



Little Birch &
Aconbury
NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2031

March 2019

Little Birch Parish Council and Aconbury Parish Meeting

Prepared by DJN Planning Ltd.

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1. SETTING THE SCENE

Introduction

- 1.1 New planning powers were given to local communities by the Localism Act 2011. These include the ability to prepare Neighbourhood Development Plans, as part of the statutory planning framework for development in the area. When planning applications are made, they must be decided in accordance with this framework unless there are overriding circumstances to the contrary.
- 1.2 Little Birch Parish Council and Aconbury Parish Meeting have agreed to work together to prepare such a Plan for their two parishes, to make use of the new planning powers and help ensure that decisions on future development are guided locally. A Steering Group with representation from both communities has guided work on the draft Plan.

Format of the Plan

- 1.3 The Plan begins by providing a thumbnail sketch of the main features of the Neighbourhood Area (chapter 2). In line with national and County-wide planning policies, the Plan seeks to contribute to sustainable development by addressing social, environmental and economic matters.
- 1.4 The Plan's vision for the future of the Neighbourhood Area up to 2031 is set out in chapter 3, together with more detailed objectives. This chapter sets an overarching policy for the future sustainable development of the Area and explains how development is to be guided.
- 1.5 The Plan then sets out planning policies for the settlements of Little Birch (chapter 4); Aconbury (chapter 5); for economic and social matters (chapter 6); and on the environment (chapter 7). A concluding chapter explains how the Plan will be delivered.
- 1.6 The Plan has been prepared using evidence gathered from a range of sources. Much information has been taken from reports and other documentation prepared by Herefordshire Council for the Local Plan Core Strategy. This has been supplemented by local sources, including a residents' survey in 2016 and an assessment of housing delivery. A summary of the resultant 'evidence base' for the Plan is at Appendix A.

National and local planning policy context

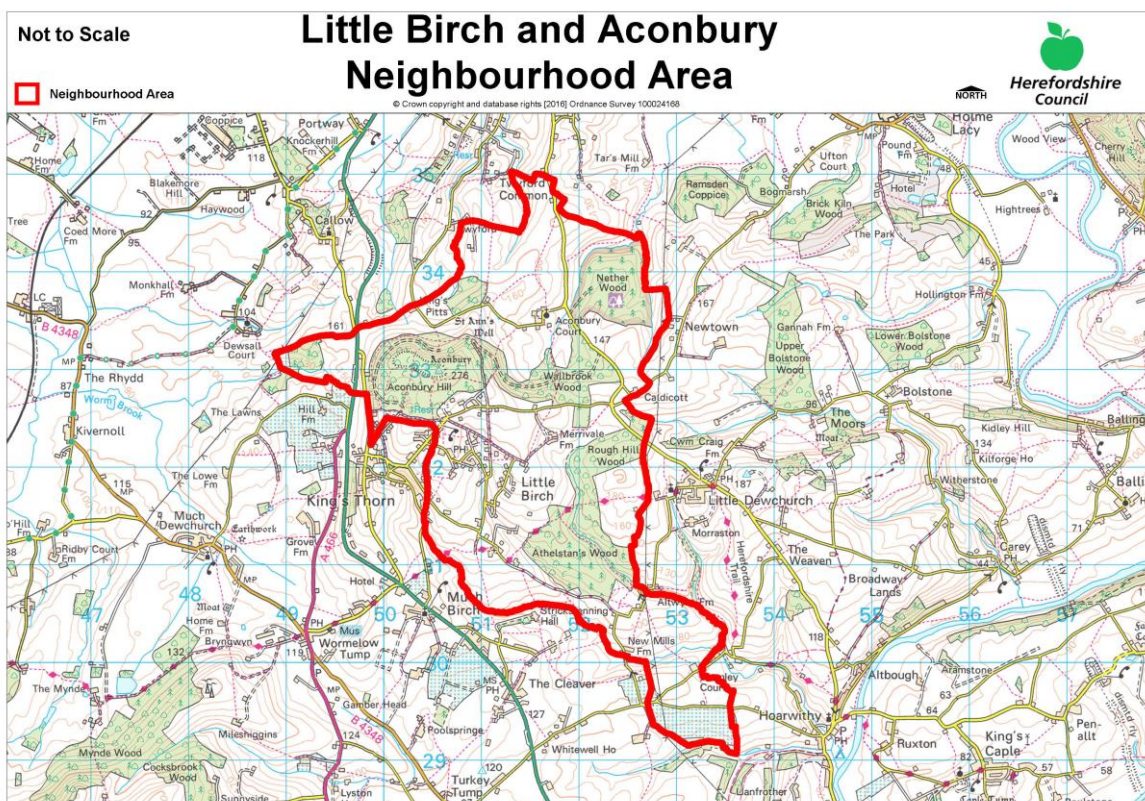
- 1.7 The Plan's policies need to be read alongside existing national and County planning policies which apply in the Neighbourhood Area.
- 1.8 National planning policy is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, which was published in March 2012. Planning Practice Guidance provides more practical advice as to how national policy is to be implemented.
- 1.9 Herefordshire Council is responsible for the production of the Local Plan, which includes strategic planning policies governing development in the County for the period 2011 to 2031.

The first document to be produced as part of the Local Plan is the Core Strategy. This sets out the immediate context for the preparation of Neighbourhood Development Plans, notably housing requirements, as well as many other policies on relevant issues such as employment, community facilities and the environment.


- 1.10 The Neighbourhood Development Plan has been written to complement rather than duplicate these existing policies, which are listed at Appendix B. Reference is made to relevant policies in the text of the Plan.
- 1.11 The Plan, like all development plans, is subject to an assessment process termed Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The Plan must also undergo Habitats Regulations Assessment because of the proximity of the River Wye, which has European- level designation as a Special Area of Conservation. The Assessments are undertaken independently, by Herefordshire Council. A scoping report in April 2017 concluded that further work would be needed as the Plan proceeds. To this end, Assessments of the draft Plan are being published as part of this consultation.
- 1.12 The Plan covers the period 2011 to 2031, coterminous with the Local Plan Core Strategy.

2. THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA

- 2.1 This part of the Plan describes the Neighbourhood Area in terms of the social, economic and environmental aspects which contribute to sustainability and to a sense of place.
- 2.2 The Neighbourhood Area was approved in May 2016. It comprises the two parishes of Aconbury and Little Birch, to the south of Hereford (Plan 1).
- 2.3 The parishes are rural in nature, with development focused at Little Birch village and the hamlet of Aconbury. Little Birch village has a dispersed rather than nucleated character, with services including a village hall, public transport, the Castle Inn public house and St. Mary's church. Aconbury is a much smaller settlement in an isolated position north east of Aconbury Hill, with no nearby services save for a bus route. Away from these settlements, there are scattered groups of houses, wayside dwellings, and farms.



Plan 1: Little Birch and Aconbury Neighbourhood Area

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- 2.4 The main connection to Hereford is via the A49 trunk road which passes through the Area to the west of Aconbury Hill. There is an alternative route to Hereford via Green Crize, and other routes to adjoining villages such as Callow, Little Dewchurch and Hoarwithy, and thence to Ross-on-Wye to the south. The Area is crossed by the Herefordshire Trail and the Violette

