

Sandy Road

Willington

Neighbourhood
Planning
Vision Statement
June 2019

HSL | HOLLINS STRATEGIC LAND





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Contents

1.0	Introduction	5
3.0	What are Wellington's aspirations?	9
4.0	Design Concept	13
5.0	Neighbourhood Benefits	17
8.0	Conclusion & Way Forward	21

Vision Statement

“Listen to local stakeholders and residents from concept through to delivery and fully understand their views on new development in the village. By engaging with the ideas, aspirations and concerns of the people who know the historic village best we can produce a high quality scheme that integrates into the village, delivers genuine local benefits, including green infrastructure and responds to the needs of the wider community”

INTRODUCTION



Bells Lane

Bedford Road

Station Road

Barford Road

Sandy Road

Site Location

Purpose

This Vision Document has been prepared by Hollins Strategic Land (HSL) and relates to a parcel of land south of Sandy Road in Willington (“the site”). It has been prepared to aid ongoing discussions with Willington Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and the Parish to help inform the site selection consultation process. The Parish may also use it to provide useful information to residents at the next Neighbourhood Plan consultation.

It demonstrates that when taking account of all the Neighbourhood Planning consultation responses, housing needs survey and technical survey work to-date, the site would be a sensible choice for housing in the emerging Neighbourhood Plan.

Site

The site lies between existing residential dwellings along Sandy Road on land well contained by vegetation and roads. It is anticipated that the site is

capable of delivering up to 50 affordable and market homes of varying sizes with community parkland, green infrastructure, open space, play areas and ecological enhancements as well as substantial community benefits which cannot be brought forward through a handful of small sites.

HSL have undertaken early technical survey work to help inform the Neighbourhood Plan and are cooperating with the Steering Group and Bedford officers. HSL are fully considering any constraints and opportunities presented by the site as a whole and welcome any suggestions from the Steering Group.

Who we are

Hollins was founded in 2007 and helps landowners bring forward sustainable and deliverable development sites. Our approach is simple: quality over quantity. Our aim from the conception of a potential site is to listen and gain support with people at the local level. Recently, HSL has secured over 10 planning consents for over 700 homes and we also

have a sister housebuilding company called Hollins Homes who build high quality developments.

Hollins work on behalf of a wide range of landowners including private individuals, charities, trusts and Government estate departments, promoting land through the planning system to secure housing allocations and planning permissions for residential development. On this site, Hollins are working with local landowners who have strong links in the village with one party owning the Frosts Garden Centre which has been a champion for charity work as well as employing a workforce of over 100 people.

HSL has an in-house project management team who are qualified planners. This helps to give HSL the edge in understanding the planning system and the issues associated with a wide and diverse range of projects without relying heavily on outside professional advice. Blended with commercial acumen results in HSL actually ensuring delivery of much needed homes and infrastructure on the ground.

WHAT ARE
WILLINGTON'S
ASPIRATIONS?

2.0

What are Willington's aspirations?

Development Plan

The current adopted development plan consists of the Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan (2008), the Allocations and Designations Local Plan (2013), the saved policies of the Bedford Borough Local Plan (2002) and made Neighbourhood Plans. The emerging Bedford Local Plan (-2030) will, when adopted, form part of the statutory development plan for Bedford and will replace the existing strategic development plan policies.

The Council has submitted its emerging Local Plan 2030 to the Secretary of State in December 2018 and seeks to plan for Bedford borough's growth needs up to 2030. It aims to deliver 970 dwellings per annum across the borough.

The estimated key milestones are summarised below:

Plan Stage	
Draft Plan consultation	Nov/Dec 2018
Pre Submission	Feb/Mar 2019
Submission	Dec 2018
Examination	May-June 2019
Inspector's Views	July 2019
Adoption	Autumn 2019

The emerging Local Plan 2030 identifies Willington as a rural service centre, which have fewer facilities than Key Service Centres and "provide a more localised convenience and service role to meet day to day needs of residents and businesses in the rural areas". Growth in the rural service centres will be more limited to help support local services. For Willington, 25-50 homes have been identified for delivery through a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Hollins Strategic Land wishes to follow the Neighbourhood Planning process in Willington so as local people have a say on how their village grows and looks.

