

Examination of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2011-2031)

Examination hearing sessions

Statement of North Hertfordshire District Council

Matter 11 – The housing allocations and the settlement boundaries: the Category A villages – Little Wymondley WY1

11.42 Is the proposed housing allocation deliverable? In particular, is it:

a) confirmed by all of the landowners involved as being available for the use proposed?

1. The developer of the site confirms that they support the allocation and the deliverability for housing in their representation to the Regulation 19 consultation on the plan (ED3, p18 [appendix 1])

b) supported by evidence to demonstrate that safe and appropriate access for vehicles and pedestrians can be provided?

2. No site specific objections to the allocations have been received from the highways authority. There is a short frontage along Stevenage Road for the main vehicular access into the site and this also provides a direct footpath connection to the village. There is a secondary access onto Blackmore End Road for emergency vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists. There is also a separate pedestrian link into the village at the eastern end of the site.

c) deliverable, having regard to the provision of the necessary infrastructure and services, and any environmental or other constraints?

3. Yes. The site has been considered through the SHLAA and is considered a suitable location for development having regard to potential constraints (HOU9, site ref WY1. See Appendix 3, p.27 and Appendix 4, p.49).
4. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan (TI1) and Local Plan Viability Assessment Update (TI2) show that this development is deliverable in infrastructure planning terms. The likely significant environmental affects of allocating the site have been considered through the Sustainability Appraisal (LP4, Appendix 6, pp.658-660).
5. No fundamental constraints to development have been identified. Site-specific criteria for this site are identified in the plan (LP1, Section Four – Communities, Wymondley pp. 213-214). These will be supplemented by the generic development management policy requirements that apply to all sites in relation to issues including (but not limited to) affordable housing, housing mix, transport, design and heritage. This includes an appropriate solution for primary education requirements within the village on this site.

11.43 Is the proposed housing allocation justified and appropriate in terms of the likely impacts of the development?

6. Yes, the proposed housing allocation in Little Wymondley is justified and appropriate.
7. In broad terms, each allocation in the plan is justified by (see the Council's Statements on Matters 5, 7 and 9):
 - The need to seek to meet the Objectively Assessed Needs (OAN) for housing as far as is consistent with the policies set out in the NPPF in a district that is currently highly constrained by Green Belt and other considerations;
 - In the Council's view, being able to mitigate or ameliorate identified harms to an extent that the restrictions in Paragraph 14 of the NPPF (and other policies of the framework) would not apply when making a balanced planning judgement on the individual site(s);
 - The significant majority of the deliverable and developable sites identified in the SHLAA (HOU9) being required for allocation if the District is to be able to meet the OAN;
 - No preferable, deliverable alternative sites existing which would allow OAN to be met over the plan period in a substantively different way;
 - There being no reasonable prospect of other authorities in shared housing market areas being in a position to assist under the Duty to Co-operate should North Hertfordshire have resolved not to meet its OAN in full.
8. WY1 lies within the Wymondley and Titmore Green landscape character area as identified in the Council's evidence base (CG16, pp.24-28c). This parcel covers the whole of Little Wymondley and land to the south and continues into neighbouring Stevenage district. It is considered to be of low to moderate sensitivity and low landscape value.

WY1

9. Little Wymondley is a Category A village within the district settlement hierarchy where draft Policy SP2 (as amended) allows general development within the defined settlement boundaries.
10. The site lies on the southern edge of Little Wymondley, fronting onto Stevenage Road adjoining existing residential development and provides an opportunity to contribute to the District's overall housing number. It comprises an area of Grade 3 Agricultural Land and could affect the setting of a number of local Listed buildings.
11. Potential constraints identified by the SHLAA are a moderate risk of surface water flooding on part of the site which should be addressed through mitigation measures as part of any planning application. On balance, positive opportunities afforded by this site are considered to outweigh harms.

