



**REPRESENTATIONS TO SOLIHULL LOCAL PLAN – DRAFT SUBMISSION  
PLAN OCTOBER 2020**

**ON BEHALF OF  
IM LAND, A SUBSIDIARY OF IM PROPERTIES PLC**

**WITH REFERENCE TO  
LAND NORTH OF MAIN ROAD, MERIDEN**

**Our Ref: [REDACTED]  
December 2020**

**Stansgate Planning** Chartered Town Planners Chartered Surveyors Planning and Development Consultants  
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<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Introduction	3
2. Spatial Strategy and Site Selection Methodology	3
• Local Plan Spatial Strategy (paragraphs 55-70)	3
• Draft Submission Local Plan: Overall Approach Topic Paper	5
• Education – Meriden Church of England Primary School	7
• Draft Local Plan: Site Selection Topic Paper	9
• Draft Local Plan: Site Assessments	10
3. Local Plan Policy Chapters	12
• Policy P1 UK Central Solihull Hub Area	12
• Policy P4D - Meeting Housing Needs – Self Build and Custom Housing	14
• Policy P4E - Meeting Housing Needs – Housing for Older and Disabled People	14
• Policy P5 – Provision of Land for Housing	15
• Policy P13 Minerals - Safeguarding Areas	16
4. Local Plan Settlement Chapters – Meriden	16
• Policy ME1 – West of Meriden (Between Birmingham Road and Maxstoke Road)	16
5. Land North of Main Road, Meriden	19
• A Vision Statement – December 2020	19
• Technical Evidence	19
• Conclusion	24
6. Modifications Required	24

## APPENDICES

Appendix 1	A Vision Statement - Land North of Main Road, Meriden (December 2020)
Appendix 2	Education Assessment Land North of Main Road, Meriden (May 2020)
Appendix 3	SMBC Site Assessment Site 556 (November 2020)
Appendix 4	Landscape and Visual Appraisal and Green Belt Review (August 2020) (LVAGBR)
Appendix 5	SMBC Accessibility Mapping Site 556 (September 2020)
Appendix 6	SMBC Flood Risk Assessment Site 10 (2020)
Appendix 7	Preliminary Biodiversity Impact Assessment (April 2020)
Appendix 8	Solihull Borough Housing Need Technical Note (December 2020)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Stansgate Planning act for IM Land who are working with landowners in respect of the submission of representations to the Solihull Local Plan – Draft Submission Local Plan (DSLPL). The DSLP was published October 2020 under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning Act (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and is the final stage before submission to the Secretary of State. The plan is available for consultation until 14 December 2020. It covers the plan period to 2036. This submission sets out representations commenting on the soundness of the Plan with specific reference to Meriden and land north of Main Road which contend that the site should be an allocated site for 100 dwellings.
- 1.2 IM Land are promoting land north of Main Road, Meriden for development of up to 100 new homes along with provision of approximately 6 hectares for green infrastructure through a series of natural green open spaces and enhanced planting to provide publicly accessible open space, recreation, local play provision and a community garden.
- 1.3 The land north of Main Road has been promoted for development at each stage of the Solihull Local Plan review and regular meetings have taken place with Council officers which have resulted in additional information being prepared where issues arise. Our Vision - Land at Main Road, Meriden is updated at December 2020 and is included in this document as **Appendix 1** to explain the proposals. The December 2020 update addresses a climate change emergency. The site is assessed in the Council's Site Assessments as 556. It lies to the east of Meriden.

## 2. SPATIAL STRATEGY AND SITE SELECTION METHODOLOGY

### Local Plan Spatial Strategy (paragraphs 55-70)

- 2.1 In summary, the strategy lacks focus and is a random combination of locations based on multiple growth options rather than a coherent strategy; many sites are large or complex and need new infrastructure or relocation of existing uses that makes them slow to deliver; smaller sites in sustainable villages can redress an over reliance on large or complex sites and will deliver the housing requirement. There is greater potential in the villages within the Borough than currently recognised, particularly in respect of Meriden, which is in a highly accessible location with a good level of services including a primary school that can easily be extended to accommodate increased capacity.

- 2.2 The introduction to the DSLP and section on developing the strategy, explain the spatial strategy has undergone a significant shift from the Solihull Local Plan 2013 (SLP) and whilst many elements remain relevant, the review is being undertaken in a different strategic context and needs to accommodate a substantial increase in the level of growth. It is right to review the approach since the 2013 strategy was developed, there are significant new elements that should influence the strategy, notable, the progress of HS2 which is due to be operational by 2026 which opens up a location for growth around the interchange station; and the need to accommodate growth arising from elsewhere in the Housing Market Area. Not only does HS2 bring opportunities in specific areas of the Borough, but there is little brownfield land left within the urban areas and therefore Green Belt land is needed, to meet housing need in the Borough.
- 2.3 The Scope, Issues and Options consultation proposed broad options for growth A to G. The consultation revealed advantages and disadvantages for each option and as a result the spatial strategy in the DSLP appears to be a combination of every option rather than a focus on any specific elements such as high frequency public transport corridors and expansion of sustainable settlements. As a result, the strategy lacks focus and has become a collection of approaches driven largely now by where land is available.
- 2.4 Essentially, a range of types of sites and locations are needed to give flexibility to allow the best chance of the housing requirement being met. The sites proposed to be allocated in the plan do provide a range from the urban area, edge of urban area, UKC and village sites, but many sites are large scale and will need new infrastructure to allow site delivery or have existing uses such as business or sports that need relocating, which extends the delivery timescales. There is an over reliance on these sites and therefore smaller scale greenfield sites should be identified to ensure the delivery of housing in the short term to avoid any shortfall in housing land supply Large sites (excluding UKC Hub) or those with existing uses to be relocated amount to 3,135 new dwellings of the 5,270 to be allocated. When added to the large site at UKC (3,135 + 2,500) it means 5,635 new dwellings of the 7,700 proposed are on large sites or have existing uses to relocate, this equates to about 73%. Only 2,135 of the total allocation of 7,700 are sites that can be easily delivered, which equates to just 27%.
- 2.5 There is greater potential in the villages for unconstrained sites than currently acknowledged by the Local Plan Strategy. For example, land north of Main Road Meriden scores 400 in the Accessibility Mapping Report 2020 compared to sites BL2 and 3 at Shirley that score 285 and 320 respectively; and site SO1 east of Solihull scoring between 175 and 340. A

greater level of housing growth dispersal on smaller sites in sustainable villages can redress an over reliance on large sites and ensure the delivery of the housing requirement particularly in the early years of the plan period where large sites are unlikely to deliver.

### **Draft Submission Local Plan: Overall Approach Topic Paper**

- 2.6 The Draft Submission Local Plan: Overall Approach Topic Paper provides the evidence base for the strategy. Meriden should be considered under Growth Option A – High Frequency Public Transport Corridors & Hubs as well as Growth Options F – Limited Expansion of Rural Villages and Growth – Significant Expansion of Villages. There is no explanation why only rail and not bus is included as high frequency travel corridors in rural areas within Option A and no explanation why certain villages are categorized as limited or significant expansion within Options F and G.
- 2.7 Growth Option A – High Frequency Public Transport Corridors - misses an opportunity as it refers solely to rail in the rural areas. Meriden has a high frequency bus service, as well as a local service, run by national express (X1 service) between Coventry and Birmingham via the A45 and Meriden. X1 is an express service with limited stops, it runs approximately every 20 minutes almost 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and there is a bus stop on Main Road which within 100m walking distance of the site proposed north of Main Road. The bus runs via the NEC and airport where there are great employment and transport connection opportunities and passes the HS2 interchange station, that when open will also offer great employment opportunities and ongoing journey connections. Journey times are:
- to Birmingham 26 minutes
  - to Birmingham International (railway station/NEC/Airport/business park 14 minutes
  - to Coventry 26 minutes
- 2.8 Growth Option F – Limited Expansion of Rural Villages - Meriden is a settlement that has a good level of services and facilities and is highly accessible. Growth Option F allows for the settlement to take proportionate growth and IM Land consider it is suitable and capable of accommodating a higher level of growth than the 100 houses proposed.
- 2.9 The Overall Approach Topic Paper concludes in respect of Meriden village, a medium to high accessibility rating and land to the east moderately performing in Green Belt terms. It is however included as a settlement considered suitable for a limited expansion rather than significant expansion. The main constraints are stated as:

- mineral safeguarding sand and gravel to the west and coal to the east;
  - The Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) identifies limited capacity of the area to the north east without impact on landscape character through coalescence. The land north of Main Road is not constrained in this way.
- 2.10 As the Minerals Safeguarding Area for coal to the east has been removed and is no longer a policy in the DSLP (see Policy P13) part of the settlement constraint has been removed and land to the east is not constrained by mineral safeguarding. Land promoted north of Main Road lies to the east so is not covered by this constraint.
- 2.11 There is however no explanation in this Topic Paper or in the Topic Paper 4 of the previous consultation plan, to how the rural settlements have been split into two groups between Growth Options F and G described as:
- *significant expansion of highly accessible and/or a wide range of services (including a secondary school);*
  - *limited expansion of settlements with a limited range of services (including a Primary School and some retail).*
- 2.12 With regard to which settlements are in which group, it would appear that in the first group a settlement could be highly accessible *or* have a wider range of services including a secondary school, it does not have to have both. Dickens Heath is in the first group (significant expansion) yet is not as accessible as Meriden and has no secondary school. Land north of Main Road, Meriden scores 400 in Accessibility Mapping but site BL1 west of Dickens Heath (Site Assessment 176 and 126) proposed to be allocated only scores 285 on the northern part and 340 on the southern part in Accessibility Mapping so clarification is needed as to why it falls in this group. At Dickens Heath, the Overall Topic Paper provides a very similar assessment to that of Meriden but on capacity finds that Dickens Heath has capacity for significant growth. It gives no explanation how it reaches the conclusion.
- 2.13 By contrast, Meriden falls in the second group of settlements 'limited expansion of settlements with a limited range of services. The fact that the accessibility study finds sites in Meriden to be highly accessible scoring higher than Dickens Heath for example, is overlooked. It is inconsistent for Meriden that is highly accessible to be in the second group.

2.14 Meriden has a lot to offer. It lies in the rural east of Solihull Borough close to the A45 Coventry Highway. At the 2011 census it had a population of 2719 and 1279 dwellings in the Parish. The settlement is largely contained within the two primary roads of Fillongley Road to the north and Main Road/Birmingham Road to the south which converge at a roundabout on the western side of the village known as The Green where a range of shops are located.

2.15 A good range of local services and facilities are available. They include:

- a primary school on Fillongley Road capable of extension;
- a doctor's surgery on Main Road;
- Post Office on Main Road;
- Pharmacy on The Green;
- Convenience store on The Green;
- Food take-aways on The Green;
- Library on The Green;
- Two Churches on Main Road and Church Lane off Main Road;
- Car sales, repair and petrol station on Main Road;
- Village Hall and Scout Hut on Main Road;
- Social Club;
- Letting Agent;
- Public Houses, Hotel and restaurants;
- Business units around Meriden Hall south of Main Road;
- Meriden sports park and recreation ground west of The Green;
- Allotments on Leys Lane;
- good public transport links by high frequency express bus to Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull.
- good public transport links to Hampton in Arden Station and Birmingham International Station providing frequent access to locations further afield.

### **Education – Meriden Church of England Primary School**

2.16 In terms of education, it is suggested by the Council in their local plan presentations that lack of capacity at Meriden Church of England Primary School constrains the settlement. The Council consider growth of 100 houses which is anticipated will be for older people's housing can be accommodated, but above this, there is no capacity. There is however nothing in the evidence base on education and nothing in the site selection topic paper that

comments on education. IM Land has therefore sought its own evidence and Turley have prepared a report Education Assessment – Land North of Main Road, Meriden May 2020 (**Appendix 2**).

2.17 The full assessment shows:

- the school is already operating over capacity as the size of the in-catchment population at 268 pupils, is higher than the capacity of the school, at 210 pupils;
- Therefore, neither the allocation of 100 houses in Policy ME1 or the land north of Main Road Meriden can be accommodated without school expansion;
- the level of demand for primary places generated by Policy ME1 West of Meriden (100 houses) and land north of Main Road (100 houses) together at 50 primary school places, do not warrant delivery of a new primary school as the demand is not large enough to fulfil the Department for Education's minimum size of new primary school (420 places); Furthermore, as ME1 is proposed for older persons housing, the number of school places generated may be less than for a general housing site, such that it may be less than 50 places generated by the two schemes;
- Meriden Church of England Primary School has sufficient space on site to accommodate a school expansion project. This position has been confirmed through consultation with the Headteacher at the school, and is also evidenced through data analysis of the indicative amount of space required to undertake a school expansion project compared to the site size of the school;
- a school expansion project in Meriden could help the primary population of existing homes attend school locally rather than travel further afield.

2.18 It is therefore concluded that an appropriate mitigation approach can be delivered through the expansion of Meriden Church of England Primary School to overcome concerns regarding the impact on primary school places resulting from the development of both Policy ME1 West of Meriden and land north of Main Road. An extension can be paid for through financial contribution from development.

2.19 Overall, Meriden is capable of taking additional growth over and above that proposed and has site opportunities potentially more accessible and less constrained than other locations in the Borough.

2.20 There is no definition or guidance on what constitutes limited or proportionate expansion. Meriden had 1279 houses at 2011 census. Two large sites have been developed since

then adding about 130 houses bringing the total to at least 1400 houses. An addition of 100 houses from Policy ME1 West of Meriden is about 7% increase. If this is doubled for the addition of 200 houses, it still only amounts to 14% increase. Given the high accessibility and good level of services, this is considered to be appropriate. It should be noted that the addition of the 130 houses to the 1279 houses in 2011 census, was a 10% increase and that was considered acceptable by the Council.

- 2.21 Therefore, if Meriden is to be considered under Growth Option F for limited expansion, it can clearly accommodate more than the 100 houses in Policy ME1 and in total 200 houses would still be appropriate as limited expansion within this Growth Option. Alternatively, in Growth Option G, it would be consistent with Dickens Heath.

### **Draft Local Plan: Site Selection Topic Paper**

- 2.22 The methodology is useful in assessing sites on a consistent basis but now has the feeling of a post hoc justification where any site not allocated is automatically rejected such that there is no selection or choice as such and the planning judgment is written to fit what the Plan has already decided.
- 2.23 By way of background the methodology set out in the Topic Paper is a 2 step process where Step 1 uses a site hierarchy based on the priorities where previously developed land in the urban area is highest priority and isolated greenfield green belt sites are lowest priority; and Step 2 is a site refinement taking into account key evidence used in the site selection process, namely, the SHELAA; Accessibility Study; Green Belt Assessment; Landscape Character Assessment; Constraints and opportunities; and Sustainability Appraisal. The final overarching planning judgement leads to the outcome of Red or Green with the latter carried forward as allocations.
- 2.24 Previously, there was an Amber category to identify sites with less harm than red sites, this no longer used as sites are either considered to be included or not. In fact the Amber sites category was helpful in offering a choice and should have been retained as a more objective approach to why some sites are allocated and others not.

### Draft Local Plan: Site Assessments

- 2.25 Land north of Main Road, Meriden is Site 556 in the Site Assessments (**Appendix 3**). In Site Selection Step 1 the site score is 5 (Yellow) as it is greenfield in an accessible lower performing Green Belt location. Sites scoring 1 to 4 are generally suitable for inclusion in the Plan, and those scoring priorities 5 to 7 are considered to have potential to be included, so this site has potential.
- 2.26 Step 2 (Refinement) concludes the site as Red although it scores highly in the SHELAA; the accessibility Study; and is low/moderately performing green belt; The LCA finds landscape sensitivity to be high, visual sensitivity to be medium and capacity to accommodate change is very low. The Commentary states:

*“Site is within an overall low/moderate performing parcel in the Green Belt Assessment, although the parcel is high performing for purpose 1 (To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas). The site does not provide strong defensible Green Belt boundaries and is within an area of high landscape character sensitivity with low capacity for change. The site does, however, score highly in the Accessibility Study being located on the edge of the built-up area of Meriden. The SA identifies 8 positive effects (6 significant) and 5 negative effects. Meriden village is identified for limited growth. However, development of this site would have a detrimental impact on the surrounding green belt.”*

- 2.27 The negative parts of the planning judgment find the site is sensitive landscape; does not have strong green belt boundaries; and would have a detrimental impact on the surrounding green belt.
- 2.28 Having regard to landscape, the council’s assessment is a ‘very low’ landscape capacity rating, it should be recognized this assessment applies to all sites around Meriden except for Area G that is being worked for gravel extraction. It also applies to Policy ME1 100 houses West of Meriden. The Council’s LCA is a high level assessment that relies on large parcels and in this case the site north of Main Road is a small part within a much larger parcel. The LVAGBR (**Appendix 4**) prepared on behalf of IM Land is able to make a more detailed assessment of the specific site (now Site 556) and finds utilising the Solihull Landscape Character Assessment (2016) Methodology that the Site exhibits a ‘Low-Medium’ landscape character sensitivity, ‘Medium’ visual sensitivity thus a ‘Medium’ overall landscape sensitivity. The landscape value of the Site is considered to be ‘Low’. Combining overall landscape sensitivity and landscape value gives the Site, based on the SMBC general matrix table, a ‘Low’ landscape capacity rating. However, based on the considered

strategy for locating built form on the lower lying slopes tied into the western built up edge of Meriden as well as the scale, and sensitive landscape strategy associated with the Proposed Development, which would provide a robust strengthened Green Infrastructure to the Site and biodiversity and amenity enhancements, it is considered that the Site has a 'Medium' landscape capacity to the development typology proposed. This more detailed assessment provides a different conclusion.

- 2.29 In respect of defensible Green Belt boundaries, in the previous site assessment (as Site 420) it was considered to have a lack of defensible green belt boundaries and this matter was addressed through revisions to the masterplan in the Vision (**Appendix 1**) by a change to the site boundary to become contiguous with a watercourse and existing hedgerow. The LVAGBR (**Appendix 4**) prepared on behalf of IM Land at paragraph 9.23 sets out how these accord with guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 139 (f) on defining boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and will be permanent. It is proposed to strengthen the hedge line with additional planting. Hedgerows are commonly used as defensible Green Belt boundaries, and this is evident throughout the Borough where many garden boundaries are the Green Belt boundary and are formed by hedgerow. Furthermore, the Council's strategic Green Belt Assessment 2016 makes reference on pages 5 and 6 to defining boundaries for the purposes of their assessment to include established hedgerow.
- 2.30 The updated site assessment as Site 556 accepts there is no longer a '*lack of*' defensible green belt boundary rather, the site does not have '*strong*' defensible green belt boundaries. A hedgerow can be a strong boundary. To the north western part of the site where there is no physical boundary alongside a short stretch of the open space. This could in fact be addressed by the amount of land to be removed from Green Belt in that the open space could be retained in green belt.
- 2.31 The '*detrimental impact on the surrounding green belt*' is not explained or understood. The surrounding green belt is not compromised.
- 2.32 There are many factors that support Land off Main Road, as suitable, sustainable and available for development. The site scores well in the sustainability appraisal and in the Draft Local Plan – Accessibility Mapping September 2020. The Accessibility Mapping updates the previous assessments of 2016 and 2019. It looks at distance to local facilities being Education, Food Store and GP Surgery along with access to public transport bus and rail. Each category is scored out of 100 and the maximum score is 400.

- 2.33 Site 556 achieves the highest score available of 400 (**Appendix 5**). There were 324 sites assessed in the Borough and in addition to site 556, only 14 others score the maximum available of 400 in a comparative assessment. This demonstrates the very high accessibility of the site.
- 2.34 Other sites around Meriden score from 250 to 350. Policy ME1 West of Meriden scores 350 with the difference from Site 556 being proximity to GP surgery as the surgery is located on Main Road close to the access to this site but at the opposite end of the village to ME1.
- 2.35 Overall, to summarize, the strategy of the Plan lacks focus and misses an opportunity to identify Meriden in a high frequency transport corridor where the X1 bus service provides a frequency of a bus approximately every 20 minutes, almost 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, stopping close to the site access and giving a journey time of 26 minutes into Birmingham and Coventry. Furthermore, it is demonstrated that Meriden can accommodate a higher level of growth within Growth Option F – Limited Expansion and 200 houses would accord with limited expansion in an accessible settlement.
- 2.36 Land north of Main Road (Site 556) is considered to perform well against the site assessment criteria and that coupled with the ability of Growth Option F – Limited Expansion to allow more than 100 houses at Meriden provides a compelling case why land north of Main Road should be allocated. Furthermore, representations on Policy ME1 – West of Meriden set out in Section 4 below, demonstrate that that site does not have capacity to deliver 100 houses without significant harm and both sites are needed to give the best chance of meeting the housing need.
- 2.37 Section 5 below provides more detail on land north of Main Road and the technical work undertaken.

### **3. LOCAL PLAN POLICY CHAPTERS**

#### **Policy P1 UK Central Solihull Hub Area**

- 3.1 To summarize, the policy is neither justified or effective as the Local Plan is over reliant on the housing numbers that can be delivered from UK Central Hub Area in the plan period; clarity is sought over the way UKC is referenced as it is unclear/confusing what part is referred to with UKC including 4 geographically separate areas; the number of houses to be

completed in the plan period from NEC and Arden Cross is too high; the nature of the developments being largely apartment based means lack of completions in the early part of the plan period leaving a shortfall; to add flexibility and to ensure that housing need in the plan period is met, additional allocations of smaller sites should be made elsewhere to compensate for this overreliance on large sites

- 3.2 The policy proposes a Growth Area that includes major mixed-use development. It incorporates a number of separate locations in the Borough including North Solihull, Blythe Valley, the Town Centre and the Hub incorporating the NEC and the HS2 interchange station at Arden Cross. Clarity is needed in the way the areas are referenced as it is unclear when parts are referred to. Paragraph 89 of the DSLP states that for housing land supply purposes, it has been assumed that across the whole UKC Solihull Hub Area there will be 2,740 dwellings coming forward in the plan period. This is split 2,240 at the NEC and 500 at Arden Cross. It is unclear why North Solihull, the Town Centre and Blythe Valley are not included as they are also stated to be UKC. Clarity is sought over the way UKC is referenced as it is unclear/confusing what UKC means including 4 geographically separate areas. Furthermore, elsewhere in the DSLP completions of 2,500 are stated, not 2,740 which needs clarification.
- 3.3 In terms of the number of houses to be delivered, further information in the Masterplans and Vision statements in the evidence base provides high level information on what the NEC and Arden Cross can deliver. Both the proposals require significant new infrastructure and rely on HS2, not due to be operational until 2026, such that the dependence by the Local Plan on the delivery of 2,740 dwellings across the two schemes that are in the early stages of planning is not robust and further evidence is needed to justify the delivery timescale and the trajectory for the housing numbers.
- 3.4 Even if the necessary road and social infrastructure is available to allow housing completions from 2026, this assumes a high completion rate of 274 houses per annum (2,740 houses/10 years). The nature of the Arden Cross proposal equates to that of a new settlement where lead in times are known to be extensive and early completions slow as a critical mass of infrastructure is needed to make the location desirable. Furthermore, the proposals rely heavily on apartments, and as such few completions may come about in the earlier part of the plan period. It is, more likely, the whole amount will be delivered on block at the end of the plan period.

- 3.5 The number of estimated completions by 2036 is unreliable and likely to lead to an under-supply in the earlier part of the plan period. This could leave a significant shortfall in delivery to meet OAN and housing delivery in the first 5 years of the Local Plan period. Therefore, to add flexibility to the plan, the number of completion at UKC Hub should be reduced and a smaller scale allocation north of Main Road Meriden should be added to compensate for this overreliance on large sites dependent on significant infrastructure and to ensure housing need is met as set out above through the plan period.
- 3.6 The plan should be modified to reduce reliance on large sites and allow further allocations from additional smaller sites included to bring flexibility.

#### **Policy P4D - Meeting Housing Needs – Self and Custom Housebuilding**

- 3.7 The Policy, although poorly worded, requires on sites of 100 units or more, 5% of open market dwellings to be made available as Self and Custom Build plots. Whilst IM Land are supportive of the principle of self and custom build, it is considered a better approach would be to allocate specific smaller sites for up to 5 dwellings for self-build rather than require a proportion of general housing allocations to accommodate this provision. The nature of self and custom build is that it is better related to smaller more individual sites as people looking for self-build are more inclined towards individual and unique design rather than being part of larger housing developments.
- 3.8 National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) offers advice on a number of ways that authorities can increase the number of permissions for self and custom build in ways that does not involve part of general housing allocations, such as using their own land or engaging with landowners who own sites that are suitable for housing and encouraging them to consider self-build and facilitating access to those on the register where the landowner is interested (Paragraph: 025 Reference ID: 57-025-201760728).
- 3.9 The Policy is unsound as it may not be effective in delivering suitable self-build and custom housing. The Policy should be reconsidered.

#### **Policy P4E - Meeting Housing Needs – Housing for Older and Disabled People**

- 3.10 The Policy sets requirements for specialist types of housing to meet the needs of those with disabilities and special needs to include accessible and adaptable dwellings; wheelchair standard dwellings; and to meet the needs of older people. Whilst IM Land are committed

to meeting needs for all, the requirements for specialist housing are set out in Building Regulations and do not need to be repeated in plan policies.

- 3.11 Notwithstanding this, it is recognized there are optional national standards over and above the minimum Building Regulations requirement that can be applied through plan policy and NPPF Footnote 46 says use should be made of the optional technical standards for accessible and adaptable housing '*where this would address an identified need for such properties*'. The NPPG provides more detailed guidance in respect of factors which local planning authorities can consider and should take into account including matters such as accessibility and adaptability of the existing stock, needs across tenures and impact on viability as well as site specific matters such as flood risk and topography (Paragraph: 007 Reference ID: 56-007-20150327 and Paragraph: 008 Reference ID: 56-008-20160519). The Council point to the HEDNA for some evidence and Policy P4E is to be applied flexibility taking into account site specific factors and viability, but more detail is required to justify the blanket approach of Policy P4E that relates to all major sites for parts 2 and 3 and sites over 300 for part 4.
- 3.12 A better approach would be to apply the requirements where need is justified, to specific sites in the Settlement Chapters of the DSLP so site allocations have already taken account of site-specific matters.

### **Policy P5 – Provision of Land for Housing**

- 3.13 Solihull Housing Need Technical Note (December 2020) prepared by Barton Willmore on behalf of IM Land is enclosed as Appendix 8 of these representations. It focuses on the calculation of housing need in the Draft Local Plan and whether this aligns with the National Planning Policy Framework (2019), the Planning Practice Guidance and the aims, objectives and policies of the Draft Local Plan. It also considers the unmet need in the wider Greater Birmingham and Black Country Housing Market Area.
- 3.14 The analysis results in the following broad conclusions:
1. The Standard Method minimum need for Solihull (807 dpa) will need to be increased to account for expected job growth from the UK Central Hub and the 'acute' need for affordable housing in the Borough;
  2. Barton Willmore's demographic modelling shows that between 1,036 and 1,248 dpa are required to support the UK Central Hub scenario;

3. Barton Willmore's calculations suggest that the deficit in unmet housing need from Birmingham City being delivered by HMA Local Plans amounts to a minimum of between 11,294 and 13,101 dwellings up to 2031, a significant increase from the 2,597 dwellings concluded on by the 2020 Position Statement. This increases when the unmet need from the Black Country is considered. Additional unmet need will be created post 2031.

