

Woodford Neighbourhood Plan

Scoping Report

December 2014

Kirkwells

The Planning People

Introduction

1. This short report sets out the outcomes of the workshop session held on the 1st of December 2014 to discuss how to progress the Woodford Neighbourhood Development Plan.
2. The workshop discussed the following:
 - ❑ Progress so far;
 - ❑ The key issues that should be addressed in the plan;
 - ❑ What could and should be done to address these key issues – the potential policy options and objectives for the plan;
 - ❑ The overall Vision for the plan; and
 - ❑ The type of plan to prepare.
3. The presentation that set the background for the session is included in Appendix 1 to this report.

Background

4. In 2013, Woodford Community Council began work to establish Woodford Neighbourhood Forum which was approved by Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council in October 2013 and became the relevant body for the preparation of the Woodford Neighbourhood Development Plan (WNDP). The area to be covered by the WNDP will not be the area originally applied for by the Community Council. It will be a smaller area excluding the Woodford Aerodrome, Figure 1.
5. All of the designated neighbourhood plan area lies within the Green Belt. The relevant national planning policy is included for reference as Appendix 2 to this report. A good understanding of Green Belt policy will help future development of the Neighbourhood Development Plan, particularly what is, and what is not acceptable in the Green Belt.
6. The area excluded from the neighbourhood plan area originally applied for by the Community Council is the Woodford Aerodrome. Also within the Green Belt existing planning policy allows for significant development at the Aerodrome. This is set out in Stockport's Unitary Development Plan and *Woodford Aerodrome Opportunity Site Supplementary Planning Document* (January 2013). It should probably be recorded, at this early stage in this report, that the large-scale development proposed at the Aerodrome, given its Green Belt location, is a source of some frustration. On the one hand, Green Belt strictly limits built development; and, on the other, large-scale development is to be allowed at the Aerodrome. Whilst these two statements may seem to be at odds, strategic planning policy set by Stockport does have some support in national planning policy. Para. 89 of which allows for:

“limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.”

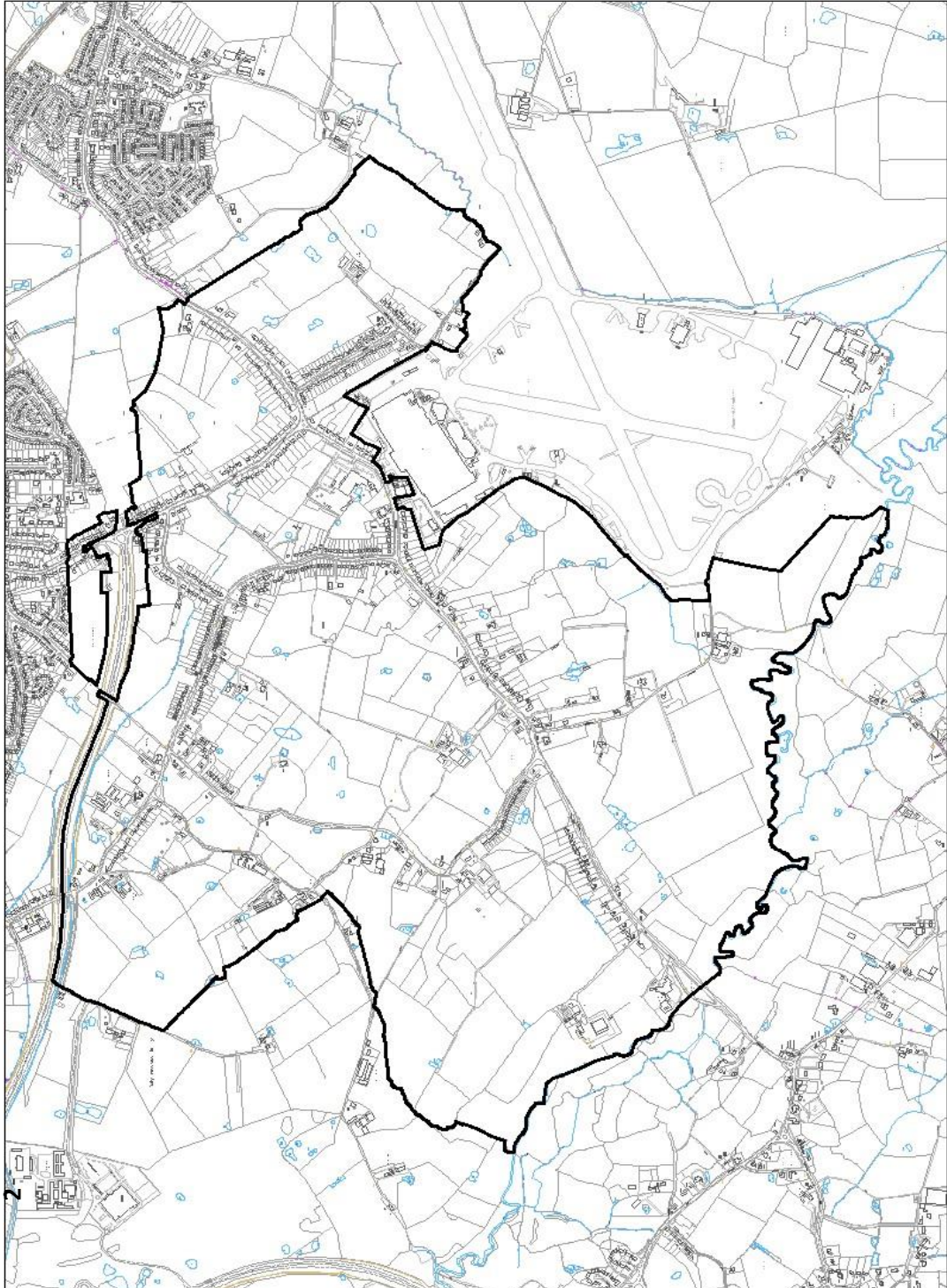
7. A hybrid planning application (Reference DC/053832) has been submitted on the Aerodrome site for:

