



Housing delivery

DJN Planning Limited

June 2017

For Little Birch and Aconbury NDP Steering Group

Draft issued 20 February 2017

Revision 1 issued 18 March 2017

Revision 2 issued 19 June 2017

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The communities of Little Birch and Aconbury are preparing a joint Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) for their parishes. A Neighbourhood Area was approved in May 2016 and a Steering Group was established to carry out the work. Three Open Day events were held in June and July 2016. A residents' questionnaire survey was undertaken in September/October 2016 to seek views on a range of matters including housing, the economy, community services and the local environment.
- 1.2 The next stage of work is to determine the approach to be taken to the delivery of new housing in the NDP, to meet the minimum housing growth targets set by Herefordshire Council's (HC) Local Plan Core Strategy. This identifies Little Birch and Aconbury as settlements to receive proportionate housing growth in the period up to 2031.
- 1.3 To ensure general conformity with the strategic planning policies, it is necessary to demonstrate how the minimum housing requirements will be met and to define the extent of the settlements of Little Birch and Aconbury. The report:
 - reviews the provisions of strategic planning policy for Little Birch and Aconbury, including the minimum housing requirement, and confirms progress to date through the granting of planning permissions (section 2);
 - considers the distinctive settlement character of Little Birch and Aconbury (section 3);
 - assesses various site and locational options which have arisen through the Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and the residents' survey (section 4); and
 - provides a recommended approach to these matters (section 5).
- 1.4 Earlier drafts of this report were discussed by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group at meetings in March and April 2017. It has been independently prepared for the Steering Group by Dr. D.J. Nicholson.

June 2017

2. Housing requirement

Herefordshire Local Plan Core Strategy (LPCS)

- 2.1 Little Birch and Aconbury are in the Ross-on-Wye Housing Market Area, where the LPCS is seeking a minimum housing growth of 14% or 1150 new dwellings between 2011 and 2031.¹ The LPCS provides for two tiers of rural settlements where such housing development will be delivered through sensitive and appropriate housing growth: those which are to be the “main focus” of housing development, and “other settlements” where new housing will be appropriate.²
- 2.2 LPCS policy RA2 identifies Little Birch as a “main focus” settlement and Aconbury as an “other settlement”. The expectation is that for such settlements the NDP “will allocate land for new housing or otherwise demonstrate delivery ... by indicating levels of suitable and available capacity”. It is worth noting that LPCS housing targets are expressed as minimum requirements and that there is no basis on which to establish any upper limit or cap on new housing.
- 2.3 Generally, residential development is to be located “within or adjacent to the main built-up area(s) of settlements”.³ Particular emphasis is placed on ensuring that in the smaller “other settlements”, such as Aconbury, new housing respects scale, form, layout, character and setting so that new housing is locally distinctive.⁴ This reflects the fact that “by virtue of their size and character many of these settlements do not have a traditional village or nuclear centre and in many cases have a dispersed settlement pattern which would need to be respected in the design of new housing proposals. This will ensure the delivery of schemes that are locally distinctive”.⁵ This dispersed character is also a notable feature of the “main focus” settlement of Little Birch.
- 2.4 A further provision is that NDPs define “settlement boundaries (or a reasonable alternative)” for the policy RA2 villages.⁶ This is so that planning control can be properly established and applied to manage the growth of settlements, and to avoid unsustainable patterns of development and new isolated homes in the countryside.⁷
- 2.5 Outside of these settlements, LPCS policy RA3 sets out the more restrictive approach to be taken to new residential development in the countryside.
- 2.6 In cases where a parish has more than one identified settlement, the LPCS gives flexibility to apportion the minimum housing requirement between those settlements. Although the Little

¹ LPCS, policy RA1.

² LPCS, policy RA2.

³ LPCS, para. 4.8.16.

⁴ For instance, LPCS para. 4.8.12 and policy RA2 (1).

⁵ LPCS, para. 4.8.12.

⁶ LPCS, para. 4.8.23.

⁷ LPCS, para. 4.8.23 and National Planning Policy Framework para. 55.

Birch and Aconbury NDP is a joint plan between two parishes, rather than for a single parish, it is likely this flexibility would apply here if sought. However, the working assumption of this report is that the two parishes will meet their housing requirements independently within the framework of the NDP.

Housing requirements

2.7 The minimum housing requirements derived from the LPCS and supplied by HC are set out below (Table 1).

Parish	Proportional growth 2011-2031
Little Birch	13 dwellings
Aconbury	5 dwellings

Source: Herefordshire Council

Table 1: Housing requirements for Little Birch and Aconbury

Delivery to date

2.8 There was one dwelling completed in Aconbury parish in the period from 2011/12 to 2015/17 (land at Old Holloway), with no completions in Little Birch.

