Huncoat – Introduction

1. It is Huncoat’s location on major transportation routes that has shaped its past and it is its location close to the M65 and A56(T) that remains so important. It also benefits from having a railway station. Manchester and Preston City centres are a 30 minute drive away and there is ready access to the M6 corridor and motorway routes around Manchester and towards Leeds and Liverpool. Huncoat would also benefit from proposals to improve the sub-regional rail network through the development of the Todmorden Curve, allowing trains to travel from Accrington to Manchester.

2. The Core Strategy recognizes the locational benefits of Huncoat and the proposals, developed through extensive consultation with local residents and developers, are based on the development of three key schemes which attract broad support:
   - The Whinney Hill Link Road – Policy A9
   - The Strategic Employment Site at Huncoat – Policy A8, and
   - The Strategic Housing Site at Huncoat – Policy A7

3. The need for a dedicated access to the strategic employment site was recognised as long ago as 1994 when the issue was considered by the Inspector in his report on the Hyndburn Local Plan. The Whinney Hill Link Road effectively extended the concept of this link road into a by-pass for Huncoat that would take heavy goods traffic off the local road network and provide a high quality access to land proposed to be used for employment uses and a waste technology park.

4. The Core Strategy continues to recognise the importance of a Strategic Employment Site at Huncoat and recognising the viability issues that exist some additional land between Altham Lane and the Railway is proposed to be added to that site.

5. In addition to the strategic employment site, the Core Strategy is also proposing the development of a strategic housing site on the site of the former colliery. The decision to allocate this site, in preference to the central Huncoat site was taken in the context of public consultation that sought to protect the central Huncoat site for use by the community as open space. This has resulted in a sense of ownership of local policy decisions consistent with PPS 12 (para 4.20). Put simply, this site is needed to increase the diversity and quality of housing available to retain those who would otherwise move out, and attract those who may wish to move in. The present market structure denies individuals and families the choice that is available elsewhere, meaning that to move into a larger house they often need to move out of Hyndburn.

6. In considering the acceptability of the proposed housing site it is necessary to consider whether the Core Strategy is consistent with national and regional policy. Although much of this
information is within the topic papers on Huncoat and Housing the Council believe there is a need to bring this information together in relation to the housing site.

**National Policy – PPG 2 and Very Special Circumstances**

7. Green Belt is a policy designation that results in a presumption against development in those locations designated as Green Belt. The purposes of the Green Belts are as follows (para 1.5 of PPG 2):
   a. to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
   b. to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
   c. to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
   d. to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns;
   e. to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

8. The Core Strategy does not propose any strategic changes to the Green Belt although there are a number of locally important changes proposed including the former colliery site. PPG 2 states\(^1\) that "once the general extent of the Green Belt has been approved it should be altered only in exceptional circumstances. If such an alteration is proposed the Secretary of State will wish to be satisfied that the authority has considered development within the urban areas contained by and beyond the Green Belt. Similarly, detailed Green Belt boundaries defined in adopted local plans...should be altered only exceptionally."

9. The Council consider that the following factors comprise the very special circumstances that justify the selection of the colliery site for the development of high quality housing (note – this is the point where the Council are seeking to play the notes in the right order!):
   i. There are no other sites available within the existing urban boundary to accommodate a site of the type, size and location needed to provide high quality housing that would help deliver the strategic objectives of the Core Strategy. The site is one of several strategic housing sites in Pennine Lancashire that are vital if the aims of the Pennine Lancashire Housing Strategy are to be met. The selection of this site is consistent with the requirement of Policy RDF 1 of RSS concerned with Spatial Priorities, which states that "emphasis should be placed on addressing regeneration and housing market renewal and restructuring."
   ii. The site can play a key role in delivering the high quality, aspirational housing needed to rebalance the housing market to support economic growth. There are no other housing sites in Accrington, other than Huncoat, capable of delivering the objectives of the strategy set of in the PLHS, the Spatial Guide and the Core Strategy.

\(^1\) Paragraph 2.6.
iii. The site of the former colliery is well located in relation to proposed employment development and together these provide a good opportunity for patterns of mixed use development which can reduce trip generation².

iv. The site of the former colliery relates well to existing and proposed transport infrastructure and the fact that it would be accessible from the link road makes the site increases its attractiveness to the development sector. The site is also well located in relation to existing bus routes and cycle routes.

v. The majority of the Central Huncoat site is not available for development. The western portion of the central housing site is not as attractive as the former colliery site due to its location immediately adjacent to social housing that suffers from a large number of empty houses (these are boarded up). The Colliery site is available, suitable and achievable as required by PPS 3 (para 54).

vi. The development of the former colliery, on the route of the Whinney Hill Link Road, provides an additional opportunity to help fund the link road now that it seems unlikely to be funded by Lancashire County Council. It will therefore help facilitate or enable the development of the employment site.

vii. The development of the former colliery site is supported by the local community and its development would allow a large area of previously developed land to be utilised and developed to the benefit of the community. It would provide for the visual appearance of the land to be significantly improved and the blight and/or pollution associated with it removed.