Willington

The last Census (2011) found that the Parish had a population of 751 people, a decrease of 4% over the previous 2001 Census (782 people). The village accounts for approximately 0.5% of the overall population in the borough.

The Parish Council commissioned a Housing Needs Survey Report which was published in May 2019. The survey return rate was 48% of residents and therefore the results may not be

representative if all those residents who may be in need. The Report recommends that 27 units be built over the next 20 years to meet only the needs identified in within the village.

Those in need are:

- Young first-time buyers
- Older people going into retirement

The survey found there are a need for 2 and 3 bed homes and bungalows (or lifetime homes). A large proportion would need to be affordable.

After several rounds of consultation by the Parish, Willington NDP Final Survey (May 2019) was published in June 2019. Some of the key points from the responses included:

- A countryside gap or green buffer zone to be provided around the outside of the village;
- Preference for new development to be grouped on several small sites of 10 or fewer dwellings;
- New development should be sympathetic to the character and positioning of surrounding buildings;
- New development should make an effort to

avoid damage to wildlife and restore and enhance wildlife;

- **Traffic speed and volume were identified as the biggest traffic problems;**
- **Only 16% use the local school frequently, a sign that there are few young families in the village.**

Green Infrastructure Plan

The Parish has also prepared a draft Green Infrastructure Plan to help inform policies and objectives in the emerging Neighbourhood Plan. The Parish Council and Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group have endorsed its findings which involved residents in a series of focused working groups.

Green infrastructure is the network of green spaces, access routes, wildlife habitats, landscapes and historic features which provide:

- **A healthy and diverse environment**
- **Attractive places to live and visit**
- **A good quality of life**
- **A sustainable future**

The woodland on the site is identified in the GI Plan as an Orchard which isn't currently publicly accessible. The GI Plan also identified various aspirations for green infrastructure which concluded the need to protect and enhance areas of the Parish including land east and west of Barford Road. Locations were also identified as important views to be retained. The site at Sandy Road is not one of these identified locations. That said, the site does offer the opportunity for substantial enhancements to green infrastructure and the provision of public accessibility.

Development of the site can help retain the green space in the heart of the village elsewhere which was a confirmed as a priority within the village.

DESIGN CONCEPT

5.0

Design Concept

Concept

The emerging design concept is at a very early stage and will be subject to community engagement to allow the proposals to evolve. The concept shows that green infrastructure is at the heart of the design which surrounds a new residential development to the south of Sandy Road.

Wildlife and green infrastructure is a priority with significant long-term management to save the dying green crested newt population and help rejuvenate the poor quality woodland. Some areas will be protected whilst others will be opened up for public access.

A new enhanced “green boulevard” along Sandy Road which connects into the village will extend the existing green infrastructure network as well as enhancing the gateway into the village. This green gateway scheme, along with highways enhancements, would create an attractive entrance to the village, incorporating safe footways as well as helping to reduce traffic speeds.

Within the development area a new woodland orchard walk area adjacent to Wood Lane

will provide a focal point for community activity. Footways will be located through the development from Sandy Road to Wood Lane to provide easy access for new and existing residents. A new outdoor gym or play area to serve new and existing young and old residents could be located adjacent to this green, to maximise the synergy of the community facilities.

