

Flintshire Local Development PlanMatter 12 – Proposed Development SitesSubmission by David Rowlinson in advance of the hearing, in relation to the Ash Lane site.25th April 2021

Dear Inspector

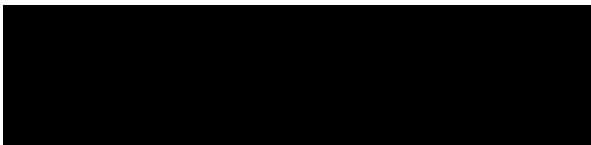
As part of the consultation for the Local Development Plan (LDP) by Flintshire County Council (FCC), I submitted a detailed objection paper, in collaboration with Mr Colin Randerson. I hope you have been able to consider these points in relation to the Ash Lane site.

My understanding from the guidance documents is that all the original objections will have been considered as part of the Public Examination. Therefore this submission in advance of the Matter 12 being discussed only covers my thoughts in response to new information provided in the LDP, or as part of the Council's response to my original objection.

I have attempted to cover these points in a concise manner, with some supporting maps / images. I would then welcome the opportunity to discuss some of these points in the hearing, as necessary. I would emphasize that whilst this submission is my own work, it is the result of discussions with a large number of Hawarden and Mancot residents who are looking to Mr Randerson and myself to bring these points to your attention.

The subject of each point is bulleted below and covered by a separate section in the rest of this document. I strongly believe that these points demonstrate that the LDP is inconsistent in its application of planning policy, has not been formed on the basis of the facts, and is ultimately unsound in its proposals for the Ash Lane site.

Yours sincerely



David Rowlinson

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- A. Coalescence / Settlement Boundary.
 - B. In support of point A – History of the settlements.
 - C. Development of a Green Wedge.
 - D. Factual errors in FCC response to objections.
 - E. In support of D – Inconsistency in approach to alternative sites.
 - F. Repeated reference to UDP.
 - G. Flooding concerns.
 - H. Lack of resilience in existing community facilities / infrastructure.
 - I. Reflection of Matter 4 – Lack of evidence of facts being used to support the decision making.

A. Coalescence / Settlement Boundary.

In my own view, the most significant reason that the Ash Lane site is inappropriate for development is that it joins Hawarden and Mancot. This will lead to the loss of the historic identify of each settlement, as has also been the case where Hawarden and Ewloe have coalesced – with residents not sure in which they live in. I believe that Welsh Planning Guidance specifically states that coalescence of settlements should be avoided at all costs – yet Hawarden has been allowed to coalesce with Ewloe, and as part of the LDP will be coalesced with Mancot – despite alternative sites being available.

This was a main issue within the previous objection report. However further information is now available which strengthens this argument.

The first new information is the plans submitted in support of the development showing the proposed housing development. A screen shot of this is shown below.



It is clear that the estate provides a through route between the access onto Gladstone Way (Hawarden) and the access onto Ash Lane (Mancot). Not only would such an arrangement coalesce Hawarden and Mancot, but there would be no discernible boundary between the two – it would be somewhere in the middle of the estate. I understand that other documents may state that no through route would be possible – but the point remains, the proposed development would mean there was no clear definition of a boundary between the two settlements – which should not be permitted.

The fact that the developer submitted such plans demonstrates no thought of the settlement boundary issue and historic identify of Mancot and Hawarden has been considered in the development of plans and their discussions with FCC to date.

In addition this point builds upon the question I posed at the Matter 4 hearing which was not answered by FCC. Where does this site sit? Which settlement is it part of? The site is called “Ash Lane (Hawarden)”. Ash Lane is clearly a Mancot address, whereas our understanding is that the developer would wish to list the new builds as Hawarden.

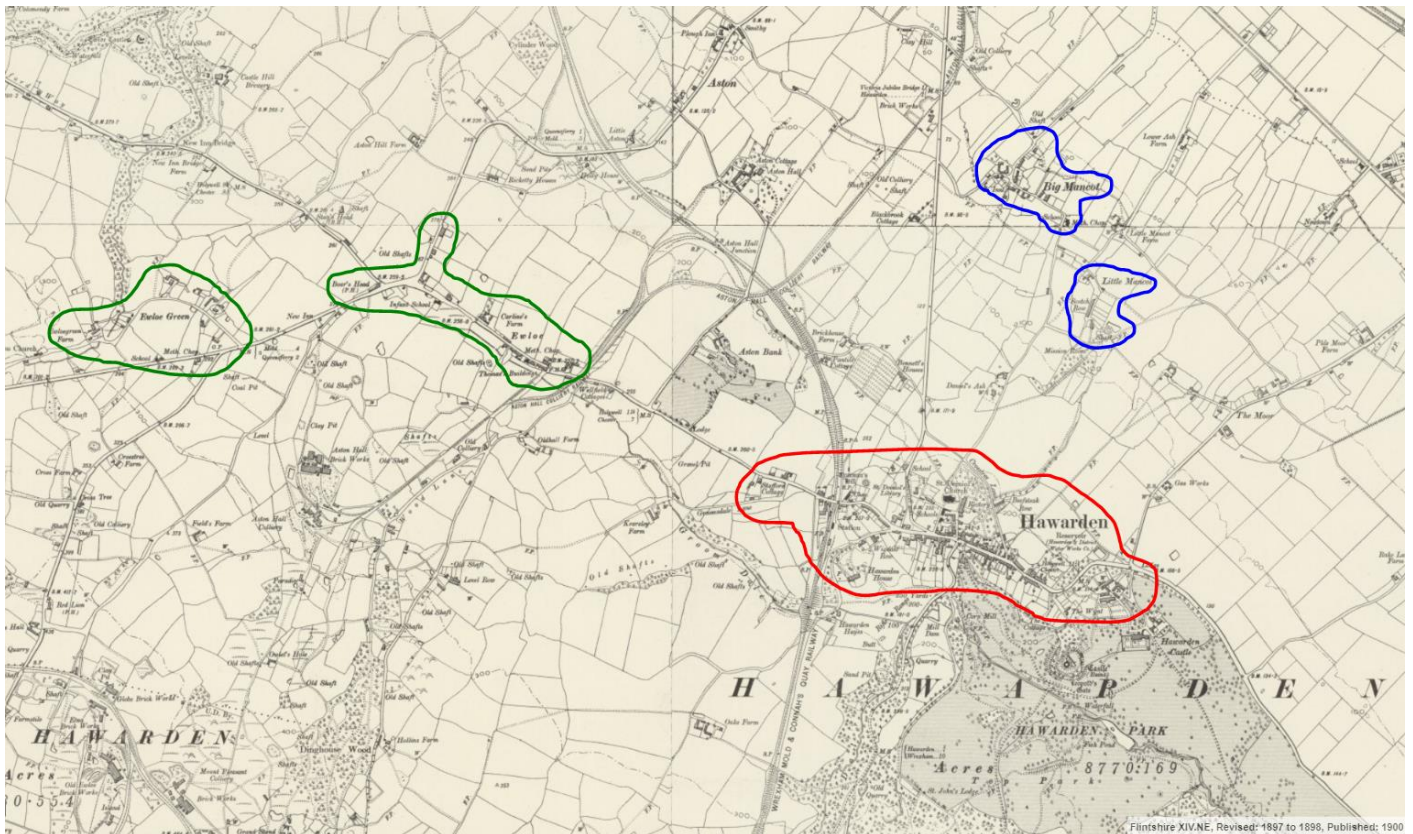
These questions are so difficult because the site coalesces the settlements, and if the site had been named Ash Lane (Mancot) then the percentage growth of Mancot would be far beyond the guidelines stated in planning policy.