Part A - Outline planning permission (excluding phase 1) for the erection of up to 775 dwellings; C2 Extra Care Unit Commercial floorspace (comprising up to 8,361sq m [90,000 sq. ft.] of Class B1c); A public house (comprising some 650sq.m. of Class A4 floorspace); Retail floorspace (comprising up to 5 shop units and some 1000sq.m. of Class A1, A3 & A5 floorspace); A one form entry primary school; Use Class D1 floorspace; and the provision of associated infrastructure (including roads, footpaths, cycleways and open space). All matters (access, appearance, landscaping, layout and scale) are reserved for subsequent approval.

Part B - Full planning permission for phase 1 (as outlined in green on plan PL1161.D.4000) for: The erection of 145 dwellings; and the provision of associated infrastructure (including roads, footpaths, cycleways and open space).

8. Stockport Council decided to approve the planning application in July 2014. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government issued a Direction to enable his Department to have a further period in which to consider the proposal. It was announced on the 9th of December 2014 that the Secretary of State has decided not to hold a public inquiry in to the application.

Figure 1 – Woodford Neighbourhood Plan Area



Key Issues for the Woodford Neighbourhood Development Plan

9. A round table discussion was held to discuss the key issues for the Woodford Neighbourhood Development Plan (WNDP). The following were identified in the workshop session (in no particular order of preference):
 - a. The need to maintain the area's Green Belt. This is a complex issue and includes both the desire to see no inappropriate development in the Green Belt, including at the Aerodrome. It also has implications for what the WNDP can and cannot do in terms of planning policy and the allocation of sites;
 - b. The desire to preserve the rural character and identity of the area;
 - c. Some expressed a view that there should be scope for limited infilling development for housing in the village. Woodford is largely ribbon development and this limits the potential for future infilling and backland development;
 - d. Road safety issues;
 - e. The need to protect the local landscape and important views;
 - f. The mix of housing in the area is limited and should be addressed in the future (more detailed analysis of 2011 Census data at Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) could be used to produce a more detailed analysis of dwelling types and sizes in the WNDP area);
 - g. Limited local employment opportunities;

- h. The need to mitigate any of the impacts arising from the Aerodrome Opportunity Site and ensuring there is integration and linkage between the existing Woodford community and the new community that would arise from development at the Aerodrome;
 - i. The area's open space should be protected; and
 - j. Recreation and community facilities – the level of provision and the protection of such facilities.
- 10. A number of these issues were raised in the questionnaire survey that was undertaken. In many cases there is strong community support to address these through the WNDP, see the accompanying *Questionnaire – Report of Survey*.
- 11. A very strong point was made that the group of issues identified would **“not match community aspirations”**. The meaning behind this being that the community were very much against large-scale development in the Green Belt (i.e. at the Aerodrome) and that to be preparing a neighbourhood plan for an area that excludes the Aerodrome and cannot stop develop on this site, or shape development on this site, would seem to be either irrelevant to the real planning issues facing Woodford; or merely dealing with relatively minor local issues and not the big strategic ones.
- 12. This raises some key implications for preparation of the WNDP in terms of how the limits of the WNDP are communicated to those who will come in to contact with the plan and those preparing it in the coming months.

Objectives and policy options for the Woodford Neighbourhood Development Plan

13. The second half of the workshop session moved on to look at what could be done to address the key issues identified in part 1. In the section that follows each of the key issues has been translated in to an objective.

