

## LOCAL PLAN SITE ALLOCATIONS: North Walsham

Summary: To identify the final suite of allocations for North Walsham ahead of Regulation 19 Consultation and subsequent submission.

- Recommendations:
- 1. It is recommended that Members endorse the identified sites for inclusion in the Local Plan.**
  - 2. The final policy wording is delegated to the Planning Policy Manager.**

Cabinet Member(s)	Ward(s) affected
All Members	All Wards
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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The emerging North Norfolk Local Plan has been subject to public consultation at Regulation 18 stage during May and June 2019. This report is one of a number of reports that seeks to finalise the draft Local Plan policy approach in relation to consideration of the consultation responses and the finalisation of the supporting evidence. At the end of the process a revised Draft Local Plan incorporating justified modifications will be produced for the authority in order to consult at Regulation 19 Draft Plan publication stage ahead of subsequent submission for examination. At such a stage the Plan will be subject to consideration by an independent inspector against a number of legal tests and soundness tests to determine if it is legally compliant, justified, effective, and has been positively prepared. A binding report will be produced which will determine if the Draft Plan is sound, with or without further modifications, following which the Plan can be formally adopted by the Council.
- 1.2 At Regulation 18 stage the Council identified a large number of candidate development sites which had been suggested for different types of development. From those available a number of Preferred Options were identified and all sites put forward were then subject to consultation. In the current stage of plan preparation, the task is to consider the comments made and decide which sites should progress to the next stage. Where preferred sites are discounted it will be necessary to identify alternatives (from those available) to ensure that identified needs and the objectives of the Plan are addressed. The remaining sites will then need to be subject to Habitat Regulation Assessment, Heritage Impact Assessment as appropriate and in some cases specific further evidence in relation to deliverability will be required.

- 1.3 This report focusses on the identification of suitable, available and deliverable sites in order to meet the identified housing requirement in North Walsham and recommends preferred sites for inclusion in the Draft Plan. It provides the updated assessment of each of the sites considered and presents Officers conclusions on the availability and suitability of each site drawing together the Sustainability Appraisal, the Site Assessment and the Regulation 18 consultation responses. It also details the proposed policies which will be applied when planning applications are submitted.
- 1.4 **The purpose** of this report is to ratify a final suite of sites in North Walsham ahead of consultation (Regulation 19) and then the submission of the Plan. Where recommended sites are discounted by Members it is necessary to consider which alternative options should be identified as preferred options to ensure strategic objectives around housing provision and other land uses are addressed. Failure to do so runs the risk that the Plan will be found unsound at examination as it will fail the test of being positively prepared to address identified needs.

## 2. Background and Update

- 2.1 The settlement hierarchy sets out where new development in North Norfolk will take place. The majority of which is in identified towns and a small number of larger villages, dependent on their local housing and other development needs, their role as employment, retail and service centers, and identified environmental and infrastructure constraints. Such locations are also inextricably linked to climate change and how, through the Plan, the Council can incorporate measures that mitigate and adapt to its effects, principally by reducing the need to travel.
- 2.2 The allocations seek to address the objectively assessed strategic need across the District and aim to boost the supply of identified deliverable sites that will support growth in the Plan period. Plans must include and demonstrate how future need for homes (and other uses) will be provided and clearly set out how the Plan will deliver the Objectively Assessed Needs (OAN). The distribution of growth and overall housing numbers are set out in policies SD3 and HOU1 at Regulation 18 stage.
- 2.3 Specific housing targets and allocations are provided for in the Large Growth Towns, Small Growth Towns and the four identified Growth Villages in Policy HOU1, which reflects their role and function. Sites have been identified that are well related to these settlements in order to meet the proposed targets. The process though is iterative and as the Plan moves towards Regulation 19 there is a process of continuous evaluation.