B. In support of point A – History of the settlements.

The historic boundaries of the settlements of Hawarden, Ewloe and Mancot are particularly pertinent to this site. FCC have repeatedly referred to the UDP Inspector's comments that the historic development of these settlements was not clear. Therefore I thought it would be helpful to provide this historic context via the following maps and commentary.

These maps are available for free at the website below – and may be useful for considering other parts of the LDP. [Explore georeferenced maps - Map images - National Library of Scotland \(nls.uk\)](https://www.nls.uk/explore-georeferenced-maps-map-images-national-library-of-scotland-nls-uk) I would assume that FCC have better access to historic mapping records. For clarity, the coloured settlement boundaries are my own interpretation.

1900 map:



Approx 100 years ago, all these settlements were clearly separate. With the following names:

Hawarden – Historic village at the top of the hill. Home of William Gladstone and the Gladstone Estate. Gladstone Library etc.

Big Mancot – Small Settlement with pub based around mine shafts. A mining village (like many other Flintshire villages at the time).

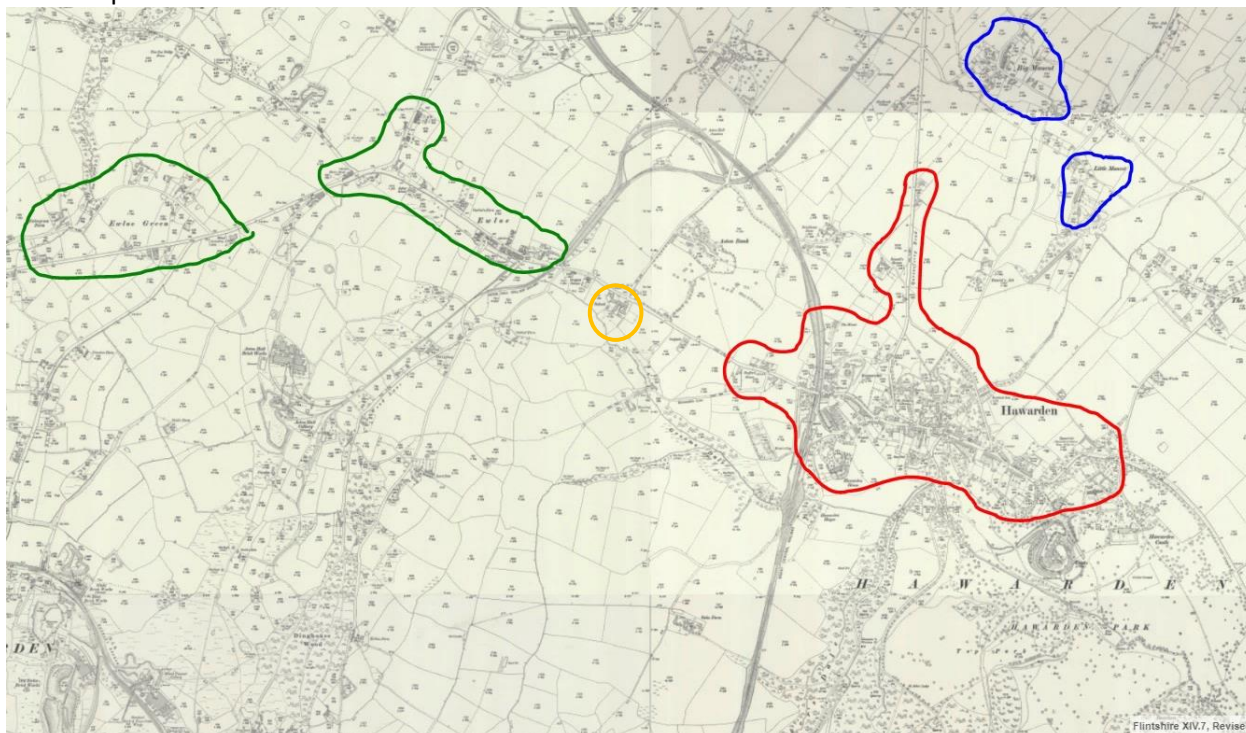
Little Mancot – Hamlet slightly apart from Big Mancot, based around separate mine shafts.

Ewloe – Hamlet based about church, pub and farm. Various mine shafts and Aston Hall Colliery / Brickworks to south west.

Ewloe Green – Separate settlement based around church and ribbon development on road to Buckley.

