

SITE NAME: Doctors Lane, Ecclestone

LPA: Chorley Council

Date: April 2025

Introduction

Story Homes controls land at Doctors Lane, Ecclestone. This site has been promoted by Story Homes at all stages of the Central Lancashire Local Plan but has not previously been selected for development. As such, it is an omission site.

Story Homes is aware that the Local Plan Inspector will only consider the development contribution from omission sites should there be conclusions that there is a lack of land supply overall. This is exactly the case in respect of the Regulation 19 Local Plan.

As part of its submissions, Story Homes has prepared several documents which should be read in parallel to this individual site representation. For ease of reference, these comprises:

1. Central Lancashire Housing Need – Prepared by Stantec on behalf of a consortium of developers
2. Housing Land Supply Assessment – Prepared by Stantec on behalf of a consortium of developers
3. Core representations to the Central Lancashire Local Plan Regulation 19 – Prepared by Stantec on behalf of Story Homes
4. Individual Site Submission (this document)
5. Accompanying Development Framework and site assessment

Across these documents, Story Homes sets out its **objections** to the Central Lancashire Local Plan Regulation 19. We do not repeat those arguments here, but it is plainly clear that insufficient land is proposed to be allocated in the Central Lancashire Local Plan, and housing needs will not be met. Furthermore, conclusions are drawn regarding the deliverability of many sites selected for allocation by the Authorities, particularly regarding the certainty of supply in Preston, where delivery and viability are significant issues.

Objections are raised in respect of the site selection methodology and process undertaken in selecting allocations. This appears to be very much based upon sites chosen based on their aggregate yield (to achieve a *minimum* housing supply to 'get through' a Local Plan examination, rather than a thorough assessment of what can realistically be delivered.

Story Homes also raises objections to the Green Belt review, for various reasons set out in this and other submissions. In short, by focusing on vary large parcels in the Green Belt review, the author has assessed land with very different functional characteristics than the smaller parcel candidate sites actually being proposed by developers. In doing so, it has arrived at illogical conclusions regarding the contribution various parcels make to the Green Belt.

Accordingly, Story Homes considers that it is evident the Local Plan requires further land to be allocated for development. Land at Doctors Lane, Ecclestone is an obvious candidate site.

Site Description

The Site which extends to c.4.6ha in size, immediately adjoins the western edge of the built-up area of Ecclestone. Ecclestone is a vibrant village, with a good range of shops and services within a 10 minutes walking distance of the Site.

The Site lies within the Green Belt and consists of two fields within agricultural use. There is a mature cop of trees located in the middle of the eastern field. The Site forms a 'L'-shape around Ecclestone Cricket Club. The eastern boundary comprises the existing residential development at Chaucer Close and Reeveswood. The Site's southern and western boundaries comprise mature tree belts, beyond which lies undeveloped land. The Site's northern boundary adjoins land that benefits from planning permission for residential development and is under construction. The proposed development of the Site represents a logical rounding off the existing settlement in this location.

Access to the Site is provided from Doctors Lane. A public footpath runs along the southern boundary of the Site adjacent to Syd Brook.

The accompanying Development Framework provides Story Homes design proposals and sets out how, through an imaginatively designed scheme, the Site can provide for a high-quality development of up to 90 homes.

