



LAND SOUTH OF LITTLE WYMONDLEY

VISION FOR DEVELOPMENT - DECEMBER 2017

Consultant Team



Masterplanning, Landscape, Ecology, Archaeology and Heritage, and Arboriculture



Planning



Flood, Drainage and Transport

FOR EDP USE

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1. Introduction

Bovis Homes Limited has commissioned this vision document to support the delivery of its land south of Little Wymondley, for a landscape-led residential development.

The site is allocated for development under Policy WY1 and Policy CGB5 of the North Hertfordshire District Council Local Plan 2011-2031, as submitted for Inspection. It is under the control of Bovis Homes Ltd, an experienced national housebuilder who are able to deliver the site as required to meet local housing need. It is available, suitable and achievable.

This document sets out the site-specific approach to creating a sustainable and deliverable landscape-led residential development, taking account of site features and context. It proposes a well-connected extension to the local community that is visually and physically contained within the immediate landscape south of the village, creating a new defensible Green Belt boundary.

As such it seeks to demonstrate that the criteria attached to the emerging development plan policy can be realised, especially in relation to ecology, landscape, heritage and the sensitive integration of the development into the local context. Specifically, provision is made for education through the inclusion of a site for a primary school, with enhanced landscaping and has full regard for the requirements of access and drainage infrastructure.

Further environmental and design analysis suggests the site is capable of delivering:

- Up to 350 new homes, comprising of a range of house types, sizes and tenures to cater for people with different incomes and at different stages of their lives;
- Potential to deliver a new primary school with the opportunity to include community facilities;
- A comprehensive landscape framework that could include: an expansion to the existing sports pitches; a network of open spaces retaining existing landscape features; walking trails; and new play area opportunities;
- A primary access point onto Stevenage Road with associated emergency access onto Blakemore End Road;
- Improved pedestrian and cycle connections to the village core linking to Stevenage Road and the existing Public Rights of Way (PROW) along Tower Close; and
- A suite of on-site proposals that mitigate potential heritage, drainage, transport and environmental concerns.