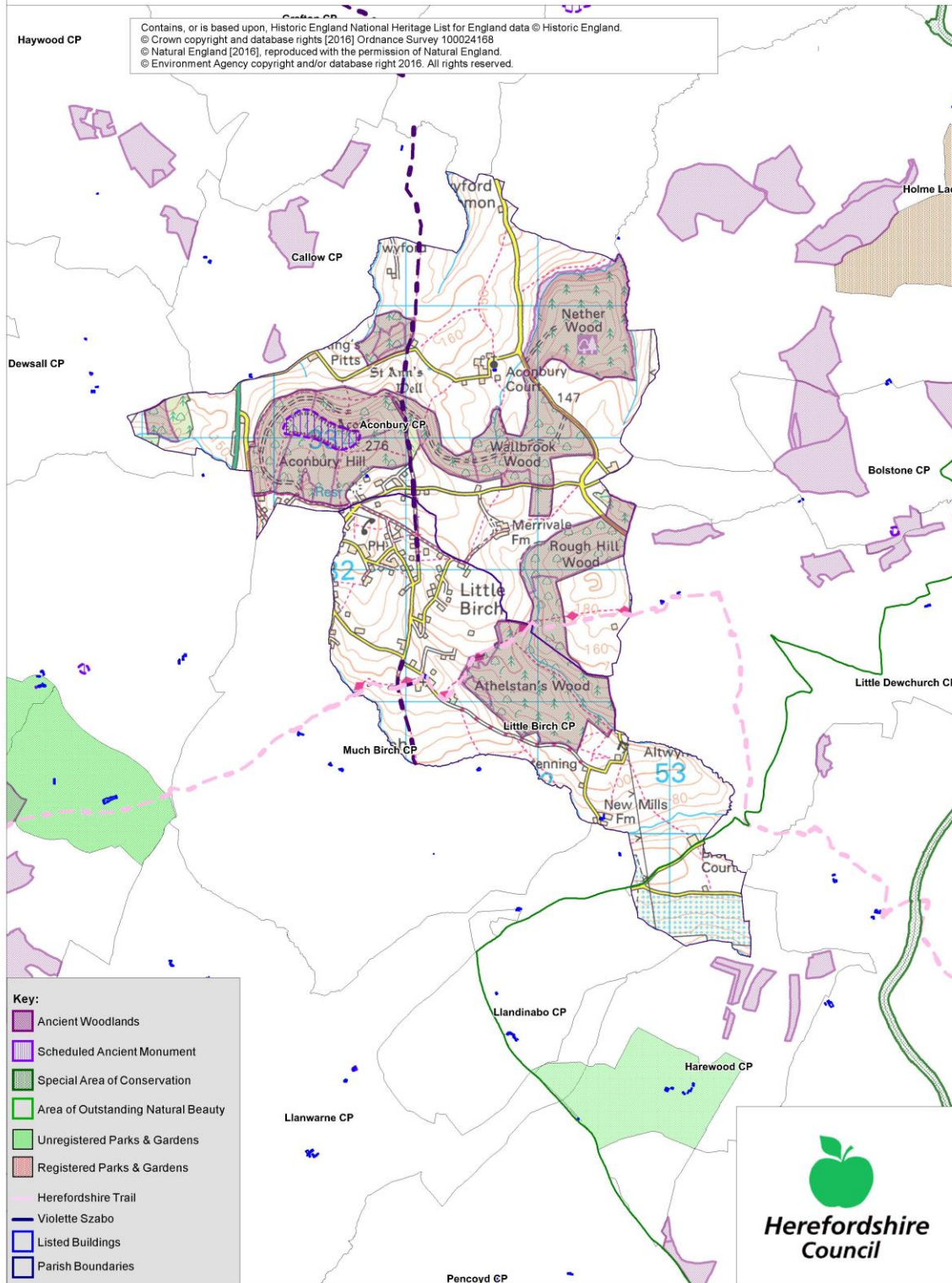
Szabo Trail, long-distance footpaths. There are several green lanes or Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs) in both Little Birch and Aconbury, and numerous other public rights of way.

- 2.5 The population of the Area was 306 in 2011, in 120 households. The age profile of the population is similar to that of Herefordshire as a whole; those aged 0-15 accounted for 17% of the population in 2011 (County figure 17.1%) and those aged 65 and over for 21.6% (21.3% at County level).
- 2.6 The population density in 2011 was 0.3 persons per hectare, reflecting the rural environs and less than that at County (0.8 ppha) or West Midlands (4.3 ppha) levels. In 2011 80% of homes were owner occupied (either outright or with a mortgage), noticeably more than the County average (67.7%).
- 2.7 Local employment is largely linked to agriculture or forestry, or is otherwise provided through the established farm enterprises and local services. There are no industrial estates or other employment areas. The rate of self-employment in 2011, 24.7% of the economically active, was higher than in the County (14.4%) or the West Midlands (8.5%). Journeys to Hereford and Ross on Wye are enabled by public transport.
- 2.8 The landscape of the Area is important in defining local character and distinctiveness. A small part to the south of Bromley Court is in the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a nationally-designated landscape; in the north, the wooded Aconbury Hill dominates the surrounding area. In the County Landscape Character Assessment, the following landscape types are distinguished: Forest Smallholdings and dwellings, in and around Little Birch village; Principal Wooded Hills in the west, at Aconbury Hill; Wooded Estatelands in the centre and north of the Area, and Timbered Plateau Farmlands in the south.
- 2.9 Woodlands are a key component of the landscape, with Nether Wood, Wallbrook Wood, Rough Hill Wood and Athelstan's Wood all notable features in a rolling topography. The main areas of woodland are either ancient or semi-natural woodland/ancient replanted woodland, and so are significant from a biodiversity as well as landscape point of view; they are shown as core areas on Herefordshire Council's Ecological Network Map and are designated as Special Wildlife Sites (now known as Local Wildlife Sites). Small-scale traditional orchards are scattered throughout the Area and are also of biodiversity interest.
- 2.10 Aconbury Hill iron age fort is a scheduled ancient monument and a significant historic feature in the landscape. The hamlet of Aconbury to the north-east of the Hill is also of historic interest as the site of an Augustinian nunnery founded in 1216. The redundant St John the Baptist originally formed the monastic church; it is grade II* listed. At Little Birch, St. Mary's church is also grade II* listed. There are no Conservation Areas.
- 2.11 The Neighbourhood Area is in the catchment of the River Wye which flows to the east. The Wye is a Site of Special Scientific Interest as well as a Special Area of Conservation. Areas liable to flood are limited and associated with the Wriggle Brook.

2.12 Plans 2 and 3 are taken from the Environmental Reports produced by Herefordshire Council as part of the SEA process referred to above. The Plans show the many areas of landscape, biodiversity and heritage interest in the Neighbourhood Area.

Little Birch and Aconbury SEA Map 1

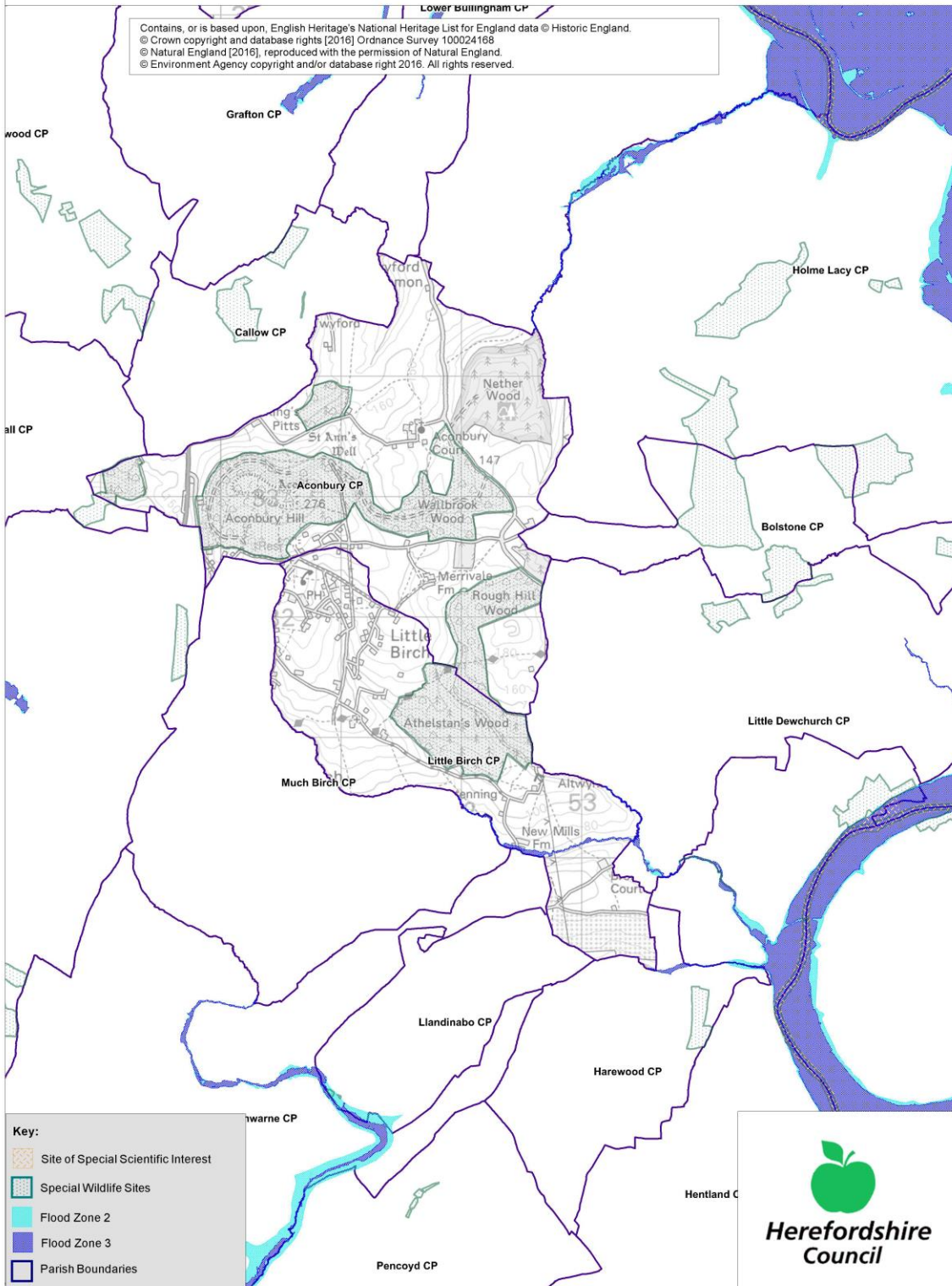
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Plan 2: Little Birch and Aconbury SEA, Landscape, Biodiversity and Heritage.

