

**Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan**

## **Additional Rural Site Assessments**

**Regulation 14 Draft, May 2020**

**Place Studio**

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1      Landscape Assessment (separate document)

Appendix 2      Heritage Assessment of emerging site for new housing development – Site 17  
Whitley Farm (separate document)

## 1 Background

### Baseline Site Assessments

*AECOM Site Assessment Report (2018, AECOM)*

This report was prepared independently by AECOM for the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. It provides an initial assessment of identified available sites for suitability for housing. 32 sites were assessed, taken from the following sources:

- Available brownfield sites and sites which scored favourably in the Wiltshire Council Strategic Land Availability Assessment (2012) (SHLAA)
- Sites included in the Wiltshire Council Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (2017) (SHELAA)
- Additional sites considered by the steering group, particularly those which had potential to accommodate 10 dwellings or more, scored favourably within the SHELAA and had support from local residents (based on the results of the community consultation which took place through autumn and winter 2017).

Of the sites assessed, 10 were found most appropriate for shortlisting for taking forward for allocation in the Joint Neighbourhood Plan. The 10 sites are listed below:

- Site 3: Land occupied by Cooper Tires
- Site 6: Land north of Sandridge Road
- Site 7: Land west of New Road Farm
- Site 13: Land east of Corsham Road (opposite First Lane)
- Site 15: Woolmore Farm Yard
- Site 16: Merretts Yard, Snarilton Lane
- Site 17: Whitley Farm
- Site 24: Berryfield, land west of A350
- Site 25: Berryfield, land east of A350
- Site 27: Land north of Berryfield (for small-scale regeneration of the existing developed areas).

A further 12 sites were found to be potentially suitable for taking forward in the Joint Neighbourhood Plan, but with more significant constraints which would need to be addressed prior to allocation in the Joint Neighbourhood Plan:

- Site 1: Greenfield Land at Avonside Enterprise Park
- Site 2: Brownfield Land at Avonside Enterprise Park
- Site 4: Murray Walk
- Site 5: Land West of Semington Road, to the rear of Townsend Farm
- Site 9: Land to the rear of Savernake Avenue
- Site 12: Middle Farm, Corsham Road
- Site 14: Land south of Western Way
- Site 19: Beanacre: Land west of Chapel Lane
- Site 21: Beanacre: Land east of Chapel Lane
- Site 23: Berryfield, Land west of Semington Road, south of Berryfield Lane
- Site 27: Land north of Berryfield
- Site 32: Roundhouse Farm, Bath Road (for small-scale regeneration of the existing developed areas).

AECOM considered that all other sites were not suitable for development allocation. This included Site 20 at Beanacre, Lacock Road, which has been included in the further assessment of rural sites (see below).

### *Housing Sites Community Engagement (2017, Lemon Gazelle)*

This draft report was prepared independently by Lemon Gazelle on behalf of Melksham Town Council and Melksham Without Parish Council. It summarises the community engagement process which took place through autumn / winter 2017, including results, undertaken in relation to sites and development within the Joint Neighbourhood Area. The purpose of the report is to review community aspirations alongside the technical assessment of sites.

## **2 Rural Site Assessments (2020, Place Studio)**

Previous assessment and community consultation work formed the basis of identifying sites for further and more detailed assessment.

Taking into account the potential large scale housing requirement for the neighbourhood area through the emerging Wiltshire Local Plan Review, it was resolved that no further consideration was given to available sites located adjacent to the boundary of Melksham Town as part of this further work.

The Steering Group resolved that further site assessments were to be carried out on the sites located away from the Melksham Town boundary. These were termed 'rural sites', and are listed below:

- Site 12: Middle Farm, Corsham Road
  - Site 13: Land east of Corsham Road (opposite First Lane)
  - Site 17: Whitley Farm
  - Site 19: Beanacre: Land west of Chapel Lane
  - Site 20: Beanacre: Lacock Road\*
  - Site 21: Beanacre: Land east of Chapel Lane
- \*AECOM considered that this site was not suitable for allocation

### **Rural Sites Further Assessment**

Melksham Town Council and Melksham Without Parish Council are producing their Neighbourhood Plan collaborating with Wiltshire Council to help ensure both the Neighbourhood Plan and the Local Plan produce a coordinated and complimentary approach to strategic and neighbourhood place making and policies.