### **Policy P13 Minerals - Safeguarding Areas**

- 3.15 IM Land support removal of the Minerals Safeguarding Area from the Plan. The Minerals safeguarding topic paper accords with the case submitted on behalf of IM Land to the previous stages of the local plan preparation in that as Daw Mill Colliery from which coal was being extracted, has closed and there are no plans for working of the coal resource. It also concurs that alternative sources of energy are now sought to meet climate change targets. The minerals safeguarding area for coal is rightly no longer in the Plan.

## **4. LOCAL PLAN SETTLEMENT CHAPTERS – MERIDEN**

### **Policy ME1 – West of Meriden (Between Birmingham Road and Maxstoke Road)**

- 4.1 Formerly Site 10, Site ME1 – West of Meriden is proposed to be allocated for 100 houses. In summary, the allocation is not justified or effective as it is considered the site does not have the capacity to accommodate this amount of housing without significant harm to the landscape character on the approach into the settlement, through loss of vegetation and impact on its designation as a potential Local Wildlife Site. Furthermore, it means a density of 50 dwellings per hectare which conflicts with the council's approach to density; to achieve 100 dwelling will require 3 storey blocks that will be difficult to effectively screen due to height; and the council's site analysis does not adequately deal with flood risk such that there is a strong likelihood that less units will be delivered or the density will increase further to accommodate 100 houses.
- 4.2 The Council's acknowledgement that Meriden can accommodate an additional 100 houses in principle is welcomed and other sites should be considered to provide for this housing need. A suitable site is offered north of Main Road, Meriden (Site Assessment Site 556).
- 4.3 Site ME1, formerly Site 10, was proposed for 50 houses originally which we also considered to be high given the constraints such as its designation as a Potential Local Wildlife Site

(pLWS Ref. SP28G4); its significant trees and water body; and its prominent location on the approach to the village.

- 4.4 Site ME1 is in a prominent position located on the approach into Meriden from the villages to the north and out of the village onto the westbound A45 dual carriageway. It comprises grassland, scrub and broadleaf woodland in addition to an existing 2 storey block of apartments (The Firs) and a former caravan park. Maxstoke Lane forms a main transport corridor into Meriden with an exit slip road from the A45 joining near to the northern boundary of Site ME1, which sits at a raised elevation, facilitating filtered views into the Site.
- 4.5 An assessment of the site in landscape and visual terms is provided in Section 8 of the Landscape and Visual Appraisal with Green Belt Review August 2020 (LVAGBR) prepared for IM Land (**Appendix 4**). It finds currently the site is well vegetated and forms part of the green gateway to Meriden. Solihull Borough Landscape Character Assessment LCA7: Northern Upland identifies under its landscape management guidelines that “*Tree planting in the vicinity of Meriden is also important to its setting and approaches*” thus it can be considered that the well vegetated nature of Site ME1 forms an important part of the setting and approach to Meriden. High density development within this parcel of land on the approach to Meriden would be uncharacteristic and loss of vegetation to facilitate development would run contrary to the guidelines highlighted in the Landscape Character Area.
- 4.6 Whilst it may be capable of some development, its constraints restrict its capacity. The council’s Illustrative Concept Masterplan aim to protect some features as much as possible with the result that of 4ha site (previously stated as 3ha and still considered by IM Land to be 3ha), 1 ha is Public Open Space (POS) to retain the existing waterbody. There is however no reference to the potential Local Wildlife Site designation at all and how this is accommodated.
- 4.7 The assumed density is too high. The site is considered to be about 3ha, not 4ha as the DSLP now claims which is a change from the 3ha stated in all other iterations of the Plan. To provide 100 houses on 2 ha (3ha – 1ha POS) is a density of 50 dwellings per ha, which is much higher than the 40+ dwellings per ha as claimed in the council’s masterplans document. 40+ is a category rather than a specific calculation and the Concept Masterplans document states a range of densities has been used to test capacity of the allocated sites to ensure that the desired 5,300 dwellings are deliverable. There are three categories:
- 30 dph and below = Low density
  - 36 dph (range 31-40) = Medium density

- 40+ dph = High
- 4.8 40+ is the high category which is suggested in those areas along transport corridors and in more urban locations in the Borough where apartment living is likely to reflect market demand. In the case of site ME1, low density would be more appropriate and is described as a response to those sites which have landscape, ecological and historic buildings to help safeguard their setting.
- 4.9 Such high density is inappropriate given the characteristics of the site and is in conflict with the council's approach in the Concept Masterplan testing and also the council's policy on matters to inform density at DSLP Policy P5 (6) iii. that says density should be *"Responding to local character and distinctiveness, including landscape and townscape features, green infrastructure and heritage assets;"*
- 4.10 To achieve 100 houses will inevitably mean 3 storey blocks and this assertion is supported by the fact the allocation is focused towards older persons housing in apartment blocks. At a likely height of at least 12m, they will be difficult to effectively screen.
- 4.11 A Level 2 Flood Risk Assessment has been undertaken by the council as explained elsewhere in the DSLP (paragraph 345). That assessment shows part of the area proposed to be developed on Site ME1 (formerly Site 10) as an area at risk of flooding (**Appendix 6**). The assessment highlights the risk and states *"The site masterplan will need to be redrawn to ensure all built development is situated outside of the flood risk areas. This will likely result in either loss of unit numbers or increased density."*
- 4.12 The council's site analysis in the masterplans document does not fully explain the flood risk, the site analysis plan shows a blue dotted line with no explanation, as does the Illustrative Concept Masterplan. It is assumed to show the area of flood risk although it does not quite accurately reflect that of the level 2 SFRA as shown in Appendix 2 of these representations, which includes a slightly larger area, notwithstanding this, it still shows that it encroaches on a small part of the northern edge of the area proposed to be developed, it is reasonable to assume it will be constraint that would result in a reduced site area, leading to fewer units or the density increasing further if 100 houses are to be achieved on a smaller area.
- 4.13 Policy ME1 should be modified to either removed the site or reduce the site from 100 houses to up to 50 houses and a new site or additional site should be allocated for up to 100 houses on land north of Main Road, Meriden (site 556).

4.14 The council's Site Assessment of Site ME1 (sites 119 and 137) finds a similar outcome as for land North of Main Road (site 556). The differences mean Site 556 actually performs better. These are:

- Site 556 has 'very high' accessibility, compared to Site ME1 only 'high'
- Site 556 has no potential Local Wildlife Site designation
- Site 556 is within an overall low/moderate performing Green Belt parcel, compared to Site ME1 within a moderately performing Green Belt parcel
- Site 556 performs better in the Sustainability Appraisal

4.15 Proposals for Land north of Main Road, Meriden (Site 556) are explained below.

## **5. LAND NORTH OF MAIN ROAD, MERIDEN**

5.1 In summary, land north of Main Road, Meriden should be an allocated site. It is highly accessible; has moderate impact on Green Belt; can provide about 6 hectares of new Green Infrastructure; is not constrained by minerals safeguarding; is visually well contained; and has the maximum SHELAA score. There are no known technical constraints. The Council's evidence base demonstrates land north of Main Road, Meriden is a highly sustainable location that is suitable for delivery of up to 100 houses in the plan period. It is available now, offers a suitable location and is achievable without significant new infrastructure. Housing can be delivered in the short term.

### **A Vision Statement – December 2020**

5.2 The proposal is for up to 100 houses and is explained in the Vision (**Appendix 1**). The Concept Masterplan site boundary is drawn to follow defensible Green Belt boundaries. The development proposal offers:

- 3.4 hectares of residential development for up to 100 dwellings;
- 6 hectares for public open space, recreation, local play provision and community gardens (including attenuation Areas);

### **Technical Evidence**

5.3 The Vision Statement provides a summary of the technical evidence and conclusions are summarised again below. A full set of technical information to demonstrate the deliverability

of the proposal is available. This includes Arboriculture Survey; Archaeological and Heritage Assessment; Ecological Appraisal; Preliminary Biodiversity Impact Assessment; Education Assessment; Drainage Strategy; LVAGBR; Minerals Resource Assessment Report; Transport Report.

### ***Arboriculture Survey***

- 5.4 The majority of the trees are located in existing field boundaries and the masterplan has been designed to allow for the retention of these features.

### ***Archaeological and Heritage Assessment***

- 5.5 The Site does not contain any nationally important features such as world heritage sites, scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields or listed buildings, where there would be a presumption in favour of their physical preservation in situ and against development. There is an archaeological feature of local interest called a 'Lynchet' just outside of the eastern boundary and this will not be affected by proposals for the Site.

- 5.6 There are a number of listed buildings, and some locally listed buildings, in the vicinity of the Site, including those on Main Street and Old Road to the south, as well as those on Meriden Hill to the south-east. The historic core of Meriden Hill is also a conservation area. The buildings in Meriden tend to have quite restricted settings which are unlikely to be harmed by development within the Site. The Church of St Laurence, some 420m away, and Meriden House, some 350m away have views over the Site although over higher land on which no development is proposed.

### ***Ecological Appraisal***

- 5.7 There are no statutory or local designations on the Site and there will be opportunities within the existing and newly created green spaces to retain, mitigate and provide opportunities for ecological habitat enhancement.
- 5.8 The Site offers opportunities to provide enhanced green infrastructure by creating links between existing woodland, footpaths, and other nature conservation assets such as hedgerows, field trees and watercourses. Active management and strengthening of hedgerow, trees and woodland to ensure conservation, diversity and connectivity of habitat will secure long term conservation and environmental enhancement and accessibility.

### ***Preliminary Biodiversity Assessment***

5.9 The assessment (**Appendix 7**) scores habitats, linear features (hedgerows and line of trees in this case), and rivers/streams separately, resulting in three separate scores. The results are summarised as:

#### *Habitats*

- The Site currently has a biodiversity value of **25.11** units;
- The Site is capable of delivering a **40.69%** net gain in biodiversity units;

#### *Hedgerows*

- The loss and enhancement level results in a 50.26% net gain in linear units;

#### *Rivers/streams*

- The 0.31km of stream will be retained within the Site and development will be more than 8m away. Therefore, there will be no change in river units.

5.10 It is demonstrated a significant net gain can be achieved. Due to the size of the site and amount of land that can be given over to open spaces, community park and garden and woodland, the site can offer a biodiversity net gain significantly higher than the mandatory level of 10% that will be effective by the time LPR is adopted.

### ***Education Assessment***

5.11 This is summarized in Section 2 above and is **Appendix 2** of these representations. It concludes that an appropriate mitigation approach can be delivered through the expansion of Meriden Primary School to overcome concerns regarding the impact on primary school places resulting from the development of the site alongside the allocated sites.

### ***Drainage Strategy***

5.12 The Site is Flood Zone 1 at low risk of flooding and surface water can be drained by ponds across the Site that link with the existing watercourse and will provide an ecologically sustainable drainage system.

### ***LVAGBR August 2020***

5.13 This assessment (**Appendix 4**) takes the Council's Landscape Character Assessment for LCA7 to a site-specific level allowing a finer grain assessment. It provides a background to

the identified opportunities and constraints to development of the Site to explain the rationale behind the revised concept masterplan in terms of landscape character, landscape and visual qualities and the Site's function within the wider landscape context, together with the justification for the revised Green Belt boundary along its eastern boundary edge.

- 5.14 Paragraph 5.15 and Table 5.1 of the LVAGBR compare their finer grain landscape assessment with the council's giving full explanation. Its overall findings conclude there is a '**medium**' capacity for change, not 'very low' and are as follows:

Criteria	SMBC LCA7 Assessment	Barton Willmore Site Specific Assessment
Landscape Character Sensitivity	High	Low-Medium
Visual Sensitivity	Medium	Medium
Overall Landscape Sensitivity	High	Medium
Landscape Value	Medium	Low
landscape Capacity to Accommodate Change	Very Low	Medium

- 5.15 Overall, at paragraph 11.24 it concludes in terms of Landscape and Visual Appraisal, the Site comprises an area of weakened landscape on the eastern edge of Meriden surrounded on three sides by existing development. The visual envelope is generally limited to medium distance views from the south and east, from where it is viewed in the context of other development within Meriden. There is potential to mitigate in the manner set out in the report and reflected in the Concept Masterplan.
- 5.16 At Paragraph 9.20 is a finer grain Green Belt analysis that concludes the contribution of the site to the purposes of the Green Belt using Solihull Methodology is **score 4** which puts it at the lower end of the scale. Using Barton Willmore methodology, this assessment concluded that the Site made '**Some to a Limited**' contribution to the purposes of the Green

Belt. The greatest contribution was in relation to preventing sprawl due to the lack of strong defensible boundaries currently existing to the east of the Site. The Site was assessed as making no contribution to the prevention of towns merging and a limited contribution to the protection of the countryside from encroachment and the protection of the setting of historic towns.

- 5.17 Existing landscape features within the Site would be retained and enhanced, primarily the existing trees and hedgerows. New hedgerows and oak trees would be established along the eastern boundaries of the Site as well as a substantial native woodland block to establish a strong new defensible Green Belt boundary.
- 5.18 The Site is identified as being located within the ‘Meriden Gap’ within the Solihull evidence base documents. This area is described as being an important area that forms the strategic separation between Birmingham and Coventry. The Site is situated 8km from the edge of Birmingham, separated by the main body of Meriden, and 4.5km from the edge of Coventry. Neither Birmingham nor Coventry is visible from the Site and development within the Site would not cause the physical or perceptual reduction in the separation of the two large settlements.
- 5.19 Overall, the more detailed Green Belt review finds the Site makes ‘**Some to Limited**’ contribution to the purposes of Green Belt, reducing as mitigation measures are implemented.
- 5.20 The LVA GBR assesses proposed policy to protect valued landscapes in the Meriden Neighbourhood Plan that was available for comment in August 2020. It concludes the ‘valued landscape’ from St Laurence Churchyard against specified criteria to understand if there are any demonstrable physical attributes rather than just popularity, that might support a designation of ‘valued landscape’ in planning policy terms. It concludes “*As a result of the above assessment , whilst the landscape identified in the MNDP is valued locally, it does not demonstrate features that elevate it above other countryside in the local area or that would make it ‘valued’ as per paragraph 170a of the NPPF.*” (page 36)

### ***Minerals Resource Assessment Report***

- 5.21 The report finds that the extraction of coal is no longer commercially viable as a means of utilising existing mineral resources and is therefore not feasible. Consequently, the proposed development would not be contrary to a mineral safeguarding policy. Notwithstanding this, Policy P13 of the DSLP confirms the minerals safeguarding area for coal is no longer justified and it has been removed.

### ***Transport Report***

- 5.22 The existing sustainable infrastructure and frequent bus services will serve the Site. The proposed development will not have a significant adverse impact on the operation of the surrounding highway network and is located where the need to travel could be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes can be maximised. The site can clearly contribute positively towards reducing travel by car thus bringing a reduction in the level of carbon emissions in line with the aspirations of the Council to address a climate change emergency and a move towards net zero carbon neutral.

### **Conclusion**

- 5.23 The overall conclusion is that Meriden can take more development. The Site performs well against the DLP evidence base. To add to this IM Lands' evidence has taken the high-level strategic assessments to a more detailed stage and demonstrates the Site is highly accessible; has 'Some to Limited' impact on Green Belt; is not constrained by minerals safeguarding; is visually well contained; the landscape has 'Medium' capacity to accommodate change; and it has the maximum SHELAA score. There are no known technical constraints and land north of Main Road, Meriden (Site 556) should be allocated.
- 5.24 The Plan should be modified by the addition of a new Policy ME2 - North of Main Road, Meriden to allocate the site for up to 100 houses.

## **6. MODIFICATIONS REQUIRED**

### **Local Plan Spatial Strategy (paragraphs 55-70)**

- 6.1 The spatial strategy should be modified as follows:
- Additional smaller sites in sustainable villages should be allocated to redress an over reliance on large or complex sites and will deliver the housing requirement;
  - It should recognise there is greater potential in sustainable villages, particularly in Meriden which is a highly accessible location with a good level of services including a primary school that can easily be extended to increase capacity;
  - Growth Option A - High Frequency Transport Corridors should recognise the opportunity offered by the high frequency X1 bus service through Meriden which provides the opportunity to for additional growth in the settlement;

- Growth Option F - Limited Expansion of Villages should recognize that Meriden has greater capacity for new development, particularly to the east where it is unconstrained and where Green Belt is moderately performing. Site 556 overall is highly sustainable and accessible;

#### **Policy P1 UK Central Solihull Hub Area**

- 6.2 The plan should be modified reducing the number of completions expected in the plan period. Instead the plan should allocate additional smaller sites such as land north of Main Road, Meriden to bring flexibility to ensure the housing need for the Borough is met in the plan period.

#### **Policy P4D - Meeting Housing Needs – Self and Custom Housebuilding**

- 6.3 The Policy is unsound as it is not effective in delivering suitable self-build and custom housing. The Policy should be reconsidered.

#### **Policy P4E - Meeting Housing Needs – Housing for Older and Disabled People**

- 6.4 A better approach would be to apply the requirements where need is justified, to specific sites in the Settlement Chapters of the DSLP so site allocations have already taken account of site-specific matters.

#### **Policy P5 – Provision of Land for Housing**

- 6.5 See Appendix 8 for the increase required in housing need figures and unmet from Birmingham City.

#### **Policy P13 Minerals - Safeguarding Areas**

- 6.6 No modification needed.

#### **Policy ME1 – West of Meriden (Between Birmingham Road and Maxstoke Road)**

- 6.7 Policy ME1 should be modified to either remove the site or reduce the site from 100 houses to up to 50 houses and a new site or additional site should be allocated for up to 100 houses on land north of Main Road, Meriden.

#### **Land North of Main Road, Meriden**

- 6.8 New Policy ME2 - North of Main Road, Meriden should be added for up to 100 houses.





# Meriden

DECEMBER 2020

## BACKGROUND

This Vision Statement has been prepared by Barton Willmore on behalf of IM Land, a subsidiary of IM Properties PLC.

IM Land is working with landowners to promote the 9.4ha site for development within the plan period. Development of the site would bring forward:

- » the delivery of around **100 dwellings** within the plan period that can be delivered in the short term;
- » **a highly sustainable development location** within 400 metres (10 minutes walk) of existing services and high frequency bus service (x1 bus service);
- » housing delivery that is achievable without significant new infrastructure;
- » **delivery of both market and affordable housing**, to meet the needs of the Borough;
- » a network of **green infrastructure**, providing movement and access to new open space and for wildlife corridors;
- » provide for an enhanced **community garden** on Leys Lane for the benefit of local residents; and
- » a development that responds to the climate emergency.

Inspiring a sense of community pride and ownership will be embedded within the heart of the proposals, by maximising opportunities for integration with existing development in Meriden, and the provision of attractive new recreation facilities that encourage social interaction.

We will look to engage with local stakeholders as part of the promotion of the site and discuss the opportunity for accommodating local facilities, as appropriate, with the site development framework proposals.

<b>1 THE VISION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3 SITE LOCATION &amp; CONTEXT</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4 CONSTRAINTS &amp; OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>5 CONCEPT MASTERPLAN</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>6 BENEFITS SUMMARY &amp; DELIVERABILITY</b>	<b>28</b>

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# 1 The Vision

‘an attractive, residential development of around 100 high quality, new dwellings in Meriden Village – a place to live that is set within a landscape and countryside setting with design and style of homes that reflect the qualities of the local area, located within a short walking distance of existing bus services, a new community garden, and an excellent range of existing village facilities and services’.

Development will provide the opportunity for:

- » around **100 new dwellings** - developed at an average density of 30 dwellings per hectare (dph);
- » **access to a ‘high frequency’ bus service** (X1) which stops immediately south of the site along Main Road – connecting Meriden to Birmingham City Centre, Birmingham International, the NEC and Coventry City Centre;
- » an attractive **green gateway** from Main Road – framing views and vistas to the open countryside;
- » a comprehensive and **well-connected green and blue infrastructure network**;
- » a series of natural / green **open spaces and enhanced planting** to integrate the development within the mature landscape and countryside setting;
- » a series of **linked pedestrian/cycleways** with enhanced links to existing PRow;
- » a **new formal play space** central to the development; and
- » an enhanced **community garden** at Leys Lane, accessible to the wider Meriden Village community.





## 2 Planning Policy Context

### LOCAL PLAN REVIEW

#### The Development Plan

The development plan is the Solihull Local Plan adopted December 2013. The site is shown to fall within Green Belt and a Minerals Safeguarding Area for Coal.

#### Local Plan Review

The Solihull Local Plan is undergoing review and the latest published document in the review process is the Draft Submission Plan October 2020. It covers the plan period 2018 to 2036 and proposes making allocations for about 5,270 houses to meet the needs of Solihull and of those, about 2,000 are to meet the needs of Birmingham.

The Spatial Strategy is one of:

- » concentration in the urban areas;
- » dispersal of development in the rural areas.

Due to the substantial housing need, there is not enough land available within the urban area, so Green Belt land needs to be released for development.

To guide development, additional criteria is suggested in the Plan that is relevant to Meriden. It states development will be focused in locations where development would be a proportionate addition adjacent to an existing settlement that although is less sustainable, still has a limited range of services available within it (including a primary school).

During the course of the review, changes are taking place at a national and regional level which need to be taken into account and will influence how the Local Plan Review moves on.

A new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published February 2019 and the Review will need to include:

- » a standard methodology for calculating housing need;
- » an extended evidence base to demonstrate the need to release Green Belt;
- » where it is concluded it is necessary to release Green Belt, first consideration is to be given to land which has been previously developed and/or is well served by public transport; this means sites well served by public transport are given the same weight as previously developed land;
- » to show how the loss of Green Belt land can be offset through compensatory improvements to environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt.
- » Further changes taking place are:
  - » Solihull Borough Council has declared a Climate Change Emergency;
  - » Delivery of HS2 has been confirmed;
  - » Biodiversity net gain, where development is to provide a 10% net gain on biodiversity assessed before development, is to be introduced;

The spatial strategy of the Local Plan Review will need to take these matters into account with the result that the housing need may change and new sites may be needed.

The Draft Submission Plan is the final stage before submission for Examination proposed early 2021.

Solihull Borough Council has concluded that Green Belt land needs to be released. The Plan strategy building on the draft, will give great weight to accessible sites well served by public transport and lower performing in their contribution to Green Belt purposes. This proposal offers:

- » a proportionate addition adjacent to an existing settlement;
- » a sustainable location that offers access to a range of services including a high frequency bus service between Coventry and Birmingham;
- » access within 400m of a high frequency bus service that is an express service between Coventry and Birmingham that runs along the A45 via Meriden;
- » a highly accessible site in the Draft Local Plan accessibility study;
- » offsetting of the loss of Green Belt by providing compensatory provision of an equivalent area of new Green Infrastructure;
- » delivery of biodiversity net gain;
- » delivery of a smaller site assisting early delivery of housing;

## GREEN BELT REVIEW / FUNCTION

The Council acknowledge they do not have enough land in the built up areas to meet the housing need and that it will be necessary to release Green Belt land for development. The 2016 Solihull Strategic Green Belt Assessment is a high level review of how land in the Borough contributes to the purposes of Green Belt. The Site forms part of Refined Parcel 25 in the 2016 Solihull Strategic Green Belt Assessment, and this was scored at 5 out of 12 in terms of its contribution, meaning that it was comparatively low scoring within the assessment.

A more detailed assessment of the contribution that the Site makes to the purposes of the Green Belt as defined within the NPPF was undertaken by Barton Willmore. This assessment concluded that the Site made 'Some to a Limited' contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt. The greatest contribution was in relation to preventing sprawl due to the lack of strong defensible boundaries currently existing to the east of the Site. The Site was assessed as making no contribution to the prevention of towns merging and a limited contribution to the protection of the countryside from encroachment and the protection of the setting of historic towns. Existing landscape features within the Site would be retained and enhanced, primarily the existing trees and hedgerows. New hedgerows and oak trees would be established along the eastern boundaries of the Site as well as a substantial native woodland block to establish a strong new defensible Green Belt boundary.

The Site is identified as being located within the 'Meriden Gap' within the Solihull evidence base documents. This area is described as being an important area that forms the strategic separation between Birmingham and Coventry. The Site is situated 8km from the edge of Birmingham, separated by the main body of Meriden, and 4.5km from the edge of Coventry. Neither Birmingham nor Coventry is visible from the Site and development within the Site would not cause the physical or perceptual reduction in the separation of the two large settlements.

Overall, the more detailed assessment finds the site performs relatively poorly in terms of its contribution to the five purposes of Green Belt.

## 3 Site Location & Context

### SITE LOCATION

The site is located to the east of Meriden Village, Warwickshire which falls within the administrative boundary of Solihull, West Midlands.

Meriden is a large village situated between Solihull, Coventry and Birmingham, and is just 5 miles from Birmingham International Airport. Meriden is located just south of the A45, providing excellent connectivity to the wider strategic road network – A452, M6 and M42. A regular bus service also runs through the village providing connections to Coventry, and nearby railway stations at Birmingham International and Hampton in Arden. Both stations provide frequent rail services for commuters to Birmingham, Coventry and London Euston.

### THE SITE

The site area measures **9.4 hectares**. Access is from 'Main Road', towards the eastern end of the village. The site forms an irregular shape, bounding the rear of residential development and the Manor Hotel fronting 'Main Road', housing development accessed from Leys Lane and Fillongley Road.

The majority of the site comprises irregular fields under arable cultivation, with an area of allotments and informal pasture with trees in the north-west. The remainder of the site is partially screened by vegetation along field boundaries which contains a number of established tree belts, hedgerows and individual medium-high grade trees.

A public footpath runs on a general north-south axis through the site and a ditched watercourse forms the south-eastern edge. There are also a number of ponds within and adjacent to the site.

### Site Location Plan



# Site Boundary Plan



 Site Boundary (9.4ha)

## SITE CONTEXT

Meriden has a range of local facilities and services, located along Main Road (x1 Bus service) and in the centre of the village (Village Green).

The site itself is located within walking distance of these facilities and services, which includes a range of shops, schools, community facilities, a library, sports park, pubs, hotels and excellent public transport links.

The site is located within walking distance of a 'high frequency' Bus service and stops along Main Road - connecting to Birmingham City Centre, Birmingham International, the NEC and Coventry City Centre.

Meriden C of E Primary School and Beechwood Care Nursery, located on Fillongley Road is approximately 480 metres from the site (6 minute walk). The nearest GP surgery is located on Main Road, within 150m of the southern site boundary (approximately a 2 minute walk).

The larger retail centres at Solihull Centre and Touchwood are located approximately 8 miles to the south-west, Coventry 7 miles to the east and Birmingham 15 miles to the west.

The site also offers sustainable travel opportunities for public transport users, cyclists and pedestrians. Public Rights of Way (PRoW) M265 and M267 run through the site, connecting to the wider PRoW network, including the long-distance Millennium Way, Heart of England Way and Coventry Way recreational footpaths accessible within 1 mile of the site. A watercourse also runs along the south-east of the site.

Local shops on Meriden Village Green



Meriden Public Footpath Network



# Facilities Plan



- |  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
|  Site Boundary                              |  Bus Stops      |  Nursery |  Hotel / B+B  |
|  PROW - Footpath                            |  Watercourse    |  Pub     |  Village Hall |
|  PROW - Millennium Way                      |  Local Shopping |  Doctor  |  |
|  PROW - Coventry Way / Heart of England Way |  Pharmacy       |  Library |  |
|  82 / 89 Bus Route                          |  Primary School |   |  |
|  X1 Bus Route                               |  |   |  |
|  Existing Allotments                        |  |   |  |

## LANDSCAPE & VISUAL CONTEXT

A Landscape and Visual Appraisal was undertaken to assess the character and features of the local landscape and the Site, to understand the contribution that the Site makes to local landscape character, and an analysis of the views towards the Site, to understand the potential visual impact of future development.