Little Birch and Aconbury SEA Map 2

Scale: 1:27,500



Plan 3: Little Birch and Aconbury SEA, Biodiversity and Flood Zones.

3. VISION, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

- 3.1 National and local planning policies place the achievement of sustainable development at the heart of the planning system. Sustainable means ensuring that better lives for ourselves do not mean worse lives for future generations. The Plan sets out what this means for the villages and the wider Area.
- 3.2 This chapter defines a vision and supporting objectives for the Plan, together with strategic policies on sustainability and the delivery of development.

Vision and objectives

- 3.3 The Neighbourhood Development Plan has been prepared to deliver the following vision by 2031, as far as is possible through the planning system and in combination with national planning policies and the policies of the Local Plan Core Strategy:

Little Birch and Aconbury will be rural parishes where the natural and historic environments are protected, where all ages can enjoy a good quality of life, where community life thrives and where there are homes, businesses, and facilities to meet the needs of vibrant, rural communities.

- 3.4 The following objectives have been set to help deliver the Vision:

Objective 1: Housing development

- 3.5 The Plan will ensure that new housing contributes to a viable and balanced community by setting planning policies to:

- Demonstrate the delivery of housing to meet the requirements of the Local Plan Core Strategy.
- Encourage new housing to provide a mix of properties to meet community needs.
- Define the extent of the settlements of Little Birch and Aconbury.

Objective 2: Economic and social development

- 3.6 The Plan will provide opportunities for economic and social development by:

- Supporting rural diversification and developments providing employment.
- Working to improve electronic communications.
- Supporting renewable energy.
- Supporting the retention of existing community facilities and new provision.

Objective 3: Protecting the environment

- 3.7 The Plan will ensure that the local environment is protected by:

-
- Providing for the protection, conservation and enhancement of the local natural, historic and built environment in accordance with Local Plan Core Strategy policies.
 - Ensuring that new development respects the character of adjoining development and the wider area.
 - Supporting modern design approaches that make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Sustainable development

3.8 Sustainable development requires planning's environmental, social, and economic aspects to be considered together, as they are mutually dependent. Gains in all three areas are to be sought jointly and simultaneously.

3.9 The Plan plays an active role in guiding development in the Neighbourhood Area to a sustainable solution. Responses to the residents' survey show that there are concerns to deliver new housing to meet local needs, encourage local employment, improve facilities and services, and protect the environment. Opportunities should also be sought to boost sustainable transport provisions in the Area. Individual development proposals will inevitably entail a mix of costs and benefits when assessed against these differing priorities. A balance will be sought in assessing development proposals, considering how different aspects of individual projects contribute overall to sustainability, to best deliver the Plan's vision and objectives.

Policy LBA1: Sustainable development

The following principles will be sought and balanced in considering the overall contribution of development proposals, in terms of their costs and benefits, to the achievement of the sustainable development of Little Birch and Aconbury:

- 1. enabling new housing to meet the needs and requirements of the Herefordshire Local Plan Core Strategy and the communities in Little Birch and Aconbury; and**
- 2. supporting proposals to deliver new and diversified employment opportunities which are compatible and in scale with the rural nature of the area; and**
- 3. wherever possible, retaining community infrastructure and promoting and enabling new provision to meet a range of needs and promote quality of life; and**
- 4. taking all opportunities to protect and enhance the distinctive natural, historic and built environments, with development avoiding undue loss of amenity or visual impact; and**
- 5. fostering sustainable transport provision in new housing, employment and other development, and making use of opportunities to provide or support the provision of new or improved public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure and connectivity.**

Development needs and requirements

- 3.10 The main type of development for which provision needs to be made in the Neighbourhood Development Plan is housing. There are strategic planning requirements to be met, as to both the minimum amount and the location of new housing. The Local Plan Core Strategy requires the Neighbourhood Development Plan to make provision for minimum housing growth of 14%, with no set upper limit. This is equivalent to at least 13 new homes in Little Birch parish and 5 in Aconbury parish between 2011 and 2031.
- 3.11 One dwelling has been built in Aconbury since 2011, and there were planning permissions for six more in Little Birch at April 2018. The position at this date is summarised in Table 1.

Parish	Housing requirement 2011-2031	Dwellings completed	Dwellings with planning permission	Remaining housing requirement
Little Birch	13 dwellings	0	6	7
Aconbury	5 dwellings	1	0	4

Table 1: Housing requirement

- 3.12 The Local Plan Core Strategy requires that new residential development be within or adjacent to the two settlements of Little Birch and Aconbury. This is so that new housing can be situated in relation to existing services and facilities; and to avoid unnecessary, isolated development in the open countryside, in line with national planning policy. As the larger village enjoying several local services and public transport, Little Birch is designated as a “main focus” of housing provision, with the smaller hamlet of Aconbury identified as an “other settlement” where housing is appropriate.
- 3.13 The Neighbourhood Development Plan supports and seeks to implement this approach by defining the extent of the two settlements, making allowance for development on smaller sites and estimating how many houses can be expected to arise as “windfalls”. These are sites which have not been specifically identified as available but which may be brought forward as planning applications.
- 3.14 The Local Plan Core Strategy also allows new housing in rural locations in exceptional circumstances, these being set out in policy RA3. In the Plan Area, such dwellings are mainly expected to arise through the re-use of redundant or disused farm and other buildings. There are several such opportunities throughout the Area, such as a redundant Methodist Chapel in Aconbury parish.
- 3.15 Table 2 confirms that the housing requirements of the Local Plan Core Strategy will be met and exceeded overall. At Little Birch, as well as the known smaller sites, further windfalls are expected to arise. Adoption of the Local Plan Core Strategy in October 2015 changed the planning status of Little Birch from open countryside to “main focus” village, and since that date six individual dwellings have been granted planning permission on garden and other

small plots. Reflecting the positive policies of this Plan which are supportive of organic and infill housing growth at Little Birch, a conservative estimate is made that a further 10 such units will arise up to 2031. No rural area windfalls have occurred since 2011 and this source is not likely to be significant.

- 3.16 At Aconbury, the modest housing requirement is expected to be met by the development of land inside the settlement boundary, together with windfalls within the extensive rural area of the parish.
- 3.17 It is expected that at least 27 dwellings will be delivered across the Neighbourhood Area, exceeding the joint requirement of 18 dwellings.