Assessment against evidence base

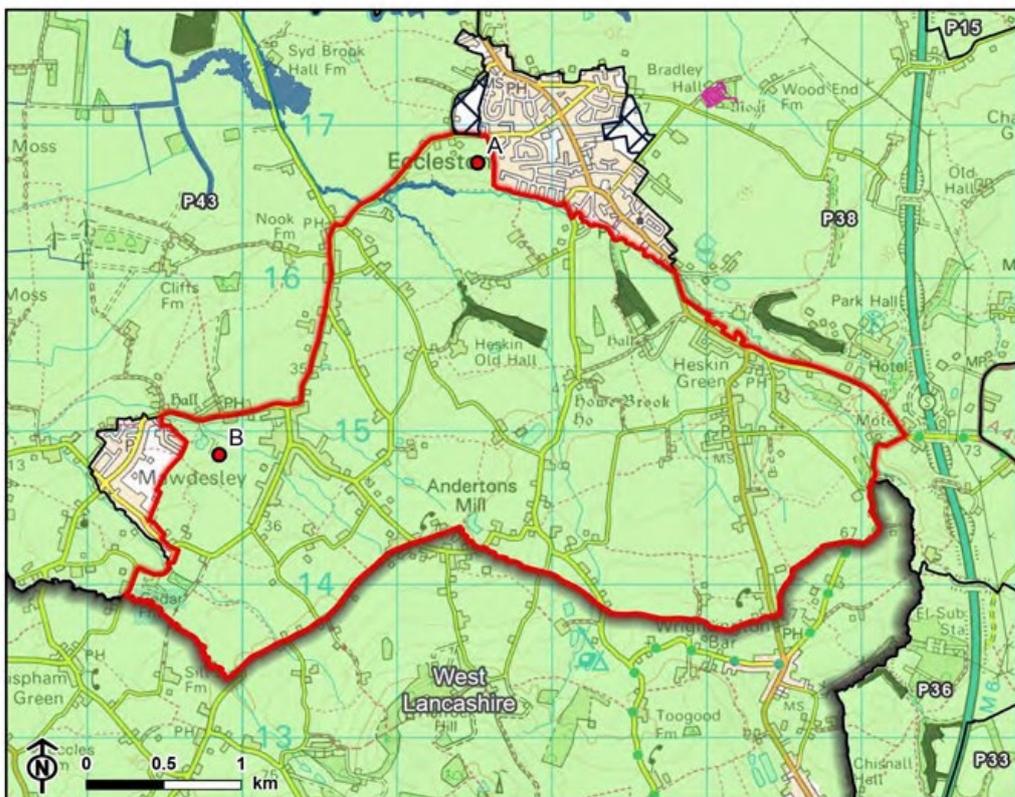
It is Story Homes' case that the Central Lancashire Local Plan does not identify sufficient land for development, and, that exceptional circumstance exists to warrant a review of the Green Belt in Central Lancashire (NPPF 145 and 146 apply). The Regulation 19 document does not provide sufficient land and is unsound on this basis. To rectify the lack of overall supply, the Council needs to release further Green Belt land for development.

The evidence base for the Council's Green Belt review is contained in document EV7, "Open Land Designation Study" (2022) prepared by LUC. One of the criticisms that Story Homes has of that evidence-based report is that the parcel areas selected by the author are so large that it is almost impossible to arrive at any meaningful conclusions regarding individual parcel contributions towards the Green Belt. By selecting such vast areas in the first place, the findings of the consultant team provide very little assistance to the Council as part of the site selection process.

Land at Doctors Lane, Ecclestone lies within assessment Parcel P40, extracted below. The P40 area is larger than the entire combined settlement areas of both Ecclestone and Mawdesley combined but has been assessed as one area. The extremely broad approach undertaken cannot assist the Council's site selection process.

The consultant arrives at the conclusion that assessment parcel makes a 'significant' contribution to Green Belt purposes, on the basis that the land parcel makes a 'significant' contribution to purpose 3, despite assessing the land parcel as making 'limited / no' contribution to purposes 1, 2 and 4, and an 'equal' contribution to purpose 5.

Parcel P40



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- | | |
|---|---|
| P40 | Policy BNE3 and G3:
Safeguarded land |
| Neighbouring parcel | Absolute Constraint(s) |
| Central Lancashire boundary | Sites of Special Scientific Interest |
| Neighbouring Local Authority | Scheduled monument |
| Green Belt | Ancient woodland |
| Location referenced in
assessment text | Flood zone 3b |

Furthermore, the author appears to recognise the flaws in its own methodology, by including specific qualification text that is intended to provide a further layer of detail that cannot be achieved when looking at the parcel as a whole.

As per the above extract, P40 includes two red dots where the author has sought to add additional comments. Point A) is almost central in the Story Homes controlled land at Doctors Lane.

