




VOWCHURCH AND DISTRICT
GROUP PARISH COUNCIL
Neighbourhood
Development Plan
2011 to 2031





Looking ahead to 2031, we wish to preserve the beautiful and essentially rural character of the area, whilst accommodating housing developments that enable more families to live in the area, including within the existing settlements.



Introduction

People in the five parishes (Michaelchurch Escley, Newton, St Margaret's, Turnastone, and Vowchurch), together with the Parish Council which serves them, welcome the opportunity to develop planning policies that support our communities and protect the area in which we live. The vision we have developed reflects two broad and mutually supportive aspirations. One is to protect and where possible enhance the local environment, since the parishes lie in an area of great natural beauty. The other is to enhance the lives of people in our communities by encouraging the provision of appropriate new housing for families and by encouraging the development of small businesses which increase the number of jobs available locally.

Our Vision

The work we have done has enabled us to develop and agree a view about how we wish to see the area develop over the next few years and to agree some objectives for what we want to achieve.

Looking ahead to 2031, we wish to preserve the beautiful and essentially rural character of the area, whilst accommodating housing developments that enable more families to live in the area, including within the existing settlements.

- ✓ **Objective 1** – to meet local housing needs through the provision of additional and affordable homes to meet the needs of the community;
- ✓ **Objective 2** – to ensure that any new development is designed to complement the character of the existing settlements and the wider environment;
- ✓ **Objective 3** – by enabling more families to live in the area to support local businesses, particularly farming, and support local services, not least by maintaining local schools.

Background

Characteristics of the local area

The five parishes lie about 10 miles to the south west of Hereford, the nearest large urban area, and broadly the same distance south east of Hay on Wye, the nearest market town. Michaelchurch Escley, lies within a few miles of the border with Wales which runs along the eastern edge of the Black Mountains. The area is about 7 miles from the nearest A road, the A465 between Hereford and Abergavenny.

The population of the parishes is about 600 within an area that measures very roughly 5 miles east to west and 4 miles north to south.

The five parish areas are wholly rural, with small clusters of houses near to the churches and otherwise highly dispersed dwellings. Most people in the five parishes live in houses with a high degree of physical separation from their neighbours. This reflects the fact that historically the area supported mainly small family farms which provided an occupation for a high proportion of local people. The dispersed nature of the settlements means that there is a complex network of very small, narrow roads.

The parishes are in the Golden Valley, an area of considerable natural beauty. National and local policies recognise the need to protect local environments by limiting development in open countryside. This is not inconsistent with a small amount of development which permits the evolution of areas to meet the needs of local communities.

The two villages which are the main focus of proportionate development in Herefordshire Council's Core Strategy, Michaelchurch Escley and Vowchurch, are surrounded by agricultural land. They contain less than 15 homes each at present. Apart from a public house in Michaelchurch and a small garage workshop in Vowchurch, neither village centre has any amenities for local people.

Lower Maes-coed consists of a small scattering of houses in the south of Newton parish with no local amenities.

Against this background, the scope for new development will be determined by the wholly rural characteristics of the area. As in the past, most future developments will be isolated, single developments such as barn conversions. But there is certainly also some scope for developments within the two villages and in Lower Maes-coed.

National legislation

National legislation makes it possible for town and parish councils to lead the local development of plans for how an area should develop in the future. This legislation sets out the basis for how such work is to be done. It also makes it quite clear that any neighbourhood plans must be consistent with both national and local authority planning frameworks. In our case this is Herefordshire Council's Core Strategy and in particular the section which deals with the rural areas.