2.9 The position regarding sites with planning permission for new houses (excluding replacements) as at April 2017 is shown in Table 2.

Site Address	Parish	Notes	Total
Land adjacent to Village Hall, Barrack Hill, Little Birch	Little Birch	152991 Site for proposed dwelling, garage and new access. Approved 23 November 2015.	1
Land adjacent to Uplands, Little Birch	Little Birch	160476 Site for proposed retirement dwelling using existing access. Approved 5 April 2016.	1
Land adjacent to Fernleigh, Little Birch	Little Birch	160491 Site for proposed retirement dwelling. Approved 26 May 2016.	1
Land at Budlia Cottage, Little Birch, Hereford	Little Birch	162984 Proposed cottage and garage. Approved 31 October 2016.	1

Source: Herefordshire Council

Table 2: Residential planning permissions, Little Birch and Aconbury, at April 2017

2.10 Taking these completions and commitments into account, the residual housing requirement is shown in Table 3.

Parish	Proportional growth 2011-2031	Completions and commitments 2011-2017	Housing remaining to be delivered
Little Birch	13 dwellings	4	9
Aconbury	5 dwellings	1	4

Table 3: Residual housing requirement, Little Birch and Aconbury, at April 2017.

2.11 The earliest of the planning permissions included here as commitments dates from November 2015. It is likely no coincidence that the LPCS was approved in October 2015, confirming Little Birch and Aconbury as settlements to accept a degree of growth. Before this date, Little Birch and Aconbury parishes were considered for planning purposes to be countryside, and so subject to the controls on new residential development now embodied in LPCS policy RA3.

2.12 Two recent refusals of planning permission in the vicinity are also of note (Table 4). In both, HC concluded that the proposals were in an open countryside, rather than a settlement, location, and were refused planning permission on the basis that they did not meet policy RA3. Issues of access, landscape impact and ecology were also raised in respect of 160575.

Site Address	Parish	Notes	Total
Land adjacent to Sunnybank Cottage, Little Birch.	Little Birch	160575 Proposed dwelling. Refused 18 April 2016	1
Land adjacent to Prospect Cottage, Little Birch	Little Birch	163716 Proposed cottage and garage using existing access. Refused 17 January 2017.	1

Source: Herefordshire Council

Table 4: Refusals of planning permission at Little Birch

3. Settlement character

- 3.1 The thrust of LPCS policy is to deliver sensitive and appropriate housing growth in the identified settlements.
- 3.2 The starting point for what this means in the local context is to define the essential character of the settlements concerned, so that this may be respected in developing an approach to housing delivery.