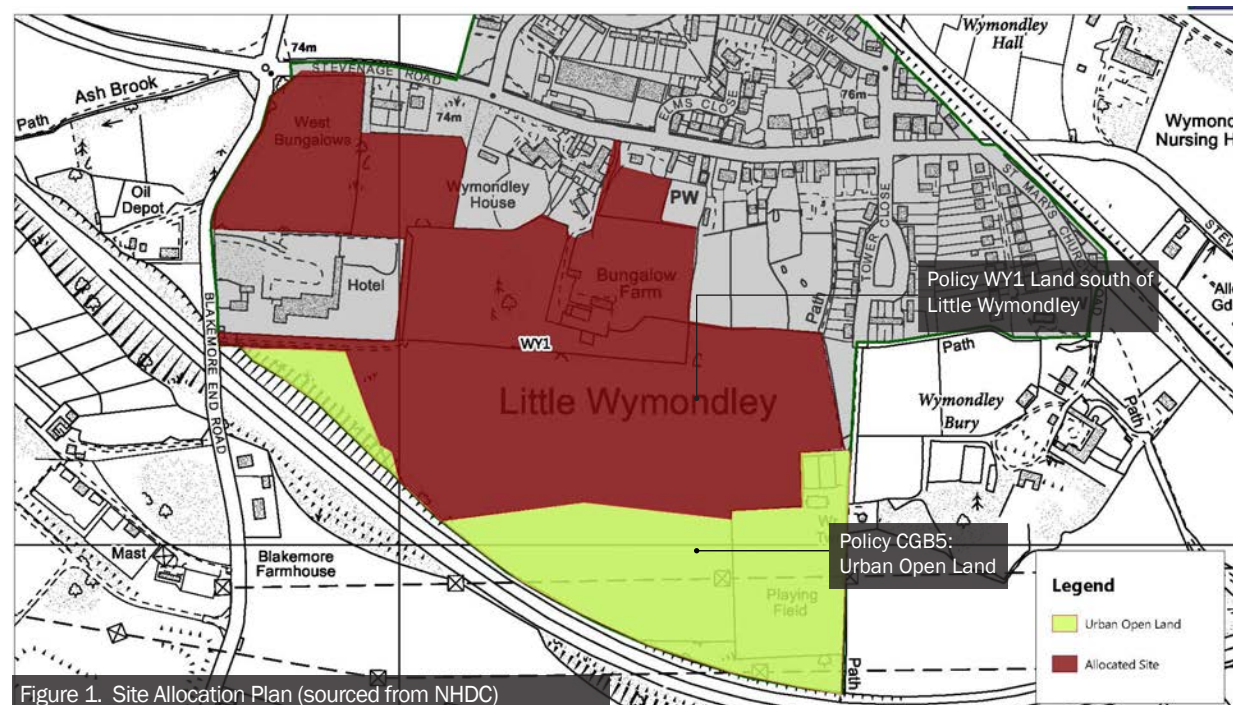


Figure 1. Site Allocation Plan (sourced from NHDC)

1.1 The Site

The site extends to approximately 20.24 hectares (ha) and currently consists of a series of grazing paddocks enclosed by mature vegetation to the north and a large single agricultural field to the south. As shown opposite, the northern boundary of the site abuts the settlement edge of Little Wymondley, which is well-screened by mature vegetation. An existing dwelling, Bungalow Farm, is located within the site near the northern boundary accessed from Stevenage Road. An existing footpath runs along the eastern site boundary adjacent to a number of village recreational facilities including Wymondley Tennis Club, sports pitches and play areas including a multi use games area. To the south, the site is bounded by the A602. A series of overhead power lines partially cross the site. To the west is Needham House Hotel and an existing access point onto Blakemore End Road. The site directly corresponds to Allocation WY1 and is fully under the control of Bovis Homes Ltd.



2. Constraints and Opportunities

The following section outlines the constraints and opportunities that have been identified from assessments undertaken by the EDP environmental team and WSP technical team.

2.1 Ecology and Arboriculture

The site is not covered by any statutory designations of international or national importance. Furthermore, there are no international statutory designations within 10km of the site, and no national statutory designations within 2km of the site. There are thirteen Local Wildlife Sites within 2km of the site (as shown in Figure 3), the nearest of which lies approximately 300m south-west of the site at the Wymondley electricity transforming station, separated by the A602 bypass.

Within 2km of the site, there are three Ancient Woodland Inventory Sites. Owing to their spatial separation from the site, the lack of any direct habitat linkage and subject to the provision of a sufficient proportion of accessible green open space within the scheme, it is considered unlikely for any direct or indirect effects to occur to any of the non-statutory designations within the site's zone of influence.

The majority of land within the site is managed as intensive agricultural land under arable cultivation, considered to be of low intrinsic ecological value. The northern portion of the site supports semi-improved grassland fields enclosed by mature tree lines, hedgerows and bands of broad-leaved semi-natural woodland and plantation woodland. Thus, considering the potential constraints the trees pose by

virtue of their presence, a tree survey will be undertaken in accordance with BS 5837:2012 Trees in relation to Design, Demolition and Construction. This baseline assessment will identify any arboricultural constraints on or adjacent to the site that should be considered in the context of the development aspirations for the site.

The network of woody habitats is considered of intrinsic ecological value in the local context, and has been retained as far as possible within the proposed concept masterplan for the site, thereby ensuring that the site remains permeable to wildlife. It is considered that, via appropriate habitat creation, restoration and enhancement measures, such as new tree, hedgerow and scrub planting, creation of informal green spaces with species-rich wildflower grassland and design of SuDS features to benefit biodiversity, the loss of low value arable habitats can be sufficiently compensated for.

Overall, studies to date have confirmed that there are no 'in principle' ecological constraints to the proposed development, and the scheme is capable of compliance with relevant planning policy for the conservation of the natural environment at all levels.

