

**SITE NAME:** Former Camelot Theme Park

**Site Address:** Park Hall Road, Charnock Richard

**LPA:** Chorley Council

**Date:** April 2025

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## **Introduction and context**

Story Homes is the freehold owner of the former Camelot Theme Park site, Park Hall Road, Charnock Richard. The theme park first opened in 1983 and is located next to the Park Hall Hotel and Leisure complex. Operated by Knights leisure, the theme park declined in popularity during the late 1990s and early 2000s, eventually closing in November 2012.

Since 2012, the theme park's leisure rides and coasters have been dismantled and demolished, including the 'Nightmare' signature rollercoaster ride, which had been left standing for some 8 years and which was something of a local landmark due to its height. The dismantling works have been completed by both Knights leisure, as owner of the theme park infrastructure, and Story Homes. Multiple trespass, arson and vandalism events have occurred on site since 2012, requiring substantial security fencing and 24-hour surveillance to be in operation. Presently, the site comprises concrete bases of existing leisure rides, various themed buildings and dilapidated storage buildings, and significant areas of hardstanding, car parks and infrastructure associated with the former theme park. It is a brownfield site.

Two Planning applications have been submitted; one in 2014 for 420 homes (ref: 14/00071/OUTMAJ), and the second in 2017 for 195 homes (ref: 17/00710/OUTMAJ). Both schemes were recommended for approval by Planning Officers but unfortunately both schemes were refused by Members..

Since then, the Site has been identified for residential development in various evidence-based documents including the Council's land availability assessments. The relevant SHELAA extracts are set out below, including a summary of the adopted Local Plan policy.

The Council previously proposed to allocate the Site and set out in the Preferred Option consultation its site selection methodology and conclusions, finding the site sustainable and available for development now. We set out that relevant context below. Notwithstanding this intention by the Council, the allocation has now been removed by the Council in its Regulation 19 document, with the explanation being that the Council no longer has exceptional circumstances to warrant the release Green Belt land, as part of the Council's broad approach to discontinuing with Green Belt releases. In doing so, the Council is also proposing changes to the adopted proposals maps.

Story Homes contend that this generic approach is flawed and unjustified. In taking this decision to drop the allocation, the Council has not had any regard to the brownfield nature of the site, the findings of its own Integrated Baseline Assessment undertaken at the Preferred Options stage, or the need to ensure that the Local Plan has a positive framework to enable the delivery of this significant brownfield site, which is one of the largest brownfield sites within Central Lancashire. We refer to the accompanying Development Framework for site specific information and Story Homes' approach to development.

## Planning Status – Adopted Chorley Local Plan

The Central Lancashire Core Strategy was adopted in 2012. This provided the strategic context for the then spatial strategy, having regard to regional planning strategies from the early 2000s (i.e. moving away from the previous moratorium approach in the North-West during the 1990s).

Subsequently, Chorley Council prepared its own Local Plan for the period 2012-2026, which dealt with site allocations and development management policies and was adopted in July 2015. This context is relevant given the change in approach the Councils have advanced under the current Regulation 19 consultation.

The adopted Chorley Local Plan identifies the former Camelot Site as comprising previously developed land within the Green Belt. Policy BNE5 applies and enables the redevelopment of the site subject to criterion d), which requires a comprehensive masterplan being provided. The policy tests followed the 2012 NPPF which relaxed the previous provisions set out in Annex C of PPG2. Policy BNE5 was further amended by the Local Plan Inspector, who noted in her report:

177. The policy text of **BNE5** is outdated and reflects the detailed guidance of PPG2: Green Belts. It is also inconsistent with paragraph 89 of the Framework regarding proposals for infill and redevelopment of previously developed sites in the Green Belt. (**MMEC46**) would remedy this by deleting criteria d, f and g. Criteria a and b, which refer to re-use have also been criticised, but I consider that they re-state parts of paragraphs 81 and 90 of the Framework. Whilst probably being unnecessary, their retention does not make the Plan unsound.

