

DESIGN, ACCESS AND PLANNING STATEMENT

5 Grass Hill, Reading, RG4 7TJ

Proposed erection of two 3-bed detached, self-build dwellings

September 2020

CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	2
2.	Site Context and Surrounding Area	3
3.	Planning History	3
4.	The Proposal	4
	- General	
	- Accessibility	
	- Design	
5.	Principle of Development	6
6.	Further Policy Assessment	13
8.	Conclusion	15
9.	Appendix A	16

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** This planning statement supports a full planning application for a residential development of 2 self-build dwellings with access and amenity space at 5 Grass Hill, Reading, RG4 7TJ.
- 1.2** The existing residential dwelling at 5 Grass Hill has previously been demolished by a third party not connected with this application. The property was a 3-bedroom property with a total gross internal area of 237m², accessed from Grass Hill.
- 1.3** For the purposes of this statement, the land in question shall be referred to as “the proposed development”, “the proposed scheme” or “the application site” throughout.
- 1.4** This statement is accompanied by supporting documents. All were completed or updated in September 2020 and should be read in conjunction with this statement:
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Tree Survey (Mark Welby)
 - Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Turnstone Ecology)
 - Affordable Housing Viability Statement
- 1.5** This application is being submitted by Peter Neville and Shaun Tanner as self-build applicants.

2. SITE CONTEXT AND SURROUNDING AREA

- 2.1 The application site is approximately 0.22 ha in size and is located in Caversham Heights. It sits in between The Warren to the south and St Peters Avenue to the north. It falls within the Reading Borough Council boundary limits.
- 2.2 The site is characterised by its semi-suburban setting, with both residential dwellings and mature trees contributing to the landscape. Residential dwellings in the area include detached housing surrounding the site on all sides.
- 2.3 The part of the site that will accommodate the built form is mostly level. The proposed amenity area mainly slopes to the south. The site is surrounded by trees and hedgerows along its southern and eastern boundaries. It adjoins the development of 3 dwellings to the north, 3 dwellings to the east and single detached properties to the west and south. The significant trees running along the boundaries give the site a sense of enclosure.
- 2.4 The site is located at Flood Zone 1 level and is at very low risk of surface water flooding. The site adjoins the Thames Valley Major Landscape Feature as well as an area of biodiversity interest.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 None



Figure 1 – Location Plan

4. THE PROPOSAL

General

- 4.1 The proposed development will replace the existing property with 2no. 3-bedroom, two-storey dwellings. The density of the development will be 9 dph, over an approximate developable area of 0.22 ha.
- 4.2 The properties both provide the principle living space on first floors, with bedroom accommodation on ground floor. Both have significant amenity terraces at first floor, contiguous with the living space.
- 4.3 The proposed GIA for Plot 1 and 2 are 228.85m² and 201.26m² respectively. Each property has a garage and adjoining parking spaces and will benefit from a 500m² amenity area, including gardens and terraces.
- 4.4 The layout of the proposed development is shown on plan 3707-200B and Figure 3. The layout is designed to ensure the proposed dwellings fit in suitably with the existing street scene, following the building line from Courtlands to the east.



Figure 2 – Site Plan

Accessibility

- 4.5 The site is accessed from the north-west, utilising the existing access serving the residential property. The applicants own the Grass Hill road and verges between the site and St Peters Avenue to the north. The driveway surfacing both properties will be a permeable surface.

- 4.6 The site is walking distance from the centre of Reading and the mainline railway station. Local bus services are also within walking distance. The no.22 bus service to Reading town centre stops outside the Caversham Methodist church, which is only a short walk from the site.

Design

- 4.7 The proposed properties are of a contemporary design located in the position on the site to compliment the surrounding built form. Both dwellings are 2-storey with primary living accommodation on first floor with access to amenity terraces, thereby taking advantage of the sloping nature of the site and the south-westerly aspect. Bedroom accommodation will be on ground floor and each plot will have areas for parking, turning and bicycle storage.
- 4.8 The materials used in the construction will reflect the contemporary nature of the design, but also be sympathetic to the wooded escarpment location. Plot 1 will have brick elevations at ground floor level, timber and zinc cladding to first floor and a zinc roof. Plot 2 will also have brick elevations to ground floor but will have only vertical timber cladding to first floor with flat roof. All windows and doors will be powder coated aluminium.



