

**STEWKLEY  
NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

**FINAL SITE ASSESSMENT REPORT**

**MARCH 2020**

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report summarises the site assessment process that has informed the selection of housing site allocations in the submitted Stewkley Neighbourhood Plan.

2. The Plan maker, Stewkley Parish Council, is aware that the imminent Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP) requires no housing site allocations to be made in Stewkley to 2033, as 101 homes have been committed (and built for the most part) in the village since 2013. But it is also mindful of the provisions of §14 of the National Planning Policy Framework in respect of securing protection for its Plan and of the need for the new Bucks Council to adopt a new Local Plan for the county by 2024. It has therefore proposed to allocate three sites for development in its Policy STK3.

3. The representations made by consultees on the draft Neighbourhood Plan identified three key issues:

- The scale of the total quantum of housing development in relation to the status in the District Settlement Hierarchy
- The selection of sites that already have planning permission
- The lack of assessment of sites as ‘reasonable alternatives’ in the Draft Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) report, which only assessed the draft allocations in Policy H2

4. As a result, a third stage of assessment has been carried out by NPSG. The NPSG was concerned that in modifying the Neighbourhood Plan and its evidence base it would have to undertake another Reg 14 consultation exercise. Given the length of time since the start of the project, and the significant risk of ‘consultation fatigue’ amongst the local community, its objective has been to address each of the above matters in way that does not lead to such an outcome. In practice this has meant that its preferred option is to avoid having to allocate different sites to all or some of those proposed in the Pre-Submission Plan, unless there is an unarguable case for doing so. The assessment review has been completed in combination with modifications to the separate Final SEA report.

5. The report recommends that the three remaining available sites that form the ‘Linear’ spatial option – sites 20, 23 and 47 - are selected to deliver a total of approx. 25 homes over the plan period. In the case of sites 23 and 47, it is recommended that they are allocated as a pair of combined sites in order to make an efficient use of land and to minimise the number of new highways access points. As required in the Pre-Submission Plan, it is also recommended that the planning, if not delivery, of the sites (which together will form a coherent southern ‘gateway’ to the village) should be co-ordinated.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This report summarises the site assessment process to date that has informed the selection of housing site allocations in the submitted Stewkley Neighbourhood Plan. Stewkley Parish Council has been advised throughout this process by officers of Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC) and at its final stages by the professional planning consultancy, O'Neill Homer.

1.2 The Parish Council is aware that the imminent Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP) requires no housing site allocations to be made in Stewkley to 2033, as 101 homes have been committed (and built for the most part) in the village since 2013. But it is also mindful of the provisions of §14 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in respect of securing protection for its Plan and of the need for the new Bucks Council to adopt a new Local Plan for the county by 2024 (thereby replacing VALP). It has therefore proposed to allocate three additional small sites for development in its Policy STK3.

1.3 A draft (and differently formatted) version of this report was published alongside the Pre-Submission Neighbourhood Plan and draft Strategic Environmental Assessment report for consultation in May 2019. As a result of the representations made on these documents, the number of sites proposed for allocation (in the original Policy H2) has been reduced from twelve to three for a variety of reasons. This final version of the report explains these reasons and presents the rationale for the selection of the sites in Policy STK3. In doing so, it has been restructured from the earlier versions to focus on describing and explaining the site assessment process and its outcome.

## **2. STAGE ONE**

2.1 The process began with the Parish Council forming a Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG) to oversee the project on its behalf. The PSG has engaged with the local community to publicise the Plan and to seek opinions and preferences on its vision and objectives throughout the project since 2016. The Planning, Landscape, Housing and Environment (PLHE) sub-group had responsibility for identifying and assessing potential sites.

