



Warfield Neighbourhood Plan Housing Site Assessment Report

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Warfield Neighbourhood Plan**

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the housing site assessment work that has informed the selection of sites in the Pre-Submission Warfield Neighbourhood Plan (WNP). This report has informed the Draft Sustainability Appraisal (SA/SEA) of the WNP, which has in turn informed the choice of its spatial strategy and of its specific site allocations.

Context

Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) is currently preparing its Local Plan, the Comprehensive Local Plan (CLP). An Issues and Options stage was completed in July 2016 and the Council proposes to publish a draft Local Plan for consultation in the forthcoming months with consultation on the Submission version of the Local Plan anticipated in the spring of 2018.

Warfield Parish Council is preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish of Warfield, in Bracknell Forest. The designated 'neighbourhood area' is coincident with the Parish boundary. The Neighbourhood Plan is likely to be examined and made in advance of the Comprehensive Local Plan (CLP) and will therefore be tested against the strategic provisions of the Bracknell Core Strategy 2008 and the Site Allocations Local Plan 2013. In preparing the Neighbourhood Plan however, the neighbourhood planning team has been cognisant of the evidence base and direction of strategic policy in the emerging CLP.

National policy requires Bracknell Forest Council to objectively identify and plan to meet the needs for housing in their area. Their studies show there is a need for 635 dwellings to be built each year in Bracknell Forest between 2013 and 2036. This figure does not take account of the policies or constraints in the Borough, and this work is ongoing.

A neighbourhood plan can allocate land for development and establish general planning policies for the development and use of land in a neighbourhood area. It can, for example, be used to identify opportunities where new housing or employment could go. It can also contain policies to influence the design of new development and to protect community facilities or locally important green spaces.

However, as a neighbourhood plan must be in 'general conformity' with the strategic policies set by the Local Plan, it cannot prevent new development allocated by Bracknell Forest Council in the Local Plan. It is the intention of the Parish Council to respond positively to the opportunity presented by paragraph 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework by using the Neighbourhood Plan to shape the way in which the Parish may successfully absorb some additional homes in the parish.

The Parish Council is also mindful that the new Local Plan will replace the saved policies of the development plan early in the lifetime of the Neighbourhood Plan. In the case of some policies it will be essential that the Neighbourhood Plan and new Comprehensive Local Plan are mutually supporting, and provide a consistent approach to the strategy for allocating housing land in the Parish.

One such policy is Core Strategy policy CS2 (Locational Principles) which seeks to ensure that land in the Borough will be allocated for development in the following sequence: Bracknell Town Centre; previously developed land and buildings in defined settlements; other land within defined settlements where there is no conflict with other policies; extensions to defined settlements with good public transport links.

The Parish Council has accepted that in the absence of a clear strategic direction for new housing in the parish, it considered that at least 200 new homes would be an appropriate target based on a range of factors which reflect the constraints on development in Warfield, the lack of available previously developed land (confirmed by the BFC Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) 2016 - Table 7) and the need for the plan to be acceptable to the community at referendum.

Taking this positive approach to planning is a central theme in the Governments Written Ministerial Statement (Dec 2016) and proposals set out in Section 3 of the Housing White Paper, and as such the Parish Council considers the scale of development proposed will ensure conformity with the 'basic conditions' whilst at the same time affording some protection should the neighbourhood plan achieve success at referendum against unsuitable planning applications in the parish.