Figure 3 – Elevations

5. PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY ASSESSMENT

- 5.1** Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless materials considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.2** The Reading Borough Local Plan (RBLP) was adopted in November 2019 and therefore carries full weight in decision-making.
- 5.3** Policy H11: Development of Private Residential Gardens is the primary policy consideration in relation to the principle of development, as the proposed dwellings will sit within the original footprint and garden area of the existing dwelling. Any application will therefore have to demonstrate compliance with the nine strands of this policy. These strands are set out below:
- 1.** The proposal makes a positive contribution to the character of the area in terms of:
 - The relationship of the existing built form and spaces around buildings within the surrounding area;
 - A layout which integrates with the surrounding area with regard to the built up coverage of each plot, building line(s), rhythm of plot frontages, parking areas, and existing pattern of openings and boundary treatments on the site frontage;
 - Providing appropriate hard and soft landscaping, particularly at site boundaries. This includes features such as the variety of trees, hardstanding/lawns and hedges, etc;
 - Compatibility with the general building height within the surrounding area;
 - The materials and elevational detail. These should be high quality, and where appropriate distinctive and/ or complementary;
 - The arrangement of doors, windows and other principal architectural features and their rhythm between buildings.
 - 2.** The application site provides a site of adequate size and dimensions to accommodate the development proposed in terms of the setting and spacing around buildings, amenity space, landscaping and space for access roads and parking;
 - 3.** The proposal includes access, which meets appropriate highway standards;
 - 4.** The proposal does not lead to tandem development
 - 5.** The design and layout minimises exposure of existing private boundaries to public areas, and avoids the need for additional physical security measures
 - 6.** The proposal does not cause a significant detrimental impact to the amenity of adjacent and nearby occupants;
 - 7.** The emphasis is on the provision of family-sized housing;

8. The development provides biodiversity net gain wherever possible, and would not have an adverse impact on biodiversity in terms of the fragmentation of blocks of gardens, which as a unit or in association with adjacent green space are deemed to make an important contribution to biodiversity and contribute to the green network

9. The proposal does not prejudice the satisfactory development of a wider area.

5.4 The following section seeks to demonstrate how the proposal complies with the nine policy strands of H11:

1. The proposal makes a positive contribution to the character of the area in terms of:

The relationship of the existing built form and spaces around buildings within the surrounding area

The site is located to the east of Grass Hill, where the existing built form consists of detached family-sized dwellings, some of which are of a contemporary design. The relationship of the existing built form sees dwellings with good sized gardens, but with minimal width to the property frontages. This limited side to side space between dwellings is mitigated by rear gardens that provide good space between dwellings in the area. Trees and hedges form the majority of the boundary treatments. The proposed scheme will integrate with this relationship by providing a smaller gap between family-sized dwellings and incorporating good sized rear gardens.

The proposed built form is situated further away from both Lime House and 5a Grass Hill, when compared with the existing dwelling. Plot 2 is proposed to be approximately 9m closer to the dwelling at Courtlands to the east. This eastern boundary is heavily screened however, and the distance between the two dwellings will still be in excess of 15m. As such, there will be no material impact on the property at 3 Courtlands.

The existing house has an extensive south-west elevation where the building is located in the centre of the site and sits between the protected Ash tree and the protected Atlantic Cedar. It is therefore prominent in views of the escarpment (see Figure 4 below). The proposed development provides two separate buildings where the space between dwellings mirrors the space between the two protected trees. The proposed buildings will therefore have less visual impact than the existing dwelling.