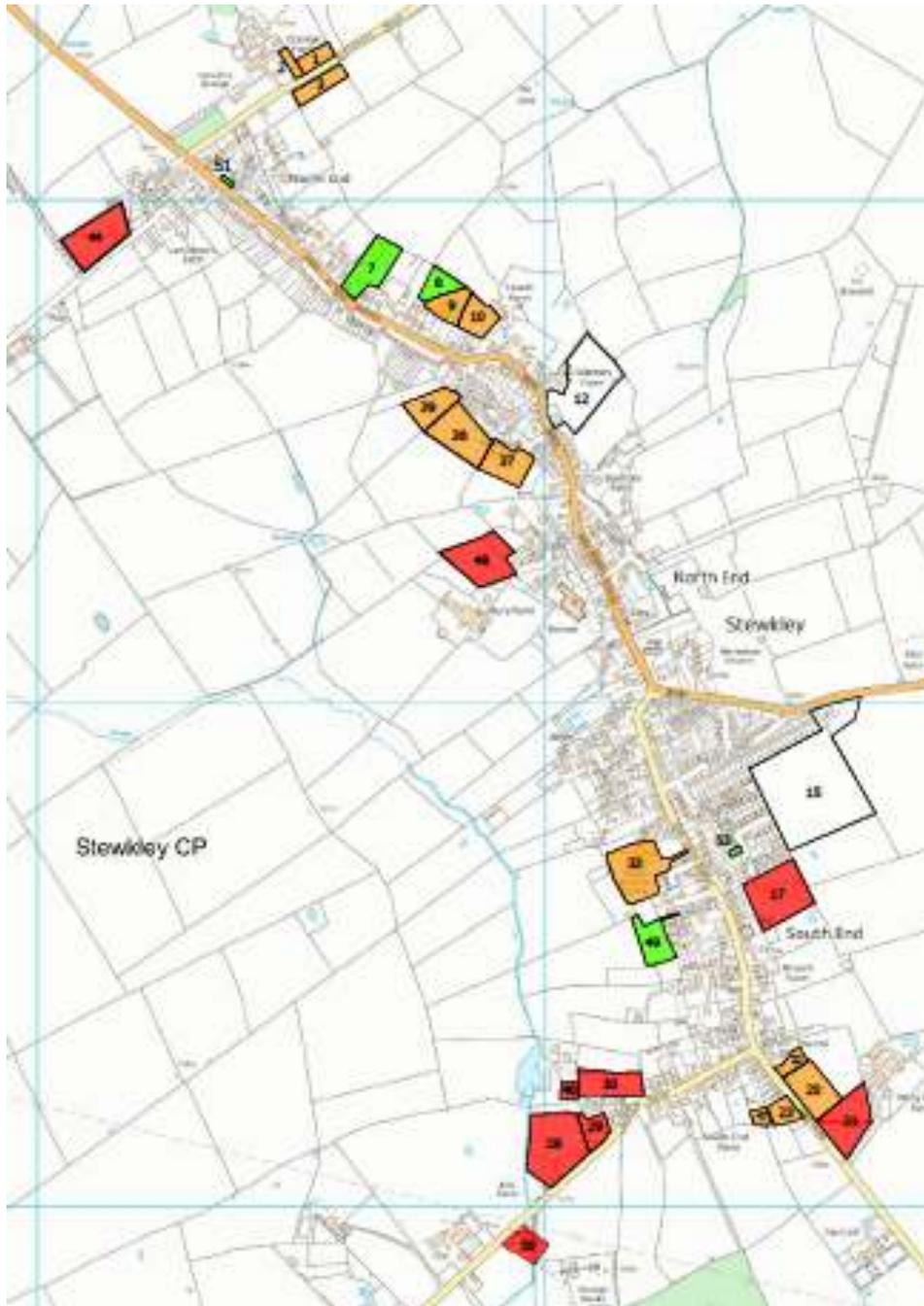
2.2 A 'call for sites' exercise was carried out in summer 2015, which led to 53 sites in the Parish being put forward for their potential housing development. They included a number of sites identified and appraised in earlier iterations of AVDC's 'Housing & Employment Land Availability Assessment' (HELAA). Each site owner was contacted either by a personal visit or letter (if they were not resident) and asked if they wished their land to be considered for future housing development over the next twenty years.

2.3 The owners of 20 sites immediately declared no interest and their sites were eliminated. As two of the remaining sites had already been subject to planning application (sites 12 and 15) they were not subjected to further assessment. A site for a single house was also excluded.