2.2 Heritage and Archaeology

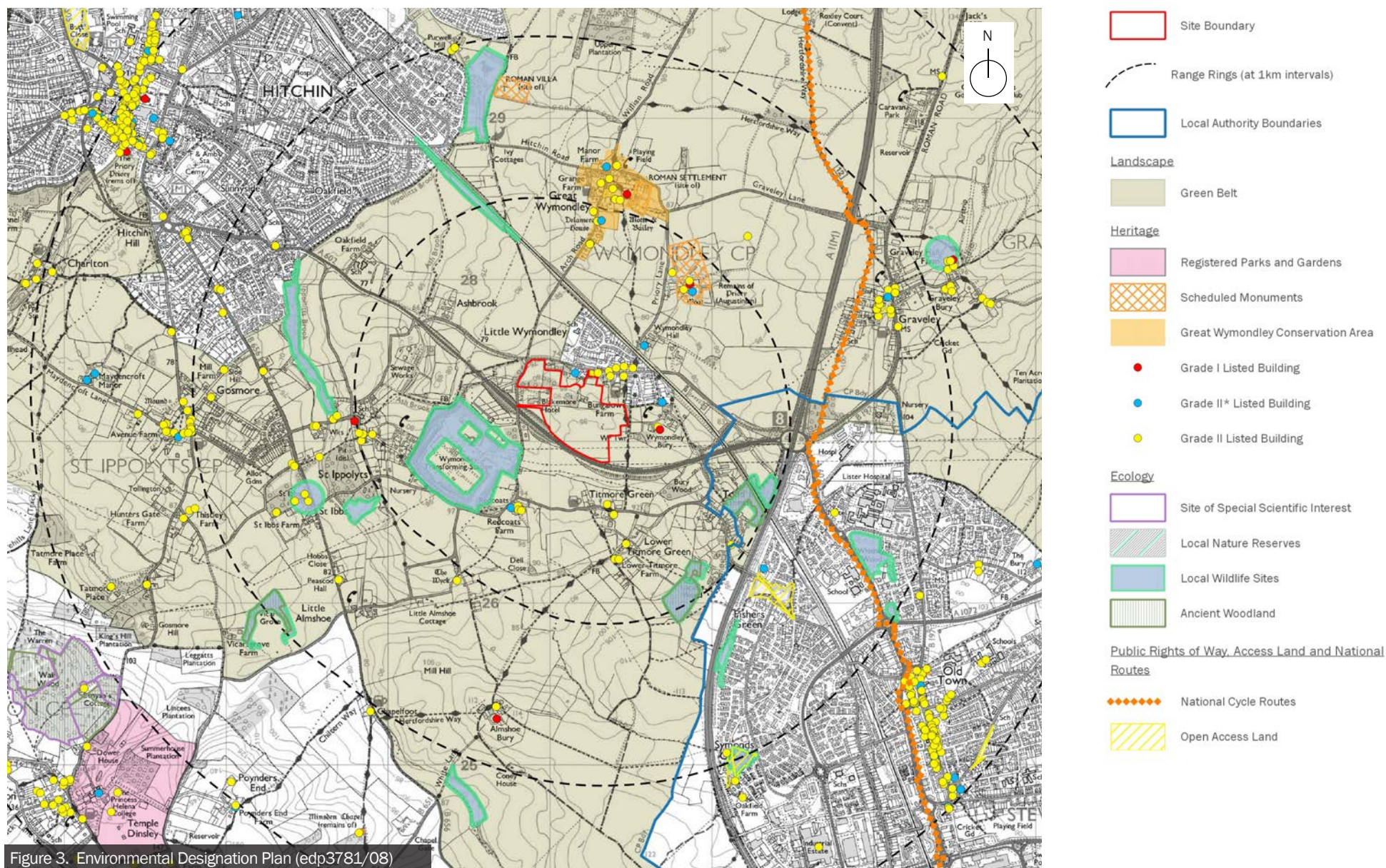
The site does not contain any designated heritage assets. There are a number of listed buildings, all of which are located within Little Wymondley (see Figure 3), which has no conservation area. Of these, those to the south of Stevenage Road and west of St Marys Church Road are

closest to the site. Wymondley Bury is listed at Grade I, Wymondley House and the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Grade II* and The Croft, Boro Cottages, Blacksmith Cottage, The Bucks Head Public House and the dovecote at Wymondley Bury are all listed at Grade II. At this stage, the potential for any effect on these assets (through changes within their setting) is not considered to be sufficient to preclude development or to materially affect the site's capacity.