The final wording of Policy BNE is provided below:

### ***Policy BNE5 of the adopted Chorley Local Plan (July 2015):***

#### **Policy BNE5: Redevelopment of Previously Developed Sites in the Green Belt**

**The reuse, infilling or redevelopment of previously developed sites in the Green Belt, will be permitted providing the following criteria are met:**

**In the case of re-use:**

- a) **The proposal does not have a materially greater impact than the existing use on the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land in it;**
- b) **The development respects the character of the landscape and has regard to the need to integrate the development with its surroundings, and will not be of significant detriment to features of historical or ecological importance.**

**In the case of infill:**

- c) **The proposal does not lead to a major increase in the developed portion of the site, resulting in a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.**

**In the case of redevelopment:**

- d) **The appearance of the site as a whole is maintained or enhanced and that all proposals, including those for partial redevelopment, are put forward in the context of a comprehensive plan for the site as a whole.**

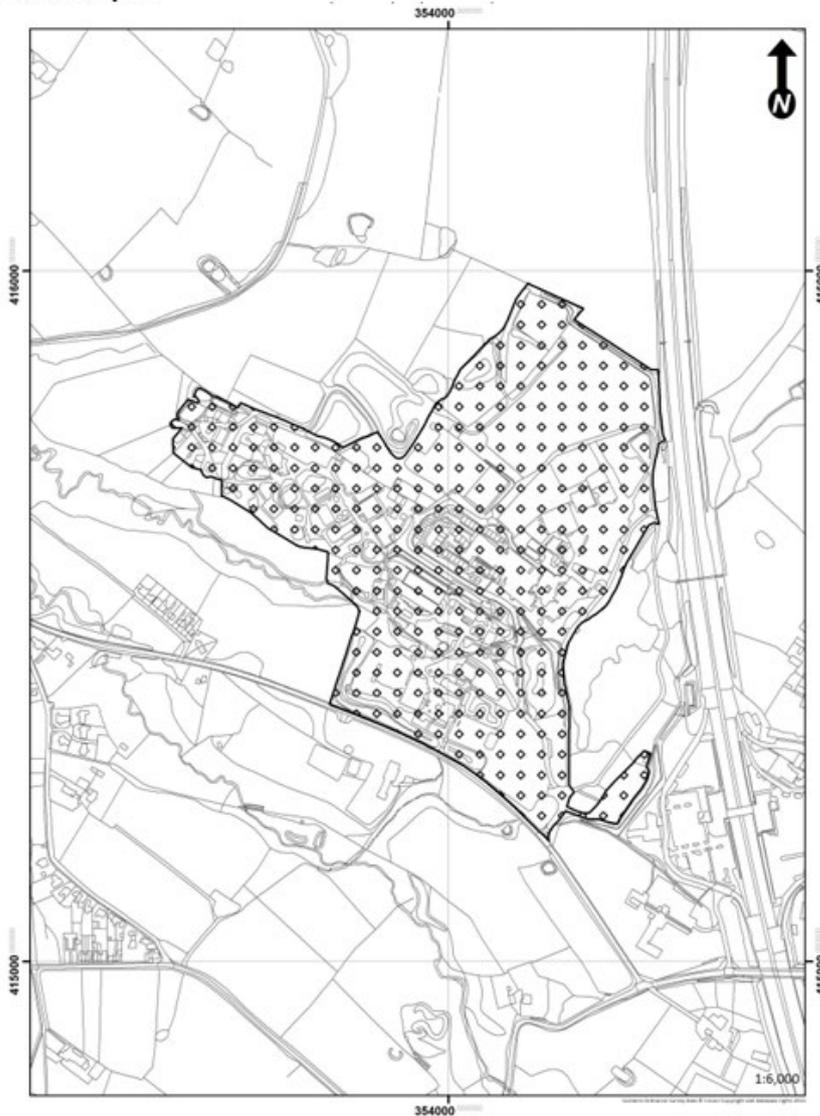
At the same time, the Local Plan Inspector considered the extent of brownfield land at Camelot. This was achieved during a joint site visit walkover where the boundary of the site was agreed, particularly having regard to the extent of hardstanding. The Local Plan Inspector concludes at paragraphs 174 and 175 of her report that modifications were needed to the Policies Maps, depicting the extent of brownfield land:

174. Text preceding policy BNE5 lists eight previously developed sites in the Green Belt to which the policy applies. It provides guidance for proposals for their re-use, infill or redevelopment. The boundaries of these sites are defined on the Policies Map. None except for the Park Hall/**Camelot** Leisure Complex and Cuerden Hall sites are contested, nor do I have any reason to question the soundness of the boundaries of those other sites.