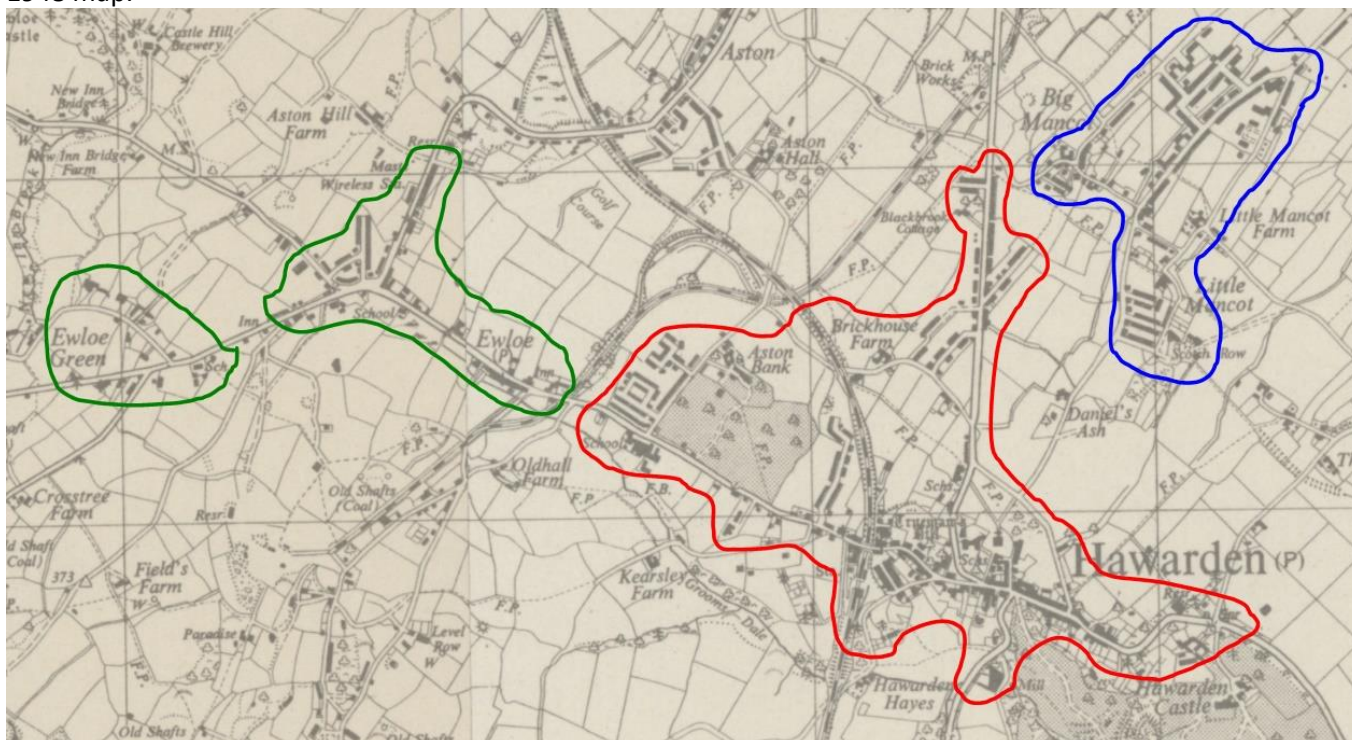
Key points – Aside from the centre of Hawarden, which is more developed, all the other settlements consist of ribbon development along the main roads, with a variety of mine shafts close by. Gladstone Way (the road going due North of Hawarden did not have ribbon development, and was the main road from Hawarden to the Queensferry Bridge crossing over the Dee.

1912 map:



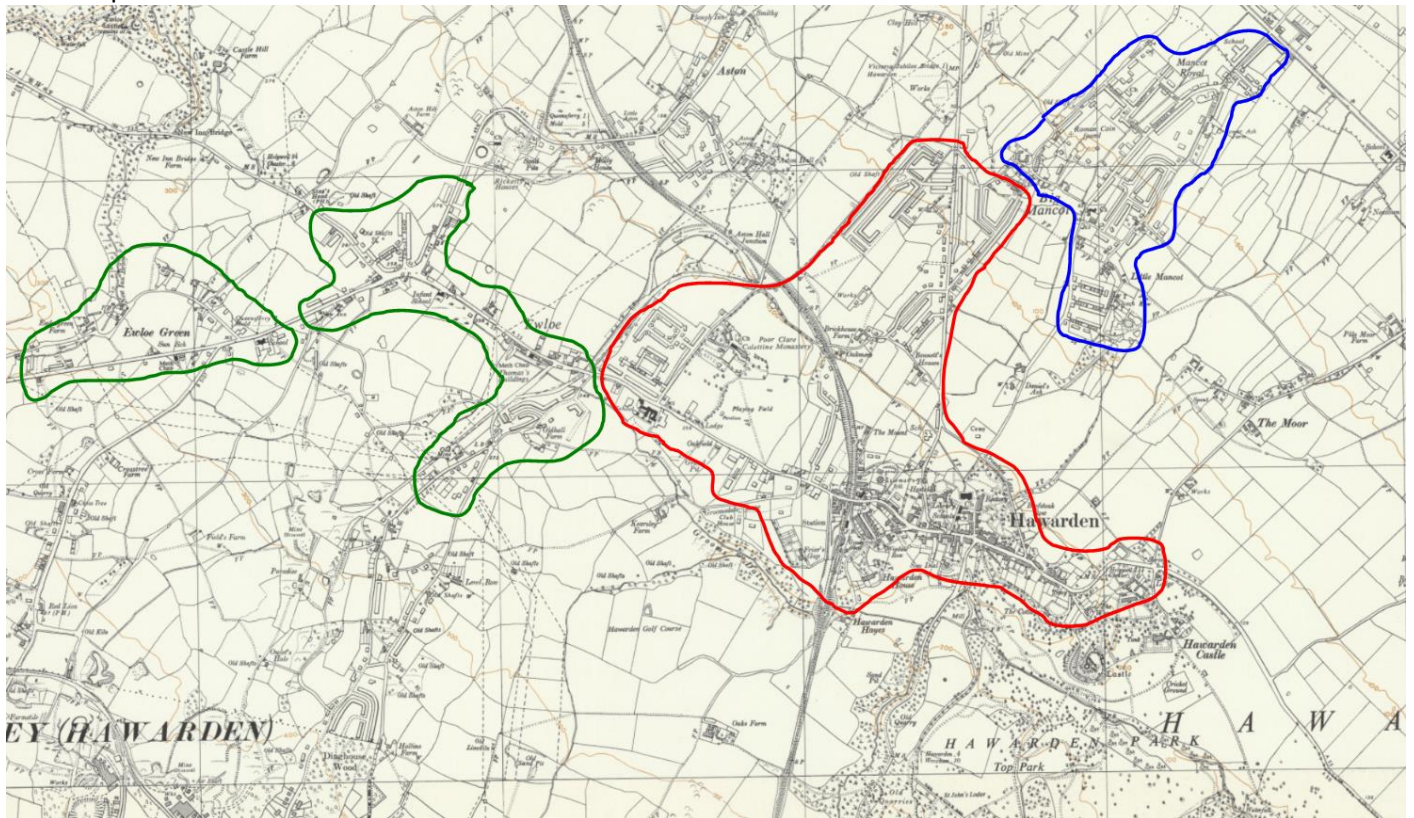
Key points – Ribbon development has started along Gladstone Way, associated with Hawarden. Hawarden High School (circled in orange) has been founded sitting in fields between Hawarden and Ewloe. Ewloe’s development is only to the North West of the Aston Hall Colliery Railway.

