

**Local Development Framework Panel
11th April 2012**



<p>Report on Preparation of the Site Allocations and Draft Inset Plans for Witham to be included in that Plan</p>	<p>Agenda No: 5</p>
<p>Corporate Priority: Environment is clean and green, business is encouraged and local economy prospers, housing and transport meet local needs</p> <p>Report presented by: Eleanor Dash / Juliet Kirkaldy</p> <p>Report prepared by: Eleanor Dash / Juliet Kirkaldy</p>	
<p>Background Papers: Local Plan Review Witham Inset Plans. Correspondence from landowners and agents proposing development sites. Correspondence with Witham Town Council. LDF Panel Report 22nd February 2012.</p>	<p>Public Report Yes</p>
<p>Options: The Panel needs to identify a site or sites to provide a minimum of 95 dwellings in addition to those already identified in Witham. The options that officers consider would be appropriate are:-</p> <p>A To allocate land off Blunts Hall Road (50 dwellings) and the reduced area of Gimsons (70 dwellings). Or B To allocate land off Conrad Road (100 dwellings).</p> <p>Members could allocate sites which would total in excess of 95 dwellings, but this would not be required to meet the Core Strategy provision.</p>	<p>Key Decision: No (There will be a recommendation to Council to approve the draft Site Allocations and Development Management Plan for public consultation in its entirety, when the whole of the draft plan, supporting evidence and SEA has been prepared.)</p>
<p>Executive Summary: This report sets out the purpose and content of the Site Allocations Document. It specifies the amount of housing land required in Witham up to 2026 to be in conformity with the adopted Core Strategy. Following the LDF Panel on 22nd February 2012, the Members agreed to defer a decision on the following sites suggested for development pending a site visit, Blunts Hall Road, Gimsons (River View), Conrad Road, Bellfields (former Chipping Hill School) and Elderberry Gardens. Members have now undertaken the site visit. This report sets out the site constraints, adjoining uses, current designations, highway/landscape officer comments, Town Council views and officer comments on these sites that have been suggested for development. <i>(It is likely that further development sites will be put forward by landowners/ agents when there is public consultation on the Site Allocation and Development Management Plan.)</i></p>	
<p>Decision: Members are requested to consider the following options for public consultation:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the former Chipping Hill School is allocated as community use, pending the decision of Essex County Council on its use. 2. That the area known as Bellfields between the former school and Braintree Road remains designated as 'visually important space'. 	

3. That the whole of the land rear of Elderberry Gardens remains designated as 'informal recreation'.

To approve either option A or B as set out in the following recommendations:-

RECOMMENDATIONS for Option A

Blunts Hall Road

It is recommended that the whole of the Blunts Hall Road site should be included within the development boundary with vehicular access from Teign Drive.

1. The hedgerow along the frontage of Blunts Hall Road should be allocated as structural landscaping.
2. A cycleway/footpath should be designated along the eastern part of the Blunts Hall Road site.
3. The whole of the Blunts Hall Road site should be allocated as housing.
4. To approve Blunts Hall Road allocations as shown on Plan 6A

Cut Throat Lane Allotments

It is recommended that land should be designated for 40 additional allotment plots as an extension to the existing allotments at Cut Throat Lane.

Gimsons (WCH 2)

1. It is recommended that the Gimsons reduced area identified on Plan 7A should be allocated for housing and structural landscaping.
2. A cycleway/footpath should be designated along the eastern part of the Gimsons site.
3. To approve allocations on Plan 8A including the designation of trees adjoining the reduced areas as visually important space.

RECOMMENDATIONS for Option B

Conrad Road (WIN 1)

1. It is recommended that the Conrad Road site should be included within the development boundary with vehicular access from Conrad Road.
2. To approve the Conrad Road site allocations for housing, structural landscaping, open space and cycleway footpath marked on Plan 9A.

Purpose of Decision:

The proposed residential sites will form part of the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan which, together with the Core Strategy, will allocate development sites and protect other areas in the District from development over the next fifteen years.