Objective 1 - To maintain the Area's Green Belt

14. Bizarrely, this is probably the most difficult and easiest issue to deal with in the WNDP. Difficult, because what a Neighbourhood Development Plan can do in terms of defining Green Belt boundaries or producing planning policies that go beyond national Green Belt policy is severely constrained. Appendix 2 reproduces national policy in relation to Green Belt in full, it is important the implications of this policy are understood in full by those preparing the WNDP.
15. Easiest, because if the Steering Group choose to do so they could simply prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan within the terms of existing Green Belt policy, avoiding the need for any policy development beyond national policy. Whilst this may help in one way, you could merely take national policy as read and produce a very simple WNDP; it may not in another, for example, in failing to meet “community aspirations” identified in para. 10 above of wanting to be in charge of the big, strategic issues.
16. It will probably help the Group to understand the above if some of the key features of Green Belt policy are set out (Table 1):

Table 1 – Green Belt and Neighbourhood Plans

National Planning Policy (NPPF)	What Scope is there for a Neighbourhood Plan to
Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan (NPPF, para. 83).	A Neighbourhood Plan cannot alter or review Green Belt boundaries. This must be done by Stockport MBC.
If it is necessary to prevent development in a village primarily because of the important contribution which the open character of the village makes to the openness of the Green Belt, the village should be included in the Green Belt (NPPF, para. 86).	Limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs is acceptable under policies set out in the <i>Local Plan</i> (NPPF, para 89). It may be possible for the Neighbourhood Plan to set such policies and <u>not</u> the Local Plan. During the meeting it was mentioned that a recent appeal decision had acknowledged Woodford was a village.
<p>New buildings in the Green Belt are generally regarded as “inappropriate development” the exceptions are buildings for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture and forestry; • Outdoor sport, recreation and cemeteries; • Extensions and alterations of existing buildings within certain limits • Replacement of existing buildings within certain limits • limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing 	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan could look at policies for all of these types of building.</p> <p>It could even look to make land allocations in terms of such uses provide the sites remain in the Green Belt.</p> <p>The Plan could have policies on extensions and replacement dwellings.</p>

development.	
National policy also allows for the re-use of buildings providing they are of permanent and substantial construction.	The Plan could include a policy on this.
Development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order.	Community Right to Build Orders are a new feature of planning policy that can be used in Neighbourhood Plan areas to bring forward development that a community has defined as necessary. Once in place the Order gives permission for the development concerned. Only one Order has so far been progressed in the country for affordable housing development, but it is a tool that could be used in Woodford.

17. The key conclusions to draw here in terms of maintaining the Green Belt boundary and the WNDP is that:

- ❑ Defining Green Belt boundaries is not a Neighbourhood Plan issue;
- ❑ There is some scope for the Neighbourhood Plan to develop a suite of policies that would be compliant with national Green Belt policy to control issue such as infilling in Woodford; certain types of new buildings; extension and replacement of existing dwellings; and re-use of existing buildings; and
- ❑ If a specific type of development is identified as needed, but not possible, within any of the above categories, a Community Right to Build Order could be pursued e.g. for affordable housing or a community use.

18. It is recommended the Group take some time to consider the implications Green Belt policy has for the WNDP. It will impact on the type plan to be prepared and its overall content. Early engagement with Stockport MBC is also recommended to ensure that the local planning authority are supportive of the approach to be taken in the Neighbourhood Plan with regard to Green Belt policy issues.

Objective 2 - To preserve the rural character of the area

19. In the normal course of events maintaining the Green Belt would help preserve rural character. The key concern raised in the workshop is that with such large-scale development proposed at the Aerodrome this character is under threat.

20. To address this the neighbourhood plan could look at:

- ❑ Mitigation of the various impacts from the Aerodrome development;
- ❑ Design within the Neighbourhood Plan Area;
- ❑ Protection of various assets and resources within the Neighbourhood Plan Area; and
- ❑ Rural character could be developed to be the “big idea” or unifying theme of the WNDP.

Objective 3 – To manage future infilling and backland development in the village

21. This issue could, potentially, be addressed within Green Belt policy. As set out in Table 1 limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs is acceptable under policies set out in the Local Plan (NPPF, para 89). It may be possible for the Neighbourhood Plan to set such policies and not the Local Plan. If this is to be pursued early engagement with Stockport MBC is recommended.

Objective 4 – To create safer roads, streets and lanes

22. Here the Neighbourhood Plan could look at possible problems arising from new development and identify suitable mitigation; specific junction improvements; cycleways; traffic calming and quiet lanes.

Objective 5 - To protect the local landscape and important views

23. The neighbourhood plan could look to conserve and enhance the existing landscape; and to identify views worthy of protection.