The cumulative capacity of the suggested sites around and within Melksham that were identified as part of the NDP call for sites and assembly of SHLAA sites in 2016/7 has the potential to contribute towards the strategy for and allocations of land to meet Melksham's housing needs up to 2036 in the updated Wiltshire Local Plan. But this should be considered in the context of all other spatial options being considered by Wiltshire Council in drafting the Local Plan.

It is therefore considered that strategic decisions relating to land allocation at Melksham should be considered as part of the Local Plan making process by Wiltshire Council. This may include

consideration of those sites identified as part of the Neighbourhood Plan process. Once strategic housing allocations and numbers have been resolved, a review of the NDP may consider if and where further non-strategic site allocations at Melksham should be made.

### **Further Site Assessment Methodology**

Surveys supplemented those assessment undertaken by AECOM. These were undertaken by suitably qualified landscape, design and planning consultants. Where heritage was identified as a potential issue at Whitley Farm a further heritage impact assessment was undertaken by a qualified heritage specialist to take proper account of the heritage assets on site (see Heritage Assessment of emerging site(s) for new housing development – Whitley Farm (2020) in the Appendix).

Each professional assessment was undertaken independently and produced reports without influence by other factors. The landscape, heritage and sustainable development considerations of these assessments can be found in the appendices to this report.

An initial desktop appraisal of each AECOM site assessment was undertaken, cross referencing with published evidence and in liaison with members of the NDP steering group. This considered the accuracy of AECOM's initial assumptions and findings. Each site then was visited and re-assessed utilising recognised landscape appraisal, site suitability and heritage impact criteria. The findings of these desktop and appraisals were then consolidated and weighed to produce a ranking.

### **Assessment Summary Conclusion**

The Place Studio Rural Site Assessments concluded that Site 12: Middle Farm, Corsham Road is most suitable for allocation in the Neighbourhood Plan. The assessment identified a number of features of the site and its context which should be protected or considered when drafting an allocation for development of this land.

## **3 Sites Assessments Combined Commentary**

### **3.1 Site 12 East of Middle Farm, Corsham Road B3353 Whitley**

3.1.1 AECOM Findings and Justification: *This site has minor constraints. The site may be appropriate for taking forward as part of the Neighbourhood Plan. However there are a number of constraints which would need to be overcome to enable development, including potential impacts on the road network. **Capacity 44***

#### **Additional Commentary / Key Issues**

3.1.2 Further assessment of this site concurred with AECOM findings. The site is relatively well connected to public transport and local facilities. It has the potential for development that would “complete” the NE corner of this part of Whitley and link to development frontages to the south.

3.1.3 It is agreed that the site is capable of supporting development. However, should it be allocated, site parameters should include for the retention of the existing PROW passing through an area of open/amenity space, to conserve existing links to the open country and views from Top Lane.

3.1.4 The creation of a new access from Corsham Road will necessitate the removal of significant existing screen hedging, which currently makes a positive contribution to the green and rural

character of Whitley. Without appropriate landscape mitigation, this may result in the increased “suburbanisation” of the village.

### **Conclusion**

The site is suitable for allocation with criteria that will protect the existing public rights of way, green infrastructure and residential amenity and secure safe access.

### **3.2 Site 13: Land east of Corsham Road (opposite First Lane)**

3.2.1 AECOM Findings and Justification: *This site has minor constraints. The site is relatively unconstrained, with no significant landscape or biodiversity designations. The site is also located outside of the boundary of any flood risk zones, has good access, and is close to local public transport links into Melksham town centre. As such the site is considered as appropriate for taking forward for the purposes of the Neighbourhood Plan. Capacity 15*

#### **Additional Commentary / Key Issues**

3.2.2 AECOM on-site assessment considered sound. However, site forms part of rural separation between Shaw and Whitley. Whilst the northern section of the site may be more closely related to the developed context of the village, the southern section (South of First Lane junction) are of greater significance in maintaining rural separation.