1948 map:



Key points – Ribbon development along Gladstone Way has been established associated with Hawarden. These are the period homes visible today. Park Avenue has been formed. The extent shown “should” have been the greatest extent to keep fields between Hawarden and Mancot. Development between Mancot settlements is leading to singular Mancot settlement – separate from Gladstone Way ribbon development, however map still refers to separate Mancot entities. Establishment of Hawarden Playing Fields and development of council estates opposite Hawarden High School. No significant development of Ewloe settlements. Aston Hall Colliery Railway remains boundary between Hawarden and Ewloe.

1963 map:

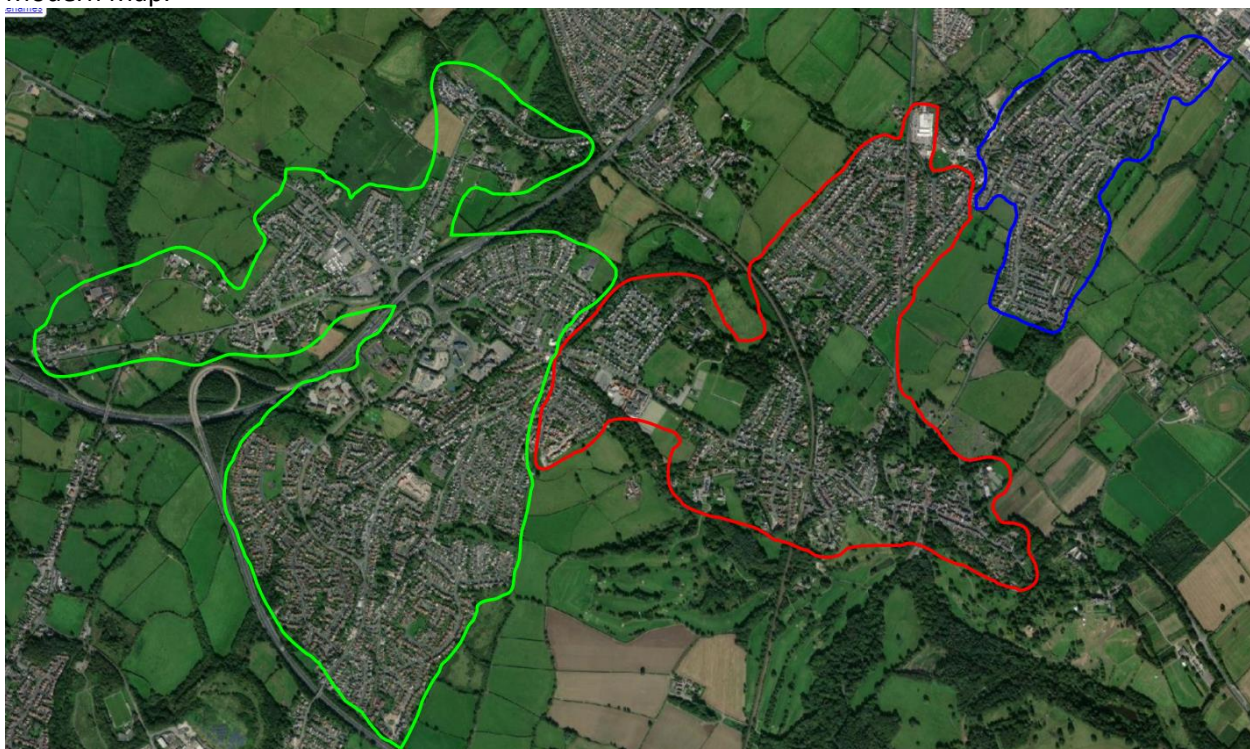


Key points – Post war development of housing estates has led to large estates being developed off Gladstone Way on East and West (known as Upperdale). Similar estate developments in Mancot. This is the time in which the end of Park Avenue development touches Mancot. However my view is that they are not coalesced given route between these estates is only via footpath or a narrow lane. Each settlement retained its identity.

Ribbon development between the original centre of Hawarden and Hawarden High School, leading to continuous development along the main road, except for the Gladstone Playing Fields. Boundary between Ewloe and Hawarden unchanged, despite the Aston Hall Colliery Railway now being taken up.

Ewloe and Ewloe Green still limited to Ribbon development only – little development from 1900s. Some house building to the south of Ewloe (end of Wood Lane), but not joined with Ewloe settlement.

Modern Map:



Note – I could not locate any maps showing these areas in the 1980s or 1990s. In this time the A494/A55 was built which cut through Ewloe.

Key points – Huge development within Ewloe, both on Wood Lane and St. David Park / Redrow Estates. Houses continuously line “Mold Road”, “The Highway” and “Glynne Way”. A494 severance and Ewloe/Hawarden coalescence led many residents to believe that Ewloe was the settlement to the North West of the dual carriage way, with everything else being Hawarden (including Wood Lane and St. Davids Estates).

Boundary between Hawarden and Ewloe is unchanged - the line of the old Aston Hall Railway, and marked by settlement name signs. Noting that Hawarden High School is within Hawarden.