Corporate implications [should be explained in detail]

Financial:	Costs of LDF Evidence and Site Allocations and Development Management Plan Preparation and Examination. Land values relating to development proposed. New Homes Bonus payment is related to housing development. Infrastructure costs. S106 and CIL payments will be related to future development.
Legal:	Plan preparation and adoption process follows legal procedures
Equalities/Diversity	Proposed development and protection of the environment have an impact upon equality/diversity
Customer Impact:	Impact of planning proposals and future planning decisions
Environment and Climate Change:	Site Allocations Document makes recommendations relating to development of land and protection of land for

	open space, allotments and other uses which will have effects upon the environment and climate change.
Consultation/Community Engagement:	Witham Town Council has been consulted on the sites submitted. The public will be consulted when the draft plan has been prepared, subject to the draft plan being approved by the Council.
Risks:	Risk of Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan not being adopted.
Officer Contact:	Juliet Kirkaldy / Eleanor Dash
Designation:	Senior Policy Planner / Planning Policy Manager
Ext. No.	2559 / 2563
E-mail:	Juliet.kirkaldy@braintree.gov.uk / Eleanor.dash@braintree.gov.uk

Background

Amount of Housing Required in Witham up to 2026

The Core Strategy (Policy CS1) identifies a minimum housing provision target of 1,700 dwellings from 2009 to 2026 as can be seen in the table below:

Settlement	Minimum Housing Provision dwellings	Indicative Provisional Dates
Witham excluding growth locations	800	2009-2026
South-west Growth Location north of Hatfield Road	600	Phased between 2017-2026
North-east Growth Location off Forest Road	300	Phased between 2021-2026

The two growth locations have already been allocated for development in the Core Strategy and their boundaries will not be reconsidered in the preparation of the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan.

Of the remaining 800 dwelling target, 199 dwellings have been completed and 288 have been granted planning permission between 2009 and 2011. Therefore, there is a minimum of **313** dwellings to be allocated in Witham through the Site Allocations Plan. However, it would be preferable to have additional dwellings over and above the minimum, in case any of the sites are slow in coming forward for development. Officers consider that at least a further 10% of the balance should be provided, giving a minimum of 344 dwellings. If sufficient dwelling sites are not identified, there is a risk that speculative applications could be submitted by developers for unallocated sites.

22nd February Local Development Framework (LDF) Panel

The LDF Panel agreed to identify the following sites for residential development in Witham:

Location	Estimated Capacity
Coach House Way (WCH 8)	14 dwellings
Land off Constance Close (WIS 2)	100 dwellings
Hatfield Road Growth Location (WIS 6)	100 additional dwellings
Former Forest Road Community Hall (WIN 7)	12 dwellings
Dorothy Sayers Laburnum Way Shops	23 dwellings
Total	249 dwellings

Summary of Housing Required in Witham

344 dwellings to be allocated (minimum)

249 dwellings identified by the LDF panel held on 22nd February 2012

Shortfall – 95 dwellings (minimum)

At the LDF Panel held on the 22nd February, Members deferred making a decision on the following proposed sites pending a site visit to look at each of them:

- Blunts Hall Road (WIW 1)
- Gimsons, Kings Chase (WCH 2)
- Conrad Road (WIN 1)
- Bellfields (WCH 3)

Members of the Panel also recommended that officers investigate the land to the rear of Elderberry Gardens as a possible housing development site.

Members have now visited each of these sites to assess their suitability for development. Officers have also obtained highways and landscape officers advice on these sites.

Blunts Hall Road (WIW 1)

LDF Site Ref: WIW1 Site Address/Name: Land at Blunts Hall Road, Witham	Gross Site Area Ha: 1.71 est. Development Capacity (units/floor space): Not specified Average Density: Not specified Type of Development: Residential Summary of Proposals: Proposed development of site for residential use.
---	---

Site location map, aerial photographs and photographs of the site are set out in Appendix 1

This site of 1.71ha has been put forward for residential development. It is currently located outside of the existing Town Development Boundary. The site is currently well screened from Blunts Hall Road with an established hedge. The site was previously used as pasture land, however it is now vacant. There has previously been strong opposition to proposed development, during the preparation of the Local Plan Review and the Council decided at that time not to allocate it as a residential site.

