been demonstrated to be surplus to need for that function in accordance with part C of this policy any proposed replacement will remedy a deficiency in another type of open space, sport or recreation facility in the local area; or*
2. *The development will be incidental to the use of the open space, sport or recreation facility.*

This existing policy would therefore appear to preclude the development of those sites designated as open space except in exceptional circumstances. The assessments of the Dunham Way, Chemistry Pits and Handford Road sites make it clear that they are so designated but the Marl Heys and Countess sites are apparently not. Unfortunately, the section of the interactive map on the CWaC website which shows the open spaces designated in the Local Plan Part 1 is not currently working!

However, the consequence seems to be that most of the potential sites for the 163 dwellings suggested in the HELAA would (or at least should) be unavailable because of other policies. Should we seek to have Marl Heys and the Country Park land properly designated as open space? If so, this again raises the question, if we want more affordable housing in Upton, where would we put it?

It is unfortunate that some of the issues raised by the HELAA designations were not raised when the document was put out for consultation in 2016. However, it does seem that, in the age-old tradition of local authority “consultation” the opportunity to do so was far from blindingly obvious. It was contained in question 105 of a long questionnaire that was mainly about the Local Plan consultation process rather than the HEELA!

*The Draft HELAA (August 2016) including site assessments, was available for comment and fact checking alongside the Local Plan (Part Two) preferred approach consultation (12th August-23rd September 2016). The Local Plan (Part Two) Preferred Approach consultation document sought views through a series of questions; question 105 asked specifically for any other comments on the supporting evidence base.*

## APPENDIX

## Summary of the HELAA Assessments

**UPT/0002 Dunham Way, (land adjacent), Chester**

Greenfield site. No known ownership or ransom strip issues.

*Constraints / issues identified that may require mitigation or policy change.* Open space designation / typology.

**UPT/0010 Land to rear of Marl Heys, Chester**

Vacant greenfield land within residential area. No known ownership or ransom strip issues.

*Constraints / issues identified that may require mitigation or policy change.* Environmental constraints identified that may require mitigation. Ecology

**UPT/0011 Ivor Road / Marina Drive (recreation ground), Chester**

Greenfield site. No known ownership or ransom strip issues.

*Constraints / issues identified that may require mitigation or policy change.* Environmental constraints identifed that may require mitigation. Open space designation / typology. Ecology

**UPT/0025 Land between Handford Road / Newhall Road, Upton**

Greenfield site. No known ownership or ransom strip issues.

*Constraints / issues identified that may require mitigation or policy change.*   
SFRA recommendation. Open space designation / typology. Historic environment asset(s) / conservation area.

**UPT/0047 Land at Countess of Chester Health Park, Liverpool Road, Chester**

Vacant brownfield site. Part of wider redevelopment of surplus NHS land. No ownership or ransom strip issues.

*Constraints / issues identified that may require mitigation or policy change.* Expression of interest / submission indicates site could be achievable. Planning application for residential development pending decision. SFRA recommendation. Ecology WEC/0026 C