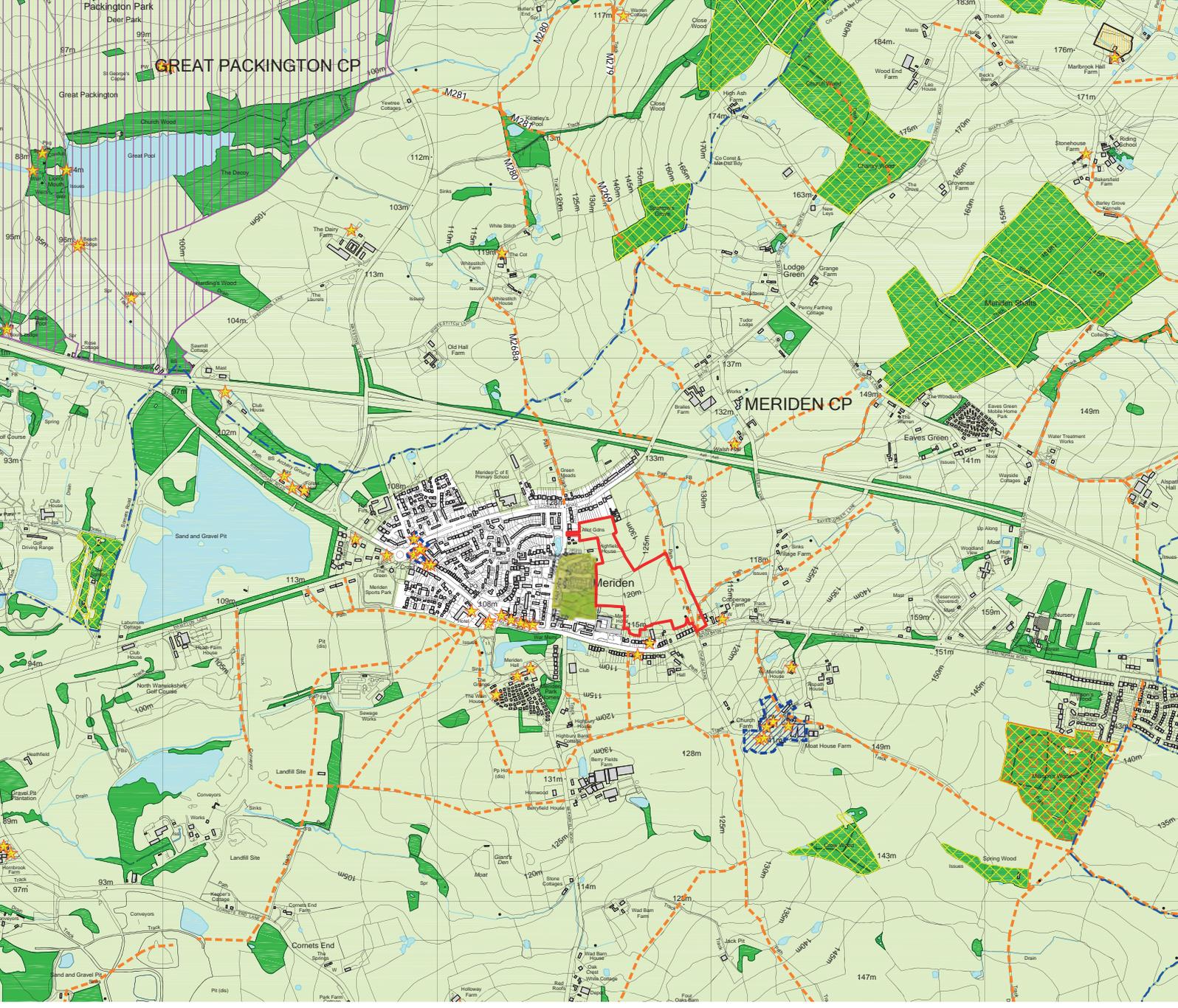
The landscape surrounding the Site is part of the Arden Landscape as assessed within the national and county published landscape character assessments. This is a well-vegetated undulating rural landscape characterised by large areas of ancient woodland, vegetated skylines and narrow lanes surrounded by high hedgerows. More locally, the landscape has been subject to field rationalisation and loss of landscape features, particularly to the east and south of Meriden, resulting in an uncharacteristically open landscape between the eastern edge of Meriden and Walsh Lane to the east of the Site.

Views towards the Site were limited to medium distance views from the area between the Site and Walsh Lane, from the footpath south of the B4104 and from isolated locations within and around the Meriden Hill Conservation Area. Longer distance views from the east and south were curtailed by vegetation and topography. Views from the north and west, beyond immediate views into the Site boundaries from the edges of Meriden were curtailed by topography and intervening built form. In summary, the visual envelope of the Site is limited to medium distance views from the south and east, from where the Site is seen within the context of the existing built edge of Meriden.

Remnant hedgerows and mature oaks remain within the south-west of the Site and some amenity planting exists around Highfield House in the north of the Site. These native hedgerows should be reinforced and new oak trees planted to create age structure and to restore the landscape infrastructure within the Site. Further native hedgerow planting with native trees, particularly oaks, should be established along the eastern boundaries of the Site, and space allowed within the development for further specimen tree planting. This will serve to restore some of the lost landscape features and structure of the area, and will help to recreate green linkages and will serve to soften and break up the newly defined edge of Meriden. Traditional materials and typologies should be reflected within the proposed development to reinforce local character.

The Site comprises an area of weakened landscape on the eastern edge of Meriden surrounded on three sides by existing development. The visual envelope is generally limited to medium distance views from the south and east, from where it is viewed within the context of other development within Meriden. There is the potential to mitigate many of the visual effects and to reduce the impact upon the Green Belt through the establishment of a new strong defensible boundary utilising the existing hedgerow and drainage channel to the east by restoring and enhancing key landscape features, planting of a substantial native woodland block to the eastern boundary as well as creating a positive green space in terms of local community park for the scheme and wider community of Meriden.

# Landscape Site Context Plan



 Site Boundary	 Conservation Area --	 Local Planning Authority Boundary
 Ancient Woodland #	 Registered Parks and Gardens ~	 SHLAA Site Assessments ##
 Existing Woodlands, Copses and Tree Belts ^	 Scheduled Monument ~	 Land to be added to Green Belt
 Existing Water Courses and Features ^	 Green Belt ^^	
 Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) ^	 Sites of Special Scientific Interest #	
 Public Rights of Way */**	 Local Nature Reserve #	
 Listed Buildings ~	 HS2 Proposed Route ++	

**Sources:**  
 ^ OS Mapping  
 # Natural England GIS Data Set  
 \* Historic England National Monument Record GIS Data Set  
 \*\* Warwickshire County Council ProW GIS Data and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council Walking and Cycling Map  
 \*\* OS Explorer  
 + Sustrans National Cycle Network GIS Data  
 ^^ Department for Communities and Local Government GIS Data  
 ## Meriden - SHLAA Site Assessments, September 2012  
 ++ High Speed Two (HS2) Limited GIS Data  
 -- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council Online Maps

## ECOLOGY

Initial desk based and field based surveys of the site have been carried out on ecological features, which covered:

- a) site area, and
- b) its potential zone of influence.

It was concluded that that the site does not present any significant ecological impacts that could not be adequately mitigated as part of the development for the following reasons:

- » there are many local wildlife sites and potential local wildlife sites within close proximity of the site. However development in this location would not result in any impact on these existing features;
- » mature trees and hedgerows within the site can easily be integrated into the development framework proposals for the site negating the need for mitigation. There is much scope for enhancement of these features and incorporation of these features within the green infrastructure element of the site design; and
- » the site is currently subject to arable farming, which limits ecological value however there is the opportunity within existing and newly created green spaces to retain, mitigate and provide opportunities for ecological habitat enhancement.

## ARBORICULTURE

The site contains a number of trees identified as 'high' or 'moderate' quality and value, prioritised for retention due to their condition, age and longevity. The majority of identified trees are located in existing field boundaries and the masterplan has been designed to respond to and retain the majority of these trees.

## HERITAGE & ARCHAEOLOGY

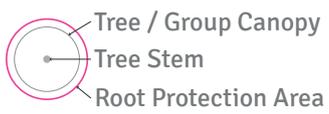
Initial desk based archaeological and heritage assessment was carried out to assess the archaeological potential of the site and the possibility for effects on heritage assets outside the site, through changes to their setting.

It was concluded that the site does not present any significant archaeological or heritage impacts that could not be adequately mitigated as part of the development, for the following reasons:

The site does not contain any nationally important features (such as world heritage sites). There are a number of listed buildings and locally listed buildings in the vicinity of the site and the historic core of 'Meriden Hill' (a conservation area). It is considered that the composition of the landscape will not change the ability of the viewer to look out over the surrounding landscape, or to appreciate the primary architectural interest of the buildings.

Such effects would therefore not represent an in principle constraint to the allocation of the site and its suitability for residential-led development. The effect on these buildings will be taken into account at an early stage in the careful design and masterplanning of development.

# Tree Survey Plan



Tree Quality & Value:

 Category A: High

 Category B: Moderate

# 4 Constraints & Opportunities

## CONSTRAINTS

- » **Green belt boundary will need to be redefined**, using a new defensible boundary;
- » There are existing homes on the southern and western boundaries which will require a sensitive design response;
- » Overhead power lines running across the southern part of the site.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- » The site has **excellent links to the strategic road network, public transport facilities and services** (A435) and a number of local routes which support connectivity of the site into the wider area;
- » The site is **located within walking distance of local community facilities and amenities** which will help support integration with the wider area and encourage sustainable movement patterns;
- » There are two potential **points of access from Leys Lane and Main Road**, which could be utilised to provide vehicle and pedestrian/cycle connections;
- » The site **sits in an established network of defined strategic landscape, hedgerows and green corridors** which create positive landscape attributes in which the development can respond to;
- » There is the **potential to incorporate green infrastructure linkages and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS)** resulting in biodiversity benefits;
- » A network of **public rights of way and bridleways** located on and near the site, providing important wider connections to the open countryside which will be enhanced in the development.
- » Existing landscape features within the Site would be retained and enhanced, primarily the existing trees and hedgerows.
- » New hedgerows and oak trees would be established along the eastern boundaries of the Site as well as a substantial native woodland block to establish a strong new defensible Green Belt boundary.
- » A longer-term strategy to create a green corridor along the route of the footpath and stream to the east of the Site would also be considered.
- » Development would reflect the context of Meriden in terms of scale, massing and typology.
- » Development would respond sensitively to the land that rises to the north of the Site, which creates an area of visual sensitivity and focus areas of development to the west and south-west of the Site on lower lying areas relative to the adjacent existing built form.
- » • Materials and typologies would reflect the distinctive local character, seeking to restore the character of this part of Meriden.

## Constraints & Opportunities Plan



- |   |                           |   |  |   |   |
|---|---------------------------|---|--|---|---|
|  | Site boundary             |  | PROW - Footpath                            |  | Site Low Point<br>(potential for attenuation) |
|  | Grade I Listed Building   |  | PROW - Bridleway                           |  | Overhead Power Line                           |
|  | Grade II* Listed Building |  | PROW - Millenium Way                       |   |   |
|  | Grade II Listed Building  |  | PROW - Coventry Way / Heart of England Way |   |   |
|  | Existing Allotments       |  | Vehicular Access                           |   |   |
|  | Road - A45                |  | Allotment Access                           |   |   |
|  | Road - Minor              |  | Countryside Links                          |   |   |
|  | Key Contours              |  | Key Views within the Site                  |   |   |

# 5 Concept Masterplan

## GUIDING DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

- » Provision of **3.4 hectares of residential development**, achieving around **100 dwellings** on the site using an average density of **30 dwellings per hectare**;
- » Provision of a **connected and accessible movement network**, with the primary vehicular access from Main Road;
- » A **safe and attractive pedestrian and cycle route running through the centre of the development**, connecting local movement from Main Road through the centre to the north via Leys Lane. This will encourage local movement and access to open space, play space, community orchard and local facilities within close proximity.
- » **Retention of existing pedestrian access points to the site** linking Meriden and the existing PROW network;
- » **New pedestrian and cycle link integrated through green corridors and primary route** through the development, to respond to key desire lines and the use of existing pedestrian routes onto Main Road;
- » The **development area is concentrated on land that is within 400m** (10 minutes walking distance) **of bus stops on Main Road**;
- » Development will be **structured to ensure the creation of a permeable, legible and safe streets and spaces**, with all public areas overlooked wherever possible;
- » **Retention and enhancement of existing green capital** wherever possible to shape a **connected and multi-functional green infrastructure network** - including a Local Area of Play (LAP), recreation, ecological habitats and attenuation;
- » **New areas of open space to accommodate new community/recreation facilities** to benefit new and existing residents of Meriden, encouraging community cohesion and a sense of ownership.
- » Provision for a **community garden for** new and existing residents;
- » **Key open space gateway** to respond to key views and topography and provide a generosity of space within the site that is in keeping with the village character of Meriden;
- » Utilise existing landscape features to create a new defensible green belt boundary with retained and enhanced planting and new community park.
- » Create a key open space gateway to respond to key views and topography and provide a generosity of space within the site that is in keeping with the village character of Meriden and responds positively to the LCA management guidelines and Meriden Parish Design Statement.
- » Create safe and attractive pedestrian and cycle routes running through the centre of the development, which utilise green corridors.
- » Retain existing pedestrian access points to the site linking Meriden and the existing PROW network.
- » Development should be structured to ensure the creation of permeable, legible and safe streets and spaces.
- » Retain, reinforce and enhance existing green capital wherever possible to shape a connected and multifunctional green infrastructure network.
- » New areas of open space to accommodate new community/recreation facilities within the Site and Proposed Development.
- » The creation of a new parkland landscape within the eastern part of the Site contained and enclosed by strategic planting which will provide a long term defensible Green Belt boundary.

Concept Masterplan



 Site Boundary (9.4ha)

- 1. Development Blocks
- 2. Existing Landscape
- 3. Proposed Landscape
- 4. Play Area
- 5. Attenuation Area
- 6. Public Right of Way
- 7. Walk / Cycle Route and Emergency Access
- 8. Community Garden
- 9. Community Park
- 10. New Defensible Green Belt Boundary

## KEY PARAMETERS

### Land Use

The concept masterplan plan for the site has been informed by the vision, site analysis and identified constraints and opportunities. The concept masterplan shows the key development principles which underpin the development of the site:

Land Use Area	Hectares
Developable Area	3.4
Public Open Space + Play Area	5.9
Drainage/SUDS	0.2
<b>Total Site Area</b>	<b>9.4</b>

Developable Area (ha)	Density (dph)	Units
3.4	30	100

### Land Use Plan



	Proposed Site Area 9.36 Ha / 23.13 Ac
	Proposed Development Area
	Potential Play Area
	Public Open Space / Landscape Planting
	Proposed SUDS

### Movement & Connections

The proposed primary vehicle access to the site is from Main Road which will connect to the local street network and will connect the remainder of the development. The existing access from Leys Lane will be utilised as a pedestrian and cycle link, which will run through the site and back to the access to the south of the site on Main Road, this can also be utilised as an emergency access if required.

The movement structure is also supported by a network of internal green links, streets, spaces which will provide walkable (and cycle) routes to on and off-site facilities and services and connect to the existing public right of way. The proposed movement framework will help to provide good access to facilities and services and integration within the wider movement network.

These connections into the wider network will increase accessibility to the remaining green belt land and provide compensatory provision.



## Green and Blue Infrastructure

The landscape and open space throughout the scheme shall include qualities and characteristics of the Northern Upland Landscape Character Area (LCA) and will be designed where possible to protect, enhance and restore the diverse landscape features within the site. In order to achieve this, the following green Infrastructure opportunities identified on site are to:

- » **enhance green infrastructure on site** - creating links between existing woodland, footpaths and other nature conservation assets such as hedgerows, field trees and watercourse in line with the guidelines for the LCA Northern Uplands
- » **strengthen the boundaries of the site** - with additional shrub and characteristic woodland planting, particularly along the southern and eastern boundaries to filter views. Additional planting could also be implemented along the western boundary to soften views of the recent housing development on Leys Lane
- » potential to utilise the landscape strategy to create a green entrance gateway and also green streets, including substantial planted tree belts within the streets to increase the attractiveness of the streets and filter views of the development



## Density

The average density across the site will be 30 dwellings per hectare, to reflect the existing settlement pattern and the existing density of Meriden village. Density and form will be lower towards the edges of the site and where there is increased visual sensitivity to mitigate visual impact of development and provide an appropriate response to the countryside edge. Structural landscaping is also integrated within this approach and to mitigate visual impact of development.



## Scale and Massing

The site has the potential to increase in scale and mass along the primary route to the south-east and centre of development.

Development edges along the north, north-east and eastern edges of the site will require sensitive treatment to reduce visual impact.



## LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

The landscape strategy has been devised to ensure that development of the site takes full advantage of the site's potential present in landform, views and vistas, connectivity with the open countryside and links with the land and history of the place. The landscape strategy sets out to provide the following:

- » **retaining and enhancing existing mature tree belts, hedgerows and areas of woodland** to help inform the layout in a manner that is responsive to the local landscape pattern and countryside setting to the east (native species include Hazel, Hawthorn, Field Maple, Oak and Blackthorn);
- » **integrating existing landscaping into the open space network**, providing a **range of green open spaces**, landscape focal points and backdrops throughout the development;
- » generous **additional landscaping and buffer planting** along the site boundary to the east and throughout a series of landscaped streets and open spaces;



## **GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND GREEN BELT STRATEGY**

The greatest contribution the Site makes is in terms of preventing sprawl. This is due to the lack of a strong defensible boundary to the east, resulting from field rationalisation and loss of landscape features.

The adjustment of the site boundary, to take into consideration the existing remnant hedgerow boundary to the east and reinforce this with substantial native woodland planting, would establish a new strong defensible Green Belt boundary that would be easily identifiable and also respond sympathetically to the landscape management guidelines set out in the LCA. The establishment of the native woodland planting following the existing field boundary would also aid in lessening any residual perceived visual encroachment of the scheme. The application of this appropriate and considered mitigation measure would result in the scheme being seen as a contiguous, well-integrated element of the existing built form that extends around the Site presently, that would also positively reinforce locally characteristic landscape features.

## **RENEWABLE ENERGY**

Our three stage approach to energy usage on the site is to firstly reduce the demand for energy, it is then to create energy using on-site renewables where possible and where any surplus demand needs to be met, this should be from renewable sources where possible.

As part of the sustainable response, the design development of the proposals will firstly seek to minimise energy usage on the site. This will include promoting active travel, by ensuring pedestrian and cycling routes are safe, attractive and convenient. The proposals will look to connect into the wider movement network, increasing accessibility and permeability.

Building upon the reduced energy demand from the site, where possible, the proposals will seek to utilise and embrace on-site renewable energy as part of the development. This may include photo-voltaic panels, domestic wind turbines, utilise rainfall or other technologies appropriate to the site.

Where there is any further shortfall in meeting energy demand and met by off-site energy providers, where possible this should be from renewable sources. This may include solar, wind, rain, tidal and geothermal, the use of biomass may also be appropriate.

## **CLIMATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

All development has a duty and obligation to consider the impact upon the climate emergency. Whilst new homes are much needed, they should not be at the detriment of the climate. Therefore, the design proposals will look to minimise negative climate impacts whilst maximising the positive elements of the site to positively contribute to a greener environment.

The development proposals incorporate best practice design throughout which includes sustainable development principles, greening the environment, increasing biodiversity, incorporating blue and green infrastructure and being of a robust framework to allow for future adaptability and flexibility.

By incorporating best practice sustainability principles from the outset at the conceptual design stage, it ensures they will be a foundation of the proposals and well-integrated. Existing features on the site will be utilised and incorporated. Careful consideration of all key design aspects will ensure that the landscape, built environment, ecology, heritage, blue infrastructure, utilities and infrastructure are all developed in parallel to deliver a comprehensive holistic proposal.

Our well designed development will further encourage active travel, enhance health and wellbeing, facilitate social interaction and positively contribute to the Climate Emergency.



-  Site Boundary
-  Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD)
-  Public Rights of Way
-  Listed Building
-  Green Belt

- Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints**
-  Existing tree planting to be protected, enhanced and incorporated into integrated blue-green infrastructure
  -  Existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees to be reinforced and strengthened with additional planting
  -  Proposed Structural Green Infrastructure to soften and absorb proposed built form
  -  Proposed structural woodland and tree planting to provide defensible Green Belt boundary

-  Elevated Land
-  Local Community Park
-  Ponds and ditches to be protected, enhanced and incorporated into integrated blue-green infrastructure
-  Views towards the Site

# 6 Benefits Summary & Deliverability

## VISION

‘an attractive, residential development of around 100 high quality new dwellings in Meriden Village – a place to live that is set within a landscape and countryside setting with design and style of homes that reflect the qualities of the local area, located within a short walking distance of a new community orchard and an excellent range of village facilities and services. It also provides the opportunity to utilise existing landscape features to create a strong defensible green belt boundary for Meriden’.

## DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS SUMMARY

Creating a sustainable, well-connected green infrastructure network, which contributes to social, environmental and economic benefits within the borough is a key part of SMBC planning policy. The Proposed Development will respond to the need to deliver green infrastructure improvements through the following measures:

- » Delivery of multifunctional public open space through biodiverse open spaces, community gardens and community parkland.
- » Creation of a green gateway to Meriden with improved links to the surrounding countryside.
- » Substantial native hedgerow and canopy tree planting throughout the Site linking into existing local green infrastructure network. Existing vegetation to be enhanced and retained as part of the native planting improvements.
- » Native tree and hedgerow planting will contribute to improvements in hedgerow and deciduous woodland habitats of principal importance within the local area.
- » Incorporating SuDS features such as swales and seasonally wet meadows.

- » Green Infrastructure improvements will reflect and positively contribute to the character of Meriden and the wider Arden landscape through increased native hedgerow and woodland block planting and provide biodiversity enhancements.
- » Creation of green streets, specifically planting a range of street trees, will positively contribute to the wider green network, local sense of place and climate change mitigation.

## LANDUSE BENEFIT SUMMARY

The development will provide for the following land use benefits:

- » 3.4 hectares of residential development of approximately 100 new dwellings;
- » 5.9 hectares for public open space, recreation and local play provision.

## DELIVERABILITY

This promotional document sets out how our proposals for Land north of Main Road, Meriden could deliver the vision:

The development will bring real benefit to Meriden, through the provision of new recreation facilities, quality spaces in the public realm that are accessible to all and the creation of a distinctive sense of place that belongs to the village and the setting.

The vision and guiding design principles will ensure the proposals deliver sustainable linkages, form a successful relationship with Meriden and facilitate community cohesion.

The development has the potential to bring a range of direct and indirect benefits to the local area, including:



**New Homes** - the creation of a sustainable and high-quality residential community and the delivery of around 100 dwellings, providing market and affordable to meet local demand;



**Responsive Design** - a carefully considered design that responds to and maximises the opportunities posed by the existing local landscape on site. Access and views to the surrounding countryside will be maximised where appropriate;



**Accessibility and Sustainability** - a development layout that is designed to be well connected, accessible and walkable to key facilities and services – supported by safe, attractive routes and spaces that are overlooked by new housing;



**Public Open Space and Landscaping** - enhancing existing links to the strategic green network and open countryside, so that new and existing residents can benefit from improved health and well-being;



**Enhanced Community Garden** – located off Leys Lane, with a new pedestrian and cycle route, serving both existing and future residents;



**Biodiversity** - proposals that can contribute to the protection and enhancement of the natural and built environment by improving biodiversity, minimising the use of natural resources and minimising waste and pollution.



**Climate Emergency Response** - The proposals will have sustainability as a key focus throughout. Promoting active travel, utilising existing features, ensuring accessibility and utilising renewable energy where possible will be a core aspiration of the site







# Education Assessment

## Land North of Main Road, Meriden

May 2020

# Contents

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1.	Introduction	1
2.	Location of site and primary pupil yield	2
3.	Review of current primary school capacity	4
4.	Forecast capacity in existing provision	11
5.	Accommodating demand generated by the site	15
6.	Conclusion	21

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## Contact

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May 2020

IMLP3007

# 1. Introduction

## **Context and purpose of this assessment**

- 1.1 This Education Assessment has been prepared by Turley Economics on behalf of IM Land in relation to Land North of Main Road, Meriden Village, Solihull ('the site').
- 1.2 This assessment follows on from an initial Education Assessment which was undertaken in March 2020, and which was submitted as part of the wider submission to Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's (SMBC) Call for Sites.
- 1.3 The purpose of this Education Assessment is to provide an assessment of the impact of the site on primary school provision and an initial recommendation as to how the additional demand for school places could be accommodated. This assessment does not include analysis of other school types, for instance early years or secondary education.

## **Engagement with SMBC**

- 1.4 As part of this assessment, Turley Economics has engaged with SMBC to request data which is not in the public domain. Ann Pearson, Team Leader – School Place Planning, Children's Services and Skills at SMBC<sup>1</sup> has responded and provided data, which is referenced where used throughout this report.
- 1.5 Prior to Turley Economics undertaking this Education Assessment, IM Land separately engaged with SMBC to discuss the potential impact of this site on primary education provision in summer 2019.

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<sup>1</sup> Email correspondence with Ann Pearson, SMBC, April and May 2020.

## 2. Location of site and primary pupil yield

### Location of the site

- 2.1 The following figure shows the red line boundary for the site, which is located at Land North of Main Road, Meriden Village, Solihull.
- 2.2 Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) is the relevant Local Education Authority (LEA) to this site.

**Figure 2.1: Location of the site**



### Primary pupil yield generated by the site

- 2.3 The site has an approximate capacity for 100 dwellings. Whilst a housing mix has not been determined at this stage, it is reasonable to assume for the purpose of this assessment that the scheme will comprise a mix of market and affordable units of 1, 2, 3 + bed units, in line with the adopted policy P4a of SMBC's Local Plan 2013 and SPD Housing Need Assessment.
- 2.4 The mechanism for estimating the number of primary school pupils generated by new housing (the pupil yield multiplier) is set out in SMBC's latest (2018) *Solihull School Organisation Plan 2018-2019* document<sup>2</sup>. SMBC's pupil yield multiplier for the primary level is 0.25 per dwellings. As such, at 100 dwellings, the site will generate demand for 25 primary pupil places, equivalent to 0.1 Forms of Entry (FE). This calculation is shown in Table 1.1.
- 2.5 It is noted that other Local Education Authorities tend to disregard one bed dwellings, on the assumption that dwellings of this size will not accommodate school age children. SMBC's pupil yield multiplier does not distinguish between dwellings of different bed sizes, and considering that the site would be likely to include a number of one bed units, it is considered therefore that the pupil yield at 25 pupils reflects the maximum number of primary pupils that this site would generate.

**Table 2.1: Demand for primary school places generated by the site**

Number of dwellings	Primary pupil yield multiplier	Number of pupils generated	Equivalent forms of Entry
100	25	<b>25</b>	<b>0.1</b>

Source: SMBC (2019) *School Organisation Plan*; Turley Economics analysis 2020

<sup>2</sup> Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (2018) *Solihull School Organisation Plan 2018-2019*

### 3. Review of current primary school capacity

#### Identifying relevant primary schools

- 3.1 It is necessary to identify the primary schools at which children at the site could reasonably be expected to access school places.
- 3.2 When considering relevant schools for the primary level, SMBC's approach is to review the schools within the relevant School Planning Area, which are used to group schools together for the purposes of planning school places<sup>3</sup>.
- 3.3 SMBC also notes that a two mile walking distance is of consideration for the primary level, this being the maximum statutory walking distance for the primary level, as set by the Education Act (1996)<sup>4</sup>.
- 3.4 Both geographies in relation to the location of the site are assessed in turn below.