12. In response to issues raised through the representations to the Reg 19 consultation regarding the lack of sustainable transport options and use of unsuitable roads leading to the village, it is proposed to ensure that appropriate mitigation measures are put in place as part of any development proposals. This is in accordance with the Council's Transport Strategy (ED14) which aims to reduce car traffic volumes below those informing the transport modelling and identifies a broader suit of potential projects and mitigation measures to ensure the continued operation of the highway network for which reasonable contributions will be sought. The following amendment to para 13.555 on p.214 in LP1 is therefore proposed to the supporting text for effectiveness:.

Our transport modelling identifies the junction between Hitchin Road and Arch Road in Great Wymondley as a location where a mitigation scheme will be required to support new development. **Some minor roads leading to and from the villages within Wymondley parish may require other traffic management measures which will also need to be investigated and will be reflected in future iterations of the Infrastructure Development Plan. Mitigation could include environmental improvements to the village centre.**

11.44 Is the proposed allocation the most appropriate option given the reasonable alternatives?

13. The proposed allocation of site WY1 represents the only reasonable option for the expansion of Little Wymondley beyond its existing limits. HOU1 (Appendix 2, p.62) shows that of the two potential sites assessed in and around Little Wymondley this is the most suitable. Site 121 was not allocated as it lies on the north side of Stevenage Road and its southern part lies in Flood Zone 3b which makes it less preferable for allocation.

11.45 Site WY1 comprises of land in the Green Belt.

a) Do exceptional circumstances exist to warrant the allocation of the site for new housing in the Green Belt? If so, what are they?

14. Yes. Exceptional circumstances exist to warrant the allocation of land for housing and supporting education infrastructure in the Green Belt at WY1. The site provides the only reasonable alternative for the expansion of Little Wymondley beyond its current built limits.

15. Under the saved policies of the current District Plan, Little Wymondley is tightly surrounded by the Green Belt. The Council's general case for the existence of exceptional circumstances is set out in its response to Matter 7. The objectively assessed need for housing significantly exceeds the level of development which can be met on development opportunities on brownfield land or contained within existing urban areas or in rural areas beyond the Green Belt.

16. The District is highly constrained by Green Belt and many of the most sustainable locations for new development are within or adjacent to existing higher order settlements as set out in Policy SP2 and supported by Section 4 of the Sustainability Appraisal in (LP4, p30 [p58]).
17. The harms to the Green Belt of the potential allocations have been assessed and weighed against the benefits of development in these locations. Measures to ameliorate or reduce the consequent impacts to the lowest reasonably practicable extent have been identified.
18. Site WY1 provides an opportunity to make a contribution to overall housing numbers and meet local needs arising within this part of the district in a Category A village identified by Policy SP2 of the Plan. There are not considered to be any insurmountable non-Green Belt constraints to development of the site which cannot be addressed through the policy requirements of the plan.

b) What is the nature and extent of the harm to the Green Belt of removing the site from it?

19. The site is part of a wider parcel of Green Belt land assessed as making a significant contribution to two of the purposes of Green Belt with a significant overall contribution (CG1 Green Belt Review p45). The site itself is assessed as making a moderate contribution to Green Belt purposes. (CG1, p123)

Table A: Contribution of allocation WY1 in Little Wymondley to the purposes of Green Belt

Site	Green Belt purpose				Overall contribution
	Sprawl	Merge	Countryside	Historic	
Site WY1	Significant	Moderate	Significant	Limited	Moderate

c) To what extent would the consequent impacts on the purposes of the Green Belt be ameliorated or reduced to the lowest reasonably practicable extent?

20. Criteria have been identified which must be satisfied before the grant of planning permission on the allocated site.
21. The site allocation boundary is drawn to ensure the built extent of Little Wymondley does not extend beyond the ridgeline and to create a gap between the development and the A602 in a cutting to the south. This gap is designated Urban Open Land (policy CGB5) and will maintain openness but also provide opportunity for some uses associated with adjoining development but which would be in keeping with the openness. The site allocation extends Little Wymondley to the south but the A602 Little Wymondley bypass creates a strong boundary to the Green Belt and the direction of expansion is not towards Stevenage so the relatively narrow gap between Little Wymondley and Stevenage would be maintained.

d) If this site were to be developed as proposed, would the adjacent Green Belt continue to serve at least one of the five purposes of Green Belts, or would the Green Belt function be undermined by the site's allocation?