Little Birch

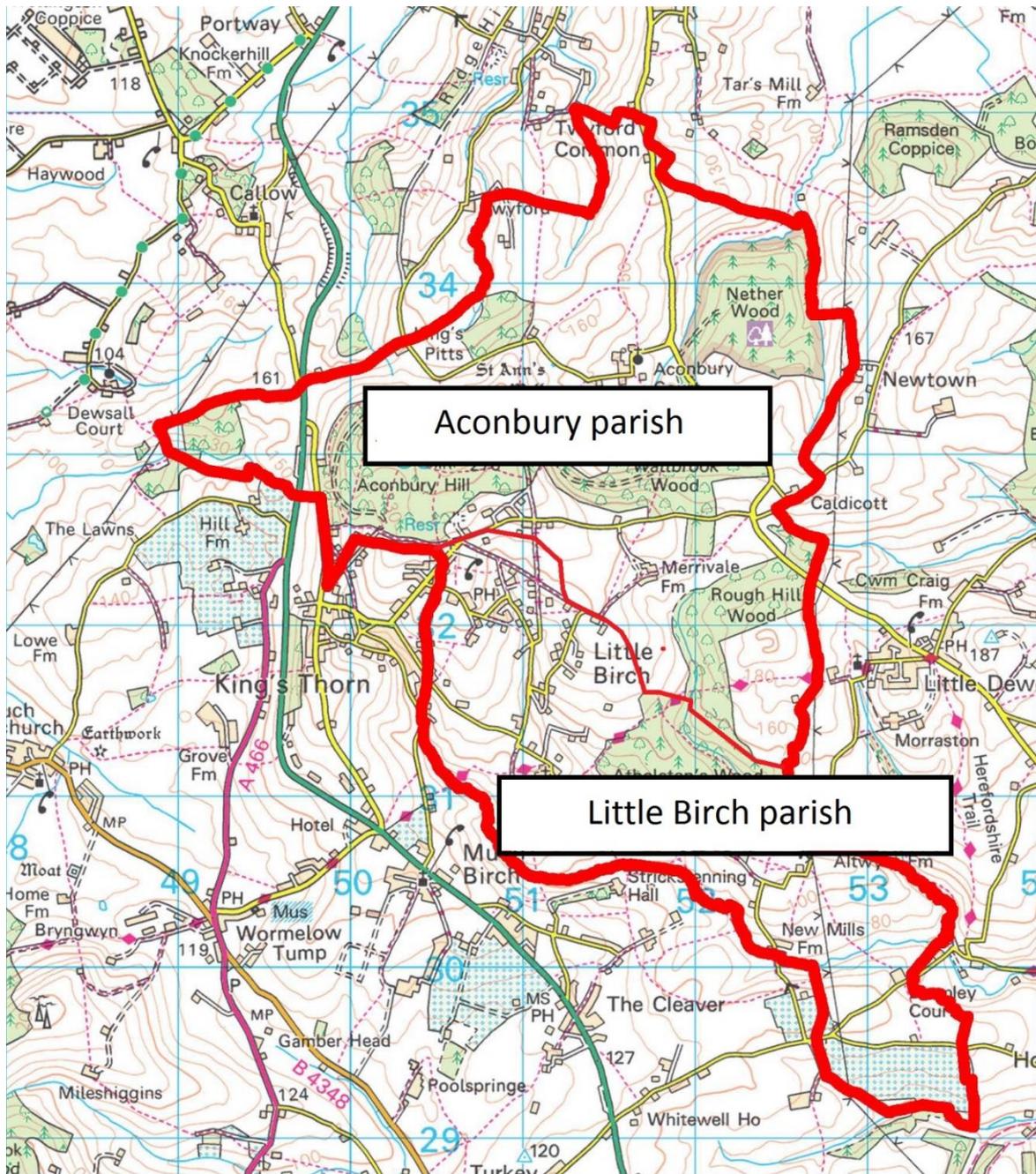
- 3.3 The settlement of Little Birch lies towards the north of the parish, on the lower slopes of Aconbury Hill (Plan 1). In the County Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), the area is attributed to the “Forest Smalholdings and Dwellings” landscape character type. Little Birch is an exemplar of the type, which is described in the LCA as follows: ⁸

“These are intimate, densely settled landscapes characterised by strings of wayside cottages and associated smallholdings. They nestle within a complex matrix of pastoral fields and narrow lanes, often defined by prominent dense hedges with hedgerow trees. The consistency of human activity in these distinctive, small scale landscapes has resulted in a unified, palpably domestic character. They primarily owe this character to the clearance, enclosure and subsequent settlement of areas of former woodland and associated small commons. The settlement pattern has developed in a random, opportunistic manner, the corresponding density, scale and ad hoc pattern of both dwellings and lanes being distinctive characteristics today. The associated, usually small, parcels of pasture and pockets of remaining rough ground with heathy/acid grassland vegetation contribute to the scale and are reminders of the origin of these landscapes. The hedgerows often have significant associated tree cover and provide an important structural element to the landscape.”

- 3.4 The LCA goes on to advise on how to manage change and accommodate new development with an eye to protecting this distinctive character. These guidelines are reviewed in section 5 of this report.
- 3.5 A useful starting point in defining the character of Little Birch is to focus initially on the highway network (Plan 2). The spine of the settlement is a circular route which is known in various stretches as Pendant Pitch, Newtown Lane, New Road, Mense Lane and Parish Lane. The route is served by public transport and links the village hall, the Castle Inn and St. Mary’s Church.
- 3.6 Relating this to the local topography and starting at the highest point, Pendant Pitch runs downhill from Barrack Hill, entering the parish east of Parish Lane. It proceeds irregularly and in places steeply down the hillside, in a series of bends and turns. The route then enters the

⁸ HC, Landscape Character Assessment, Supplementary Planning Guidance, 2004 updated 2009, p. 45.

more gentle and straight descent of New Road along the valley bottom. After passing the cluster of dwellings at Bannutree Lane where the local watercourse diverges to Higgins' Well,



-  Little Birch and Aconbury Neighbourhood Area
-  Little Birch/Aconbury parish boundary

Plan 1: Neighbourhood Area and parish boundary

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the route turns west into Mense Lane. This connects with Parish Lane, which is largely outside the parish although properties on its east side are within Little Birch. It runs uphill to rejoin Pendant Pitch.