LITTLE BIRCH	
Local Plan Core Strategy housing requirement	13
Dwellings completed since 2011	0
Dwellings with planning permission, April 2018	6
Smaller site opportunities in settlement, see Appendix C	2
Windfall sites in the settlement, estimated on basis of planning permissions since adoption of Local Plan Core Strategy	10
Estimate for rural windfalls	2
Total housing delivery for Little Birch	20
ACONBURY	
Local Plan Core Strategy housing requirement	5
Dwelling completed since 2011	1
Dwellings with planning permission, April 2018	0
Estimate for windfall sites in the settlement	3
Estimate for rural windfalls	3
Total housing delivery for Aconbury	7
NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA HOUSING REQUIREMENT	18
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Table 2: Housing delivery

- 3.18 Local housing needs must also be considered. There are no up to date surveys of affordable housing requirements in the parishes. The most recent survey, in 2012 for Aconbury parish, found only one household needing affordable housing. Social rented housing was the least favoured form of housing provision in responses to the residents' survey, with shared ownership viewed more favourably. However, comments made to the survey emphasised the need for more housing in the form of lower cost, smaller and starter homes to enable young people and families to stay in the village and help deliver a more balanced demographic. This is less about providing affordable housing as building relatively lower cost properties for sale. Should affordable housing be sought, Local Plan Core Strategy policy H2 makes provision for such schemes on land which would not normally be released for housing, where this is a proven local need.

3.19 The Local Plan Core Strategy recognises the need to plan for a range and mix of house types and sizes which can contribute to balanced communities (policy H3). Housing developments should be informed by and respond positively to this issue, whilst not being over-prescriptive in the case of smaller schemes. Evidence from the Herefordshire Local Housing Market Assessment¹ on the size and type of dwellings required in the Ross Rural Housing Market Area (which includes Little Birch and Aconbury) is set out in Table 3.

House type	Market Housing	Affordable housing
Houses	94.7%	88.8%
Flats	5.3%	11.2%
House size		
1 bedroom	7.4%	21.5%
2 bedroom	24.3%	40.1%
3 bedroom	63.2%	34.5%
4+ bedroom	5.1%	3.9%

Table 3: House types and sizes, Ross Rural Housing Market Area

- 3.20 In practice, housing developments in Little Birch and Aconbury are likely to be for houses, rather than flats, with a need for 2- and 3-bedroom accommodation to reflect both housing market pressures and the locally expressed desire for more affordable open market homes.
- 3.21 Local community needs include new housing to cater for older people, to enable downsizing and so the release of larger property for family occupation. Housing development will be expected to contribute to meeting local housing needs.
- 3.22 Proposals for new businesses and other forms of economic development supporting the diversification of the rural economy are also expected to arise. These could include tourism and home working as well as proposals arising from agriculture and forestry. Suitable schemes which are in scale and character with the rural context will be supported, both in the settlements and the countryside. Proposals for other types of development will be assessed in terms of their locational suitability against the following policy, together with other policies of this Plan and of the Local Plan Core Strategy.

Policy LBA2: Development needs and requirements

The main focus for meeting housing, employment and other development needs and requirements in the Neighbourhood Area will be Little Birch village, followed by Aconbury hamlet. This will be enabled by:

- 1. setting out a definition of the extent of Little Birch village which recognises and protects the distinctive dispersed pattern of development; and**
- 2. defining a settlement boundary for Aconbury; and**

¹ Herefordshire Council, Herefordshire Local Housing Market Assessment – 2012 update, November 2013, tables 72 and 73.

-
- 3. supporting housing, employment and other development in the settlements where this is appropriate in scale and in keeping with the established character.**

Outside the two settlements, proposals for new residential development will need to satisfy the requirements of Local Plan Core Strategy policy RA3 and allied policies.

In all cases, housing proposals should be of a type and size that contribute to meeting the latest assessment of housing needs.

Proposals to generate employment and to support and diversify the rural economy will be supported in the countryside where they are of a scale and nature appropriate to their location and setting.

4. LITTLE BIRCH

Little Birch village

4.1 Little Birch lies towards the north of the parish, on the lower slopes of Aconbury Hill. The pattern of village development has evolved over time and is dispersed rather than nucleated. Dwellings are distributed in the landscape with intervening areas of farmland, open fields, pasture and smallholdings. The settlement pattern is well-described in the County Landscape Character Assessment, where the prevailing “Forest Smallholdings and Dwellings” landscape type is set out as follows:²

“These are intimate, densely settled landscapes characterised by strings of wayside cottages and associated smallholdings. They nestle within a complex matrix of pastoral fields and narrow lanes, ... They primarily owe this character to the clearance, enclosure and subsequent settlement of areas of former woodland and associated small commons. The settlement pattern has developed in a random, opportunistic manner, the corresponding density, scale and ad hoc pattern of both dwellings and lanes being distinctive characteristics today. The associated, usually small, parcels of pasture and pockets of remaining rough ground with heathy/acid grassland vegetation contribute to the scale and are reminders of the origin of these landscapes.”

4.2 The village is grouped along a circular route which is known in various stretches as Pendant Pitch, Newtown Lane, New Road, Mense Lane and Parish Lane (Plan 4). The route also gives access to the village’s facilities, the village hall, the Castle Inn and St. Mary’s Church, and is served by public transport.

4.3 There are various offshoots from this circular route:

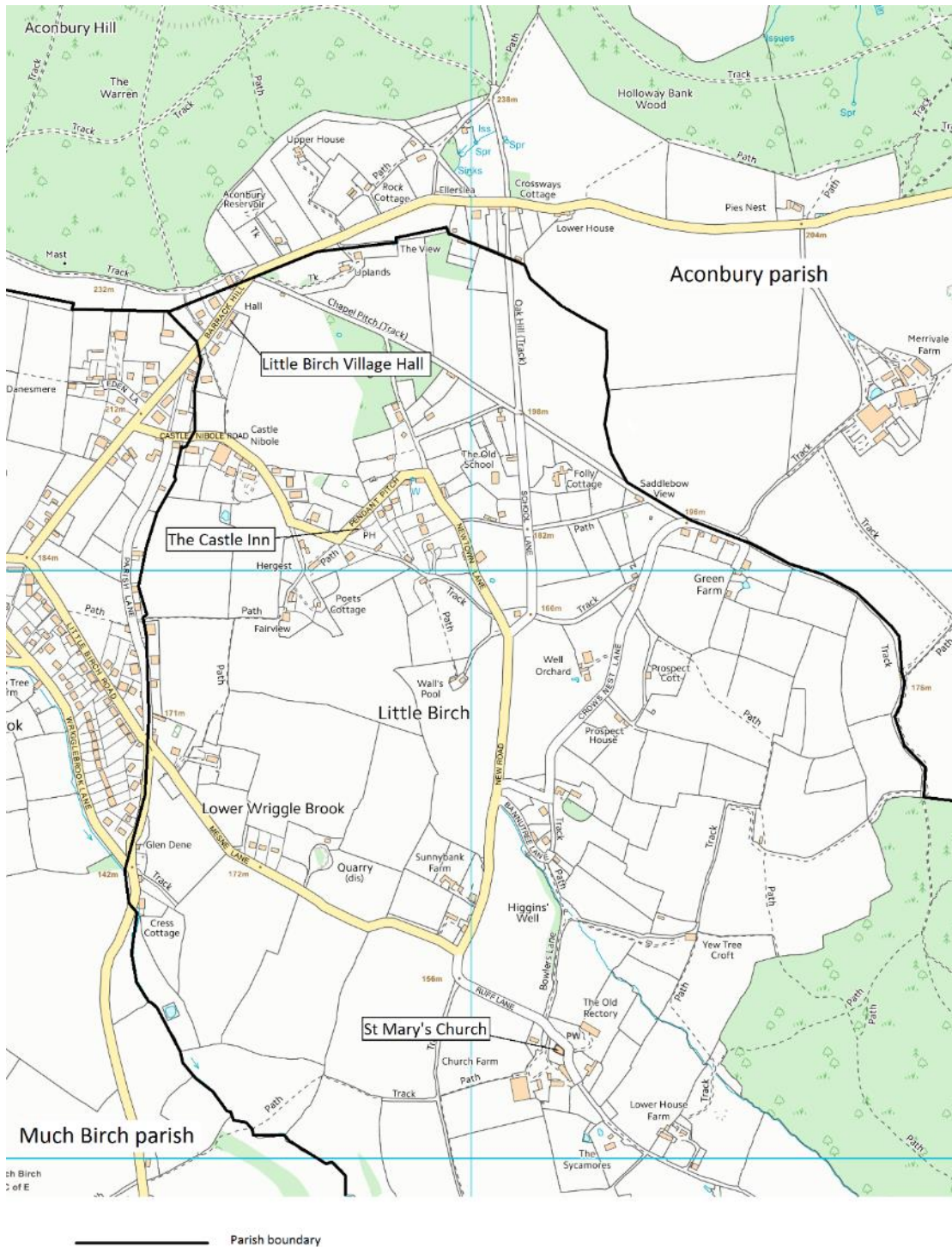
- School Lane, running from New Road uphill towards Chapel Pitch;
- Crows Nest Lane, also running uphill from New Road to Chapel Pitch; and
- Ruff Lane, heading east from the junction of Mense Lane and New Road.