The northern part of the site is located within an 'archaeological alert area'. Although this is not a designation, it will require specific assessment during any planning application for the site. That said, very little is known regarding the potential for buried archaeological deposits within the site itself, with the Historic Environment Record returning only two records. These relate to the 20th century bungalow cottage and traces of former ridge and furrow cultivation, both of which are of negligible heritage potential.

More widely, the site is located within a landscape of high archaeological potential with evidence for prehistoric ritual landscape and Romano-British settlement activity. Evidence for later activity on the site, if present, is likely to be agricultural in nature.

Overall there are no 'in-principle' heritage constraints anticipated in delivery of the site.



2.3 Landscape

The site does not contain or fall within any designated landscape and there are no such landscapes within the 4km study area. The site does, however, currently lie within the Green Belt, which is protected by Section 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The proposed submission NHDC Local Plan (2011–2031) proposes to remove the site from the Green Belt and include it within the Little Wymondley settlement boundary (SP2).

In terms of the Green Belt that (currently) covers the site, the boundary has not been reviewed since the construction of the Little Wymondley bypass (A602). The ‘new’ proposed defensible boundary provides a logical, defensible edge for the Green Belt to the south of Little Wymondley, which will endure beyond the life of the forthcoming Local Plan. Specifically, development of the site would not result in coalescence or reduce the actual or perceived gap between the settlements of Stevenage and Hitchin.

The site is inherently visually and physically well contained in most areas as indicated on the plan opposite. This is due to a combination of varying topography, mature vegetation, with built form bounding the site to the north and the A602 bypass bounding it to the south. Consequently, development would not therefore encroach into open countryside or affect nearby settlements which lie to the south of the bypass.

Bovis agrees with the council’s approach of removing all of the land between the existing village edge and the

Wymondley Bypass (A602) as indicated on the Proposals Map as the bypass demonstrably forms a robust, defensible and long term future boundary which is logical and a pragmatic approach to the treatment of this area of land.

Through the proposed submission Local Plan (2011–2031), the site is covered by two allocation types: partly as a strategic housing site (WY1) and partly as Urban Open Land (CGB5). It is envisaged that these adjacent allocations within the proposed settlement boundary would combine to provide a gradual transition from urban to countryside.

The most sensitive area of the site in landscape terms is limited to the far south of the site, and the concept masterplan takes this into account accordingly, limiting to only low-impact sensitive development in the area that is well-screened by new landscape planting. The land to the south comprises one large field that rises to a shallow ridge at 95metres (aOD) that then drops away to the A602 (in cutting). This area of the site is generally physically contained to the west, south west and south east by semi-mature woodland, whilst there is a gap on the southern boundary where the A602 is in cutting. The northern portion of the site comprises a number of semi-enclosed fields that are surrounded by mature trees and understorey vegetation, which visually contains this part of the site from the surrounding area.

Development on the site would be visible from a small number of locations from the surrounding landscape. The masterplanning exercise will take account of these areas in terms of limiting views, whilst also being mindful of integrating the development into its landscape and visual context.

As shown in Figure 4, key considerations in relation to landscape and visual matters are:

1. Stevenage Road runs along the bottom of a localised valley.
2. Development north of Stevenage Road screens views from further north.
3. Railway line contains the settlement of Little Wymondley to the east and north.
4. A602 bounds the site to the south and contains Little Wymondley from open countryside.
5. Blackmore End Road contains Little Wymondley to the west.
6. Mature vegetation bounding and within the site limits inter-visibility with adjacent visual receptors.
7. Dense mature vegetation screens the site from the surrounding area.
8. Land rises to the north.
9. Land rises up to localised ridge before gently falling to the A602.