Objective 6 – For new housing development to provide a variety and mix that meets local needs

24. This issue was seen as affecting younger people who lived in the area but could not afford to buy, and older people who had lived in the area for some time in a larger property who may now wish to “downsize” to a smaller home. The Neighbourhood Plan could look to improve the mix of size, type and tenure of new homes. This would be limited to new development – conversions, infill, re-use of existing buildings so may have a small impact. A way to address this with greater impact may be through a Community Right to Build Order.

Objective 7 – To make the most of local employment opportunities and to improve access to jobs outside the area

25. There are 107 businesses in the area. The Neighbourhood Plan could include an objective to increase local employment opportunities. Policies to help achieve this could include: improving links to existing and new employment opportunities; rural diversification; and encouraging re-use of existing buildings for employment use.

Objective 8 - To mitigate any of the impacts arising from the Aerodrome Opportunity Site and ensure there is integration and linkage between the existing Woodford community and the new community that would arise from development at the Aerodrome

26. The WNDP cannot directly plan for the Aerodrome site – it lies outside the designated area. What the WNDP could do is look at how development on the site integrates with the area covered by the WNDP. This could look at green links, footpaths, cycleways, and roads. The WNDP could also look at how the impact of the new development on the existing community is mitigated. In part, this could be by strengthening some of the mitigation measures identified in the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and planning application by including them as neighbourhood plan policy e.g. the SPD identifies the need for “generous useable open spaces linked to Woodford Village ensuring permeability of the countryside”. The WNDP could seek to identify these open spaces and links in the WNDP area; the WNDP could look at policy for impact on the “Woodford Landscape Character Area”; the SPD also states:

“The village today [Woodford] has a very linear form with no clear centre or defined point of entry and exit. Any new development provides an opportunity to encourage growth which (in environmental and design terms) would result in a consolidated core as well as creating a new focus to the village and its community.”

Again this is a further example of the detailed policy work the WNDP could address. There are others. By addressing these issues it may be possible to meet some of the “community aspirations” referred to in para. 10 above.

Objective 9 – To protect the area’s open spaces

27. The Green Belt status of the area currently protects all the extensive open areas in the WNDP Area. One opportunity for the Neighbourhood Plan would be to identify more local green spaces for protection.

28. National planning policy has introduced a very strong protection for local green spaces. This is contained in paragraphs 76 and 77 of the National Planning Policy Framework:

76 Local communities through local and neighbourhood plans should be able to identify for special protection green areas of particular importance to them. By designating land as Local Green Space local communities will be able to rule out new development other than in very special circumstances. Identifying land as Local Green Space should therefore be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or reviewed, and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period.

- 77 The Local Green Space designation will not be appropriate for most green areas or open space. The designation should only be used:
- a. where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
 - b. where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
 - c. where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.
29. Potentially use of this designation could give a further very strong protection to local green spaces, particularly if they were under the threat of infilling type development.

Objective 10 – To protect and enhance recreation and community facilities

30. The need to enhance and protect existing recreation provision.
31. The WNDP could look to identify sites for protection (e.g. pubs, community and recreation facilities); it could also identify area for enhancement, and what those enhancements should be.

Vision

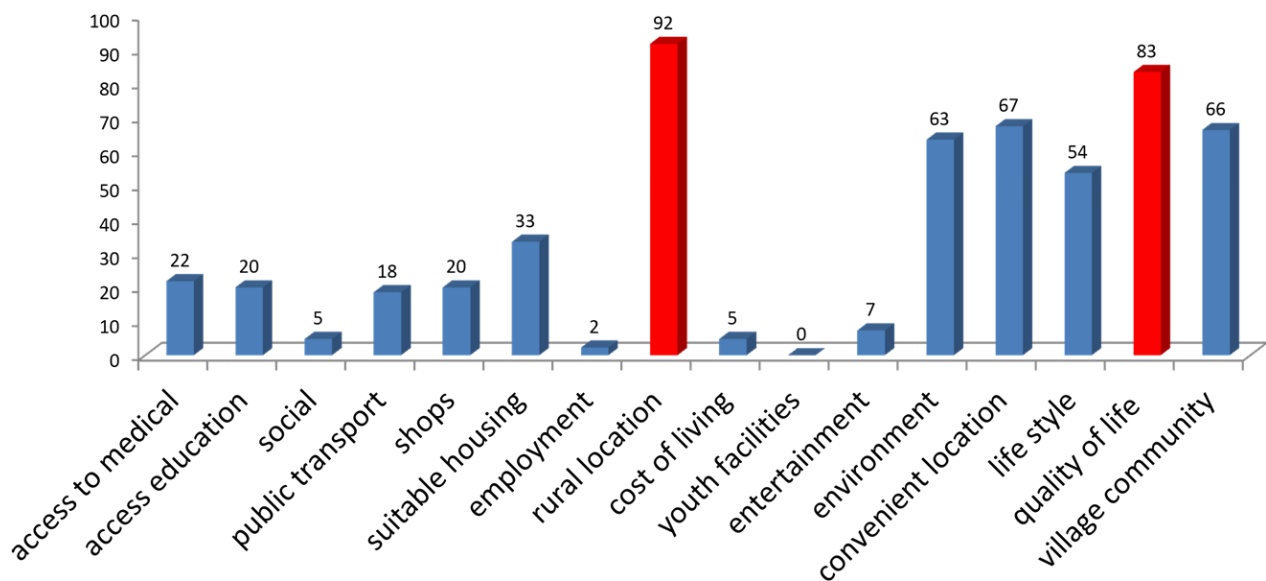
32. The group were then asked to consider from the issues identified how could they be pulled together to define a Vision, or overall aim, for the WNDP.