4.4 In addition, the area is crossed by public rights of way in the form of green lanes, tracks and paths.


4.5 Village development has tended to gravitate to the higher land to the north, along Pendant Pitch/Newtown Lane and up to Chapel Pitch. Here, dwelling plots face or front onto a variety of roads, tracks or green lanes. Whilst there are some wayside dwellings, the more usual approach is for houses to be sited irregularly in their (usually generous) plots, set back from the frontage on their own terms and reflecting the constraints and opportunities of the topography. This individualistic approach extends to the age, type and size of dwelling, and many different architectural styles, designs and materials are evident. To the south and east,

² HC, Landscape Character Assessment, Supplementary Planning Guidance, 2004 updated 2009, p. 45.

the settlement pattern becomes more dispersed although the eclectic approach to siting, design, and materials continues.



Plan 4: Little Birch village: settlement pattern and services

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- 4.6 There are significant areas of undeveloped land inside the settlement form. Intermingled with the domestic curtilages there are a myriad of garden areas, smallholdings and paddocks, together with larger fields, such as between Pendant Pitch and Mesne Lane. These areas of undeveloped land in all their variety make a significant contribution to the locally distinctive character of the settlement.
- 4.7 The Neighbourhood Development Plan recognises that a sensitive approach is needed to defining the extent of the settlement and to enabling the delivery of necessary development, if the character of the village is to be sustained. The traditional settlement boundary approach, with its presumption in favour of development on land so enclosed, would not serve these objectives. The local community supports a flexible means of differentiating between settlement and countryside (52% of respondents to the residents' survey), compared to 21% who supported use of a settlement boundary.
- 4.8 The Plan therefore sets out a more nuanced approach which gives scope for the principle of development to be assessed at development management stage, whilst still meeting the requirements of the Local Plan Core Strategy to define the main built-up form of the settlement. The extent of Little Birch settlement is defined in policy LBA3 by reference to the matrix of highways, tracks and lanes which serve areas and clusters of development. This recognises the distinctive dispersed pattern of development and provides a basis for this to be respected in considering development proposals.

Policy LBA3 Little Birch village

The village of Little Birch comprises residential curtilages or other developed plots fronting onto or directly served by lanes and tracks giving vehicular access from:

- **Barrack Hill**
- **Castle Nibole Road**
- **Pendant Pitch**
- **Chapel Pitch between School Lane and Vaughan Lane**
- **Newtown Lane**
- **School Lane**
- **New Road**
- **Crows Nest Lane**
- **Bannutree Lane**
- **Ruff Lane between Bowlers Lane and Lower House Farm to include the Church**
- **Mense Lane, north side, from the junction of New Road**
- **Parish Lane east side.**

Development in Little Birch

- 4.9 Policy LBA4 sets out a criteria-based approach to guide and manage development proposals which may arise within the settlement matrix. It is designed to allow suitable proposals to go

ahead whilst safeguarding the character of the village. Whilst it is anticipated that the majority of new development coming forward in Little Birch through this policy will be for single new homes, the principles of the policy should also be applied in considering proposals for other uses so that development can be accommodated which is in scale and keeping with settlement character.

- 4.10 Policies LBA3 and LBA4 provide the opportunity for windfall development on plots of garden, pasture and rough grazing in and adjacent to the settlement matrix. As set out above, four such dwellings have been granted planning permission since adoption of the Core Strategy confirmed Little Birch’s status as a village to accommodate housing growth. An allowance for 10 further windfalls over the remainder of the plan period is made (Table 2). This approach reflects the preference expressed in responses to the residents’ survey for new homes to be provided as individual new houses within areas of existing dwellings.
- 4.11 An example of such potential windfall capacity is land associated with the dwelling “Maryland” at Pendant Pitch, identified as part of a larger site in Herefordshire Council’s Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA).³ The SHLAA parcel includes an area of traditional orchard listed in the Priority Habitat Inventory⁴ as well as the dwellinghouse itself. Excluding these leaves two smaller areas of land with some potential for windfall development under policy LBA4 should they come forward.
- 4.12 Further opportunities for new dwellings have been identified through the consultations and other work undertaken for the Plan, and by reference to the SHLAA. These potential sites are listed at Appendix C as evidence of the level of interest and opportunity for suitable development.

Policy LBA4 Development in Little Birch

Development proposals for housing and other purposes on land in the village of Little Birch as defined in policy LBA3 will be permitted provided that they:

- 1. are part of a developed area/plot of the village and do not intrude into open countryside, taking into account the size and use of the plot, its relationship to existing development, and the enclosure provided by established natural boundaries; and**
- 2. can be integrated through plot sub-division, rounding-off or consolidation without undue harm to the dispersed settlement pattern; and**
- 3. comprise frontage development and will not result in backland or tandem development; and**

³ HC, Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, Rural Report, 2015.

⁴ The Priority Habitat Inventory is a national database published by Natural England which describes the extent and location of Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 section 41 habitats of principal importance.

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4. will result in dwelling(s) with a curtilage similar in size to those in the immediate vicinity and otherwise respect the character of adjoining development and the wider area; and
 5. do not result in the loss of open spaces, trees and hedgerows which contribute to village character; and
 6. do not unduly affect the amenity of adjoining dwellings and are not adversely affected by the operation of existing uses; and
 7. where practicable provide for new or improved connectivity to public transport provision and community facilities.

