



Phillips Planning Services Ltd.  
Town Planning and Development Consultants

# **LAND SOUTH OF VICARS CLOSE** BIDDENHAM, BEDFORDSHIRE

## **LOCAL PLAN CALL FOR SITES** **SUPPORTING STATEMENT**

**PROPOSED ALLOCATION OF LAND FOR  
RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF UP TO  
12 NEW HOMES**  
AUGUST 2020

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The following statement has been prepared to support the promotion of land south of Vicars Close, Biddenham, Bedfordshire for inclusion as an allocation for residential development in the Bedford Borough Council Local Plan Review.
- 1.2 The site is located on the southern side of Vicars Close on the southern side of the settlement of Biddenham, and it is submitted that it would represent an appropriate and sustainable location for residential development. The development of the site also provides the opportunity to reinforce the gap between the settlements of Biddenham and Great Denham through enhancing boundary planting to create a strong edge to the existing settlement.
- 1.3 In preparation of this submission, the site has been subject to detailed technical assessment in respect of the matters of transport, landscape, and ecology. The advice and conclusions of these reports coupled with the objective that the development should reflect the existing character and settlement pattern of Vicars Close and Biddenham and reinforce the settlement gap have informed the preparation of an indicative layout which has been included with this submission. The layout demonstrates a low-density development of 12 new homes (including 4 elderly person bungalows) could be comfortably provided on the northern portion of the land in a complementary second cul-de-sac form. The southern portion of the land (approximately 1/3) remains undeveloped including The Spinney.
- 1.4 The purpose of this statement is to provide an overview of the submission and should be read in conjunction with the 'Call for Sites Submission Form', Access Appraisal prepared by TPA, Landscape Assessment prepared by Wynne Williams Associates and Ecological Appraisal prepared by Middlemarch Environmental.

1.5 Should upon review the council consider that further information relating to any specific aspects of the site would be helpful, the landowners would be pleased to provide this.

1.6 This statement is organised as follows:

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Site Analysis

3.0 Indicative Site Proposals

4.0 Ownership & Delivery

5.0 Conclusions

## 2.0 SITE ANALYSIS

- 2.1. Vicars Close is a L shaped private residential cul-de-sac accessed off Main Road on the southern side of the village of Biddenham. It is characterised by large detached properties set within generous plots.
- 2.2. The promotion site is the broadly rectangular grassed field located directly to the south of Vicars Close adjoining the southern boundaries of nos. 12, 12A, 14, 16 and the plot known as no. 18.
- 2.3. In addition to owning the freehold of the promoted site, the promoters also own nos. 12 and 12A, the plot known as no 18 and the road and verges within Vicars Close. Nos. 12 and 12A have planning permission for demolition and replacement whilst the plot known as 18 has outline consent for 2 dwellings.
- 2.4. The land south of Vicars Close covers an area of approximately 2.9 hectares and has trees and hedgerows delineating its northern, eastern, and western boundaries and small block of woodland (The Spinney) along its southern boundary. The promotion site comprises the northern 1.9 hectares only as discussed further below.
- 2.5. To the south and west of the site is The Bedford Golf Course beyond which is the settlement of Great Denham, whilst to the east is an agricultural field, beyond which are residential properties located on Merril's Field and Cooper Close which are both within Biddenham. The golf course occupies the open gap between Biddenham and Great Denham.
- 2.6. As shown on the extract below, the council's adopted Local Plan identifies that the current designations relevant to the site are that it is located adjacent to Biddenham's settlement boundary and is also within an area of 'urban open space' and forming part of a 'gap' between the settlements of Biddenham and Great Denham.

2.7. Adopted policies AD42 and AD43 of the Allocations and Designations Local Plan adopted July 2013 identify that the objectives of the 'local gaps' designation is to 'prevent the coalescence of settlements', 'maintain the predominately open and undeveloped character of the gap' and 'protecting the separate character and identity of settlements including their setting'. Specifically, the open space designation for Biddenham is to provide 'visual breaks and safeguard local distinctiveness including views'.