3.7 There are various offshoots from this circular route:

- School Lane, running from New Road uphill towards Chapel Pitch. School Lane is a green lane or Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT) in its upper stretch; Chapel Pitch is a public right of way following the ridgeline;⁹
- Crows Nest Lane, also running uphill from New Road to Chapel Pitch; and
- Ruff Lane, heading east from the junction of Mense Lane and New Road.

3.8 In addition, the area is crossed by numerous public rights of way in the form of tracks and paths.

3.9 Development has tended to gravitate to the higher land towards the north, along Pendant Pitch/Newtown Lane and up to Chapel Pitch. Here, dwelling plots face or front onto a variety of roads, tracks or green lanes. Whilst there are some wayside dwellings, the more usual approach is for houses to be sited irregularly within their (usually generous) plots, set back from the frontage on their own terms and reflecting the constraints and opportunities of the topography. There is at best only a loose semblance of a building line. There is no development in depth.

3.10 This individualistic approach extends to the age, type and size of dwelling. Most of the original modest cottages have been subject to extensions over the years, with new dwellings tending to the more substantial. Most houses are two-storey detached properties, with some bungalows at Pendant Pitch. Many different architectural styles, designs and materials are evident.

3.11 Heading south and east, the tendency is for the settlement pattern to open out. There is some relatively consolidated development along Parish Lane but this is soon replaced by detached dwellings in clusters within open countryside, such as along Mense Lane or Bannutree Lane, and then for such clusters of dwellings to become “looser” and to be better seen as single dwellings in increasingly isolated positions. The overall impression is of open countryside progressively predominating over the settled character. The eclectic approach to such matters as siting, design and materials continues.

3.12 For the avoidance of doubt and as a cautionary note, the areas described above do not represent the “main built-up area”. There is no recognisable village or nuclear centre. Indeed, there are significant areas of pasture and other undeveloped land present within the settlement form, so that the existing pattern and character of development is only part of the story. Intermingled with the domestic curtilages there is a myriad of smaller fields, garden areas and paddocks. This is the “complex matrix” referred to in the LCA. On plan at least,

⁹ Highway and route classifications taken from HC administrative map.

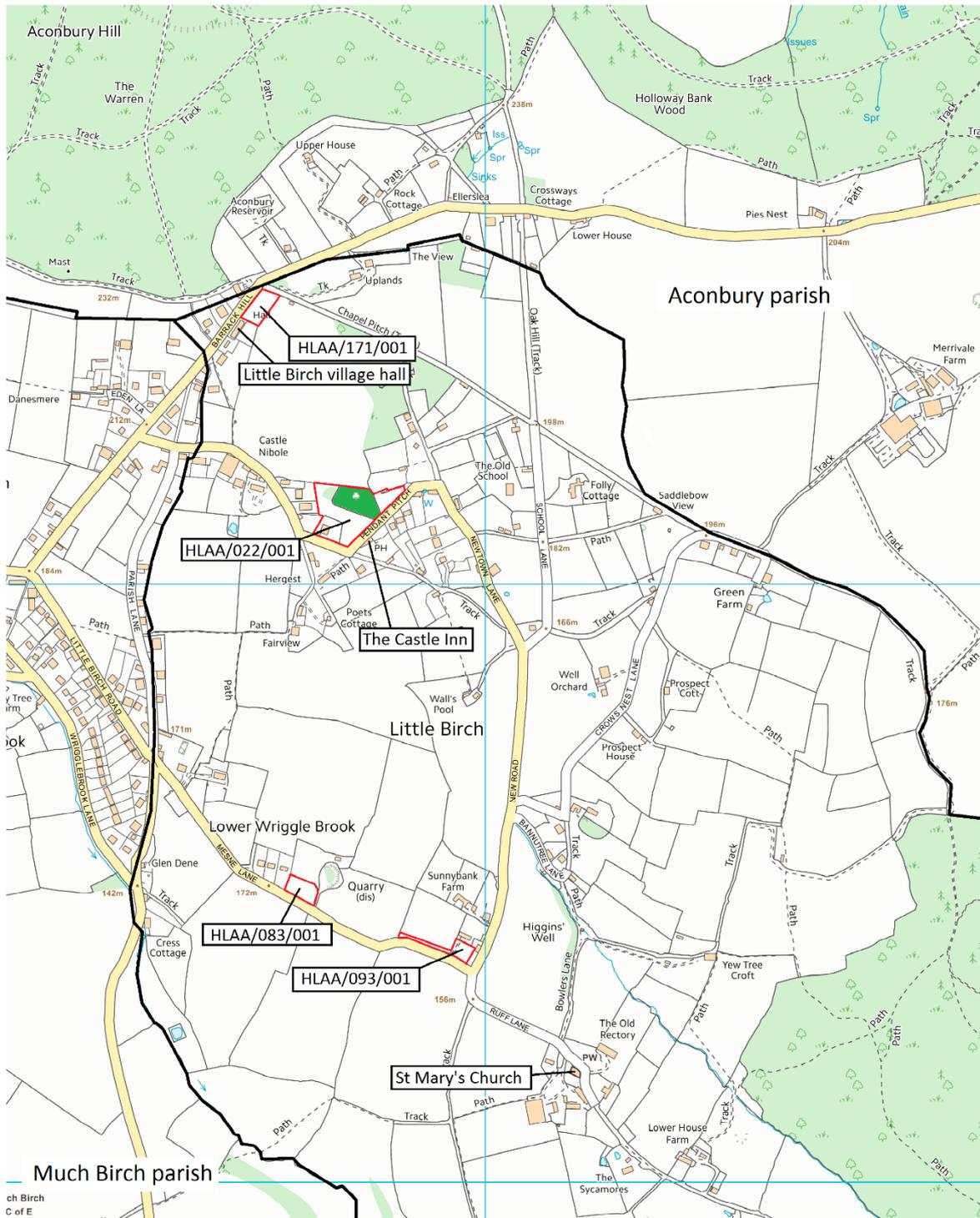
without knowledge of topography and other site characteristics, these tend to present as infill sites. Alongside these are larger fields, such as between Pendant Pitch and Mesne Lane. As HC planning officers have pointed out, each “existing and potential development site within or adjacent to the village is contiguous with the surrounding countryside on at least one of its flanks by virtue of the sinuous, warren-like wayside settlement pattern”.¹⁰ Collectively, and as noted in the LCA, these areas of undeveloped land in all their variety make a significant contribution to the locally distinctive character of the settlement.