5. ACONBURY

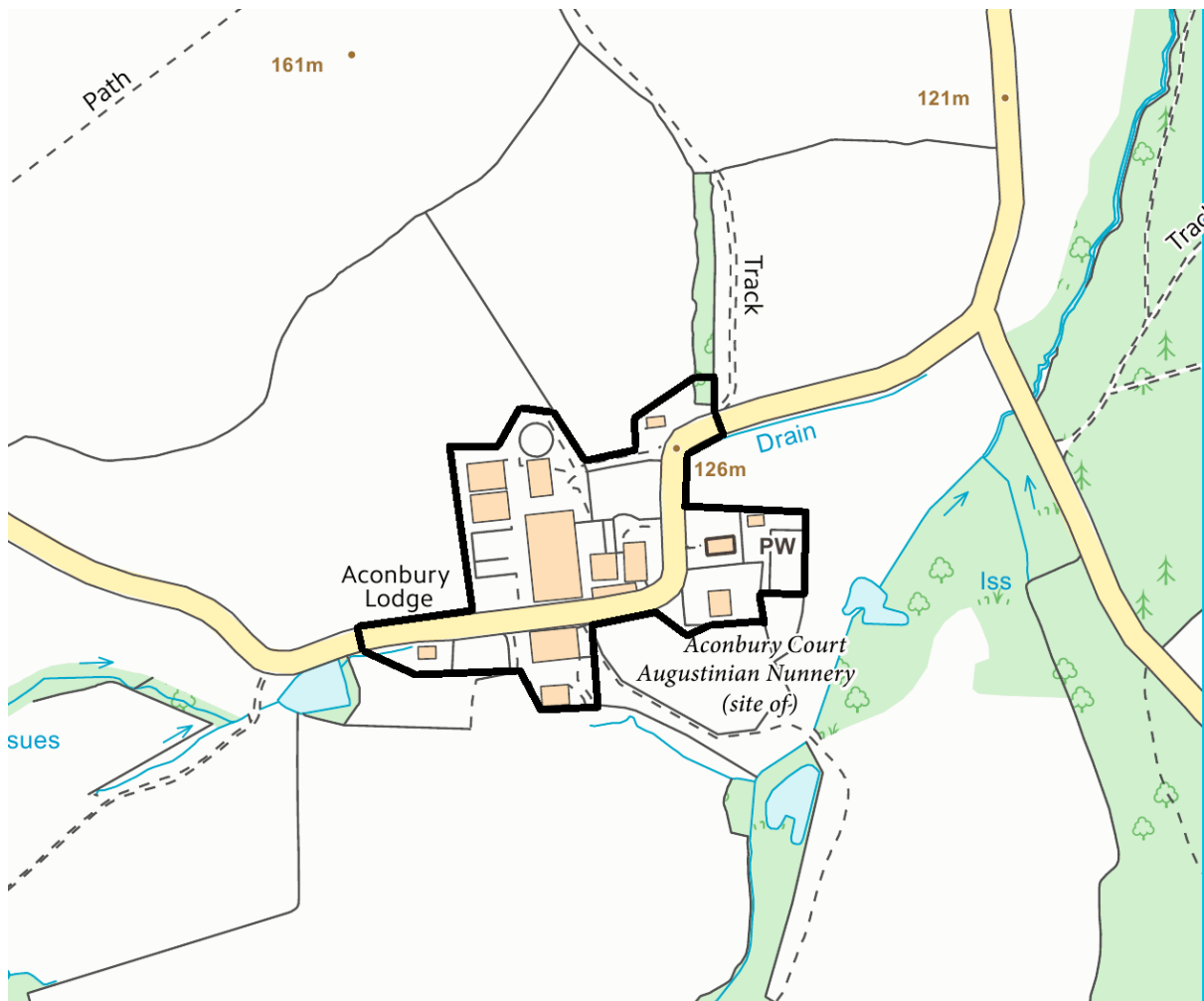
Development in Aconbury


- 5.1 The hamlet of Aconbury nestles in wooded countryside to the north-east of Aconbury Hill. It is part of the Wooded Estatelands landscape character type, as described in the County's Landscape Character Assessment. These are wooded agricultural landscapes of isolated farmsteads, clusters of wayside dwellings and occasional small estate villages, where any new development needs to be carefully sited to protect their visual integrity.
- 5.2 The hamlet conforms to this latter description. It is dominated by the disused and grade II* listed church of St. John the Baptist, now redundant and used as a store; Aconbury Court and a range of functional farm buildings, with a handful of dwellings besides. The buildings are clustered together in an open landscape of fields within the valley, enclosed by woodland on the higher ground. It is remote from services save for bus routes between Newent, Ross-on-Wye and Hereford on the adjacent C1261.
- 5.3 The Landscape Character Assessment seeks the conservation of the visual integrity of estate villages such as Aconbury. The hamlet is a distinct group of buildings in the open countryside. A settlement boundary is defined to delineate the extent of the built form and preserve its visual integrity (Plan 5), whilst enabling modest opportunities for windfall development through policy LBA5. Outside the settlement boundary, it is expected that further housing will arise in accord with Local Plan Core Strategy policy RA3. This is expected to be mainly through the conversion of redundant farm and other buildings

Policy LBA5: Development in Aconbury


A settlement boundary is defined for Aconbury as shown on Plan 5 within which development proposals for housing and other purposes will be permitted provided that they will:

- 1. respect the character of adjoining development and the wider area; and**
- 2. not result in the loss of open spaces, trees and hedgerows which contribute to the character of the hamlet; and**
- 3. not unduly affect the amenity of adjoining dwellings and are not adversely affected by the operation of existing uses; and**
- 4. serve to protect and enhance heritage assets in the hamlet, including the redundant church of St. John the Baptist, and their settings.**



 Settlement boundary

Plan 5: Aconbury settlement boundary

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6. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL

Rural economic development

- 6.1 Locally-based employment includes agriculture, forestry, small businesses and home working, with many residents also working outside the area in Hereford and elsewhere. Respondents to the residents' survey thought that the Plan should mainly encourage agriculture, forestry and related activities. There was also considerable support for a shop/post office and for pubs, restaurants, and cafes. Larger-scale types of employment, such as light industry or manufacturing, were less favoured.
- 6.2 In making provision for jobs and the local economy, survey replies favoured home working, including by building new live/work units; the protection of existing sites from changes of use, and the conversion of existing buildings for business purposes.
- 6.3 The Local Plan Core Strategy recognises the role of the rural economy, with policy RA6 giving support for a wide range of employment uses in the County's rural areas including through the re-use of redundant rural buildings (policy RA5), homeworking (policy E3) and tourism projects (policy E4). Policy E2 safeguards existing employment land and buildings from redevelopment for other purposes.
- 6.4 This Plan supports proposals to generate employment and to diversify the rural economy where they are of a scale and nature which are appropriate to their location and setting (policy LBA2). The planning requirements to safeguard the character of locations and their settings, residential amenity, highway safety, and water quality are set out in policy RA6 of the Local Plan Core Strategy. Within this framework, the following policy recognises the scope for new employment in farming, agricultural diversification, home working, small-scale businesses, and tourism and leisure. Here, proposals which serve to conserve and enhance Aconbury Hill Fort scheduled ancient monument will be welcomed.
- 6.5 The Plan does not identify new employment land. Suitable larger-scale provision in this regard is made in the Local Plan Core Strategy at Hereford and the market towns. The Hereford Enterprise Zone at Rotherwas is six miles to the north, with good access via the A49 trunk road, and is the County's largest area of employment land.
- 6.6 The provision of a village shop and other local services was a significant theme in the residents' survey. Direct provision of such facilities is beyond the scope of the Neighbourhood Development Plan, but it can enable a positive planning framework, so that proposals coming forward in suitable village premises can be readily agreed through the planning stage.

Policy LBA6: Rural economic development

A range of proposals for employment development and rural diversification that comply with policies in the development plan will be supported, including:

- 1. the provision or extension of commercial facilities in Little Birch village, such as a village shop;**
- 2. home working, such as through extending existing dwellings;**
- 3. the re-use of rural buildings for business use, including live work units;**
- 4. the development and diversification of existing farm, forestry and other land-based rural businesses;**
- 5. rural tourism and leisure proposals, including those which seek to improve the understanding of and public access to Aconbury Hill Fort scheduled ancient monument, and to other areas of woodland.**

Infrastructure

- 6.7 The residents' survey highlighted several local services where there were calls for improvement. Many of the matters raised either fall outside the planning system or are already dealt with through policies in the Local Plan Core Strategy.
- 6.8 Areas of concern around highways and transport were road maintenance, safety and excessive traffic speeds, with calls for speed limits to be established and enforced. There were also comments on public transport, recognising its importance to groups in the community and calling for service improvements; for better provision for walkers, cyclists and horseriders; and on the use made of the narrow lanes by heavy goods vehicles.
- 6.9 Local Plan Core Strategy policies SS4 and MT1 set out Herefordshire Council's requirements for traffic management, highway safety and promoting active travel (walking or cycling). Other matters are outside the scope of this Plan; for instance, speed limits are set by Herefordshire Council as highway authority and are enforced by the West Mercia Police and the Roads Safety Partnership. Local working with Herefordshire Council and others will continue, to identify and implement measures to address issues raised where possible. This may include seeking traffic calming and the further introduction of speed limits. Suitable references and commitments are included in section 8 of the Plan. Development proposals which provide for improvements to walking, cycling and public transport will be supported. An example where a modest scheme could be implemented to enhance connectivity to existing facilities is along the A49 between Kings Pitt Road and the C1263. Here a cycle/footway link could provide enhanced and safe access to the existing bus stop, which is situated on the trunk road midway between the two side roads.
- 6.10 The water supply to the Neighbourhood Area is provided by Dwr Cymru Welsh Water or otherwise by private borehole. No issues with the supply network have been identified. There is no public sewerage. Development proposals will need to satisfy Local Plan Core

Strategy policy SD4 in respect of both specifying alternative foul drainage options and supplying the required information on the implications for water quality and the integrity of the River Wye Special Area of Conservation.

