

# **Brownfield Land Regeneration Case Study:**

**Salford City Council**

**Astley Road**

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## Salford, Astley Road site.

*“You must have the right resources in-house and partnership relationships... to make it work. You cannot do it on your own. Be quite bold. Don't be held back. If you can convey the ambition alongside the deliverability and the benefit, what's not to like?”* (Housing Officer)

### 1. Introduction

- The Salford (Astley Road) case study demonstrates the challenge of achieving a viable development on a small site with significant ground problems (i.e., peat soil) and where viability is often marginal.
- The development of 100% affordable housing onsite was made possible by a Land Release Fund grant. Salford City Council were able to capitalize on this funding opportunity by:
  - the Estates team taking a strategic role in conducting market research and building, over time, a network of partnerships with development partners and
  - Planning developing evidence on housing demand and land availability and facilitating the delivery process through its development management function.

### 2. Executive Summary and Key Success Factors

#### Planning

- Planning provided market intelligence through the local plan including housing need projections and land availability assessments.
- Planning facilitated on-site delivery. Pre-application discussions with the developer ensured all parties understood the site constraints in conjunction with the relevant planning policy requirements for the site.
- This ensured there were an appropriate mix of uses, and that design quality was factored in alongside other material considerations including the viability of the development.
- Planning managed all stakeholder inputs, including liaison with consultees, members and the public.

#### Key planning tools

- The development is subject to a Section 106 agreement. This acknowledges constraints e.g., viability at the time of construction, and provides for ‘claw back’ of developer contributions, which are required by planning policy for this type of development, as and when land values increase over time.
- Design skills: *“... you do need to have some level of design experience to understand how the sites have been laid out and whether or how you can actually improve upon the submissions”* (Planning Officer)

#### Site identification

- Astley Road is a windfall site. It was not allocated in the Local Plan because it became available after the plan was adopted following the closure of municipal offices.

- The site was an Asset of Community Value (ACV) under S87 of the Localism Act 2011 following the cessation of its use as municipal offices. However, the site was delisted as an ACV after 5 years with no community uses brought forward during this timeframe.

### Site viability

- The principal constraints to development at Astley Rd were adverse ground conditions, specifically extensive presence of peat and a high-water table. These have been remediated with Land Release Fund monies.

### Leadership and governance

- The local authority has a strong tradition of municipal provision and taking a value led approach that encourages direct action by the council to secure positive regeneration outcomes of public value, especially affordable homes.
- Planning plays a key role in a multi-disciplinary approach to development, led by the Regeneration Team and requiring multiple specialist inputs.

### Lessons Learned

- **The importance of collaborating closely with established partners-**, and using market intelligence helps in securing funding opportunities such as Land Release Funding (LRF):

*“I think it is important to have strategic relationships with your Registered Providers and other providers... so the Strategic Housing Partnership is significant. It's important to have a visible pipeline and not just linked to those sites in the Council's ownership, but also private sector... having those relationships and that intelligence base... when opportunities arise. You might have 100 sites, but based on that funding opportunity, you pick site 15”.* (Housing Officer)

- **The role of Planning as an enabler** - The ability of planning to play an enabling role is also crucial:

*“You need to have your consultees in place and they need to be able today to have the capacity to respond to those constant requests and any additional information within an appropriate time scale.”* (Planning Officer)

- **The retention of skills and resources in house** by the local authority was also a key factor:

*“...having the resources in place internally... strategic property, strategic investment, strategic planning... for some authorities, that's a little bit of a rarity. We decided to maintain our teams to maintain our resource, whereas other local authorities reduced... or haven't recruited back. That's kind of thanks to our members who have always had that kind of entrepreneurial (approach/attitude) if you invest.”* (Housing Officer)

- **Having a properly resourced planning service** is crucial to delivering the development and affordable housing.