No change in the boundary between Hawarden and Mancot since 1960s – the settlements just touch each other over the back gardens of properties at the end of Park Avenue. Access between the two remains via footpaths and narrow lane.

In summary:

Hopefully these maps provide some context to the historic identity of the different settlements, and when development has occurred. It shows that while Hawarden and Mancot touch each other at the end of Park Avenue, this has been the situation since the 1960s, and each settlement has retained its historic identify.

Alternatively Ewloe has been allowed to develop enormously in the last 30 years, and due to this and the severance caused by the A494, it has lost its historic identify, and is coalesced fully with Hawarden.

I do not believe it is sound planning policy to use the mistakes of the past (ie allowing Park Avenue to be extended and touch Mancot over back gardens) as justification to coalesce Hawarden with Mancot and create one coalesced Ewloe / Hawarden / Mancot.

My final point is that the settlement boundaries proposed by the FCC appear to be trying to ignore the errors of the past to create “simple” settlement boundaries in plan view which would meet today’s planning standards. My depiction of this is shown below. The red outline is the “historic Hawarden” which FCC refer to repeatedly even though it is not a recognised settlement or entity. The Ash Lane site would enable Mancot to include all the Upperdale development in a neat way with a boundary surrounded by fields. FCC can then use Hawarden’s playing fields as a boundary with Ewloe, despite the fact this puts Hawarden High School, Hawarden Day Nursery, Hawarden Vets, Hawarden Scouts and numerous Hawarden addresses into the Ewloe boundary.

Such an arrangement is a farce because it ignores the history of these settlements and looks to manage development in a way which is easiest for the planning department to demonstrate compliance with policy, rather recognising historic development decisions, and supporting the right development for the settlement and its communities.



Figure above – Incorrect settlement boundaries which could be assumed from development massing review without understanding historic development decisions. Areas in red hatch are Hawarden addresses. Ash Lane site in yellow.

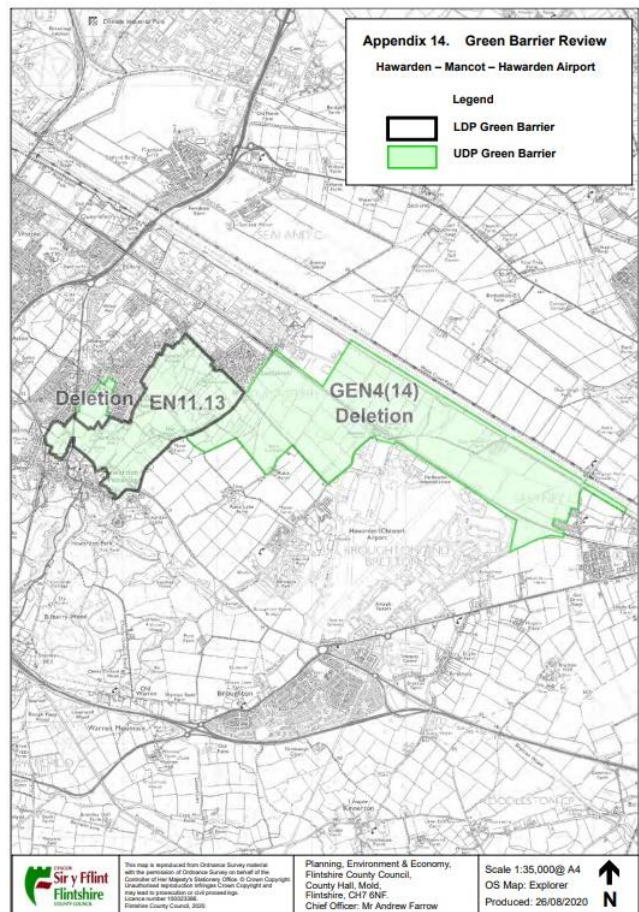
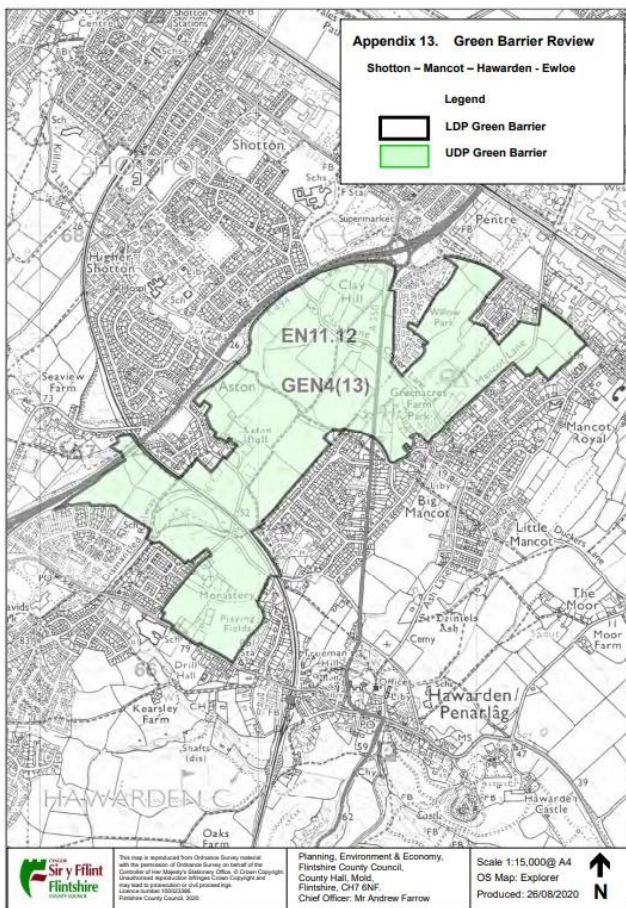
C. Development of a Green Wedge.

In reviewing the LDP documentation, we have found what appear to be errors in the Green Barrier review. Below is Appendix 13 showing the Hawarden area. My understanding is that the Ash Lane site forms part of the existing Green Barrier. Therefore this plan should be showing as a minimum that the Ash Lane site is under review, or shown as deleted.

This is then contrasted with the much smaller scale map in Appendix 14 which does show the Ash Lane site being deleted.