33. The key issues were grouped under the following headings:

- ❑ Rural character, identity and the sense of community
- ❑ Maintaining Green Belt and Woodford's separation from other settlements
- ❑ The quality of life and attractiveness of the area
- ❑ Managing change

34. The first two of these scored most highly in the recently completed questionnaire exercise, see Figure 2.

Figure 2 – WNDP Questionnaire – What is most important about Woodford?



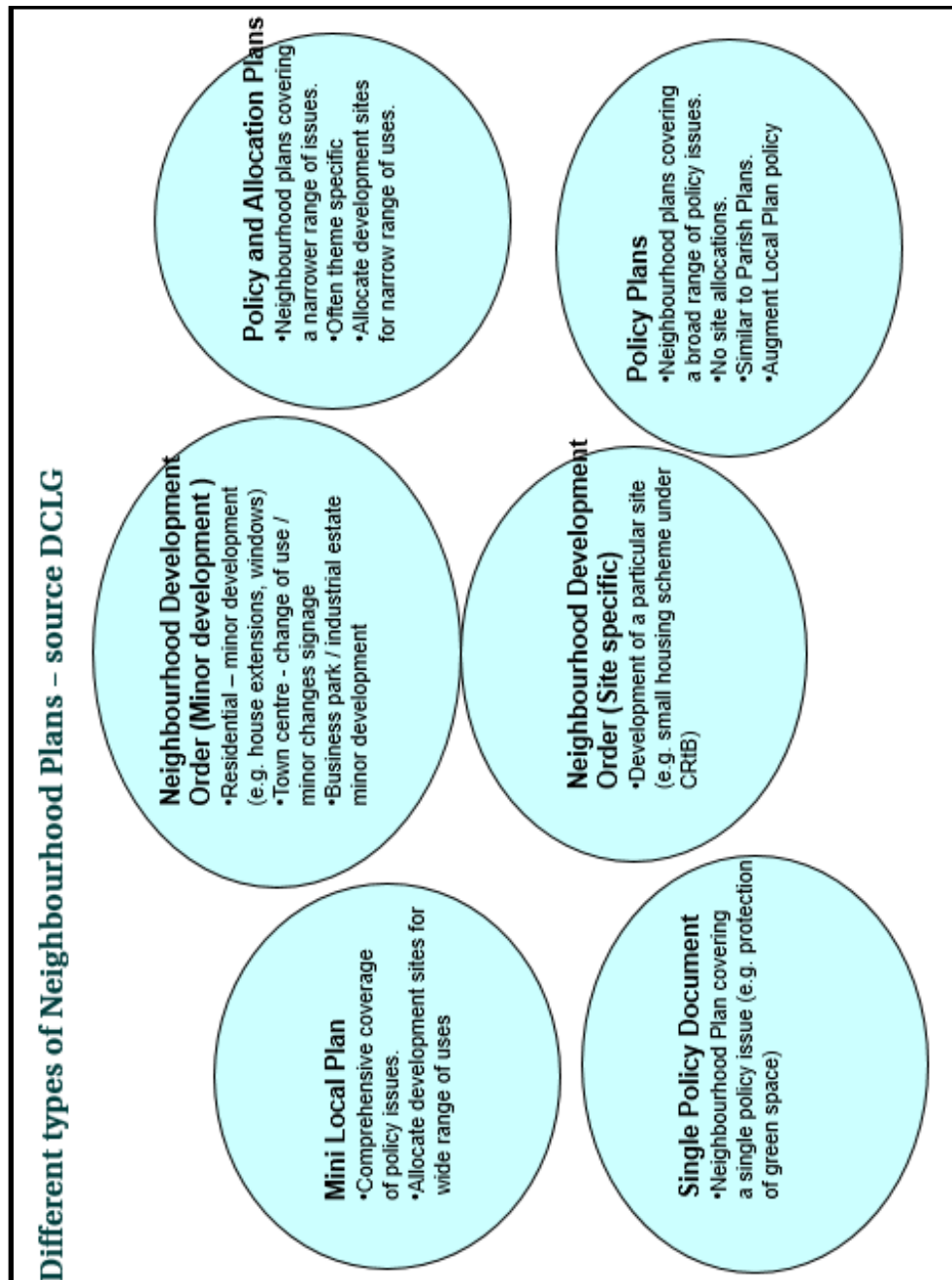
35. The following draft Vision was identified:

“The Vision for the Woodford Neighbourhood Development Plan is to manage and instigate change whilst retaining and enhancing the village’s rural identity, character, quality of life and sense of community.”

