

Land at Stencils Farm, Walsall

Vision Document

July 2019



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Executive Summary





Aerial impression looking North West across the site from Longwood Bridge

Purpose

This Vision Document has been prepared on behalf of Bloor Homes by a professional, multi-disciplinary team in support of the land at Stencils Farm, Walsall.

In recognition of the work which is being undertaken by the respective Black Country Authorities to review the Black Country Core Strategy and with it the acknowledged need to release a significant quantum of land from the Green Belt in order to deliver additional houses within the Black Country, this document considers the suitability of the land at Stencils Farm for residential development. It advocates its release from the Green Belt so as to assist in meeting these identified housing needs.

The primary purpose of this document is to demonstrate the site is suitable to be released from the Green Belt having regard to the purpose it serves and by consequence, that the site is suitable and available to deliver a significant quantum of homes to meet the need which is identified across the Black Country. To this end, it supports the Call for Sites submission which has already been made to the Review; this site being identified as No.125, 'Land at Stencils Farm,



Aldridge Road, Walsall'. The document builds on the previous work which has been presented previously.

The purpose of the statement is therefore fully aligned with the acknowledged commitment by the Black Country Authorities (BCA) to undertake a full Green Belt review so as to enable the identification and allocation of new sites to meet the acknowledged residential need as part of the preparation of its Core Strategy review.

The site at Stencils Farm represents a logical and sustainable extension to Walsall on its eastern edge, contiguous with the existing settlement boundary and within close proximity to existing services, employment opportunities and public transport links.

The following sections of this document set out the site specific approach to creating a sustainable and deliverable residential led development at Stencils Farm. Ultimately, it is a development which works with the existing landscape form, takes full account of the site's existing features and is therefore truly responsive to its context.

Through this process we will demonstrate Bloor Homes' credentials as a developer that is sympathetic to the environment and the communities in which it works and that the site at Stencils Farm represents a logical, sustainable and deliverable one which it is entirely appropriate to release from the Green Belt. Ultimately it is a development which will create a thriving community and will be a positive asset for Walsall Borough and the Black Country more generally.

Bloor Homes looks forward to continuing a constructive dialogue with the BCA and is committed to promoting the land at Stencils Farm through future stages of the Core Strategy Review process.

Headline Benefits

Key benefits of the proposed scheme include the delivery of:

- approximately 700 market and affordable homes with a range of housing sizes and tenures to help meet the demand for new housing in the area;
- new areas of public open space;
- a new two form entry primary school
- a new Local Centre;
- a development which respects the adjoining neighbours in terms of providing landscape buffers between existing and proposed homes,
- a sensitive, high quality green infrastructure network that maintains and improves the wildlife corridors and biodiversity in the area, whilst maintaining much of the existing planting, hedgerows and trees; and
- a development which works with the existing constraints to ensure that the purposes of the retained Green Belt are strengthened, not diminished by creating this new sustainable urban extension.







1.0 Introduction



1.0 Introduction



Figure 01:01 Site Location Plan

Backdrop to the Stencils Farm Vision

- 1.1 Work is now well underway towards the preparation of the Black Country Core Strategy Review which will take the plan period to 2036. The Issues and Options have been published and the Council are, at the time of writing, undertaking the work necessary to produce a Preferred Options Document. Publication of this is expected in the Autumn of 2019.
- 1.2 The May 2018 Black Country Urban Capacity Review confirms that the Black Country and South Staffordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2017 housing need (2014 to 2036) is 78,190 homes. The total confirmed supply for the same period however is just 60,377 homes.
- 1.3 There is therefore an acknowledged supply shortfall for the plan period 2014 to 2036 of some 17,813 homes based on local objectively assessed need. It is acknowledged that the shortfall drops slightly to 17,263 when using the government's new proposed standardised methodology.
- 1.4 Added to this shortfall is a further 3,000 homes on account of the BCA's stated commitment to accommodate a share of the unmet need from Birmingham City Council. Thus, the total acknowledged shortfall across the Black Country is 20,813 homes for the plan period 2014 to 2036 (using local objectively assessed need).

- 1.5 The May 2018 Black Country Urban Capacity Review confirms that despite reviewing the additional potential housing numbers through a series of structured assumptions based around density and windfall sites, the amount of homes that cannot be accommodated within the existing Black Country urban areas remains significant.
- 1.6 Given the urban areas within the Black Country are, for the most part, contained by the West Midlands Green Belt, the Urban Capacity Review concludes that the exceptional circumstances needed to trigger a Green Belt review in the Black Country in order to meet both housing and employment needs are met.
- 1.7 As a consequence, the BCA have issued a fresh call for sites and with this the acceptance that sites within the Green Belt will need to play a significant role in meeting the BCAs housing requirement over the Review plan period.
- 1.8 Bloor Homes are confident that this site, which adjoins the eastern edge of Walsall and is contiguous with the existing residential development is a logical, highly sustainable and therefore obvious candidate for site allocation in the Core Strategy Review.

The Site

- 1.9 The site which currently comprises agricultural land split into a series of fields, extends to approximately 37.8 hectares and is irregular in form. The land gently rises from the northern and southern edges to an elevated central area. The greater part of the western boundary abuts existing residential development, fields abut the remainder of the site to the west/north west whilst the Daw End Branch canal defines the north/north east edges.
- 1.10 The southern edge of the site is contained by the A454 Aldridge Road, which for almost the full length of the site's southern edge is dual carriageway and includes a traffic island which provides access to Calderfields Golf Club and the Dilke pub/restaurant which are to the south.
- 1.11 Bloor Homes currently controls the land as illustrated in the Site Location Plan (Figure 01:01) and is committed to the delivery of a high-quality, contextually responsive and comprehensive residential-led scheme providing much needed new housing and community facilities for the local area.
- 1.12 As we go on to discuss in this document, the site is well-related to the existing settlement, contained on all sides by the existing settlement edge (to the west), the canal (to the north and east) and the A454, Aldridge Road (to the south). A Garden Suburb style development at this site would be a logical sustainable urban extension, if sympathetically designed.



View North East from Aldridge Road Roundabout across the site.



2.0 Creating a new Gateway & Garden Suburb

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A New Sustainable Urban Extension

- 2.1 Bloor Homes wishes to work closely with the BCA and other key stakeholders, including the local community, in order to deliver a comprehensively planned development of the highest quality at Stencils Farm. This site will create a new sustainable urban extension in the form of a Garden Suburb. The development shall flow with the existing topography and respect the existing landscape features to create a 21st Century Garden Suburb on the north eastern edge of Walsall.
- 2.2 In response to the local policy setting of the Green Belt and the need to ensure a strong green gap is preserved between Walsall and Aldridge, a Garden Suburb with green credentials and high quality design is proposed. With this in mind, this chapter demonstrates the thorough understanding and appreciation of the above requirements and the need to ensure that the use of Garden City principles delivers a site specific response in terms of a strong Vision and robust set of development principles in order to inform the design process.
- 2.3 This chapter clearly sets out the factors which need to be incorporated and considered in the development of the design philosophy, Vision and principles to ensure it delivers a sustainable, contemporary, high quality 21st Century Garden Suburb.

Developing the Design Philosophy

- 2.4 The client and design team have spent time considering the design philosophy that should underpin the masterplan. The site already has a strong Green Infrastructure network within and around it. A sympathetic approach to development is required, working with the grain of the landscape. The following paragraphs therefore set out the evolution of the design philosophy which we have developed to underpin the masterplan.

- 2.5 e*SCAPE Urbanists has followed a 'landscape led' masterplanning approach, whereby the existing site features, topography and general flow of the landscape and surrounding context govern the form and scale of the development.
- 2.6 This approach is as much grounded in 'New Urbanism' as any other. New Urbanism in itself calls on a rediscovery of walkable neighbourhoods and the priority of walking, cycling and public modes of transport over private motor vehicles. The approach thus allows streets to be taken back by communities as social spaces, as opposed to domination by the car.
- 2.7 New Urbanism and its various off-shoots, appropriately have their roots in the Garden City Movement of the early 20th Century. With the resurgence in interest in Garden Cities, Towns, Suburbs and Villages and the principles they advocate, the Government has promoted the identification and delivery of sites across the country. e*SCAPE Urbanists is working on two nationally recognised Garden Villages, one in Cheshire East and the other in Knowsley, Liverpool.
- 2.8 These new Garden Cities, Towns, Suburbs and Villages will not be a slavish mirroring of the previous centuries Garden Settlements, but a contextual and site specific reinterpretation of the Garden City approach, which would pull together the best of the tradition, along with lessons learnt from the last 10 to 15 years of the 'Urban Renaissance' in the UK. Thus creating principles which enables an exciting, vibrant and new settlement or neighbourhood to develop. Such an approach should advocate working with the grain of the landscape in which it sits, create a place which is not over-dense and places homes and facilities within a green environment. In order to deliver a New Garden Suburb we needed to understand:

- the foundations on which Garden Cities are founded;
- how current best practice (New Urbanism) has delivered recent schemes which have a similar ethos;
- and, thus how those principles need to be updated and renewed.

- 2.9 The following narrative addresses the above bullet points in order to aid our informed development of the masterplan for Stencils Farm.

Evolution of the Garden City

- 2.10 Garden Cities were initially conceived by Sir Ebenezer Howard in 1898 and then refined and applied to new suburbs by Raymond Unwin around 1909-1912.

- 2.11 Unwin is clear that before any design work is undertaken a full understanding of the context, history, character and site must be undertaken to influence and guide development. Unwin takes Howard's somewhat rigid development forms and creates more organic and site specific layout responses, as is seen in his masterplan for Hampstead Garden Suburb. This site specific approach is also seen at Welwyn Garden City (by De Soissons), where the orientation of the main vista was aligned with three ancient oaks.



“The Garden City: A more harmonious combination of city and country, dwelling house and garden.”

2.12 The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), formerly the Garden Cities Association has produced a number of publications recently promoting the rediscovery of the Garden City concept, in terms of spatial and layout planning. 'Nothing gained by overcrowding' and 'Creating Garden Cities and Suburbs today' not only celebrate Howard's and particularly Unwin's approach to new settlement/suburb design, but re-publishes Unwin's original pamphlet and then seeks to update and modernise the underlying principles they advocate.



2.13 This promotion of the Garden Settlement, as a sustainable approach to development, has been taken on board and encouraged by national government at the highest levels and recognised in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, paragraph 72, bullet point c). It should be noted that those original Garden City Design Principles still hold true and that the challenges they faced then; meeting housing shortages, generating jobs and creating beautiful and inclusive places are still as relevant now, although they are joined by globalised markets and climate change.

2.14 Garden Cities, Towns and Villages provide the opportunity to address sustainable transport, low carbon housing, local food sourcing and some form of community governance. Whilst the Garden Village should create a new settlement, with its own unique character and be identifiable as something different, it should also be welcoming, connect out to the wider area and be highly permeable and accessible to residents of the existing local settlements, a sustainable resource for all.

Precedent & Best Practice

2.15 The formulation of the design principles should not be worked up using theories and hypotheses, but grounded in the real world by exploring best practice. With this in mind the design team has undertaken a review of UK based successful modern urban developments, that are located in similar situations, in order to see how their approaches could be used to inform the best practice approach at Stencils Farm.

2.16 A short case study review has been undertaken of the proposed development at Deanslade/Lichfield South, Lichfield and the currently being built developments at Upton, Northampton and Poundbury, Dorset as three successful, but very different Urban Extensions, which align with Garden City/New Urbanist development approach.

2.17 Summarised case study information is provided in the following paragraphs.

Case Study 1: Deanslade/Lichfield South, Lichfield

2.18 Although conjoining the existing southern urban edge of Lichfield and therefore forming more of an urban extension, taken together these two developments, which sit adjacent to one another and which form strategic allocations in Lichfield's current plan will, when developed, comprise some 1,000 homes and associated community facilities employing key principles from the garden settlement movement.

2.19 The combined allocation serves as a particularly useful example to draw on not only because of its relative proximity in geographical terms to Stencils Farm (just 7 miles as the crow flies) but more importantly because of the key similarities that exist between the two sites; both in terms of physical context and design approach.

2.20 Physical Context: Principally, the main parallel to be drawn between Deanslade/Lichfield South (for ease hereafter referred to as Lichfield South) and Stencils Farm is the fact that both sites occupy Green Belt locations (or rather Lichfield South did before its allocation for residential development within Lichfield's Local Plan Strategy and consequential removal from the Green Belt).

