

New Local Plan Village Housing Options and Settlement Boundaries Consultation – January 2014

From Leek Wootton & Guy's Cliffe Parish Council

Dear Sirs,

The following points summarise the Parish Council's representation in response to the Warwick District Council (WDC) Consultation document published on 25th November 2013.

The comments are derived from a wide variety of discussions and communications with individual parishioners and local stakeholders, including a public meeting held on 7th January 2014. What follows is therefore a community-led response to the WDC proposals.

1. Settlement Boundaries and Greenbelt Inset

1.1. Leek Wootton

It is the opinion of the Parish Council that, with the exception of parts of the Police HQ site, there is **NO** justification for removal of the existing Green Belt status for the settlement area of Leek Wootton and opposes the proposal on the following grounds:

- In addition to extending the "developable" area, it is assumed that the proposed "insetting" is designed to facilitate the future planning application process and to increase the scope for future "windfall" development.
- Setting aside Areas 1-4, the increase in the area within the proposed new boundary is negligible and also includes two parcels (at the rear of The Elms and gardens to the north of The Hamlet) that are landlocked by existing relatively new developments.
- The only other "open" areas within the existing village envelope (e.g. the "Puffins" field in front of the Church and various smaller paddocks) are worthy of protection on environmental, aesthetic and wildlife grounds.
- Given the extent of proposed new, "greenfield" development, further "windfall" increases are considered unsustainable in the village environment, since they could only be based upon replacement and greater consolidation of existing properties, which would impact the character of the existing village by increasing density.

1.2. Hill Wootton

It is similarly the opinion of the Parish Council that there is **NO** justification for removal of the existing Green Belt status for Hill Wootton and the proposal is opposed on the following grounds:

- The scale and character of the settlement is that of a typical rural hamlet, concentrated around farming activities. Any significant increase in the settled area would destroy this.
- The 2013 consultation report: "A Critical Field Analysis of Warwick District Council's Green Belt Assessment" concluded that, "*The open character of Hill Wootton makes an important contribution to the green belt*".

- The WDC Local Plan states: "*Hill Wootton is an important green belt parcel which fulfills a very valuable role in maintaining the open space between larger settlements.*" In both cases supporting the existing position.
- The Parish Council does not therefore support the removal of Green Belt status for the existing settlement area but wishes to discuss opportunities for replacement development, which could enhance the existing hamlet.

2. Overall Scale of Proposed Development

The target expansion of 85 new dwellings (+22.3%) is considered excessive and would have significant negative impact on the village environment. The Parish Council opposes the proposal as it currently stands.

- The Revised Development Strategy document referred to "*Limited growth in smaller villages and hamlets, of a scale appropriate to the existing settlement*".
- In this context, it is not clear why Leek Wootton should be close to the maximum target for a 'Secondary Village' when 'Primary Villages' such as Kingswood (Lapworth and Rowington) and Hampton Magna (incorporating Norton Lindsey) are both proposed at less than half the minimum projection (62 and 100 respectively).
- The Parish Council therefore proposes a reduction in the scheduled expansion so as to bring the number closer to the average for all villages. It is considered that a maximum of **60** new dwellings is a more appropriate total representing an increase of 15.75% on the current housing stock.
- This number could reasonably be accommodated within the proposed sites, subject to the comments made under items 3 and 4 following.

3. Phasing over 15 Years

Suitable phasing of new developments is essential to ensure that the village does not become a perpetual construction site and that new additions are easily assimilated within the existing settlement.

- There is little attention given to the issue of phasing in the Consultation document apart from the reference to phases 1-3 in Table 2 (page 11).
- The original on-line publication on 25/11/13 contained a fourth bullet point under item 6.3: "*Detailed consideration will need to be given to appropriate phasing of developments – particularly larger sites and how they best accommodate local housing need and supporting infrastructure requirements.*" This statement has been omitted from the printed document and now the on-line version.
- This leads to the obvious conclusion that the focus of the Local Plan, as drafted, is on short-term development opportunities in the first phase over the next five years and raises question-marks over the ability of the village infrastructure to keep pace.
- The uncertainty over the future of the Police HQ buildings (Area 4) also raises the possibility that this might be brought back into the mix at a later date, either in the shape of the existing planning consent for a "care home" development (60-bed nursing home plus 40 close-care apartments and 35 cottages) or some alternative "windfall" development.
- Other "windfall" sites are already identifiable which would lead to the community exceeding the already high target proposed.
- In view of this uncertainty and the range of potential options relating to Area 4, a view should be taken on the potential impact this could have on overall expansion of the village over the projected 15-year period and the, Parish Council, proposed maximum of 60 new dwellings.

- The Parish Council therefore proposes that, in order to provide greater clarity, any development of Areas 1 and 4 should be deferred until at least Phase 2 of the Local Plan, commencing 2020.

4. Location and Distribution of Preferred Sites

The Parish Council opposes the notion of any single large development in order to increase the housing stock, preferring a number of smaller developments spread over the time frame of 15 years.