This is further evidence of the LDP being either inconsistent, incorrect, or not properly checked – leading to confusion about the matters in hand.

My understanding is that the Ash Lane site is currently a Green Barrier to prevent coalescence between Hawarden and Mancot. FCC are aware that developing a Green Barrier is against PPW guide lines. Therefore their proposal is to delete the Green Barrier. This seems a very contrived and ill-judged way of getting around the PPW guidelines, rather than trying to follow them



D. Factual errors in FCC response to objections.

You will have no doubt noted the large number of objections to the Ash Lane site – significantly more than most of the LDP sites. This included the detailed objection raised by Mr Randerson and myself. From reviewing the majority of these objections, most seem to be based on genuine concern about the impact of the Ash Lane site on the wider community, rather than nimbyism / concern about losing views from their back gardens.

FCC decided to respond to all these objections with a single document, making it difficult to understand which points aligned with which objections. However, I have undertaken a lengthy review.

My general opinion is that it seems the purpose of the FCC response is to quash all the points raised in the objections, rather than considering some of the points raised by the community and improving the LDP accordingly. This is not the consultative approach I understand is expected of FCC.

Whilst I generally disagree with many of the points FCC make in their response, I wanted to draw your attention to some responses which I feel are fundamentally incorrect, and demonstrate that FCC are not taking note of objections and are either mistakenly or willingly overlooking pertinent points for this site. Some specific examples of this are:

- The council refers to a “mail drop” advertising the drop in sessions to engage with the LDP. I am not aware of any residents in Hawarden or Mancot who received any such material in the post. I certainly did not. As part of my engagement with the community, many people were unaware of the LDP objection process or the associated deadlines.
- The council stated that it used an “industry leading” portal to provide information to objectors. However FCC then quote that only 10 of the 196 objections at this site were via the portal. I would expect this demonstrates that the portal has not been used effectively or is not fit for purpose (as was my experience), thus leading to a large number of letter and email objections.
- FCC’s response refers repeatedly to “Background Paper 8” as the justification for site selection. However, I could find no such document named Background Paper 8 when looking on the portal. Therefore, a critical piece of evidence was either unavailable, hidden, or difficult to find – a huge concern given the apparent importance of this document.
- FCC state that “Hawarden and Mancot are already physically merged”, before referring to the short length of boundary where back gardens meet. This statement is incredibly misleading, particularly as it is noted as THE justification for allocating the site.
- FCC make repeated reference to the proposed developer’s plans for the site (shown earlier in this document). FCC reference the road design, provision of play areas and separation between the development and the listed farm. I don’t understand how FCC would be in a position to use a developer’s plans to justify the allocation of the site, when the plans themselves should only have been submitted to FCC as part of the consultation process. There certainly isn’t this level of design development for all the selected and alternative sites, which suggests proper process is not being followed.
- FCC states they cannot understand why Mancot would be so damaged by the scale of the Ash Lane development. Any professional would be able to easily compare the number of proposed houses (approx. 300) against the number of houses in the 2014 Housing Land Study (980) and see that the increase would be 30% - far in excess of the guidelines. FCC would argue that the allocation is to Hawarden, but I refer you to the earlier points about the name of the site being Ash Lane (a Mancot road) and there being a road entry to the development from the Mancot side. Even being generous and splitting the allocation equally between Hawarden and Mancot would result in Mancot having 15% growth, which I understand, exceeds the guidelines for a Tier 3 sustainable settlement.
- FCC state that, with their proposals “there is still an open gap between Hawarden and the allocated site which is retained as green barrier”. This makes no sense, as the site is allocated as Hawarden, so there can’t be an open gap between Hawarden and Hawarden acting as a green barrier, and earlier they stated Hawarden and Mancot were physically merged. They can’t argue it both ways – it’s inconsistent.
- FCC state when considering the “The Highway”, a road between Ewloe and Hawarden, that “the overall impression is still of an open gap between two settlements.” This is factually incorrect. Firstly, the gap they refer to is not the boundary between Hawarden and Ewloe. Secondly there is a continuous ribbon of development right the way along “The Highway” on at least one side of the road, so it’s not correct to say

there is an impression of an open gap between settlements. I'm sure you will come to your own conclusion when visiting the site.

- FCC go on to advise: "the above analysis clearly shows that there is not a continuous urban form and that each settlement has its own open countryside context." Again, this statement is presented as a fact which would influence many people – yet the point above demonstrates it's not correct about the Hawarden-Ewloe boundary, and earlier in the response FCC stated that Hawarden and Mancot were physically merged. In addition, in the Matter 4 discussion, FCC's officers noted these settlements as being continuous. Therefore, this position is inconsistent at best, and at the worst deliberately misleading.
- FCC discuss Hawarden as having a "historic nature" and goes on to explain how there is a green barrier around Hawarden in line with PPW guidelines to protect this. They then state the Ash Lane site doesn't contribute to the historic part of the village. This is doubly incorrect. First of all, PPW makes no distinction between historic or other parts of a settlement. The settlement boundary as a whole is to be protected. Secondly, the increased demands on the limited remaining facilities within the historic part of the village, caused by the increased population at the Ash Lane site will be damaging. FCC seems to imply that Green Barriers are just about preventing the settlement boundary increasing, and are not considering the wider impact of development of settlements, such as community facilities and infrastructure.
- I comment in the section below about FCC's response to an alternative site I put forward, but their response regarding the Brownfield site at Mold County Hall appears extremely flawed. PPW states that brownfield land should, if possible, be developed in advance of any green spaces, and specifically before any green barrier land that could result in coalescence. Yet FCC list topography, adjacent law courts, a theatre, demolition (which has already been completed) and some offices, as the main reason this large brownfield site could not be allocated. It just gives the impression that the FCC have decided where they believe development should be, and will not hear any arguments for alternatives.
- FCC state "There are no air pollution issues within the County". However, there is an unpopular 50mph limit on the A494 adjacent to Hawarden/Ewloe with average speed cameras which have signs clearly stating the reason for the speed limitation is not safety, but pollution levels. Given such unusual measures to control air quality in the vicinity of the site, how the additional pollution of 300 new home owners who will regularly use that stretch of road could be classed as not relevant to the site allocation is beyond me.
- FCC make reference to a Transport Assessment undertaken in 2018 by the site owner, to address concerns about local traffic. I cannot conceive of any situation where relying on evidence by the people wishing to develop a site is appropriate. Not to mention that whilst the timing of the survey was before summer holidays, it was at a time when High Schools have reduced attendance and so not typical of everyday traffic flows.