Adjoining Uses

The site is currently situated between agricultural land to the west, the Rugby Club to the east and the Witham River Walk to the north of the river. It contributes to the provision of a 'green lung' into the heart of Witham. There is open access onto the land from the Public Footpath, which follows the eastern boundary of the site this provides access to the Humber Road estate.

Site Constraints

Blunts Hall Road, just to the west of the proposed site is identified as a Protected Lane (see photograph in Appendix 1). The Local Plan Review policy states that proposals that would adversely affect the physical appearance of Protected Lanes, or give rise to a material increase in the amount of traffic using them should be resisted.

Mature hedgerow on Blunts Hall Road frontage.

Access from Blunts Hall Road constrained by width of highway and bend with impact on visibility splays.

Vehicular access from Teign Drive on Humber Road estate would need to be gained across land owned by Greenfields and would therefore require Greenfields consent. It would need to be provided by a minor access road from the end of Teign Drive, through the existing greensward between properties, with the removal of parking that currently exists at the end of Teign Drive and repositioning of the street light on the greensward. It would be necessary to re-provide the parking for residents at Teign Drive as part of the development. The access road would need to cross the ditch and row of trees at the north of the site and is therefore likely to require removal of a tree or trees. Please see aerial photograph in Appendix 1.

Proposed Housing Site

The site would provide a logical rounding off of the development boundary on the west side of Witham and would contribute towards the housing requirement and affordable housing needs. A 1.71 ha site could accommodate, at 30 dwellings per hectare, about 50 dwellings. Greenfields have confirmed that they would have no objection in principle to the access over their land, if the development was done by the Council in partnership with Greenfields.

A Public Footpath runs along the eastern boundary of the site from the Humber Road estate to Blunts Hall Road, which could be designated as a future cycleway, which would link to the footpath north of the site providing walking/cycling links to Witham River Walk.

Highways Comments

Essex County Council Highways have raised concerns about any access into the site from Blunts Hall Road, which is currently a single lane carriageway. The road would have to be widened to allow for two - way traffic. The Essex Design Guide requires a minimum width of 4.8 metres, with 2 x footways (*of which 1 should be 2m wide*). A footpath adjacent to the road would also need to be provided to link with the existing footpath south of the site. The sharp corner to the south east of the site is also a concern for visibility splays.

Impact of Highway Requirements

It would be necessary to remove most of the hedgerow on the site frontage along Blunts Hall Road, in order to widen the road to allow for two way traffic and a footpath. This would have a detrimental impact on the character of Blunts Hall Road and the protected lane. It is considered that if the site were allocated for development that access to the site should be provided solely from Teign Drive and that the hedgerow on Blunts Hall Road should be protected as structural landscaping.

Landscape Services Comments

The eastern and southern boundaries to the site are dominated by a line of well established field maple trees with an invasive belt of blackthorn that has migrated out beyond the line of the established hedge into the field. The former are in good condition and with suitable management/maintenance will provide a robust and sustainable screen to the site from these two aspects.

Town Council View

Witham Town Council considers that whilst housing would be acceptable there would be a problem with the access from a protected lane. However, with the current demand for allotments the Town Council considered that at present this land should be designated for community allotments

Proposed Allotment Site

Braintree District Council currently holds a waiting list for all the allotments in the District. There is a current allotment waiting list of 40 persons in Witham. The Green Spaces Strategy also recognised that there was a notable deficiency of allotments in Witham.

There is currently one Council owned allotment site in north Witham, at Cut Throat Lane, which has recently been enlarged to provide a total of 103 plots. There is potential to further enlarge the Cut Throat Lane allotment site on Council owned land to the north of the existing allotments. This could meet the need for additional allotments in Witham. However, it would be more sustainable to provide allotments in two locations in Witham in different parts of the town, to lessen the travelling distance to the allotments. The land at Blunts Hall Road, or part of this site, could be a suitable location for additional allotments. Development of the whole site for allotments could provide around 80 additional plots. Vehicular access to the allotments would be difficult from Blunts Hall Road as set out earlier in the report. Costs of providing vehicular access to the allotments from Teign Drive could be prohibitive. It might therefore be possible to only provide access to the allotments via the footpath/cycleway route along the east of the site.