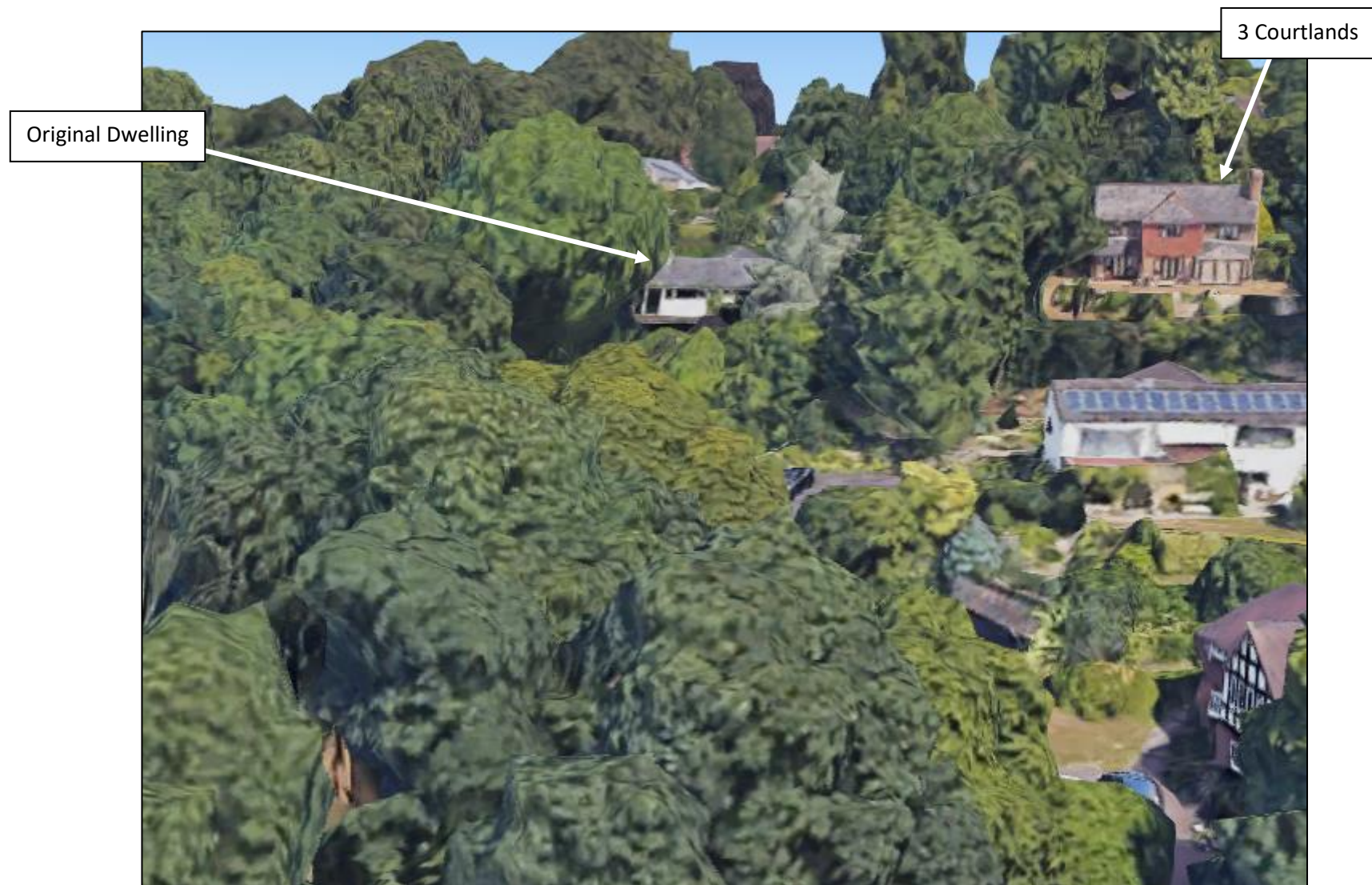


Figure 4 – View of the escarpment from the south-west

In terms of density, the proposed scheme shows two dwellings on a site size of 0.22ha. This equates to 9 dph. Although this is less than the 30-60 dph set out in RBLP Policy H2: Density and Mix, the criteria set out in that policy as to the appropriate density is relevant, particularly in relation to the character of the area in which it is located. The surrounding area includes the three properties to the north along Grass Hill (12 dph) and the properties to the east at Courtlands (10 dph). This demonstrates that the site's density makes a positive contribution to the character of the area by matching the relationship of the existing built form.

A layout which integrates with the surrounding area with regard to the built-up coverage of each plot, building line(s), rhythm of plot frontages, parking areas, and existing pattern of openings and boundary treatments on the site frontage

The layout seeks to follow the existing building line created by the three dwellings at Courtlands. The proposal will continue this building line to the north-west, before it curves to the north with the properties along Grass Hill. The proposed built form will therefore sit comfortably alongside the existing built form of Courtlands and Grass Hill. This building line follows the topography of the hill, which drops away to the south-west beyond these properties. The development therefore follows the rhythm of plot frontages along this contour line.