*“We need to ensure that we got the resources in place. Planning is important. It's all very well saying “We need to start building houses... but then when push comes to shove,*

*you need the resources to be able to determine those planning applications.” (Planning Officer)*

- the importance of pre-application discussions:**  
*“It’s really important that you go through the pre application process because that makes it easier for us and for the developer further down the line ... we don’t want to be in a situation whereby you receive a refusal notice for something that could have been resolved prior to the submission of the application”*
- the need to retain design skills in-house:** *“I think you do need to have some level of design experience to understand how the site’s been laid out and whether or how you can actually improve upon the submissions... some developers will come in with the bare necessities and it’s for you to try and enhance the scheme... to create a benchmark for future schemes coming forward elsewhere. So, I do think you need to have that design expertise which does come with experience” (Planning Officer)*
- At corporate level, a value led approach** - an approach that acknowledges the need to take risks is very important: *“Our Members are more risk taking... I mean there is obviously tons of leadership and political affiliation ... municipalization and inclusive growth and an ambition to insource services where possible. And there’s also the entrepreneurial ... because without that development, you’re not going to get the business rates or the Council tax that allows you to get your income stream to be able to develop things like a housing company to then have your own kind of products in-house.” (Housing Officer)*

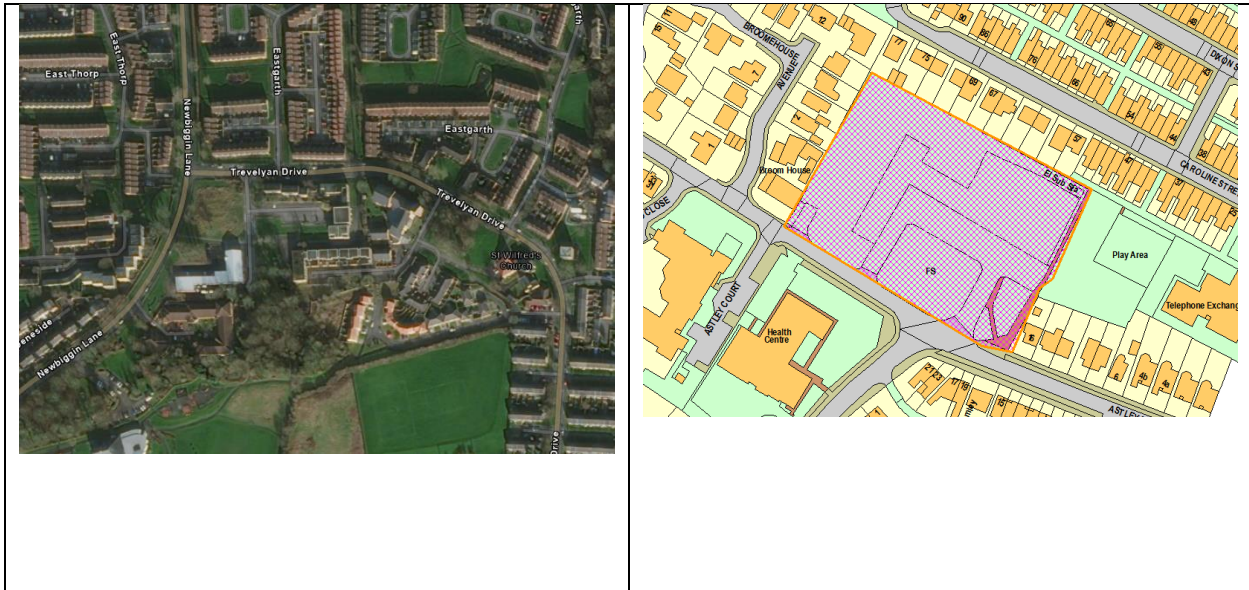
### 3. Basic site information, key stakeholders, and dates

#### The site

<p><b>Local Planning Authority</b> Salford City Council (SCC)  <b>Land ownership</b> Seddon Construction (previously Salford City Council)  <b>Type of location</b> Urban. Residential area with community uses (medical centre, school) adjacent. Application describes site as “unremarkable,” comprising previously developed land which, given its location close to shops, services and public transport to meet day-to-day needs, is a sustainable location for new housing.  <b>Size of site</b> 0.8 ha.  <b>LRF Funding Received</b> £342,000  <b>Main Developer(s)</b> Seddon Construction in partnership with Great Places  <b>Current stage in the development process (from allocation to build out, e.g., Completed,</b> 27 dwellings, 2, 3 and 4 bed houses and flats, in cul de sac form.</p>
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#### Site maps

Location Plan	Site Plan / Aerial Photograph
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## Key dates in planning history

Site previously occupied (until 2013) by Salford City Council as an office, as such classified as employment land.