Conformity with RSS

10. RSS is still in force and it is therefore necessary to consider the policies that are relevant to this proposal. These include:
   o Policy DP4 (that cross refers to DP1-9)
   o Policy RDF1
   o Policy CLCR 1
   o Policy L4

11. Policy DP 4 presents a sequential approach to the location of development and contains two elements.

12. The first element of the policy encourages development in locations where there are existing concentrations of activities and existing infrastructure. This part of the policy also states that priority should be given to developing in locations that do not require major new infrastructure, but where this is unavoidable development should be phased to coincide with the provision of that infrastructure.

13. The need for a new access road / link road to serve the strategic site(s) at Huncoat has been recognised for many years (since the Hyndburn Local Plan 1996) and the need for a link road is now recognised by the Minerals and Waste Development Framework and the Local Transport Plan and the Core Strategy is seeking to be consistent with other plans in this respect. The link road is a key factor in the decision to continue to allocate the strategic employment site and also the decision to propose housing on the site of the former colliery site. The support of the local community was dependent on the delivery of an access road that would minimise the amount and type of additional traffic that would pass through Huncoat.

14. A strategic employment site should not be served from the local road network, the success of such a development being dependent upon having a ready access to the strategic route network. The benefits of the strategic housing site being readily accessible are also recognised by the consultants acting on behalf of the colliery site.

15. It would be necessary to phase development to ensure that it coincides with the provision of the link road.

16. The second element of the policy presents a sequential approach to new development, proposing the following sequential approach:

- **First, using existing buildings (including conversion) within settlements, and previously developed land within settlements;**

Huncoat was chosen as a location for a strategic housing development on the basis of its relationship to the strategic transport network (both road and rail). There are no opportunities to meet the scale or types of housing required through the use of existing buildings within settlements and there are no previously developed sites comparable to the Huncoat Colliery site elsewhere in the Borough that benefit from having excellent links to the motorway and rail networks.

- **Second, using other suitable infill opportunities within settlements, where compatible with other RSS policies;**

A search was undertaken of other suitable infill opportunities within the existing urban area and so suitable sites could be found that would provide the number and quality of new houses required to help re-balance the housing market, i.e. high quality family homes.

The Council considered the existing “Central Huncoat” Site that is allocated in the Hyndburn Local Plan under Policy H2. When the Council resolved that the Colliery site should be preferred option, the Council also resolved that it wouldn’t support the development of the Central Huncoat site, preferring it to be allocated as protected open space for use by the community. This would mean that the site was not available for development. Given the proximity of areas of poor quality social rented housing with high levels of vacancies (on the Within Grove Estate) doubts were also expressed about the viability of developing high quality housing in that area.
Third, the development of other land where this is well located in relation to housing, jobs and other services and infrastructure and which complies with the other policies in DP1-9.

The Huncoat Colliery Site is well located in relation to existing housing, existing and potential jobs and other services and infrastructure. It also satisfies the requirements of Policies DP1-9. As well as being in close proximity to the strategic road and rail network, the site is also within easy reach of the ‘Huncoat Greenway’ which is a footpath/cycle-route linking Huncoat to Accrington town centre and bus routes which use Station Road and Enfield Road.

The approach is also consistent with Policies DP1-9 which are considered below.

17. The supporting text to Policy DP4 stresses the need to make greater use of previously developed land.

18. In identifying the former Huncoat Colliery site for future housing the Council has placed emphasis on the outcome of public consultation and recognise that the overwhelming view of the residents of Huncoat (expressed at the various consultation events and through written submissions from the Huncoat Forum) is for the Colliery site to made available for housing rather than land between Bolton Avenue, Bluebell Way, Lynwood Road and Winterley Drive. The approach fits well with the Government’s localism agenda that seeks to give local communities more say in the future of their areas.