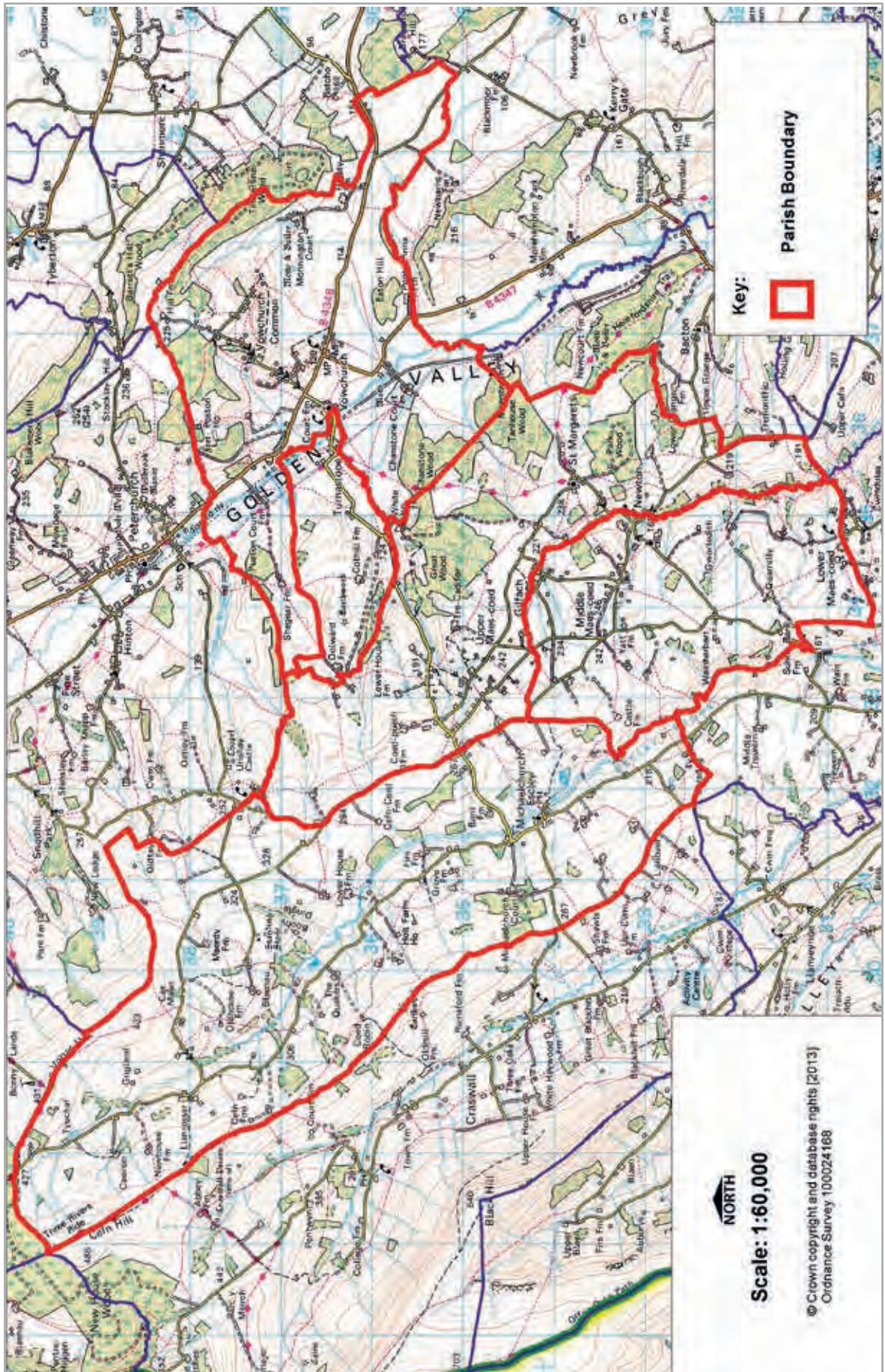
Herefordshire Council's Core Strategy

The Core Strategy sets out targets for new housing in the county as a whole, making a distinction between what is likely to be built in the city, in the major towns and in the rural areas.

For Herefordshire's rural areas, the Core Strategy identifies a number of settlements within several distinct geographical areas as being "the primary focus for (new) housing" which will meet housing needs and support the regeneration of the rural economy.