#### Schools located within the Rural East School Planning Area

- 3.5 The site is located within the 'Rural East Primary' School Planning Area, which comprises five primary schools:

- Balsall Common Primary School;
- Berkswell Church of England Primary School;
- George Fentham Endowed School;
- Lady Katherine Leveson Church of England Primary School; and
- Meriden Church of England Primary School<sup>5</sup>.

#### Schools within a two-mile walking distance

- 3.6 In line with the Education Act 1996<sup>6</sup>, SMBC also considers a two mile walking distance as the maximum distance a child under the age of 8 can be expected to travel to school before the provision of school transport is required.
- 3.7 There is just one primary school within a 2 mile walking distance from the location of the site: Meriden Church of England Primary School. This school is located in close proximity to the site, at approximately 480 metres, equivalent to a walking travel time of approximately 6 minutes.
- 3.8 All of the other four primary schools in the Rural East School Planning Area are located much further away, with none being within a 2 mile walking distance, although it is noted that Berkswell Church of England School is located just outside the 2 mile walking distance (2.2 miles).

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<sup>3</sup> SMBC (2019) Solihull School Organisation Plan, page 27

<sup>4</sup> SMBC (2019) Solihull School Organisation Plan, page 26

<sup>5</sup> SMBC (2019) Solihull School Organisation Plan

<sup>6</sup> Education Act, 1996, statutory walking distances for children under the age of 8

3.9 The location of all five primary schools in the school planning area is detailed in Table 3.1, and are shown in the following map on page 6.

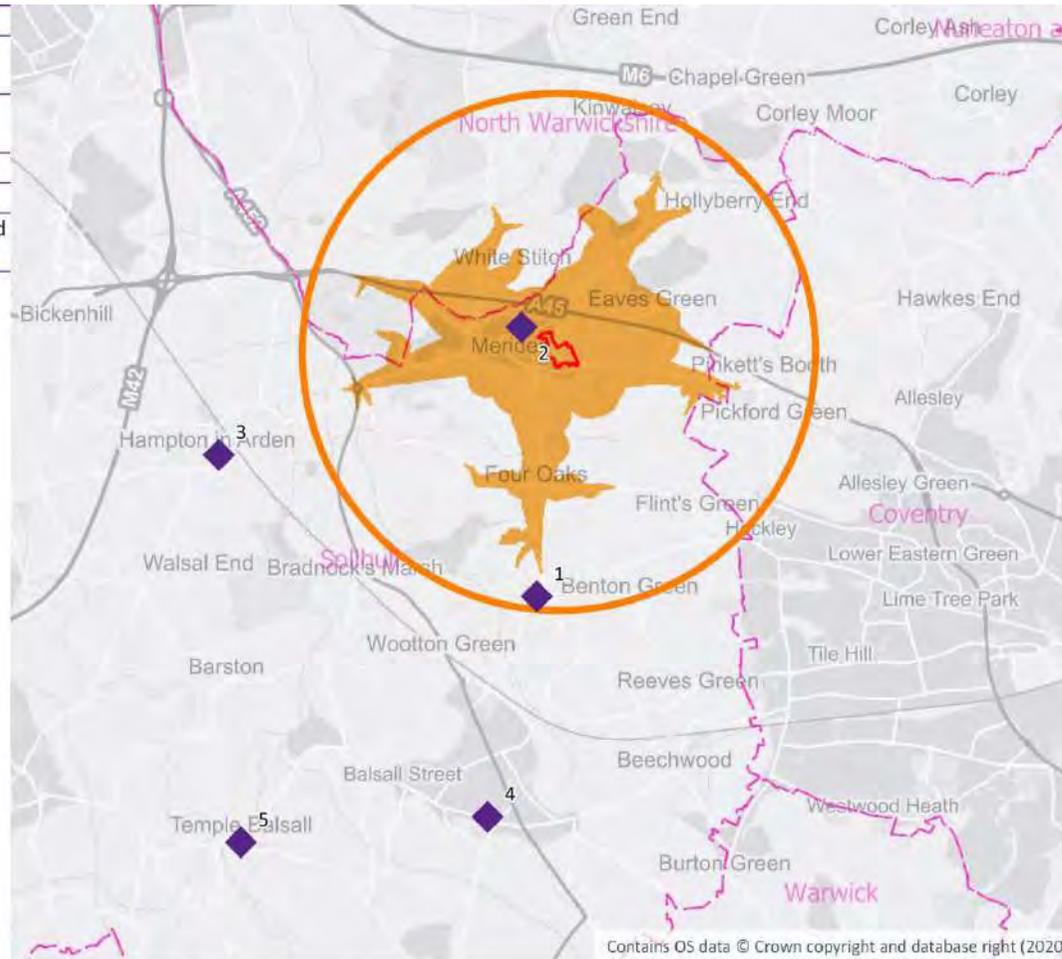
**Table 3.1: Distance of primary schools in Rural East Primary School Planning Area from the site**

Name of school	Walking distance	Travel time on foot	Within 2 mile walking distance?
Meriden Church of England Primary School	480 metres	6 minutes	✓
Berkswell Church of England Primary School	2.2 miles	45 minutes	x
George Fentham Endowed School	3.2 miles	1 hour	x
Balsall Common Primary School	4.3 miles	1 hour 30 minutes	x
Lady Katherine Leveson Church of England Primary School	5.8 miles	1 hour 55 minutes	x

*Source: Turley Economics, QGIS mapping, 2020 is used for analysis of walking distance; Google maps is used for analysis on walking time*

**Figure 3.1: Location of all primary schools in Rural East Primary School Planning Area**

Ref	Name
1	Berkswell Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
2	Meriden Church of England Primary School
3	George Fentham Endowed School
4	Balsall Common Primary School
5	Lady Katherine Leveson Church of England Primary School



The site
  2 mile radius
  Local Authority
 ◆ Schools (Primary)
  2 mile walking distance



### **Suitability of Meriden Church of England Primary School**

3.10 Where comparative proximity is taken into account and with regard to the two mile walking distance, it is considered appropriate that it is assumed that the primary pupils generated by the site would attend Meriden Church of England Primary School rather than the other four schools in the school planning area, so as to promote sustainable patterns of school travel.

### **Size of in-catchment population**

3.11 SMBC has provided data <sup>7</sup>which shows that, at present, a total of 268 primary aged pupils reside in the catchment area of Meriden Church of England Primary School<sup>8</sup>. As already shown in Table 2.2, this school has a capacity of 210 places.

3.12 As such, there are 58 more pupils residing in the catchment area compared to the size of the primary school. The data therefore indicates that not all primary pupils living in the catchment area are able to secure a place at Meriden Church of England Primary School. This is explored further in the section on 'Pupil movements'.

3.13 As such, there may be latent demand for additional places at Meriden Church of England Primary School by pupils who reside in Meriden. If additional places were made available at Meriden Church of England Primary School, all pupils residing in the catchment area could be accommodated within the school.

3.14 These findings are shown in the following table.

**Table 3.2: Size of in-catchment primary aged school population compared to capacity of Meriden Church of England Primary School**

Size of in-catchment population for Meriden Church of England Primary School	Current capacity of Meriden Church of England Primary School	Difference between size of catchment and capacity of the school
268	210	58

*Source: Data provided by SMBC, May 2020*

### **Current capacity**

3.15 The following table demonstrates that Meriden Church of England Primary School is currently operating at capacity and indeed is accommodating 8 more pupils over its official capacity threshold of 210 places.

3.16 All of the other four schools in the school planning area, however, have spare places, and as such across all five schools, there are currently 84 spare places.

<sup>7</sup> Data provided in email correspondence with Turley Economics by SMBC, April and May 2020

<sup>8</sup> SMBC notes that the in-catchment population of 268 primary aged children does not include pupils that are educated in Specialist provision or pre-school pupils that attend a private, voluntary or independent early years provision.

3.17 These findings are shown in the following table.

**Table 3.3: Current spare capacity within existing provision of schools in Rural East Primary School Planning Area**

Name of school	Capacity	Current number on roll	Spare capacity
Meriden Church of England Primary School	210	218	- 8
Berkswell Church of England Primary School	240	224	16
George Fentham Endowed School	240	225	15
Balsall Common Primary School <sup>9</sup>	675	660	15
Lady Katherine Leveson Church of England Primary School	210	164	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,575</b>	<b>1,491</b>	<b>84</b>

*Source: SMBC (2019) Solihull School Organisation Plan; DfE School Census January 2019 via Get Information About Schools website, accessed March 2020; Turley Economics analysis 2020*

### **Pupil movements**

- 3.18 This assessment takes into consideration the home location of pupils and the location of schools attended to understand patterns of cross catchment movement.
- 3.19 Based on data provided by SMBC for this assessment<sup>10</sup>, the following table lists all primary schools currently attended by pupils residing in the Meriden Church of England Primary catchment area.
- 3.20 As Table 3.5 shows, at 60%, the majority of pupils in the catchment area attend Meriden Church of England Primary School. This is equivalent to 161 pupils, comparing this proportion to the size of the in-catchment population at 268 pupils as discussed

<sup>9</sup> Please note that for this school, SMBC's data as published in the School Organisation Plan is used instead of the DfE School Census data. The DfE School Census data shows that this school is currently accommodating over 100 more pupils than its capacity figure, which is taken to be erroneous. Instead SMBC's data is used.

<sup>10</sup> Data provided in email correspondence with Turley Economics by SMBC, April and May 2020

above. This data therefore shows that not all in-catchment pupils are attending this school.

- 3.21 It may be that this trend reflects a decision of choice and parental preference. However, as the school is full, evidenced by the fact that the school is currently accommodating 8 more pupils above its capacity figure, these patterns of cross-catchment movement may be out of necessity, as for example, places may be allocated to pupils with special conditions which would take priority in the admissions process, before accommodating local children<sup>11</sup>.
- 3.22 As the following table shows, the majority of pupils currently attending Meriden Church of England Primary School reside in the catchment area, equivalent to 76.7% of all pupils currently attending this school.

**Table 3.4: Number of in-catchment pupils attending Meriden Church of England Primary School, compared to size of school**

Number of in-catchment pupils currently attending the school	Capacity of school	Equivalent proportion
161	210	<b>76.7%</b>

*Source: Data provided by SMBC and Turley analysis; May 2020*

- 3.23 The following table lists all schools currently attended by pupils residing in the catchment area of Meriden Church of England Primary School.
- 3.24 The data presented shows that 82% of all primary aged pupils residing in the Meriden Church of England Primary School catchment area attend schools in the relevant School Planning Area – the Rural East Primary School Planning Area. Discounting those pupils that attend the Meriden school, 22% of pupils residing in the catchment area attend one of the other four schools in the planning area, albeit these schools are considered to be beyond what is considered to be a suitable distance from Meriden for primary children to walk to school.

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<sup>11</sup> For instance looked after children, and siblings of children already on roll at the school. See SMBC’s admissions arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools for 2019/20:  
<https://www.solihull.gov.uk/Resident/Schools-learning/schooladmissions/admissionarrangements2019-20>

**Table 3.5: Name of primary schools attended by pupils residing in the catchment area of Meriden Church of England Primary School**

Name of primary school	Percentage of pupils residing in Meriden Church of England Primary School attending each school	Turley Economics analysis of number of pupils, based on data of in-catchment population of 268
Meriden Church of England Primary School	60%	161
Berkswell Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School	7%	19
George Fentham Endowed School	6%	17
Balsall Common Primary School	6%	16
Lady Katherine Leveson Church of England Primary School	3%	8
<b>Sub-total in School Planning Area<sup>12</sup></b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>221</b>
Schools located outside of the borough ( <i>school names are not provided</i> )	13%	36
Solihull Independent Schools	1%	2
Woodlands	1%	2
Allesley Primary School	0%	1
Burton Green Church of England Academy	0%	1
Cannon Park Primary School	0%	1
Coppice Junior School	0%	1
Eversfield Preparatory School	0%	1
Langley Primary School	0%	1
Warwick School	0%	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>268</b>

*Source: Data provided by SMBC, May 2020; Turley analysis, May 2020*

<sup>12</sup> Comprising the schools: Meriden Church of England Primary School; Berkswell Church of England Primary School; George Fentham Endowed School; Balsall Common Primary School; and Lady Katherine Leveson Church of England Primary School.

## 4. Forecast capacity in existing provision

### Forecast spare capacity

- 4.1 Where the previous section considers current capacity, it is important to understand how this is projected to change in the forecast position.
- 4.2 SMBC has provided data on forecast number on roll at all of the primary schools located within the Rural East Primary School Planning Area<sup>13</sup>. As the following table shows, it is forecast that there will be spare capacity in all of the five schools, at a total of 233 spare places across all five schools in 2023.
- 4.3 The forecast trend therefore is for falling pupil numbers across the five schools, when compared with the total number of 84 spare places in the current position, as set out in Table 3.3.
- 4.4 The general trend of falling pupil numbers is applicable to Meriden Church of England Primary School. The data on current numbers on roll, as presented in Table 3.3 shows that the school is currently accommodating 8 pupils beyond its official capacity number, but the forecast data indicates that the school will have 19 spare places in 2023. However, the forecast level of spare places at this school will not be sufficient to accommodate all of the demand generated by the Site, which is estimated to generate a maximum of 25 primary pupils<sup>14</sup>.

**Table 4.1: Forecast number on roll and spare capacity of schools in Rural East Primary School Planning Area**

Name of school	Capacity	Forecast number on roll, 2023	Forecast spare provision in 2023
Meriden Church of England Primary School	210	191	19
Berkswell Church of England Primary School	240	210	30
George Fentham Endowed School	240	196	44
Balsall Common Primary School	675	615	60
Lady Katherine Leveson Church of England Primary School	210	130	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,575</b>	<b>1,342</b>	<b>233</b>

*Source: Forecast number on roll data provided by SMBC, May 2020; Turley analysis of forecast spare provision based on current data on school capacity.*

<sup>13</sup> Data provided in email correspondence with Turley Economics by SMBC, April and May 2020. Please note that SMBC has emphasised that the forecast data was prepared in July 2019 and that the data is only reviewed annually. As such, we may expect that SMBC will publish its updated forecast data around July 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Though this level could be accommodated if the school were to continue to operate over capacity as it would require up to 6 additional places compared to the current 8 provided above the school's capacity.

### **Forecast size of in-catchment population**

- 4.5 Turley has requested SMBC to provide data on the forecast number of primary aged pupils residing in the relevant catchment area to Meriden Church of England Primary School; this data was not provided.
- 4.6 However, reflecting the falling number of pupils at this school in the forecast position in 2023 compared to the current number on roll, it can be inferred that there may be a parallel fall in the number of pupils living in the catchment area.
- 4.7 Based on the assumption that the fall in the number on roll at the school reflects the fall in the catchment population, it can be estimated that the in catchment population will fall by 27 pupils to 241 pupils. Therefore, the forecast in-catchment population, even assuming a fall in primary aged pupils, would still be higher than the size of Meriden Church of England Primary School, at 210 places.

### **Demand generated by wider residential development**

- 4.8 SMBC notes that the forecast data regarding pupil on roll numbers does include the pupil yield from housing sites with planning approval, but does not include pupils which would be generated by sites which are proposed in the draft Local Plan which will impact on the forecast numbers for these schools<sup>15</sup>.
- 4.9 For reference, it is noted that SMBC's approach in compiling the forecast data is in line with DfE's guidelines to LEAs, wherein the guidance advises that projected pupil growth should be based on demographic changes of the existing population as well as demand by confirmed housing growth with planning permission, and as such allocated sites are not typically considered as there is no certainty regarding their deliverability:

*"Your pupil forecasts should only include expected pupil yields from housing developments that have a high probability of being delivered within the timeframe of the forecasts. In most cases such developments will have full planning permission"*<sup>16</sup>.

- 4.10 Therefore, in addition to the forecast position set out in Table 4.1, the potential additional demand that may come forward by proposed residential schemes and allocated sites has been assessed to understand if these sites may be geographically relevant to Meriden Church of England Primary School.
- 4.11 SMBC's latest (2019) Solihull School Organisation Plan, in reference to the allocated and proposed allocated sites for the relevant School Planning Area 'Rural East Primary', states:

*"This planning area includes sites 1, 2, 3, 6 and 10. Sites 1 to 3 total 1,150 proposed dwellings – are located in the Balsall Common area. Sites 6 and 10 total 150 dwellings – are located in the villages of Meriden and Hampton in Arden. This planning area is already subject to approved housing development, totalling 150 dwellings, which is creating pressure on existing school places as*

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<sup>15</sup> Confirmed in email correspondence with Turley Economics by SMBC, April and May 2020.

<sup>16</sup> DfE (June 2019) School Capacity Survey Guide for local authorities, page 11

*is the demand from parents living outside of the Borough. 1,150 dwellings will generate circa 288 primary age pupils creating the need for additional primary school places.*

*To meet the existing and future demand for school places in this area, it is anticipated that an additional 420 primary school places will be required provided through the creation of a new two form entry (420 place) primary school which would also enhance choice and diversity in the area. Sites 6 and 10 are only small developments. However, they are proposed for the edge of existing rural villages. Additional pupil numbers, however small, may mean that demand from the village cannot be met by the village school but the proposed developments are not large enough to warrant the need for additional school places”<sup>17</sup>.*

4.12 As set out in the excerpt above, SMBC calculates the level of demand coming forward by residential development will altogether warrant the delivery of a new 2FE (420 places) primary school. It is considered more appropriate that the location of a new school would be in the Balsall Common area as this is where the majority of the residential development coming forward will be located<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, Site 1 at Barratt’s Farm for 900 dwellings includes the provision of a new primary school on site.

4.13 It is important to note however, the location of the sites coming forward:

- Sites 1 to 3 total 1,150 proposed dwellings and are located in the Balsall Common area and therefore closer to Balsall Common Primary School and Lady Katherine Leveson Church of England Primary School.
- Site 6 is located in the village of Hampton in Arden, and therefore the nearest George Fentham Endowed School.
- It is considered that only Site 10 is geographically related to the site and Meriden Church of England Primary School. It is also important to note that Site 10 is identified as having the potential to include specialist older person housing alongside traditional housing, though it is noted that further assessments are required to ascertain the balance of provision which is appropriate.

4.14 In addition, three other sites (Sites 21 to 23) are proposed to be allocated in SMBC’s Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation January 2019 document. Meriden Church of England Primary School is not the closest primary school for any of these sites. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the allocated and SHELAA sites and the site north of Main Road and the demand for primary provision that they will generate.

4.15 Therefore, in summary, although SMBC considers that the level of demand on identified sites will warrant the need for a new two form entry (420 place) primary school, it is clear that much of the demand generated will be in closer proximity to primary schools other than Meriden Church of England Primary School. As shown in the following table, Site 10 and the site could together generate demand for 50 primary school places.

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<sup>17</sup> SMBC (2019) Solihull School Organisation Plan, page 32

<sup>18</sup> As discussed in SMBCs’ 2018 School Organisation Plan.

**Table 4.2: Allocations and the site in the Rural East School Planning Area**

Site reference	Site name	Indicative number of dwellings	Indicative primary pupil yield	Equivalent Forms of Entry	Nearest primary school
<b>Proposed allocations in Draft Local Plan</b>					
Site 1	Barratt's Farm	900	225	1.07	Balsall Common Primary School
Site 2	Frog Lane	110	28	0.13	Balsall Common Primary School
Site 3	Windmill Lane	220	55	0.26	Balsall Common Primary School
Site 6	Meriden Road, Hampton in Arden	100	25	0.12	George Fentham Endowed School
Site 10	West of Meriden <sup>19</sup>	100	25 <sup>20</sup>	0.12	Meriden Church of England Primary School
Site 21	Pheasant Oak Farm	100	25	0.12	Balsall Common Primary School
Site 22	Trevallion Stud	300	120	0.57	Berkswell Church of England Primary School
Site 23	Lavender Hall Farm	60	15	0.07	Berkswell Church of England Primary School
<b>Sub – total</b>		<b>1,890</b>	<b>518</b>	<b>2.46</b>	
The Site	Land North of Main Road, Meriden	100	25	0.12	Meriden Church of England Primary School
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,990</b>	<b>543</b>	<b>2.95</b>	
<b>Total demand for Meriden Church of England Primary School</b>		<b>200</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>0.24</b>	

Source: SMBC (2019) Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation, pages 25, 83 and 85.

Please note: the number of dwellings presented in this table are taken from the Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation January 2019 as the maximum number of dwellings which could be accommodated in each site, whereas the numbers in the SMBC's School Organisation Plan in the excerpt above are taken from the Draft Local Plan December 2016. This explains the discrepancy between the numbers in this table and the numbers presented by SMBC's School Organisation Plan in the expert above.

<sup>19</sup> Comprising two sites: 137: The Firs, Meriden and 119: Land at Birmingham Road, Meriden.

<sup>20</sup> Note that this site includes residential accommodation for older persons, and it is assumed that only the proportion of the scheme for mainstream residential development will be likely to generate primary pupils. As such, the pupil yield of 25 is likely to be an overestimation. It is not possible to calculate the pupil yield accurately at this time.

## 5. Accommodating demand generated by the site

- 5.1 Reflecting on the findings as presented in Chapters 3 and 4, this Chapter sets out the suitable options to mitigate the impact generated by the site on primary school provision.
- 5.2 Considering the close proximity of Meriden Church of England Primary School to the site, and the fact that the other four schools in the relevant Rural East School Planning Area are located further away, with no others in a two mile walking distance, it is assumed that the pragmatic decision would be for pupils generated by the site to attend the local school of Meriden Church of England Primary School.
- 5.3 As the following table shows, taking into account the demand generated by the site, as well as demand generated by Site 10, together for 50 primary places, there would be 31 primary pupils which could not be accommodated at Meriden Church of England Primary School based on the school's total capacity of 210 places and forecast spare capacity of 10 places.
- 5.4 Taking into account the analysis on the size of the current and forecast population of the catchment area, as well as the demand generated by the site and Site 10, there could be approximately between 62 and 89 pupils residing in the catchment population above the capacity of the school, depending on whether a fall in the in-catchment population is assumed in line with falling numbers at the school.
- 5.5 In either forecast scenario, this number of pupils, however, does not trigger the need for a new primary school. The DfE recommends that new primary schools should be for a minimum of two forms of entry (2FE, 420 places) due to financial viability<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> DfE (April 2019), Education provision in garden communities, page 17

**Table 5.1: Demand – supply balance for Meriden Church of England Primary School**

	Analysis based on current size in-catchment population	Analysis based on Turley Economics' assumed fall in forecast in-catchment population
<b>Demand analysis</b>		
Demand generated by the site	25	25
Demand generated by Site 10	25	25
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>
Pupils residing in the catchment area, above the capacity of the school	58	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Supply analysis</b>		
Current capacity of school	210	210
Forecast spare capacity at school in 2023	19	19
<b>Demand generated by the site and Site 10 which could not be accommodated at Meriden Church of England Primary School</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Total in-catchment pupils which could not be accommodated at Meriden Church of England Primary School</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>62</b>

Source: Turley analysis; May 2020

### **Expansion at Meriden Church of England Primary School**

- 5.6 It is considered appropriate for SMBC to give consideration to the expansion of Meriden Church of England Primary School. An expansion at this school would mean that pupils generated by the site could be accommodated. In addition, an expansion project at this school would also provide a more optimal solution to provide additional local primary school places for pupils in Meriden.

### **Recent primary school expansions in Solihull**

- 5.7 Table 5.2 presents data published by DfE on the capacity impact and cost estimates associated with different new school build and school expansion projects which have been undertaken in Solihull. In total, ten such primary school projects have taken place since 2015. Of these, two have been 'Permanent Expansion Extension' projects, one for an additional 60 places and the second for an additional 180 places.

- 5.8 The fact that both of these two school expansion projects provide a lower number of places than a single form entry (210 places) provides confirmation of precedent for schools in Solihull to undergo permanent expansion projects for small numbers of pupils, where demand does not warrant the delivery of a new school but where it is recognised that current capacity will not support forecast pupil growth.

**Table 5.2: Additional primary school provision in Solihull, 2015 – 2018**

Year of project	Accommodation category	Number of additional mainstream places provided	Total mainstream cost excluding land
2015/16	Temporary Expansion	15	£50,000
2015/16	Permanent Expansion New Build	84	£1,500,000
2015/16	Permanent Expansion New Build	66	£1,500,000
2015/16	Temporary Expansion	30	£50,000
2015/16	Temporary Expansion	30	£50,000
2016/17	Temporary Expansion	15	£50,000
<u>2016/17</u>	<u>Permanent Expansion Extension</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>£1,316,667</u>
<u>2016/17</u>	<u>Permanent Expansion Extension</u>	<u>180</u>	<u>£2,464,286</u>
2016/17	Temporary Expansion	15	£120,000
2016/17	Temporary Expansion	30	£100,000

Source: DfE (2019), School Place Scorecards Underlying Data

### **Suitability of Meriden Church of England Primary School for expansion**

- 5.9 It is also important to recognise that it is understood that there is capacity for this expansion to be accommodated.
- 5.10 As part of this assessment, Turley Economics has engaged with SMBC to understand if the LEA has undertaken an assessment to understand if Meriden Church of England Primary School could undergo an expansion project. The contact at SMBC, Ann Pearson, has responded to confirm that, as far as she is aware, no feasibility has been undertaken by SMBC to investigate the potential for expansion at this school.
- 5.11 The developer for the site has however liaised directly with the Headteacher for the primary school, who has confirmed that the school would be appropriate for a school expansion project and there is space on site to accommodate additional teaching

space<sup>22</sup>. An expansion project would also allow for some rationalisation and renewal of old buildings and provide the opportunity to add breakout space to aid teaching of the pupils accommodated at school who have special educational needs.

- 5.12 The DfE’s latest guidance on the provision of new housing makes it clear that their position is to support “delivering schools to support housing growth<sup>23</sup>”. As such, it follows that the delivery of a justified school expansion project at Meriden Church of England Primary School would be welcomed by DfE so as to support housing growth in the area.

### Analysis of site requirements for expansion at Meriden Church of England Primary School

- 5.13 As an example, if Meriden Church of England Primary School were to expand its capacity by 0.5 FE, which is equivalent to 105 primary pupils, then the DfE (May 2019), Schedule of Accommodation Tool, a school building for 105 primary pupils would require a total GIA area of 940 sqm<sup>24</sup>. The calculation is shown at Table 5.3.

**Table 5.3: DfE Schedule of Accommodation tool, primary education, indoor floorspace required for 105 primary pupils**

Number of primary pupils	Minimum	Maximum	DfE recommended area (sqm)
Basic teaching area	300	360	323
Large halls	132	162	150
Learning resource area	24	59	43
Staff and administration area	59	93	70
Storage	43	76	68
Subtotal including net float	658	721	658
Facilities <sup>25</sup>	270	296	282
<b>Total</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>1,048</b>	<b>940</b>

Source: DfE (May 2019), Schedule of Accommodation Tool

- 5.14 The following figure, Figure 5.1, shows a site plan for Meriden Church of England Primary School. As the plan shows, there are currently two buildings on site, at 276.07

<sup>22</sup> Consultation with Mrs Lucy Anderton, Headteacher at Meriden Church of England Primary School, August and September 2019

<sup>23</sup> DfE (2019) Non statutory guidance, published at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-schools-to-support-housing-growth>

<sup>24</sup> DfE (2019), DfE (May 2019), Schedule of Accommodation Tool

<sup>25</sup> Kitchen, toilet, plant and ICT areas

sqm and 1,614.17 sqm respectively, with grounds in addition at 8,815.21 sqm. Therefore, the school site is 10,705.45 in size, equivalent to just over 1 ha<sup>26</sup>.