What type of plan should the WNDP be?

36. The opening presentation had looked at the different types of neighbourhood development plans, see Figure 3.
37. Given the Green Belt status of Woodford there is an issue with making land allocations for uses such as housing. To do this would be contrary to Green Belt policy. The only other way of addressing this issue would be to prepare a Community Right to Build Order.
38. The best option for the WNDP would be to prepare a “Policy Plan”.
39. This could be more than just a land use plan. A number of issues were raised during the discussions about non-land use planning issues – operational issues at the community centre; healthcare, bus services; broadband.
40. One area that could explored would be to include such non-land use issues in the WNDP making it a more rounded document that included land use issues and non-land use a “community plan”.
41. The only note of caution to be sounded here is that some examiners of neighbourhood plans have not favoured this approach and have asked this type of material to be included in an appendix or separate document.

Figure 3 – Types of neighbourhood plan



Actions

42. A number of key actions were identified during the meeting. These are to:

- a. Make sure the organisation and reporting mechanisms for producing the WNDP are all clearly documented and available on-line;
- b. Decide on the type of plan to be prepared;
- c. Agree the aim or Vision for the WNDP;
- d. To agree the objectives for the WNDP based on paras. 12 to 29 of this report;
- e. All group members to familiarise themselves with Green Belt policy, see Appendix 2 of this report;
- f. Be clear following a discussion with Stockport MBC about what can and cannot be delivered through the WNDP within current Green Belt policy. It may be possible to then define a suite of policies for the WNDP that are in line with national Green Belt policy;
- g. Produce a Project Plan for the rest of WNDP preparation process;
- h. Decide on the key messages for the community engagement on the WNDP, particularly how to address the “community aspirations” in relation to the Aerodrome site;
- i. Decide on the format of the next stage of community engagement. This could be an issues and options consultation based on the work undertaken at the session that is the subject of this report.

- j. Explore funding opportunities, including Localities bridging grant; and
- k. To discuss and agree with Stockport MBC the process for Strategic Environmental Assessment of the WNDP.

43. In addition, to these actions it is recommended that the group also begins to look at some, or all, of the following:

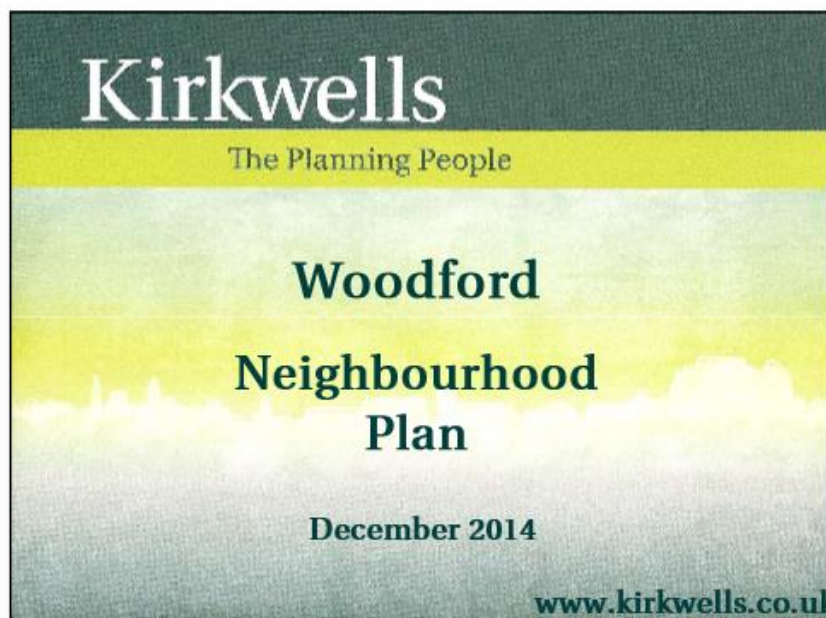
- a. Local design features that should be reflected in new design; examples of recent good development, and poor development;
- b. Local green spaces worthy of protection – to do this you could fill in the following table –

	Proximity to local community	Demonstrably special	Local in character	Not an extensive tract of land
Space 1				
Space 2 etc.				