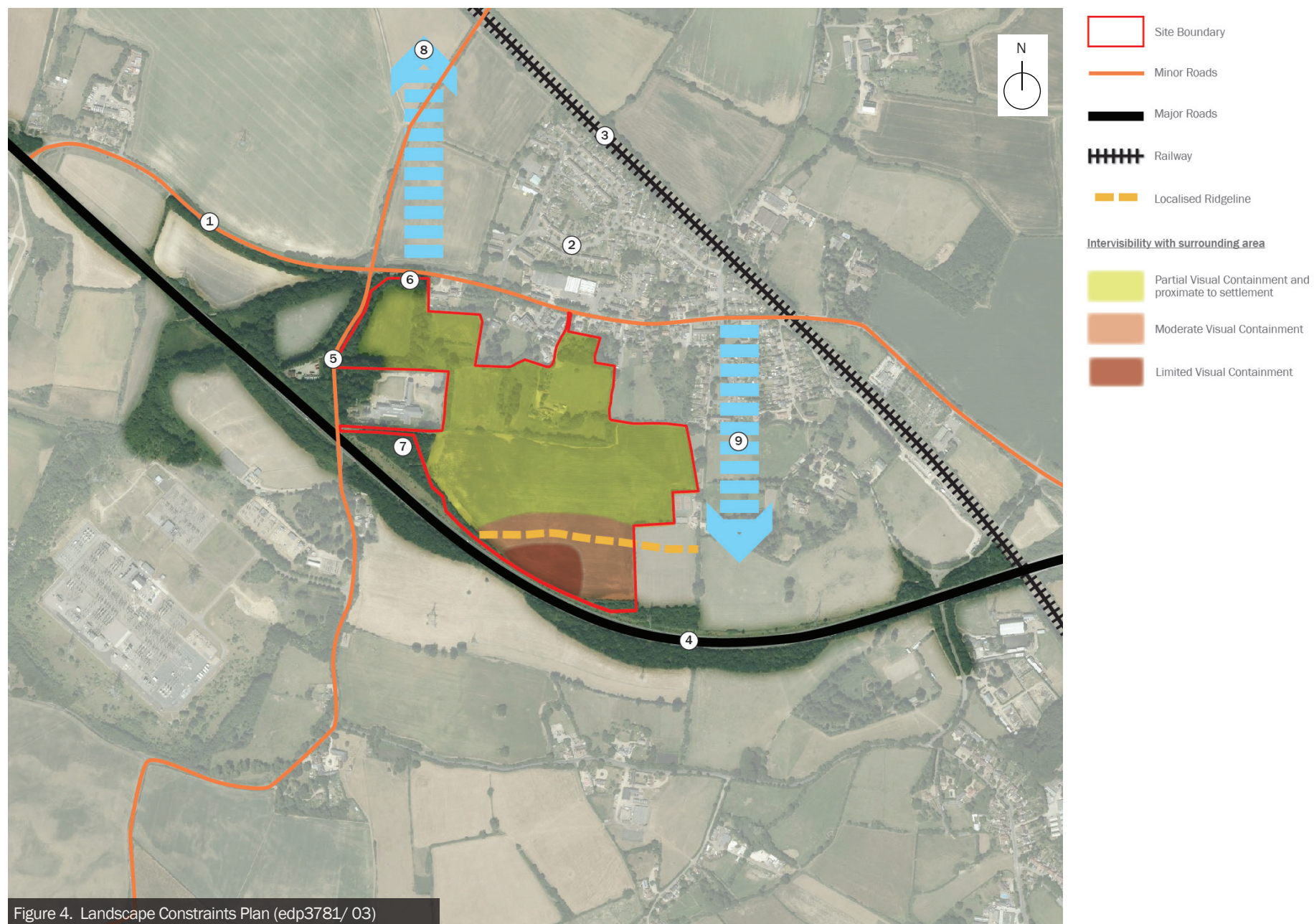


Figure 4. Landscape Constraints Plan (edp3781/ 03)

2.4 Transport and Access

The scheme will be served by a primary access point onto Stevenage Road on the northern boundary of the development site and a supporting emergency access point onto Blakemore End (as shown in Figure 6). The site frontage along Stevenage Road is subject to a 30mph speed limit. Stevenage Road is the main vehicular route through the village supporting several bus stops and includes a number of traffic calming elements.