- 5.15 DfE’s latest (2014) Building Bulletin 103 sets out the space requirements for school sites. For primary aged pupils, the maximum total site area – referring to both indoor teaching areas and outdoor components including play areas – is 11 sqm per pupil for Reception and Key Stage 1 year groups, and 50 sqm for Key Stages 2-4 year groups<sup>27</sup>.
- 5.16 Therefore, for example if Meriden Church of England were to expand to by an additional 0.5 FE, to accommodate a total of 315 primary pupils, the total site requirement would be 10,485 sqm. As already detailed above, the existing total site size of the school is larger than the required quantum. Therefore, even with an extension to accommodate an additional 0.5 FE (105 pupils), there is sufficient space on site to meet the required standards published by DfE. These calculations are shown in the following table, Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4: Comparison of existing site size compared to required site size for school expansion at Meriden Church of England Primary School**

Scenario	Total site size (sqm)	Pupils accommodated	Equivalent Forms of Entry
Total existing site size of Meriden Church of England Primary School	10,705	210	1 FE
Total site size required for 315 primary pupils (1.5 FE)	10,485	315	1.5 FE

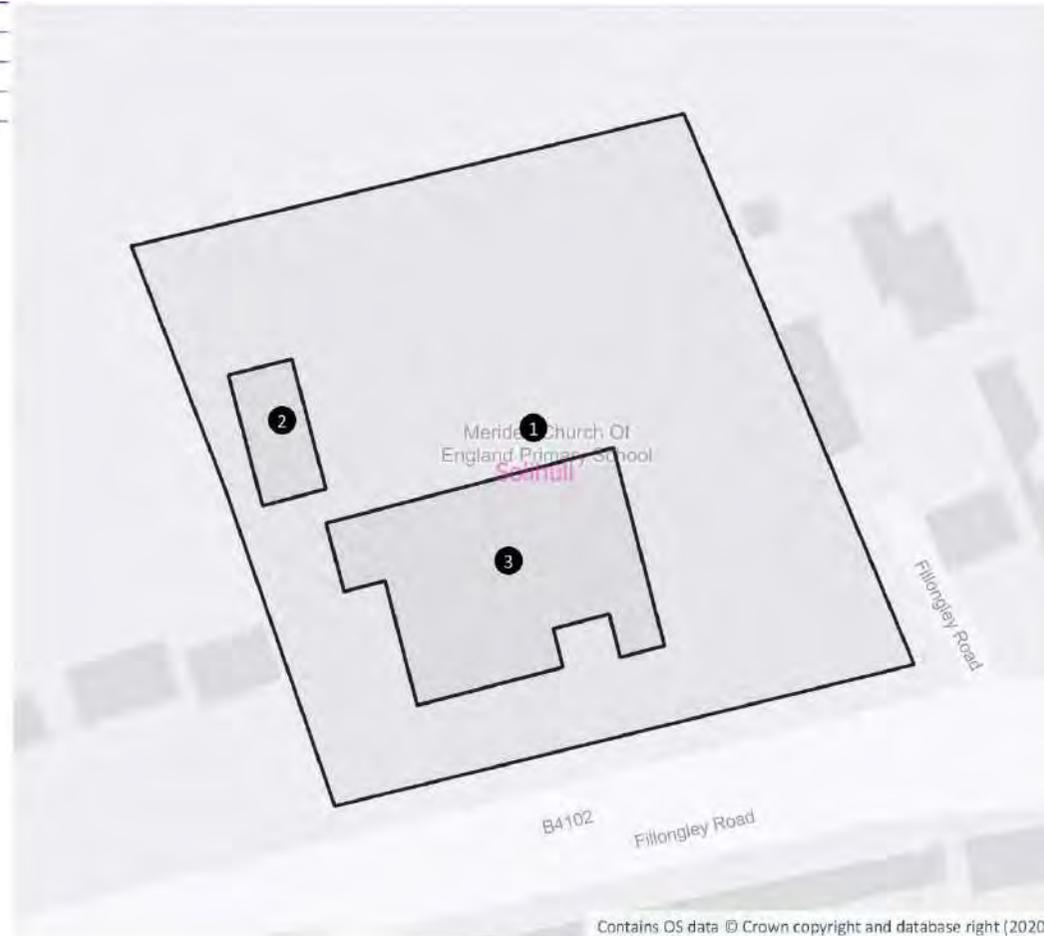
*Source: DfE (2014), Building Bulletin 103: Area guidelines for mainstream schools*

<sup>26</sup> Please note that this assessment is desk-based only; no site visit has been undertaken at Meriden Church of England Primary School.

<sup>27</sup> DfE (2014), Building Bulletin 103: Area guidelines for mainstream schools, page 44

**Figure 5.1: Meriden Church of England Primary School Site**

Ref	Area sqm	Type
1	8815.21	grounds
2	276.06	building
3	1614.17	building



□ Site sizes

## 6. Conclusion

6.1 This assessment has demonstrated that while there may not currently be capacity within Meriden Church of England Primary School to accommodate all of the additional demand that would be generated by the site, this could be mitigated through a justifiable expansion of the school.

6.2 The following key reasons are put forward:

- All other primary schools in the Rural East Primary School Planning Area are located beyond a suitable distance for a primary school age pupil to travel to school;
- The size of the in-catchment population of Meriden Church of England Primary School, at 268 pupils, is higher than the capacity of the school, at 210 pupils. Therefore, a school expansion project in Meriden could help the primary population of existing homes attend school locally rather than travel further afield;
- The level of demand for primary places that would be generated by Site 10 and the site, together for 50 primary school places, do not warrant the delivery of a new primary school as the demand is not large enough to fill DfE's minimum size of new primary schools (420 places); and
- Meriden Church of England Primary School has sufficient space on site to accommodate a school expansion project. This position has been confirmed through consultation with the Headteacher at the school, and is also evidenced through data analysis of the indicative amount of space required to undertake a school expansion project compared to the site size of the school.

6.3 It is therefore concluded that an appropriate mitigation approach can be delivered through the expansion of Meriden Primary School to overcome concerns regarding the impact on primary school places resulting from the development of our client's site alongside other allocated and proposed sites. This should inform the consideration of the site as an appropriate location for new housing under the emerging plan by SMBC.

**E**  
**E**  
**E**

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** RE: Meriden - Education Assessment  
**Date:** 30 April 2020 15:51:15  
**Attachments:** [image002.jpg](#)  
[image003.jpg](#)  
[image004.jpg](#)  
[image005.jpg](#)  
[image006.jpg](#)  
[analysis of meriden catchment area - primary.xlsx](#)

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Hi Maxine

I have answered the questions you have sent me as best I can at this point in time. However it is important for you to note that the information is provided as at today and is subject to further change, depending on when this site comes forward and how it fits with the Solihull draft Local Plan.

At the moment our primary school places are covered by Community Infrastructure Levy however if this were to change then this site would be considered for a S106 contribution and whether that was appropriate at the time of application. Your data request is only based on primary pupils and it is important to note that it is likely that we would want to claim a S106 contribution for Special Educational Needs provision using the methodology outlined in the School Organisation Plan 2019 and I would want to consider a secondary contribution, again depending on when this site were to come forward. The sites indicated in our draft Solihull Local Plan will have a significant impact on the provision of school places in this area so it is hard to anticipate without knowing the timing of this development what spare capacity could be used to accommodate the pupil yield or whether this will already have been factored in. Work is underway at the moment to consider the implications of the latest dwelling numbers included in the draft Local Plan and I would anticipate that this will be published in the next version of the School Organisation Plan later this year.

Q1. 268 primary age pupils reside in the catchment area for Meriden CE Primary School. Please note that this does not include primary age pupils that are educated in Specialist provision or pre-school pupils that attend a private, voluntary or independent early years provision. It does include pupils in school nurseries.

Q2. We do not forecast numbers of pupils in catchment areas only by school.

Q3 & Q4. Attached sheet 1. Please note that this is only for primary aged pupils in mainstream schools and does not include those pupils in Specialist provision.

Q5 Attached sheet 2. Please note that these forecast are at July 2019 and are only reviewed annually. They include pupil yield from housing sites with a planning approval and do not include the sites proposed in the draft local plan which will impact on the forecast numbers for these schools.

Q6. Not by the Council as far as I am aware.

Kind regards

**Ann Pearson**  
**Team Leader – School Place Planning**  
**Children’s Services and Skills**

---

**From:** Maxine Kennedy [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 06 April 2020 13:39  
**To:** Pearson, Ann (Childrens Services - Solihull MBC) [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Meriden - Education Assessment

Hi Ann,

Hope you are keeping well.

I’m getting in touch on behalf of my client at IM Properties, who is submitting a site in Meriden in the latest Call for Sites. The site is located at Land North of Main Road, Meriden.

I believe that you spoke with Sarah Milward at IM and Rachel Best at Stansgate Planning last summer about this site and the potential impact on primary education provision.

As the position may have changed in the intervening time since last summer, I have a few queries which I set out below. Could you provide me with an indicative timeframe by which you will be able to respond? I understand you may be particularly stretched at the moment. If you could also confirm receipt that would be helpful.

Many thanks,

Maxine

**Questions for SMBC:**

**Cross-catchment data**

1. Please may you provide data on how many primary aged pupils currently reside in the relevant catchment area for Meriden Church of England Primary School. If a catchment geography is not relevant, can you provide the data for the relevant ward instead?
2. Can you also share the data for the forecast number of primary aged children expected to reside in the catchment / ward?
3. Please may you provide a list of all the primary schools currently attended by primary aged

pupils living in the catchment / ward.

4. Can you also share data on the number or proportion (%) of the primary aged pupils living in the relevant area attending each school?

#### **Forecast pupil data**

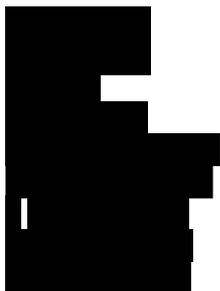
5. Please may you provide forecast data for the following individual schools? From reviewing the data published by SMBC in the *Solihull School Organisation Plan*; the data is only published for the School Planning Area (Rural East). Can you provide the data for each school separately?
  - Meriden Church of England Primary School
  - Berkswell Church of England Primary School
  - George Fentham Endowed School
  - Balsall Common Primary School
  - Lady Katherine Leveson Church of England Primary School

#### **Meriden Church of England Primary School**

6. Has there been a feasibility study to understand if Meriden Church of England Primary School can undergo an expansion project? If so, can you share a copy of this study, or share a summary of the findings, i.e. if the school is suitable to undergo an expansion, and if so, how many additional pupils could the school accommodate following an expansion project?

#### **Maxine Kennedy**

Senior Consultant, Economics



All Turley teams are now [remote working](#) wherever possible in line with Government guidance.

Our co-owners are contactable in the usual ways and we suggest using mobile numbers in the first instance. We are doing all we can to maintain client service during this challenging time.

[turley.co.uk](http://turley.co.uk)

[Twitter](#)

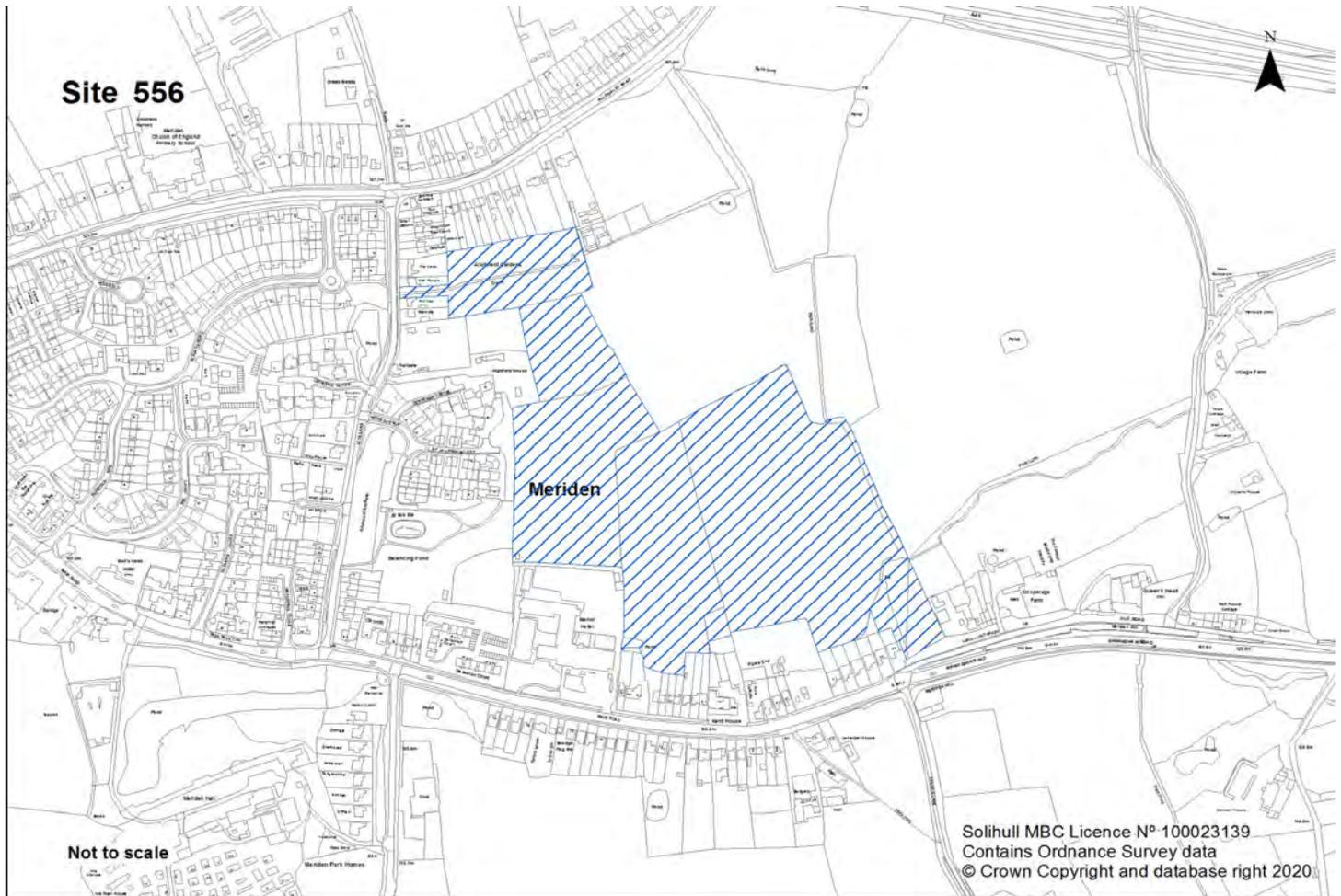
[Linkedin](#)

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<b>Site Reference</b>	556	<b>Site Name</b>	Land North of Main Road
<b>Gross Area (Ha)</b>	9.36	<b>Ward</b>	Meriden
<b>Capacity (SHELAA)</b>	219	<b>Parish</b>	Meriden
<b>Green Belt</b>	100	<b>Greenfield/ Brownfield</b>	Greenfield



### Constraints

**Policy Constraints** Mineral Safeguarding area Green Belt

**Hard Constraints**

**Soft constraints** PROW through east of site; Allotments at north of site included in boundary

## Evidence

<b>SHELAA</b>	Category 1
<b>Accessibility Study</b>	Primary School: Very High Food Store: Very High GP Surgery: Very High Public Transport: Very High (Bus) Overall: Very High Access: Footway along site frontage
<b>Green Belt Assessment</b>	Moderate performing parcel (RP25) overall with a combined score of 5. *Highly performing in terms of purpose 1.
<b>Landscape Character Assessment</b>	Within LCA7 Landscape character sensitivity - High Visual sensitivity - Medium Landscape value - Medium Landscape capacity to accommodate change - Very Low
<b>Sustainability Appraisal</b>	See CFS 420 (and 211) (Overlap with 556) AECOM 153/Site CFS 42019 effects: 8 positive (5 significant); 7 neutral; 5 adverse.

## Site Selection

<b>Spatial Strategy</b>	Growth Option G: Significant expansion of rural villages/settlements
<b>Site Selection Topic Paper</b>	Meriden is identified as a settlement where limited expansion is acceptable in principle. Sites to the west generally have lower performing Green Belt and are well-related to services.
<b>Site Selection Step 1</b>	5
<b>Commentary</b>	Site is within an overall low/moderate performing parcel in the Green Belt Assessment, although the parcel is high performing for purpose 1 (To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas). The site does not provide strong defensible Green Belt boundaries and is within an area of high landscape character sensitivity with low capacity for change. The site does, however, score highly in the Accessibility Study being located on the edge of the built up area of Meriden. The SA identifies 8 positive effects (6 significant) and 5 negative effects. Meriden village is identified for limited growth. However development of this site would have a detrimental impact on the surrounding green belt.
<b>Site Selection Step 2</b>	R



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# Meriden: Landscape and Visual Appraisal with Green Belt Review

Prepared on behalf of IM Land

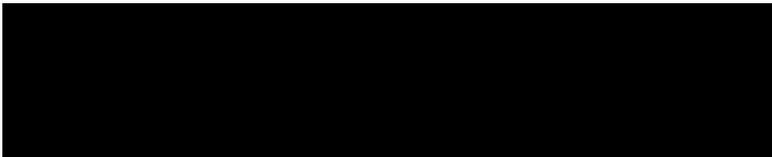
August 2020

# Meriden: Landscape and Visual Appraisal with Green Belt Review

Prepared on behalf of IM Land

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Barton Willmore LLP



Date: August 2020  
Status: Issue

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## CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction .....	3
2.0	Methodology .....	5
3.0	Landscape Context and Site Appraisal .....	11
4.0	Landscape Policy Context.....	15
5.0	Landscape Character Context .....	17
6.0	Visual Appraisal .....	26
7.0	Review of Proposed Meriden’s Valued Landscapes in MNDP.....	29
8.0	Proposed Allocation Site 10 Context and Appraisal .....	36
9.0	Green Belt Review .....	38
10.0	Development Proposals .....	44
11.0	Summary and Conclusion.....	47

## ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL

Figure 1: Site Context Plan

Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan

Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan

Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan

Figure 5: Proposed Allocation Site 10 Appraisal Plan

Figure 6: Visual Appraisal Plan

Figure 7: Green Infrastructure and Green Belt Strategy Plan

Figure 8: Illustrative Landscape Sections

Figure 9: Concept Masterplan

Site Appraisal Photographs (A-I) dated July 2020

Site Context Photographs (1-12) dated July 2020

Valued View Photographs Summer and Winter

Proposed Allocation Site 10 Appraisal Photographs (J-O) dated February 2019

**APPENDICES**

Appendix A.1: Landscape Policy Context

Appendix A.2: Extracts from Evidence Base Documents

Appendix A.3: Extracts from Published Landscape Character Assessments

Appendix A.4: Relevant Case Law Relating to Valued Landscapes

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Barton Willmore Landscape Planning and Design (BWLPD) were commissioned by IM Land to undertake a Landscape and Visual Appraisal with Green Belt Review (LVA GBR) and assessment of the opportunities and constraints to development on land south-east of Meriden (referred to as 'the Site') for a residential development of up to 100 dwellings (the 'Proposed Development') as part of the Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) Local Plan Review process.
- 1.2 The SMBC Draft Local Plan (DLP) consultation has undergone two stages in November 2015 and November 2016, which initially included site allocations deemed to be contentious. As a result, SMBC decided to postpone the move to the next plan stage and instead introduced a DLP Supplementary Consultation (January 2019). Further changes have since taken place, including the granting of Royal Assent to the first phase of HS2 in February 2020, and a new Local Development Scheme has been produced setting out an updated timeframe, which currently proposes a further consultation in the summer of 2020.
- 1.3 In addition, the Submission Draft of the Meriden Neighbourhood Development Plan (MNDP) was submitted to SMBC in March 2020 and consultation is running from 29<sup>th</sup> June to 24<sup>th</sup> August 2020. This updated LVA GBR has been produced as part of the MNDP consultation. The MNDP includes a section on 'Valued Landscapes' which includes view 3 from St Lawrence Churchyard as part of Figure 13 with Figures 14 – 18 showing Views from St Lawrence Churchyard. This updated LVA GBR addresses this issue in Chapter 7.0.
- 1.4 Barton Willmore LLP, based on the initial LVAGBR advice, produced a revised masterplan in December 2018 for the Site based on 100 dwellings and green infrastructure on a reduced area of land, which avoids development on the more elevated landform within the Site. This was submitted to Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) and is assessed as Site 420 in the additional call for sites submissions, with the assessment outcome listed as Red following the second stage of planning assessment.
- 1.5 There are no further site allocations in Meriden; however, the current Proposed Allocation Site 10 has seen its capacity increased from 50 to 100 dwellings.
- 1.6 The extents of the Site are as outlined by the red boundary on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan** and **Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan**. In order to gain a robust understanding of the area south-east of Meriden, this LVA GBR considers the wider Study Area, which corresponds to the full area shown on **Figure 1**. The boundary of Proposed Allocation Site 10 is also displayed on **Figure 1** and a high-level landscape and visual appraisal of Site 10 is set out within Chapter 8.0 of this report.

1.7 The objectives of this document are to provide a robust background to the identified opportunities and constraints to development of the Site and to explain the rationale behind the revised masterplan in terms of the landscape character of the Site and its surroundings, the landscape and visual qualities of the Site and its function within the wider landscape context (the 'Study Area'), together with a justification for the revised Green belt boundary along its eastern boundary edge. The work undertaken to justify the rationale for the concept masterplan and Green Infrastructure and Green Belt Strategy Plan includes an assessment of the existing landscape features, a visual appraisal of the Site and its context, planning policy and evidence base and landscape character baseline. Furthermore, this document addresses the proposed 'Valued Landscapes' as set out in Chapter 6: Natural Environment of the MNDP.

1.8 The objectives of the Landscape and Visual Appraisal and Green Belt Review are:

- To assess the landscape character of the Site and its context and the function of the Site within the wider landscape, particularly in relation to existing landscape designations and policies;
- To appraise the visibility of the Site and the nature and quality of existing views towards the Site;
- To assess the potential of the Site and its landscape context to accommodate potential development in terms of landscape and visual opportunities and constraints;
- To consider the opportunities and constraints for absorbing potential development within the landscape and the provision of a robust network of green infrastructure;
- Propose development design principles to guide the scheme to responding sympathetically and sensitively to its surroundings;
- To consider the policy basis for the underlying Green Belt designation which applies to the Study Area, as defined on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**;
- To assess the contribution of the Site in response to its Green Belt function and potential for the Green Belt boundary to be amended; and
- To consider whether the Meriden landscape as viewed from St Lawrence Churchyard is actually a valued landscape as purported in Chapter 6 of the MNDP.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Landscape and Visual Appraisals (LVA) and Green Belt Reviews (GBR) are separate assessments, the latter not being a landscape designation. However, the information ascertained through the LVA is used to aid the assessment of the contribution that the Site makes to the purposes of the Green Belt, such as through the assessment of the relationship of the Site with the existing built form, the identification of defensible boundaries that may prevent sprawl, the physical and visual encroachment into the countryside and the physical and visual merging of settlements.

### **Methodology for Landscape and Visual Appraisal**

2.2 The methodology employed in carrying out the LVA has been drawn from the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' 3rd Edition<sup>1</sup> (2013) also referred to as 'the GLVIA3'. The aim of these guidelines is to set high-standards for the scope and content of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIAs) and to establish certain principles that will help to achieve consistency, credibility, transparency and effectiveness throughout the assessment.

2.3 The GLVIA3 sets out the difference between Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA). The preparation of an LVA has the rigour of the EIA process but looks to identify issues of possible harm that might arise from the development proposal and offset them through change and modification of the proposals before a fix of the final design scheme. This LVA has been used as a tool to inform the design process, rather than an assessment of a final proposal.

2.4 The assessment of landscape and visual effects, in common with any assessment of environmental effects, includes a combination of objective and subjective judgements. It is, therefore, important that a structured and consistent approach is adopted to ensure that the assessment undertaken is as objective as possible.

2.5 A landscape appraisal is the systematic description and analysis of the features within the landscape, such as landform, vegetation cover, settlement and transport patterns and land use that create a particular sense of place. A visual appraisal assesses visual receptors, which are the viewers of the landscape, and could include people using locations such as residential or business properties, public buildings, public open space and Public Rights of Way (PRoW).

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<sup>1</sup> Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition

- 2.6 A desktop assessment of the Study Area was undertaken, including an assessment of landscape character, landform, landscape features, historic evolution, policy and designations. This information was used as a basis against which to compare the findings of the Site assessment.
- 2.7 The Study Area has been confined to that shown on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**. This distance from the Site was chosen based on existing features such as landform and vegetation; settlement morphology and land use patterns. This is considered a sufficient area to establish the landscape and visual baseline and to allow the appraisal of the Site and its context, and to inform the development of masterplan proposals.
- 2.8 A brief description of the existing land use of the Study Area is provided and includes reference to existing settlement, transport routes and vegetation cover, as well as local landscape designations, elements of cultural and heritage value and local landmarks or tourist destinations. These factors combine to provide an understanding of landscape value and sensitivity, and an indication of key views and viewpoints that are available to visual receptors, which are then considered in the visual appraisal.
- 2.9 The Site has been considered in terms of the following:
- i) Landscape Character  
i.e. land form, vegetation cover, land use, scale, state of repair of individual elements, representation of typological character, enclosure pattern, form/line and movement
  - ii) Visual Influence  
i.e. land form influences, tree and woodland cover, numbers and types of residents, numbers and types of visitors and scope for mitigating potential for visual impacts
  - iii) Landscape Value  
i.e. national designations, local designations, tranquillity / remoteness, scenic beauty and cultural associations

#### **Methodology for Green Belt Review**

- 2.10 The Site was assessed against the first four purposes of the Green Belt as set out in Paragraph 134 of the NPPF, which are:
- *"To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
  - *To prevent neighbouring towns from merging in to one another;*
  - *To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and*
  - *To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns..."*

- 2.11 The fifth purpose of the Green Belt *"to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land"*, has been scoped out of the assessment as the Council is considering greenfield sites and, therefore, should the Site be brought forward for development, it would not prejudice derelict or other urban land being brought forward for development.
- 2.12 The NPPF states in Paragraph 136 that *"once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans"*. Paragraph 139 f) states that Green belt Boundaries should *"define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent."*
- 2.13 The NPPF seeks to align Green Belt boundary reviews with sustainable patterns of development, as set out in Paragraph 138, with Local Planning Authorities encouraged to *"consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary"*.
- 2.14 Paragraph 141 sets out principles for the beneficial use of the Green Belt:

*"Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land."*

#### **Assessment in relation to the purposes of the Green Belt**

- 2.15 The criteria used to assess the contribution made by the Site as existing to the first four purposes of the Green Belt are set out in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1: Purposes of the Green Belt - Assessment Criteria**

Purpose	Criteria
Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.	<p>Considerable - Development of the land would be strongly perceived as sprawl, as it is not contained by robust physical features and/or would extend the settlement pattern in an incoherent manner.</p> <p>Some - Development of the land would be perceived as sprawl, as it is partially contained by robust physical features and/or would extend the settlement pattern in a moderately incoherent manner.</p> <p>Limited - Development of the land would be perceived as sprawl to a limited degree, as it is largely contained by robust physical features and/or would extend the settlement pattern in a broadly coherent manner.</p> <p>None - Development of the land would not be perceived as sprawl as it is well contained by robust physical features and/or is entirely set within the existing coherent settlement pattern.</p>
Prevent neighbouring towns from merging.	<p>Considerable - Development would result in the physical unification of two (or more) towns</p> <p>Some - Development would substantially reduce the physical or perceived separation between towns</p> <p>Limited - Development would result in a limited reduction in the physical or perceived separation between towns</p> <p>None - Development would not physically or perceptually reduce the separation between towns</p>
Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.	<p>Considerable: No built or engineered forms present and perceived as inherently undeveloped and/or rural in character. Development would potentially result in a strong urbanising influence over the wider landscape.</p> <p>Some: Built or engineered forms present but retaining a perception of being predominantly undeveloped and/or rural in character. Development would potentially result in a moderate urbanising influence over the wider landscape.</p> <p>Limited: Built or engineered forms present and a minimal perception of being undeveloped and or rural in character. Development would potentially result in a limited urbanising influence over the wider landscape.</p> <p>None: Built or engineered forms present and perceived as inherently developed and/or urban in character. Development would not result in an urbanising influence over the wider landscape.</p>
Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	<p>Considerable: Strong physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town. May be within or adjoining the historic part of a town.</p> <p>Some: Partial physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town, whilst not adjacent to it.</p> <p>Limited: Weak physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town.</p> <p>None: No physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town.</p>

2.16 The NPPF states that the key characteristics of the Green Belt are *"their openness and their permanence"*. In defining new boundaries to the Green Belt, it must be ensured that these characteristics are not diminished for the areas remaining within the Green Belt designation as a direct result of development. An assessment is made of the openness of the Green Belt in

the vicinity of the Site and to what extent its removal could have on the perception of openness in the remaining designated area.