Method

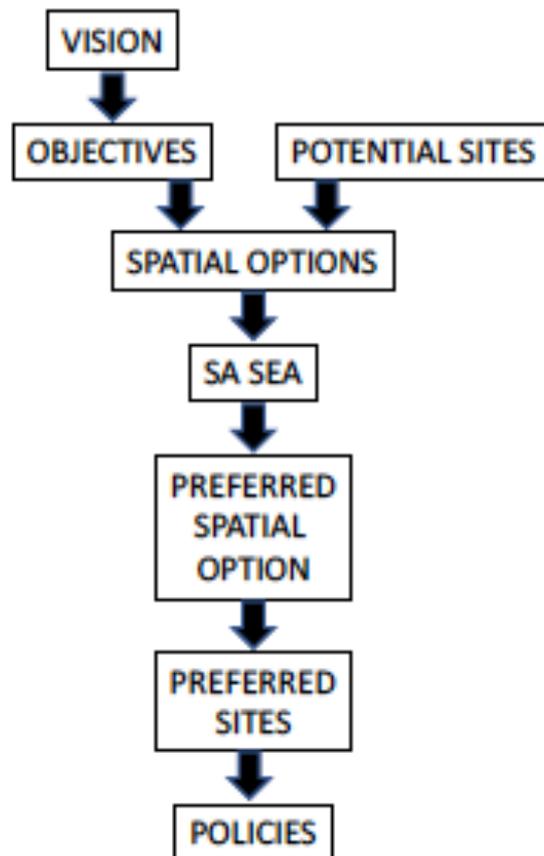
It is important to explain how the site assessment work fits with the process of preparing the Neighbourhood Plan and with the separate but closely related SA/SEA exercise. The approach reflects the advice contained in National Planning Practice Guidance on the assessment of broad locations and sites for their housing and other development potential. The flow diagram overleaf explains this further.

The method for site assessment essentially comprised a three-stage process, whereby the Parish Council firstly engaged the community in considering the vision and objectives for the Plan and in parallel drew up a 'long list' of potential housing development sites. The long list was derived from the Steering Group's own identification of potential sites across the Parish, from those sites that landowners had offered up for assessment and subsequently the SHELAA list provided by BFC.

Secondly, there were another two parallel exercises. Those sites that were not strategic policy compliant or were contrary to a range of other national and adopted Core Strategy policies were excluded to form a short list of sites. And the Steering Group translated the outcome of its visioning and objective setting work into a preferred spatial strategy (see below), which was tested against the sustainability measures of the SA/SEA and compared to the potential alternative strategies.

Thirdly, the short list sites were assessed against the preferred spatial strategy of the neighbourhood plan and other factors against which more detailed assessment was undertaken. Those sites that were consistent with the strategy were taken forward for further assessment in the SA/SEA and for allocation. Those that were not consistent

with that strategy (but were part of one or more of the alternative strategies considered in the SA/SEA) were discarded. For completeness, this site assessment report includes an assessment of all of the short list sites. The method reflects the approach set out in Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG ID3-028).



The Spatial Strategy

As neighbourhood plans cover much smaller areas than Local Plans, they are able to consider a variety of spatial options that may not be possible at the Borough-wide scale. This allows far more emphasis to be placed on defining and comparing spatial options before considering the role that individual sites or clusters of sites may play in delivering one or more of those options.

As described in the supporting text to Core Strategy Policy CS2, the Borough contains a number of environmental, physical and policy constraints which influence the location of development. In planning for new homes and based on the advice of BFC, the Parish Spatial Context Plan (overleaf) provided a clear preference for a spatial strategy that the Plan must adopt.

Essentially, the preferred strategy focuses on avoiding Green Belt locations to the north and acknowledges there is insufficient land in the existing urban area to the south to deliver any meaningful housing growth than that already planned for in the committed strategic allocation (SALP Policy SA9).

The preferred strategy has therefore focussed development in the remaining 'countryside gap' (annotated yellow in Plan A) between those two areas, within which are located the 'defined settlements' of Newell Green, Warfield Street and Hayley Green.

Site assessments were undertaken by the neighbourhood planning team and their consultants to ascertain the suitability availability and simple capacity of land around the defined villages in the 'countryside gap', given no land was available within the village boundaries and the land to the south of the countryside gap was already allocated through policy CS5/SA9.