### 3. STAGE TWO

3.1 The remaining thirty sites are shown on Plan A below and were assessed by members of the NPSG and classified as follows:

- The site does not meet the village need and may have a negative impact
- The site generally meets the village need but some issues may have a detrimental impact unless resolved
- The site meets the village need without any or minimal impact



*Plan A: Stage 2 Sites  
(OS Licence 100002189)*

3.2 During the months of November 2016 - February 2017, the AVDC Neighbourhood Planning Team and an Independent specialist development company were asked to provide comments on the suitability of the sites for development and inclusion in a Neighbourhood Plan.

3.3 The consultee comments were collated for each site and combined with comments from the NPSG and its working groups. A public meeting was held on 11 March 2017 and parishioners were asked to give written comments on the 30 sites. Using this feedback, the number of sites was reduced from 30 to 14. A further two sites were subsequently removed as they were deemed unsuitable due to existing trees or highway issues. Twelve sites are proposed for development within the Neighbourhood Plan.

3.4 The 18 sites that have been rejected through the consultation process are detailed in Table A below. The table gives a brief summary of the reasons why a site was rejected. The rejection might be due to a planning concern such as access or incursion into open countryside etc., or an objection based upon the features listed in Table 1 that were of importance to Stewkley residents, such as preserving the linear nature of the village.

Site No.	Site Location	Reason(s) for rejection based upon planning considerations and Stewkley scores.	Public Consultation Votes For /Against
8	124 High Street North	Backland development, incursion into countryside, detrimental to linear village.	3/28 (90%)
9	122 High Street North	Backland development, incursion into countryside, detrimental to linear village.	3/28 (90%)
10	Laurel Farm	Backland development, incursion into countryside, detrimental to linear village.	2/12 (86%)
17	Field behind Methodist Chapel	Backland development, access, detrimental to linear village.	10/22 (69%)
21	Wing Road	Too far from edge of village, beyond the edge of the proposed 'gateway'.	11/19 (63%)
28	Dunton Road	Incursion into countryside, access	8/18 (69%)
29	Dunton Road	Incursion into countryside, access	8/12 (60%)
30	South Lane	Access, edge of village down a steep lane, rural feel	10/10 (50%)
37	Field behind Sycamore Farm	Incursion into countryside, detrimental to linear village, access	3/32 (91%)
38	Field behind Sycamore Close	Incursion into countryside, detrimental to linear village, access	3/23 (88%)
39	Field behind Sycamore Close	Incursion into countryside, detrimental to linear village, access	3/20 (87%)
44	Dean Road	Detrimental to vista across open countryside. Outward extension into the countryside. Introduces an irregular pattern of development harmful to the character of this part of the village.	12/15 (55%)
46	Raywood House, South Lane	Access, edge of village down a steep lane, rural feel	6/10 (62%)
48	Fishweir	Withdrawn by landowner for personal reasons.	N/A
49	Field behind Courtneidge Close	Incursion into countryside, detrimental to linear village, access.	10/42 (81%)
50	Field off Dunton Road	Rural isolated site, impact views. Poor proximity to village – no footpaths.	3/17 (85%)
51	Garden 10 Heywood Park	Existing mature trees prevent use	NPSG decision
52	Barns at Potash	Egress from site being a hazard	Bucks CC Highways

*Table A: Stage 2 Rejected Sites*

3.5 The table also includes the number of votes cast for each site by the residents during the consultation period. The number in brackets shows the percentage of against votes cast for that site. Eight of these sites were rejected by over 80% of the votes cast. These were sites 8, 9, 10, 37, 38, 39, 49 and 50, which were overwhelmingly rejected by those who participated in the public consultation. In addition, the decision to exclude 18 sites was made by consolidating the feedback from all the consultees including AVDC, Bucks CC Highways, parish residents and the NPSG Working Groups.

3.6 Twelve sites were recommended for inclusion in the Neighbourhood Plan as shown in Table B below and detailed site assessment information is included in the earlier Site Assessment Report of May 2017.