In the Golden Valley, the Core Strategy identifies two settlements in our parishes with the potential "for sensitive and appropriate housing growth." These settlements are Michaelchurch Escley and Vowchurch. New developments here should be "within or adjacent to the main built up areas" and support and enhance

Vowchurch and District Group Parish Areas



the character of these local settlements. Development will be permitted which is "proportionate to the size of the community and its needs.."

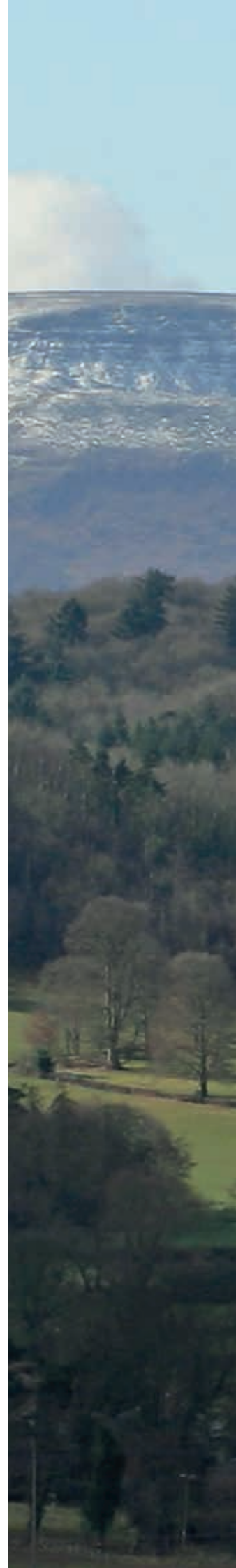
The Core Strategy also identifies Lower Maes-coed as a community in which some new housing development can take place. Here any such new housing should "respect the scale, form, layout, character and setting of the (existing) settlement" - recognising that such small settlements often do not have a village centre. New housing proposals will need to respect the existing settlement pattern and can meet identified local housing needs.

The Core Strategy is based on an expectation about the numbers of new homes that will be built in rural areas up to 2031. These are homes that will be built in parishes as a whole, not only within the settlements. This growth will be made up of:

- the homes that are built in line with existing planning guidelines, including barn conversions;
- homes built in open countryside that meet planning criteria, such as buildings linked to businesses;
- development within the settlements which is covered by this plan.

The Core Strategy expectation is that about 28 homes will be built in our five parish areas by 2031. By way of comparison, over the previous planning period from 1996 to 2011, 34 new developments were completed. The majority of these developments were for single units, either replacements or conversions, that is, they were small scale and in keeping with the characteristics of the area. There is no reason to think that this pattern of developments will not continue in the current planning period, with numbers of one off dwellings.

In the period covered by the Core Strategy, that is, from 2011, a number of new developments have already been put in train in the five parish areas, both replacements of existing homes and developments of new homes. This suggests that the level of growth in housing for the area within the Core Strategy up to 2031, is likely to be comparable with that which occurred during the period from 1996 to 2011. There are likely to be a significant number of individual conversions in the wider area. These will be complemented by the developments which this neighbourhood plan supports within the settlement boundaries of Michaelchurch Escley and Vowchurch, and in Lower Maes-coed.



The Basis for the Policies in this Plan

The Plan is based on:

- a) a series of informal consultations we have had with local people at public meetings which everyone had an opportunity to attend;
- b) a questionnaire in 2014 which everyone had an opportunity to complete;
- c) formal consultation in 2016 in which everyone with an interest in the five parish areas, whether they live here or not, had an opportunity of taking part.

At all stages of the process of preparing the plan we have held public meetings and sought local involvement in our work. We have advertised meetings in local parish newsletters, put up posters and distributed information leaflets. Where we were aware of people, such as landowners, who have an interest in our parishes but did not live locally, we have written to them individually.