Each site within the gap was identified as being part of one of four theoretical spatial options:

1. Hayley Green Option – defined as extending the village to the north, beyond the existing settlement boundary (Noting: growth already planned to the west in SA9/Area 3) – it comprises SHELAA sites 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19 to deliver an approx. total number of 400 homes in the plan period.
2. Warfield Street Option – extending the village to the north and west, beyond the existing settlement boundary (Noting: growth already planned to the south and east – SA9/Area 1 & 3 - it comprises SHELAA sites 8, 9, 10 to deliver an approx. total number of 115 homes in the plan period.
3. Newell Green Option – extending the village to the north, beyond the existing settlement boundary (noting: growth already planned to the south and south west – SA9/Area 1 and 2 – it comprises SHELAA site 6 to deliver an approx. total number of 400 homes in the plan period
4. Dispersal Option – distributing development by extending each of the three defined villages in the countryside gap (a combination of 1, 2 and 3) to deliver an approx. total number of 200 homes in the plan period

These spatial options were tested during the preparation of the Draft SA/SEA with the first option (Hayley Green) being identified as the preferred option, and option 2 -4 as reasonable alternatives. As that report highlights, given the appraisal was of the spatial options, which contained all the relevant available sites, there was no value in appraising the individual sites in isolation of each other.

That exercise confirmed that the preferred option was most consistent with the framework of sustainability objectives when compared to the alternatives. As a result, the Pre-Submission WNP proposes the allocation policy that was consistent with the preferred option. In addition, Policy 1 of the WNP proposes to amend the settlement boundary to contain growth to the preferred cluster of sites. Those sites that were located in one of the other spatial options were therefore not taken forward as site allocations as a) those options were not appraised as providing a more sustainable solution and b) there was no need to allocate any additional land.

In addition, promoting a cluster of sites ensures 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts' and provides the opportunity for an integrated approach to masterplanning and to identify community benefits such as the provision of open

space and facilities, which a series of standalone developments would not. The principle of comprehensive development where opportunities arise is supported by BFC.

The site assessment process and its outcome are explained further in the draft SA/SEA Report.

The Sites

At the time of drawing up the 'long list', the government were consulting on proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework so that neighbourhood plans could allocate "appropriate small-scale sites" in the Green Belt specifically for starter homes¹ as an exception to Green Belt policy. Hence the long list originally included sites within the Green Belt for such purposes and detailed assessments were undertaken on five sites where such a policy might apply (P, Q, R, S. & T).

During the passage of the site assessment work however, it became clear that the necessary changes to planning policy and regulations were unlikely to be formally adopted in the short term and hence these five Green Belt sites were excluded from further consideration as they would be contrary to both the spatial strategy and Green Belt policy.

The suitability and capacity of the sites that were shortlisted indicated that there was more than enough capacity available to deliver the quantum of dwellings sought and hence a 'call for sites' was not considered necessary.

From the list of twenty-four original sites (the 'Long List'), one additional site was added at the request of a landowner. The eleven sites located in the Metropolitan Green Belt were excluded (for the reasons stated in the previous section). Of the other available sites, land that was beyond the three settlements was also excluded at the outset as being contrary to a range of National and adopted Core Strategy policies.