3.2.3 The potentially developable section of the site would therefore have a significantly smaller capacity (c.7) and would need to be accessed from the northern (private) lane.

### **Conclusion**

The site is not suitable for allocation due to its relationship with the green gap between Whitley and Shaw and its impact on local landscape quality.

### **3.3 Site 17 Whitley Farm**

3.3.1 AECOM Findings and Justification: *The site has minor constraints to development, and development has the potential to be sympathetic to surrounding residential areas and capitalise on the underutilised nature of the site. Although there are three Grade II listed buildings within the locality of the site, development has the potential to enhance the setting of these historic features. From a community perspective, the inclusion of any flood alleviation schemes, for example through sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDs) would help to address surface water flooding issues. As such, the site is considered appropriate for taking forward for the purposes of the Neighbourhood Plan. Capacity 31*

#### **Additional Commentary / Key Issues**

##### **Brownfield Land Classification**

3.3.2 The site is described by AECOM as a former farm and as ‘brownfield’. It is however questioned whether the disused farm buildings can be considered a brownfield site. Brownfield land is defined as land that has been ‘previously developed’, by the NPPF, this definition excludes agricultural or forestry buildings and gardens.

3.3.3 Previously developed or Brownfield land is defined by the NPPF (NPPF 2019 page 70) as “Land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed) and

*any associated fixed surface infrastructure. This excludes: land that is or was last occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings;”*

3.3.4 The Place Studio team therefore assess this site to be greenfield.

### **Site Assessment**

3.3.5 The site contains two Grade II listed buildings, late 17<sup>th</sup> Century Whitley Farmhouse and Barn at Whitley Farmhouse, also late 17<sup>th</sup> Century and a Grade II listed structure – a three step plain mounting block - against outside wall of farmyard.

3.3.6 Whilst the buildings do not currently appear on the Historic England’s heritage at risk register, there is greater risk of dilapidation as a result of disuse of the farm complex.

3.3.7 The existing setting of the historic structures is harmed by the existing neighbouring collection of 20<sup>th</sup> Century agricultural buildings, ad hoc storage units and general poor repair of the site. It is agreed that re-use and/or development of the site with appropriate new uses and buildings could conserve and enhance the setting of the existing historic assets. Potential allocation of the site should consider requirements for a comprehensive approach that secures the future conservation and maintenance of the listed structures as part of any development. This may also include guidance on the form and approach to securing appropriate design and landscape associated with an allocation.

3.3.8 The site is set within a rural context with close and long views to and from the open countryside. The site is slightly elevated and therefore more prominent. Whilst in a poor condition and with buildings and structures that are harmful to visual amenity, the farm use is consistent with the rural context. Housing development on this site could create a more anomalous intervention. Any potential allocation may consider design and landscape parameters to secure appropriate form and landscape mitigation. Such parameters may affect the potential capacity of the site, reducing it below the AECOM estimate.

3.3.9 The existing farm buildings complex, including a large slurry tank, has expanded into the neighbouring fields. This expansion has resulted in the removal of hedgerow, increasing the open view into the farm. Potential allocation and development creates an opportunity to restore the hedgerow and boundary structures as part of a comprehensive landscape requirements.

### **Conclusion**

The site is not suitable for allocation. Whitley Farm was proposed for potential allocation and was supported with a significant level of illustrative information to illustrate its potential capacity and ability to viably deliver off site community benefits, primarily relating to flood management, car parking and children’s play space. In addition to the potential to enhance the condition of the underused farm yard site, the community benefits package was material to the site being identified by the Whitley community as a preferred location for allocation. However, consultation with Wiltshire Council, Historic England and impact assessment undertaken to inform NDP evidence identified a risk of unacceptable levels of harm to the setting of Whitley Farm’s listed buildings. Whilst this was at odds with heritage assessment submitted on behalf of the land owner, it was concluded that only a significantly smaller amount of development could be reasonably accommodated on this site. Dialogue with the landowner’s representative concluded that this could not viably support the initially proposed package of community benefit.