I apologise for the length of this section, but such a long objection response needs to be reviewed properly.

The above demonstrates that many of the points in the council's objection response for the Ash Lane site do not stand up to scrutiny.

The style and handling of the public enquiry reinforces my belief that FCC are going through the motions in responding to objections, but are not actively looking to take on board comments and improve the LDP. Their arguments are flawed, and so is the allocation of the Ash Lane site.

E. In support of D – Inconsistency in approach to alternative sites.

I believe the best evidence to support the view that FCC have not looked to adequately assess the alternative sites and determine the most appropriate sites in an analytical way is by comparing the Ash Lane Site (1) with their response to the suggested alternative site of Bennett's Lane (2). These are indicated on the map and commentary below.

The inconsistency in the arguments against Bennett's Lane and for Ash Lane suggest that FCC had already determined the sites they wished to allocate within the LDP and have back fitted the evidence to support their "planning judgement" rather than assessing all of the potential sites in an analytical, systematic and fair way, to determine a ranking of sites from best to worst.

Red – FCC Hawarden Settlement Boundary

Blue – FCC Mancot Boundary

Yellow – Potential sites (1) Ash Lane, (2) Bennett's Lane.



Key points:

- FCC describe the Bennett's Lane Site (2) as agricultural land in an open wedge of countryside between two arms of built development. This is correct, although it should be noted that there is development around almost the whole perimeter of this site as shown on the close up. This is similar to the Ash Lane description of "The site has a continuous belt of development which surrounds the site on three sides". It should be noted that the Bennett's Lane site boundary has a greater perimeter development than the Ash Lane site.
- The Bennett's Lane site is described as having a "prominent rising nature". Whilst the site is clearly on the side of a hill, it is not prominent due to the housing on Gladstone Way and Bennets Lane providing a screen to seeing the fields.
- FCC state that the site "helps provide an open setting to the historic core of Hawarden". Firstly, PPW only recognises settlement boundaries – not "historic village cores". Secondly, due to the screening effect of the buildings around the Bennett's Lane site, it does not contribute to an open setting as it's hidden from view at ground level. This reinforces my perception that FCC manage settlement boundaries and green barriers in plan rather than considering visibility at ground level.

- FCC state “development of this site would harm the function and openness of the Green Barrier”. Openness of Green Barrier is covered above. In addition, it appears the Green Barrier is acting to protect one part of Hawarden from another. This should be contrasted against the Ash Lane Green barrier which is extremely visible on both Gladstone Way and Ash Lane (no buildings in the way) and which provides a barrier between two separate settlements.
- FCC state that “Highways Development Management Officers consider the site is unsuitable as the only highway frontage is onto Bennett’s Lane, and this is unsuitable due to limited width, alignment and lack of pedestrian provision.” There are so many issues with this statement. The extent of the site would enable easy remodelling of the junction with Bennett’s lane to meet modern highway standards – and improve safety. Given development could be on either side of the road, it would be easy to widen the road and add suitable footway provision. As an Engineer, I can see no reason why it would not be possible to design a suitable highways provision for this site. If the site owner had invested in consultants, similar to the Ash Lane site owner, I’m sure these issues would have been overcome. Yet FCC present these as a categorical reason for rejecting the alternative site.
- Further to the above, the Bennett’s Lane site could actually provide a benefit to pedestrian routes around Hawarden. Currently many children walk up Bennett’s Lane (without pavement/footway) and then use a footpath through the woods, as this is the most direct path to Hawarden High School. Alternatively they might continue along the full length of Bennett’s Lane and up Aston Hall Lane – neither of which have footpaths and form a busy commuter “rat run”. A Bennett’s Lane development could provide a pavement/footway link to the end of Trueman’s way which would be a significantly improved pedestrian link in terms of public and traffic safety. However time has not been spent to consider such benefits when considering the site.
- This negative approach to the site access is in stark contrast to the vast array of information provided about the Ash Lane site, where accesses have been identified, traffic surveys carried out, a master plan drawn up. With these proposals by the developer being used by FCC to justify site selection.
- FCC present the Ash Lane site as a natural rounding off of a settlement, yet in reality it develops a visible Green Barrier and coalesces two settlements. The Bennett’s Lane site would actually achieve a natural rounding off of the Hawarden settlement, enable some highway safety benefits and enhance pedestrian links between historic Hawarden and Upperdale. From my perspective, it’s a much better proposition, follows WPP and would still achieve the LDP’s goal of a reasonable level of development within the Hawarden settlement.

Despite the above points, and FCC’s specific request for the public to provide alternative sites in their objections, it appears no effort has been made to give serious consideration to these alternative sites. Instead, FCC have quickly put together a few points to dismiss suggestions, whilst going to great length to support the Ash Lane site and dismiss the numerous Ash Lane objections.

F. Repeated reference to UDP.

I have been particularly disappointed in FCCs repeated reference to the UDP. This was something I noted in my initial objection. However, it was not adequately addressed in the council's response to the objection, and the objection itself made repeated reference to the UDP (16 separate references) rather than LDP specific evidence.

In my professional career, I have often been in the position of making use of relevant previous work to support a new commission. However, in such cases, particularly when under scrutiny from a client, the expectation is always that the current proposals are supported by evidence for the specific instance.

For example, if I were to be carrying out a bridge assessment, I have access to the previous assessment's findings and calculations. However, it would be wholly unprofessional to make reference to the previous assessment to justify my findings. Instead, I would review the previous assessment, carry out my own feasibility and survey work, provide new calculations in line with updated codes of practise, and this in turn would provide the opportunity to reach new or different conclusions.

I am absolutely in support of the efficiency in starting the LDP from the previously prepared UDP information. But that is where reference to the UDP should end, particularly when the LDP has different strategic aims, differing stakeholder engagement and a different delivery mechanism.