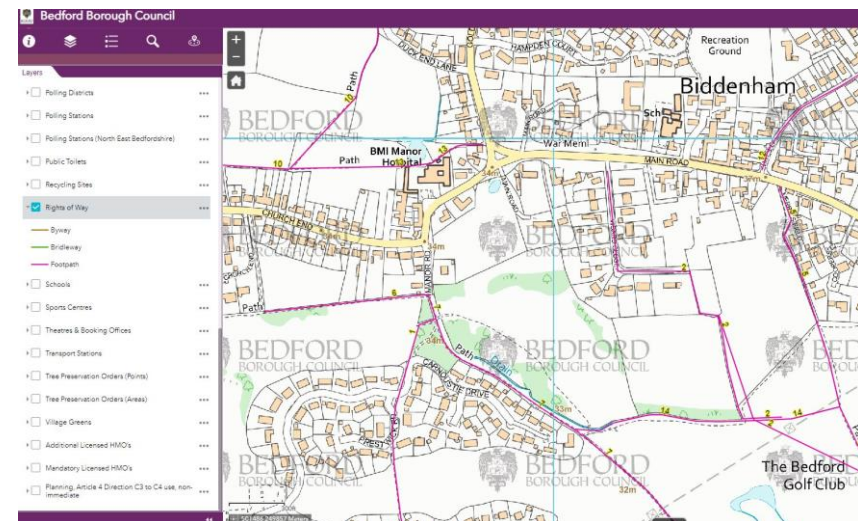
Extract from Bedford Borough Council Local Plan 2030 Policies Map adopted January 2020  
(Promotion Site annotated with red line)

2.8. As noted above, the gap between Biddenham and Great Denham is predominately occupied by the golf course. Between the rear of Manor Road, Biddenham and Carnoustie Drive, Great Denham this gap is approximately 110m wide. If the promotion site were developed as proposed a slightly larger separation gap of 115m-120m would remain to Carnoustie Drive to the west and some 460 metres to Gleneagles Close to the south.

2.9. There are no technical constraint designations related to the site. As will be noted, it is located within Flood Zone 1, so is not at risk of flooding and, does not contain nor is in close proximity to any statutory heritage assets (e.g. listed buildings or SAMs etc).

2.10. The site is also well connected and accessible to services and facilities within Biddenham and the surrounding area via Vicars Close, the public right of way network and public transport.

2.11. As will be noted, public footpath 2 runs from Main Road through Vicars Close and along the eastern boundary of the site. It connects into public footpath 14 which runs along the southern boundary of the site. Public Footpath 14 links into public footpath 7 to the west which runs into Great Denham and public footpath 5 to the east which connects into the western edge of Bedford.



Extract from Bedford Borough Council's online Rights of Way Mapping system

2.12. As can be seen from the list below, there are a good number of services and facilities within reasonable walking and cycling distance:

#### Education

- St James VA Primary School, 49 Main Road, Biddenham (*approx. 400m*)
- St Joseph's and St Gregory's Catholic Primary School, Biddenham Turn, Biddenham (*approx. 1.2km via footpath network*)
- Biddenham International School and Sports College, Biddenham Turn, Biddenham (*approx. 1km via footpath network*)

#### Health

- Great Denham Medical Centre (incl. Pharmacy), Kingswood Way, Great Denham (*approx. 1.5km via footpath network*)
- Queens Park Health Centre, 23C Carlisle Road, Bedford (*approx. 1.5km via footpath network*)

#### Public House & Conveniences

- The Three Tuns Public House, 57 Main Road, Biddenham (*approx. 400m*)
- Sainsburys Local and shopping parade, Biddenham Neighbourhood, Great Denham (*approx. 1.3km via footpath network*)

#### Open Space & Play Equipment

- Biddenham Recreation Ground & Pavilion, Days Lane or Deep Spinney, Biddenham (*approx. 1km*)

- Play Equipment north eastern side of Great Denham Park (*approx. 800m via footpath network*)

#### Place of Worship

- St James's Church, Church End, Biddenham (*approx. 1.1km*)

#### Community Facilities

- Biddenham Village Hall, Nodders Way, Biddenham (*approx. 500m*)
- Great Denham Community Hall, Saxon Way, Great Denham (*approx. 1.2 via footpath network*)

2.13. In terms of public transport, the site is within short walking distance of the bus stops at the War Memorial and Merril's Field. Both stops are served by Route 41 which provides an hourly service (Mondays to Fridays & Saturdays) to Bedford, Bromham, Stagsden, Turvey, Lavendon, Olney, Yardley Hastings, Denton, Brafield on the Green and Northampton. A less frequent service also runs on Sundays.

2.14. The journey time into Bedford is approximately 6-7 minutes to Bedford Railway Station and 12-13 minutes to Bedford Bus Station in the town centre.

#### Technical Note – Access Appraisal

2.15. Access to the site has been reviewed by Transport Planning Associates (TPA) and a Technical Note is submitted with this site promotion.



- 2.16. As referenced above, it is highlighted that the site is a highly accessible location with good walking cycling and public transport connections to a range of local facilities.
- 2.17. Access to the site would be provided by a 5.5m shared surface road running from the southern end of Vicars Close (before it turns east), between plots 12 and 12a. The access review notes that appropriate forward visibility can be provided, and that TRICS traffic data shows that a low density development of just 12 new homes (including 4 elderly persons bungalows) would not materially impact traffic flows in the area. The existing Vicars Close access is a shared surface roadway and it is considered that it would be most appropriate to retain this character of road and extend it to serve the proposed development. This would be in keeping with the existing character of Vicars Close. Although TPA assess it as unnecessary given the low number of new homes proposed should Council Officers consider that a dedicated footpath should be provided, this can be accommodated as the site promoter owns the verge land either side of the existing carriageway. Should a footpath be deemed necessary, it is submitted that this should take the form of an informal path set within the grass verge rather than part of / adjoining the roadway to maintain the rural, low key character of the cul-de-sac.
- 2.18. In summary, it is concluded that there are no highway reasons to prevent the allocation of the site.