Aconbury

- 3.13 The settlement of Aconbury lies within wooded countryside to the north-east of Aconbury Hill. It is within the Wooded Estatelands landscape character type in the LCA.¹¹ These are wooded agricultural landscapes of isolated farmsteads, clusters of wayside dwellings and occasional small estate villages, where any new development needs to be carefully sited to protect their visual integrity.
- 3.14 The hamlet conforms to this description. It is dominated by the disused and grade II* listed church of St. John the Baptist, Aconbury Court and a range of functional farm buildings, with a handful of dwellings besides. The buildings are clustered together within an open landscape of fields, themselves enclosed by woodland on the higher ground. It is remote from services save for a bus route on the adjacent C1261.

¹⁰ HC Delegated decision report to application 163716, Land adjacent to Prospect Cottage, Little Birch, January 2017

¹¹ HC, LCA, pp.63-64.



-  Parish boundary
-  SHLAA site
-  Traditional orchard at HLA/022/001

Plan 2: Little Birch settlement pattern, SHLAA sites and services

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Little Birch and Aconbury NDP · Housing delivery

4. Site options

Sites identified in HC's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

- 4.1 The SHLAA is a County-wise assessment of the potential availability of land for housing. The 2015 Rural Report focuses on the rural settlements of Herefordshire and is intended to support the LPCS and emerging Neighbourhood Development Plans.¹²
- 4.2 Little Birch has yet to be specifically assessed. However, the assessment for neighbouring Kingsthorne identifies four sites within Little Birch. Only one of these, HLA/022/011 Land including and to the rear of Maryland, was assessed by HC officers in the SHLAA process. The others were discounted at an early stage due to their small size, and were not taken further. It is understood that all four sites are available, having been submitted by or on behalf of the respective landowners in response to a 'call for sites' by HC.
- 4.3 The four sites concerned are shown on Plan 2 and reviewed in Table 6. This includes an assessment of development potential for each of the sites in order to advise the Steering Group of their scope to contribute to meeting the housing requirement.
- 4.4 There are no SHLAA sites identified within Aconbury parish.