- 2.17 In addition, the relationship of the Site to existing elements, such as built form, roads, railways and rivers, as well as visual barriers, such as ridgelines and areas of notable vegetation is set out. This assists in the assessment of the Site in relation to the existing Green Belt and consideration of potential development in relation to the openness of the remaining Green Belt and the permanence of Green Belt boundaries.
- 2.18 Where relevant, these factors, on top of consideration of the contribution of the Site as existing to the Green Belt, are then used to determine the degree of harm to the Green Belt, resulting from the Proposed Development, accounting for the mitigation by design approaches taken (and beneficial uses as set out in paragraph 141 of the NPPF if the Site remains within the Green Belt).

**Table 2.2: Definitions**

Term	Definition
Brownfield	See 'Previously Developed Land'
Character	A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that differentiates one area from another.
Coalescence	The physical or visual linkage of large built-up areas.
Countryside	In planning terms: land outwith the settlement boundary. In broader terms: the landscape of a rural area (see also rural)
Defensible Boundary	A physical feature that is readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.
Encroachment	Advancement of a large built-up area beyond the limits of the existing built-up area into an area perceived as countryside.
Green Infrastructure	A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.
Greenfield	Land (or a defined site) usually farmland, that has not previously been developed.
Large Built-Up Area	An area that corresponds to the settlements identified in the relevant Local Plan, including those inset from the Green Belt.
Merging	(see coalescence)
Neighbouring Town	Refers to settlements identified within the relevant Local Plan and those within the neighbouring authorities' administrative boundary that abut the Green Belt.
Open space	(NPPF definition) All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity.
Openness	Openness is taken to be the degree to which an area is primarily unaffected by built features, in combination with the consideration of the visual perception of built features. In order to be a robust assessment, this should be considered from first

	principles, i.e. acknowledging existing structures that occur physically and visually within the area, rather than seeing them as being 'washed over' by the existing Green Belt designation.
Previously Developed Land	(NPPF definition) Land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed) and any associated fixed surface infrastructure. This excludes: land that is or has been occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings; land that has been developed for minerals extraction or waste disposal by landfill purposes where provision for restoration has been made through development control procedures; land in built-up areas such as private gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments and land that was previously-developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape in the process of time.
Sprawl	The outward spread of a large built-up area in an incoherent, sporadic, dispersed or irregular way

### 3.0 LANDSCAPE CONTEXT AND SITE APPRAISAL

3.1 This section provides a landscape and visual appraisal of the Site, determining its potential capacity to accommodate residential development from a landscape and visual perspective. The Site and the surrounding environment were visited in May 2018, February 2019 and July 2020. **Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan and Site Appraisal Photographs A - I** illustrate the existing features and characteristics of the Site. The locations from which the Site Appraisal Photographs were taken are shown on **Figure 4**. Site Context Photographs are referenced where necessary in order to establish a comprehensive appraisal of the Site and its setting in the landscape with further narrative on the Site Context Photographs set out within section 6.0 of this report.

3.2 A landscape and visual appraisal has been undertaken to ascertain the existing character of the Site and to determine the relationship of the Site to its surroundings. This is accomplished through recording and analysing the existing features and characteristics, the way the landscape is experienced and the value or importance of the landscape and visual resources in the vicinity of the Site. The elements of the landscape that contribute to landscape character include the built and natural form, the pattern of features, detailing, scale, planting, land use and human perception. In this regard, landscape character is derived as a result of the perception of, and action and interaction between natural and human factors.

#### Site Description

3.3 The Site is situated on the eastern edge of Meriden in the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull, as shown on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**. It comprises part of four arable fields, an area of amenity land and an area of allotments, as shown on **Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan**. It is bordered to the north by existing residential development on Fillongley Road, to the west by existing residential development on Leys Lane and to the south by residential and commercial development (including Manor Hotel) on the B4104 Main Road and Old Road. The northern part of the eastern boundary is marked by the existing boundaries to the allotments (**Site Appraisal Photograph G and H**) and the amenity land. The eastern boundary of the remainder of the Site is essentially unmarked although remnant boundary hedgerows extend along limited stretches (**Site Appraisal Photograph B and E**).

#### Land Use and Settlement

3.4 The Site is situated immediately adjacent to existing residential development in Meriden on three sides (**Site Appraisal Photograph A, B and F**). Summer Site Appraisal Photo B also shows recent development to the south of the site. Meriden itself is a large village, primarily comprising post-war development. Development extends east from Meriden along the B4104

and Old Road along the southern boundary of the Site and along Fillongley Road to the north of the Site, as shown on **Figure 1**. The Meriden Hill Conservation Area is situated 600m to the south-east of the Site on a local area of high ground and this contains the Grade I Listed Church of St Lawrence, Meriden House and a number of other historic buildings. This area has a distinct historic village character separate from Meriden proper.

- 3.5 There are large areas of minerals extraction, particularly to the west and south-west of Meriden, resulting in large open pits and degraded landscapes.
- 3.6 The Site and the area to the east comprises an arable landscape with isolated farmsteads and rural dwellings.

### **Topography and Hydrology**

- 3.7 The topography of the Study Area and Site is demonstrated on **Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan**.
- 3.8 The landform falls from the north-eastern corner of the Study Area with a high point of 180m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), 1.5km to the north of the Site. The land falls to the south to around 125mAOD and further towards the west at 85mAOD. Meriden is situated on land that generally falls towards the south and south-west.
- 3.9 The Site ranges from over 130mAOD in the north, to 115mAOD in the south and south-east (see **Site Context Photographs 5 and 8**). The land rises again to the south of the B4104 to over 140mAOD in the Conservation Area, 600m to the south-east, and 130mAOD around Berry Fields Farm, 500m to the south where there is a localised ridgeline. The land falls away to the north of Fillongley Road and to the west of the Site.

### **Vegetation and Field Pattern**

- 3.10 The landscape of the Study Area is generally well vegetated with frequent hedgerows and hedgerow trees, blocks of woodland and further tree planting along the routes of streams, as shown on **Figures 1 and 4** and **Site Context Photographs 4, 6, 7, 8 and 11**. The field pattern is irregular and medium to large in scale, particularly where field rationalisation has occurred. The area east of Meriden, between the settlement edge and Walsh Lane, and to the south-east of Meriden have suffered notable hedgerow and tree loss, resulting in uncharacteristic open landscapes (**Site Context Photograph 7, 11 and 12**).
- 3.11 The route of the A45 is heavily planted but this forms a notable and uncharacteristically straight linear feature cutting across the landscape.

- 3.12 The Site itself contains remnant field boundaries with mature oak trees in the south-west (**Site Appraisal Photographs D and E**), and greater vegetation around Highfield House in the north of the Site. The area to the east of the Site, as far as Walsh Lane, has been denuded of much of its boundary vegetation and tree planting, resulting in an open landscape.

#### **Access and Rights of Way**

- 3.13 The Heart of England Way, Millennium Way and Coventry Way Long Distance Trails pass around the southern edge of Meriden, converging at various points and passing through the Meriden Hill Conservation Area. These connect to a wider and dense network of PRoW, with fewer routes west of Meriden, as shown on **Figure 1**.
- 3.14 PRoW cross the south-eastern corner of the Site, with one route extending north to Fillongley Road and one extending east to Walsh Lane. A further PRoW joins Walsh Lane to the Fillongley Road to the north-east of the Site.

#### **Designations**

- 3.15 There are no national landscape designations within the Study Area, as shown on **Figure 1**. The entire Study Area is within the Green Belt. Large areas of Ancient and Semi Natural Woodland occur to the north and north-east, separated from the Site by the route of the A45. Meriden Hill Conservation Area is situated 600m to the south-east of the Site. No Local Wildlife Sites are proposed, potential or designated within the Site.
- 3.16 The Site is situated within 'Valued Landscape' 3 as shown on Figure 13 on page 44 of the MNP. This is addressed in Chapter 7.0.

#### **Landscape Context and Site Appraisal Summary**

- 3.17 In summary, the Site comprises four irregular arable fields F1-F4, amenity land and an area of allotment gardens all situated immediately adjacent to the existing built form of the settlement of Meriden. The landform of the Site broadly rises from the southern boundary at an elevation of below 115m AOD to the northern boundary which lies at an elevation of over 130m AOD. There is an additional localised ridge of elevated land, which rises along the eastern and north-east boundaries of the Site to an elevation of 125m AOD. Along the eastern boundary of the Site, hedgerow degradation has resulted in a weaker existing defensible boundary, however it does form a distinct landscape feature bounded by a drainage channel.
- 3.18 Built form and the allotments along the western and northern boundaries of the Site have a strong suburbanising influence, which detract from the character otherwise experienced further to the east within the Site. The proximity of the transport corridors of the B4104 to the southern

boundary and Birmingham Road further to the north of the Site also detract from the sense of tranquillity.

## 4.0 LANDSCAPE POLICY CONTEXT

- 4.1 Policy of relevance to landscape and visual considerations has been published at a national and local level. These policies are described in greater detail in **Appendix A.1** with extracts from relevant evidence base documents set out in **Appendix A.2**. A summary of the policies of particular relevance to the Site and Proposed Development are provided below.
- 4.2 At a national level, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), updated in February 2019, includes focus on, among other points: protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment (paragraph 8); creating a strong sense of place sympathetic to local character and optimising the potential of the Site to accommodate development, including green space (paragraph 127); recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside (paragraph 170); and developing green infrastructure networks. Chapter 13 of the NPPF covers Protecting Green Belt Land with further examination of Green Belt matters undertaken within Section 8.0 of this report. Paragraph 170 refers to the protection and enhancement of valued landscapes, *"in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan"*.
- 4.3 At a borough level, the adopted SMBC Local Plan (December 2013) is currently being reviewed following a legal challenge on housing allocations and HS2, although policies P10 (Natural Environment), P14 (Amenity), P15 (Securing Design Quality), P16 (Conservation of Heritage Assets and Local Distinctiveness), P17 (Countryside and Green Belt) and P18 (Health and Well-Being) are still relevant to landscape and visual matters. SMBC published their Reviewing the Plan for Solihull's Future: Solihull Local Plan Review Draft Local Plan (November 2016), which contains draft policies similar to those set out in the 2013 SMBC Local Plan.
- 4.4 SMBC have engaged in a DLP Supplementary Consultation January 2019, which sought to assess additional sites identified in the latest round of call for sites, as well as reassessing all proposed sites for appropriateness in light of up to date evidence base. The following DLP Supplementary Consultation documents are relevant to this LVAGBR report:
- Reviewing the Plan for Solihull's Future, Solihull Local Plan Review, Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation (January 2019)
  - Reviewing the Plan for Solihull's Future, Solihull Local Plan Review Site Assessments (January 2019)
  - Solihull Local Plan Review Draft Concept Masterplans (January 2019)
  - Solihull Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal Site Options Assessment (Prepared by AECOM, January 2019)

- 4.5 Reviewing the Plan for Solihull's Future, Solihull Local Plan Review, Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation (January 2019) sets out a series of key questions as part of the consultation of which Questions 2, 30, 37 and 39 are relevant to the Site and Proposed Allocation Site 10.
- 4.6 Other relevant evidence base documents include:
- SHELAA (2016, updated 2018)
  - Green Infrastructure Study (2012)
  - Countryside Strategy (2010)
  - Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Green Infrastructure Habitat Biodiversity Audit (2015)
- 4.7 At a neighbourhood level, Meriden Parish Council made an application for the designation of a Neighbourhood Area in November 2014. The submission draft of the MNDP, which was submitted to SMBC in March 2020, is currently out for consultation. Further review of the MNDP, particularly the section relating to 'valued landscapes' is explored further in Chapter 7.0. Meriden Parish Council published the Meriden Parish Design Statement in 2011, which sets out the characteristics and qualities local people value in the parish and its surroundings as well as issues and concerns about enhancing the local environment. The design statement also separates the village of Meriden into 14 distinct character areas, but the character area assessments do not consider sensitivity or susceptibility to different development typologies although do set out several development guidance notes. The Site falls outside of the village character areas but immediately abuts areas 4, 5 and 6. Proposed Allocation Site 10 is partially included within areas 2 and 3.

## 5.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER CONTEXT

- 5.1 The landscape character of the Site and Study Area is described within published Landscape Character Assessments at different scales, from national to district. These are supplemented by an assessment of the character of the Site. A comparison of the character of the Site and its surroundings aids the understanding of the contribution that the Site makes to the wider landscape character and value. This, in turn, aids the assessment of the sensitivity to, and the ability to accommodate, new development.
- 5.2 This chapter identifies the Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) in which the Site and its surroundings are located. The geographical extent of the LCAs and LCTs is shown on **Figure 3: Landscape Character**. Full extracts of the published LCAs relevant to the Site are contained within **Appendix A.3**. The key characteristics of each of these landscape character areas and types are summarised below. Landscape guidance for each of the identified character areas is set out at the end of this chapter.

### Published Landscape Character Assessment

#### *National Character Area 97: Arden*

- 5.3 At a national level, the Site is situated within National Character Area (NCA) 97: Arden<sup>2</sup>, described by Natural England as "*farmland and former wood-pasture lying to the south and east of Birmingham*". Key characteristics relevant to the Site and Study Area are as follows:

- *"Well-wooded farmland landscape with rolling landform.*
- *Mature oaks, mostly found within hedgerows, together with ancient woodlands, and plantation woodlands that often date from the time of enclosure. Woodlands include historic coppice bounded by woodbanks.*
- *Narrow, meandering clay river valleys with long river meadows...*
- *Numerous areas of former wood-pasture with large, old, oak trees often associated with isolated remnants of more extensive heathlands...*
- *Diverse field patterns, ranging from well hedged, irregular fields and small woodlands that contrast with larger semi regular fields on former deer park estates...*
- *Complex and contrasting settlement pattern with some densely populated where traditional settlements have amalgamated to form the major West Midlands conurbation whilst some settlements remain distinct and relatively well dispersed.*

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<sup>2</sup> Natural England (2014) [National Character Area Profile 97: Arden](#)

- *Shakespeare's 'Forest of Arden', featured in 'As You Like It', is still reflected through the woodland cover, mature oaks, small ancient woodlands and former wood pasture."*

*Warwickshire Landscape Project (1987)*

- 5.4 The Site is located within the Arden Pastures Landscape Character Area. The Arden area is described as **"an area of former wood pasture and ancient farmlands"**. It is further described as having **"few dramatic physical features"** but as having **"an intimate, historic character with a strong sense of unity"**.
- 5.5 The Arden Pastures are described as **"a small scale, enclosed landscape, often pervaded by suburban influences and characterised by small fields, typically bordered by mature hedgerow trees"**. Characteristic features include:
- **"A gently rolling topography;**
  - **A well-defined pattern of small fields and paddocks;**
  - **Numerous mature hedgerow oaks;**
  - **Permanent pasture often grazed by horses;**
  - **A network of minor lanes often with ribbon development;**
  - **Many place names ending in Heath."**

*Solihull Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2016)*

- 5.6 The Site is situated within Landscape Character Area (LCA) 7: Northern Upland according to the Solihull Landscape Character Assessment<sup>3</sup>. This area covers 8.15km<sup>2</sup> to the east and north-east of Meriden. The landscape is described as **"generally undulating and higher than the neighbouring character areas, allowing long views out to both the cities of Coventry and Birmingham"**. The area is described as having a strong hedgerow structure and narrow roads with good examples of green lanes including Walsh Lane to the east of the Site. Extensive woodland provides the backdrop to many views and is an important local feature.
- 5.7 Key characteristics include:
- Undulating upland plateau ranging from 180 to 110m AOD;
  - High point at the northern extent sloping down towards the south-east and south-west.
  - Pickford Brook, reservoirs and numerous field ponds, which are characteristic of the area;
  - Predominantly agricultural landscape interspersed by woodland blocks;
  - Presence of horsiculture;
  - Irregular medium to large-scale field pattern;

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<sup>3</sup> Waterman (2016) Solihull Borough Landscape Character Assessment for Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

- Strong hedgerow structure although some open field boundaries exist, resulting in the amalgamation of fields which is described as impacting negatively on the area;
- Extensive woodland cover, dominating the skyline;
- Good tree cover in fields and hedgerows;
- Meriden Hill Conservation Area is a key feature and the setting of the moat at Marlbrook Hill Farm and the Churchyard Cross at St Lawrence's Church are of importance;
- The A45 is a noticeable feature in the landscape;
- Narrow single track roads with high hedgerows are a feature.

5.8 Sensitivities and pressures are described as including:

- Neglect and potential loss of ancient woodland;
- The uncharacteristically straight nature of the A45;
- Limited capacity for additional built development without risk of coalescence;
- Loss of biodiversity through intensive farming; and
- Decline in frequency of hedgerow trees.

5.9 The landscape character sensitivity of LCA 7 is assessed as 'high' with the following justification for the rating:

- ***"This is an attractive landscape with a strong 'sense of place', distinct landscape features including extensive woodland cover, narrow lanes and high hedgebanks that create a harmonious and unified landscape. Overall, the landscape is in very good condition. There are a few detracting features such as communication masts and the caravan park at Eaves Green" (p.53).***

5.10 Visual sensitivity is assessed as 'medium' due to the long to medium distance views with the following justification:

- ***"The general visibility in this LCA consists of long to medium distance views that are elevated, fragmented and contained, in parts shallow with a horizontal orientation. Strong tree cover forms the backdrop in many views across the area. Views to the cities of Coventry and Birmingham are a key feature of this area. There is a strong relationship with the Conservation Area at Meriden Hill to the south of the LCA" (p.53).***

5.11 Overall sensitivity for LCA 7 was assessed as being 'high' based on a combination of high landscape character sensitivity and medium visual sensitivity.

5.12 Landscape value was assessed as 'medium' with the following justification:

- *"This is a locally distinctive landscape containing valued characteristics. The Meriden Hill Conservation Area along with several listed buildings provide historical and cultural associations within the area. Local Wildlife Sites, ancient woodlands along with the unique landform contribute towards the local distinctiveness of this area. The value of the area is increased by the presence of the two long distance trails passing through the centre of the LCA"*(p.53).

5.13 Landscape capacity was assessed as being 'very low' with the following commentary:

- *"The LCA covers large areas of ancient woodland and local wildlife sites. It is an area that is distinctly rural with limited development. This area would be able to accommodate new development but only in very restricted areas, which would need to be of an appropriate type, of small scale and form, in be keeping with the existing character and features of the area"*(p.53).

5.14 However, the SMBC assessment acknowledges that:

- *"This assessment therefore will only be able to suggest a general assessment of the 'Landscape Capacity' based on the matrix set out in Table A.5. This general scoring will need to be reviewed when details of specific development proposals are known for specific sites"*(p.viii, Appendix A).

#### Assessment of the Site against Solihull Landscape Character Assessment Methodology

5.15 The Site occupies approximately 9.36ha of land east of the village of Meriden within LCA7: Northern Upland, which covers an area of 8.15km<sup>2</sup>. Considering that LCA7 represents a significantly larger area than the Site, Barton Willmore LLP has conducted a site-specific assessment utilising the Solihull Character Assessment methodology (referenced in **Appendix A.3**) and the assessment findings are set out in the following table below.

**Table 5.1: Assessment of Site against Solihull Landscape Character Assessment Methodology**

Criteria	SMBC Landscape Character Assessment for LCA7	Barton Willmore LLP Site Specific Assessment
Landscape Character Sensitivity	High - This is an attractive landscape with a strong 'sense of place', distinct landscape features including extensive woodland cover, narrow lanes and high hedged banks that create a harmonious and unified landscape. Overall, the landscape is in very good condition. There are a few detracting features such as communication masts and the caravan park at Eaves Green.	The Site is considered to exhibit a ' <b>Low-Medium</b> ' landscape character sensitivity. This is due to several factors. Hedgerow degradation, particularly within the eastern area of the Site, contributes to fragmentation of the existing field pattern. However, the general landscape structure and pattern is obvious. The suburbanising influence of the existing built form and domestic features e.g. gardens and

		allotments to the south, west and north-west of the Site lessen the perception of rural character and demonstrate mixed land use within the Site with adjacent built form not unsympathetic in scale in the context of Meriden.
Visual Sensitivity	Medium - The general visibility in this LCA consists of long to medium distance views that are elevated, fragmented and contained, in parts shallow with a horizontal orientation. Strong tree cover forms the backdrop in many views across the area. Views to the cities of Coventry and Birmingham are a key feature of this area. There is a strong relationship with the Conservation Area at Meriden Hill to the south of the LCA.	The Site is considered to exhibit a <b>'Medium' visual sensitivity</b> . The proximity of built form, which wraps around the Site to the south, west and north, creates a strong relationship between the Site and existing urban built form. The Site does not form an important feature in the prevention of coalescence, performing only a minor role, due to the 1.7km separation between the Site and nearest settlement at Millison's Wood to the east. It is noted that existing built form already extends further east along the B4104 than the Site. The relatively elevated north and north-eastern areas of the Site are more visible from further afield to the south and south-west, however the intervening topography and existing vegetation in the wider landscape prevent longer-range views to and from the Site.
Overall Landscape Sensitivity	High	Based on the findings of both the landscape character sensitivity and visual sensitivity it can be considered that the Site exhibits a <b>'Medium' overall landscape sensitivity</b> .
Landscape Value	Medium - This is a locally distinctive landscape containing valued characteristics. The Meriden Hill Conservation Area along with several listed buildings provide historical and cultural associations within the area. Local Wildlife Sites, ancient woodlands along with the unique landform contribute towards the local distinctiveness of this area. The value of the area is increased by the presence of the two long distance trails passing through the centre of the LCA.	The Site is considered to be of a <b>'Low' landscape value</b> . The Site is not covered by any statutory national or local landscape designations. There are no Local Wildlife Sites within the Site. The landscape features within the Site are generally of a degraded state as a result of field enlargement from modern farming practices and there exists a high potential for landscape improvements to reinstate characteristic landscape features. It is noted that the northern area of the Site is currently formed of garden allotments thus has a value to local residents, however the remaining Site is not accessible by the public apart from the PRow along the eastern boundary and comprises arable land. In the context of the wider LCA7 area the Site demonstrates common landscape features e.g. undulating arable land with evidence of hedgerow degradation so is not considered to be rare.
Landscape Capacity	Very Low - The LCA covers large areas of ancient woodland and local wildlife sites. It is	In line with the Solihull Landscape Character Assessment (2016), the

	<p>an area that is distinctly rural with limited development. This area would be able to accommodate new development but only in very restricted areas, which would need to be of an appropriate type, of small scale and form, in keeping with the existing character and features of the area.</p>	<p>landscape capacity of the Site has been derived from the combination of overall landscape sensitivity and landscape value thus based solely on the general matrix table the Site has a 'Low' landscape capacity.</p> <p>However, on balance at a site specific level and considering a low-medium landscape character sensitivity, medium visual sensitivity and low landscape value, as per the justification set out above, as well as the scale, nature and sensitive landscape strategy associated with the Proposed Development, the Site has a '<b>Medium</b>' <b>landscape capacity</b> to the development typology proposed.</p>
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### Natural England Historic Landscape Characterisation (2019)

- 5.16 Natural England have published a merged dataset comprising regional HLCs at a resolution of 250m-scale grid covering England.
- 5.17 The Site falls within the dominant broad type of Enclosed Agriculture of the post-war era. The on-site photographic study conducted in February 2019 indicates that hedgerow degradation and boundary fragmentation has resulted in a reduction in enclosure within the Site and its immediate surroundings particularly to the east towards Walsh Lane.

### Management and Guidance

- 5.18 Advice and recommendations contained in the Published Landscape Character Assessments are set out within **Appendix A.3** and points relevant to the Site are summarised below.

#### *National Character Area 97: Arden*

#### Strategic Environmental Objectives

- 5.19 The NCA sets out Strategic Environmental Objectives for the character area, of which the following are relevant:
- SEO 1: Manage and enhance the valuable woodlands, hedgerows, heaths, distinctive field boundaries and enclosure patterns throughout the NCA, retaining the historic contrast between different areas while balancing the needs for timber, biomass production, climate regulation, biodiversity and recreation.
  - SEO 2: Create new networks of woodlands, heaths and green infrastructure, linking urban areas like Birmingham and Coventry with the wider countryside to increase biodiversity, recreation and the potential for biomass and the regulation of climate.

## Landscape opportunities

- Conserve, enhance and restore the area's ancient landscape pattern of field boundaries, historic (including farm) buildings, moated sites, parkland and pasture and reinforce its well wooded character.
- Protect and manage woodlands particularly ancient woodlands and wood pasture to maintain the character of Arden.
- Manage and restore hedgerows and restore parkland, ancient trees and stream side trees plus manage and replace hedgerow trees.
- Create new green infrastructure with associated habitat creation and new public access on former mining sites and close to urban populations in the West Midlands Green Belt.

*Warwickshire Landscape Project (1987)*

5.20 The Site is situated within the Arden Pastures landscape character area. A key feature of this landscape type is described as ***"the sense of enclosure provided by the abundance of mature hedgerow trees. The density of trees reflects the generally intact pattern of small pastoral fields"***.

5.21 The management strategy for this area is to conserve and enhance the small-scale enclosed character of the landscape.

5.22 The landscape guidelines are as follows:

- Maintain the wooded character of mature hedgerow and roadside oaks;
- Conserve and enhance tree cover through natural regeneration of hedgerow oaks;
- Conserve historic pattern of small hedged fields.

*Solihull Borough Landscape Character Assessment – LCA 7: Northern Upland*

5.23 Guidelines of relevance for this LCA are set out as follows:

- Manage hedgerows to retain the strong hedgerow structure and plant individual trees along field boundaries particularly close to the A45. Tree planting in the vicinity of Meriden is also important to its setting and approaches.
- Resist further field boundary loss and discourage field amalgamation.
- Promote proactive management of existing woodlands and create links between existing woodlands using green lanes and footpaths.
- Protect long views out towards Coventry and Birmingham.
- Protect the setting of Meriden Hill Conservation Area.
- Aim to further reduce the visual impact of the A45.