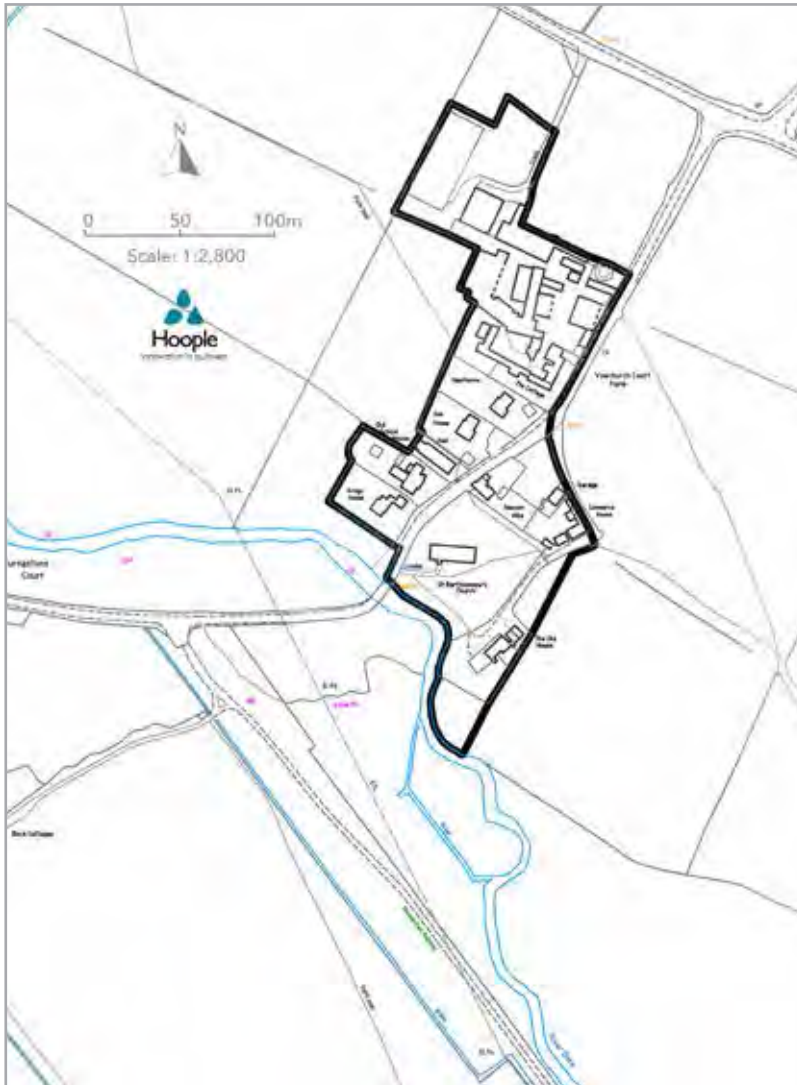
The results of the various informal consultations, the survey of residents and interested parties and the formal consultation in 2016 are as follows. The percentages quoted relate to the survey carried out in 2014.

1 Settlement Boundaries

Michaelchurch Escley and Vowchurch

The expectation of the Core Strategy is that the proportionate growth in housing in Michaelchurch Escley and Vowchurch will take place within a defined settlement boundary. A settlement boundary "is a line that is drawn on a plan around a village, which reflects its built form."¹ Such a boundary is used as "a policy tool reflecting the area where a set of plan policies are to be applied" as in the case of the policies set out in this neighbourhood plan. Such boundaries need not reflect current land use or land ownership.

When we consulted on settlement boundaries for Michaelchurch Escley and Vowchurch, we used as our starting point those boundaries which have been applied over many years for the two settlements. In both settlements this includes land which contains dwellings and other buildings, the churches and a



Vowchurch

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limited amount of land which is currently used for agricultural purposes. Overall these boundaries reflected the shape of the built form of areas which themselves reflect the historic pattern of incremental development of the two small settlements.