SHLAA reference	Address	Size (ha.)	Comment on development potential
HLAA/171/001	Adjacent village hall	0.25	The southern half of this site has planning permission for a single dwelling under reference 152991. There is potential for a further frontage dwelling to be accommodated on the remainder of the site.
HLAA/022/001	Land including and to the rear of Maryland	1.04	<p>This site was assessed in the SHLAA for Kingsthorne. Some 0.32 ha of the central part of the site is shown as Traditional Orchard in the Priority Habitat Inventory, and was discounted in the SHLAA on this basis, leaving 0.72 ha in two parcels, including the existing dwellinghouse. These remaining portions were assessed as having scope for development, with capacity constrained by its irregular shape.</p> <p>The SHLAA rates the site as of low potential. This is because there are other sites closer to the main built-up part of Kingsthorne which would be preferred. This sequential approach does not apply when the site is assessed solely in the Little Birch context. Indeed, it is situated in the more densely-settled part of the settlement, with convenient access to local facilities. The SHLAA notes that there are views to the east. The site is visible in the local landscape, but development would be seen against the backdrop of other more elevated housing when viewed for instance from Crows Nest Lane across the valley.</p>

¹² https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/media/3821672/shlaa_rural_report_nov_2015.pdf

			The site is a candidate for allocation in the NDP. Site factors and design will heavily influence dwelling capacity. The SHLAA estimate of capacity, 8 dwellings, is over-optimistic having regard to the more detailed assessment of settlement character carried out here. A more reasonable estimate of potential would be 5 dwellings.
HAAA/083/001	Land adjacent to Daneswood	0.2	This site has no planning history. There is a field access in the south-western corner of the site. Subject to further consideration of site factors including landscape impact at application stage, there is potential for a single dwelling.
HAAA/093/001	Land adjacent to Sunnybank Cottage	0.25	This site has had a recent refusal of planning permission (reference 160575, Table 4). There is a field access in the south-western corner of the site. The site is of limited depth for much of its extensive frontage to Mesne Lane. Subject to further consideration of site factors including landscape impact at application stage, there is potential for a single dwelling.

Table 6: SHLAA sites in Little Birch

Locations and sites identified in residents' survey 2016: Little Birch

4.5 The residents' questionnaire survey included a question (Q5) asking respondents to identify specific locations thought suitable for new homes. Many responded in general terms, referring for example to the opportunities offered for infill development by paddocks and unused small fields, to add to the existing clusters of housing; or by identifying criteria new development should meet. However, various locations were suggested, albeit in general terms. Some of these were outside the Neighbourhood Area. Those in Little Birch were:

- Adjacent to St. Mary's Church
- Barrack Hill
- Mense Lane
- Pendant Pitch/adjacent to The Castle Inn
- Crows Nest Lane
- School Lane
- New Road/Well Orchard

4.6 Most of these locations fall within the settlement of Little Birch as described in section 3, with an emphasis on the northern parts of the area.

4.7 The companion survey Q6 asked about locations thought not suitable. Several locations were mentioned in answers to both questions. Further details of the responses can be found in the Results Report and Comment Listings.¹³

Locations and sites identified in residents' survey 2016: Aconbury

4.8 Locations suggested in Aconbury were:

- West of A49
- As an extension of Little Dewchurch

4.9 A small part of the parish lies west of the A49 in open countryside with no existing dwellings and remote from other settlement. As such it is unsuitable for new residential development. Little Dewchurch lies to the east. A NDP is being prepared and is at examination stage. This provides a settlement boundary to the village. Because this does not adjoin the Little Birch and Aconbury Neighbourhood Area, there is no scope to associate development in Aconbury parish with the growth of Little Dewchurch.

¹³ Little Birch and Aconbury NDP Steering Group, Results Report and Comment listings, November 2016.