#### Landscape Appraisal

- 2.19. A Landscape Appraisal has been prepared by Wynne Williams Associates. The appraisal has reviewed the landscape planning context as well as the potential visual impact of development at the site.

- 2.20. The assessment acknowledges the site's location within the 'urban open space' and 'gap' and that there are a number of potential landscape sensitivities within the area including the series of public rights of way and other recreational routes within its vicinity as well as the Biddenham Conservation Area and a number of listed buildings.
- 2.21. However, the very comprehensive review undertaken explains that due to the extensive existing screening to the eastern, western and southern boundaries and the existing properties along the northern boundary on Vicars Close, the potential visual impacts of the development as proposed in this submission on landscape character would be extremely limited.
- 2.22. Accordingly, the appraisal recommends the retention of the existing boundary planting and to enhance as appropriate, such as in the north eastern corner of the site where there is a small gap and also to ensure a sensitive design of the access.
- 2.23. In terms of the gap / coalescence, the assessment explains that with the retention of the boundary planting there would not be any visual sense of a closure or reduction in the existing gap between the settlements. However, notwithstanding this the promotion does not seek allocation of all the land down to the southern boundary, rather a significant physical gap is proposed to be retained. As such not only would there be no visual appreciation of an encroachment of built development but also physically the gap would remain extensive and (as outlined above) it would remain wider than other sections of the existing gap to between the settlement and Great Denham.

#### Ecological Appraisal

- 2.24. Middlemarch Environmental have prepared a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. This has identified that woodland and boundary planting and immediately adjacent strips of land to these areas hold the most biodiversity value, and that there is evidence of badger holes within the woodland. Accordingly, recommendations have been made to provide a 30 metre buffer zone to the

woodland and the retention of the existing boundary planting. This advice has been incorporated as explained above with only the northern portion of the land promoted for development and at a low density.

## 3.0 INDICATIVE SITE PROPOSALS

3.1. Having analysed the site including the detailed advice on transport, landscape and ecology as discussed above, an indicative proposal has been prepared to show how it can comfortably and suitably accommodate a modest, low density residential development of 12 new homes, reflective of the existing Vicars Close layout and character.

3.2. This section explains the indicative proposal in detail and identifies the benefits of allocating the site.

### The Layout

3.3. In analysing the land south of Vicars Close, the key elements of advice are that it can very comfortably and respectfully accommodate a low-density residential development focussed on the northern portion of the site with an undeveloped southern section and retained boundary planting. It is clear that any new development must also respond to the character of Vicars Close, provide an appropriate mix of houses, maintain the amenity of neighbouring properties whilst also providing appropriate living space and amenity for the future occupants of the development.

3.4. In following these considerations, the layout has been developed on the basis of retaining existing boundary planting, focussing on the northern portion of the land (approximately 1.9 hectares) with approximately a third of the land undeveloped (including The Spinney).

3.5. This is explained in greater depth below.

### Landscape

- 3.6. As discussed in the Landscape Appraisal, the positioning of the development on the northern part of the land and retaining the boundary landscaping means that the development will not impact upon landscape character nor have visual effects as the site is extremely well screened. There is currently only one small section of the boundary landscaping in the north eastern corner of the site which requires reinforcing in this regard.
- 3.7. The positioning of the development also means that the 'gap' maintained between Biddenham and Great Denham would still be comfortably in excess of the existing gap between the settlements. This is currently 110 metres between Manor Road and Carnoustie Drive and would be at least 115 metres between the closest point of the proposed development and Carnoustie Drive to the west whilst some 460 metres to the south of Gleneagles Close. There is also substantial potential to further strengthen the existing boundaries and provide a strong, clear and enduring edge to Biddenham which would have the effect of protecting the gap between the settlements which is occupied and maintained by the golf course.
- 3.8. The use of the northern part of the land also ensures an appropriate relationship with the existing settlement form and pattern.

### Ecology

- 3.9. As discussed, the ecological appraisal similarly recommends that the development is focussed on the northern portion of the site in order to provide a 30 metre buffer zone to the woodland to the south as well as highlighting the importance of retaining the existing boundary planting.
- 3.10. Again, the layout has facilitated these recommendations.