In determining boundaries we have made use of the criteria set out in the Guidance Note provided by Herefordshire Council quoted above. The key criteria for us is that the boundaries should broadly trace, even if they extend, the edge of the built up area. What limited new developments have taken place within the two settlements in the last two decades have taken place within the built up areas.

At the same time, we have noted the requirement in the guidance that "settlement boundaries should be drawn to facilitate an appropriate level of proportionate growth within the plan period". This implies some easing of the boundary line and certainly would not be achieved by reducing the land area covered by the settlement boundaries. It is also relevant to bear in mind the policy in Herefordshire's Core Strategy which is that settlement developments should take place "within or adjacent to the main built up areas". Any boundary line should be considered as merely an indication of where developments might take place, certainly not as a strict limit of developments around the margins of the area.

The great majority of responses to the questionnaire in 2014 and all subsequent consultations have confirmed that we should adopt settlement boundaries which broadly defined the current built up area, including at least some of the agricultural land which has been included in the historic boundaries. But at the same time, there was no strong support for

significantly extending the amount of land to be included within the boundaries.

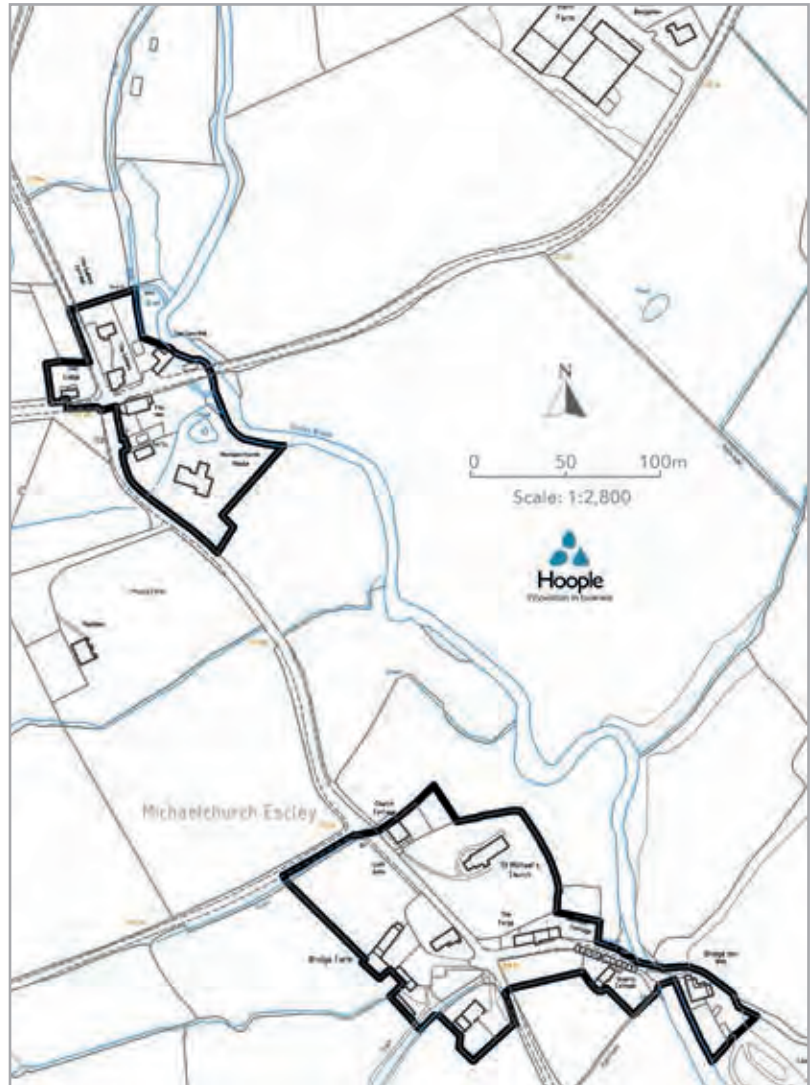
Some comment was made on the proposed settlement boundaries during the formal consultation in 2016, on the basis that a settlement boundary should not include specific parcels of land which are currently used for agricultural purposes, some of which, it is claimed, was previously part of a garden.