- c. Areas of traffic congestion/problems;
- d. To look at the evidence base in terms of local housing needs;
- e. Local community and recreation facilities to be protected and improved;
- f. Wildlife and other features in the natural environment worthy of protection;

- g. Heritage areas and sites for protection, including local sites that may not benefit from statutory protections that could be included in a local list for protection; and
- h. Views and landscape features worthy of protection.

APPENDIX 1 – PRESENTATION SLIDES FROM THE DECEMBER 1ST WORKSHOP

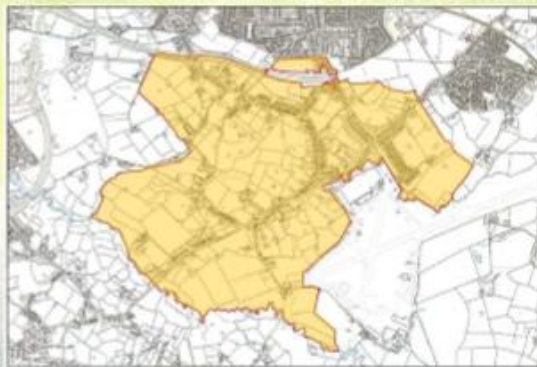


Where do you think you are up to?

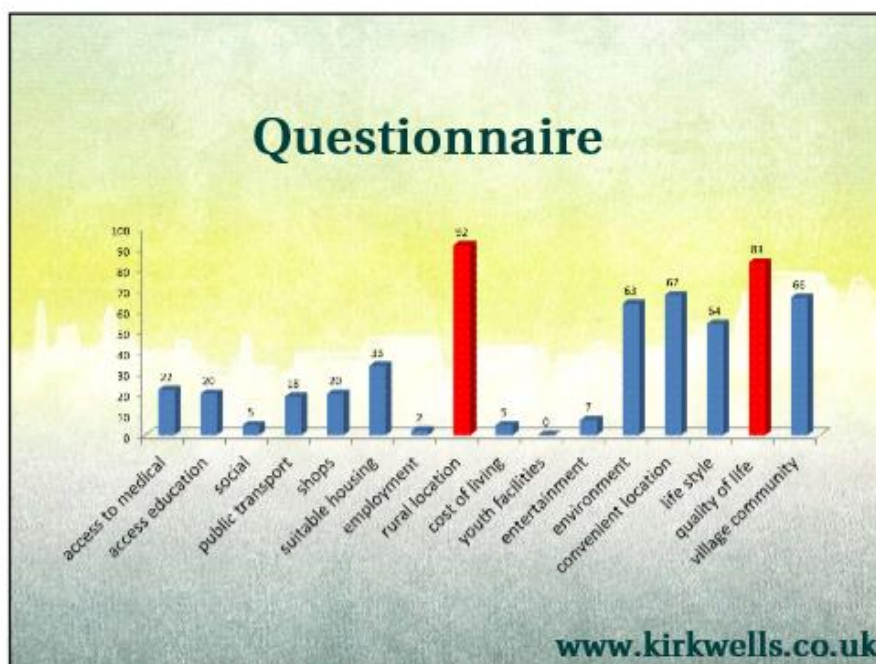
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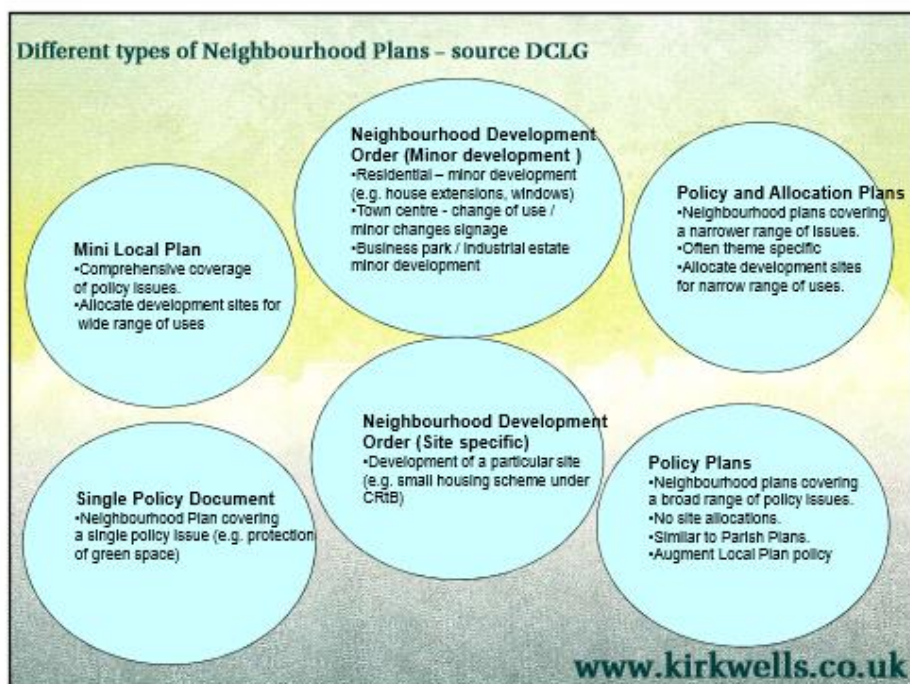
Current Position