A technical assessment has been undertaken which demonstrates that on the grounds of capacity and safety, the proposed single access can serve the proposed development of up to 350 homes.

The proposed primary access junction will include provision of pedestrian crossing points to access the northern footway that runs along Stevenage Road. Additional pedestrian and cycle connections to the village will be provided from the existing access to Bungalow Farm and onto Tower Close to the east of the site.

Public rights of way through the site will be retained within the development and the possibility of improvements and links to the site will be explored.

In terms of sustainability, the site benefits from good accessibility to the local facilities of Little Wymondley and the wider facilities of the nearby towns of Hitchin and Stevenage, both located within cycling distance of the proposed development.

The site also benefits from proximity to existing bus services that operate within Little Wymondley, providing frequent links to Hitchin, Stevenage and Luton and connections to Stevenage and Hitchin Railway Stations.

As such, the sites location is considered to accord to the relevant Local and Central Government Policy Guidelines in terms of being in a suitable location and is clearly accessible by modes other than the private car.



Figure 5. A Selection of images from the site and Little Wymondley

2.5 Site Level Constraints and Opportunities

The main opportunities and constraints to development as identified from initial environmental studies are illustrated on Figure 6. The key elements are summarised below.

Access and Connectivity

- Singular vehicular access to be taken from Stevenage Road supported by an associated emergency access from Blakemore End Road;
- Pedestrian and cycle links to connect to Stevenage Road to the north and Tower Close to the east; and
- Existing PRow to the east of the site will be retained with the opportunity for a series of new walking and cycling routes throughout the site.

Landscape and Visibility

- The site is visually contained by areas of mature trees to the east, west and north of the site. Where the site is partially visible, a combination of landscape screening and sensitive built form treatment will mitigate any harmful impact; and
- The southern extent of development has been established through the landscape and visual assessment (see Section 2.3).

Green Infrastructure

- Wherever possible all existing woodland, hedgerows and trees will be retained and incorporated into open space areas;
- Opportunity to establish a number of green corridors connecting open spaces across and beyond the site,

providing a series of multifunctional spaces with ecological, screening, amenity and drainage purposes; and

- New open space area located to the south of the site to enhance existing village recreational facilities and create a defensible edge to development.

Local Character and Context

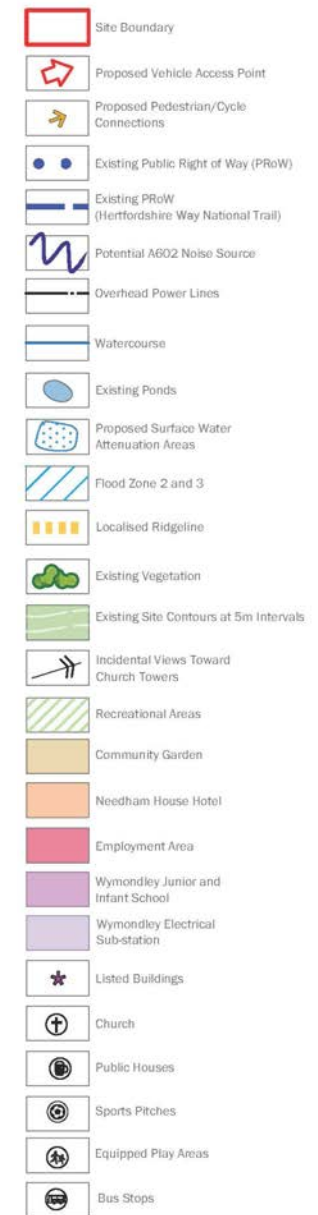
- Ensure an appropriate scale and massing of southern development area to reflect an informal village edge character;
- Utilise the best characteristics of the district to create a development of recognisable local character that integrates with its context; and
- Opportunity for incidental views towards local church towers to the north and north east.