2005 Outline planning consent granted for development of 40 dwellings.

2013 Employment use at Irlam Council Office relocated to nearby Irlam and Cadishead college

2013 Astley Rd site placed on market by Salford City Council.

2013 Site listed (January 2013) as Asset of Community Value following application by Hamilton Davies Trust (status expired July 2014)

2014 Site proposed for allocation for housing development in new Local Plan, by City West Housing Trust

2017 Former municipal offices on site demolished by the council due to poor ground conditions and to prevent use of building for anti-social behavior.

2017 ForViva (registered social landlord) propose to relocate care facility to site, and to develop remainder for affordable housing. ForViva request Salford City Council to dispose of site for nominal fee in return for share of units (two dwellings) on another site. No agreement reached due to proposed overall reduction in care provision in scheme.

2018 Salford City Council submit application for Land Release Fund to remediate problematic ground conditions (peat, high water table). Development partner is ForViva. Bid based on proposal to build 56 place care facility plus 10 affordable dwellings. Grant of £500,000 awarded.

2018 ForViva find proposal to relocate care facility to Astley Rd found unviable, ForViva withdraw from development.

2018 Seddon Construction, in partnership with Great Places (registered social landlord), submit offer for site based on development of 100% affordable housing uses (27 units, of which five available to Salford City Council).

2019 Approval sought for changes to project (as above) from One Public Estate. Salford City Council awarded reduced LRF grant of £342,000.

2019 Salford City Council agree terms of site disposal with Seddon,



## Key stakeholders

Public Sector	Private Sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Salford City Council</li> <li>- Urban Vision</li> <li>- Greater Manchester Combined Authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ForViva (development partner for initial LRF proposal)</li> <li>- Seddon (development partner for completed scheme)</li> <li>- Great Places (development partner for completed scheme)</li> </ul>

## 4. Planning strategy, site allocation, key decisions dates

The relevant Local Plan, for determining the application to develop Astley Rd, was the *City of Salford Unitary Development Plan 2004 to 2016*, adopted by Salford City Council in June 2006. The Astley Road site is not allocated in this plan.

Salford City Council nominated sites through its *Strategic Land Assessment*. The Astley Road site was proposed for housing development by City West Housing Trust. It was included in the *Suggested Sites Consultation. Neighbourhood Area Document: Irlam and Cadishead 2014*.

A new *Draft Local Plan* was published in November 2016 and a *Revised Local Plan* in January 2019.

In 2020, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council withdrew from the *Greater Manchester Spatial Framework*, and the remaining nine local planning authorities in Greater Manchester, including Salford, continued to work on an alternative joint plan, *Places for Everyone*, submitted to the Secretary of State in February 2022.

Examination is scheduled for autumn 2022 and adoption anticipated in 2023. *Places for Everyone* notes that 85% of new build housing in Salford will be located on brownfield land, but allows for development, as an exceptional case, of 1,500 homes plus employment uses on four Green Belt sites. This is offset by new Green Belt land designation elsewhere.

The *Salford Local Plan: Development Management Policies and Designations* was submitted to the Secretary of State in summer 2021 and examination commenced in winter 2021. This document specifically excludes site allocations as the initial framework for these will be set out in *Places for People*. These will be included in the *Salford Local Plan: Core Strategy and Allocations*. There is no timetable for this plan set out in the *Local Development Scheme*.

The absence of a strategic planning framework, including site allocations, was not considered a significant obstacle to delivering housing on urban brownfield sites in Salford: *“Places for Everyone, in terms of the allocations itself is more concerned with development on Greenbelt ... so it doesn't really concern us on a on a broader basis, the development that's taking place around city centre, Salford around the Quays, Media City, in our town centers ... there's been no impact on our ability to deliver”* (Housing Officer)

The unallocated site at Astley Road itself was classified as a *windfall site*.

### Planning decisions process, key dates

Notwithstanding the extended period that the site remained vacant, the failure of a number of specific disposal and development proposals, the planning decision making process can be described as “routine.”

Prior to the planning and implementation of the present scheme, the site was subject to outline permission granted for residential uses in May 2005. There were no objections from key consultees (Highways, Environment Health, Flood Risks).

No objections were raised to the Council’s application to demolish the site in 2017. It was deemed surplus to requirements under the terms of Part 31 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (now superseded), and the demolition created no detrimental impact on the area.