2.21 When preparing its current plan (2008- 2029) Lichfield District Council found itself in a similar position to that which the BCA find themselves in at present, namely the pressing requirement to release Green Belt land in order to meet its objectively assessed housing need.

2.22 In a similar vein to the conclusions that the BCA have already reached, spatially, LDC concluded that one of the most sustainable locations to accommodate housing growth within the district was on the edge of Lichfield, particularly its southern side which enjoys the best access to existing infrastructure and services.

2.23 Like the major conurbations with the BCA, Lichfield's southern edge is however constrained by the Green Belt and thus in order to locate new housing development in this most sustainable location, it was necessary to remove a substantial quantum of land (some 83.5ha) from it.

2.24 This need to locate new housing development in the most sustainable locations in the district was key to justifying the exceptional circumstances which are required for Green Belt boundary alteration.

2.25 As set out previously, beyond this key overarching point of equivalence, Lichfield South shares a number of other similarities with Stencils Farm which serve to reinforce the appropriateness of its allocation for residential development within the Black County Local Plan Review.



Figure 02:02 Deanslade/Lichfield South Case Study Extract from the Lichfield Local Plan Strategy (2008 – 2028) (1 of 3)



Figure 02:03 Deanslade/Lichfield South Case Study Extract from Taylor Wimpey Design and Access Statement: Deanslade Farm, Lichfield - Application 17/01191/OUFMEI (2 of 3)

2.26 By extending to the south of the city, the Lichfield South extension will, when developed, reduce the physical separation that exists between Lichfield and the village of Wall which lies to the south west. Whilst the prevention of settlements merging is a key purpose of the Green Belt, of particular note however is the fact that the contours of the site rise markedly at its southern end thus preventing any inter visibility between the two settlements.

2.27 Consequently, there will be no visual indication of an erosion of the separation that presently exists. The contribution that the site currently makes towards checking sprawl and preventing the merging of settlements will be maintained.

2.28 The land at Stencils Farm is no different in this respect. The land rises towards its northern extent which means that when viewed from the A454 Aldridge Road, this change in topography prevents any views beyond the site itself; rendering any views of Aldridge impossible.

2.29 The same is true when looking south toward the site from the B4154 which lies beyond the site to the north on the southern edge of Aldridge. Views of the site are not possible by virtue of the existing topography.

2.30 By consequence, whilst the development of the land at Stencils Farm will reduce the distance between Walsall and Aldridge, this will not be apparent from the ground owing to the existing topography. The purpose the land currently serves in checking sprawl and preventing the merging of any settlement will therefore remain unchanged.

2.31 In addition to these topographical features which, as demonstrated serve to significantly lessen the impact of built development on the purpose that the Green Belt designation would otherwise serve, both sites share a similar level of visual and tangible containment

by existing physical features.

2.32 Beyond the existing built form which lies to its north and east and the elevated landform to the south, Lichfield South is contained by Knowle Lane to the southeast and Claypit Lane to the west. Similarly, there is strong containment of the land at Stencils Farm by the Daw End Branch Canal to the north/north east and by the A454 Aldridge Road to the south.

2.33 Furthermore, the containment would be strengthened at both sites by the introduction of significant landscaping enhancements to make the boundaries concerned unquestionably defensible.

2.34 As far as the Green Belt and its recognised purposes are concerned therefore, it is clear from the strong parallels drawn in the preceding paragraphs that the removal and allocation of land at Stencils Farm would be entirely in accordance with recent best and local practice for a development of a similar scale that has been thoroughly tested, not only through the Local Plan Examination in Public Process but also subsequently through the High Court.

2.35 Key Development Principles: Driving the design of Lichfield South is a need to place emphasis on the physical and social integration of new development with existing neighbourhoods so encourage the widespread use of sustainable travel modes by existing and new households to access local facilities and the city centre. The importance of the landscape setting is key a determinant of the urban form and development composition. In addition, the concept is founded on the fundamental need for improved east-west connection through the southern part of Lichfield City, and to accommodate a development designed and built according to the principles of sustainable development and good urban design.



Figure 02:04 Deanslade/Lichfield South Case Study Extract from Taylor Wimpey Design and Access Statement: Deanslade Farm, Lichfield - Application 17/01191/ OUFMEI (3 of 3)

2.36 The transition between town and country and the successful management of this is a key philosophy of the overall design so as to ensure the successful integration of new development within the landscape. The premise is that a sensitive configuration of development at the urban edge will create attractive views to the city as well as out of the city, and should support access to the open countryside.

2.37 The development will include:

- Varying densities which respond to a clearly identifiable road hierarchy. For example, high density land parcels follow the main boulevards with lower densities towards the south to aid the transition into the rural landscape via the parkland areas of public open space.
- Appropriate responses to the local context. Design inspiration for the various house types is drawn from Lichfield's rich and varied local vernacular. The development proposes key character areas within the site to create interest and aid its legibility whilst maintaining a strong and consistent approach to architecture throughout.
- A landscape/landform led response. The development will work with the key landscape and landform features, notably the rising topography to the south and the route of the yet to be restored Wyrley and Essington canal toward the northern end of the site.
- Ease of access through the site via a range of sustainable transport methods. The proposed development is highly permeable so as to take advantage of the site's relative proximity to Lichfield's existing infrastructure and services.

2.38 In summary: The proposals for Lichfield South employ key design principles from the Garden Settlement ethos, using relatively low densities, a highly legible and

permeable layout with a strong and easily understood hierarchy of boulevards, secondary routes, green routes, lanes, public spaces and landmark buildings rooted in a landscape-led design, rich in new planting.

2.39 It works with the key landscape and landform features of the site not only to ensure that the design responds successfully to its context but also to ensure that as former Green Belt land, its impact is suitably low.

Case Study 2: Upton, Northampton

2.40 Located on the western edge of Northampton, Upton is perhaps more accurately described as an urban extension, rather than an autonomous urban village in the true sense. Nevertheless, in terms of the overall design ethos, Upton encapsulates many of the key principles that underpin the Garden Settlement movement, including the commitment to mixed-use, sustainability, a strong green infrastructure, quality streets and spaces, the creation of walkable neighbourhoods and locally inspired character.

2.41 **Key Development Principles:** The underlying philosophy for Upton was to promote sustainable urban growth and create a distinctive and enduring environment, including:

- A wide range of house and apartment types has been carefully integrated into the perimeter blocks. Along the High Street, taller ground floors are required to permit changes in use as population increases and small business use emerges.
- A minimum of 22% affordable housing will be provided, pepperpotted throughout the development.
- Every building in Upton was being built to the BREEAM Ecohomes 'Excellent' standard, prior to its demise.
- A sustainable urban drainage system is being used to manage rainwater run-off and rainwater harvesting technologies are being incorporated into block and building design. The SUDS network



Figure 02:05 Upton Case Study Imagery (1 of 2)



Figure 02:06 Upton Case Study Imagery (2 of 2)

will also promote local biodiversity by allowing new wildlife habitats to be established and by creating an ecological network linking Upton with the Upper Nene River Valley.

- The design of Upton draws inspiration from the Northamptonshire vernacular, including local urban morphology, architecture and landscape design. Upton is divided into four distinct character areas, each with a clearly defined role and relationship within the overall urban hierarchy.
- To reduce reliance on cars, public transport facilities were put in place early on in the development
- The SuDS allows a network of green fingers to permeate through the site, connecting streets and spaces.
- A legible structure of streets and blocks link Upton to adjacent developments and amenities such as the Upton Grange and Princess Marina Hospital developments, Upton Country Park, a supermarket and other facilities at nearby Sixfields
- The local population will support a mix of uses including a primary school, local shops, and live-work units. Other commercial office, retail and community uses will form a local centre along Weedon Road.

2.42 In Summary: Upton has a strong urban character, with most properties positioned hard against the back of pavement. Most houses lack front gardens. This may seem at odds with the Garden Settlement ethos which promotes generous green space and a marrying of town and country. In Upton's case, a strong network of wide street swales, street trees and public open space help to soften the built form and introduce natural elements to the public realm.

2.43 Upton is a pre-recession urban extension, is of a higher density than that proposed at Stencils Farm and the strong urban forms and enclosure of the streetscape would not necessarily directly relate to that proposed at Stencils Farm. However the strong

green infrastructure network with its integral SUDs system, a single principle co-ordinating development partner and its general development principles would apply just as easily.

Case Study 3: Poundbury, Dorset

2.44 Poundbury is a Duchy of Cornwall urban extension on the western outskirts of Dorchester. Whilst it is seen as an extension to Dorchester, the masterplan has created a mixed use settlement which includes not only homes, but local and district centres, focused around a series of squares, which includes shops, public houses, restaurants, offices and light industry.

2.45 Key Development Principles: This urban extension was created to provide a vibrant new settlement integrating a broad mix of uses. The settlement is based on a traditional form of architectural and urban design approach which includes:

- A strong hierarchy of avenues, streets, lanes and public spaces.
- Well overlooked streets with active frontages enclosed by buildings.
- Use of existing mature trees as settings to open spaces.
- Buildings are set to rear of pavement in many locations.
- Buildings reflect many historic eras of traditional vernacular.
- A high density approach within many of the residential neighbourhoods with a lowering of density out to the peripheral, suburban fringes.
- High use of rear parking courts and narrow lanes, especially in the earlier phases.
- Parking is set at 2.3 spaces per dwelling.

2.46 In Summary: A single land owner has enabled a strong vision to be created and implemented.

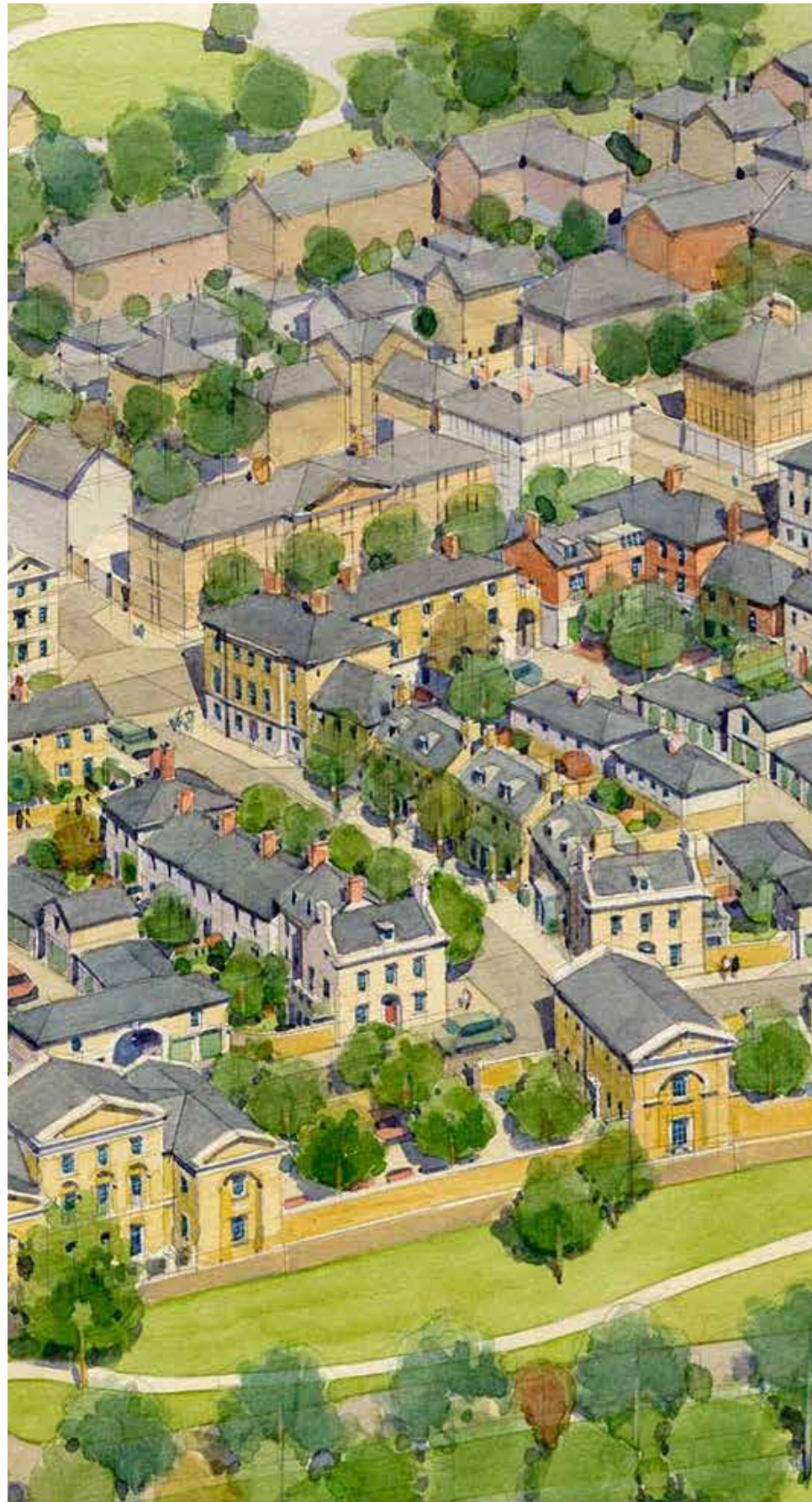


Figure 02:07 Poundbury Case Study Imagery (1 of 2)

2.47 Early phases pushed the car into rear parking courts which caused some issues with residents in terms of access between vehicle and property, as well as the desire to be able to see their vehicles from the windows of houses. Later phases of development, whilst still utilising parking courts also provided on street parking bays.