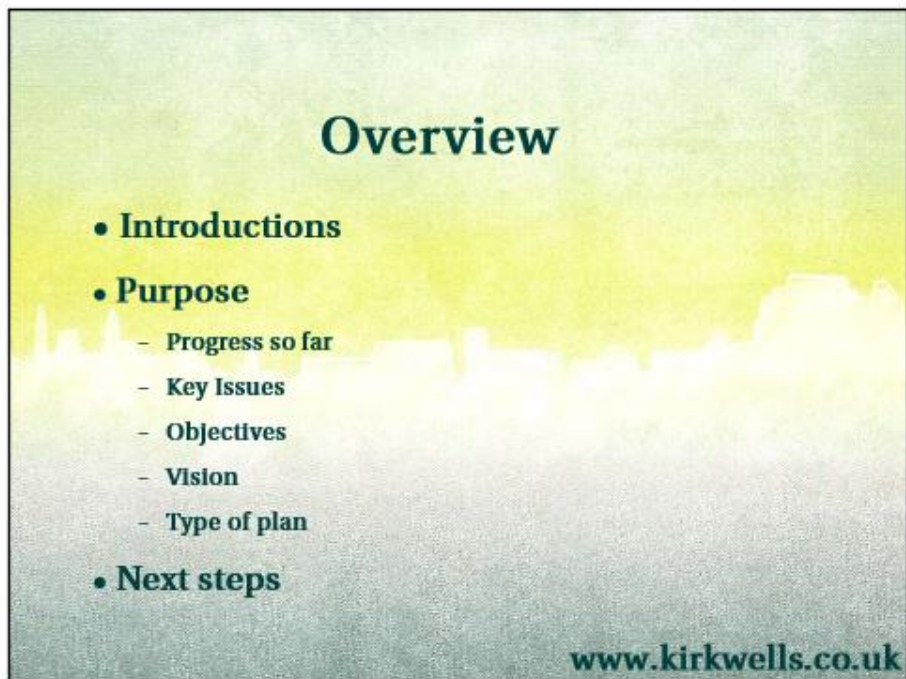
- Designation
- Questionnaire
- Drafting the Plan?



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APPENDIX 2 – NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK – GREEN BELT (all paragraph numbers refer back NPPF)

9. Protecting Green Belt land

79. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

80. Green Belt serves five purposes:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

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

82. The general extent of Green Belts across the country is already established. New Green Belts should only be established in exceptional circumstances, for example when planning for larger scale development such as new settlements or major urban extensions. If proposing a new Green Belt, local planning authorities should:

- demonstrate why normal planning and development management policies would not be adequate;

- set out whether any major changes in circumstances have made the adoption of this exceptional measure necessary;
- show what the consequences of the proposal would be for sustainable development;
- demonstrate the necessity for the Green Belt and its consistency with Local Plans for adjoining areas; and
- show how the Green Belt would meet the other objectives of the Framework.

83. Local planning authorities with Green Belts in their area should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans which set the framework for Green Belt and settlement policy. Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. At that time, authorities should consider the Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period.

84. When drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries local planning authorities should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development. They should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary.

85. When defining boundaries, local planning authorities should:

- ensure consistency with the Local Plan strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;
- not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;
- where necessary, identify in their plans areas of 'safeguarded land' between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;
- make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the

permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following a Local Plan review which proposes the development;

- satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period; and
- define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.

86. If it is necessary to prevent development in a village primarily because of the important contribution which the open character of the village makes to the openness of the Green Belt, the village should be included in the Green Belt. If, however, the character of the village needs to be protected for other reasons, other means should be used, such as conservation area or normal development management policies, and the village should be excluded from the Green Belt.

87. As with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

88. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

89. A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

- buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;

- the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
- limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the Local Plan; or
- limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.

90. Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in Green Belt provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belt. These are:

- mineral extraction;
- engineering operations;
- local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
- the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction; and
- development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order.

91. When located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.

92. Community Forests offer valuable opportunities for improving the environment around towns, by upgrading the landscape and providing for recreation and wildlife. An approved Community Forest plan may be a material consideration in preparing development plans and in deciding planning applications. Any development proposals within Community Forests in the Green Belt

should be subject to the normal policies controlling development in Green Belts.

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