22. Through the actions specified in the allocation criteria, the Green Belt adjacent to sites WY1 will continue to contribute to the purposes of Green Belt.
23. The assessment of the strategic land parcels and sub-parcels in the Green Belt Review shows that land beyond the proposed allocation boundaries already serve Green Belt purposes (CG1, Figure 2.8, p.31 and Figure 3.6, p.66).
24. The adjacent Green Belt land would continue to play an important role in, in particular, maintaining the gap between Hitchin and Stevenage.

e) Will the Green Belt boundary proposed need to be altered at the end of the plan period, or is it capable of enduring beyond then?

25. The extent to which existing settlements might be further expanded in order to meet future need is finite particularly given the dense settlement pattern in existence at the more sustainable locations in the west and central areas of the District.
26. The review and release of land undertaken as part of this plan would extend Little Wymondley in its current form to its logical maximum extent in all directions.
27. To the north, any further development would be restricted by the East Coast mainline railway line, to the east is Wymondley Bury and the potential encroachment and narrowing of the gap between Little Wymondley and Stevenage. To the south is the A602 which provides a robust barrier and to the west development would encroach into an important gap between Hitchin and Little Wymondley/Stevenage.
28. Notwithstanding this point, each settlement within and adjoining the District will need to be properly assessed for further expansion capacity to inform any future local plan review process.
29. However, it is the intention of the plan that the amended Green Belt boundaries will endure beyond the plan period in order to continue to ensure the Green Belt continues to perform its key strategic functions.

f) Are the proposed Green Belt boundaries consistent with the Plan's strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development?

30. Green Belt boundaries have been determined with a view to achieving the most sustainable pattern of development. The new Green Belt boundaries have been established in order to accommodate the reasonable maximum of development that can be accommodated within the District at the present time in accordance with the settlement hierarchy.

31. This seeks to allocate development to higher order settlements in the first instance in accordance with Policy SP2 (as amended). This approach to the distribution of development and the establishment of enduring Green Belt boundaries is supported as the most sustainable approach to achieving the development needs over the plan period.

g) Has the Green Belt boundary around the site been defined clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent? Does it avoid including land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open?

32. Yes. Every effort has been made to clearly define the Green Belt boundaries around the settlement using physical features such as roads and footpaths that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.

33. Where no such permanent features exist, or where use of such features would necessitate release of substantial additional land beyond the proposed allocation boundary from the Green Belt, it has been necessary to use semi-permanent existing features such as field boundaries, hedgerows, public rights of way and / or tree belts.

34. Where no features exist the allocation criteria specify that the allocation should seek to establish a landscape feature that will sufficiently contain the site and be identifiable as the Green Belt boundary such as through the establishment of hedgerows or tree belts.

35. Only a small part of the housing allocation is coterminous with the proposed revised Green Belt boundary. This is to the west and north-west of the site where the allocation is bounded by Stevenage Road and Blakemore End Road.

36. As per the Council's evidence to Matter 15, there is no clear defensible feature at the southern edge of the proposed allocation which would be suitable as a Green Belt boundary. To the west and north, the proposed allocation does not have a continuous or consistent frontage.

37. The proposed Green Belt boundary is therefore defined by the footpath extending from Tower Close to the east, the A602 Wymondley bypass to the south, Blackmore End Road to the west and Stevenage Road and the existing settlement boundary to the northwest.

38. Between the area allocated for development and the A602 green Belt boundary there is an area of Urban Open Land which will retain the openness of the Green Belt whilst allowing for appropriate land uses associated with adjoining development.