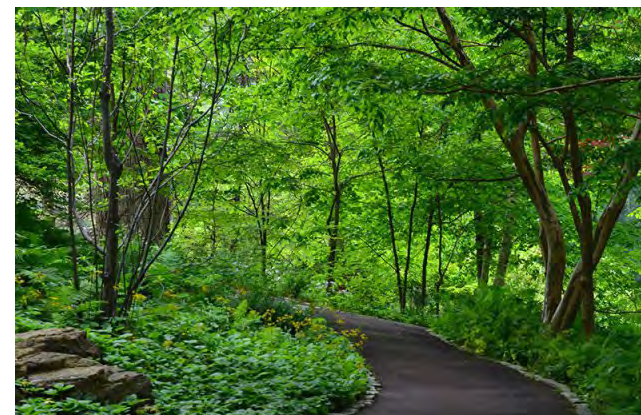
The new residential blocks have taken influence from the existing residential streets in terms of their size, density and orientation. Architectural features typically found elsewhere in the village will set the tone for the character of the development. A palette of traditional, high quality materials with varied window and door styles will also echo the character of the existing village.

Existing good quality trees and hedgerows will be retained and new quality areas of landscaping and amenity green space integrated throughout the development.

In summary, the concept identifies a number of potential opportunities including:

- **A green boulevard along Sandy Road;**
- **Protecting and enhancing wildlife habitats, particularly great crested newts;**

- **Up to 50 affordable and market homes of varying sizes to meet local needs;**
- **New woodland orchard acting as a community focal point and asset;**
- **Highway rumble strips on Sandy Road to reduce speeds in conjunction with cameras;**
- **New safe pedestrian links and crossings;**
- **Allotments;**
- **Outdoor gym or play area;**
- **Pedestrian improvements along Sandy Road and at Barford Road improve usability and safety.**



Example woodland orchard walk



Key

- ① Road access taken from Sandy Road with right turn lane into site.
- ② Up to 50 (low-medium density) affordable and market to help meet needs identified in the Housing Needs Survey Report.
- ③ Pond and woodland area enhanced in perpetuity to save dying newt population.
- ④ New better quality green infrastructure, ecological pond and woodland walk.
- ⑤ Provision of green infrastructure within the development to provide ecological corridors.
- ⑥ View into site from Sandy Road opened up, providing view of existing woodland.
- ⑦ New pedestrian footway and safe refuge area along Sandy Road.
- ⑧ Hedgerow and new native tree planting to enhance green infrastructure along Sandy Road.
- ⑨ Development set back to imitate existing character of properties along Sandy Road.
- ⑩ Footway connections into Wood Lane allowing public access through the woodland walk, play area, as well as connections into the wider attractive countryside public rights of way.
- ⑪ New highway improvements including rumble strips to compliment speed cameras, footway widening, refuge upgrade on Barford Road and improved road markings.
- ⑫ New public play area or outdoor gym for all.
- ⑬ Walking corridor along Wood Lane enhanced with green infrastructure improvements.
- ⑭ Community allotment provision.

NEIGHBOURHOOD BENEFITS

4.0

Neighbourhood Benefits

HSL believe there is an opportunity for further discussions with local residents to see how the site might be able to accommodate some of the aspirations residents have shown a demand for, as well as providing an updated position on the needs of the local area from the residents themselves.

As identified in previous sections of this document, the Parish and Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group have identified a whole host of issues as well as opportunities for improving the village. We are listening and genuinely wish to help the village achieve these aspirations.

Economies of Scale

However, it is our view that small ad-hoc development is unlikely to be of a scale to be able to financially contribute to delivering what the community want beyond housing. Small sites simply do not have the economies of scale that larger sites do, and small sites (below 10 dwellings) are not required to provide affordable housing. In addition they are unlikely to have the capacity within the site to provide for open spaces or community facilities.

Small sites also have an inherent uncertainty, delivered as and when, or in some cases not at all. They also may not facilitate improvements to infrastructure.

By comparison, we believe the site south of Sandy Road offers a real opportunity to work with residents and the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to allocate a single site that can help meet the urgent needs in the Housing Survey as quickly as possible as well as investing heavily in improving the green facilities in the village now.

HSL will also work with utility and infrastructure providers to ensure that if existing infrastructure is problematic it can be upgraded before any development starts.