Officer Conclusions

There are two options for the site which would be appropriate:-
The land off Blunts Hall Road could be allocated for housing within the town development boundary, with an access of Teign Drive. This could provide approximately 50 dwellings. Alternatively it could be allocated for allotments. The hedgerow along Blunts Hall Road could be protected as structural landscaping and a cycleway designated along the east of the site.

Options for the sites at Blunts Hall Road, Gimsons and Conrad Road are set out at the end of the report, to enable Members to consider the merits and constraints of all of these sites together.

Gimsons, Kings Chase (WCH 2)

<p>LDF Site Ref: WCH2 Site Address/Name: Land at Gimsons, Kings Chase</p>	<p>Gross Site Area Ha: 2.54 Development Capacity (units/floor space): 90 units Type of Development: Residential, open space, landscaping Summary of Proposals: Residential</p>
--	---

Site location map, aerial photographs, developers proposed scheme, photographs of site, map of surrounding land uses, map of Tree Preservation Orders, map of the Local Wildlife Site and proposed revised development boundary for Gimsons are set out in Appendix 2.

The site currently comprises a large 1920's style house named 'Gimsons' set in substantial gardens, the total site area is approximately 2.54 ha. The site cannot be accessed for public use. Access to the house is currently gained off Kings Chase. Current designations of the site and adjoining land are shown in Appendix 2. This site is currently identified on the proposals map of the Local Plan Review 2005 as Visually Important Space. The site abuts the Conservation Area. Some trees within the site are protected by tree preservation orders (see Appendix 2H). A cycleway is proposed along the northern boundary of the site. Bra 174 Riverview Meadows is a Local Wildlife Site (see Appendix 2G) which abuts the southern boundary of the proposed site. It also extends to the east of the site south of River View, the proposed vehicular access for the site.

Adjoining Uses

The north-eastern edge of the site is defined by the Town Park and the footpath that runs from Kings Chase to River View, the north-western edge is formed by the rear of the existing properties in Newland Street, whilst the southern side follows a hedge that runs parallel to the river.

The adjoining uses include that of Witham Park, Newland Street (Witham Town Centre), Witham River Walk and Helen Court, which is an 'extra care facility'. The Park, Sports Ground and River Walk are all protected from development in the Local Plan Review and will continue to be protected from development in the Site Allocations Plan.

The plan of land use designations and aerial photograph in Appendix 2 illustrate the extent of the Witham River Walk. As can be seen from the map, it adjoins the southern boundary of the proposed development. Although this part of the River Walk does not have a tarmac path, it does provide woodland walks. There are also views of the site across the river from the footpath

/cycleway along the River Walk south of Bridge Street. The photograph in Appendix 2 illustrate the views into the site from River View. The River Walk can be seen on the far left of the photograph, and the Gimsons site can be seen on the right. Witham Town Council leases the River Walk from the District Council and are responsible for its management. The hedge on the south side of Riverview forms the boundary of the River Walk and is maintained on its northern side by the District Council and on its southern side by Witham Town Council.

Essex Wildlife Trust are currently working on a 'back channelling project' immediately south of the site. The project comprises the cleaning out of a backwater of the River Brain, the construction of a new length of channel linking the backwater channel to the current River Brain and the construction of two wildlife ponds.

Developers Proposal

The proposal put forward by the developer suggests development of 84 dwellings, including 30% affordable housing, with the retention of the large house (Gimsons) and its immediate garden. Vehicular access would be from Riverview, with cycle/pedestrian access only off Kings Chase. The site layout proposed by the developer can be viewed in Appendix 2. The developers held a public consultation on these proposals to which there was public opposition. If the Council supported the allocation of this site for development, they could choose to amend the boundary of the area proposed for development.

A small part of the site (south west) is in flood zone 3 although as can be seen from the site layout, this is proposed as a landscaped buffer between the river walk and the site. The development proposes the retention and management of the mature trees as part of the creation of a new public realm.

The developers have recently suggested that the access to the site could be moved further away from Helen Court, as shown on the plan in Appendix 2. However, this would be problematic for several reasons: This would require the removal of a section of the hedge and the use of River Walk land leased by Witham Town Council and would encroach upon the wildlife site BRA 174 in that location. Officers therefore consider that this would be unacceptable.