The LUC Green Belt Assessment text states in specific reference to that point:

“To the southwest of Eccleston there is an area of open land contained between Syd Brook and Tincklers Lane (map point A), with weaker distinction from inset settlement edges to the east and north. Although the western part of this area makes a significant contribution to Purpose

because of the number of strong hedgerows that separate it from the urban edge, a release that didn't extend beyond the brook or Tincklers Lane would have a more limited impact on adjacent Green Belt than development extending further south."

Given this finding, it is wrong to conclude that that the site fulfils a 'Significant' purpose to inclusion within the Green Belt. It is self-evident that the author does not consider that that parcel of land at point A), fulfils a Green Belt function given that it is entirely contained.

Story Homes - Green Belt Assessment

As part of its Local Plan submissions, Story Homes has provided a Development Framework document which included the company's own assessment of the Green Belt as below. **It is Story Homes case that land at Doctors Lane in Eccleston provides no, or very limited contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt and should be released for development.**

Purpose of the Green Belt	Assessment
1. Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	The Site is small and contained by the Cricket Club site. It does not fulfil a role in preventing any wider urban sprawl or coalescence. The Site is contained by existing landscape features, Syd Brook and the cricket club.
2. Prevent neighbouring towns from merging	Eccleston is not a densely built up area, nor is it vulnerable to merging with other settlements. The Site does not sit within an area of separation.
3. Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	The Site is contained on all sides and development of the Site would not lead to any wider erosion of the countryside. It is therefore suitable for development without harming the purposes of including land in the Green Belt.
4. Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	The Site does not lie within a conservation area or its setting, in addition there are no listed buildings within the vicinity of the Site which would be impacted upon
5. Assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling or urban / derelict land	This purpose is not relevant as Eccleston does not have any regeneration needs. It is a thriving, successful village with very few derelict, redundant or brownfield sites available, therefore Green Belt land is the only logical solution for new development.

Safeguarding land

Separately and when defining Green Belt boundaries, the NPPF requires Authorities to identify areas of safeguarded land to meet the longer-term needs stretching beyond the plan period. Criteria c) and d) apply as below.

148. When defining Green Belt boundaries, plans should:
- a) ensure consistency with the development plan's strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;
 - b) not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;
 - c) where necessary, identify areas of safeguarded land between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;
 - d) make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following an update to a plan which proposes the development;
 - e) be able to demonstrate that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period; and
 - f) define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.

In the case of Central Lancashire, the need for safeguarded land was discussed briefly at the Preferred Options stage. In that document, at page 33, the Authorities recognise the role that safeguarded land has played in identifying land beyond 2015, particular in South Ribble and Chorley.

In the case of South Ribble, the report states that safeguarded land has not been required to come forward and is therefore not needed in the new Local Plan. However, this is qualified by concerns raised in the progress of Pickering's Farm, and the need to consider the role safeguarded land can play in considering the strategic growth of Curden / Samlesbury.

In the case of Chorley, the Preferred Options document states that the majority of these allocations have been granted planning permission upon appeal and are therefore included in the housing supply, with other remaining safeguarded sites either discounted due to constraints or proposed for allocation.

Noting the above findings, the Council clearly accepts that safeguarded land has provided a useful policy mechanism to help deliver homes beyond the original plan period. It is counter intuitive to therefore not consider the role of safeguarded land further in this Regulation 19 document.

Furthermore, as the Regulation 19 Local Plan is based on achieving only 80% of the standard housing methodology, it is self-evident that land needs to be safeguarded to meet future needs. The inconsistency in the Council's approach to Green Belt at this stage is misleading to the public and not justified.

Summary

Story Homes controls land at Doctors Lane, Ecclestone which it is promoting for development. Story Homes' own conclusions on the site align with the Council evidence base in that the Site provides a very limited / no contribution to the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. It should therefore be allocated for development.

Should the Inspector find that there is sufficient land in the plan period to achieve the 80% of housing needs being advanced as part of this strategy, then the site should at least be identified as safeguarded land under the provisions of the NPPF.

Supporting Documents

- Development Framework document prepared by Stantec.