- The concentration on the Police HQ site (88% of the WDC proposed total or 65% if Area 4 is excluded) on one site is considered too high.
- Uncertainty over the deliverability of Area 4 suggests that it can only be considered once the future usage is clear. When combined with Area 1, these two sites have the potential to account for more dwellings than the total for the entire parish. For this reason, as noted above, these two sites should only be considered for inclusion in Phase 2 of the Local Plan or beyond.
- The proposed development of the rest of the HQ site includes relatively high-density development of Areas 2 and 3. This is considered inappropriate in the context of the existing and surrounding properties raising questions regarding suitable access. A review of proposed density for Areas 1-3 is required.
- There are a number of anomalies in boundaries relating to the Woodcote Estate, including the extent of the Leek Wootton Conservation Area, what has separately been defined as 'Parkland' and what is subject to TPO's and 'listing'. These will require resolution before a definitive plan for any development of Areas 1-3 can be determined.
- Having regard to the demand for a mix of properties, consideration needs to be given to alternative use of Area 5 which could cater for some increase in proposed numbers without increasing the developed footprint - e.g. a small apartment complex, harmonising with the existing Hayes properties, could easily treble the number of proposed dwellings on that site, without removing all of the existing car parking. This could also fulfill some of the specific needs identified by the recent 'Housing Needs Survey' undertaken by the Parish Council.
- Representations have been made to the Parish Council by the owners of some of the discounted options, for reconsideration. They will no doubt put their own case to WDC but the Parish Council confirms its strong opposition to any additional northward and north-westward expansion of the settlement area.
- The Parish Council continues to oppose any development on Areas 7-13, following the criteria and arguments expressed in the appendix to the Consultation.

5. Access and Traffic Management

Increased traffic volumes and access problems are a recurring theme in the comments from parishioners, especially concerning the narrowness of Woodcote Lane and 'The Anchor' junction.

- Since it is likely that, even with reduced numbers of new dwellings, the Police HQ site will account for the majority of new development in the long run, there are major concerns regarding access.
- It is felt that increased traffic and access problems along Woodcote Drive, Woodcote Lane and at 'The Anchor' junction have not been addressed adequately.
- Apart from the increased traffic flow, resulting from new development, pedestrian access is very poor indeed, requiring numerous crossings of the lane or side roads in order to reach Warwick Road. This represents a

significant problem for children on their way to and from the school at the south end of the village during peak times.

- The absence of adequate footpaths along Woodcote Lane even encourages greater use of vehicles in order to access the school.
- Given the possibility that the Police HQ operations will remain for some years and traffic will then be increased by any new development of Area 4, there is a clear case for a complete re-appraisal of the impact, including all possible solutions for the eastern end of Woodcote Lane and The Anchor junction.
- The Parish Council would like to discuss a number of traffic management options with WDC prior to submission of a detailed request to the WCC Highways Department for complete re-evaluation.

6. Impact on Existing Infrastructure

Much of the supporting infrastructure is at capacity. Improvements would need to precede any specific new developments, rather than follow them.

- See earlier representation to Revised Development Strategy. An increase of 85 dwellings will necessitate extension of the school in order to accommodate 25-30 additional pupils across years 1-7. This will require a minimum three extra classrooms plus extension of the school hall and ancillary facilities.
- Area 5 is currently used as an informal car park for the school and walkers, which any future development would remove. This will need to be considered as a specific need alongside future expansion of the school facilities in particular.
- Concerns have been expressed over the capacity of the sewerage system to handle any major new development. Sewage is currently pumped from certain areas of the village to the treatment works east of the A46 and The Hamlet expansion required the construction of a holding "sump" in order to handle flows. Much of this infrastructure will require updating.
- The Parish Plan identified a need for improved and more comprehensive sports and recreation facilities for the community. In addition to rehabilitation and access to the Woodcote woodland, expansion of the community should also include new and broader provision in this respect.

7. Hill Wootton

Hill Wootton is a typical rural hamlet and should remain so.

- The Parish Council cannot support the proposed new development of five properties.
- There is significant opposition from local residents to development on the identified field, Area 1. Planning applications for development of this field have been refused previously (albeit in 1974 and 1986).
- Hill Wootton has its own characteristics as a typical rural hamlet. There are no public facilities (other than a post box) and services are limited. There is no gas supply and there have been a number of interruptions to the electricity supply because of lack of capacity.
- Access roads to Hill Wootton for both vehicles and pedestrians are poor and the indicated access to the Area 1 would require a right-turn on a blind bend when approached from Leek Wootton.
- Rather than establish a defined boundary for the hamlet, the Parish Council proposes that Hill Wootton should remain within the Green Belt but that existing sites suitable for refurbishment and redevelopment are identified as part of the total new dwelling 'quota' in the Neighbourhood Planning process.

- This approach offers the potential to meet the proposed expansion in the number of dwellings, whilst at the same time providing development that is both sympathetic to the surroundings and acceptable to parishioners.
- In line with the comment made on page 50 of the Consultation Document, the Parish Council proposes further detailed discussion.

8. Relationship with Neighbourhood Planning

It should be noted that the approved Parish Plan for Leek Wootton opposed expansion of the built-up areas of the village on the grounds that it is important to maintain the character of the village and its clear separation from the towns of Warwick and Kenilworth.

- Whilst some additional development is regarded as inevitable, the Parish Council believes that the Neighbourhood Planning exercise can provide the best mechanism for meeting a mutually agreed target for expansion.
- If “insetting” within a revised village boundary is an unavoidable premise of the Local Plan, the Parish Council would want to discuss these proposals in detail, based upon local knowledge, alongside the need to accommodate new dwellings.
- Mix of properties can also be an important mechanism for meeting the targets while at the same time responding to the specific needs for differing types of accommodation (smaller dwellings, retirement properties, flats for professional people in the area for a short time etc.).
- Appropriate phasing is a major consideration. Since it is already clear that a number of local landowners are lining up to sell to developers, the Parish Council wishes to discuss the detailed timing of future planning consents for any proposals exceeding five properties. Without this, there is a danger that the entire village could become an extended building site.

This summary is necessarily framed as an ‘objection’ to the current proposals. However the members of the Parish Council are available for further discussions in order to refine the WDC proposals during preparation and prior to finalising the New Local Plan Submission Draft.

Yours faithfully,

Leek Wootton & Guy’s Cliffe
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