Sustainability Issues

This is a large site in a sustainable location, with easy pedestrian access to the town centre, bus routes, open space and the railway station.

Site Constraints

In terms of site constraints, development is not being proposed on land at risk of flooding and trees protected by tree preservation orders would be retained. The proposed site boundary is situated some distance from the River Brain and development of the site does not include any of the existing river walk, but does adjoin the boundary which obviously has important public and environmental value.

At the previous Local Plan Inquiry in 2005 the Planning Inspector concluded that the site *'is an urban green area that complements the sports and recreation areas and the green areas alongside the river. Together with these areas the site makes a valuable contribution to the setting of the town and is essential to the character and appearance of the area.'* This conclusion remains relevant when reviewing the allocation of the site for residential development.

The key issue here is whether this site should continue to be protected as a visually important space or not and to what extent development would impact upon trees and the usage of, or views from the River Walk. The proximity of the access road to Helen Court is also an issue.

Town Council View

Witham Town Council strongly believes that development here would be inappropriate and could impinge on the River Walk. Access to the site from 'Kings Chase' would be inappropriate as would access from 'River View' as it is adjacent to the care home. Witham Town Council concluded that the site should remain as Visually Important Space

There is strong local opposition to development of the site, including opposition from residents of Helen Court on the basis of the effect upon the river walk and upon access from Riverview. The Sauls Bridge Residents Association and Witham Countryside Society are against development of the site.

Highway Comments

Vehicular access to the site would need to be gained from Riverview, subject to visibility splays being achieved onto Maldon Road, as Kings Chase is unsuitable. Kings Chase would only be a suitable vehicular access for further 1 or 2 dwellings therefore it would not be suitable to serve a residential or sheltered housing scheme. A less dense scheme would obviously generate less traffic. The path on the eastern boundary of the site should be upgraded to provide a cycle/footpath link to connect with Witham River Walk and Witham park.

Landscape Service Comments

The boundaries to the site contain a significant number of willow and poplar trees growing as a mixed age stand. They provide a good screen and much valued amenity feature in the spring and summer but have greater transparency through the winter months.

Poplar and willow species tend to become very tall are relatively short lived and are prone to wind damage, significant branch drop and wind blow as they age. This is not much of a problem within a dedicated landscape buffer zone, but would be less acceptable when close to individual dwellings where they can rapidly become the subject to nuisance complaints and fears about hazard to property and personal safety.

The linear group of trees within the site protected by a Tree Preservation Order form a distinctive and characterful feature off Kings Chase and would be more suitable on public open space within a development rather than as boundary trees to individual properties.

Officers Conclusions

This could be a sustainable location for development, within walking distance of the town centre, provided that:-

- Protected trees can be preserved.
- There is a suitable buffer around other trees that are to be retained.
- The character of the River Walk is not damaged.
- The wildlife site BRA174 is not detrimentally affected.

In order to ensure that the trees along the boundary with the river walk are protected, officers consider that it would be advisable to exclude this part of the site from the area allocated for development. These could be retained as Visually Important Space. In accordance with the landscape officers advice, to ensure the trees protected by the Tree Preservation Order (TPO) within the site are not affected, this TPO area could be designated as structural landscaping.

The remaining area of the site could accommodate less dwellings, estimated as a maximum of 70 dwellings.

When Helen Court was granted planning permission, the Council was aware of the need to protect a vehicular access to the land around Gimsoms, in case this was required for development in the future. Hanover were aware of this requirement and the boundary of the Helen Court development was designed to safeguard such a future access, if required. The access road would be located between the perimeter fence of Helen Court and the hedgerow along the River Walk. There would be a footpath on both sides of the access road. If Members wished to reduce the traffic impact upon Helen Court, part of the development site could be allocated for sheltered housing, which would generate less traffic than family housing.

It would also be possible for Hanover to improve privacy for Helen Court residents by screening their boundary fence, by for example growing broad leaved ivy along the fence, which can provide a dense evergreen screen that is fairly narrow in width.