- Promote the management of native roadside tree planting and links with woodland in the wider countryside.
- Design at the settlement edge will require a high quality approach and the use of appropriate materials to reinforce local distinctiveness.
- Enhance the footpath network and its contribution to landscape character.
- Explore opportunities to increase public access.

### Landscape Character Summary

- 5.24 The Site is situated within the context of post-war development to the north, south and west. It is only partially visible from the northern boundary of the churchyard of the Church of St Lawrence on the northern edge of the Meriden Hill Conservation Area, but the two areas are notably distinct, partially separated by the intervening road and modern development and intervening vegetation. The Site has been subject to field rationalisation and neglect of hedgerows. Some mature oak hedgerow trees remain, and these are important characteristic features, together with the remnant hedgerows which still provide a structure to the existing field boundaries. To the immediate east, the landscape is more open with hedgerow removal and field rationalisation evident. The courses of the streams to the east of the Site are unvegetated and the landscape generally denuded of vegetation as far east as Walsh Lane. With the exception of the rolling landscape and the few remaining trees and hedgerows, the Site makes only a partial contribution to landscape character as part of the wider landscape pattern.
- 5.25 The landscape character sensitivity of LCA 7, within the SMBC assessment, is 'high' and described as an attractive landscape with a strong sense of place. Visual sensitivity is assessed as medium due to the long to medium distance views. Overall sensitivity for LCA 7 was assessed as being 'high'. Landscape value was assessed as 'medium' and landscape capacity was assessed as being 'very low'. However, the assessment acknowledges that the scoring will need to be reviewed when the specific details of the proposed development are known.
- 5.26 The Solihull Landscape Character Assessment describes long distance views towards Birmingham and Coventry, but these are not evident within the Site. The visual envelope of the Site is described further later in this LVAGBR report.
- 5.27 The Barton Willmore LLP Site-Specific Assessment (**Table 5.1**) utilising the Solihull Landscape Character Assessment (2016) Methodology determined that the Site exhibits a 'Low-Medium' landscape character sensitivity, 'Medium' visual sensitivity and thus a 'Medium' overall landscape sensitivity. The landscape value of the Site was considered to be 'Low'. Combining overall landscape sensitivity and landscape value gives the Site, based on the SMBC general matrix table, a 'Low' landscape capacity rating. However, based on the

considered strategy for locating built form on the lower lying slopes tied into the western built up edge of Meriden as well as the scale, and sensitive landscape strategy associated with the Proposed Development, which would provide a robust strengthened Green Infrastructure to the Site and biodiversity and amenity enhancements, it is considered that the Site has a 'Medium' landscape capacity to the development typology proposed.

## 6.0 VISUAL APPRAISAL

- 6.1 A site visit was undertaken in February 2019 and again in July 2020, with 12 representative **Site Context Photographs** taken in the surrounding area to represent views towards the Site. Photographs were taken from a range of directions and distances, taking into account the topography and designated areas, under winter conditions (February 2019 photos), where the potential visibility of the Site is at its greatest in line with guidance set out in GLVIA 3 as well as the balance shown with leaves on the trees in summer conditions (July 2020). The location of the viewpoints are demonstrated on **Figure 6: Visual Appraisal Plan** and copies of the photographs are included within the Illustrative Material which accompanies this document.
- 6.2 The visual appraisal was undertaken to determine the relationship of the site with its surroundings and its approximate extent of visibility within the wider landscape from publicly accessible viewpoints, primarily roads, footpaths and open spaces, to determine the approximate extent of the area from which the Site is visible from the eye level of a person standing on the ground. The visibility of the Site is predominantly influenced by landform and the extent and type of vegetation cover and built elements within the surrounding landscape. Baseline studies of these features enabled the identification of the potential visibility of the Site from the surrounding area, to be tested through fieldwork.

### Visual Context

- 6.3 The topography within the immediate area of the Site slopes southwards from the north-east, in the region of the A45, towards the B4104, before rising again to the south of the B4104 towards the Meriden Hill Conservation Area and Berry Fields Farm, with views obtained towards the Site from the northern boundary grounds of St Lawrence's Church and from the PRoW which extends east – west north of Berry Fields Farm. The landscape to the east of the Site has been denuded of vegetation, resulting in medium distance views from the local PRoW, as far east as Walsh Lane. Existing development within Meriden reduces views from the north-west and immediate south.

### Site Context Photographs

- 6.4 **Site Context Photograph 1** is taken from Old Road to the immediate south-east of the Site. It demonstrates the modern residential development along the southern boundary of the Site, with the northern areas of the Site rising up beyond the hedgerow in the foreground.
- 6.5 **Site Context Photograph 2** is taken from the PRoW to the east of the Site, extending from Old Road to Fillongley Road. It demonstrates the remnant hedgerow and mature tree structure

on the eastern boundary of the Site as well as existing built form to the north and south of the Site with the land rising up towards the vegetated skyline east of Leys Lane.

- 6.6 **Site Context Photograph 3** is taken from Mons Avenue immediately to the west of the Site. It demonstrates the close proximity of existing built form adjacent to the west of the Site and the rising land within the northern area of the Site. It demonstrates the vegetative cover to the western boundary of the Site and where less dense filtered views across the Site to the east are available. It is also possible to see the land rising up beyond the Site to the east to form a tree lined skyline.
- 6.7 **Site Context Photograph 4** demonstrates the view south from the PRow which extends north-south from Fillongley Road to the B4104. From this point the majority of the Site is screened by the curve in the landform and the vegetation to the north-east. However, the south-eastern boundary defined by remnant hedgerow and mature hedgerow trees is clear to see. It is also possible to see the elevated landform rolling towards the east towards the route of the A45 and the rise in the land towards the Conservation Area to the south-east.
- 6.8 **Site Context Photograph 5** demonstrates how the Site is screened from views from this part of Fillongley Road due to the topography and intervening layers of vegetation.
- 6.9 **Site Context Photograph 6** is taken from a footpath that extends from Church Lane to the B4104 looking northwards towards the Site. Existing residential properties can be seen extending east-west along the B4104 with the landform rising to the north to meet the vegetated skyline.
- 6.10 **Site Context Photograph 7** is taken from the Heart of England Way and Coventry Way Long Distance Trails where they pass through the northern boundary of the churchyard of St Lawrence's Church. It is possible to see the northern and central areas of the Site with the existing built up edge of Meriden to the north, south and west visible. The view demonstrates how the remnant hedgerows and mature groups and individual trees break up the Site within the view. The Birmingham skyline is also visible in the view.
- 6.11 **Site Context Photographs 8 and 9** are taken from the footpath on the localised ridgeline of rising land south of the B4104. It is evident that the most open views towards the Site are from the eastern end of the PRow, closer to the Conservation Area. From this point, the central area of the Site is visible rising beyond the existing development along the B4104. The strong vegetation in the vicinity of the Site provides strong enclosure to the south-western areas of the Site during summer months and the southern and south-eastern areas are screened behind the existing development along Old Road and the vegetation along Church Lane. The photos demonstrate the screening effects of the existing vegetation during the winter months. From the western end of the footpath, in the region of **Site Context Photograph 9**, the Site is

mainly screened behind the existing development along the B4014 and the strong vegetation along the eastern edge of Meriden.

- 6.12 **Site Context Photograph 10** is taken from the junction of the B4104 and Old Lane as it descends Meriden Hill towards Meriden. Whilst the majority of the Site is screened by the intervening vegetation it is still possible to see a small part of the centre of the Site behind the buildings in the foreground.
- 6.13 **Site Context Photographs 11** is taken from the PRoW crossing the fields to the north-east of the Site, from where it is possible to see the centre of the Site, set back against the vegetated skyline and to the right of the existing development on Old Road. This view demonstrates the denuded nature of the landscape to the east of the Site and the way in which the trees and hedgerows within the south-western part of the Site create a filtering effect to views.
- 6.14 **Site Context Photograph 12** demonstrates the views west from Walsh Lane towards the Site, which is foreshortened within the view due to the topography. This view demonstrates the denuded nature of the landscape east of the Site and the loss of hedgerows along Walsh Lane. It is also possible to see the existing development within Meriden to the south, west and north of the Site.

### **Visual Appraisal Summary**

- 6.15 The most open views towards the Site are medium-distance views from the east, south and south-east, from the local PRoW and isolated locations on the edge of the Meriden Hill Conservation Area, albeit through intervening vegetation. However, from these viewpoints, the Site is generally seen in the context of existing development to the north, south and west within Meriden and the strongly vegetated skyline. The existing trees and hedgerows within the Site would break up the massing of the houses as seen within these views to an extent in any event.

## 7.0 REVIEW OF PROPOSED VALUED LANDSCAPES IN MNDP

### The MNDP Policy Background

7.1 Policy NE1 of the 2020 Submission Draft of the MNDP relates to 'Valued Landscapes' and states:

***“NE1.1 In order to maintain the distinctive character of the Neighbourhood Area, all new development must have regard to the valued landscapes, skylines and views as shown on Figures 8 to 18.***

***NE1.2 Measures to improve the quality of the landscape, its scenic beauty and tranquillity; and to reduce light pollution will be encouraged.***

***NE1. 3 Proposals which have an adverse impact on any valued landscape or skyline will be resisted.”***

7.2 The MNDP identifies three such 'Valued Landscapes', based on a survey of local residents and the landscapes they valued most. Those identified are:

- 'The Dowlands';
- Field from Berkswell Road to Church Lane; and
- View from St Laurence Churchyard.

7.3 Of the three identified valued landscapes, the third includes the eastern edge of the Site. Having identified the three valued landscapes, the MNDP then discusses each of them in section 6.8 with the View from St Laurence Churchyard explained in paragraph 6.8.4. The document states:

***“The view from St Laurence Churchyard, which sits in the Meriden Hill Conservation Area, encompasses the landscape that features in LCA 7 Northern Upland. It has had the most mentions in the surveys and drop-in sessions as one of Meriden’s favourite valued landscapes. One can see Birmingham and Coventry in the skyline, Meriden Gap, as well as the fields towards Fillongley Road and the area of Eaves Green. It is popular with residents and ramblers and also features parts of the Millennium Way and Coventry Way trails as well as the Heart of England Way trail.”***

7.4 Photographs illustrating both the summer and winter views from the northern part of St Laurence Churchyard which reflect the same views as Figures 14, 15 and 16 within the MDNP are included within the Illustrative Material accompanying this LVA GBR.

## Discussion

- 7.5 Policy NE1 and its explanation contains two fundamental errors. The first relates to the confusion between what constitutes a landscape and what constitutes a view; and the second relates to the definition of a 'valued landscape' in planning policy.

### *Views or Landscapes*

- 7.6 The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition<sup>4</sup> (GLVIA3) is the industry accepted guidance on the assessment of impacts on views and landscapes. The GLVIA3 makes reference to the European Landscape Convention (ELC) which the UK has signed and ratified.

- 7.7 The ELC defines the landscape in terms of not just its aesthetic and visual amenity but as a resource in its own right<sup>5</sup>:

***"The landscape is part of the land, as perceived by local people or visitors, which evolves through time as a result of being acted upon by natural forces and human beings."***<sup>6</sup>

- 7.8 The GLVIA3 differentiates between the assessment of landscape and visual effects and states that ***"the distinction between these two aspects is very important but often misunderstood"*** (paragraph 2.22). Paragraph 2.21 distinguishes the assessment of landscape and visual effects thus:

- 1) Assessment of landscape effects: assessing effects on the landscape as a resource in its own right;***
- 2) Assessment of visual effects: assessing effects on specific views and on the general visual amenity experienced by people.***

- 7.9 The MNDP conflates landscape and visual issues through the confusion of the view from St Laurence Churchyard as a 'valued landscape'. The view may be locally valued by residents, and its merit and sensitivity to change has been addressed elsewhere within this LVA GBR, but that is different to being a landscape of value. This leads onto the second point.

### *Valued Landscapes*

- 7.10 The phrase 'valued landscapes' was introduced in the 2012 edition of the NPPF (paragraph 109) and repeated in the 2019 edition (paragraph 170a). The first clear definition of what

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<sup>4</sup> Landscape Institute and IEEMA (2013) [Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment](#) Third Edition

<sup>5</sup> GLVIA3 paragraph 2.4

<sup>6</sup> European Landscape Convention (2000) [online] available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/landscape/the-european-landscape-convention> (cited 5th August 2020)

constitutes a 'valued landscapes' comes from the 'Stroud decision', an Appeal by Gladman Developments Ltd against Stroud District Council in reference to the refusal of a planning application for 150 houses by the Cotswold escarpment, and generally cited within other similar Appeal situations. In the Appeal Decision<sup>7</sup>, the Inspector stated that, in the absence of formal guidance on what constitutes a valued landscape:

***"I consider that to be valued would require the site to show some demonstrable physical attribute rather than just popularity. In the absence of any such designation, I find that paragraph 109 is not applicable to the appeal site..." (paragraph 18)***

7.11 This was upheld by Mr Justice Ousley in the High Court Decision<sup>8</sup> regarding the same case. Mr Justice Ousley goes on to refer to the lack of evidence on which to justify that the landscape was 'valued' in the sense of the NPPF:

***"...the Inspector was entitled to conclude on the evidence he had before him that there had been no demonstrated physical attributes to make the land "valued". I have been taken to that which was referred to; there are certain limitations to that evidence which the Inspector was plainly recognising. He had before him evidence from consultants engaged by the Council which had not supported any particular physical attributes." (Paragraph 15)***

7.12 It is further important to note that Mr Justice Ousley further concluded that the site being visible from the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the highest form of landscape designation, was not sufficient to make it a valued landscape:

***"...The views of the site from the AONB were carefully considered by the Inspector. There can be no doubt but that those aspects were dealt with and he did not regard those as making the land a valued piece of landscape. That is a conclusion to which he was entitled to come." (Paragraph 16)***

7.13 If a view from an AONB is insufficient to make a landscape valued, then a view from a conservation area is also insufficient without those features and characteristics which take it above the ordinary.

7.14 In the absence of clear guidance in the NPPF as to what constitutes a valued landscape, it is important to take into account Mr Justice Ousley's point above, that the Inspector's decision needed to be made on the basis of evidence. There is no evidence in the MNDP to support the designation of the landscapes within the identified views as 'valued', other than they

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<sup>7</sup> Appeal Decision APP/C1625/A/13/2207324

<sup>8</sup> High Court Decision Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government v Gladman Developments Ltd CO/4082/2014

demonstrate the features cited in the published landscape character assessments and they are popular with the local population. As discussed above, popularity alone is not justification for a landscape to be considered 'valued' in planning terms. Further, a landscape cannot be considered as 'valued' simply because it demonstrates the characteristics of the local countryside.

7.15 S Baird, the Inspector in another Gloucestershire Case at Tuthill<sup>9</sup>, also addressed the issue of valued landscapes:

*"...Given that all landscapes are valued by someone at some time, the words "valued landscape" must mean a landscape that is considered to be of value because of particular attributes that have been designated through the adoption of a local planning policy document. ...Paragraph 109 starts by reiterating the wider objective of enhancing the natural environment, which I take to mean the countryside in general and then it goes on to refer to valued landscapes, which must mean something more than just countryside in general." (Paragraph 16)*

7.16 In summary, it is clear from the above case law decisions that the landscape needs to demonstrate something that take it above the ordinary and more than just the local landscape to be considered to be valued.

7.17 In the absence of any guidance within the NPPF, the best method of judging whether a landscape is valued is set out within Box 5.1 of the GLVIA3 (page 84). These are:

- Landscape quality (condition);
- Scenic Quality;
- Rarity;
- Representativeness;
- Conservation Interests;
- Recreation value;
- Perceptual aspects; and
- Associations

#### **Assessment of Landscape Value of Site and Land Within the View from St Laurence Churchyard**

7.18 An assessment of the sensitivity and capacity of the Site for development as compared to the wider LCA7 is set out above in Chapter 5. The table below includes a discussion of the value

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<sup>9</sup> Planning Inspectorate (2016) Appeal ref: APP/P1615/W/15/3003662 Land North of Gloucester Road, Tutshill

of the landscape of the Site and the wider land within the view from St Laurence Churchyard in relation to the criteria set out in Box 5.1 of the GLVIA3.

**Table 7.1: Assessment of Landscape Value**

Criteria	Land Within View from St Laurence Churchyard	The Site
Landscape quality (condition)	The view demonstrates the features set out in LCA 7 with frequent hedgerow trees and woodland blocks. Hedgerow loss and poor maintenance is evident. Modern housing is evident throughout the view, on the skyline and to the south and west of the Site.	The Site contains remnant hedgerows in poor condition and hedgerow Oaks. It is situated in the context of the adjacent housing development on the edge of Meriden.
Scenic Quality	The wider view, taking in the undulating hills, frequent trees, including in the foreground, and the areas of woodland planting contributes to scenic quality. Modern housing which does not reflect local character, and which has not been sensitively integrated into the landscape is evident on the edge of Meriden. The presence of the A45 and B4014 reduce the tranquillity, particularly in the north of the area shown on Figure 13 of the MNDP.	Views from within the Site are limited towards the east due to the topography and surrounding built form. Views to the east take in generally more level and more open fields with greater reduction in field boundaries.
Rarity	Similar landscapes exist throughout the Study Area and in the Arden Pastures, an area noted for its undulating landscapes with well-defined fields and hedgerow oaks. The partially degraded nature of the field pattern and presence of major roads and modern housing reduces the rarity of the landscape. The landscape to the north of the A45 with LCA7 demonstrates a more intact field pattern with more field and hedgerow trees.	As per the wider area, the Site contains the remnant field structure and some field oaks, the former of which are in poor condition. The landscape to the north contains a more intact Arden landscape. As such, the Site is not a rare example of the landscape type.
Representativeness	The landscape contains features typical of LCA7, although the field pattern is degraded and in poor condition. The landscape to the north of the A45 is a better representation of LCA7 due to lack of built form and greater tree cover and better field pattern.	
Conservation Interests	The landscape identified on Figure 13 of the MNDP does not contain a	The Site does not contain a nationally or locally designated ecological area.

	nationally or locally designated ecological area.	
Recreation value	Footpaths cross the landscape within the view, providing public access into the land between the east of the Site and Walsh Lane. These form part of an extensive PRow network within the wider area. As such, the landscape has some recreational value, but this is not greater than the surrounding areas.	Footpaths cross the eastern part of the Site but the majority is not open to public access.
Perceptual aspects	The A45 and B4104 extend through the area identified within the MNDP and, although these are partially screened by topography and vegetation, they form an audible element. The landscape is influenced by modern development on the eastern edge of Meriden and extending along the B4104 and Fillongley Road.	The Site is immediately adjacent to existing development. Although the A45 is partially screened by intervening vegetation and topography, it is audible within the Site.
Associations	The view is clearly valued by the local population, as evidenced by the Residents Survey in 2016 and drop-in session in March 2019. However, the MNDP does not cite any further cultural associations or particular value for the landscape above local appreciation.	There is no evidence of cultural associations for the Site, beyond its appearance in a view from the churchyard.

7.19 The landscape identified on Figure 13 of the MNDP as falling within valued landscape 3, is a relatively intact rural landscape on the edge of a settlement and influenced by that settlement and the surrounding roads. It contains features characteristic of the local landscape, but these are degraded, particularly in the case of the hedgerows and field boundaries to the east of the Site. The landscape to the north of the A45 demonstrates the characteristics of LCA7 more thoroughly with a more intact field pattern and greater presence of field and hedgerow oaks. As a result of the above assessment, whilst the landscape identified in the MNDP is valued locally, it does not demonstrate features that elevate it above other countryside in the local area or that would make it 'valued' as per paragraph 170 of the NPPF.

#### **A Note on Green Belt**

7.20 It is important to acknowledge that the Site is situated within the Green Belt and this designation may have erroneously contributed to its identification as a valued landscape. Green Belt is not a landscape designation and is not allocated on the basis of landscape or visual quality but is rather a functional designation dealing with spatial strategy. In any event, the

surrounding landscape is also situated within the Green Belt and the landscape identified within the MNDP, therefore, would not be elevated above the surrounding area.

### **Summary**

- 7.21 In summary, the MNDP conflates and confuses views and landscapes in the identification of the view from St Laurence Churchyard as shown on Figure 13. These are two separate issues, which whilst related should be assessed accordingly.
- 7.22 Secondly, the MNDP does not put forward evidence to support the landscape being 'valued' beyond its popularity with the local population. As demonstrated by case law, popularity alone is not enough for a landscape to be considered 'valued' in planning terms. An assessment of the value of the Site against the criteria in Box 5.1 of the GLVIA3 demonstrates that the Site is not a valued landscape. The land within the view demonstrates features and characteristics of LCA7 and is an attractive landscape. However, this does not raise it above the level of the surrounding countryside to be considered a 'valued' landscape.

## 8.0 PROPOSED ALLOCATION SITE 10 CONTEXT AND APPRAISAL

8.1 As previously identified earlier in this report, Proposed Allocation Site 10 represents SMBC's current preferred location for housing in Meriden. Site 10 was visited in February 2019 in order to conduct a baseline landscape and visual appraisal. **Figure 5: Proposed Allocation Site 10 Appraisal Plan** and **Proposed Allocation Site 10 Appraisal Photographs J - O** illustrate the existing character and features of the Site. The locations from which the Site Appraisal Photographs were taken are shown on **Figure 5**, which indicate that the photographic study was conducted from publicly accessible roads and pavements surrounding Site 10.

### Proposed Allocation Site 10 Context

8.2 The Site is situated on the western approach to Meriden in the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull, as shown on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**. It comprises grassland, scrub and broadleaf woodland in addition to existing 2 storey block of apartments (The Firs) and a previously used caravan park as shown on **Figure 5**. It is bordered to the north, west and east by Maxstoke Lane, and Birmingham Road to the south. Dense vegetation and canopy trees within the site immediately abut the roads that border Site 10. Existing residential properties along Wyatt Close, Maxstoke Close and Letitia Avenue sit immediately to the east (**Photographs J and O**). In terms of topographical variation, Site 10 is broadly level at an average elevation of 109m AOD. Maxstoke Lane to the north of Site 10 sits at a raised elevation of 116m AOD with views of the existing built form within Site 10 (The Firs) visible on the approach to Meriden from the A45 (**Photograph M**). There are no PRoWs within the site boundary or immediately adjacent to it. However, a private track does run parallel to its eastern boundary. In terms of hydrology a small drainage channel extends along the northern boundary with a small pond located on the western boundary to Maxstoke Lane. A sand and gravel pit is situated approximately 250m to the south-west with large areas filled with water ingress.

8.3 There are no statutory landscape designations covering Site 10, however it is wholly within the Green Belt. The Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull – Green Infrastructure Habitat Biodiversity Audit<sup>10</sup> identifies Site 10 as being partially proposed as a potential Local Wildlife Site (Ref. SP28G4). This is consistent with what is identified within the 2012 SHLAA in that under the heading 'Suitability for Housing' and under 'physical problems and limitations', Local Wildlife Site and potential local wildlife site (2/3<sup>rd</sup>s of site) is mentioned. There are no listed buildings within Site 10. However, a Grade II listed building (The Laurels) sits immediately to the south

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<sup>10</sup> Source: Warwickshire Habitat Biodiversity Audit (2015), (<http://maps.warwickshire.gov.uk/greeninfrastructure/>), Accessed 21/02/19

along Birmingham Road. Packington Hall Registered Park and Garden sits approximately 850m north-west of Site 10 and abuts the A45.

### **Proposed Allocation Site 10 Appraisal**

- 8.4 Site 10 is situated on the western approach to Meriden surrounded by road infrastructure and comprises grassland, scrub and broadleaf woodland with existing built form (The Firs) set within the vegetation. The former caravan site within the south-east of Site 10 is currently scrub and grassland having formerly been industrial land. Maxstoke Lane forms a main transport corridor into Meriden with an exit slip road from the A45 joining near to the northern boundary of Site 10, which sits at a raised elevation, facilitating filtered views into Site 10. Currently, views from Maxstoke Lane and Birmingham Road show Site 10 as well vegetated and forming part of the green gateway to Meriden. Solihull Borough Landscape Character Assessment LCA7: Northern Upland identifies under its landscape management guidelines that; *"Tree planting in the vicinity of Meriden is also important to its setting and approaches"*.
- 8.5 It is considered that the well vegetated nature of Site 10 forms an important part of the green infrastructure setting and approach to Meriden. Development within this parcel of land on the approach to Meriden would be uncharacteristic and loss of vegetation to facilitate development would run contrary to the guidelines highlighted in the LCA. It would also lead to the suburbanisation of Maxstoke Lane and lessen the perceived sense of its *"rural / village feel"*, which would stand contrary to the Meriden Parish Design Statement as discussed under section 4.0 of this report.

## 9.0 GREEN BELT REVIEW

9.1 The Site is identified as sitting within the 'Meriden Gap' east of Solihull and part of the West Midlands Green Belt that surrounds Birmingham and Coventry.

### Published Green Belt Reviews

9.2 Extracts from the relevant Green Belt Reviews are included in **Appendix A.3** of this report.

#### *Solihull Strategic Green Belt Assessment (2016)*<sup>11</sup>

9.3 The Site is located within Refined Parcel (RP) 25 in the above document, a larger area of land wrapping around the north and east of Meriden, extending as far as Walsh Lane. This area was assessed against the first four purposes of the Green Belt as set out within the NPPF:

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.

9.4 Refined Parcels were given a score of 0-3, with a score of 0 meaning the Refined Parcel does not perform against the purpose and 3 meaning the Refined Parcel is higher performing against the purpose. RP25 was scored as follows:

- 1) 3
- 2) 1
- 3) 1
- 4) 0

Total. 5

9.5 The Refined Parcel was assessed as making the greatest contribution to checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas. A score of 5 makes RP25 relatively low scoring in comparison to other RPs and Broad Areas.

9.6 In relation to how the boundaries of Refined Parcels were determined the assessment states:

- *"The Refined Parcels and Broad Areas were delineated on OS Mastermap using strong permanent physical features which are easily identifiable, in line with the requirements of Paragraph 85 of the NPPF: When defining boundaries, local planning authorities should (...) define boundaries*

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<sup>11</sup> Atkins (2016) Solihull Strategic Green Belt Assessment

*clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent. The physical features used in defining boundaries for the purposes of this Assessment included:*

- *Roads (motorways, A and B roads);*
- *Rail and other permanent infrastructure;*
- *Watercourses;*
- *Areas of woodland, established hedgerows and treelines; and*
- *Established field patterns” (p.5).*

9.7 Under the Assessment Criteria Table (p.6) the assessment goes on to state that:

- *“Durable permanent boundaries are considered to be motorways and A roads, other infrastructure, and permanent natural features such as watercourses etc. Less durable boundaries are considered to be established field boundaries, hedgerows and treelines. Whilst easily identifiable these features are less durable”.*

9.8 Within the SMBC DLP Supplementary Consultation Site Assessments (2019) document, SMBC consider that in terms of Green Belt and Site 420 (the ‘Site’):

- *“Site is within moderately performing parcel in the Green Belt Assessment, although it would result in indefensible boundaries to the east and north”.*

*Greater Birmingham Housing Market Area (HMA) Strategic Growth Study: Greater Birmingham and the Black Country (February 2018)*

9.9 This document<sup>12</sup> comprises a four-stage process to identify potential housing land supply to meet the identified demand. These stages comprise: attempts to increase density through use of policy, identification of non-Green Belt land, identification of previously developed Green Belt land and, should a shortfall still remain, undertake a strategic Green Belt Review of all of the land within the HMA to identify further sites.

