

WICKHAMBROOK

Site Masterplanning studies

REPORT | October 2023



Quality information

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1	17/12/2022	Review, research, site visit	Giuseppe Verdone	Associate Urban Designer

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Introduction

01



01. INTRODUCTION

Through the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' Neighbourhood Planning Programme led by Locality, AECOM was commissioned to provide design support to Wickhambrook Parish Council. The support is intended to provide design guidance and masterplanning for a possible development site.

01.1 Purpose of this document

This report presents design studies for a mixed use site being allocated for development in the emerging West Suffolk Local Plan (Regulation 18) Preferred Options (May 2022).

The report has been prepared to support emerging Neighbourhood Plan policies that will guide the assessment of future development proposals on the site.

The objective of this report is to advise on the key placemaking principles, illustrating options for the site allocated.

The design studies are high level and illustrative, prepared to demonstrate how the design principles that the Parish Council wishes to promote could be applied on the sites. We have not undertaken technical studies on topics such as ground conditions, traffic and drainage (although AECOM specialists have inputted into design development). It is expected that full co-design exercises are undertaken the applicant. This report is just a step in that direction, enabling stakeholders to progress from an informed position.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF; 2021, paragraph 127) states that "Neighbourhood planning groups can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development, both through their own plans and by engaging in the production of design policy, guidance and codes by local planning authorities and developers."

The stages of production for this document are outlined here:

1
— **Site visit and analysis.**

2
— **Develop design options**

3
— **Feedback period.**

4
— **Address feedback.**

5
— **Final review.**

6
— **Submission of a final report.**

01.2 Wickhambrook

Wickhambrook is located in West Suffolk in eastern England. The parish is a historically significant survival of a Suffolk 'gathered hamlet and Green settlement' which has Anglo-Saxon heritage. Wickhambrook is unique to England as an ancient settlement, with nine 'Greens' or commons and small but separate hamlets, with clusters of old buildings, some noted in the Domesday Book.

The 'Greens' are Ashfield, Attleton, Baxter's, Coltsfoot, Farley, Genesis, Meeting, Moor and Nunnery, with associated hamlets Boyden End, Malting End and Park Gate and are spread over 6.5 square miles.

The village was first mentioned in the Domesday Book as Wicham, later known as Wickham in Anglo-Saxon times. The historic heart of the village is located on Church Lane, which is a designated conservation area and contains architectural and historical value, including the ancient Parish Church of All Saints and several listed buildings.

Within the parish there are 56 listed properties, including seven halls (Aldersfield, Badmondfield, Butlers, Clopton, Giffords and Old High), spread evenly across the village, with small groupings in and around the centre of the 'Greens'. Additionally there are six scheduled monuments in and around the Neighbourhood Area.

The majority of the land within the Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Area is classified by the Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment as 'undulating ancient farmland', with a smaller area of 'rolling valley farmland'.

Wickhambrook is very rural in character, the nearest town is Newmarket, located around 10 miles north of the village. The landscape features long views across rolling farmland and open fields.

The main settlement area of Wickhambrook lies between the B1063, Cemetery Road and Nunnery Green. The village amenities such as the doctor's surgery, school and village shop are located here.

The village has an agricultural heritage and there are several examples of large 15th century farmhouses remaining in Wickhambrook which demonstrate the success of its historic agricultural industry.

Today Wickhambrook is primarily residential in use. More recent developments to the parish have occurred near to, or within, the main settlement area where the amenities are concentrated.



Figure 01: Detached house in one of Wickhambrook's hamlets in the village's rural setting.



Figure 02: Map showing Wickhambrook within its wider context

01.3 The site

Land west of Bunters Road is proposed as a preferred site for mixed use development in Wickhambrook providing an indicative capacity of 40 dwellings, with the opportunity for community facilities or retail and/or employment to be explored and determined through a site development brief.

The site is located to the west of Wickhambrook and is part of a large arable field of about 2.85 hectares. To the west lies Claydon's agricultural business site and to the east is Bunters Road, screened by mature hedgerows.

The site was included in the emerging Local Plan preferred options consultation (see 01.4 below), with the following citation: "One new site is proposed as a preferred sites for mixed use development in Wickhambrook providing an indicative capacity of 40 dwellings, with the opportunity for community facilities or retail and/or employment to be explored and determined through a site development brief."



Figure 03: View north of the site from Bunters Road.



Figure 04: View across the site from east to west on Bunters Road.



Figure 05: View south of the site from Bunters Road.



Bunters Rd B1063

Cemetery Rd




Thorns Cor


1

2

3

KEY

- Site boundary 
- Buildings 
- Main roads 

 N

0m 1km 2km

Figure 06: Land west of Bunters Road map.