The Parish Council discussed the outcome of the various consultations, including the more recent comments, in the light of the advice and guidance we have received from Herefordshire Council. The Parish Council took the view that it is wrong to suggest that agricultural land cannot ever be developed for housing. It is strongly of the view that there should be no reduction of the amount of land within the proposed boundaries by excluding land that is currently used for agriculture. We have therefore confirmed the boundaries for Michaelchurch and adjusted the boundary in Vowchurch to include farm buildings and other land that are properly part of the settlement and exclude only a small area of land with no coherent vehicular access. The result is an increase in the area covered by the settlement boundary for Vowchurch.

The boundaries are shown on the maps on these pages.

Lower Maes-coed

We do not consider that it is necessary to define a settlement boundary for Lower Maes-coed. The designation of a settlement boundary in this location would not reflect the historic development pattern of Lower Maes-coed. This is an area where single dwellings and scattered farmsteads have been built over a number of years. There is no form or pattern to



Michaelchurch Escley

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the settlement and the introduction of a settlement boundary would lead to an uncharacteristic urbanised settlement form.

Therefore future planning applications in this location should be assessed using the policies which are set out in this neighbourhood plan. These policies will help define those areas to be classified as Lower Maes-coed for the purposed of future growth as opposed to areas which are more appropriately considered as part of the wider open countryside.

2 Housing and businesses

The results shown here reflect the survey carried out in 2014.

Kind of housing – a large majority of people support the building of modest sized houses, either 1 to 2 bedroom or 2 to 3 bedrooms in both villages.

This is broadly consistent with the local housing market assessment carried out on behalf of Herefordshire Council in 2013. The report on this work concludes that about two thirds of the market housing required in the Golden Valley should be three bedroom, with most of the rest being smaller homes of one or two bedrooms.²

Type of homes – For Michaelchurch Escley 67% of people thought that new houses should be privately owned. At the same time 56% supported building affordable homes and 56% supported homes which are provided on the basis that they are partly rented and partly owned. For Vowchurch 65% thought that new houses should be privately owned. 47% supported building affordable homes and 59% supported homes that are partly rented and partly owned.

The local housing market assessment carried out on behalf of Herefordshire Council in 2013, referred to above, shows that in the Golden Valley over 75% of homes were privately owned, whilst over 10% were privately rented. Both these figures were higher than the average in the county, perhaps reflecting lower than average levels of social housing renting or ownership. In addition 70% of homes were detached, higher than the average in the county, but reflecting the historic pattern of development that has already been referred to. There is also a high level of second home ownership, at 3% higher than the county average.

Style of homes – 94% of people supported building homes in keeping with existing buildings.

External lighting – 85% of respondents supported having clear limitations on the amount of external lighting in future developments.



Converting redundant buildings – 87% of people supported converting such buildings for local families to live in. 69% supported the further use of such buildings for workshops and small businesses, whilst 48% supported their use for holiday lets.

Small businesses – a majority of respondents supported the development of small businesses (73% workshops, 77% farms and 55% small manufacturing)

This has to be seen against a background in which over 30% of people in the Golden Valley work at home, whilst more have to travel over 10 miles to get to work. Employment in the Golden Valley tends to be concentrated in the construction, health and social work, farming, information and communications and property sectors.

Tourism – less than half of those responding (43%) supported the inclusion of tourist facilities in the neighbourhood plan (57% either opposed it or had no opinion). 56% of people thought that there should be bed and breakfast accommodation and 46% short term holiday lets in any new tourist facilities.

Identification of suitable sites for future developments

We have considered whether there would be benefit in identifying specific sites for future developments. However, sites which might be suitable for development within the settlements are relatively small and dispersed. This is a rather different situation from other areas of Herefordshire where it is possible to designate reasonably large and clearly demarcated areas of land (frequently agricultural land) for future development. Our preference therefore is to identify policies which provide criteria against which planning applications, whether within the village centres, in the small area of Lower Maes-coed or in open countryside, should be assessed.