9.10 The strategic review of Green Belt sites was based on the assessment of the performance of the strategic areas against the five purposes of the Green Belt as set out within the NPPF. The strategic areas were assessed as to whether they made a ‘principal contribution’ or a ‘supporting contribution’. Figure 6 of this document identifies the area of the Site as making a principal contribution, rather than a supporting contribution.

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<sup>12</sup> GL Hearn (2018) Greater Birmingham HMA Strategic Growth Study

- 9.11 The assessment resulted in the identification of six 'Areas of Search' for new settlements and six for urban extensions, together with three Areas of Search for employment uses, as demonstrated by Figure 7 of this document. In addition, a number of areas were identified where 'proportionate dispersal' might be appropriate, i.e. small-scale developments of approximately 500-2,500 dwellings. The Site was not situated within or near one of these areas.
- 9.12 Chapter 8 of the document sets out the strategic Green Belt Review that was undertaken as part of the overall assessment process. The Site is situated within Green Belt parcel SE5 for the purposes of analysis. This parcel covers all of the land from the A452, the A45 and the western edge of Coventry. The overall study area was divided into six 'sectors' which were also assessed for their landscape character and settlement pattern. Parcel SE5 is situated within the north of the 'South East Sector'.
- 9.13 The analysis of the sector notes that:
- "the settlement pattern away from the conurbation and main settlements remains relatively dispersed, typified by small nucleated villages and scattered farmsteads. Smaller settlements of Balsall Common, Hampton in Arden and Meriden remain relatively distinct and well-dispersed."***
- 9.14 Under the heading of 'Green Belt Role', the strategic function of the Green Belt within the sector is described as principally relating to the strategic separation of Birmingham and Coventry, as well as containing sprawl along the western edge of Coventry and Kenilworth. It goes on to state:
- "Prevention of encroachment into open countryside, either through evidence of past change or potential for future change, is particularly apparent in the vicinity of Dorridge, Catherine-de-Barnes, Balsall Common, Hampton- in-Arden, Meriden and Allesley to the west of Coventry." (Paragraph 8.70)***
- 9.15 Figure 31 on page 181 shows the majority of S5 as contributing to the strategic separation of settlements with the area of the Site being identified as 'safeguarding from encroachment'. The location of the strategic separation on the plan suggests that it is primarily to maintain the separation of Birmingham and Coventry.
- 9.16 Figure 36 shows that the area of the Site provides a principal contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt.
- 9.17 The scale of the search and the identified parcels and strategic Areas of Search mean that this assessment cannot be usefully applied to development at a site level. The contribution of the

area including SE5 relates to the strategic separation of Birmingham and Coventry, to which the Site effectively makes no contribution.

### Contribution of the Site to the Green Belt

- 9.18 Barton Willmore has undertaken their own assessment of the contribution made by the Site to the Green Belt, focussing on the Site itself.
- 9.19 The Site is situated on the eastern edge of Meriden on land that falls away to the east and south, before rising to the south of the B4104. The countryside to the east has been denuded of vegetation, resulting in an uncharacteristically open character as far as Walsh Lane. The Site is contained from views immediately adjacent to the north and west due to the existing built edge, and is limited to medium distance views from Walsh Lane to the east, the rising land immediately south of the B4104 to the south and from isolated locations within the northern boundary of St Lawrence's Church to the south-east.
- 9.20 The findings of the review are set out below:

Purpose	Critique	Contribution	Contribution Using Solihull Methodology
Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	The Site lacks a defensible boundary to the east due to the removal of hedgerow boundaries and the unvegetated character of the watercourses. Walsh Lane to the east forms the most defensible boundary. However there exists the opportunity to define and establish a defensible boundary utilising the current readily recognisable physical line of the remnant hedgerow and ditch along the eastern boundary of the Site and strengthening and reinforcing this boundary with native woodland and hedgerow planting.	Some	2
Prevent neighbouring towns from merging	The Site is surrounded by existing development within Meriden to the north, west and south. Development within the Site would be physically and visually separated from the nearest town to the east, which is Coventry, the edge of which is over 4km away. The nearest settlement to the east, although not a town in terms of the NPPF, is Millisons Wood, 1.5km to the east. Development within the Site would not cause the perceptual or physical merging of settlements.	None-Limited	1
Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Development within any Green Belt site will result in physical encroachment. However, the Site is surrounded on three sides by existing residential development and would not result in Meriden extending further to the east than is currently the case along Fillongley Road and the B4104.	Limited	1

Purpose	Critique	Contribution	Contribution Using Solihull Methodology
	<p>Development within the Site would be visible from medium distance views to the south of the B4104, from the open fields west of Walsh Lane and from isolated locations in the Meriden Hill Conservation Area. In these views, the development would mainly be seen in the context of existing development within Meriden, particularly when viewed from the south, and would be broken up by the existing field boundaries within the Site. As a result, there will be some visual encroachment, particularly from the east.</p> <p>This visual encroachment and perception of encroachment would be mitigated by the proposed Green Infrastructure Strategy which includes robust structural planting within and on the eastern boundaries of the Site.</p>		
Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	Meriden is not a historic town, although the Meriden Hill Conservation Area is situated to the south-east. The centre of the Site is visible in medium-distance views from isolated locations within the Conservation Area, primarily on the northern edge. In these views, the Site is seen within the context of the existing development along the B4104. Once planting is established within and along the eastern boundary of the Site, this perception of development will reduce further.	None	0
<b>Overall</b>		<b>Some to Limited</b>	<b>4</b>

### Green Belt Review Summary

- 9.21 As can be seen in the table above, the greatest contribution the Site makes is in terms of preventing sprawl. This is due to the lack of a strong defensible boundary to the east, resulting from field rationalisation and loss of landscape features.
- 9.22 In total, the Site makes 'Some to a Limited' contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt, reducing as mitigation measures are implemented.
- 9.23 The adjustment of the site boundary to take into consideration the existing remnant hedgerow boundary to the east and reinforce this with substantial native woodland planting would establish a new strong defensible Green Belt boundary, in line with Para. 139 of the 2019 NPPF, which would be easily identifiable and also respond sympathetically to the landscape management guidelines set out in the LCA. The establishment of the native woodland planting following the existing field boundary would also aid in lessening any residual perceived visual encroachment of the scheme. The application of this appropriate and considered mitigation

measure would result in the scheme being seen as a contiguous, well-integrated element of the existing built form that extends around the Site presently, that would also positively reinforce locally characteristic landscape features.

- 9.24 In terms of the Solihull methodology, the Site results in a score of 4, which would place it in the lower end of the scale.
- 9.25 In terms of Para. 138 of the NPPF and Question 37 of the SMBC DLP Supplementary Consultation (2019) relating to compensatory provision, the new defensible Green Belt boundary would support accessibility to Green Belt land east of the Site, through providing a green corridor and local community park together with improvements to the PRoWs that extend north-south and east-west from the Site towards Fillongley Road and Walsh Lane respectively. Further native hedgerow and hedgerow tree planting could be achieved within the wider land holding between the eastern boundary of the Site and Walsh Lane, which would contribute to the enhancement of environmental quality in the Green Belt.

## 10.0 DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

### *Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints*

10.1 A robust analysis of the landscape, visual and Green Belt baseline of the Site and Area of Search has highlighted the following opportunities and constraints to development that would be considered as part of the masterplan process for the Site:

- Existing landscape features within the Site would be retained and enhanced, primarily the existing trees and hedgerows.
- New hedgerows and oak trees would be established along the eastern boundaries of the Site as well as a substantial native woodland block to establish a strong new defensible Green Belt boundary.
- A longer-term strategy to create a green corridor along the route of the footpath and stream to the east of the Site would also be considered.
- Development would reflect the context of Meriden in terms of scale, massing and typology.
- Development would respond sensitively to the land that rises to the north of the Site, which creates an area of visual sensitivity and focus areas of development to the west and south-west of the Site on lower lying areas relative to the adjacent existing built form.
- Materials and typologies would reflect the distinctive local character, seeking to restore the character of this part of Meriden.

### *Green Infrastructure Strategy*

10.2 Green Infrastructure as defined by Natural England and also set out in the SMBC Green Infrastructure Study (2012) can be considered as follows:

- ***"Green Infrastructure includes established green spaces and new sites and should thread through and surround the built environment and connect the urban area to its wider rural hinterland. Consequently, it needs to be delivered at all spatial scales from sub-regional to local neighbourhood levels, accommodating both accessible natural green spaces within local communities and often much larger sites in the urban fringe and wider countryside"*** (p.5).

10.3 Creating a sustainable, well-connected green infrastructure network, which contributes to social, environmental and economic benefits within the borough is a key part of SMBC planning policy. The Proposed Development will respond to the need to deliver green infrastructure improvements through the following measures:

- Delivery of 5.85ha of multifunctional public open space through biodiverse open spaces, community gardens and community parkland.
- Creation of a green gateway to Meriden with improved links to the surrounding countryside.
- Substantial native hedgerow and canopy tree planting throughout the Site linking into existing local green infrastructure network. Existing vegetation to be enhanced and retained as part of the native planting improvements.
- Native tree and hedgerow planting will contribute to improvements in hedgerow and deciduous woodland habitats of principal importance within the local area.
- Incorporating SuDS features such as swales and seasonally wet meadows.
- Green Infrastructure improvements will reflect and positively contribute to the character of Meriden and the wider Arden landscape through increased native hedgerow and woodland block planting and provide biodiversity enhancements.
- Creation of green streets, specifically planting a range of street trees, will positively contribute to the wider green network, local sense of place and climate change mitigation.

#### *Development Design Principles*

10.4 Based on the opportunities and constraints and green infrastructure strategy highlighted above, several development design principles would be incorporated into the scheme as part of the design evolution process:

- Create a key open space gateway to respond to key views and topography and provide a generosity of space within the site that is in keeping with the village character of Meriden and responds positively to the LCA management guidelines and Meriden Parish Design Statement.
- Create safe and attractive pedestrian and cycle routes running through the centre of the development, which utilise green corridors.
- Retain existing pedestrian access points to the site linking Meriden and the existing PROW network.
- Development should be structured to ensure the creation of permeable, legible and safe streets and spaces.
- Retain, reinforce and enhance existing green capital wherever possible to shape a connected and multifunctional green infrastructure network.
- New areas of open space to accommodate new community/recreation facilities within the Site and Proposed Development.

- The creation of a new parkland landscape within the eastern part of the Site contained and enclosed by strategic planting which will provide a long term defensible Green Belt boundary.
- Provision for a community garden and allotments for local food production facilities.

### **Development Proposals Summary**

- 10.5 By implementing the mitigation and development design principles highlighted above, the Site would respond positively to its local landscape setting and become a well-integrated contiguous element of the existing settlement of Meriden whilst also acting as a key green gateway from the east through substantial native woodland and hedgerow planting. Additionally, by responding to the visual sensitivity of the raised land to the north through implementation of native planting and large areas of open space the Site would also contribute to the provision of 5.85ha of public open space to service not only the Site but the wider community of Meriden. These principles would also be underpinned by a robust and holistic landscape and biodiversity management strategy, in accordance with the NPPF, to ensure the long-term establishment and sustainability of the landscape features and the new defensible Green Belt boundary.
- 10.6 Creating a sustainable, well-connected green infrastructure network is a core element of the Proposed Development, which will establish a green gateway to Meriden that also connects to the wider countryside, provides for local benefits in terms of local community park and substantial Green Infrastructure benefits and would reflect the wider Arden landscape.

## 11.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### Summary

- 11.1 The Site is situated on the eastern edge of Meriden in Solihull District. It comprises a series of arable fields, an area of amenity land in the north and an area of allotments, surrounded to the west, north and south by existing residential development associated with Meriden. The Site is situated within the Green Belt.

### *Landscape Context and Site Appraisal*

- 11.2 The Site comprises arable fields on the edge of Meriden, separated by remnant native hedgerows containing mature oaks. To the immediate east, the landscape has been denuded of vegetation, resulting in an uncharacteristically open landscape as far east as Walsh Lane. The Site is surrounded on three sides by existing residential development and the Meriden Hill Conservation Area is situated 500m to the south-east.
- 11.3 The topography slopes southwards towards the south and east, before rising south of the B4104 to a further localised ridgeline. As a result, the Site is contained from the north and west but is more open to medium distance views to the south and east.

### *Landscape Character*

- 11.4 The Site is situated within the Arden landscape at a national and county level. This is an ancient landscape characterised by a small field pattern and frequent hedgerow oaks. At a local level, the Site is situated within the Northern Upland, described as an undulating area with a strong hedgerow structure and narrow roads.
- 11.5 The Site and, in particular, the area to the immediate east as far as Walsh Lane, has been denuded of vegetation and is not reflective of the local landscape character. It also does not demonstrate the long-distance views towards Birmingham and Coventry identified within the published landscape character assessments.
- 11.6 The western and northern edges of the Site are strongly influenced by the suburbanising elements of existing built form along Leys Lane and the allotment gardens, which lessen the perception of rural character and instead emphasise a stronger connection to the settlement edge.
- 11.7 The landscape character sensitivity of LCA 7, within the SMBC assessment, is 'high' and described as an attractive landscape with a strong sense of place. Visual sensitivity is assessed as medium due to the long to medium distance views obtained. Overall sensitivity for LCA 7 is

assessed as being 'high'. Landscape value is assessed as 'medium' and landscape capacity is assessed as being 'very low'. However, the assessment acknowledges that the scoring will need to be reviewed when the specific details of the proposed development are known.

- 11.8 The Solihull Landscape Character Assessment describes long distance views towards Birmingham and Coventry, but these are not evident within the Site. The visual envelope of the Site is described further later in this LVAGBR report.
- 11.9 The Barton Willmore LLP Site-Specific Assessment (**Table 5.1**) utilising the Solihull Landscape Character Assessment (2016) Methodology determined that the Site exhibits a 'Low-Medium' landscape character sensitivity, 'Medium' visual sensitivity thus a 'Medium' overall landscape sensitivity. The landscape value of the Site is considered to be 'Low'. Combining overall landscape sensitivity and landscape value gives the Site, based on the SMBC general matrix table, a 'Low' landscape capacity rating. However, based on the considered strategy for locating built form on the lower lying slopes tied into the western built up edge of Meriden as well as the scale, and sensitive landscape strategy associated with the Proposed Development, which would provide a robust strengthened Green Infrastructure to the Site and biodiversity and amenity enhancements, it is considered that the Site has a 'Medium' landscape capacity to the development typology proposed.
- 11.10 As part of the SMBC DLP Supplementary Consultation (2019) individual sites were assessed in further detail and Site 420 (the 'Site') was assessed in terms of landscape and visual matters as; "Within LCA7 Landscape character sensitivity - High Visual sensitivity – Medium Landscape value - Medium Landscape capacity to accommodate change - Very Low". The assessment does not provide further narrative on the justification for these ratings.
- 11.11 The Barton Willmore LLP Site Specific Assessment is based on both desktop and site visit data with the transparent narrative and justification set out within Table 5.1. The differences between the Barton Willmore LLP Site Specific Assessment and Landscape Character Assessment for Site 420 (the 'Site') set out within the SMBC DLP Supplementary Consultation Site Assessments document (2019), relating to landscape character sensitivity, landscape value and landscape capacity, can be considered against the same narrative justification set out in Table 5.1 as it is more refined and site specific. Both the Barton Willmore and SMBC site assessment agree that the Site exhibits 'Medium' visual sensitivity.
- 11.12 In relation to Question 2 from the SMBC DLP Supplementary Consultation (2019), relating to the site selection process, it is our opinion that in terms of landscape matters, the methodology employed by SMBC is not transparent and demonstrates inconsistencies that are not sufficiently explained within the documentation publicly available. The DLP Supplementary Consultation Site Assessment document (2019) appears to upgrade the landscape capacity of the Site from

'Very Low' to 'Low' in the commentary between Stages 1 and 2 from the landscape character assessment in the evidence section of the same document, although this is not expanded upon further.

#### *Visual Appraisal*

- 11.13 The undulating topography of the area results in the Site being visually enclosed from the north and west, with the exception of immediate views. The land falls away to the east with medium distance views possible from Walsh Lane and the footpaths between Walsh Lane and the Site. Medium distance views are also possible from the southern side of the valley of the B4104 and from isolated locations within the Meriden Hill Conservation Area. There are no long distance views towards the Site. Long distance views towards the area of the Site are possible from an isolated area of high ground to the north from the PRoW in the vicinity of Sparrows Grove Ancient woodland and Lodge Green, but the Site was not visible in this view.

#### *Policy and Evidence Base*

- 11.14 Key policy relevant to the Site relates to the protection and enhancement of the character of the countryside, including the protection and enhancement of landscape features such as trees and hedgerows.
- 11.15 The Site was identified as being within the Meriden Gap within the Countryside Strategy, an area being of particular importance in maintaining the separation of Birmingham and Coventry.
- 11.16 In relation to the recently published DLP Supplementary Consultation evidence base the Site, assessed as Site 420, is currently rated as Red whereas the Proposed Allocation Site 10, comprising Sites 137 and 119, is rated as Green under SMBC Site Assessment RAG scoring at Stage 2. The planning judgement commentary that sits between Stages 1 and 2 indicates that the Site (Site 420) is in an area of medium visual sensitivity whereas Proposed Allocation Site 10 (Sites 137 and 119) are stated as falling within areas of high visual sensitivity. The commentary also considers capacity for change stating the Site (Site 420) has a low capacity for change whereas Proposed Allocation Site 10 has a very low capacity for change.

#### *Development Proposals*

- 11.17 It can be considered that by implementing the mitigation and development design principles highlighted in section 9.0 of this report, the Site would respond positively to its local landscape setting and become a well-integrated contiguous element of the existing settlement of Meriden whilst also acting as a key green gateway from the east through substantial Green Infrastructure including native woodland and hedgerow planting. Additionally, by responding to the visual sensitivity of the more elevated land to the north through implementation of

native planting and large areas of open space, the Site would also contribute to the provision of more than 5ha of public open space to service not only the Site but the wider community of Meriden in terms of local community park.

- 11.18 Creating a sustainable, well-connected Green Infrastructure network is a core element of the Proposed Development, which will establish a green gateway to Meriden that also connects to the wider countryside and reflects the wider Arden landscape.

#### *Green Belt Review*

- 11.19 The Site was assessed as being contained within Refined Parcel 25 (RP25) in the 2016 Solihull Green Belt Review, with RP25 being assessed with a score of 5 out of 12. This resulted in RP25 being lower scoring in terms of its contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt. The 2018 Birmingham HMA Strategic Growth Study assessed the Site as being located in an area important to the separation of Birmingham from Coventry.
- 11.20 Barton Willmore's analysis of the contribution the Site makes itself to the purposes of the Green Belt as set out within the NPPF, assessed the Site as making Some to a Limited contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt. It was assessed as making the greatest contribution to the prevention of sprawl, due to the lack of strongly defensible boundaries to the immediate east. The Site is visually and physically separated from both Birmingham and Coventry, the latter by 4.5km and, therefore, development within the Site would not cause the perceptual or physical merging of towns. This last consideration is in contradiction to the wider published Green Belt Reviews due to the comparative scale of the areas assessed.
- 11.21 Adjustment of the site boundary to take into consideration the existing remnant hedgerow boundary to the east and reinforce this with substantial structural native woodland planting would establish a strong defensible Green Belt boundary, in line with Para. 85 (139) of the NPPF, which would be easily identifiable and also respond sympathetically to the landscape management guidelines set out in the LCA. The strengthening and positively managed establishment of both existing and proposed hedgerow, tree and woodland vegetation together with the proposed blue infrastructure would provide enhancements and biodiversity benefits in accordance with the Framework.
- 11.22 The proposed treatment of native woodland planting extending along the existing eastern field boundary would also provide a robust Green Belt boundary and provide containment and enclosure to the proposed local community parkland and reduce the opportunity for any perceived visual encroachment of the scheme into the wider landscape. This would result in the scheme being seen as a contiguous, well-integrated element of the existing built form that extends around the Site presently that would positively reinforce locally characteristic landscape features.

*Valued Landscapes*

- 11.23 The MNDP conflates and confuses landscape and views, two separate but related issues. Further, the MNDP does not demonstrate evidence for the designation of the land within the view from St Laurence Churchyard as 'valued' beyond its popularity locally. Case Law demonstrates that this is not enough on its own to consider the landscape as 'valued'. The landscape within the view does not demonstrate attributes that raise it above attractive countryside to be considered a 'valued' landscape in the terms of the NPPF.

**Conclusion**

- 11.24 The Site comprises an area of weakened landscape on the eastern edge of Meriden surrounded on three sides by existing development. The visual envelope is generally limited to medium distance views from the south and east, from where it is viewed within the context of other development within Meriden. There is the potential to mitigate many of the visual effects and to reduce the impact upon the Green Belt through the establishment of a new strong defensible boundary utilising the existing hedgerow and drainage channel to the east by restoring and enhancing key landscape features, planting of a substantial native woodland block to the eastern boundary as well as creating a positive green space in terms of local community park for the scheme and wider community of Meriden.
- 11.25 The Site is identified as being within the 'Meriden Gap', an area important to the strategic separation of Birmingham and Coventry. The Site is separated from Coventry by 4.5km of intervening landform and vegetation and from the edge of Birmingham by 8km of intervening landform, vegetation and the built form of Meriden. Development within the Site would have no impact upon the separation, physical or perceptual, of Birmingham and Coventry and would cause limited impacts upon the wider Green Belt, particularly with a robust landscape mitigation and enhancement strategy.



**VISUAL MATERIAL**

Figure 1: Site Context Plan

Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan

Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan

Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan

Figure 5: Proposed Allocation Site 10 Appraisal Plan

Figure 6: Visual Appraisal Plan

Figure 7: Green Infrastructure and Green Belt Strategy Plan

Figure 8: Illustrative Landscape Sections

Figure 9: Concept Masterplan

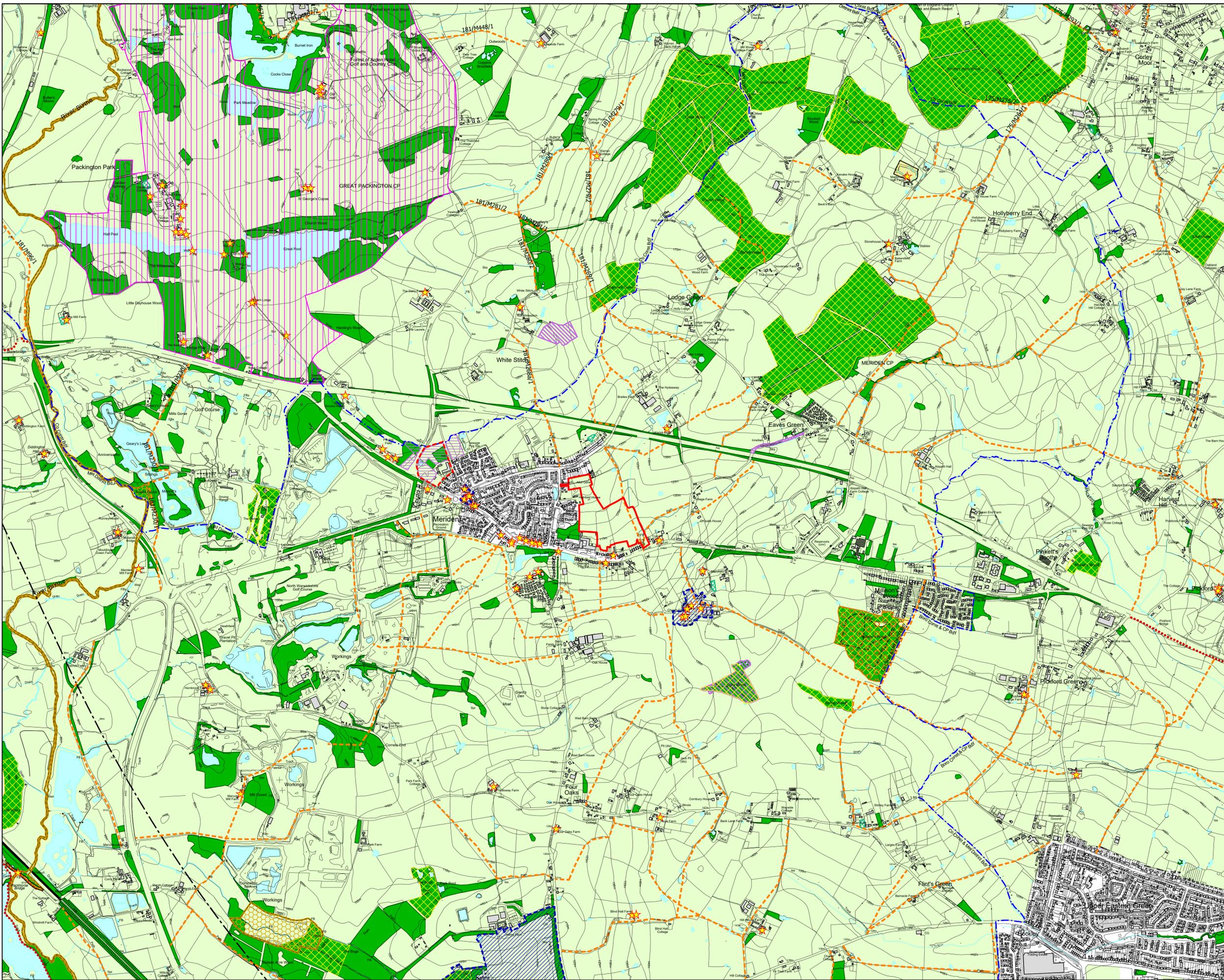
Site Appraisal Photographs (A-I)

Site Context Photographs (1-12)

Valued Views Photographs Summer and Winter

Proposed Site Allocation Site 10 Appraisal Photographs (J-O)





### Legend

- Site Boundary
- Proposed Allocation Site 10
- Ancient Woodland #
- Existing Woodlands, Copses and Tree Belts ^
- Existing Water Courses and Features ^
- Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) ^
- Public Rights of Way \*\*/\*\*\*
- ★ Listed Buildings ~
- Conservation Area ~~~
- Registered Parks and Gardens ~
- Scheduled Monument ~
- Green Belt ^^
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest #
- Local Nature Reserve #
- HS2 Proposed Route ++
- Local Planning Authority Boundary
- Local Wildlife Site ## (within 1km of the Site)
- Potential Local Wildlife Site (SP28G4 Fields) ## (within 1km of the Site)

Sources:  
 # OS Mapping  
 ^ Natural England GIS Data Set  
 ^^ Historic England National Monument Record GIS Data Set  
 \* Warwickshire County Council PRow GIS Data and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council Walking and Cycling Map  
 \*\* OS Explorer  
 + Sustrans National Cycle Network GIS Data  
 ++ Department for Communities and Local Government GIS Data  
 +++ High Speed Two (HS2) Limited GIS Data  
 ~~~ Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council Online Maps  
 ## Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Green Infrastructure Interactive Map

Data collated for constraints and analysis mapping is based on publicly available sources at the time of preparation inserted using the British National Grid and may itself not be accurate. Barton Willmore shall not be liable for the accuracy of data derived from external sources.

## FIGURE 1

Project  
**Land North of Main Road  
 Meriden**  
 Drawing Title  
**Site Context Plan**

|            |              |          |          |
|------------|--------------|----------|----------|
| Date       | Scale        | Drawn by | Check by |
| 06.08.2020 | 1:10,000 @A1 | SS-MN    | MDC-WL   |
| Project No | Drawing No   | Revision |          |
| 27878      | LN-LP-101    | A        |          |

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