11.46 Is the proposed settlement boundary:

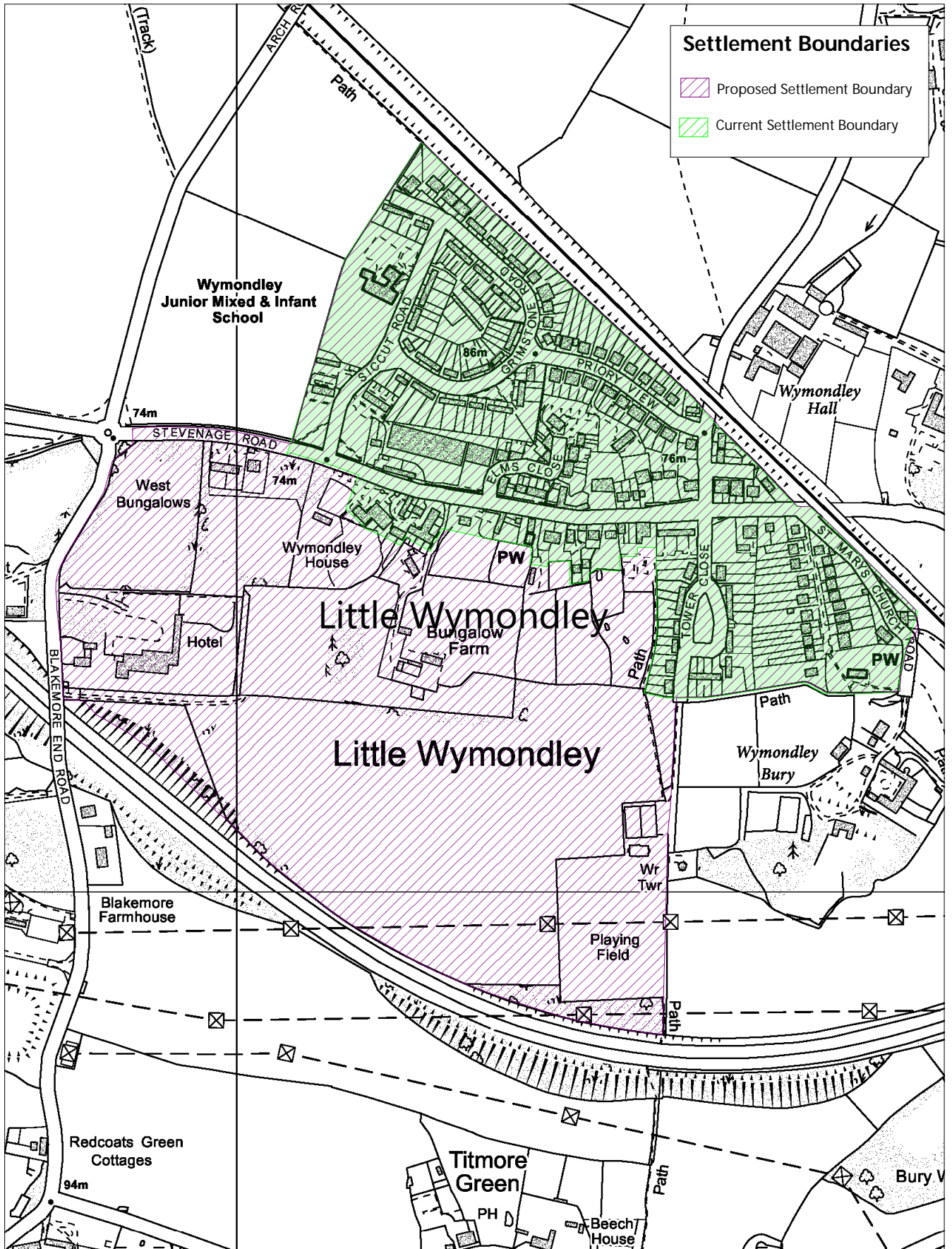
a) consistent with the methodology for identifying the settlement boundaries?

b) appropriate and justified?

Matter 11 (Little Wymondley), North Hertfordshire District Council

39. No further alterations to the settlement boundary are proposed beyond those necessary to create a coherent Green Belt boundary around site WY1. Beyond the changes necessitated by the proposed allocation, the main east coast railway line forms the northeast boundary and St Marys Church Road and PRow Wymondley 010 forms the southeast boundary. The eastern boundary is PRow Wymondley 008.
40. A map showing the existing and the proposed settlement boundary for Little Wymondley is attached to this Statement as Appendix 1 to aid interpretation.

Appendix 1: Current and proposed settlement extent of Little Wymondley



Scale: 1:6000
Date: 10:10:17