01.4 Policy context

As the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 126) notes, “good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities”.

National and local policy documents can provide valuable guidance on bringing about good design and the benefits accompanying it. Some are there to ensure adequate planning regulations are in place to ensure development is both fit for purpose and able to build sustainable, thriving communities. Other documents are more technical and offer specific design guidance which can inform design codes and masterplanning activities.

Developers should refer to these key documents when planning future development in Wickhambrook. The following documents at a national level have informed the Wickhambrook Design Guidance and Codes report and the :

2021 National Model Design Code DLUHC

This report provides detailed guidance on the production of design codes, guides and policies to promote successful design. It expands on 10 characteristics of good design set out in the National Design Guide. This guide should be used as reference for new development.

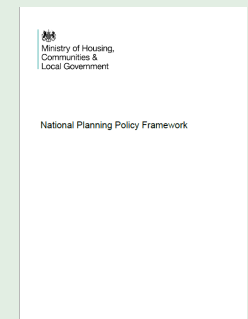
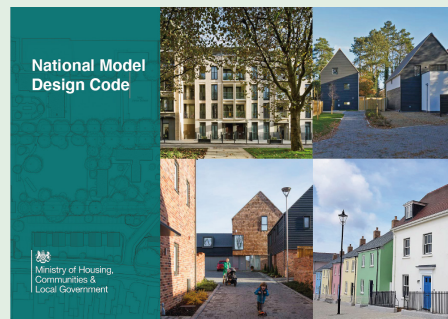
2020 - Building for a Healthy Life Homes England

Building for a Healthy Life (BHL) is the new (2020) name for Building for Life, the government-endorsed industry standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods. The new name reflects the crucial role that the built environment has in promoting wellbeing.

The BHL toolkit sets out principles to help guide discussions on planning applications and to help local planning authorities to assess the quality of proposed (and completed) developments, but can also provide useful prompts and questions for planning applicants to consider during the different stages of the design process.

2021 - National Planning Policy Framework DLUHC

Development needs to consider national level planning policy guidance as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG). In particular, NPPF Chapter 12: Achieving well-designed places stresses the creation of high-quality buildings and places.



2019 - National Design Guide

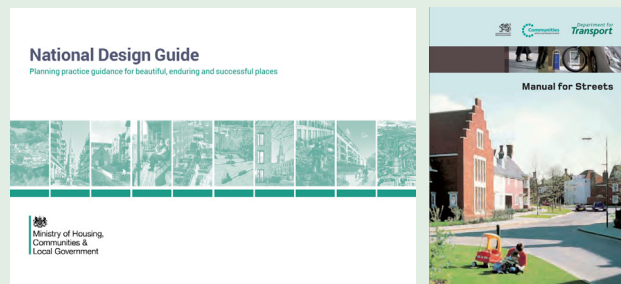
DLUHC

The National Design Guide (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2019) illustrates how well-designed places that are beautiful, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice.

2007 - Manual for Streets

Department for Transport

Development is expected to respond positively to the Manual for Streets, the Government's guidance on how to design, construct, adopt and maintain new and existing residential streets. It promotes streets and wider development that avoid car dominated layouts and promote active travel.



01.4.1 Local planning policy context

Local planning policy can provide design guidance that is tailored to the context of the development and supported by analysis that is taken directly from the area. Therefore, it is vital local policy is considered when developing in Wickhambrook.

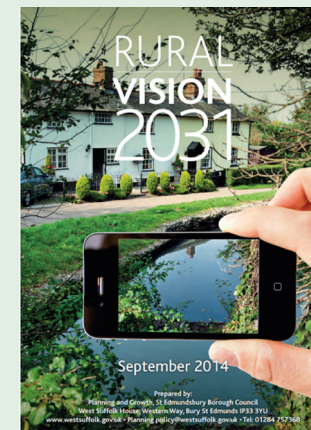
2022 - West Suffolk Local Plan

The West Suffolk Local Plan, when complete, will set out the long term planning and land use policies for West Suffolk. The Preferred Options consultation, including the site, took place in June and July 2022 but the Plan is not expected to be adopted until 2025.

2014 - Rural Vision 2031

Part of St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Local Plan

The Rural Vision 2031 provides a framework for managing the pressures and opportunities for growth in rural St Edmundsbury up to 2031. Within the vision Wickhambrook is identified as a 'local service centre' and there are policies and guidance relating to the village.



Masterplanning
options

02



02. MASTERPLANNING OPTIONS

This section outlines the existing context of Land west of Bunters Road and its physical features. This analysis has informed the options study for the site development.