### Access

- 3.11. The Access Appraisal has reviewed the access to the site, and has confirmed that suitable access and visibility can be achieved by extending the existing road and the bend of Vicars Close and running between the new units at nos. 12 and 12A. It also confirmed that a low density development of 12 units would not impact on traffic flows and can be safely accommodated.
- 3.12. Accordingly, the indicative layout utilises this access proposal and serves the development by replication the L-shaped bend of the existing road within the site.

### Character

- 3.13. Vicars Close is characterised by being a low density form of development, with detached dwellings in generous plots set back off the L-shaped cul-de-sac. The existing density of Vicars Close is approximately 5 dwellings per hectare and this would be maintained in the this proposed extension.
- 3.14. The layout complements the existing character by also reflecting the L-shaped cul-de-sac pattern and setting the new homes back from it on generous plots around a shared surface road.
- 3.15. The design of the new homes would also take into account the vernacular of the locality and provide a high quality finished development.

### Mix

- 3.16. The indicative layout has been designed to include a mix of dwelling sizes (3, 4 and 5 bed homes) and include 4 elderly person bungalows. It is considered that this again responds the character and mix of Vicars Close and Biddenham.
- 3.17. It is also confirmed that a policy compliant proportion of the units would be affordable housing.

### Amenity

- 3.18. The units provided within the indicative layout provide living accommodation which exceeds the national minimum housing standards as well as generous private amenity spaces.
- 3.19. The low density form of development, also means that there is comfortable spacing between each plot and all are provided with adequate parking provision.
- 3.20. The layout has also sought to ensure that the amenity of the existing properties on Vicars Close is protected, through providing appropriate distance for privacy off the northern site boundary and positioning the single storey bungalows on the northern side of the proposed access road.
- 3.21. The distance coupled with the single storey form of development would ensure that the amenity of the existing properties is maintained. Further to which, there would be sufficient space on the northern boundary to provide additional planting to screen the development.

### Sustainable Location

- 3.22. As has been set out, it is also reiterated that it is considered that the site represents a sustainable location for development. It is situated adjacent to the existing settlement of Biddenham and is well connected and accessible to a variety of services and facilities via sustainable modes of transport including immediate access into the public rights of way network.
- 3.23. In regards to local facilities, it is also understood that the primary and secondary schools are operating under capacity (St James – 168 pupils for capacity of 210, St Joseph & St Gregory – 508 pupils for capacity of 525 and Biddenham International – 1172 pupils for capacity of 1200) so would also be understood to be easily capable of accommodating the additional pupils resulting from this modest development.

### Climate Change -Policy 51S

- 3.24. The Call for Sites Submission Form also notes that the council has declared a climate change emergency and seeks to ensure that developments recognise this matter and are consistent with the aims and objectives of the adopted Local Plan 2030 policy 51S. This policy specifically identifies that the council will require new development to address climate change, adapt to future changes and mitigate against further change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- 3.25. Due to the relatively low density of the indicative proposal, it is clear that there would be significant scope for introducing sustainable features to provide energy and water efficient dwellings utilising renewable energy technologies were feasible. Furthermore, there is also substantial undeveloped space to provide sustainable drainage systems, enhanced tree planting and associated biodiversity enhancements.



3.26. As has also been referenced, the site is highly accessible and connected to a variety of services and facilities via walking, cycling and public transport. Providing development in locations which are not solely reliant on private car travel have the potential of reducing associated greenhouse gas emissions.

## 4.0 OWNERSHIP & DELIVERABILITY

- 4.1. As set out on the 'Call for Sites' submission form, Mr Ian and Dr Hugh Laing own the site, nos. 12 and 12A Vicars Close, the plot known as no. 18 Vicars Close and Vicars Close (the road and verges within Vicars Close).
- 4.2. There are therefore clearly no land ownership constraints in bringing forward development on the site and accordingly it is deliverable.

## 5.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1. This submission seeks the residential allocation of land south of Vicars Close, Biddenham for 12 dwellings in the Bedford Borough Local Plan Review.
- 5.2. As has been set out, the site is considered a sustainable location for development, and its development would assist in providing the opportunity to protect the gap between Biddenham and Great Denham by strengthening the edge of Biddenham in this location.
- 5.3. The site has been specifically reviewed in respect of transport, landscape, and ecology issues. Each assessment has concluded that an appropriate low-density form of development reflective of the existing Vicars Close character as is proposed can be comfortably accommodated at the site.
- 5.4. An indicative layout illustrating how the development could come forward has also been provided with this submission. The layout has taken into account the recommendations of these assessments through retaining boundary planting and the woodland and providing a buffer to the woodland and eastern and western boundaries to allow for additional planting and associated biodiversity enhancements. The development has also been designed to provide a low density form of development, a mix of housing types with appropriate living accommodation and amenity space as well as to protect the amenity of neighbouring properties.
- 5.5. Accordingly, it is considered that it has been demonstrated that the site would be appropriate for allocation with Local Plan Review.



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