175. However, in the light of what was observed at my accompanied inspection of the Park Hall/Camelot Leisure Complex, its boundaries should be amended, partly as indicated in representations by extending the boundary to the north-east to include the paintball area, but not including the natural area around The Dam and Swifts Wood in the south-east, since at my visit this area appeared natural and open, and did not display clear characteristics of previously developed land. Although the revised boundaries may not reflect land ownership boundaries, I conclude that they would correctly define the extent of this previously developed Green Belt site. Therefore, the Plan would not be sound unless the Policies Map was amended accordingly, as detailed by (**MMMECS**).

A map change is included in the Modification establishing the extent of previously developed land; extract as below:

**Map 1 – MMMECS: Previously developed site boundary for Park Hall/ Camelot Leisure Complex**



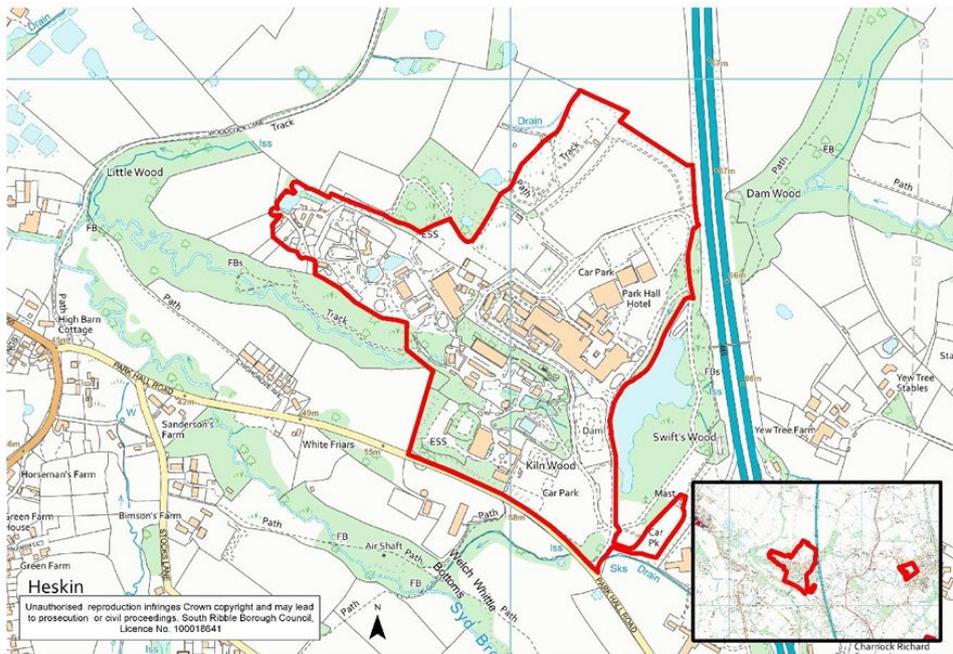
### **Emerging Central Lancashire Local Plan – Preferred Options & Integrated Evidence**

The Central Lancashire Local Plan consultation into its Preferred Options ran for 10 weeks from Monday 19th December 2022 until Sunday 26th February 2023. The consultation was in the form of a Preferred Options Part One document which outlined strategic policy directions for the emerging Local Plan. Development requirements for housing and employment, along with potential site allocations to meet these uses were also consulted on at the same time.

As evidence to this process, the Councils commissioned LUC in July 2021 to carry out an Integrated Assessment (IA) of the emerging Central Lancashire Local Plan. The IA comprises Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Health Impact Assessment (HIA) and Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA). The assessment included a full sustainability appraisal matrix of all sites and informed the Councils Preferred Options selection process.