02.1 Site analysis

Landscape & topography

The site is a large greenfield used for agriculture. It is framed by mature hedgerows on three sides: along Bunters Road and to the north and south boundaries. The topography is largely flat, as is the surrounding rural landscape which is mostly comprised of managed agricultural fields, predominantly arable in use.

Movement & access

The site is framed on its north side by a modern access road off Bunters Road, leading to an agricultural machinery business adjacent to Gaines Hall, a grade II listed buildings.

The site's eastern boundary is formed by the B1063, Bunters Road, while its western

side will be framed by the woodland and hedgerows buffer of the consented Assembly Building.

Currently, the site has three access points all from Bunters road respectively, to the north, centre, and south of the site's eastern boundary.

Land use & facilities

The surrounding built form is predominantly residential in use to the eastern and southern boundary, while arable farm land is prevalent to the site's northern boundary.

A farm/agriculture machine supplier facility is located to the west. The facility is in the process of consolidating their operations, with a new assembly building, an extension to an existing building and a change of use at Gaines Hall. The assembly building is proposed to be extended to provide office space; a collection of disused buildings in the centre of the yard will make way for a new weld shop building and the existing weld shop will change use to provide a dedicated research and development facility.

Site constraints

As shown on the site analysis plan overleaf, the site presents no obvious significant

constraints to the development. The land is relatively flat with the topography ready to accommodate development.

There are a number of hedgerows across the site and trees which provide an instant landscape structure within which the development should sit. These important landscape features should be retained and enhanced, ideally by being integrated into the open space component of the development.

The existing three access points are unlikely to serve the development due to the proximity of the junction (southern access), the adjacency to the existing dwellings (central access) and the dedicated agricultural machinery business served by the northern access.

There are some existing dwellings located on Bunters road which will require buffering and screening, while there is only one listed building in close proximity located on the other side of Bunters road.

The southern part of the site has been identified for SuDs location, thus development would be restricted in that location.



Figure 07: Map showing the site constraints

02.2 Site opportunities

Drawing on the site analysis, an opportunities plan was prepared to set out the key spatial components of the development approach. These are:

- A principal access rural route from Bunters Road, providing access and structure to the development parcels. It would change its character, depending on which part of the site it is located, with the southern section being more of a shared priority route alongside the amenity space, and the northern section, being more of a formal road in terms of its design and character.
- The public open space at the south of the site would be a multi-functional space, accommodating SUDs features, children's play, general amenity space and it could also be suitable for allotments.
- The northern open space is in the form of a village green. This space gives focus and creates a particular character for development in this part of the site.
- The existing hedgerows/structure planting on the site boundaries will be

retained and enhanced to help knit the development together with the existing built and natural environments. The hedgerows on Bunters road will be "pinched" to allow access to the site.

- A new pedestrian route is proposed and integrated into the site, allowing for connections back in to Wickhambrook and the wider countryside.
- The spatial arrangement of development, as proposed, has the potential to deliver the target number of homes, in a mix and range (density, house types, tenure mix) as well as the mixed use facilities required in a way that would provide a more balanced and efficient use of land.
- There is also a relatively even apportionment of development opportunity across the site, with open space component that allows for a more easily achievable phased delivery of development.



Figure 08: This road through Meeting/ Moor Green is an example of the typical rural roads which serve the hamlets and Greens in Wickhambrook: narrow, without pavement and lined with greenery.



Figure 09: Image showing houses and green space in Attleton Green.



Figure 10: Map showing the site opportunities

02.3 Illustrative masterplan options

The actual form of the development, as it will be delivered at land west of Bunters Road, will be arrived at following a more detailed process of design exploration, based on a more comprehensive assessment of the site's constraints and opportunities. However, it is helpful to show how development might be arranged in accordance with the general development principles set out in the above opportunities plan.

The following illustrative masterplan options show how development could be arranged in such a way as to deliver the key open space components that give structure and character to the proposals.

They also clearly show a variety of development opportunities, with smaller and larger units arranged as semi-detached pairs and as single dwellings set within larger plots. There is an implied mix of tenure across the site, in accordance with planning policy.

It is worth noting that the development parcels allow for relatively deep back gardens throughout the site. This is a deliberate attempt to create a more flexible plan, where garden space is part of the green infrastructure and helps to contribute to the sense of place of the wider development.

The design studies are high level and illustrative, prepared to demonstrate how the design principles that the Parish

Council wishes to promote could be applied on the sites. We have not undertaken technical studies on topics such as ground conditions, traffic and drainage (although AECOM specialists in these last two areas have inputted into design development). It is expected that full co-design exercises are undertaken by applicants on the sites. This report is just a step in that direction, enabling stakeholders to progress from an informed position.