### **3.4 Site 19: Beanacre: Land west of Chapel Lane**

3.4.1 AECOM Findings and Justification: *Constraints to development include associated with access issues, the absence of any mains drainage, and the site's location away from the key services and facilities in Melksham town. However the site is relatively accessible by public transport. As such the site may be appropriate for taking forward for the purposes of the Neighbourhood Plan. Capacity 10*

#### **Additional Commentary / Key Issues**

3.4.2 The site is crossed diagonally by existing power lines. This is likely to significantly impact upon the viable capacity of the site, below the AECOM estimate.

3.4.3 Whilst access to the site is feasible via the existing (widened) gateway onto Chapel Lane, the route is bridleway at this point, requiring extension of the highway and potential loss of existing boundary vegetation.

3.4.4 Access from Chapel Lane onto the A350 may not be suitable to support additional traffic movements. Pedestrian links along the A350 Leacock Road towards local facilities and bus stops is extremely poor and affected by heavy and fast traffic.

3.4.5 The site is currently relatively well contained by existing housing boundaries and hedgerow to the open country. However, the site would extend the development boundary further into the open countryside.

#### **Conclusion**

The site is not suitable for allocation due to its access and infrastructure constraints and its impact on extension of the village into open countryside.

### **3.5 Site 20: Beanacre: Lacock Road**

3.5.1 AECOM Findings and Justification: *The site has significant constraints. The main constraints to development surround access issues, its location away from the main built-up area of Melksham, the loss of agricultural land, the absence of any mains drainage, and the likely changes to the villagescape of Beanacre. Given the number of potential constraints, it is recommended that the site is not taken forward for the purposes of the Neighbourhood Plan. Capacity 35*

#### **Additional Commentary / Key Issues**

3.5.2 Further assessment concurs with AECOM conclusion.

#### **Access**

3.5.3 Site levels are c 1.5m above the A350 Lacock Road. The site is screened by vegetation that forms a gateway feature when approaching Beanacre from the north. The creation of a suitable site access onto the A350 would be likely to have significant harmful impact on the site boundary landscape.

3.5.4 In addition to distances to local facilities, pavements along the A350 are narrow and in close proximity to heavy and fast moving traffic.

#### **Conclusion**

The site is not suitable for allocation due to its access constraints and its impact on extension of the village into open countryside and impact on rural views.

### 3.6 Site 21: Beanacre: Land east of Chapel Lane

3.6.1 AECOM Findings and Justification: *The site has minor constraints. Constraints to development include associated with access issues, the absence of any mains drainage, and the site's location away from the key services and facilities in Melksham town. However the site is relatively accessible by public transport. As such the site may be appropriate for taking forward for the purposes of the Neighbourhood Plan. Capacity 11*

#### Additional Commentary / Key Issues

##### Site Sub-division and Use

3.6.2 This site is effectively sub-divided into three elements:

##### A Small Southern Paddock

Small and largely enclosed unimproved area of grass contained by existing building boundaries to the south and east and Chapel Lane hedgerow boundary to the west. There is no direct access to this parcel. However, it is contained within the existing limits of development and development would not encroach into the open countryside.

##### B Central linear strip

Connected to plot A, this section of the site extends behind existing development boundaries and is part of the open countryside. The plot is bounded to the north by a relatively new fence and hedge planting. The site has long views onto and from the open countryside. Whilst at the time of visiting views were screened by crops, views would widen at other times of the year.

##### C Northern Field

The site is an integral part of the rural setting to Beanacre, with long open views north and east, partially obscured by seasonal crops. The site is currently in use for private informal recreation/football.

3.6.3 Access is from Chapel Lane bridle way, which would require improvement to highway quality. As with site 19, the feasibility of additional vehicle movements onto the A350 from Chapel Lane may be considered unacceptable.

#### Conclusion

The site is not suitable for allocation due to its access and infrastructure constraints and its impact on extension of the village into open countryside.