All of this can be delivered with certainty on a single larger site which would be less harmful than other sites closer to the heart of the village. An allocation on Sandy Road helps protect unwanted development from happening elsewhere.

Maintaining Vitality

Willington benefits from existing facilities, but the reduction in the population between 2001

and 2011 identifies the threat that such facilities can face in rural locations. There is a clear case, based on national policy, for well designed, high-quality schemes that help maintain the vitality of rural communities and support (and indeed enhance) its existing services.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (para. 78) states that:

“To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where it will support local services”

Tangible Benefits

Support for development of the land at Sandy Road can secure the following real benefits:

- Protecting and long-term enhancement of existing green infrastructure and habitats;
- Retaining and providing over 30% green infrastructure in accordance with the Bedfordshire Green Infrastructure Plan and Forest of Marston Vale objectives;
- An ecological long-term management programme to restore the dying population of great crested newts;
- The provision of a choice of up to 50 affordable and market homes in line with the Housing Need Survey Report to help meet needs quickly within five years and at a low-medium density to match the existing character;
- Highways improvements including footway widening on Sandy Road;
- New safer pedestrian refuge on Barford Road subject to BBC Highways approval;
- New orientation to corner of Barford Road/ Station Road to improve safety subject to BBC Highways approval;
- Rumble strips on Sandy Road to help reduce traffic speeds entering the village and to compliment provision of speed cameras;
- Creating a 'green boulevard' into the village by planting new native trees and hedgerow which will also create a residential 'feel' to road users helping to slow traffic down;
- A new wildlife pond which contributes improved ecology and to blue infrastructure;
- New community allotments for young and old in the village who like to get their fingers green;
- A new outdoor mini gym or play area;
- Creating a community asset by bringing a new woodland orchard into public use for walkers or cyclists via new paths into the site;
- The potential for land to be gifted to the Parish;
- By allocating the site and by HSL bringing it forward for development, it is estimated that around £120,000 will be donated directly to the Parish through Community Infrastructure Levy receipts to spend as it wishes. This could be for improvements elsewhere in the village.

Neighbourhood Plan Key Themes Test

The Parish Council and Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group have undertaken extensive public consultation in the village. We are doing our homework and listening to those important views to ensure development on the site meets the aspirations of those who know the village best.

We have reviewed the consultation responses to date as well as the Housing Needs Survey and have summarised those key themes relevant to the site to 'test' how it meets those themes.

Key theme		
Fewer than 10 dwellings per site	✘	Whilst the proposals at this early stage are for up to 50 homes, we believe that the site can provide more certainty in providing tangible benefits to the community in a wider range of areas because there is the economies of scale. Homes can be provided with more certainty and urgency.
More affordable housing	✓	The site can provide all of the urgent affordable homes identified in the Housing Needs Survey for new young families and those wishing to downsize. The site will meet at least the policy requirement for affordable homes.
2 and 3 bedroom homes and bungalows/ Lifetime Homes	✓	The site has the capacity to provide a range of homes of different sizes to meet local needs.
Consider the scale of surrounding buildings	✓	Development will be sensitively designed and range from low to medium density in line with existing development.
Be sympathetic to the character and positioning of surrounding buildings	✓	Development will be set back from Sandy Road to match the character of the existing dwellings on Sandy Road.
Sympathetic of the open space character and density of the village	✓	Green infrastructure and open space is a key priority on the site with plenty of open space brought into community use. The development will be low to medium density.
Important Green Spaces	✓	Whilst the site is not identified as an Important Green Space, its allocation can serve to deliver the requirements of the Bedford Local Plan and protect Important Green Spaces from development elsewhere. In addition, as the current proposals are to create a new community orchard and woodland walk, there is potential to designate this new area as an Important Green Space in a future Neighbourhood Plan.
Agricultural land should be protected	✓	The site is not used for intensive agricultural purposes owing to its small size and disconnection with the wider agricultural fields. The concept proposals offer the opportunity for community allotments to be provided for the parish to use.
Traffic speed, volume and HGV's	✓	Traffic calming, rumble strips and improvements to pedestrianisation.