## 3. Site Selection Methodology

- 3.1 It is important to note that the site selection process follows a clear, transparent and justified assessment process which itself was subject to consultation and follows government advice, and this allows for a consistent approach across the District. Policies and proposals that are justified and evidenced in a positive and realistic way, will provide more certainty at examination and stand the test of time. Building a strong evidence base to support and inform not just site selection but policies throughout the Local Plan is vital to its immediate and long-term success.
- 3.2 Evidence can be both quantitative (facts and figures such as census data) as well as qualitative, (e.g. opinions given in consultation responses, as long as they are backed up by facts). Evidence, **not opinion**, should be used to inform decisions on policies and proposals. Such evidence should also be made publically available in a full and transparent way throughout the production of a Plan where it will be

scrutinised at future consultations, submission and examination. It is worth remembering that **planning policies and site proposals need to be based on a clear planning rational and aligned to the legislative requirements.**

- 3.3 The site assessment methodology follows the process advocated in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Planning Practice Guidance. The detailed methodology was explained in Background paper no 6, [Development Site Selection Methodology](#) which accompanied the previous Regulation 18 consultation and can be found in the published document library under consultation documents. **The process is summarised in the report appended to this report as Appendix 1 and along with the Background paper should be read in conjunction with this report.** The continued application of a consistent methodology through assessment and decision making is paramount to Plan making and the legal tests of soundness which the Plan is examined against.

## 4. Site Selection

- 4.1 In order to provide an audit trail and a concise location for the review of information, updated assessments of each of the sites considered have been undertaken and are included in the Site Assessment Booklet appended to this report. This booklet details background information including contextual settlement level information, includes a summary of the feedback from Regulation 18 consultation from statutory consultees, individual members of the public and from parish councils. It includes a review of issues and constraints and goes on to detail officers detailed assessment through an updated set of assessment criteria and Red, Amber, Green (RAG) scoring system. There is an updated Regulation 19 Sustainability Appraisal and the detailing of the review of each site option put forward.
- 4.2 The assessments conclude with the reasoned justification and recommendation for the selection, or information on why sites were discounted, which is summarised in Section 6, below. They will be updated and further informed with factual information such as the emerging Employment Study and Open Space Study and the results of Habitat and Heritage Impact Assessments where required. A number of statutory consultees made standardised comments in relation to many of the proposed allocations seeking clarity and consistency in the wording of the applicable policies including Anglian Water, Minerals and Waste Authority, Environment Agency and Natural England. All of these requested changes will be incorporated into the final Plan.
- 4.3 In some cases site promoters have started to respond to the representations which were made and have either amended their proposals or submitted additional information. Where this is the case it is referenced in the booklet.
- 4.4 For both the proposed mixed use allocations in North Walsham it is recommended in the Policy that a Development Brief is produced. For the Western Extension, work is underway on the development brief and will provide further information and detail on many of the matters discussed above.

## 5 Update information for North Walsham

- 5.1 **Transport Evidence Study 2020:** The study provides a high-level traffic assessment of the growth allocated in the emerging Local Plan of NNDC in North Walsham.

- 5.2 The report concludes that the delivery of a Western Link Road (WLR) is expected to mitigate a number of the traffic impacts that the growth proposed in North Walsham could cause. This high-level study also identifies that the possible WLR extensions should improve the benefits of the WLR and that it is feasible (in engineering terms) to deliver the WLR with possible northern and southern extensions. Additionally, the WLR is expected to solve some of the existing routing issues for HGVs caused by the low bridges in the town with the delivery of the northern spur.
- 5.3 **Development Brief Engagement:** Initial engagement and discussions have been had with Local Stakeholders including North Walsham Town Council and Regenerate North Walsham to provide them with an update on the production of the Western Extension Development Brief. Further engagement and consultation is scheduled to take place in the New Year. We are continuing to liaise with colleagues through-out the Council (and partners) on the other projects in the Town – such as the High Street Heritage Action Zone project team.
- 5.4 We are continuing to ensure that landowners, site promoters and other partners are keep informed of progress.