There are two options for the site which would be appropriate:-

- To allocate a reduced area of the site for housing and structural landscaping with the trees outside the housing area protected as Visually Important Space as shown in Appendix 8A. This could provide approximately 70 dwellings.
 - To allocate the site as visually important space.
-

Bellfields (part former Chipping Hill School)

<p>LDF Site Ref: WCH3 Site Address/Name: Bellfields, Braintree Road</p>	<p>Gross Site Area Ha: 1.01 Type of Development: Residential/Public Open Space Summary of Proposals: Redevelopment of Bellfields and Chipping Hill infant school for residential development.</p>
<p>LDF Site Ref: WCH5 Site Address/Name: Land to rear of 24-40c Church Street, Witham</p>	<p>Gross Site Area Ha: 0.81 Average Density: Not specified Type of Development: Residential Summary of Proposals: Proposed development of land for residential use.</p>

Site location map and photographs are set out in Appendix 3.

WCH 3 – Bellfields, Braintree Road

Essex County Council have recently confirmed that the ‘former school part’ of the site **will no longer** be put forward for development (as it has not been declared surplus to ECC requirements) and should therefore not be considered as part of the Site Allocations DPD.

The land to rear of the school, fronting Braintree Road, is still being put forward as a proposed development site.

At the previous Local Plan Inquiry in 2005 the Planning Inspector determined that the site should not be identified as a residential site due to the highway/access problems.

Adjoining Uses

The adjoining uses are predominately residential.

Developer Proposals

There have been no detailed proposals submitted by the developer. The site has been put forward for residential development. Based on approximately 30 dwellings to a hectare, the site could accommodate 15 dwellings.

Sustainability Issues

The site is located in close proximity to Witham railway station and bus stops. There is also a food store and small shops near to the site.

Site Constraints

The vacant land to the rear of the former school (*immediately adjacent to Braintree Road*) which now forms the site is known to be contaminated land and would therefore need to be subject to treatment prior to development.

Braintree District Council has undertaken a process of ‘Air Quality Review and Assessment’ to identify areas where it is considered that the government’s air quality objectives will be exceeded. It indicates the locations with readings which exceeded the National Air Quality Strategy annual mean nitrogen dioxide objective of 40 micrograms per cubic metre. Chipping Hill Witham

(near Railway Bridge), which is in close proximity to this site has been identified as a site exceeding this target.

Highway Comments

Highways stated that this site had been looked at previously and there had been some initial designs done based on an access from Braintree Road. Highways had suggested that a safety audit be carried out on the proposed access. Highways have raised concerns over this site; it would be preferable not to create further accesses onto Braintree Road to accord with Essex County Council policy. However there is potential that the access issues could be overcome.

Landscape Comments

The site is mostly scrubland with some formal planting around the school buildings. The open scrubland between the school boundary and the main road contains some attractive birch trees that are normally found as colonising species on redundant open ground; they are found in two groups near the existing school boundary and in the north east corner of the plot. The latter group make an attractive feature and would provide a useful amenity feature for the next 25 – 50 years.

Town Council Views

Witham Town Council was reminded that land at Bellfields is contaminated and must not be built on unless the ground has been properly treated. Witham Town Council discussed the possibilities for this site and wondered whether the original school building should be listed and used as a medical centre with part of Bellfields used for residential and part as a much needed commuter car park to be accessed from the roundabout on Braintree Road.

Officer Conclusions

The Bellfields site is constrained by concerns over access, contaminated land and air quality issues. As the County Council are no longer proposing redevelopment of the former school for residential purposes, the site could in any case only make a very minor contribution towards the housing requirement for Witham. Officers consider that it should continue to be designated as visually important space because of the constraints upon development.

Recommendations

- 1. That the former Chipping Hill School is allocated as community use, pending the decision of Essex County Council on its use.**
- 2. That the area known as Bellfields between the former school and Braintree Road remains designated as ‘visually important space’.**

WCH 5 - Land to rear of 24- 40c Church Street

The site is currently vacant open land. Existing vehicular access to the site off Church Street is poor. As the former Chipping Hill School (part of WCH 3) is

no longer coming forward for development, vehicular access cannot be gained. It had previously been suggested that access could be gained through this site. This site can therefore **no longer be considered for development**.

Conrad Road

LDF Site Ref: WIN1 Site Address/Name: Land adjacent Conrad Road	Gross Site Area Ha: 5.22 Average Density: Not specified Type of Development: Residential Summary of Proposals: Site considered suitable for housing development.
--	---

The site location map, aerial photo and photographs of the site can be viewed in appendix 4.