Utilities and Services:

- Development to have sufficient off sets and built form treatments to mitigate noise from A602; and
- Development to be set back from overhead pylons to the south.

Drainage

- The site is located wholly within flood zone 1. However it is immediately adjacent to the flood zones 2 and 3 associated with the Ash Brook to the north of Stevenage Road; and
- A comprehensive drainage strategy will ensure that development would attenuate surface water on site and not increase run-off above existing field rates.



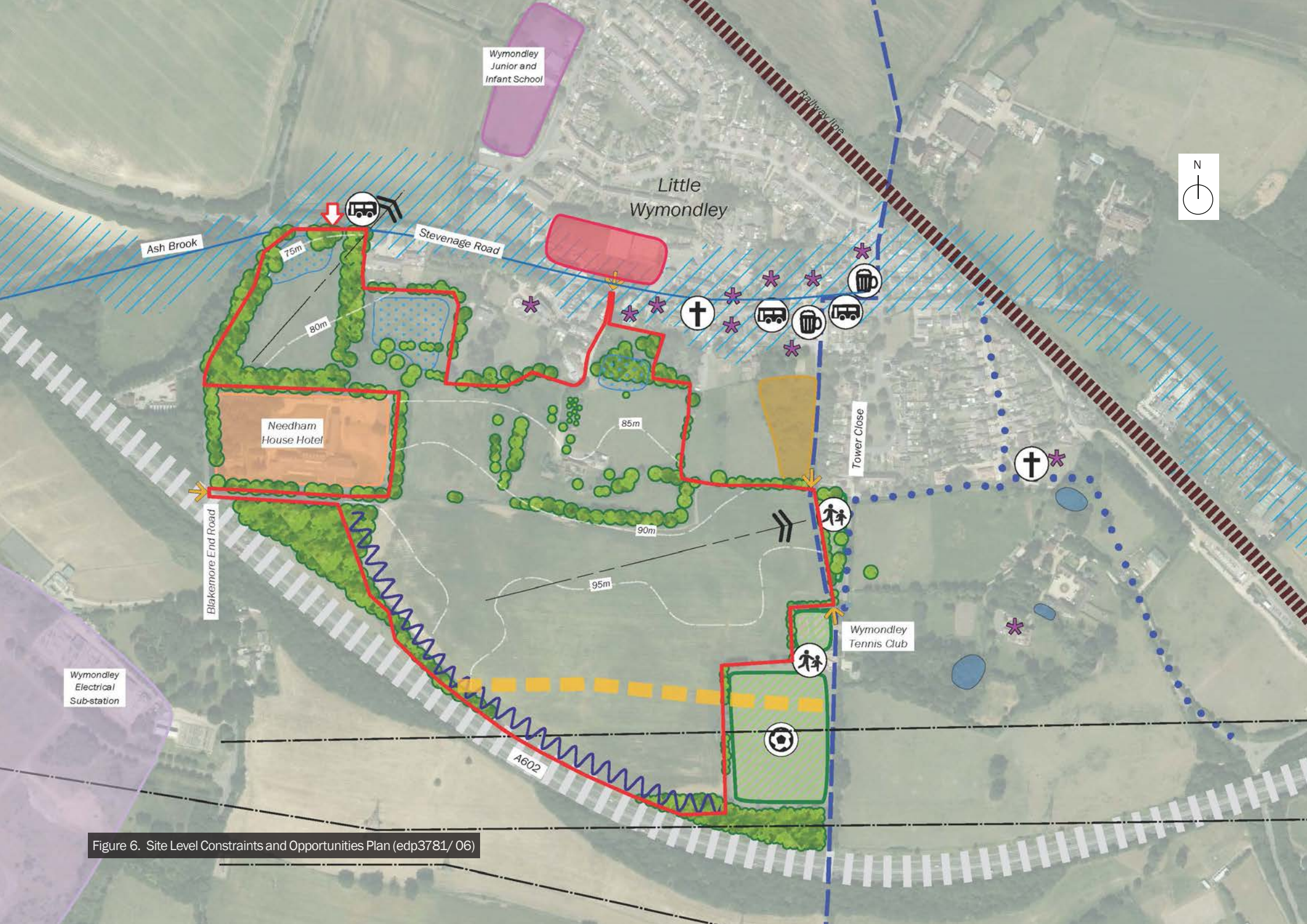


Figure 6. Site Level Constraints and Opportunities Plan (edp3781/ 06)