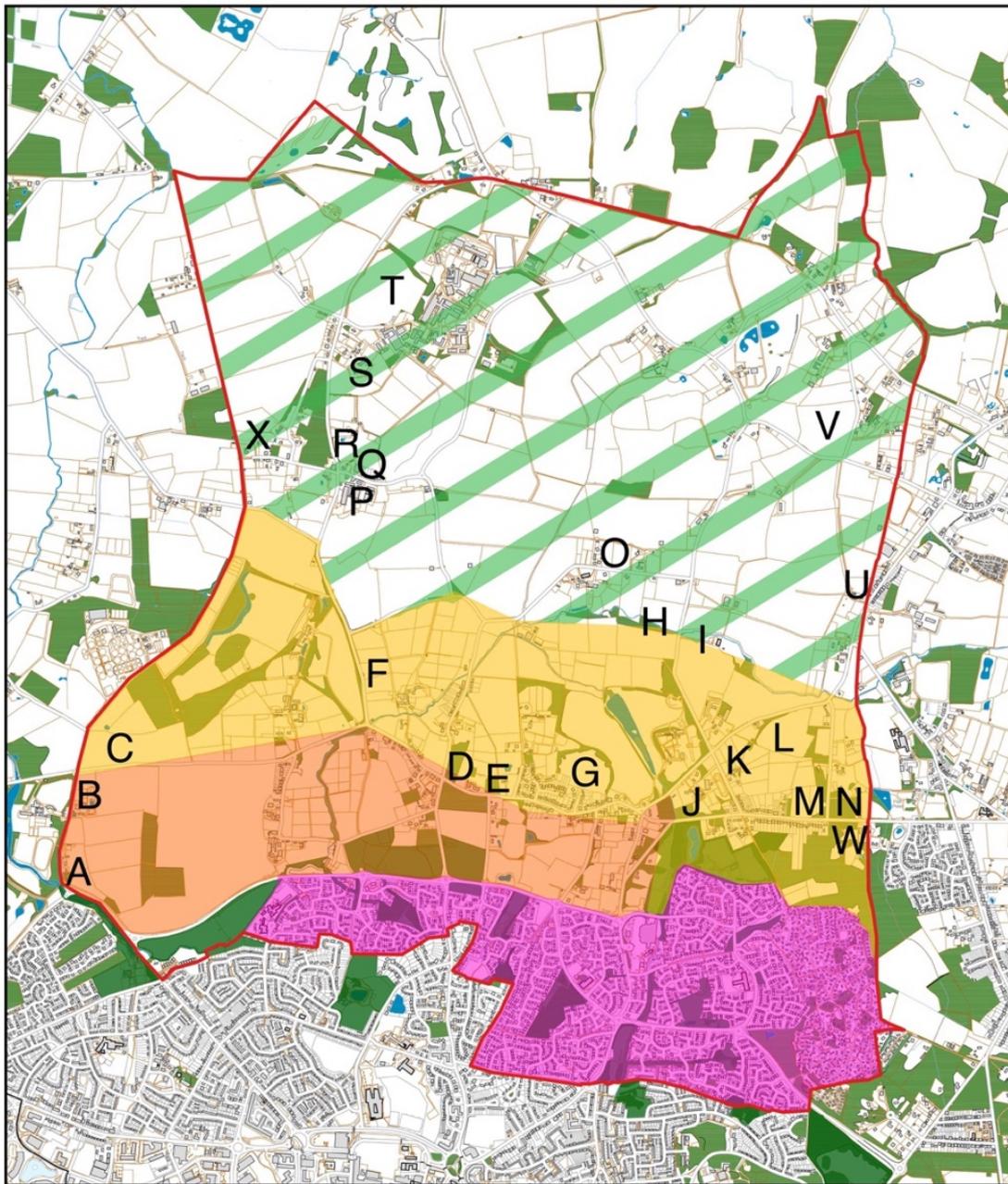
All the shortlisted sites apart from one were subsequently included in the SHELAA published in November 2016, and this additional site (WAR11) was subsequently assessed as an addendum to the original study.

All of the shortlisted sites have been assessed and their observations recorded. For each site, the observations relate to:

- its location in respect of the five spatial options
- its current/past use
- its location in relation to existing policy designations
- the nature of its surrounding land uses
- its planning history
- the potential, by way of its location, to realise another reasonable community benefit as part of a scheme.

The summary assessment in Annex A indicates those sites that were taken forward for detailed assessment and those that were excluded and the reason for their rejection.

¹ HM Government, Consultation on proposed changes to national planning policy, December 2015, p19-20



Parish Spatial Context (illustrative purposes only)

The Parish of Warfield is characterised in four parts. Development opportunities in the existing built-up area and new area in the south of the parish are scarce. The Green Belt is heavily protected. Therefore, development is most likely in the 'countryside' area that is sandwiched in between:

-  Existing built up area in the south
-  Emerging new built up area (Warfield extension SA9)
-  Defined settlements and countryside including West End, Newell Green, Warfield Street and Hayley Green
-  Metropolitan Green Belt

Plan A – Location of all sites originally identified ('Long List')