2.48 Overall, the scheme is a positive example of urban design principles in action, with a strong sense of enclosure, use of shared space, good permeability and a high quality use of materials, detailing and construction.

Lessons Learnt for The Garden Village

2.49 All the settlements provide useful information to inform the emerging masterplan at Stencils Farm. The lessons learnt are set-out below:

- Strong development lead with a single Vision in order to deliver a settlement of high quality.
- Good, contextually led masterplanning is key.
- Creation of a legible layout with strong communal areas of public realm.
- Good integration with the adjoining existing settlement and landscape.
- Strong, consistent approach to architecture which provides variety and choice, but without creating a riot of styles across the settlement.
- Landscape and public realm is just as important as the architecture.
- Use existing landscape features to create a sense of place and maturity.

2.50 Design alone will not create a community and needs to be supported by a strong social strategy to establish structures in the form of neighbourhood forums, along with encouraging more social interaction through local interest groups, hobbies and work parties etc.



Figure 02:08 Poundbury Case Study Imagery (2 of 2)

Creating A Strategic Gateway

- 2.51 Based on the above appreciation of the Garden Settlement Movement and recent best practice as described above, the site is well located to create a new Garden Suburb as part of the wider Walsall conurbation. But not only a suburb be new gateway into the town as described below.
- 2.52 Walsall has eight strategic routes into the town from the surrounding settlements, as illustrated in Figure 02:05. The A454, Aldridge Road connects the large settlement of Aldridge with Walsall. Stencils Farm creates the ideal opportunity to create a strong and positive gateway into the town from the north east.
- 2.53 The 'Aldridge Gateway' would provide a positive, welcoming and outward looking, finished edge to the town from this approach.
- 2.54 The new Green Belt boundary would be well protected by the canal and the on-site ecological buffers to create a well defined boundary and strong green gap between Walsall and Aldridge.
- 2.55 The Garden Suburb represents a very special opportunity to showcase what Walsall can achieve in a partnership between the public and private sectors.
- 2.56 The residential-led mixed use development at Stencils Farm will provide a strong, cohesive and strategically logical opportunity for Walsall to meet the demands of a growing population.

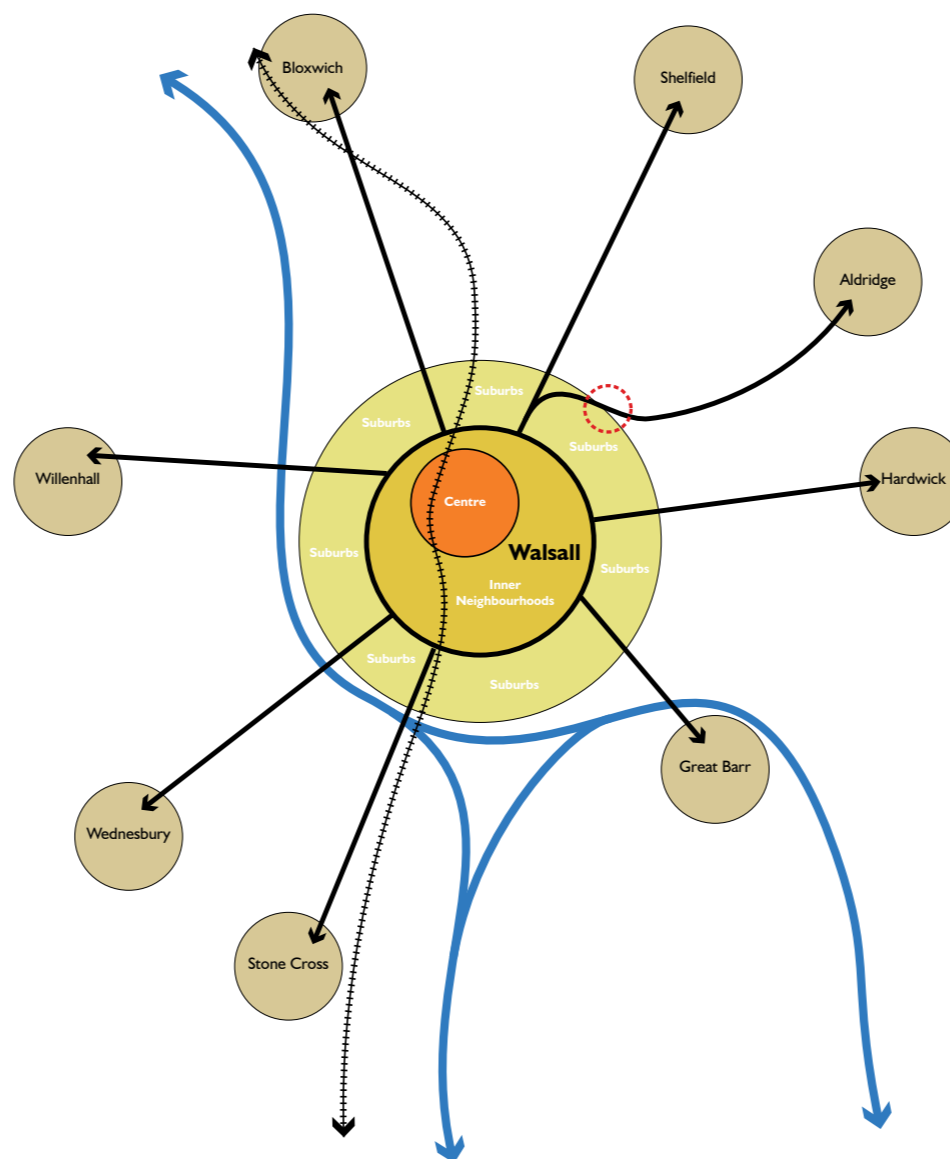


Figure 02:09 Creating a Strategic Gateway - The 'Aldridge Gateway'

A Vision for the Stencils Farm Garden Suburb

- 2.57 Our Vision for Stencils Farm has sprung out of the appreciation of the surrounding context and features of the site itself as set out in detail in Chapter 4, with the Vision itself explored at the start of Chapter 5. However the panel to the right summaries that Vision:
- 2.58 This new neighbourhood will create a sympathetic and high quality development set into a strong and bold network of green spaces, wildlife corridors, habitats and recreational footpaths/cycleways. All these elements form an integral part of the Green Infrastructure network, linking the site to the local facilities, adjoining suburbs and countryside via the already identified wildlife corridors which run through the whole borough of Walsall (see Figure 03:01 in the following chapter).
- 2.59 The masterplanning team has carefully considered all the opportunities and constraints to inform this development framework, which demonstrates that the site can comfortably accommodate a sustainable neighbourhood of around 700 dwellings. The proposals will enable the provision of a network of public open spaces for use by the existing and new members of the community.
- 2.60 The result will be a sympathetic, sustainable and integrated Gateway neighbourhood on the north eastern edge of Walsall, within a logical Green Belt release site, creating a strong addition to Walsall and complementing the surrounding neighbourhoods.
- 2.61 What also comes out of the understanding of Garden Settlement and New Urbanists best practice is a set of **site-specific development principles** which are set-out over page, under a series of over arching theme headings.

“Bloor Homes’ Vision for Stencils Farm will create a new sustainable urban extension on the north eastern edge of Walsall.

The new neighbourhood shall create a new high quality, welcoming and outward looking gateway into the town and will be designed following the principles of a 21st Century Garden Suburb.

A network of green spaces, wildlife corridors, habitats and recreational footpaths/ cycleways will be developed within the proposed extensive Green Infrastructure network.

The Avenues, Streets, Greens, Mews and Squares shall be enclosed and overlooked by the homes, schools and shops, creating a heart and focus to the neighbourhood.

The neighbourhood will develop its own unique character and contain a choice and variety of homes. The fringes of the neighbourhood shall use a range of outward facing detached properties, using a rural materials palette to create a softer and more rural fringe, enabling it to blend and blur into the open countryside.

This organic approach works with the grain of the existing landscape and sympathetically overlays development. It will quickly mature and become a part of the setting and character of the wider town.”

The Stencils Farm Garden Suburb Development Principles

1. Social

Create an inclusive, diverse and equal neighbourhood

- Develop a local centre, community facilities & social public realm for residents to meet & socialise.
- Homes developed in a mix of tenures, sizes & locations to offer something for everyone.
- Develop flexible homes to enable families to become long-term members of this new community.

Encourage a self-managing and self-sufficient suburb

- Set up of a Neighbourhood Forum to ensure residents have a long-term stake in their community.
- Food production shall be encouraged through the provision of community orchards & allotments.

Create a healthy neighbourhood

- Encourage walking & cycling through the provision of safe & direct footpath/cycleways.
- Promote outdoor, energetic & naturalistic play, social interaction & opportunities for self-learning.

2. Characterful

Create a distinctive suburb

- Create a new gateway into Walsall which is, outward looking, green & welcoming.
- Create a high quality, unique & contextually sensitive design.
- Create a local centre with a vibrant focus at the heart of the new suburb.

Encourage a creative suburb

- Encourage the community to garden, plant & maintain the orchards & allotments.
- Develop unique site branding and identity through community involvement.

- Incorporate art into the fabric of the development process.

Develop a timeless suburb

- Develop adaptable buildings which can grow & evolve with advances in technology.
- Explore opportunities to encourage changes of use & flexible ground floor spaces for alternative uses.

3. Environmental

Create a biodiverse suburb

- Work with the existing landscape & ecological features and habitats at Stencils Farm.
- Develop a Green Infrastructure network which connects habitats together encouraging colonisation by native animal & plant life from the surroundings.

Interpret the history and heritage of the suburb

- Draw on the site's history & heritage in terms of interpretation, signage & public art.

Promote a water sensitive suburb

- Utilise the existing topography, ditches & ponds to develop a blue infrastructure network.
- Create a well-managed surface water system encouraging the use of the SuDS network by wildlife.

Develop an energy efficient suburb

- Use advances in insulation, air tightness & renewable technologies, as well as passive systems to create an energy conscious & efficient environment.
- Explore the opportunities for energy & heat generation to create an integrated energy network.

4. Movement

Create a connected neighbourhood

- Ensure the neighbourhood is permeable & legible in terms of layout, to encourage ease of access.

Create a pedestrian friendly suburb

- Create shared surface lanes & spaces where the pedestrian takes priority over the private car.

Create an accessible suburb

- Ensure all user groups are catered for in the detailed design of the public realm, allowing easy access to the streets, public realm & open spaces by people with disabilities, families and the elderly.

5. Economic

Create an adaptable suburb

- Develop flexible homes with wi-fi & superfast broadband thus encouraging working from home.

Promote an integrated suburb

- Encourage the use of the suburb for recreation, shopping, employment, allotment food production, community events, formal and informal education by the wider community & visitors.
- Provide strong links & connections between the suburb & adjacent neighbourhoods through fast & efficient public transport systems, footpaths & cycleways.





3.0 Planning Policy Background



3.0 Planning Policy Background

Housing Need

- 3.1 As has already been set out in the preceding section of this document, there is a significant supply shortfall within the Black Country for the plan period 2014 – 2036. This shortfall stands at some 20,813 homes including the 3,000 that the BCA have committed to take from Birmingham’s unmet need.
- 3.2 It should also be noted that the identified supply includes 6,408 ‘potential’ homes, a figure arrived at through assumptions made about windfall deliveries and increased densities. In reality therefore, there remains the likelihood of the actual shortfall being even greater than 20,813 homes should these assumptions fail to materialise.
- 3.3 Through its Issues and Options document and subsequently through the Black Country Urban Capacity Review (May 2018), informed by the Greater Birmingham Housing Market Area Growth Study (Feb 2018), there is an acknowledgement that in order to provide for its full objectively assessed need over the Review Plan period, there is the requirement to assess and revise existing Green Belt boundaries in the Core Strategy Review. Without such revisions the BCA will not be able to deliver the identified shortfall.
- 3.4 Local housing needs arise across the Black Country and in all parts of Walsall Borough.