The site was promoted as an alternative growth location at the Core Strategy stage by Witham Town Council and Rivenhall Parish Council who objected to the Forest Road growth location. However, Conrad Road was not considered a suitable site for a 'growth location' as it could only accommodate a maximum of 150 dwellings and would not meet the identified housing need.

The 'Technical Supplement to the Draft Strategy for People and Places in the Braintree District' used criteria to assess the potential Greenfield growth locations around the periphery of Witham (including Conrad Road).

The assessment concluded that Conrad Road was 'amber', as there was some potential for housing, but it was not as close to station, employment, or town centre as some of the other sites such as Forest Road.

Adjoining Uses

The site is located on the northern edge of Witham outside of the existing Town Development Boundary. To the south of the site is the Templars residential estate, to the north east is the Community Orchard, Rickstones Academy, nursery and Southview School. The site is bounded by Elm Hall Cottages on the north western boundary. The B1018 is located to the south west of the site.

Developer Proposal

There have been no detailed proposals submitted by the developer. The site has been put forward for residential development.

Sustainability Issues

The site is located in close proximity to bus stops. There are schools and small shops nearby.

Site Constraints

This site is currently outside the existing development boundary for Witham.

The Landscape Character Assessment identifies this area as having low to medium capacity for the landscape to accommodate development, Table 3.3.11 of 'volume 8 Landscape Character Settlement Fringe Study' notes that the western part of the character area (where Conrad Road site is located) is generally of higher sensitivity.

If the site was to come forward for development a low density scheme would be preferable to reduce the impact on the landscape character. Based on approximately 25 dwellings to a hectare, the site could accommodate approximately 100 dwellings.

Highway Comments

Subject to on street parking etc, access to the site could be gained from Conrad Road. Access off the B1018 would not be supported.

A cycle/pedestrian access would be sought to provide a link from the site to existing footpath along Braintree Road.

Landscape Services Comments

There is a mature hedge on the boundary of the site fronting Conrad Road. Structural landscaping on the periphery of the site could provide a buffer to enhance the visual appearance and protect the surrounding landscape area.

Town Council Views

Although Witham Town Council promoted this site as an alternative to the Forest Road growth location during the Core Strategy hearing, they are concerned that the infrastructure in north Witham is insufficient to cope with both the Forest Road growth location and additional development on this site. Congestion along Cressing Road was raised which is a problem at peak periods in particular. Officers advised that new dwellings would be required to provide s106 funding which would include supporting infrastructure. Witham Town Council considers that an extension to the development boundary at WIN1 cannot be supported without sufficient infrastructure being in place.

Rivenhall Parish Council Views

Rivenhall Parish Council has written to the Council confirming they do not support the inclusion of the Conrad Road site and state the following...

*'... During previous consultations relative to the Forest Road development site it was recommended by my Council that the Conrad Road site be considered as an **alternative** rather than as an addition. This recommendation was subsequently rejected by Braintree District Council. Why, therefore, is this site now being considered for inclusion given that the infrastructure of the surrounding area is finding it difficult to cope with the existing development, leaving aside the Forest Road site? To include a further site for housing development would create an intolerable burden on the local infrastructure...'*

Officer Conclusions

The site at Conrad Road would be suitable as a housing allocation. In order to reduce the landscape effects of the site, it could be proposed as a site to be

developed at a fairly low density, of around 25 dwellings per hectare. This could provide approximately 100 dwellings. The hedgerow along Braintree Road could also be identified as structural landscaping, as could the hedgerow on the north-eastern edge of the site and an area to screen the Elm Hall Cottages.

A transport assessment would be required to identify highway infrastructure requirements. The site is further from the town centre than the sites at Gimsons and Blunts Hall Road.

Land Rear of Elderberry Gardens

The site location map and aerial photograph can be viewed in Appendix 5.

At the LDF panel on the 22nd February, officers were asked to investigate the suitability of this site for development.

The site is currently identified on the proposals map of the Local Plan Review 2005 as 'informal recreation'.