3. The Concept Masterplan

3.1 The Concept Masterplan

After considering the primary constraints and opportunities for the site, a concept masterplan (see Figure 7) was prepared demonstrating the vision for development of the site. The concept masterplan illustrates a residential developable area of 9.3 hectares which could deliver approximately 325 units @ (average) 35 dwellings per hectare.

Key features of the concept masterplan are as follows:

1. Primary vehicular access from Stevenage Road;
2. Emergency and pedestrian/cycle access from Blakemore End Road;
3. Pedestrian/cycle access connecting into village centre;
4. Retention of existing vegetation (wherever possible) to create a sense of place and link open space areas with opportunity for area of play;
5. Inclusion of screen planting along southern development edge and eastern edge buffer;
6. Potential location of a new 2FE primary school with combined community facilities that is close to existing sports facilities;
- 6a. Location of school play space and sports pitch;
- 6b. Location of open space as a key pedestrian link between Tower Close and new school;
7. Surface water swales to be located within areas of open spaces, integrated with biodiversity enhancements

- (subject to inputs from Drainage Engineer);
8. Opportunity for allotments;
 9. Housing to be at a lower density and sensitively designed to create an informal edge to development with opportunities for open space areas to extend north and fragmenting built form;
 10. Proposed locations of surface water attenuation areas, in accordance with the drainage strategy;
 11. Informal views towards north and north-east;
 12. Retained existing orchard on site; and
 13. Boundary of Urban Open Land (Policy CGB5).

Policy CGB5: Urban Open Land

The following states how the concept masterplan complies with the proposed policy criteria:

A:

- i. Allotments and recreational open space will be located in this area.
- ii. School play areas and pitches to be located in this area; and
- iii. Inclusion of landscape planting that is characteristic of surrounding area to screen development;

B: Development edge to be at a lower density and fragmented in form to make a soft transition along the settlement edge.

C: Building orientation and landscaping will create a gentle transition from village edge to rural area beyond.

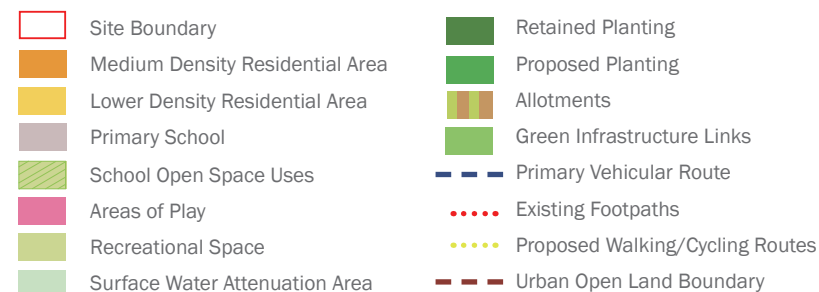




Figure 7. Concept Masterplan (edp3781/ 04h)

4. Conclusion

4.1 Available, Suitable and Achievable

Overall, this vision for development illustrates how the site represents a logical development opportunity, makes efficient use of the land and is capable of being delivered in a timely manner. It can be considered to represent a sustainable form of development, benefiting from the landscape-led design evolution process brought forward by Bovis Homes Ltd.

Bovis Homes Ltd intends that the content of this document should provide a useful overview of the proposed development strategy for its land at Little Wymondley as allocated in the emerging Local Plan. Bovis Homes Ltd would welcome the opportunity to work with North Hertfordshire District Council to ensure timely and effective delivery to make a material contribution to the housing needs of the District.





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