Green Belt Policy

- 3.5 Paragraph 136 of the National Planning Policy Framework, (hereafter the Framework) makes it clear that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans. Clearly, the evidence and justification for boundary review is place and the vehicle for doing so is the Core Strategy Review.
- 3.6 When reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the

Framework, at paragraph 138 is clear, that the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account. Furthermore, plans should give first consideration to land which is well served by public transport. Plans should also set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land.

- 3.7 When defining new Green Belt boundaries, plans should, amongst other things: define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.
- 3.8 With this in mind the land at Stencils Farm presents an excellent opportunity to deliver some of the identified housing need in a highly sustainable location without undermining the identified purposes which Green Belt land should fulfil.
- 3.9 As the presented master plan makes clear, the site immediately adjoins the existing eastern edge of Walsall and is well contained by the Aldridge road to the south the Daw End Branch Canal to the north/north east. The presence of these robust features helps to contain the site both visually and physically and will ensure that a long-term defensible new Green Belt boundary is established.
- 3.10 The site has been assessed against the recognised Green Belt purposes which are enshrined within the Framework at paragraph 134.

a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

The site is well contained to the East, South, North and West by existing houses, the Aldridge road, and the Daw End Branch Canal respectively. All these features provide permanent and robust boundaries

that would clearly restrict the further expansion of the built form in these directions. Thus, there is no potential for unrestricted sprawl as a consequence of the site’s development. Accordingly, in terms of the site’s current performance against this purpose, it is concluded that it does not score highly.

b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Aldridge, the settlement which is closest to the eastern side of Walsall lies just over a kilometre away to the north east. Whilst the development would bring the eastern edge of Walsall closer to Aldridge, there is no risk of any settlement coalescence on the basis that the Daw End Branch Canal would easily and physically contain the development site along its northern/north-eastern/eastern edges. Beyond the canal there would remain a significant quantum of open agricultural land in excess of half a kilometre in depth which would clearly maintain the separation between the two settlements.

c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

At a basic level there will inevitably be some degree of countryside encroachment as a result of almost all Green Belt land release. Nevertheless, the proposed development would simply infill a logical gap that is, as we have already demonstrated, well contained. Thus, the site at present does not perform a particularly strong role in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment but owing to the physical features which have been identified will, once developed, present a robust settlement edge that would be difficult to extend beyond.

d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

The Stencils Farm site is not part of, or adjacent to

any Conservation Area and does not contain any listed buildings. Its development would not have any impact on any such area or other designated heritage asset. Accordingly, the site does not perform strongly against this purpose.

e) to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

3.11 The BCA's acknowledge that there will be scope to provide for some housing within the urban area but as the emerging evidence base already acknowledges, there is insufficient capacity within the Black Country's urban areas to accommodate the level of housing growth that is required during the plan period 2014 to 2036. Accordingly, the inclusion of this site within the Green Belt serves no real purpose in assisting in urban regeneration because edge of settlement Green Belt release is required in order to meet identified housing need. The development of the site will be of no consequence to the development or redevelopment of any smaller windfall site within the urban area.

Green Belt purposes, a summary

3.12 As is evident from the commentary above the land at Stencils farm does not perform strongly against any of the framework's stated green belt purposes. The site benefits from strong physical and visual containment by robust features which would prevent further expansion of Walsall to the North East, East, and South which in turn would prevent any risk of settlement coalescence with Aldridge. Furthermore, the topography of the site is such that when viewed from Aldridge road no long distance views are possible that the site is viewed very much in its immediate context.

3.13 Whilst there will be some loss of countryside as there will with any greenfield site, the land at Stencils farm does not perform any particular function in safeguarding

the wider countryside from encroachment. That said the physical boundaries which contain the site do perform this function but the development of the site would not prejudice them in any way.

3.14 The BCA's already acknowledge that Green Belt release will be necessary to deliver the quantum of homes that are required within the housing market area and thus the exclusion of this land from the Green Belt and its subsequent development will not

prejudice the ability for smaller windfall sites to come forward within the urban area.

3.15 For these reasons, the site represents an obvious candidate for release as part of the BCA's overarching Green Belt review in order to facilitate the site development to provide for a significant quantum of homes in a highly sustainable location in order to assist in meeting the identified housing need across the Black Country housing market area.

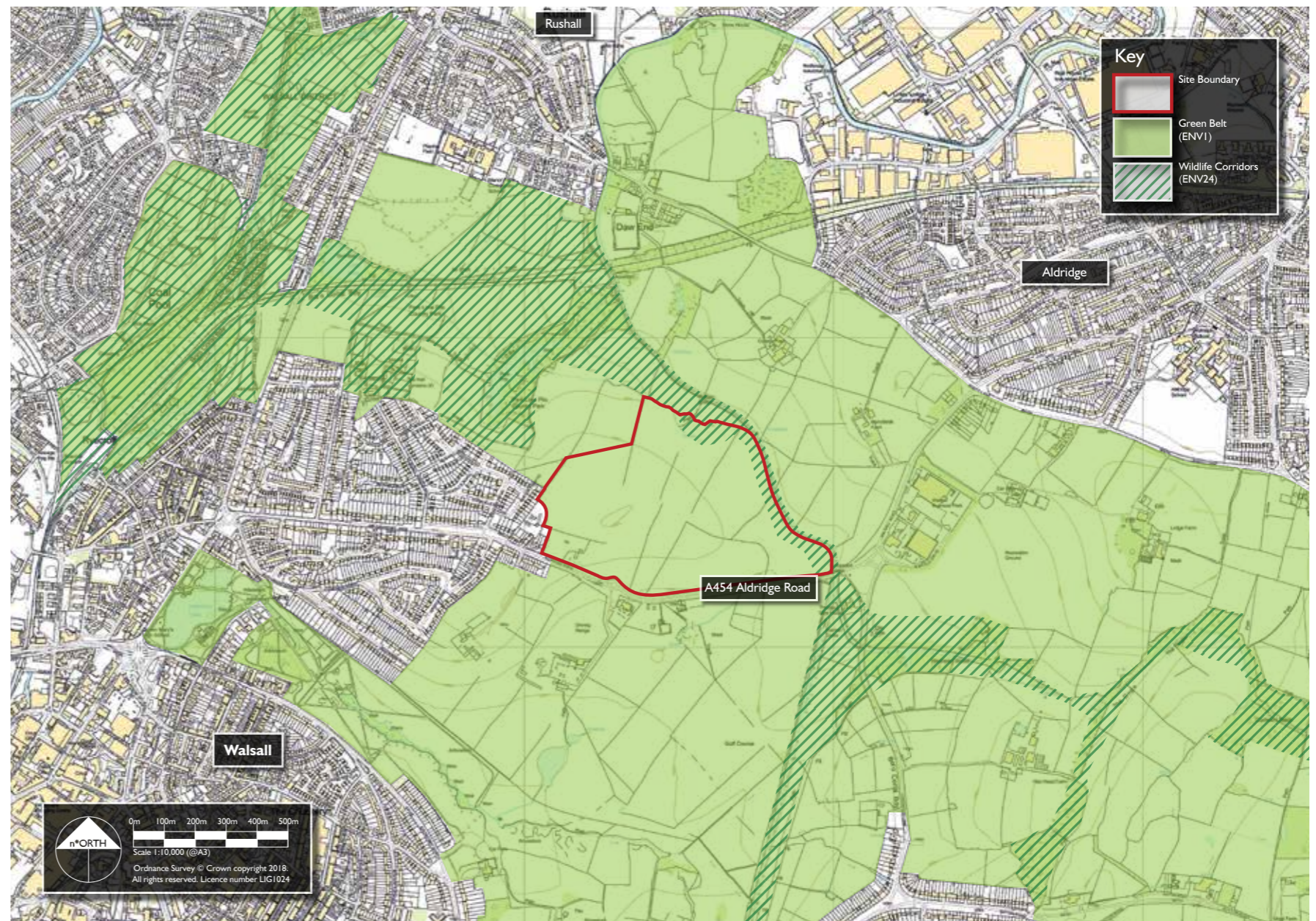


Figure 03:01 Site Related Green Belt & Related Designations





4.0 Working with the Site



4.0 Working with the Site

Introduction

- 4.1 This site has been intensively farmed for many years and has been used primarily for arable crops with some livestock grazing to the smaller peripheral field parcels.
- 4.2 There are remnants of the former field patterns and areas of ecological interest in the form of native hedgerows, associated watercourses, wetland flushes and tree stands. These existing features will form the backbone of the Green Infrastructure network and shall inform the layout of the proposed neighbourhood.
- 4.3 e*SCAPE follow the principles of 'landscape-led' masterplanning, whereby the existing site features, land form and general flow of the landscape and surrounding context govern the form and scale of the development. Indeed this approach is as much grounded in 'New Urbanism' as any other.
- 4.4 New Urbanism in itself calls on a rediscovery of walkable neighbourhoods and the priority of walking, cycling and public modes of transport over private motor vehicles. The approach thus allows streets to be taken back by communities as social spaces, as opposed to domination by the car. New Urbanism in turn has its roots in the Garden Cities, Towns, Villages and Suburb movement of the early 20th Century.
- 4.5 Such an approach works with the grain of the townscape and landscape in which it sits, creates a place which has a varied mix and density of housing and places homes within a green environment. The following paragraphs provide the material to aid our understanding, of the site and its surroundings.

Appreciating the Physical Context

- 4.6 In demonstrating that the site at Stencils Farm represents an appropriate and logical location for development, Bloor Homes is also seeking to understand how the site interacts with the town, surrounding settlements

and countryside, so that future development can be integrated into the townscape and landscape setting.

- 4.7 This initial appreciation of these various levels of context which include both the wider area and site, is set out below.

Regional/Sub-Regional Context

- 4.8 As illustrated in Figure 04:01 the site lies on the north eastern edge of Walsall, adjoining the existing settlement edge to the west, contained by Daw End Branch Canal to the north and east and Aldridge Road to the south.
- 4.9 The site sits within a good communications network within the West Midlands in the heart of the Black Country. The site immediately adjoins the A454 Aldridge Road which provides direct and easy access into Walsall Town Centre which is less than 1.5 miles from the site and on to the M6 which is less than 3 miles to the west of the site.
- 4.10 Walsall itself is located just 8 miles north west of Birmingham and 6 miles east of Wolverhampton.
- 4.11 Jobs and employment opportunities are available locally with the Walsall Business Park within walking distance to the east of the site, the Aldridge Fields Business Park in Aldridge just a mile to the north east and the various business and industrial parks to the west within Walsall.
- 4.12 Aldridge Road links the site to Walsall and the M6 to the east, as highlighted above, and north east to Aldridge, Brownhills and the A5.
- 4.13 The nearest train station is located in Walsall town centre with trains to Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Crewe, Shrewsbury and Rugeley.