5. Recommended approach

Delivering development and protecting settlement character

- 5.1 The LCA provides initial guidance on how to manage the development of the settlements within each of the landscape types.
- 5.2 For Little Birch, the Forest Smallholdings and Dwellings landscape type typically accommodates “a dense settlement pattern with a complex matrix of intersecting lanes fringed by wayside cottages interspersed with small hedged pastures and pockets of rough grazing”.¹⁴ In terms of managing development, the LCA notes: ¹⁵
- “The many small plots of rough land or pasture offer considerable scope for infill development, putting further pressure on these landscapes. The pattern and character of the individual dwellings is one of the most significant characteristics of this landscape type and increasing urbanisation is the greatest threat to their character”.
 - Additional individual dwellings may be appropriate where the scale of the original settlement would not be compromised.
 - Clustered groups of new housing would not be sympathetic to the landscape character.
 - Strategy should be based on the conservation of the small scale, settled rural character.
 - Conservation of the character, particularly scale and detailing, of the cottages and smallholdings together with their pattern and setting should be a priority.
 - Retention of open spaces within the settlement matrix to be encouraged.
- 5.3 For the LCA guidelines to be translated into planning policy, and for the character of Little Birch to be respected and new housing to be locally distinctive, it is impractical for the NDP to attempt to apply the LPCS default approach of directing development to “within or adjacent to the main built-up area”. A more sensitive approach is needed to the question of the extent of the settlement and the delivery and management of development within it.
- 5.4 The traditional settlement boundary approach, with its presumption in favour of development on land so enclosed, would not serve the policy objectives. A more nuanced approach is needed which gives scope for the principle of development to be assessed at development management stage, within the framework of a suitable NDP policy. Local opinion supports this. In responses to the residents’ questionnaire survey, a majority favoured using a criteria-based approach as a flexible means of differentiating between settlement and countryside (52%), compared to 21% who supported use of a settlement boundary.
- 5.5 For Aconbury hamlet, the LCA seeks the conservation of the visual integrity of estate villages. The hamlet is a distinct cluster of buildings in the open countryside and a settlement boundary provides a ready means of defining the extent of the built form.

¹⁴ HC, Landscape Character Assessment, Supplementary Planning Guidance, 2004 updated 2009, p. 46.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Recommended approach: Little Birch

5.6 In the village of Little Birch, where settlement ends and countryside begins is a matter of judgement. What is sought is a balance. On the one hand, there needs to be sufficient opportunity for new development so that targets can be met in such a way as to protect the character of the settlement, avoiding over-consolidation or ‘cramming’. On the other, there is a need to protect the open countryside by not unduly extending the areas of opportunity so as to risk isolated development.

5.7 The recommended approach is a combination of the following:

- Defining the extent of the settlement by reference to a matrix of highways, tracks and lanes which serve areas and clusters of development. The settlement is to be defined as the developed curtilages fronting onto or directly served by lanes and tracks giving vehicular access from:
 - Barrack Hill
 - Pendant Pitch
 - Chapel Pitch between School Lane and Vaughan Lane
 - Newtown Lane
 - School Lane
 - New Road
 - Crows Nest Lane
 - Bannutree Lane
 - Ruff Lane between Bowlers Lane and Lower House Farm to include the Church
 - Mense Lane north side
 - Parish Lane east side.
- The settlement would be described on this basis in policy, rather than on plan (see Policy 1 in the Appendix).
- Using a criteria-based policy to guide and manage development within and adjacent to the settlement matrix. Policy 2 (Appendix) illustrates the approach. It is designed to allow suitable proposals to proceed whilst safeguarding the character of the settlement. There is notable scope for such development on the many plots of garden, pasture and rough grazing within and adjacent to the settlement matrix.
- Allocating parts of site SHLAA/022/001 for residential development, after its availability has been confirmed. The traditional orchard area should be excluded for biodiversity and landscape character reasons. The allocation would then form two parcels, which will better serve the integration of development with the settlement pattern.

5.8 In summary, the recommended approach will deliver the remaining housing target for Little Birch (nine units) through:

- the operation of Policies 1 and 2, which will allow appropriate “windfall” planning permissions within or adjacent to the settlement. Several potential opportunities for new single dwellings have been referred to in this report; and

- the allocation of land at Maryland for residential development (estimate five units); and
- the granting of planning permissions for residential development in the rural area of the parish where these meet the more restrictive criteria of LPCS policy RA3. These are expected to be principally via the conversion of redundant rural buildings.

Recommended approach: Aconbury

5.9 At Aconbury, the number of homes required to be delivered is in low single figures and an approach based on allowing windfall provision to continue is appropriate.