19. For the reasons set out above the Council believe that very special circumstances exist to justify the proposed development of land at Huncoat Colliery for housing and that there are no sequentially preferable sites available that could deliver the quantity and quality of new homes needed to rebalance the housing market. The Council also believe that the approach taken by the Core Strategy is sound and consistent with the approach advocated by national, regional and sub-regional policy.
Regional Spatial Strategy - Policies DP 1-9

Policy DP1  Spatial Principles

This policy outlines the principles set out below (DP 2-9)

Policy DP2  Promote Sustainable Communities

The proposed development at Huncoat provides the means of promoting sustainable communities in the ways envisaged by Policy DP 2. It will seek to foster a sustainable relationship between homes and workplaces and meet the criteria set out by the policy

Policy DP3  Promote Sustainable Economic Development

The proposed development of a strategic employment site at Huncoat is consistent with Policy DP3.

Policy DP4  Make the best use of Existing Resources and Infrastructure

This is considered in more detail above.

Policy DP5  Manage Travel Demand; Reduce the need to travel and increase accessibility

The Highways Agency, in their letter dated 17th September 2010 observe that “the aspirations to deliver housing within Huncoat provides an opportunity for mixed use development which can reduce trip generation at source”. There would be a need to ensure that development proposals are well connected to public transport and provide a choice of means of transport.

The sites at Huncoat are genuinely accessible by public transport, walking and cycling in line with the requirements of Policy DP5. The means by which accessibility and connectivity can be improved will be considered in more detail in the Site Allocations and Development Management DPD's. The Pennine Lancashire Spatial Guide makes specific reference to housing on the Huncoat Colliery Site at paragraph 5.15, noting its proximity to the strategic employment site.

“The former Huncoat Colliery provides a major development opportunity close to transport links, particularly the M65 and the A56 / M66 towards Manchester. It is also within walking distance of Huncoat railway station. It is close to the strategic employment site at M65 Junction 8…."

Policy DP6  Marry Opportunity and Need

This policy states that priority should be given, in locational choices and investment decisions, to linking areas of economic opportunity with areas in greatest need of economic, social and physical restructuring and regeneration.
The proposals for Huncoat reflect this principle and the development of the colliery site presents an opportunity to marry opportunity and need in several ways:

- The development of the colliery site presents an opportunity to assist with the funding of the Whinney Hill Link Road. It is doubtful whether this opportunity would have existed if the “central Huncoat” site was developed for housing.
- The development of the colliery site could make a significant difference to the viability of the development proposed at Huncoat when considered as a whole, particularly now that Lancashire County Council are not proposing to fund the development of the Whinney Hill Link Road. Housing on the colliery site will provide the quantum of development needed to fund the first phase of the WHLR.

**Policy DP7  Promote Environmental Quality**

The proposed development at Huncoat can satisfy all the criteria in Policy DP 7. Most of these criteria would need to be addressed in the Site Allocations DPD.

**Policy DP8  Mainstream Rural Issues**

This is not relevant to the Huncoat issues except insofar as the former colliery site is beyond the urban boundary.

**Policy DP9  Reduce Emissions and Adapt to Climate Change**

The Huncoat Colliery site is in a location that provides a choice of means of access – by car, rail, bus or cycle. There are opportunities to develop good links with near-by employment sites and extend public transport and cycle networks. Opportunities to develop decentralised energy supply systems can be considered in situations where large housing developments are situated in close proximity to employment development and there are opportunities to plan both to utilise sustainable design techniques coupled with energy efficient buildings.

**Policy RDF 1**, concerned with Spatial Priorities, also states that “emphasis should be placed on addressing regeneration and housing market renewal and restructuring.”

**Policy CLCR 1** recognises the need for the regeneration and restructuring of the East Lancashire economy and the need to provide for a range of good quality housing that is accessible to local facilities. The proposed development at Huncoat is consistent with these objectives as well as those prescribed by **Policy L4**.
**Housing Quality – Type, size and location**

One of the strategic objectives of the Core Strategy is to provide for a greater choice and quality of housing. The need for high quality family housing, and the ways in which it can be delivered, is set out in the Pennine Lancashire Housing Strategy (and its refresh) and the Pennine Lancashire Spatial Guide. These policy documents recognise the importance of developing the colliery site from not only a housing perspective but also an economic perspective.