Local Context

- 4.14 As stated above, the site sits within a good communications network within the West Midlands lying just to the east of Walsall Town Centre within the A454 Aldridge Road corridor.
- 4.15 The site lies in the metropolitan borough of Walsall and adjoins the established residential suburb of Longwood.
- 4.16 Historically Walsall emerged as a market town in the 13th Century and evolved from a village of just 2,000 people in the 16th Century to an industrial town of 86,000 by the 18th Century.
- 4.17 The town's industries have changed throughout its industrialisation from coal and limestone extraction, to metal working, leathersgoods and more recently plastics, electronics, chemicals and aircraft parts.
- 4.18 The site is well located in terms of the current employment opportunities, being in close proximity to the Walsall Business Park, Aldridge Fields Business Park in Aldridge and the various business and industrial parks located in Walsall, as illustrated in Figure 04:02.
- 4.19 Walsall is home to various departments from the University of Wolverhampton which are located in the town centre and there are a variety of primary and secondary schools located locally to the site. In addition a new two-form entry primary school is proposed on the site to offer additional places and capacity to the wider community.
- 4.20 The Dilke Public House and Restaurant lies immediately across the A454, Aldridge Road from the site, with the Calderfields Golf and Country Club just slightly further south. A good number of other public houses, cafes and restaurants are located in the surrounding towns and settlements.
- 4.21 As illustrated in Figure 04:02, Walsall Town Centre is

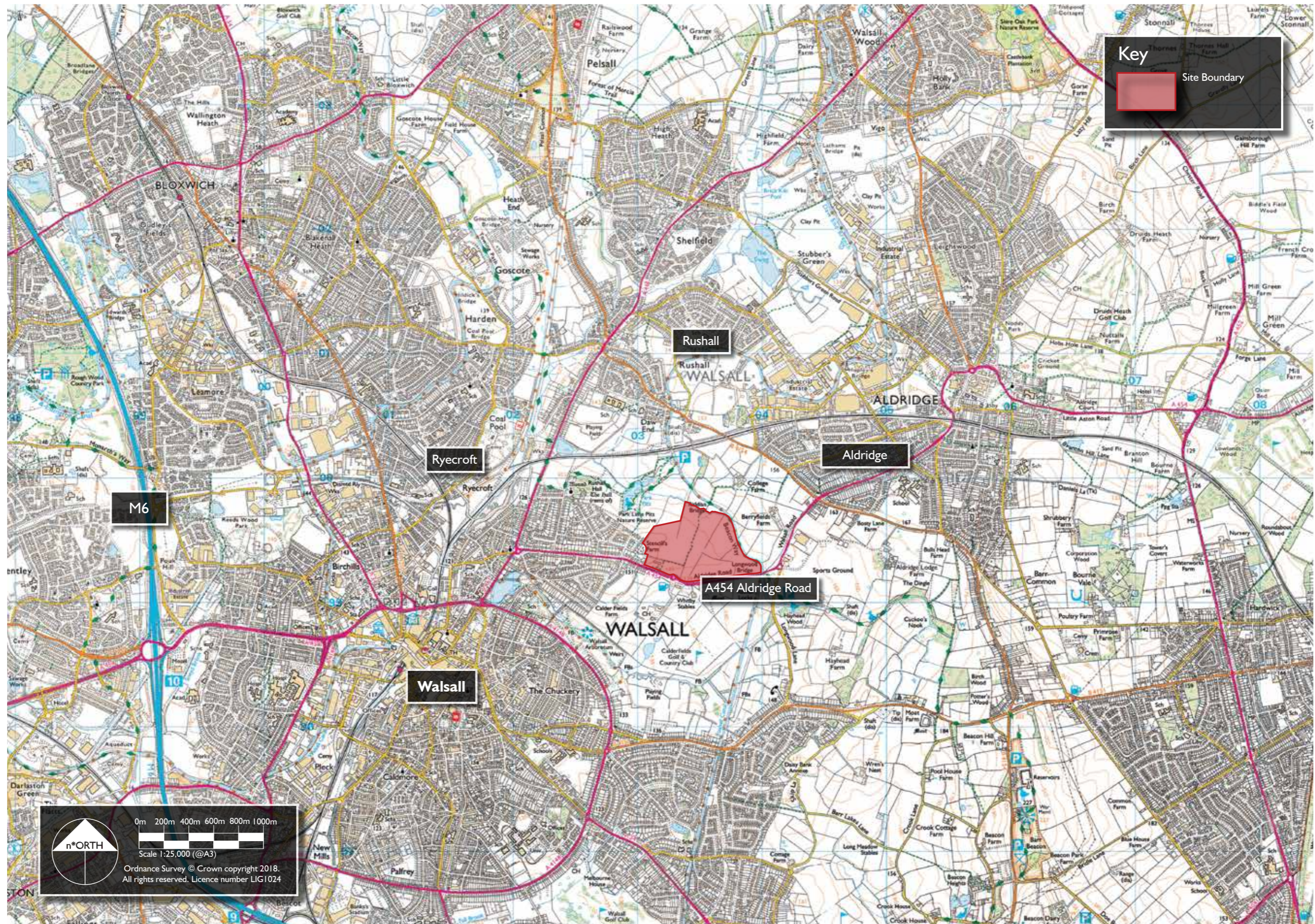


Figure 04:01 Sub-Regional Context

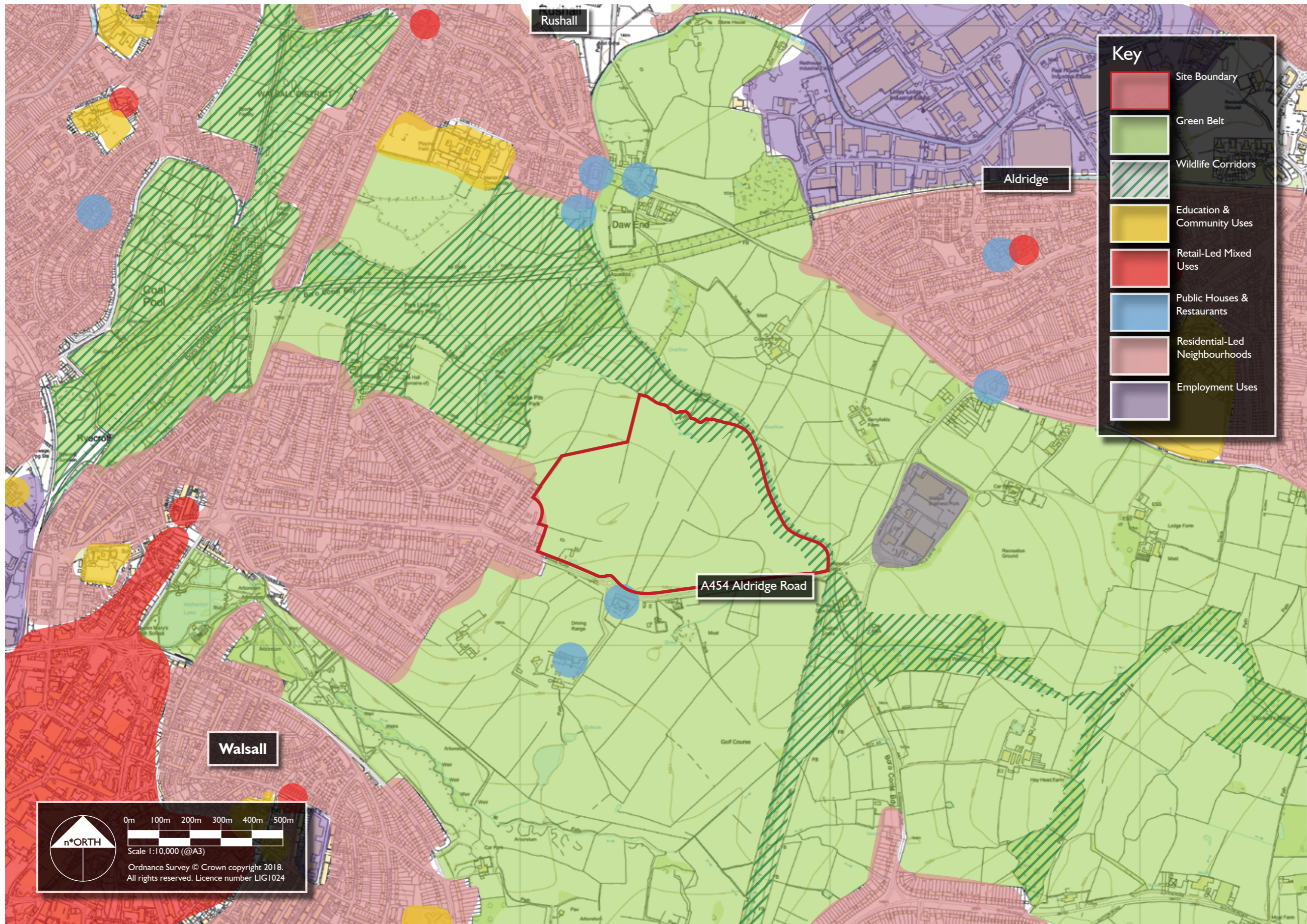


Figure 04:02 Local Context

located just 1.5 miles from the site and offers a range of services and facilities including shops, pharmacies, medical services, art gallery, museums, hotels, restaurants and cafes.

- 4.22 The site has a series of bus stops located along its frontage with the A454, as illustrated in Figure 04:03 over page. The services include the number 6, 7, 7A, 7S and 40 providing connections to Walsall Town Centre, Aldridge, Sutton Coalfield and Castlefort and the various stops in between.
- 4.23 In planning terms the site currently lies within the Green Belt as illustrated in Figure 04:02 but is well contained by the existing settlement edge, canal and Aldridge Road.
- 4.24 As is clearly indicated by Figure 04:02, even if the site is developed the remaining gap between Aldridge and Walsall will be substantial at more than 600 metres width to the site boundary. In addition, the intention is to provide a substantial linear eco-park along the site frontage with the canal which will increase the width of the separation to over 750m before any development will occur.
- 4.25 In summary therefore development on the site:
- would form part of a new gateway to Walsall;
 - would create a strong green infrastructure network and green corridor along the Daw End Branch Canal;
 - create a new sustainable urban extension; and
 - is enclosed by existing residential uses, the canal and Aldridge Road which represents enduring boundaries, which means there is no potential for further expansion to the east.
- 4.26 The proposed neighbourhood will be a residential led mixed use urban extension, with a clearly defined heart and a strong and active community.

Site Constraints & Opportunities

Introduction

- 3.27 As stated previously, Bloor Homes believe in developing proposals which complement the character of the local area, working with the natural grain and flow of the land and utilising existing natural and man-made features, which will give our evolving designs an immediate sense of place and maturity.
- 3.28 An important part of the masterplanning process is to understand the site and surrounding context in detail. Desktop and physical assessments have been undertaken by a multi-disciplinary team of consultants to inform the development of the opportunities and constraints plan, which is illustrated in Figure 04:03 over page. A summary of that work which has informed the formulation of the development framework is provided below. In summary, no technical barriers preventing the development of the site have been identified.
- 3.29 The site is bounded by the A454 Aldridge Road to the south which is separated from the site by an intermittent native hedgerow, woodland stands and intermittent trees which provide some screening of the site from the road.
- 3.30 To the east and north east the site abuts the Daw End Branch Canal before the canal swings north away from the site.
- 3.31 To the north west the site adjoins open fields with the Park Lime Pits Local Nature Reserve visible beyond them.
- 3.32 The eastern boundary consists of the former Stencils Farm and has an extant planning permission for residential development. This area and the adjoining established residential properties will require a sensitive treatment within the proposals for the site.

Landscape & Visual Appraisal

Landscape Character

- 4.33 The site is located within the Barr Beacon and Aldridge Fields Character Area (WL09) as documented by the Black Country Historic Landscape Characterisation document funded by English Heritage for the four Black Country Authorities, including Walsall. The document summarises the area as, “This area is the most rural landscape in Walsall, with field systems covering more than two thirds of its surface (although recreational land is also important). Four fifths (80%) of the area dates to before 1900. It is bounded on almost all sides by settlement, and in the north-east and south-east by the boundaries with Staffordshire and Birmingham respectively.”
- 4.34 The site generally accords with the more detailed descriptions under the heading of Modern Character and highlights that the area is characterised by agricultural land and dispersed farms. It acknowledges that important recreational areas around Barr Beacon are within the character area and this is located to the south of the proposed development site. There are also three golf courses that were laid out in the 20th century in the area such as Druids Heath in the north of the character area, the Great Barr in the south and one adjacent to Walsall Arboretum in the west.
- 4.35 Farmland in the area is almost entirely enclosed field systems and it is likely that the earliest of these were created in the late medieval and early post medieval periods through the piecemeal enclosure of the open fields which once covered most of this area. There is some evidence of ridge and furrow earthworks surviving, however some of these fields have been subject to boundary loss, especially during the 20th century. To the east lie field systems enclosed during the late 18th/ early 19th century, which exhibit straight roads and boundaries typical of parliamentary enclosure.