The Green Spaces Strategy identifies an 'over provision of 14.5 hectares of amenity space by 2011' the development of this site for residential would reduce this. With a further 1,700 dwellings proposed in Witham, Witham will also need to ensure sufficient open space is provided to meet the needs and requirements. This area of informal recreation should therefore be retained towards meeting this provision.

Adjoining Uses

Immediately to the east of the site is the main line railway, beyond this is the Eastways Industrial estate. To the north of the site is the Forest Road Growth Location. To the south of the site is the Cut Throat Lane allotments. To the west of the site is the Forest Road residential estate.

Developer Proposal

The site has not initially been put by the Council for development.

Sustainability Issues

The site is in close proximity to bus stops. It is also within easy walking distance of the Eastways Industrial estate. Access can also be gained to Witham railway station via Cut Throat Lane.

Site Constraints

The site is in close proximity to the railway line, therefore a noise buffer will be required, considerably reducing the size of the site.

Development of this site would have an adverse impact upon adjoining flats that overlook this area of open space.

There are level issues on the site. The southern part of the site is particularly narrow, making it a difficult area to develop. It is also lower than the northern part of the site.

Tree planting north of the site.

Highway Comments

Access would not be possible from Elderberry Gardens or Yew Close. Access to the site could be achieved via the Forest Road growth location. However, this would only serve the northern part of the site.

Access could be gained to the south of the site via Cypress Road/Motts Lane however it would need to be wide enough to provide a two way road and cycleway, which will be costly.

A further Highways Assessment would be required to determine the cumulative impact of developing this site and the Forest Road growth location on the junctions.

There is a Public Footpath which meanders around the site.

Landscape Services Comments

There is a strong landscaped border, this can be seen on the aerial photo, on the northern boundary of the site, which would need to be removed to allow an access if the site was to come forward. This provides a screened buffer to the railway line and could also provide a screened buffer to the proposed Forest Road growth location. It should therefore be retained.

Town Council Views

The Town Council has not been consulted on this proposed site.

Officer Conclusions

Access to the site is poor. As the site is in close proximity to the railway line a noise buffer would need to be provided, this would reduce the amount of developable area, and therefore only provide a minor contribution towards the housing requirement for Witham. The site contributes to the 'informal recreation provision' in north Witham officers consider that this designation should remain because of the constraints on the site.

Recommendation

That the whole of the land rear of Elderberry Gardens remains designated as '*informal recreation*'.

OPTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED BY LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK PANEL

The Panel needs to identify a site or sites to provide a minimum of 95 dwellings in addition to those already identified in Witham. The options that officers consider would be appropriate are:-

A To allocate land off Blunts Hall Road (50 dwellings) and the reduced area of Gimsons (70 dwellings).

Or

B To allocate land off Conrad Road (100 dwellings).

Members could allocate sites which would total in excess of 95 dwellings, but this would not be required to meet the Core Strategy provision. Officers have set out the following recommendations for Members to use in accordance with the option that they select.

RECOMMENDATIONS for Option A

Blunts Hall Road

It is recommended that the whole of the Blunts Hall Road site should be included within the development boundary with vehicular access from Teign Drive.

1. The hedgerow along the frontage of Blunts Hall Road should be allocated as structural landscaping.
2. A cycleway/footpath should be designated along the eastern part of the Blunts Hall Road site.
3. The whole of the Blunts Hall Road site should be allocated as housing.
4. To approve Blunts Hall Road allocations as shown on Plan 6A.

Cut Throat Lane Allotments

It is recommended that land should be designated for 40 additional allotment plots as an extension to the existing allotments at Cut Throat Lane.

Gimsons (WCH 2)

1. It is recommended that the Gimsons reduced area identified on plan 7A should be allocated for housing and structural landscaping.
2. A cycleway/footpath should be designated along the eastern part of the Gimsons site.
3. To approve allocations on Plan 8A including the designation of trees adjoining the reduced areas as visually important space.

RECOMMENDATIONS for Option B

Conrad Road (WIN 1)

1. It is recommended that the Conrad Road site should be included within the development boundary with vehicular access from Conrad Road.
2. To approve the Conrad Road site allocations for housing, structural landscaping, open space and cycleway footpath marked on Plan 9A.