We are confident that there are small sites in the two village centres and in Lower Maes-coed which would be appropriate for future development and which are not constrained by being in the grounds of listed buildings.

NOTES

¹ Herefordshire Council Guidance Note 20 – *Guide to settlement boundaries* (See www.herefordshire.gov.uk)

² *Herefordshire Local Market Housing Assessment 2012 Update*, November 2013.

Conclusion

The outcome of all our consultations is therefore quite consistent with the policies and expectations of the Core Strategy. In particular sensitive and proportionate development within the two identified settlements and Lower Maes-coed, as well as continuing developments in the wider area, would be welcomed by local residents. There is a strong wish to see some development locally which meets housing needs, in particular those of families with children.

There is strong local support for new commercial developments. Proposals for such developments will therefore be encouraged whether involving the conversion of existing buildings or developments on existing businesses such as farms.

At the same time we have to recognise that our parishes lie within a broader area and will continue to depend on services and facilities in other parishes, in nearby towns and in Hereford itself. These services and facilities will in turn derive support from housing developments in our settlements and the wider parishes.

It is on this basis that we have developed a set of policies for use in assessing future planning applications. These are set out below.

Policies for protecting and enhancing the local environmental

POLICY

1

To protect and enhance the local environment development proposals will have to demonstrate the following:

- that their design and scale reflect the character of the local environment and existing buildings in a way which enhances the natural and historic beauty of the local area;
- that they protect and enhance wildlife sites, listed buildings and ancient monuments, and assets such as stone walls, wildlife sites and commons;
- that they protect and maintain native trees, hedgerows and other important vegetation and do not have an adverse impact on local brooks, streams and rivers.

Justification – This reflects the vision set out above for preserving the beauty of the local environment and the three objectives we have for achieving that vision.

Policies for assessing planning applications for new homes

POLICY

2

Location of future developments in Michaelchurch Escley, Vowchurch and Lower Maes-coed

New housing proposals will be permitted within the defined settlement boundaries for Michaelchurch Escley and Vowchurch and within the small settlement area of Lower Maes-coed. Proposals will be subject to the following criteria:

- they should broadly be for no more than 1 to 3 homes on each site, reflecting the historic building pattern of small developments;
- they should be for in-fill on land around or between existing buildings;
- where possible they could be for the conversion of existing buildings such as stables, barns and workshops;
- schemes should blend in sensitively with the historic pattern of houses.

Justification – This policy reflects the priority given in Herefordshire Council’s Core Strategy for development in rural areas to take place within defined geographical areas. We have consulted on the settlement boundaries and those described here reflect the views of local people. It further reflects the wish to see the development of suitable market homes which are proportionate to the size of the existing community.

No flooding issues arise in relation to Michaelchurch Escley and Lower Maes-coed, whilst in Vowchurch the River Dore to the west of the settlement boundary does not pose a flood threat to the area within the boundary.

POLICY

3

Developments in open countryside

This neighbourhood plan supports the policy set out in Herefordshire Council’s Core Strategy, that new housing development in the countryside should only be permitted when it satisfies one or more of the following:

- it is essential housing for agricultural, forestry or other local worker to live permanently at or near their place of work
- it accompanies and is necessary for the establishment of a new, or growth of an existing rural business
- it replaces an existing dwelling and is no larger than the dwelling to be replaced
- it re-uses an existing rural building
- is rural exception housing in accordance with Policy H2 (that is, it is a small affordable housing scheme to meet a clear local need)
- is of exceptional quality and innovative design
- is a site providing for the needs of travellers

Justification – This policy is restated here from Herefordshire Council’s Core Strategy because it reflects our overall objective which is to preserve the natural beauty of the local environment. This objective also underpins national and Herefordshire strategies (Core Strategy policy RA3) to restrict new housing in open countryside, even though new national planning guidelines make possible the development of redundant barns which meet defined criteria.