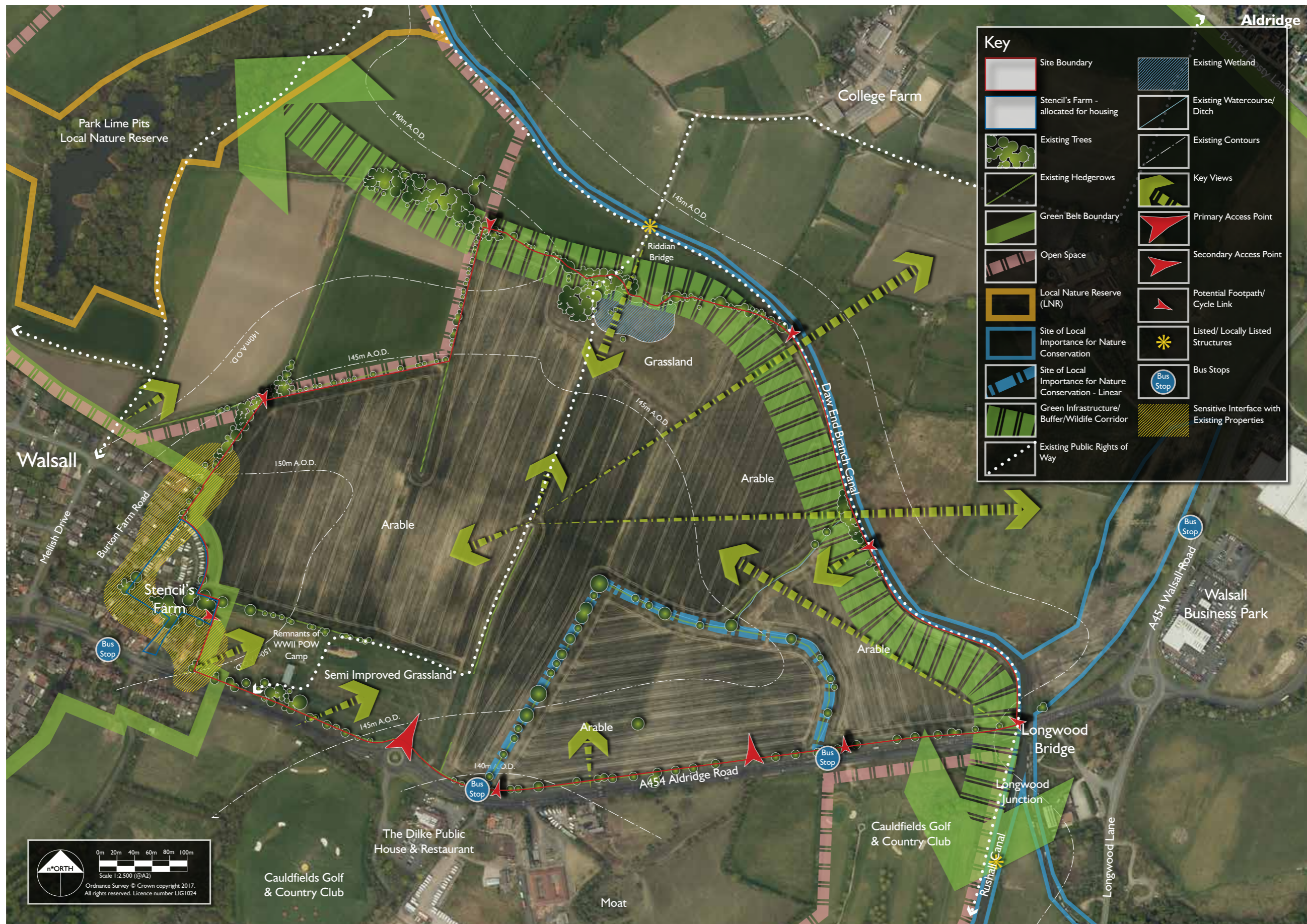


Figure 04:03 Site Constraints & Opportunities

4.36 Like the fields systems, the associated farms date from many different periods. The earliest have medieval origins, although the oldest surviving farm buildings date to around the early 18th century. Others have been rebuilt between the 18th and 20th centuries but have much earlier origins.

4.37 Two small clusters of housing lie in the centre of the area. One is a distinctive estate of large houses in woodland at Bourne Vale, dating to the inter/ post war period. It was built on the site of a landscaped park belonging to Bourne Vale House. The other is a number of detached houses from a similar period located on the Longwood and Erdington Roads south of Aldridge.

4.38 Also, south of Aldridge, small areas of woodland survive - originating from at least the 18th or 19th centuries. Some of these are areas of former limestone quarrying. A further survival is the heath land at Barr Beacon, which is the only area of what had once formed part of Cannock Forest to survive the planned enclosures of the 18th/19th century.

4.39 The area of proposed development is located at Land at Stencils Farm, Aldridge Road, Walsall. It is on the north eastern settlement edge of Walsall within the Birmingham Green Belt designation.

4.40 The site which currently comprises agricultural land split into a series of fields, extends to approximately 37.8 hectares and is irregular in form.

4.41 The land gently rises from the northern and southern edges to an elevated central area. The Park Lime Pits Nature Reserve and Country Park bounds the site to the north/north west whilst the Daw End Branch canal defines the north/north east edges.

4.42 The southern edge of the site is contained by the A454 Aldridge Road, which for almost the full length of the site's southern edge is dual carriageway and includes a traffic island which provides access to Calderfields



Photograph 01: View North East from Aldridge Road Roundabout across site.



Photograph 02: View North West from Aldridge Road looking across site.



Photograph 03: View West from Longwood Bridge across site towards Walsall suburbs.



Photograph 04: View South West across site from Daw End Branch Canal tow path across site.



Photograph 05: View South from Riddian Bridge along Public Right of Way towards site.



Photograph 06: View South from centre of site along Public Right of Way towards existing wetland area.

Golf Club and the Dilke pub/restaurant which are to the south.

- 4.43 The boundaries are mostly delineated by native hedgerows with mature trees in groups or as single specimens. Within the boundaries the majority of land cover is taken up with arable fields bound by partly removed hedges. One of the hedge alignments to the south is designated as a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation. An area of semi-improved grassland is located to the south west and an area of wetland is adjacent to the northern boundary.
- 4.44 The topography of the proposed development area gently rises from the east to west from approximately 135m AOD to 150m AOD. There is a Public Rights of Way (FP Wal59) that travels across the site that links Beacon Way to Aldridge Road on the southern boundary. A Grade 2 listed bridge is within close proximity (but outside of the site) to the north and provides pedestrian access across the Daw End Branch Canal.
- 4.45 PGLA Landscape Architects have prepared a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and identified the landscape to be Medium High sensitivity to account for the location of the proposed development site within the Green Belt. The assessment of the potential effects on the landscape concludes that there will be a moderate major change in the landscape fabric of the existing site as the proposed development and associated infrastructure are introduced, however, there is potential for any identified adverse effects being further reduced over time as the planting and landscape framework within the site matures.
- 4.46 The setting of the site will benefit from the introduced planting to infill the gaps in the hedgerows, particularly on the southern and northern boundaries. The proposed development is likely to have an imperceptible effect on the broad landscape character. However, the landscape proposals are also considered to

be potentially beneficial as they reflect the species of the adjacent landscape and are consistent with the Landscape Character description for the Black Country.

Visual Amenity

- 4.47 The site is located on mixed arable and pastoral farmland with gently rolling landform to either side of a central ridge. The the landscape is adjacent to the eastern edge of the urban area of Walsall.
- 4.48 Sensitive visual receptors are identified as being localised to the western and northern edges accounting for the interface with the existing residential area of Walsall and the Daw End Branch Canal which forms a well vegetated and defensible boundary to the development site. The southern boundary is adjacent to Aldridge Road.
- 4.49 There is one public footpath (Wal59) that crosses the proposed development site and travels north to south linking Aldridge Road to the Beacon Way and the B4154 just the south of Aldridge to the north of the site. There will be an obvious change in view to these receptors as residential housing is introduced but the landscape strategy outlines the mitigation measures that will be introduced as part of the development to reduce any potential adverse effects on the visual amenity of these receptors.
- 4.50 Generally, the proposed development site is visually well contained when viewed from further afield. Views from the west and south are screened by the existing Walsall settlement and from the north and east by Aldridge and the vegetation on the B4154 roadside and within the hedgerows in the landscape and canal corridor.
- 4.51 It is likely that some immediate views are achievable into the site from Aldridge Road and to some degree from Walsall Road to the east, but these will be sporadic and limited due to the landform and vegetation within

the existing countryside. The landscape strategy will ensure that appropriate planting is introduced to provide mitigation for any identified adverse effects.

- 4.52 The visual assessment that has been carried out has demonstrated that the proposed development will have some general effects on the immediate visual amenity along Aldridge Road and the Beacon Way, however, views into the site are mostly localised to the immediate vicinity of the site boundaries.
- 4.53 The residential amenity of the properties on Aldridge Road, Mellish Drive and Stencils Road will undergo varying degrees of change. However, as the proposed landscape structure planting and the proposals seek to reinforce the screening, the residual effects are deemed to moderate to negligible.
- 4.54 The users of the public footpath networks will experience some moderate major effects to the visual amenity at time of completion and the residual effects are likely to reduce to minor moderate as the proposed planting matures. The long to medium view range footpath network will experience negligible residual effects due to the existing settlements, landform and vegetation within the countryside.
- 4.55 A substantial degree of visual separation will be maintained from the south of Aldridge to the northern built edge of the development due to intervening vegetation and this will be further enhanced by the separation provided by the planting within the introduced linear park immediately south of the canal on the development side.
- 4.56 Generally, it is not considered that any long term significant adverse effects will pervade in respect of the likely impacts on the landscape character and visual amenity.
- 4.57 Although any major development on a green field site will result in some landscape change, the LVIA concludes that **'the development is likely to have**



Photograph 07: Daw End Branch Canal



Photograph 08: Riddian Bridge



Photograph 9: Public Right of Way through wetland



Photograph 10: View West from Aldridge Road across site towards Walsall suburbs



Photograph 11: View West from Longwood Bridge across site towards Walsall suburbs



Photograph 12: View South East from Public Right of Way on site towards Aldridge Road and The Dilke Public House

an imperceptible effect on the broad landscape character’ and whilst there ‘will be some general effects on the immediate visual amenity along Aldridge Road and Beacon Way, views into the site are mostly localised to the immediate vicinity of the site boundaries.’

Existing Vegetation & Trees

- 4.58 A remnant field pattern of native hedgerows subdivides the site into a number of field compartments, as illustrated opposite. Most of the hedgerows are very gappy and heavily flailed. However, the hedgerow which forms the Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (linear) as illustrated in Figure 04:03, as the designation suggests is physically of a better form and creates an important feature in the landscape of the the site currently. All hedgerows shall be integrated into the development where possible as part of the green infrastructure network.
- 4.59 A number of mature native trees are located either within the hedgerows or fields and create a setting for the site and wider landscape.
- 4.60 The trees and hedgerows combine to filter views of the site from the wider area and all shall be retained where possible with only shorts breaks being created through the existing hedgerows to allow access between the field compartments.

Drainage & Flood Risk

- 4.61 The site has been subject to a preliminary flood risk assessment and consideration of the surface water drainage discharge options. Infiltration potential and foul water discharge solutions have also been considered.

Fluvial Sources

- 4.62 Several watercourses are situated within reasonable proximity of the site. Notably the Daw end branch canal is the largest river in the vicinity and it flows along the eastern boundary of the site. A further small water

course channel is shown to flow from the larger of the two lakes that are situated within the park lime pits local nature reserve which lies some 0.4 km beyond the north west boundary of the site.

- 4.63 The entire development site is located within flood Zone 1 based on the EA’s mapping and thus has a less than 1 in 1000 annual probability of river or sea flooding in any year. Thus, it has the lowest probability of flooding as defined in national planning policy.
- 4.64 Whilst the site also lies in close proximity to the Daw End Branch Canal, the management of this watercourses is such that it presents an extremely low risk of flooding.
- 4.65 Furthermore, the topography of the site is such that it increases as progress is made away from the existing watercourses which consequently provides additional flood resilience.
- 4.66 Accordingly, it is asserted that there is an extremely low risk of flooding from both natural and artificial fluvial sources.

Pluvial Sources

- 4.67 In terms of surface water flooding, the Environment Agency’s maps indicate that the majority of the site is in an area classified to have a very low risk of surface water flooding. There are a limited number of areas within the site that are affected by surface water flooding, it should be noted that all accumulations/ flow paths are shown to flow away from the site in accordance with the local topography. Thus in terms of establishing an overall risk of flooding from surface water sources, it is concluded that the risk is a low one.
- 4.68 Nevertheless, preliminary mitigation strategies have been explored in order to deal with any residual risk. Firstly it is recommended that developed areas of the site are prioritised on elevated land and

situated away from any local drainage ditches. Site boundaries, where surface water flooding may occur would be best suited to areas of public open space which could also include the provision of sustainable drainage features. Secondly, it is proposed that the development will include a positive surface water drainage system that will intercept the majority of run-off generated within the site itself. This will minimise the risk to new buildings in addition to reducing the risk to others across the wider area. The overall effect will be to provide a significant reduction in surface water flow rates post development through the utilisation of this sustainable drainage system.