Figure 11: Illustrative Masterplan Option 1



Figure 12: Illustrative Masterplan Option 2

02.4 Preferred Option

Following a village consultation in spring 2023, option 2 was selected as preferred option. It aims to provide a green open space including play area, amenity and/ or allotments, to the bottom of the site. A pedestrian corridor is located alongside the Bunters Road southern boundary to link with proposed coffee/ small restaurant and local shops (Class E uses) to the northern side. Class E uses have load/delivery/parking located in the internal courtyard.

The 40 dwellings are delivered within four small parcels with the main access envisaged to be from the middle of the eastern boundary.

The existing units on Bunters Road are screened by mature vegetation and are facing the Class E uses internal courtyard and public realm.



Land use budget

Overall the site area is about 2.5 hectares of which 1.7 hectares is proposed for mixed use and the remaining 0.8 hectares is preserved as open space.

The net density is of c.24 dwellings per hectare (dph). The gross (whole site) density for this option is c.16 dph.

Land Use	Area (Sqm)	Area (ha)	Percentage	Density (Net)	Total units
Open space (including village green)	8,127	0.80	32%		
Development (Including building gardens, roads and parking)	17,350	1.70	68%	24 dph	40
Total	25,477.45	2.50	100%		

Housing mix numbers

The housing mix is based on the assumptions that this site is required for small units rather than large units. Thus it provides:

Dwelling size mix	Percentage	Assumed housing number
2 bedroom	25%	10
3 bedroom	37.5%	15
4 bedroom	25%	10
5 bedroom	12.5%	5

In terms of Class E (commercial, business and service) uses the option allows for max 450sqm.

Access and movement

The key to structuring the site, and providing access to development parcels, is the access and movement framework.

The plan, opposite, sets out how this key component of the site might be arranged relative to the Illustrative Masterplan.

The main access is provided from Bunters Road. Four separate neighbourhood blocks are served by the road network. The retail parking space is located in the internal courtyard. However, the plan is for illustrative purpose and any development should be subject to adequate and detailed highways studies.

The proposed network of pedestrian/cycling routes integrate seamlessly with the surrounding context linking the existing shops south of the site with the proposed class E uses, creating a highly accessible and permeable new neighbourhood.



Building heights

Given the prevailing land form in the surrounding area and the potential for existing and new landscape structures to provide the setting for built development, it is proposed that the residential parcels indicated on the plan opposite, would be potentially capable of accommodating buildings of up to two storeys.

However, in order to preserve long distance views across the site, careful consideration should be given at the detailed design stage to the dwellings and class E units alongside Bunters Road. It is envisaged that mitigation, including the use of 1 storey buildings or gaps between buildings, might be appropriate.

Village structure

Development is arranged in a series of parcels. The southern parcels facing onto the open space, the norther characterised by the Class E uses alongside with a public open space. The aim is to provide frontages which will have to be carefully designed to deliver a coherent and consistent character and form. In addition, there are a number of

points within the development, at junctions or the termination of short and middle distance views, where landmark buildings with a

specific architectural treatment might be appropriate.



Green infrastructure

The range of open spaces provides focus and a sense of place for the built development, integrates the new development into the wider built and natural environments, and provides the new residents with amenity space, play space and a chance to interact with the environment close to their homes.

At every opportunity, this network of open space must seek to integrate existing features. These existing features comprise, for the most part, the hedgerows around the edge of the site, the mature woodland, and existing trees.

In addition to this network of open spaces, the open space near the class E uses, provides amenity and public realm for outdoor activities including cafes and small pop up events.

Private gardens, both front and rear, are an important part of the wider green and blue infrastructure. The treatment of front gardens in particular can help contribute to the sense of place and it is proposed that low hedges, shrubs, and perennial planting should be used.



Figure 16: Option 2 green infrastructure map



Delivery

03



The masterplanning studies will help secure context-driven, high-quality development within Wickhambrook. They will be used in different ways by different actors in the planning and development process, as summarised in the table.

Actors	How They Will Use the Document
Applicants, developers and landowners	As a guide to community and Local Planning Authority expectations on design, allowing a degree of certainty.
Local Planning Authority	As a reference point, embedded in policy, against which to assess planning applications. The studies should be discussed with applicants during any pre-application discussions.
Parish Council	As a guide when commenting on planning application and in pre-application discussions. Also, to inform the Neighbourhood Plan.
Statutory consultees	As a reference point when commenting on planning applications.

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