

# Stoke Golding Neighbourhood Plan

## Site Selection and Evaluation Process

This paper explains how the site selection and evaluation for the Stoke Golding Neighbourhood Plan (NP) has been undertaken.

### 1. Development Strategy

In early 2019, the Neighbourhood Plan Advisory Committee (NPAC) assessed whether it needed to make any proposal for additional housing in the NP given the high level of development in the village in recent years. It was too soon for Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council (HBBC) to provide any indicative housing numbers for their forthcoming Local Plan so the NPAC needed to make a proposal on this (or wait a year or more until the new Local Plan was available).

The NPAC was persuaded it needed to allow for some development between now and 2036 or the NP would be unlikely to get approval. From December 2018 to March 2019, the NPAC reviewed the requirements of the Strategic Growth Plan and the current HBBC Core Strategy. This was assessed against development to date and the Household Survey findings (ref 1 Household Survey Results June 2017) and the NPAC decided an allocation of around 25 homes would be a fair proposal.

Therefore, the NPAC submitted a paper to HBBC suggesting the NP allowed for around 25 homes (ref 2 Stoke Golding Housing Provision). HBBC replied saying they were still unable to supply an indicative number of homes required but they advised the target for Stoke Golding was likely to be higher than 25.

HBBC considered the village could sustain further levels of development than the NP was proposing and suggested the NP should allow appropriate flexibility. HBBC (and our consultant) suggested we add this flexibility to our NP by including a reserve site. This would show our preferred strategy while allowing for a further site to be allocated. We clarified our development objectives in a presentation (ref 3 Strategy for Determining the Scale of Development).

### 2. Assessment Process and Criteria

From December 2018 to April 2019, the NPAC defined the process and criteria for the assessment of possible sites for allocation. At the outset, the NPAC established the principle that it would first define the criteria and then assess the candidate sites as a subsequent exercise. This was aimed at reducing the risk of introducing bias into the criteria from site specific considerations.

The NPAC was considering a significant number of criteria; it was also becoming clear by this point, it would need to assess some 10 to 20 sites. The NP needed a methodology which could accommodate this. On the advice of our consultant, the NPAC adopted the model used successfully for the Brigstock Neighbourhood Plan, with any necessary adjustment for local circumstances. This was to define the criteria, assess the candidate sites against each of the criteria using a RAG scoring system and then total the overall results to achieve a ranking in terms of preference.

The derivation of the criteria came from three main sources:

- (a) The analysis of results by the RCC into the Stoke Golding Household Survey (ref 1 Household Survey Results June 2017)
- (b) The feedback from drop-in sessions (ref 4 Site Evaluation Criteria from Drop-in Sessions Feedback)

- (c) The criteria used for Brigstock Neighbourhood Plan (ref 5 Summarised Application of the Brigstock Assessment Criteria); some of these criteria were not relevant for Stoke Golding.

The NPAC, aided by our consultant, used these sources to generate 31 criteria which were then collated into a framework document. This contained two parts:

- (a) An introduction which identified the principles (ref 6 Site Assessment Framework – Introduction); and
- (b) The criteria - with explanatory notes to guide the RAG scoring, evidence for the basis of the criteria and any relevant comments (ref 7 Site Assessment Framework – Detailed Criteria).

### **3. Identification of Sites**

The identification of sites commenced with the SHELAA in December 2018 (ref 8 SHELAA site availability Stoke Golding) which comprised 12 sites.

The subsequent site identification process contained two elements:

- (a) Identifying whether there were any additional sites; and
- (b) Re-confirming the viability of the existing sites.

Three new sites were identified – White Swan, Mulberry Farm and the corner of Hinckley Road/ Stoke Road. The owners/agents for all existing submissions were asked to re-confirm which they did; in the process, site AS539 was very considerably enlarged.

The resulting set of sites is shown on the map (Ref 9 Sites for Assessment).

### **4. Assessment of Sites**

The NPAC held a series of workshops from May to November 2019. These were formal, minutes were taken and our consultant was present to provide guidance and ensure processes were correctly applied.

The evaluation process was done by criteria (rather than by site) such that each criterion was taken in turn and all sites were peer ranked to get a RAG scoring for that criteria. This was repeated for each criterion and then the results were aggregated. These aggregated results are provided (ref 10 Site Assessment Framework results).

Based on the full set of 15 sites, the top three preferred sites (in order) were:

- 1 White Swan
- 2 Mulberry Farm
- 3 AS540.

### **5. Due Diligence**

The NPAC then undertook due diligence reviews of the preferred candidate sites to ensure the Plan did not contain site proposals which were not viable. As a result, the White Swan site needed to be rejected.

There was a meeting with Marrons (agents for Everards who own the White Swan) which brought forward unexpected difficulties. The White Swan proposal had by now been submitted as a formal planning application making it unlikely the NPAC could include it as a site allocation in its Plan. Subsequently, there was then strong opposition to the application from the HBBC Conservation Officer because the site was on battlefield land. Everards consequently withdrew their planning

application and the NPAC considered it was no longer able to consider this a viable site. Next on the ranking was Mulberry Farm.

## **6. Selection of Main and Reserve Sites**

Mulberry Farm is not technically 'brown field' as it contains a mixture of poor quality agricultural buildings. It was felt, though, that the removal and redevelopment of these would be met with general favour within the village and meet one of our main criteria fed back from the Household Survey of using previously used land. It would also tidy up the mess of the poor and largely redundant buildings. The site containing the buildings was also included as a Site for Improvement in the Local Plan of HBBC, thus indicating that the planners also saw this site as a problem requiring improvement.

The whole of Mulberry Farm was a bigger site than desired. It had a capacity for a larger number of houses (perhaps 50-60) than required for just one site. This is because it includes two green fields beyond the farm buildings and their footprint. The NPAC decided to support the whole site for development and proposed the part outside the building footprint would be supported as the reserve site.

The NPAC held a Public Open Event on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2020 to inform the village about the progress of the draft Neighbourhood Plan. This included explaining the sites that had been put forward for potential development, how each had been assessed and the thinking behind the recommendations made. This recommended the Mulberry Farm site as the first choice with, if needed by HBBC, the two adjoining fields as the reserve.

The event was well supported by members of the village. Feedback from the Public Open Event was overwhelmingly in support of the proposals on display with the only major negative comments being on possible access issues, not the fact that the sites were on the edge of the Designated Battlefield. Whilst it was clear that the majority of those commenting would prefer to see as little development as possible in the village, the proposals were seen as the least worst option.

## **7. Replacement of Reserve Site**

However, in March 2020 the NPAC met with HBBC Planning and Conservation Officers. The HBBC Officers expressed no significant concerns with our choice for the main site, i.e. the farm buildings, but Conservation had a big concern about the reserve site. This was because it was on the designated Bosworth Battlefield land and, as a result, was strongly opposed by HBBC on conservation and heritage grounds. HBBC Conservation Officer provided an informal opinion on the matter (Ref 11 HBBC Conservation Officer Informal Opinion on Mulberry Farm). It therefore became necessary to replace the proposed reserve site with an alternative.

Logically, this meant moving to the next on our list of ranked sites. This is AS540, which is the land adjacent to Pine Close. The full site of Plot AS540 is 2.75ha but the draft Neighbourhood Plan is only proposing a part of this - to allow for around 25 homes. This partial development of the plot is supported by agents (on behalf of the owners) who have supplied an initial outline proposal allowing for development of some 20-25 homes.