- 6.11 Local Plan Core Strategy Policy SD3 deals with sustainable water management and water resources and sets out a range of requirements with regard to flood risk, sustainable drainage, and water conservation and efficiency measures to be included in new developments.
- 6.12 Responses to the residents' survey emphasised that improvements to broadband services and mobile phone reception would encourage new businesses to locate in the parish, as well as allowing effective home working. Broadband services are subject to a County-wide investment programme under the Fastershire project, with work in the Plan Area already underway. Such infrastructure improvements will support the Plan's policy on local business and economic activity, including enabling working from home, as well as many other aspects of village and community life, and are welcomed for these reasons. New residential and business development should be future-proofed by making advance provision for connectivity, such as ducting (included within policy LBA11 below). Communications infrastructure needing planning permission should be in keeping with the rural environment and character of the villages and countryside.

Policy LBA7: Infrastructure

Proposals for the provision of communications and broadband infrastructure will be supported by ensuring that development for communications and broadband services is well-designed and sited, where this is consistent with technical and operational requirements and the delivery of service improvements.

Proposals which provide for the provision or improvement of walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure will be supported wherever feasible and appropriate, particularly where they deliver enhanced connectivity to existing facilities. A cycle/footway link within the Neighbourhood Area alongside the A49 between the Kings Pitt Road and the C1263 at Cross in Hand Farm, or similar facility as appropriate, will provide much-needed enhanced access to the existing bus stop on the trunk road at this location.

Renewable energy

- 6.13 National planning policy and guidance supports positively expressed and balanced policies in Neighbourhood Development Plans that allow the need for renewable or low carbon energy to be considered alongside environmental factors, cumulative impacts and the implications for heritage assets and local amenity. Local Plan Core Strategy policy SD2 on renewable and low carbon energy generation includes protection for amenity and the natural and historic environment. In the Plan area, this will include the Wye Valley AONB.
- 6.14 The residents' survey canvassed opinion about the scope for renewable energy schemes. Support was shown for solar power and ground sources above biomass and wind turbines.

Comments generally supported schemes for renewable energy where they were appropriate in scale and in location.

- 6.15 Considering the results of the survey consultation and the relative lack of backing for wind energy from the local community, the Plan does not identify sites or areas as suitable for wind energy development. However, in supplementing the County-level approach reference is made below to highway safety and capacity as another issue to be considered, because of the narrowness of many of the rural lanes; and to cumulative impacts. Support is given for a community-led scheme. Renewable energy micro-generation, through for instance photovoltaic panels, should be included in new development as part of the overall approach to a scheme's sustainability (see policy LBA11).

Policy LBA8: Renewable energy

Proposals for renewable energy generation will be supported where it is shown that the individual and cumulative impacts on the natural and historic environment, amenity and highway safety and capacity are or can be made acceptable, including the need to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Wye Valley AONB.

Community-led renewable energy proposals where benefits can be demonstrated are encouraged.

Community facilities

- 6.16 Local community facilities are well-regarded, and the residents' survey identified the village hall, bus services and the Castle Inn as of notable importance. The Castle Inn is listed on Herefordshire Council's List of Assets of Community Value. This and other local facilities will be retained, and enhancements and proposals for new provision supported, all in line with Local Plan Core Strategy policy SC1. This provides that existing facilities will be retained unless an equivalent alternative is available, or that the facility is no longer required, viable or fit for purpose. Where appropriate, it must have been vacant and marketed for community use without success.
- 6.17 Local Plan Core Strategy policy ID1 proposes a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of infrastructure to support development and sustainable communities. This is to be undertaken by securing developer contributions through legal section 106 agreements and a future Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The CIL can be used to fund a wide range of infrastructure needed to support the development of the area. This may be new provision or improvements to the capacity of existing infrastructure. Section 106 agreements will still be used for site-specific matters where necessary to make individual schemes acceptable in planning terms.
- 6.18 When the CIL is operational and the Neighbourhood Development Plan made, 25% of CIL funds arising in the Area will be transferred to the Parish Council/Parish Meeting. This neighbourhood portion will then be available to support the development of the Area by

funding suitable community infrastructure. The residents' survey has highlighted play facilities for children, improvements to the village hall, a local shop/Post Office and café, and more provision for tourism as requirements in this regard.

Policy LBA9: Community facilities

Proposals for the enhancement of community facilities, and for new provision in and adjacent to Little Birch village which is accessible by a choice of transport modes, will be supported. Proposals should take account of the potential for the co-location of services in achieving viability. Support will be given to diversification proposals where these can be shown to enable viability. Existing social and community facilities at Little Birch village hall, the Castle Inn and St. Mary's Church will be retained in accordance with Local Plan Core Strategy policy SC1.

7. ENVIRONMENT

Protecting the local environment

- 7.1 The Neighbourhood Area includes a wide range of natural environment and historic features. Many of these are identified under national legislation and so enjoy statutory protection:
- part of the Wye Valley AONB, in the south of the Area;
 - Aconbury Hill Fort, a scheduled ancient monument; and
 - listed buildings.
- 7.2 The Neighbourhood Area is within the catchment of the River Wye, with local watercourses Tar's Brook and Wriggle Brook joining the Wye at Holme Lacy and Hoarwithy respectively. As noted earlier, the River Wye is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a European-level Special Area of Conservation. Local Plan Core Strategy policy SD4 requires that development does not undermine the achievement of water quality targets for the County's rivers, particularly through the treatment of wastewater.
- 7.3 The principal areas of woodland at Aconbury Hill, Wallbrook Wood, Rough Hill Wood and Athelstan's Wood are locally designated Local Wildlife Sites. In turn, these and other areas of woodland are part of a varied agricultural landscape of orchards, hedged fields and scattered farmsteads. Apart from the limited area within the AONB, the landscape is not formally designated, but is valued nonetheless. The undulating topography offers a changing sequence of views, from open vistas on the higher ground to more secluded scenes within the valleys and gives a setting for Little Birch village and the hamlet of Aconbury. Overall, the Area's natural environment and its historic assets combine to produce a locally distinctive environment.
- 7.4 The Local Plan Core Strategy includes policies to protect landscape and townscape (policy LD1), biodiversity and geodiversity (policy LD2), green infrastructure (policy LD3), and the historic environment and heritage assets (policy LD4). These policies, together with national policy and guidance, give an overall framework for environmental protection which is proportionate to the status and significance of the features involved. They do not need to be repeated here but are given local focus in the following policy.
- 7.5 Local consultations including the residents' survey emphasised the importance of new development being in keeping with its surroundings and of protecting views and vistas from local vantage points such as Aconbury Hill and the highways and byways. These include views of Marcle Ridge, May Hill, the Malverns, the Forest of Dean, Ross-on-Wye, the Monmouth Hills, the Golden Valley, Weobley Hills and Credenhill. A notable example is the view looking south from Barrack Hill opposite the former Methodist Chapel across open countryside to May Hill. Features such as Higgins Well and the Holy Thorn at Little Birch, and green lanes in both parishes, were identified as local assets and should be retained as they contribute to local distinctiveness.

Policy LBA10: Protecting the local environment

Proposals should demonstrate that they protect, conserve and enhance the local natural, historic and built environment in accordance with the principles in Local Plan Core Strategy policies LD1 to LD4. This includes the following, as is relevant to the proposal:

1. giving the highest priority to conserving and enhancing the landscape, natural beauty and wildlife of the Wye Valley AONB;
2. ensuring that development within the catchment of the River Wye avoids adverse effects on the River Wye Special Area of Conservation / Site of Special Scientific Interest;
3. protecting, conserving and where possible enhancing the Aconbury Hill Fort Scheduled Ancient Monument and listed buildings in a manner appropriate to their significance; and
4. conserving, restoring and enhancing sites and habitats of local biodiversity interest, including Local Wildlife Sites, other woodland, veteran trees, traditional orchards and watercourses, in accordance with their status and taking account of their contribution to the coherence of the ecological network and as green infrastructure. Substantial harm to or loss of irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland should be wholly exceptional;
5. supporting appropriate new tree planting both in woodland areas and elsewhere including as part of landscaping schemes submitted with development proposals; and
6. ensuring that proposals respect the character of the landscape and townscape including views, trees and hedgerows and local features of interest; take into account the amenity value of green lanes; and serve to protect and enhance the setting of the settlements of Little Birch and Aconbury.