## **6 Summary of Site Assessment for North Walsham**

- 6.1 North Walsham does not have the significant environmental and landscape constraints that are found elsewhere in the District. It is not in the AONB, close to the Broads or in proximity to any international designated sites. Whilst over the Plan period it is expected that a process of re-development, infill developments, and changes of use will continue to provide a supply of new homes and other uses, these opportunities are relatively modest and will not address the identified need for new homes in particular. New greenfield allocations are therefore necessary in order to deliver the required growth. The scale of growth envisaged in North Walsham will allow for the delivery of infrastructure that is of local strategic importance, namely, the delivery of highway improvements and significant areas of open space and green infrastructure.
- 6.2 There were over 50 sites to consider in North Walsham, which were predominately greenfield sites around the edge of the town. Discounted sites were not chosen for a number of reasons including the impact development could have on the landscape and countryside more generally. Those sites with adverse junction and cumulative highway network impacts and those where suitable vehicular access isn't achievable were also ruled out. Some sites were not well connected to key services and the town centre by walking, cycling or public transport were considered unsuitable. Site selection has also sought to avoiding sites which are detached from the town and not well related to the existing built up areas.
- 6.3 The delivery of a larger number of smaller sites around the town may deliver the appropriate level of housing required, however, there are concerns that such a strategy would not deliver the strategic infrastructure benefits for the town, namely improved transport infrastructure, enhanced green infrastructure & open space and other community infrastructure such as a new primary school.
- 6.4 Two sites for mixed use allocation have been identified as the preferred options for North Walsham with an allocation of approximately 2150 new dwellings. Another site has been identified for allocation as employment land providing a further 2ha of land adjacent to the existing industrial estate. It will provide land for a new strategic road link from the western link road that will provide access into the industrial estate and onto the wider network.

- 6.5 These 3 sites are considered to be the most suitable sites available for North Walsham and subject to the detailed policy requirements these sites are considered to be the most appropriate options to meet the housing and employment land requirement. Each are well located to services within the town centre, existing employment land and to the local schools (both existing and proposed), they are reasonably contained within the landscape and will deliver the strategic infrastructure required.
- 6.6 None of the selected sites are subject to insurmountable constraints and the consultation process has shown that they are deliverable over the Plan period provided that development proposals come forward which comply with the suggested policies of the Plan (as modified following the consultation).
- 6.7 The following sites have been chosen as preferred sites, and meet the requirements for North Walsham:
- NW62 - North Walsham Sustainable Western Extension:** is a sustainable urban extension to the west of the town and will provide up to 1800 new houses, 7 hectares of employment land and a site for a new primary school. The Western Extension will deliver a new western link road which will mitigate the impact of the development traffic and improve general transport network conditions in the town. It will deliver significant amount of public open space and new green infrastructure.
- NW01/B** - Land at Norwich Road & Nursery Drive will have an allocation of up to 350 dwellings, 2 hectares of employment land and will improve connectivity between previously developed residential sites. It will deliver 3.5ha public open space.
- NW52** - Land East of Bradfield Road will provide approximately 2.4ha of employment land plus land for a new highway connection (and highway improvements) between Cornish Way and Bradfield Road.
- 6.8 The detailed Site Assessment Booklet should be read in conjunction with this report and is included in **Appendix 2**.

## **7. Recommendations**

- 1. It is recommended that members endorse the identified sites for inclusion in the Local Plan.**
- 2. The final policy wording is delegated to the Planning Policy Manager.**
- 3. That all other sites are discounted at this stage.**
- 4. That the green open space designations shown on the site assessment maps are agreed.**

## List of proposed allocations

### Residential Sites

Site Ref	Description	Gross Area (ha)	Indicative Dwellings
NW01/B	Land at Norwich Road & Nursery Drive	18.62	350
NW62/A	North Walsham Western Extension	108.3	1800

### Employment Site

Site Ref	Description	Gross Area (ha)
NW52	Land East of Bradfield Road	2.4ha

## 8 Legal Implications and Risks

- 8.1 The Council must produce a Local Plan which complies with various regulatory and legal requirements and in determining its policy and proposals each must be justified and underpinned by evidence, the application of a consistent methodology and demonstrate how public feedback has informed the Plan.
- 8.2 The statutory process requires records of consultation feedback and demonstration of how this has/will have informed plan making with further commentary demonstrating how the representation at regulation 18 have been taken into account in line with Regulation 22 and also requires that a sustainability appraisal has informed the production of the Plan

## 9. Financial Implications and Risks

- 9.1 Failure to undertake plan preparation in accordance with the regulations and NPPF is likely to render the plan 'unsound' at examination and result in the need to return to earlier stages. Substantial additional costs would be incurred.

**Appendix 1** – Site Assessment Methodology

**Appendix 2** –Site Assessment Booklet North Walsham