- 4.69 In addition to potential sources of fluvial and pluvial flooding, the drainage assessment also considers the development site’s infiltration drainage potential. Desktop research reveals that the ground conditions are however such that infiltration based drainage is unlikely to be suitable. Nevertheless, infiltration testing will of course be undertaken to further explore the potential for drainage by this mechanism as the development site progresses through the plan making process.
- 4.70 In terms of foul water disposal, initial investigations suggest that a pumping station will be required to convey flows to public foul sewers which are assumed to be present within the Aldridge Road to the south of the site.
- 4.71 Accordingly, the preliminary drainage and flooding assessment concludes that the site is at **low risk of flooding from both fluvial and pluvial sources and that there are no particular constraints which indicate that subject to a suitable sustainable drainage strategy, any sources of flooding could not be satisfactorily mitigated.**

Ecology

- 4.72 Preliminary ecological assessment of the site has been undertaken. In the main, the site comprises two

grassland fields in arable use which are of relatively limited ecological value. The field in the south west corner of the site is less intensively managed however and does present the potential to support reptiles. Their presence would be confirmed by further survey work.

4.73 Ordnance Survey mapping also indicates that a pond is located in this south west area too but initial survey work indicates that it is likely to only hold water during very heavy rainfall events. There is an absence of any wetland vegetation here and there are no records of any Great Crested Newts (GCN) within the local area. Nevertheless, should this pond hold any water during the GCN breeding season, further survey work should be undertaken.

4.74 Confirmed wetland in the northern part of the site holds the greatest ecological value. This presents an opportunity for retention and enhancement as part of the development proposals.

4.75 The field margins support a range of box cut hedgerows and thick tree belts containing a number of mature specimens. These margins provide foraging opportunities for bats and accordingly, further survey work will be undertaken to establish activity and mitigation as necessary. Preliminary field work also indicates the presence of a badger sett within the southern field margin and further survey work will be undertaken to confirm the extent and importance of this sett and any others.

4.76 In summary, through further survey work and appropriate mitigation the **existing ecological value of the site can not only be safeguarded but there are numerous opportunities for enhancements** across a wide range of flora and fauna.

Heritage & Archaeology

4.77 The development site has been subject to a comprehensive desktop heritage assessment

undertaken by Orion Heritage which, in accordance with the Framework draws together all available archaeological, historic, topographic and land-use information to clarify the heritage significance and archaeological potential of the site.

4.78 There are no designated archaeological assets within the site or indeed within the wider area which surrounds the site such that their significance would be impacted by the proposed development.

4.79 Whilst there are designated heritage assets to southwest of the site, namely the registered Park and Garden of the Arboretum and the Arboretum Conservation Area, the site does not form part of the setting of either of these designated heritage assets and furthermore does not contribute to their significance.

4.80 The Daw End Branch of the Wyrley and Essington canal which contains the site to the north east/east is a non-designated heritage asset. As has already been set out within this document, its significance will not be unduly impacted as a result of the development rather its presence has informed the masterplanning of the site, increasing the opportunities which are available to the public to enjoy it by improving the accessibility to it from the public realm and ultimately safeguarding its setting by virtue of the development of a eco-park adjacent to it along the site's north eastern/eastern boundary.

4.81 Although no physical archaeological investigation of the site has taken place, desktop research has revealed that there may be the remains of a World War II camp within the site and further archaeological investigation will be undertaken as the plan making process continues.

4.82 Nevertheless, on the basis of the historical information that is available, Bloor Homes heritage consultant concludes that there **'are unlikely to be**

any archaeological assets within the site of such significance that would preclude or constrain development or adversely affect the deliverability of the site.'

Public Rights of Way

3.83 A Public Right of Way cross the site roughly from north to south as illustrated in Figure 04:03 and connects the site up to the fringes of Aldridge and the tow path of the Daw End Branch Canal. The majority of the route will be retained on its current alignment and within a green corridor.

3.84 Additional connections to the public right of way and the canal tow path will be created through the proposed extensive green infrastructure network to ensure the site is permeable and well connected to the surrounding areas.

Access & Movement

4.85 The development site's immediate proximity to the A454 Aldridge Road to the south, provides obvious and easily accessible means of connection to the existing highway network. To this end, Waterman, the appointed transport consultant concludes that **'a safe and technically sound solution, which achieves the necessary visibility splays can be delivered. The site will integrate directly into the existing footpath network.'** Further, there are not considered to be any particular concerns in relation to the capacity of the existing network to accommodate the trips that the proposed development would generate.

4.86 More specifically, the access strategy would include the provision of two vehicular accesses from Aldridge Road, the first comprising an additional arm from the existing roundabout, the second a new a priority T junction further to the east.

4.87 Not only is the ability for the site to connect to the existing transport network excellent, the site also enjoys excellent sustainability credentials. A total of

five bus services serve the immediate area providing access to various areas within Walsall as well as Aldridge and Sutton Coldfield. The two nearest bus stops to the site are approximately 120m and 260 m away from site to the south and east respectively.

4.88 Furthermore, Walsall has been identified as a 'Sprint Corridor' destination from Birmingham city centre along the A45. It is anticipated that this service will be operational by 2022 in order to support the Commonwealth Games and will incorporate some 20 stops in each direction with the journey time being around 40 minutes with priority given to 'Sprint' services at traffic signals.

4.89 The site also enjoys close proximity to Walsall railway station which is approximately 2 ½ km away. There are direct services to Birmingham New Street, Rugeley Trent Valley and Wolverhampton on a frequent basis.

4.90 The site is evidently well located therefore to allow easy access to public transport options thus reducing reliance on private motor vehicle use.

4.91 The transport assessment has also analysed the site's accessibility to various amenities and facilities within its proximity including those relating to education, healthcare, employment, leisure and retail.

4.92 There are 9 infant and primary schools and 4 secondary schools within 3 km of the development site. It should also be noted that the development is likely to incorporate a primary school of its own in order to cater for the educational needs that a development of this scale will give rise to.

4.93 In terms of health care, the most accessible primary health care facility is just some 3.1Km from the development site.

4.94 There are retail/leisure facilities and employment opportunities in abundance within Walsall itself as well as within the centres of Birmingham and

Wolverhampton which are clearly within sustainable travelling distance.

Residential Amenity

4.95 Existing residents who front or back onto the site will be considered in the design and layout of the proposals. Landscape buffers shall be used to create a stand-off from the sensitive boundaries and built form will be set back to ensure minimum overlooking distances are exceeded.

Wider Green Infrastructure Network

4.96 The internal green infrastructure network as illustrated in Figure 04:03 shall be retained, as will its connections out to the wider area.

4.97 This network shall form the structure of the proposed layout and provide not only a backdrop to the proposed development, but also links between surrounding wildlife habitats and the site to ensure good connectivity is maintained in the form of wildlife corridors into and through the proposed development.



Photograph 13: Finger Post on Southern boundary



Photograph 14: View South West from tow path across site towards Walsall suburbs.



5.0 Creating a New Neighbourhood

5.0 Creating a New Neighbourhood



Figure 05:01 Paramteers Masterplan

A Vision for Land at Stencils Farm

- 5.1 Out of this contextual appreciation of place and analysis of the site springs our Vision. The development of this site will create a sustainable urban extension on the north eastern edge of Walsall. The development shall integrate and become part of the existing settlement pattern of the town, whilst also being bounded, enclosed and softened by the retained hedgerows, associated trees and new complimentary native planting.
- 5.2 The development shall create a new high quality, welcoming and outward looking gateway into the town. This new neighbourhood will be designed following the principles of a 21st Century Garden Suburb, developing a new neighbourhood which creates a series of high quality green spaces. These green spaces, along with wildlife corridors, ecological habitats and recreational footpaths/cycleways will be developed within an over arching and extensive Green Infrastructure network, linking the site to the local facilities, wider settlement and countryside, as well as buffering the site from the wider Green Belt.
- 5.3 This new Garden Suburb will be focussed around the Open Spaces, Mews and Squares and shall be enclosed and overlooked by a mix of homes, school and shops, creating a heart and focus to the neighbourhood, utilising existing features such as the trees and hedgerows as focal features within them.
- 5.4 The neighbourhood will develop its own unique character and contain a choice and variety of homes. The fringes of the neighbourhood shall use a range of outward facing properties, using a rural materials palette to create a softer and more rural fringe, enabling it to blend and blur into the open countryside.
- 5.5 This approach works with the existing landscape, sympathetically overlaying development which will become a part of the character of the wider town.

An evolving masterplanning process...

- 5.6 Developing a visionary and unique masterplan, if done correctly, is an iterative process. Initial ideas develop out of the site's own context, constraints and opportunities, as touched upon in the previous chapter.
- 5.7 That initial process provides a logical structure and framework for the masterplan and also, as further work is undertaken and discussions are held with stakeholders on ecology, movement, landscape, the appreciation of the local character and vernacular, our understanding develops of the historical evolution and development of the surrounding settlement. Additional layers of detail can then be added in terms of layout, access, hierarchy of streets and public realm, detailing of the built form, materials and landscape.



Creating a Place

- 5.8 In order to deliver the Vision, the masterplan must take account of the site's context and constraints and turn them into opportunities for use in developing the proposals. The parameters masterplan illustrated here in Figure 05:01 is the result of that process. These opportunities emerged out of the earlier contextual and constraints work and provided the foundation for the masterplan. The following paragraphs describe each building block.

Use and Quantum

- 5.9 The masterplan illustrates residential led development complimenting the surrounding established use mix, set within a network of Green Infrastructure. The site in total is circa 37.80 hectares and will include some 19.34 hectares of residential development, a Two Form Entry School (2.0 hectares), Local Centre (0.64 hectares) and 15.82 hectares of Green and Blue Infrastructure which will include woodlands, wetlands and grasslands, incorporating naturalistic play areas, orchards/allotments, cycle routes and nature trails.

- 5.10 This new neighbourhood would contain a range of housing densities, offering choice and variety in terms of locations and size of homes. Densities would vary from the fringes at circa 18 homes per hectare up to 55 homes per hectare at its heart. This varied density would roughly equate to a net average of 36 homes per hectare, or a gross density of around 20 homes per hectare.

Layout and Movement

- 5.11 The layout has emerged from the earlier constraints and opportunities work as set-out in Chapter 4. Figure 05:01 illustrates how the trees, wetlands and topography have been used to provide a starting point for developing a layout for the sites. These drivers have been used to establish a route hierarchy that forms the basis of the design. The primary element



Figure 05:02 Illustrative Masterplan

is the Main Avenue which would be flanked by street trees and creates a bold green avenue from the main gateway right through the centre of the site.

5.12 Running from the Main Avenue there is a Secondary Avenue which could be used as a looping bus route into the site connecting the Main Avenue out to the proposed primary school and provides a secondary access back onto Aldridge Road.

5.13 A number of Streets and Lanes feed off the avenues and form the movement network based around traditional Streets, shared surface Lanes and Mews style spaces. Where these routes intersect; raised thresholds, public squares or landscape features will be introduced to aid legibility and reduce traffic speeds. The layout is also designed to ensure pedestrian and cycle permeability. There are clear opportunities to link into surrounding footpaths, towpaths, open spaces and other routes, thus ensuring that maximum permeability and integration is achieved.

Scale, Mix and Massing

5.14 It is proposed that approximately 700 homes can be accommodated on the site. The proposals have the potential to provide a range and choice of housing from one and two bedroom apartments to larger more aspirational 4 and 5 bed detached housing.

5.15 The form of the adjoining neighbourhood suggests principally 2 storey (between 8 to 10 metres to ridgeline) development would be appropriate. However, in order to create interest in the streetscape and roovescape appropriate increases in scale could be used at principle junctions, within mews and around key green spaces to aid legibility and enclosure.

Landscape Strategy

5.16 The development of the layout for this site has taken the existing green infrastructure into account to provide a landscape led mixed use development set within a substantial landscape framework.

5.17 There are significant opportunities for new tree planting and landscaping within the site, and infill planting especially on the western interface with the existing settlement edge of Walsall and the southern boundary adjacent to Aldridge Road. The hedgerow adjacent to Aldridge Road will be enhanced with infill planting and groups of native trees. Furthermore, it is proposed that a substantial tract of public open space in the form of a Linear Eco-Park is located to the north and west of the site and school playing fields surrounded by woodland to the south eastern section of the site. This will provide a substantial landscape buffer offering visual separation from the landscape to the north of the Daw End Branch Canal.