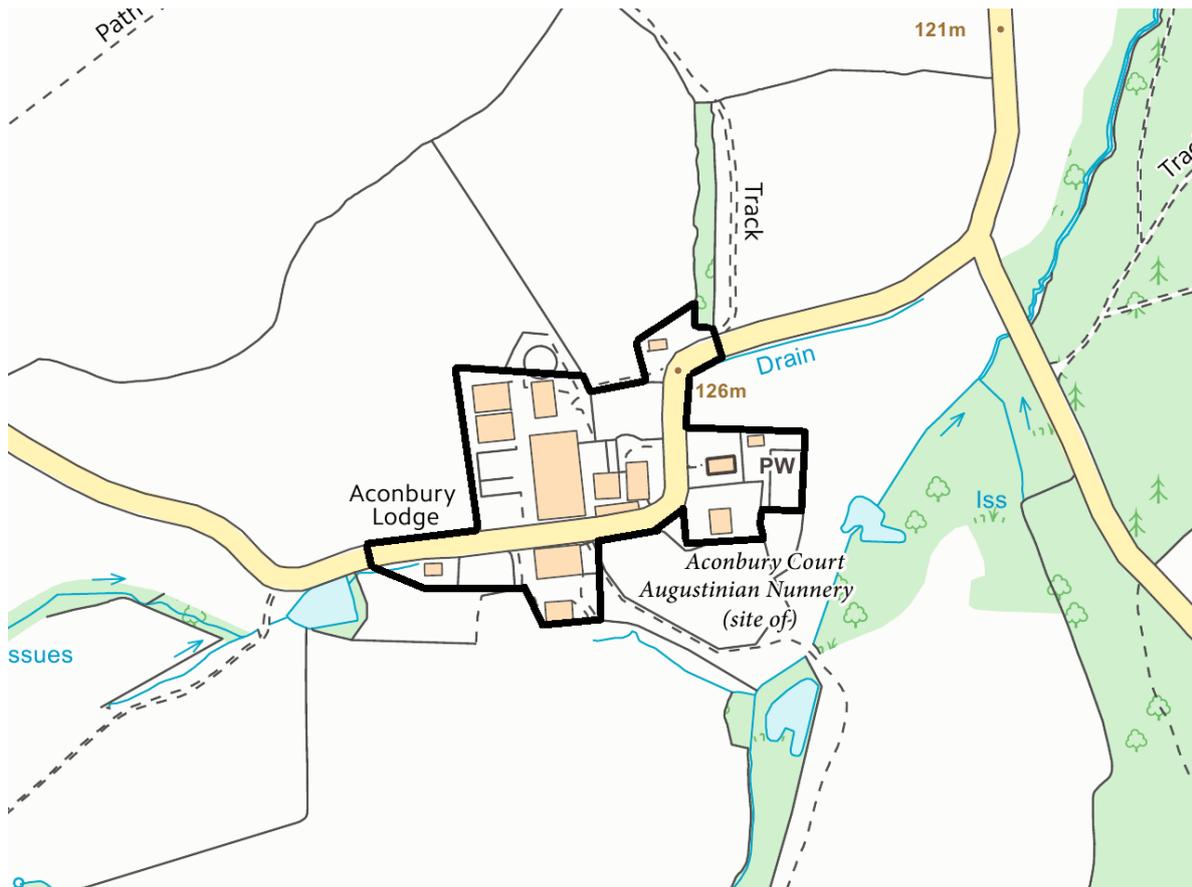
5.10 It is recommended:

- that a settlement boundary be drawn for the hamlet of Aconbury (Plan 3) with a view to preserving the visual integrity of the settlement, to be accompanied by a suitable policy acknowledging the potential for windfall residential development therein.

5.11 The housing target for Aconbury to be delivered through:

- Windfall residential development at Aconbury; and
- the granting of planning permissions for residential development in the rural area of the parish in line with LPCS policy RA3.

5.12 During discussion of the earlier draft of this report, several potential windfall opportunities were referred to by Steering Group members, such as the redundant Methodist Chapel at Barrack Hill. It is recommended that these are investigated further (including at Aconbury) to gather evidence that the assumptions as to windfall are realistic and likely to be achieved.



 Settlement boundary

Plan 3: Draft settlement boundary for Aconbury

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Appendix: Draft policies for Little Birch

- A1 The following are examples of the recommended approach to defining the settlement of Little Birch (policy 1) and to managing planning applications therein for residential development (policy 2). When incorporated into the NDP, they will be supplemented and explained by a 'reasoned justification' which would explain the underlying aims and objectives. A further policy will need to be included in the NDP to provide for the allocation of land at Maryland.

Policy 1 Little Birch settlement

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

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

Policy 2 Residential development at Little Birch

Residential development on land within or adjacent to the settlement of Little Birch as defined in policy 1 will be permitted provided that:

- 1. It is within or immediately adjoins a developed area of the settlement; and**
- 2. It can be integrated through plot sub-division, rounding-off or consolidation without undue harm to the prevailing dispersed character of the settlement; and**
- 3. It comprises frontage development only and would not result in backland or tandem development; and**
- 4. It will result in dwelling(s) with a curtilage similar in size to those in the immediate vicinity and otherwise respect the character and amenity of adjoining dwellings and the wider area including in terms of the siting of buildings on plots, scale, architectural detailing and materials; and**
- 5. It does not intrude into open countryside, having regard to the size and use of the plot, its relationship to existing development, and the enclosure provided by established natural boundaries.**