It is the Council's position that the Preferred Options Site Selection process for housing and employment land was robust. The former Camelot Theme Park site was identified as brownfield land and suitable for housing development at around 27 Ha total area.

## Location Map



## Site Details

<b>Allocation Reference</b>	CH/HS1.8
<b>SHELAA Reference(s)</b>	19C394a
<b>Local Authority</b>	Chorley Council
<b>Site Name</b>	Camelot Theme Park
<b>Settlement</b>	Chorley
<b>Ward</b>	Eccleston, Heskin & Charnock Richard
<b>Size (Ha)</b>	26.87
<b>Current Use</b>	Brownfield

Recognising the brownfield nature of the site, the Preferred Options document identifies the former Camelot theme park site as providing a significantly positive development opportunity of approximately 671 dwellings, in both the main text and Site Appendices proformas of the Integrated report (reference: 19C394a). The only negative attribute listed in the Integrated Assessment is the proximity to ancient woodland (which has always been excluded from any development proposal, with an appropriate buffer). **Having undertaken the robust site assessment process, the Camelot site was then identified as an allocation for 564 houses, under Policy CH/HS1.8.**

Separately, the Site was also identified on the Policies maps as an allocation, with the boundary aligning with the 2015 Adopted Local Plan Policies maps.

## Case for Allocation

Having regard to the above context, Story Homes **objects** to the current Regulation 19 Local Plan which has deleted the allocation of the Camelot site since the Preferred Options stage. This change in approach is unsound for several reasons.

The former Camelot site has been through a rigorous site selection process by the Council and its advisers LUC. That process resulted in this significant brownfield site being selected for development. In doing so, the Council recognised the findings of the previous Local Plan Inspector regarding the redevelopment potential, the extent of brownfield land and the need for policy support accordingly.

Story Homes considers that the former Camelot site represents an important site for allocation now and inclusion within the Local Plan. Story Homes' wider individual core submissions, together with those from the developer consortium, demonstrate that Central Lancashire does not have enough housing land overall to meet its needs. This finding also extends to the Chorley area. We do not replicate those arguments here, but it is Story Homes position that exceptional circumstances exist to warrant Green Belt release, and that Chorley does not have enough land for both market and affordable housing.

In addition to that overall case for development, Policy SS1 of the Regulation 19 document and paragraphs 2.16, 3.7 and 4.16 state that the Council prioritises the delivery of development on previously developed (brownfield) land. Story Homes considers that the Council has not done this.

At 27 Hectares, the former Camelot theme park site is the largest brownfield site in Chorley. It is defined as brownfield land within the adopted Local Plan, with the previous Local Plan Inspector specifically visiting the site to define the boundary. The Council's own evidence base at the Preferred Option stage, identifies the positive sustainability of the site. The combination of these facts is such that the site represents one of the best development opportunities in Central Lancashire.

It is apparent that the Council's eagerness to put land back into Green Belt has resulted in a failure to consider other key spatial components of the Local Plan, including the prioritisation and reuse of brownfield land. In doing so, the Council has failed its own tests as set out under Policy SS1.

Separately, the proposed change to remove the Camelot site boundary from existence on the Policies maps is in direct conflict to the adopted Local Plan and previous Inspector's findings as noted above. It appears to be an attempt by the Council to conveniently forget about the development potential of what is the largest brownfield site in Chorley.

For the above reasons, Story Homes considers the Local Plan to be unsound. The Council's previous assessment of the Site as suitable as a residential allocation should be reinstated, as aligned with the overall spatial strategy of prioritising the use of brownfield land. The status of the Site has not changed since the Council reached its own conclusions in the earlier draft of the Local Plan, and, the allocation of redundant brownfield land would align with the principles of Local Plans being 'positively prepared'. As set out above, it is the largest brownfield site within Central Lancashire.

Should the residential allocation of the Site not be accepted by the Inspector, then the previous designation within the adopted Local Plan should be fully reinstated, with the Policies maps updated to reflect the extent of brownfield land previously agreed by the 2015 Local Plan Inspector.

## Supporting Documents

- Development Framework document prepared by Asteer Planning.