Site Number	Site location	Reason(s) for inclusion.	Votes from public consultation For/Against
1	Bletchley Rd North	Formation of a gateway into the village. Ideal for frontage development. Contribute to traffic calming entering the village.	(61%) 17/11
2	Bletchley Rd North		(58%) 14/10
3	Bletchley Rd South		(47%) 14/16
7	Bowls Farm HIGH STREET NORTH	Village infill opportunity which can enhance the conservation area at that site.	(56%) 18/14
12	Cricketers Farm	Outline Planning Approval given (upon appeal) for 14 houses	Not included in the vote
15	Soulbury Road	Outline Planning Approval given for up to 67 houses	(40%) 6/9
20	Wing Road East	Formation of a gateway into the village. Ideal for frontage development. Contribute to traffic calming entering the village.	(55%) 17/14
22	Wing Road Orchard		(70%) 21/9
23	Wing Road West		(63%) 19/11
33	Manor Industrial Estate HSS	Village infill opportunity – timeframe 15+ years contingent on industry relocating to an alternative location within Stewkley parish	(44%) 8/10
47	West of Site 23	Must be developed in conjunction with Site 23	(56%) 13/10
53	Griffin Field	Village infill opportunity – green space adjacent.	(61%) 11/7

*Table B: Stage 2 Selected Sites*

3.7 The District Council replaced their original rejected draft plan with a new draft District Plan in November 2017. Within this plan the proposal for providing additional new homes in Stewkley Parish was reduced from the original 141 to a new figure of 101. The NPSG considered the proposed reduced figure of 101 did not meet the Parish requirements, as set out through the earlier completed Questionnaire. It was therefore concluded that the parishioners should be asked for their views.

3.8 The NPSG and SPC understood that the VALP and the Stewkley NP would be reviewed periodically after adoption and if necessary, revised if local housing requirements increased. However, it was felt that the Parish should be allowed to have their say on the number of houses included in the Stewkley NP.

3.9 A survey was conducted over a period of two weeks during November 2017 via a proforma delivered to every household in the parish. Parishioners were given three options and asked to vote for one. Each of the three scenarios was described with some 'high level' positive and negative statements – these were not intended to be a comprehensive assessment of the pros and cons of each option.

3.10 The options were to develop a NP for the planning period up to 2033:

- Option 1 Delivers the VALP target of 101 homes;
- Option 2 Builds 127 homes excluding certain sites that had been identified along the Stewkley High Street;
- Option 3 Builds 150 homes currently identified in the drafted NP

3.11 Over two thirds of the votes were cast for Options 2 and 3, meaning that the majority did not want to develop a NP to satisfy the current VALP. Instead they wanted to pursue a higher target of new builds to meet the forecasted needs of Stewkley and cover some potential growth in the VALP. As Option 3 narrowly scored higher than Option 2, the NPSG unanimously agreed to advise the Parish Council to proceed with Option 3 which was duly ratified at a Parish Council meeting on 4th December 2017. As a result, the Pre-Submission version of the Plan therefore proposed to allocate the 12 sites in its Policy H2.

#### **4. STAGE THREE**

4.1 In respect of this process, the representations made by consultees on the draft Neighbourhood Plan identified three key issues:

- The scale of the total quantum of housing development in relation to the status in the District Settlement Hierarchy
- The selection of sites that already have planning permission
- The lack of assessment of sites as 'reasonable alternatives' in the Draft Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) report, which only assessed the draft allocations in Policy H2

4.2 As a result, a third stage of assessment has been carried out by NPSG with the help of the professional planning consultancy, O'Neill Homer, and in consultation with AVDC officers. The NPSG was concerned that in modifying the Neighbourhood Plan and its evidence base it would have to undertake another Reg 14 consultation exercise. Given the length of time since the start of the project, and the significant risk of 'consultation fatigue' amongst the local community, its objective has been to address each of the above matters in way that does not lead to such an outcome.

4.3 In practice this has meant that its preferred option is to avoid having to allocate different sites to those proposed in the Pre-Submission Plan, unless there is an unarguable case for doing so. The assessment review has been completed in combination with modifications to the separate Final SEA report.