5.18 The overall elements of the landscape strategy for the site can be summarised as follows:

- Retention of the existing elements that make up the site's green infrastructure, such as trees and hedges and integrating these into the development, giving the scheme an immediate sense of maturity;
- Ensuring the gaps in the existing hedge adjacent to the boundaries and Aldridge Road are in-filled with native trees and hedge planting. Evergreen species of holly should be included in the mix to provide effective screening through the winter months;
- Ornamental and native hedge planting to be planted in and around the proposed development to soften the adverse effects of the built form.



Impression of the Main Avenue looking North



Aerial impression looking North West across the site from Longwood Bridge

5.19 A range of trees to be introduced to reflect the street hierarchy including the central avenues, crescents, squares and mews. Native trees should be planted in the Linear Eco-Park and general perimeters including areas of public open space and school.

5.20 The landscape strategy has been taken into account when considering the mitigation for the identified potential adverse landscape and visual effects arising at the operational stage of the proposed development and these have been reflected when considering the overall residual effects.

Public Realm and Hard Landscape

5.21 The hard landscape materials palette also reflects the spatial hierarchy and patterns of movement through the development. Avenues and Village Streets will be designed as traditional roads, with the Lanes, Mews and Squares designed as more intimate, human scale spaces where pedestrian movement takes priority over motorised vehicles.

From Concept to Masterplan

5.22 Demonstrating this staged approach to developing the masterplan clearly illustrates our thought processes from first principles in terms of appreciating the local context, design philosophy and the utilisation of the site's own unique features to guide the development of the masterplan structure.

The Illustrative Masterplan

A Legible Hierarchy

5.23 The hierarchy of routes, as touched upon previously is expanded on here and illustrated in Figure 05:02 opposite. In effect, the development should be legible and permeable; a visitor should be able to find their way around the development intuitively by understanding the importance of the streets and spaces through which they are moving.



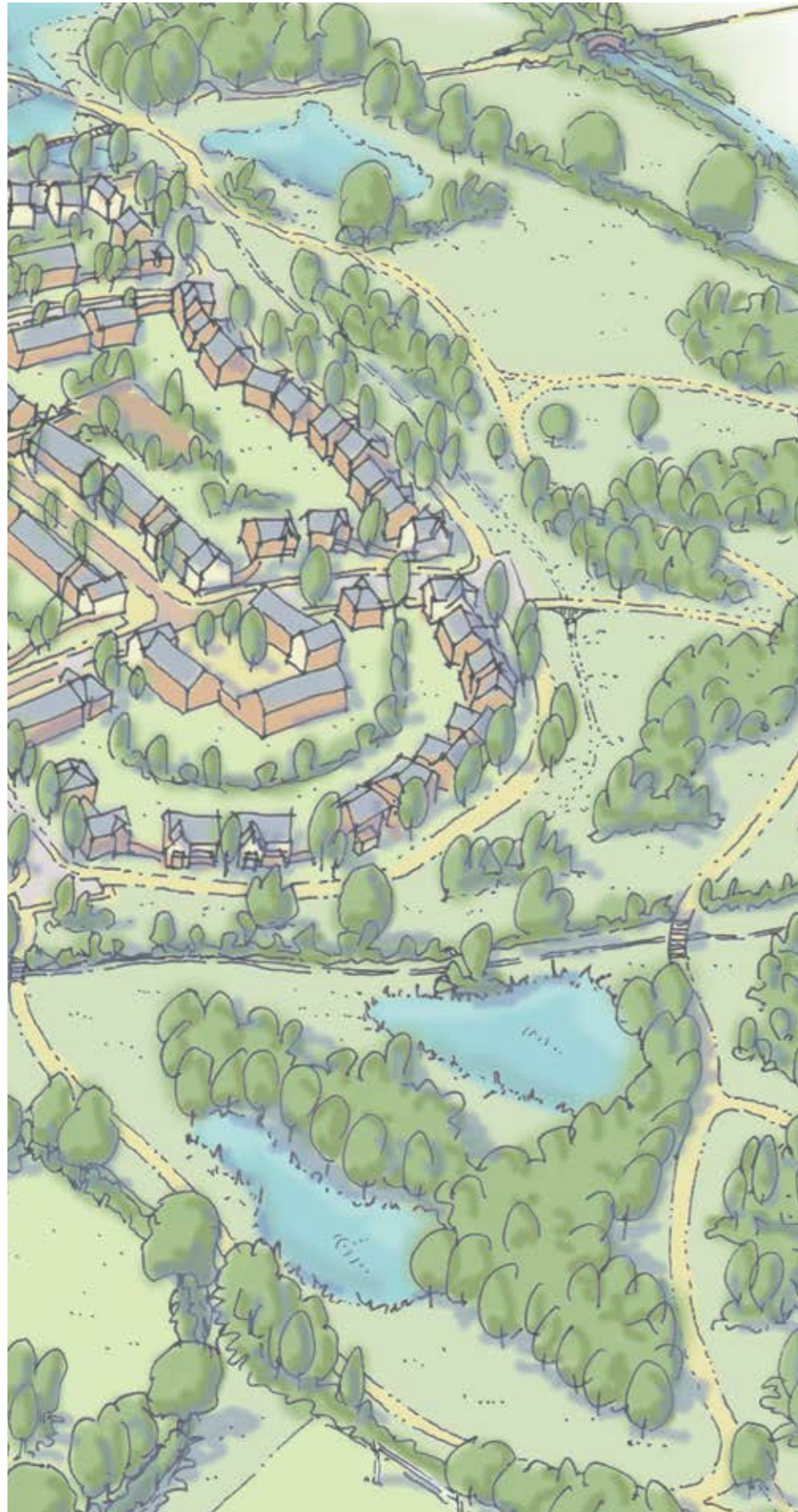
Impression of the Crescent looking West

5.24 A movement and street hierarchy has been developed and is set out below in the order of importance:

- The Main & Secondary Avenues
- The Squares, Mews & Crescents
- The Streets & Lanes
- The Shared Drives

5.25 The Main & Secondary Avenues are at the top of the route hierarchy. The Main Avenue provides the main access in the form of a broad tree lined linear green space into the residential areas from the gateway and also provides a green setting for the existing Public Right of Way as it crosses the site.

5.26 The Secondary Avenue provides a link to the school and a potential route for a diverted bus service into the site. In addition, it also provides access to the proposed new primary school.



5.27 The built form is set back from the road, allowing sufficient room for the planting of street trees. These add scale to the streetscape and reinforce the green character of the development.

5.28 The Squares, Mews and Crescents are at the heart of the development and are fronted and enclosed by the homes which surround them, with corner buildings rotated to focus views onto the central spaces. Designed as a piece of public realm or green space, rather than a traditional road, they provide a focus within the development for residents and other users.

5.29 The Streets and Lanes are the secondary access routes, linking the Avenues into the heart of the residential areas. The Streets and Lanes will be a mix of traditional roads and shared surface areas. The scale is a more domestic feel, as the built form is set slightly closer to the road and street tree planting will incorporate smaller growing species. Gardens will be enclosed by native hedgerows.

5.30 The Shared Drives are the last element in the hierarchy of access routes. They are domestic in nature, designed as a simple shared surface route which provides access to only a small number of properties along its length and often connects onward into pedestrian/cycleways at its end. Traditional upstand kerbs and raised pavements are also avoided to create a more seamless transitional space between the residential properties and the landscape beyond. This approach also assists with the SuDS strategy by facilitating the movement of surface water flows from the roads onto grassed transition strips and from there to swales and the wider drainage system.

Secured by Design

5.31 The layout responds to Secure by Design principles in terms of maximising the opportunities for overlooking of the streetscape, public realm and open spaces from habitable rooms. The streets and spaces are designed to be legible in terms of movement and their

public, semi-private or private nature. Pedestrian/Cycle routes are safe, secure, overlooked and direct to ensure they reflect the aspirations for the reduction of the occurrence and perception of crime.

Sustainable Urban Drainage Strategy (SuDS)

5.32 The SuDS is part of the Blue and Green Infrastructure network and has six site specific objectives:

- To efficiently drain the site whilst not causing flooding down stream,
- To create suitable habitat for amphibians, invertebrates, birds, mammals, native aquatic and marginal plant life,
- Create ecological corridors across the site to enable wildlife to move more freely and native plants to spread and colonise the wider area,
- Create an aesthetically pleasing setting for development,
- Promote the site as a sustainable place to live and work, and,
- Use SUDs features at property boundaries as part of the approach to Secure by Design.

In Summary

5.33 In essence the Illustrative Masterplan takes the constraints, Vision and parameters and demonstrates that the proposals will create an integrated extension to the settlement, set into the existing landscape, creating a high quality addition to the town, offering much need homes and choice to the local community.

5.34 As illustrated in Figure 05:04 the Stencils Farm proposals will have a minimal effect on the purpose of the retained Green Belt between the proposed Sustainable Urban Extension and Aldridge to the north east, with a gap of 700 metres between Aldridge's settlement fringe and the first homes on the site set behind the proposed ecological buffer.



Figure 05:04 Retained Green Belt Wedge





6.0 Summary



6.0 Summary



Aerial impression looking North West across the site from Longwood Bridge

- 6.1 The BCA have an urgent need to identify strategic sites to deliver a significant number of dwellings outside of the existing Black Country Urban Area. There is an acknowledged need to release land from the Green Belt to achieve this and at the time of writing, Green Belt Review across the Black Country is ongoing to assist in the site selection process.
- 6.2 The land at Stencils Farm is well placed to assist in meeting this need and this Vision Document has demonstrated through detailed Landscape and Visual Impact assessment work and carefully considered landscaping, that the site can be released from the Green Belt without compromising the strategic purposes of including land within it.
- 6.3 Indeed, the development of the site, representing a logical extension of the existing urban edge on the eastern side of Walsall along a major arterial route which serves the city, echoes many of the historical development patterns that are seen across the Midlands region.
- 6.4 The site could deliver a significant quantum of housing to meet the BCA's need and for its size, it is in the relatively unique position of being under the control of just one land owner which will facilitate its efficient and rapid delivery. This will be in partnership with just one housebuilder possessing a strong track record for developing quality homes, neighbourhoods and ultimately communities.
- 6.5 A safe and suitable access solution can be delivered from the A454 Aldridge Road to the south comprising two separate access points, one from the existing traffic island, the other from a proposed priority T junction to the east. The site enjoys excellent proximity to public transport links and is well catered for in terms of the number of existing services which operate in the locality.

- 6.6 Having been thoroughly tested, the site is confirmed as being at an extremely low risk of flooding from both fluvial and pluvial sources. Nevertheless, the technical work carried out to date indicates that there are an absence of constraints which would mean that subject to a suitable sustainable drainage strategy, any sources of flooding could be satisfactorily mitigated.
- 6.7 Preliminary assessments have been undertaken in respect of technical matters such as archaeology and ecology and subject to suitable mitigation, these assessments confirm that the site is wholly suitable for development.
- 6.8 The various constraints and opportunities that have been assessed have been used to inform an indicative masterplan which follows the principles of the garden suburb movement to deliver some 700 homes, significant new areas of public open space, green infrastructure network, a primary school and local centre.
- 6.9 Bloor Homes are committed to working collaboratively with Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, the other BCA and other local stakeholders to bring forward this site for allocation in the Black Country Plan as a high quality gateway into Walsall from the north east.



“Bloor Homes’ Vision for Stencils Farm will create a new sustainable urban extension on the north eastern edge of Walsall.

The new neighbourhood shall create a new high quality, welcoming and outward looking gateway into the town and will be designed following the principles of a 21st Century Garden Suburb.





A network of green spaces, wildlife corridors, habitats and recreational footpaths/ cycleways will be developed within the proposed extensive Green Infrastructure network.

The Avenues, Streets, Greens, Mews and Squares shall be enclosed and overlooked by the homes, schools and shops, creating a heart and focus to the neighbourhood.

The neighbourhood will develop its own unique character and contain a choice and variety of homes. The fringes of the neighbourhood shall use a range of outward facing detached properties, using a rural materials palette to create a softer and more rural fringe, enabling it to blend and blur into the open countryside.

This organic approach works with the grain of the existing landscape and sympathetically overlays development. It will quickly mature and become a part of the setting and character of the wider town.”



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