The Housing Strategy relates strongly to the Spatial Guide, recognising the importance of the M65 corridor in delivering growth. Within this corridor, the PLHS stresses the importance of diversifying the supply of housing, stating at page 5:

“The lack of diversity of aspirational homes has resulted in people with means moving out of the area, polarising the sub-region and leading to degraded neighbourhoods. It is vital that the housing market here is rebalanced to include aspirational housing to retain the affluent population whilst simultaneously improving the condition of existing stock, to meet modern needs. This must be delivered in tandem with improvements to education, skills, worklessness, connectivity and business growth initiatives to ensure that local communities benefit from internal and external growth, from linking into neighbouring conurbations, through strategic rail schemes e.g. Todmorden Curve, and are not a drag to any growth delivered through the interventions of the PLMAA.”

Put simply, increasing the diversity and quality of housing will help to retain those who would otherwise move out, and attract those who may wish to move in. The present market structure denies individuals and families the choice that is available elsewhere, meaning that to move into a larger house they often need to move out of Hyndburn.

The development of new housing at Huncoat fits well with the objectives behind the Pennine Lancashire Housing Strategy, particularly where the M65 corridor is concerned.

- The development would make significant contribution to the supply of high quality family homes, helping to rebalance the housing market in Hyndburn and provide choice to its residents. It would help deliver aspirational homes.
- The development would facilitate the development of new housing in close proximity to an area of future economic and business growth.
- Facilitating new development in highly accessible locations, linking to neighbouring conurbations. Huncoat would benefit from the strategic rail scheme (Todmorden Curve) referred to by the Strategy above and is in close proximity to the strategic road network.

The Huncoat Colliery site would be able to provide “prestige” housing in a high quality environment, in a popular neighbourhood, that would meet the exacting demands of the high and upper middle income bands, as evidenced by the SHMA.

The Pennine Lancashire Housing Strategy (refresh - 2010) places increased emphasis on the importance of delivering high quality, aspirational housing to rebalance the housing market to support economic growth. There are no other housing sites in Accrington, other than Huncoat, capable of delivering the
objectives of the strategy set out in the PLHS. This is why Huncoat is identified in the Spatial Guide and supported by the Core Strategy.

Although much of the discussion on housing revolves around numbers, it is important to stress the importance of housing types and quality. Although the Pennine Lancashire Housing Strategy recognises the importance of an adequate housing supply, rebalancing the housing market is dependent upon developing more housing of the right type and quality that is also in the right location, an approach that is also articulated and supported in the Spatial Guide.

The PLSG recognises the importance of strategic housing and employment sites and the need to ensure these were located where they could complement each other. In relation to the need for strategic housing sites, the guide supports the stance taken by the Pennine Lancashire Housing Strategy stating:

“A range of new housing sites will need to be delivered in Pennine Lancashire in order to achieve the twin objectives of regeneration and economic growth. Renewal will need to continue in inner urban neighbourhoods in order to widen the housing offer there and reduce the proportion of older terraced housing stock, a significant proportion of which is in an unfit state and fails to meet the housing needs of the local population. At the same time, in order for the sub-region’s economic growth aspirations to be realised, a number of more aspirational sites will need to be delivered. In order to meet the needs of families, and to attract higher wage earners to live in the sub-region, provision of larger family and executive style housing in attractive locations will be necessary. These sites will be central to ensuring that Pennine Lancashire can provide a housing offer that is capable of competing with neighbouring sub-regions in order to retain and attract higher wage earners to support economic growth.”

Strategic housing sites across the sub-region that will play a central role in achieving the aims and objectives of the Pennine Lancashire Housing Strategy have been identified. The overall housing “offer” of Pennine Lancashire is central to attracting investment and retaining a skilled population. Firstly we need to provide opportunities for housing growth, to bring in a scale of high quality new housing sufficient to secure a shift in the market. Secondly we need to continue to pay attention to our regeneration priorities, to take advantage of the opportunities presented by our existing housing stock and to ensure that local communities benefit from economic growth.

The Pennine Lancashire Spatial Guide makes specific reference to housing on the Huncoat Colliery Site at paragraph 5.15, noting its proximity to the strategic employment site.

“The former Huncoat Colliery provides a major development opportunity close to transport links, particularly the M65 and the A56 / M66 towards Manchester. It is also within walking distance of Huncoat railway station. It is close to the strategic employment site at M65 Junction 8....”

---

3 At paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3.
The Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Hyndburn provides further evidence to support the need for aspirational housing, but also stresses the need for this housing to be sited within a high quality environment.\footnote{SHMA, paragraph 7.34.}

“The demands of the high and upper middle income bands are exacting in terms of both quality of product and neighbourhood. They exhibit a strong bias towards large semi-detached and detached housing in owner occupation. This does not preclude the consumption of other housing types, but this would largely be predicated on the quality of the surrounding environment, neighbourhood quality and prestige factors.”