4.4 Firstly, the two sites with planning permission (12 and 15) have been deleted. Secondly, a review has been undertaken of the settlement boundary used by the NPSG to inform its original choices (see Plan B). This has resulted in sites 1, 2 and 3 now being excluded from further consideration and has validated the original exclusion of sites 21, 28, 50 and 52. However, sites 29, 30, 44 and 46 are now considered to adjoin the boundary and form part of the assessment.

4.5 Thirdly, sites 22, 51 and 53 lie within the proposed settlement boundary and are small, infill sites and have been excluded from further consideration, as the principle of development is already accepted. Fourthly, some sites are no longer being made available, i.e. sites 7 and 33.

4.6 Finally, a review has been undertaken to identify a reasonable and logical means of distinguishing between the location and characteristics of the remaining sites, and of those remaining available sites discarded at Stage 1. This has been done to enable other sites to be deleted and so reduce the overall scale of allocations. In reviewing the 15 sites it has been possible to divide them into three spatial categories:

1. 'Linear' – whereby the strong linearity of the village form is maintained by allocating only sites with site frontages/access to High Street or by extending the village to the north or south (comprising sites 20, 23 and 47) and totalling a minimum of approx. 25 homes)
2. 'Dog Bone' – whereby the strong linearity of the village form is maintained on its current length and the opportunity is taken to grow one or both of its 'poles' with allocations to the east and/or west (comprising sites 29, 30, 44 and 46 and totalling a minimum of approx. 22 homes)
3. 'Bulge' – whereby the strong linearity of the village form is modified by allocating sites behind the High Street frontage or off Soulbury Road (comprising sites 8, 9, 10, 17, 37, 38, 39 and 49 and totalling a minimum of approx. 55 homes)

4.7 The housing capacity totals of each spatial option are considered approximate minimums as only general assumptions have been thus far in defining the gross developable area in some cases and in calculating an appropriate site density. However, it has been noted that all three options are of a similar overall scale of development and would remain so even with detailed site capacity analysis, and therefore it is not necessary to complete such analysis for this review. In each case, the total quantum is considered to fit with Stewkley's status of a 'medium village' in the Hierarchy.

4.8 The Final SEA report has assessed the sites as they together form one of these three spatial options as the 'reasonable alternatives', rather than the individual sites. It has concluded that each option has the potential to have some adverse environmental effects that can be satisfactorily mitigated through making allocation policy requirements and that none is starkly better or worse than the other in its overall performance. In which case, it concludes that the spatial option that most closely resembles the selection of sites in the Pre-Submission Plan – the 'Linear' option – can continue to form the basis of the Submission Plan, with no need to add any previously-discarded sites.

4.9 The NPSG has revisited the extensive community consultation work undertaken to inform site selection to determine if the 'Linear' option remains consistent with local opinion, both as an overall spatial option and in terms of its composite sites. It too has concluded that there remains a strong fit between this technical outcome and the majority of community opinion, with no grounds for selecting either of the two alternative spatial options.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SITE ALLOCATIONS**

5.1 On this basis, it is recommended that the sites that form the Linear' spatial option – sites 20, 23 and 47 - are selected to deliver a total of approx. 25 homes over the plan period. In the case of sites 23 and 47, it is recommended that they are allocated as a pair of sites in order to make an efficient use of land and to minimise the number of new highways access points. As required in the Pre-Submission Plan, it is also recommended that the planning, if not delivery, of the sites (which together will form a coherent southern 'gateway' to the village) should be co-ordinated.

5.2 The SEA has indicated how each site should seek to avoid or mitigate any adverse effects and these requirements will be made in the respective allocation policies.

5.3 Each of the three preferred allocation sites are available now and the landowners have confirmed there are no known legal or other encumbrances to prevent planning applications being submitted shortly. Policy H2 of the Pre-Submission Plan sought to evenly phase the delivery of the allocated sites over the remainder of the plan period.

5.4 However, there remains a strong case for desiring the sites to be jointly planned and delivered, most likely in the next five years. It is possible that although planning consents may be obtained for all three in that time their developer(s) may choose to wait for the build out of the much larger, consented Soulbury Road scheme before commencing delivery of their sites.