Building design

- 7.6 A further aspect of local distinctiveness is the sense of place provided by the design of individual buildings. Local Plan Core Strategy policy SD1 deals with sustainable design and energy efficiency and details a wide range of factors to be assessed in this respect; and policy SD3 addresses sustainable water management and water resources. For this Plan, emphasis is given to those aspects of importance to the local community, particularly securing a locally distinctive design approach in individual developments to support the existing character of the settlements. A further aspect of local concern is to secure environmentally sustainable development, and in this respect a dwelling has recently been completed in Aconbury parish which has been built to Passivhaus standards.
- 7.7 At Little Birch, the dispersed settlement pattern is a particular feature of the village and is safeguarded by policy LBA4. Most of the original modest wayside cottages have been extended, with new dwellings tending to the more substantial. Most houses are two-storey detached properties, with some bungalows at Pendant Pitch. Many different architectural styles, designs and materials are evident. This existing individualistic approach to design

offers considerable opportunity for imaginative and innovative designs which add to the overall character of the village, whilst respecting surrounding development. As well as aspects of physical appearance, this also includes designs which elect to deliver enhanced levels of energy efficiency and sustainability, such as Passivhaus buildings. It is emphasised that this is without prejudice to proposals which meet current building regulations.

- 7.8 In assessing proposals, an aspect of concern is external lighting. This should be kept to a minimum and be designed to avoid light pollution, so as to help ensure the protection of dark skies, an important aspect of the rural character and local distinctiveness of the parishes.

Policy LBA11: Building design

Development proposals should:

- 1. respect the character of adjoining development and the wider area by virtue of the siting of buildings on plots, scale, height, massing, architectural detailing and the choice of materials; and**
- 2. incorporate relevant sustainability measures to include building orientation and design, energy and water conservation, the use of sustainable construction methods and materials, and provision for the recycling of waste, cycle storage, communications and broadband technologies, and the generation of renewable energy; and**
- 3. Where external lighting is proposed, ensure it is appropriate to its purpose and avoid adverse amenity and environmental impacts occurring through light spillage; and**
- 4. retain and incorporate existing site features of amenity and biodiversity value, such as trees, ponds and hedgerows, as far as practicable; and**
- 5. provide for new landscaping to integrate new buildings within their surroundings and to support the green infrastructure of the area.**

Modern design approaches which take an innovative approach, including to energy efficiency and sustainability, will be welcomed where they make a positive contribution to the character of the area and contribute to local distinctiveness.

8. DELIVERING THE PLAN

8.1 The Plan is a long-term planning document, which will be implemented in the period up to 2031 primarily via decisions on planning applications, but also by the actions and investments of other agencies and parties. Little Birch Parish Council and Aconbury Parish Meeting will seek to implement the objectives of the Plan as follows in delivering the sustainable development of the Neighbourhood Area.

Housing development

- Working with Herefordshire Council, landowners, developers, and the community to secure housing growth.
- This includes seeking decisions in favour of housing development which meets the Plan's housing policies, and against proposals which would conflict with the Plan, including in respect of the setting of Little Birch and Aconbury and the wider countryside.

Economic and social development and infrastructure

- Working with businesses to improve local employment opportunities in line with the Plan.
- Supporting improvements to communications infrastructure advanced by partnerships and network operators.
- Working with Herefordshire Council and Balfour Beatty Living Places to improve all aspects of transportation, including sustainable provisions and the implementation of the lengthsman scheme.
- Working with Herefordshire Council, West Mercia Police and the Safer Roads Partnership to address issues of road safety and excessive traffic speed, with reference to the views of the local community set out in responses to the residents' survey.
- Supporting proposals for renewable energy and encouraging community-led initiatives.
- Working with Herefordshire Council and local community and voluntary organisations to protect, retain and enhance local facilities.
- Using Community Infrastructure Levy funds to support the development of the area.

Environment

- Working with Herefordshire Council to secure decisions on planning applications in accordance with the Plan so as to protect and enhance landscape character, biodiversity and heritage assets, and to deliver sustainable building design which respects local distinctiveness.

APPENDIX A: EVIDENCE BASE

A.1 The following planning policy documents, reports, consultation evidence and other survey material have been used in drawing up the draft Plan.

HC = Herefordshire Council

National level evidence

National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance, Department for Communities and Local Government.

Census 2011 at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census>

National Character Area profiles, 104: South Herefordshire and Over Severn, 2014, Natural England.

River Wye SAC, Nutrient Management Plan, Evidence base and options appraisal, Action Plan, 2014, Environment Agency and Natural England.

Environment Agency, Flood Map for Planning.

Historic England, National Heritage List for England.

Natural England, MAGIC website at <http://www.magic.gov.uk/magicmap.aspx>

County level evidence

Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan, 2007, HC.

Landscape Character Assessment, Supplementary Planning Guidance, 2004 updated 2009, HC.

Green Infrastructure Strategy, 2010, HC.

Herefordshire Ecological Network Map, 2013, HC.

Herefordshire Local Housing Market Assessment 2012 update, 2013, HC.

Herefordshire Local Plan, Core Strategy 2011-2031, 2015, HC.

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, Rural Report, Assessment of land with housing potential – Kingsthorpe, 2015, HC (includes sites in Little Birch parish).

Parish and local level evidence

Local Housing Needs Survey for Aconbury parish, 2012, HC Strategic Intelligence Team.

Strategic Environmental Assessment, Scoping Report, 2015, HC.

Reports by DJN Planning Limited for NDP Steering Group:

- Evidence base and strategic planning policy review, 2016
- Resident's questionnaire survey, Results report and comment listings, 2016
- Housing delivery, 2017.

Residential commitments and completions data for Little Birch and Aconbury, 2017, HC.

APPENDIX B: NATIONAL AND LOCAL PLANNING POLICIES

B.1 A number of planning policies apply to the Neighbourhood Area, courtesy of the National Planning Policy Framework and County-level plans. The principal documents and their provisions are summarised below.

National Planning Policy Framework

B.2 The Framework sets out national policy statements on the full range of planning matters, including both development and environmental protection. Relevant chapters are:

- Supporting a prosperous rural economy (Chapter 3)
- Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes (6)
- Requiring good design (7)
- Promoting healthy communities (8)
- Meeting the challenge of flooding (10)
- Conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment (11,12)

B.3 The Framework is supported by Planning Practice Guidance which sets out more detail on how the national policies should be implemented.

Herefordshire Local Plan, Core Strategy 2011-2031, 2015

B.4 This sets out a County-level spatial strategy and policies on a wide range of planning matters, with the following of particular relevance and importance to the Neighbourhood Development Plan:

- SS1 Presumption in favour of sustainable development
- SS4 Movement and transportation
- RA1 Rural housing distribution
- RA2 Housing in settlements outside Hereford and the market towns
- RA3 Herefordshire's countryside
- RA4 Agricultural, forestry and rural enterprise dwellings
- RA5 Re-use of rural buildings
- RA6 Rural economy
- H1 Affordable housing
- H2 Rural exception sites
- H3 Ensuring an appropriate range and mix of housing
- SC1 Social and community facilities
- OS1 Requirement for open space, sports and recreational facilities
- MT1 Traffic management, highway safety and promoting active travel
- E3 Home working
- E4 Tourism
- LD1 Landscape and townscape

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- LD2 Biodiversity and geodiversity
 - LD3 Green infrastructure
 - LD4 Historic environment and heritage assets
 - SD1 Sustainable design and energy efficiency
 - SD2 Renewable and low carbon energy generation
 - SD3 Sustainable water management and water resources
 - SD4 Wastewater treatment and river water quality
 - ID1 Infrastructure delivery

APPENDIX C: SMALL SITES IN LITTLE BIRCH

C.1 The following site opportunities in the village have been identified, either through notification to the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) or during the process of preparing the Plan. They are known to be available for residential development in the period covered by the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Site address	Source	Estimated capacity (no. of dwellings)
Land adjacent to Daneswood	SHLAA/NDP process	1
Land adjacent to Prospect Cottage	Planning application/NDP process	1