Policies for assessing planning applications for new homes continued...

POLICY 4	<p>Nature and scale of new homes</p> <p>New housing proposals will be permitted for small family homes of two and three bedrooms. The accent should be on well designed, modest buildings which are affordable, especially for local people.</p> <p>Justification – The views of local people about the kind of homes that are needed is completely consistent with the findings of the study carried out for Herefordshire Council referred to above. That is, primarily homes with up to 3 bedrooms, as well as some smaller homes being required.</p>
POLICY 5	<p>Housing design criteria</p> <p>Housing proposals will be permitted for buildings which reflect the existing, particularly historic, local building styles in the use of materials such as stone, slate, wood and brick. Proposals will be subject to the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • building proposals should be in keeping with the existing nature of the settlements, providing gardens, with tree screening and blending with the surrounding environment; • proposals for buildings which offer a high degree of energy efficiency will be welcomed as long as they meet the above criteria. <p>Justification – This reflects the objective we have to “ensure that any new development is designed to complement the character of the existing settlements and the wider environment”. Modern suburban bungalows are not considered suitable for these locations.</p>
POLICY 6	<p>Affordable housing</p> <p>Proposals for new homes which are affordable for local people, whether as fully owned, partly owned or rented will be welcomed. This includes schemes which favour local people either as private owners or renters will also be encouraged.</p>
POLICY 7	<p>External lighting and amenity</p> <p>Planning proposals that include external lighting will have to demonstrate that there has been a proper assessment of the need for such lighting and that care has been taken to design appropriate lighting which minimises the impact on neighbours and reduces light pollution and energy consumption. In addition, no new housing development will be permitted if there is an undue impact on the amenity of existing residential premises or if the proposed housing is likely to be impacted by noise or nuisance.</p> <p>Justification – External (and in some cases, internal) light installations can have an adverse impact on neighbours, the local environment and views of the night sky. At the same time well designed lighting can reduce the risk of crime and improve safety. Minimising light pollution is a high priority for local people and this plan. Also new developments should have minimal impact on neighbours.</p>

Policies for other developments

<p>POLICY</p> <p>8</p>	<p>Applications for new commercial developments</p> <p>Proposals for small businesses in the five parishes will be supported where they are consistent with the overall objective of preserving the existing rural character of the area.</p> <p>Justification – Proposals for small businesses in the area will be supported in line with the policies in Herefordshire’s Core Strategy for diversifying the rural economy (RA6) which supports proposals “where they are of an appropriate scale for their location, accessible by a choice of transport modes and of a form which protects and respects the environmental and landscape quality.” It has to be acknowledged that there is limited scope for commercial developments in the two villages and Lower Maes-coed, but some development is possible through the conversion of existing buildings within or close to the settlement boundaries, as well as in the wider parish areas where redundant farm buildings might lend themselves to such developments. It has to be said that any such developments would be made more likely by the implementation of stable and fast broadband connections in the area.</p>
<p>POLICY</p> <p>9</p>	<p>Applications for new tourist developments</p> <p>The development of new facilities in the wider area should be supported where this is appropriate and meets current planning guidelines.</p> <p>Justification – The natural beauty of the area makes it attractive for visitors as a place to enjoy for its own sake and as a base for exploring the Brecon Beacons National Park and attractive local towns such as Hay on Wye. There is already a range of bed and breakfast accommodation and short term holiday lets, including a caravan site at Poston, in Vowchurch. There was qualified support in our survey for new tourist facilities in the area.</p> <p>This would be consistent with the policies in Herefordshire’s Core Strategy which “recognises the contribution that tourism makes to the Herefordshire economy and seeks to ensure that this continues and is enhanced through new developments which are of an appropriate scale, type and location.”</p> <p>Any developments should meet the criteria set out in the policies above, that is, they should fit into the local environment, be consistent with existing building styles and minimise external lighting.</p>