It appears FCC did a lot of work in the UDP to support the Ash Lane site. This has just been copied straight into the LDP, thus providing a large proportion of the proposed justification. I would argue the UDP inspector's comments should not be relevant to the LDP and should not be being used by FCC to justify the selection of the Ash Lane site.

G. Flooding concerns.

Since the LDP consultation, there have been numerous incidents of significant surface water flooding in Mancot. This is not something I was aware of previously, but in speaking to residents, it is a reasonably frequent occurrence.

It would appear the flooding is caused by the clay ground being saturated, and then heavy rain flowing across the surface of the fields and quickly filling and bursting the surrounding land ditches. The Ash Lane site is a significant source of this surface water flow.

I am aware that developers will need to develop sustainable drainage systems that have no greater impact on the surrounding network than the previous situation – but I fear this will miss an opportunity to reduce the flooding impact on the Mancot community.

I would request that any development which would have drainage impact should have robust requirements to upgrade infrastructure it impacts, rather than “just” ensuring no detriment to flows.

H. Lack of resilience in existing community facilities / infrastructure.

In my objection report, I discussed the lack of detailed review of actual capacity of community facilities and infrastructure. I commented that the assessment of sites appeared to be on the basis of whether there were doctors surgeries, open spaces or similar, rather than a proper assessment of their capacity.

Since the consultation, I understand these deficiencies have been further understood, resulting in proposed contributions (for example) to Hawarden Village School and Hawarden High School. My thoughts would be that this again demonstrates a lack of proper process.

Hawarden Village School and Hawarden High School (within the Ewloe Settlement Boundary) are already large and highly developed complexes. So providing money does not mean that expanding capacity will be simple or ensure best value. Furthermore I'd expect a better solution to be to understand any deficit in education, healthcare etc in detail before allocating a site, so that the sites with the most capacity, or ability to develop capacity can be selected.

Such a point was supported by the comments in Hearing 4 where the less developed western Flintshire communities were requesting development because of their spare capacity and ability to deliver good value on investments.

Instead it seems FCC is supporting sites which are not sustainable, and suggesting that developers pay their way to force through such developments – with such payments ultimately being passed on to the new home owners.

Of particular concern was that payments by the Ash Lane developer would go to the Hawarden Village School, and Hawarden High School, but that no contribution would go to Sandycroft Primary School (within the Mancot settlement boundary), despite the fact this would be equally preferable and more easily accessible to parents at the Ash Lane site.

At a more strategic level, I find it disappointing that FCC do not have detailed data about capacity and demand of all public services. This would enable a joined up planning and development policy at FCC, which would include allocation of sites, provision of new services, upgrades of transport systems and other facilities in a controlled, data driven and sustainable manner. The current process seems akin to identifying where there is some spare capacity and looking to use it up – completely using up all the resilience in our communities and resulting in significant loss of services in unexpected events – e.g. medical incidents, school closures, road traffic accidents or similar. FCC as a whole should be planning resilience as part of a sustainable development plan.

I. Reflection of Matter 4 – Lack of evidence of facts being used to support the decision making.

Having attended Matter 4, and considering the points I've made above, my final reflection is a real concern about how FCC have gone about putting the LDP together, how they demonstrate they have made appropriate decisions based on the available evidence, and how they demonstrate engagement and strategy development following the public consultation.

At the Matter 4 session, and in their objection response, FCC have emphasized the need to use "planning judgement". I'm well familiar with making decisions using my professional judgement, but in such cases, particularly for important public impacting elements (I've worked on major Rail and Aviation projects), it's vital that evidence is provided to support that judgement, so that it holds up to scrutiny. This just does not seem to be the case with the LDP. FCC has stated, "we used our planning judgement" and expect that to be the end of it.

With the Ash Lane site, it appears that FCC determined very early on that it would be allocated in the LDP, on the basis of work done in the UDP. They have ignored the public outcry that resulted in the site being omitted from the UDP; they have ignored or twisted interpretations of the PPW which seek to prevent coalescence of settlements; they have used terms not recognised in planning policy such as "historic Hawarden"; and they have failed to adapt their plan based on the considerable objection raised at public consultation.

When questioned, FCC have been unable to provide any direct link between the facilities in a settlement and the allocation of a tier rating. It has been shown that the settlement boundaries have not been applied in a consistent or logical way, and FCC have tried to evade criticism on this issue by stating that the boundaries are for a planning tool only – and don't need to represent the actual boundaries! FCC have repeatedly changed their position on coalescence between Ewloe / Hawarden / Mancot, sometimes within the same document, or hearing response. At hearing 4 it was stated that the settlements are already merged; in the objection report it states there is a clear gap between Ewloe and Hawarden (albeit many Hawarden facilities including the high school are on the wrong side of it); and Mancot is variously merged with Hawarden whilst also having green barriers between Mancot and Hawarden and indeed between Hawarden and historic Hawarden. It is not consistent, despite being fundamental to following Welsh Planning Policy.

FCC have failed to provide any direct link between the preliminary assessment of the sites available to them, and how it was decided which sites would be allocated and which would be considered alternative sites. There appear to be alternative sites which would better fit the LDP strategy and PPW policy than Ash Lane, but these have been discounted based on feeble appraisals. There is no evidence based ranking of the best to worst sites, and many green rated sites have not been allocated in favour of amber rated sites. Data on resilience/capacity in the community has not been used effectively to determine any settlements ability to support growth.

All the while, it appears that FCC have worked extremely closely with Gladstone Estate, who have spent a significant amount on surveys, ground water monitoring, design, historic building reports and other supporting evidence. It seems that if enough money is spent considering a site, it can be shown to be viable.

In my view, it cannot be appropriate that there is such an unbalanced level of evidence between sites at the allocation stage, and given the serious concerns this raises about the integrity of the process, it is of great concern that FCC only justify their selection by stating they are using "planning judgement", and the fact that Mancot and Hawarden touch over a few back gardens.

As a result, I can see no other conclusion than to find it unsound to allocate the Ash Lane site in the LDP. I am less familiar with the rest of the LDP, so cannot comment in detail. However given the fundamental issues encountered on the Ash Lane site, it would suggest the soundness of the entire LDP is called into question.