Pre-application discussions on the present development were held in August 2019. The principle of residential development was accepted. The pre-application stage was considered crucial in delivering the project; *“We always encourage developers to submit a pre application advice prior to submitting a major application such as this. It’s the perfect opportunity to outline any issues or matters that could be easily resolved at that point rather than the determination process. Normally, if a planning application of this size is submitted and there’s issues attached to that, then that can be a significant delay. The pre-app was to establish whether this site was capable of being developed.”* (Planning Officer)

Public consultation and member consultation was held in October 2019. There were a small number of objections in respect of impacts on: visual amenity; density, trees, existing parking use.

The planning application from Great Places was considered formally by the Planning and Transportation Regulatory Panel in February 2020. The policies in the UDP were broadly supportive of residential development on the site in respect of its contribution to 1) sustainable urban neighbourhoods; 2) contribution to housing supply; 3) accessibility by soft modes of transport; 4) environmental quality; 5) context; 6) affordable housing; *“We just have to ensure that of course it complies with all the policies and of course, like I said, it was technically employment land. It was it had a community use and there was an element of public open space on there. So, providing that all those material considerations were appropriately discussed and complied with, then it was considered that this was the perfect opportunity to make an efficient use of undeveloped site or an under-utilized site.”* (Planning Officer)

Planning consent was granted subject to conditions – described as “standard” for such a site - and a S111 and S106 agreement.

### S106/CIL

The development comprises 100% affordable housing. The Astley Rd development is subject to a S.111 agreement which will require Great Places to enter into S106 agreement once it has acquired an interest in the land. This includes a *claw back mechanism* which will provide for future contributions, given problems of viability at the point of planning consent, and the anticipation of increasing land values during the lifetime of the development.



## Key site challenges

The viability of the development was affected by problematic ground conditions. There were significant costs (estimated at the time at £500,000) of remediation associated with removal of peat and addressing the high-water table. This presented problems in achieving the optimum mix of housing and other uses to make the development financially viable.

*“I suppose there's been quite a long space of time between when that building was vacated... at that time back in 2012, austerity had had kicked in, there was no Land Remediation Funding available and previously, the normal programs would have been from the Northwest Development Agency... development of brownfield - there wasn't anything to support that... didn't make it attractive.”* (Planning Officer)

Negotiations with potential development partners had, on numerous occasions, proceeded to the point of site investigation, followed by inevitable withdrawal of the developer on grounds of viability.

The problem of viability led to the withdrawal of the original development partner, ForViva, who were keen to include an element of care provision on site but were unable to make this financially worthwhile, even with £500,000 gap financing from LRF.

The site was declared an *Asset of Community Value* in January 2013. This represented a temporary obstacle. The absence of a community purchase meant that in July 2014 the designation lapsed and the site became fully available for housing.

## LPA skills and resources

The importance of *collaborative working within the local authority* were stressed by all. This includes a strategic market intelligence function and brokerage role played by Estates, and an enabling role in terms of land availability work and development management played by Planning.

*“Within the Place Directorate, we have a pipeline of sites ... we know what the demands are. We know what the opportunity is and therefore we can match it ... that's how we collectively work, both in terms of property and investment ... it's not just about funding, it's about coordination. .... I will also consult with our Planning Policy Team in terms of land availability assessments and housing projections ... we gain an input to our long-term pipeline awareness ... there's also development control who deal with the planning application itself ... I think based on our awareness of this site in terms of being in the ownership of the Council, the demand for housing and the opportunity that arises from a partner like and Great Places and Seddons ... all these functions come together to deliver that solution.”* (Housing Officer)

The role of planning has been as enabler of development, through the development management process, rather than setting a strategic framework for site allocation.

*“The planners are more involved in ... making sure the purchasers, whatever their ideas are, are implementable, whatever the proposed scheme is, is implementable, and really high-level planning before the planning application goes in.”* (Housing Officer)

## Effectiveness of stakeholder engagement

A key factor in Salford in delivering windfall sites such as Astley Rd has been the existence of a well-established and durable set of relationships between the Council and potential

development partners; *“we have a Strategic Housing Partnership ... which the RSL's will sit on in 2013 after (the site) was declared surplus ... We marked it aside ... developers and those that are active in the local area and all the RSL's get emailed the advertisement and then we go from there.”* (Housing Officer)

In short: *“... it is the soft ways around partnership working in getting the best players and best resources and to deliver the solutions we need and obviously it's our land as well. So, as well as LRF, it was our land and that's why we've presented an opportunity to the market and the public sector grant has really filled the gap and enabled that to happen”* (Housing Officer).