Key theme		
Includes sufficient car parking for residents and visitors	✓	The development to provide sufficient car parking which meets all Bedford standards.
Retain Wood Lane to Sheerhatch Wood designated as a local green space	✓	The green infrastructure improvements can help improve the character of Wood Lane as a walking route.
Create safe crossing at A603	✓	Highways improvements would consist of footway widening, new safer pedestrian refuge at Barford Road.
Enhance site as accessible wildlife area	✓	New wildlife pond, newt management plan and orchard.
Enhance pedestrian/cycle access along A603	✓	The proposals include widening the pedestrian footway on Sandy Road, new footway access through the site.
Enhance pedestrian safety crossing points of Barford Road	✓	Improved pedestrian refuge at Barford Road and improvements to road markings.
Create publicly accessible green space (plant as community woodland?)	✓	New woodland planting a significant element of the proposals whilst facilitating new access for the community.
Actively support developments that further the aims of Greensand Ridge Nature Improvement Area and Forest of Marston Vale	✓	The proposals will provide improvements to and in excess of the 30% woodland cover in line with the Forest of Marston Vale objectives. Green and blue infrastructure (native trees, pond and hedgerows) are in-line with Greensand Ridge aims.
Impact on historically or architecturally important buildings, structures, views	✓	Development of this site will have little to no impact on historic or architecturally important buildings, structures or views compared with other locations.
Renewable energy incorporated into development	✓	Renewable energy will be incorporated, with car charging ports. An attenuation pond will also retain surface water.
Improve footpaths	✓	Footpaths widened and new ones provided through site.
More for younger people	✓	Outdoor play area, gym, allotments and woodland walk.
A countryside gap or green buffer zone to be provided around the outside of the village	✓	The proposals will retain a substantial woodland buffer around the perimeter of the site to keep the edge of the village green. The site is of a kind which is well contained by roads and houses and therefore cannot expand in the future unlike other site options.

CONCLUSION & WAY
FORWARD

6.0

Conclusion & Way Forward

Hollins Strategic Land wish to continue engaging with the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group representatives and with a landowners who have strong links to the village, HSL are very keen to see the delivery of a sustainable development which provides both short and long-term tangible benefits to Willington.

Our vision illustrated within this document has been carefully informed by the residents who know the village best and who have taken the time to engage in the Neighbourhood Planning process. Whilst the vision is at an early stage - and is by no means final - we are committed to continue the extensive consultation that has already been undertaken to enable the proposals to evolve.

Next Steps

If the identification of site as an allocated is supported, HSL would undertake a public exhibition, workshop and consultation with the community to help finesse the proposals in parallel with the finalisation of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Further discussions with the Parish and Neighbourhood Plan group would continue up to

referendum and the NDP being formally made.

Following this, an outline planning application would be prepared and, in accordance with Willington NDP policies, would be submitted to BBC planning department.

HSL would continue negotiation and receive comments from the Parish whilst the application is being consulted and decided.

It is hoped with support in the NDP that the site could be approved in 2020, with development starting by 2022 and completion by 2024.

Finally

It is our genuine and professional view that development of this single site, with perhaps an allowance for small infill sites to come as and when, is the only way to guarantee with certainty the provision of significant community infrastructure, affordable homes and green infrastructure. Several small piecemeal sites may not ever deliver the affordable homes for those in need now or even be viable, and certainly won't meet the wide green infrastructure aspirations and highways improvements the village aspires for. As the Government's agenda is on actual

delivery of homes, a lack of new homes in the village may leave the village vulnerable to speculative development.

We have done the right thing and followed the democratic process of the village through a Neighbourhood Plan and believe the site can help make those aspirations a reality whilst having the economies of scale to facilitate an estimated £120,000 directly to the Parish through community infrastructure levy.



Vision Statement



Sandy Road, Willington