The built coverage of each proposed dwelling integrates well with the surrounding area. The three properties to the north of the site have an average built form coverage of 23% over their plots, whereas the properties at Courtlands have an average of 15% built form coverage over their plots. The proposed dwellings have an average of 12% (136m² GIA against a circa 1100m² plot size), which is less than the adjoining properties and therefore entirely in keeping with the surrounding area. Openings and boundary treatments on the site remain unchanged from the existing property.

Providing appropriate hard and soft landscaping, particularly at site boundaries.

This includes features such as the variety of trees, hardstanding/lawns and hedges

The existing property benefits from an extensive amount of mature vegetation at its boundaries. No trees or hedges are proposed for removal, with the exception of the hedge on the north-eastern boundary with Lime House. This hedge has been irreparably damaged by unauthorised excavation works on the boundary carried out last year by a third party (see Figure 6 below). It is proposed to install a retaining wall along this boundary, incorporating a new planting area where a semi-mature replacement hedge will be planted. The scheme has been carefully designed to sit sensitively



Figure 5 – Block Plan

around the existing trees on site. In addition, a semi-mature tree of suitable indigenous species will be planted between Plots 1 and 2, while the plot boundaries will be marked by hedges and not fencing.

Compatibility with the general building height within the surrounding area

The sloping topography means that building heights are varied in the surrounding area. The proposed dwellings are designed to fit in with the building heights of the adjoining properties. The ridge height of the existing house is 67.69 AOD. The ridge height of Plot 1 is 68.95 AOD and this dwelling relates to the adjoining Lime House, where the eave height is 69.05 AOD and the ridge height is 73.75 AOD. Plot 2 sits slightly higher in the site and as such, is designed to have a flat roof. This will minimise any impact on the rear garden of Lime House. The roof height of Plot 2 is 68.80 AOD which is comfortably below the ridge height of the adjoining 3 Courtlands, which is 72.94 AOD. It is noteworthy that the roof height of Plot 2 will only be marginally higher than the top of the fence line along the boundary of Lime House.



Figure 6 – Existing damaged hedging on northern boundary

The materials and elevational detail. These should be high quality, and where appropriate distinctive and/or complementary

Recent development in this area has been of innovative and contemporary architecture, with examples including Lime House, Arctic House and 8 Grass Hill, using modern materials of both timber and stone detailing. In this development, the use of zinc, timber cladding and brickwork facades, will add to the distinctive architectural style that predominates and will therefore be complementary to the character of the area.

The arrangement of doors, windows and other principal architectural features and their rhythm between buildings.

Whilst the proposed development fits in with the rhythm of built form in this area, there is no additional relationship of windows, doors or architectural features between the neighbouring buildings. The primary windows have been placed on the south-west elevation to benefit from the

maximum advantage of solar gain and maximise natural light to the primary living areas on first floor. This is both consistent with adjoining properties at Courtlands and will help in reducing the energy requirement for heating.

2. The application site provides a site of adequate size and dimensions to accommodate the development proposed in terms of the setting and spacing around buildings, amenity space, landscaping and space for access roads and parking

As discussed above, the density of 9 dph demonstrates that the site is of adequate size to accommodate the proposed development in terms of the setting and spacing around the buildings. The dimensions on the site are restricted by trees and slope that falls away to the south. On that basis, the dwellings are located closer to the northern boundary to ensure that the built form is located away from the surrounding trees. The proposal therefore complies with policy EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland.

The proposal complies with policy H10: Private and Communal Outdoor Space, which states that for dwelling houses, useable private outdoor space should be no less than the gross floor area of the dwelling to which it relates (measured externally and including garage space). The amenity space provided for each dwelling is 500m². Suitable space has been provided for the access road, with driveway parking provided in addition to the garage space. The gross floor area including garage for both properties are 251.85m² and 223.26m². In the case of Plot 1, this is 50% smaller than the amenity areas for this property. The gross floor area for plot 2 is 55% smaller than its amenity area.

3. The proposal includes access, which meets appropriate highway standards

The access arrangements into the site remain the same as for the existing dwelling. The access complies with the appropriate highway standards and suitable turning areas are provided within the site.

4. The proposal does not lead to tandem development

The RBLP defines tandem development as a dwelling built behind another, the rear building having no frontage and being accessed by a private roadway or track alongside the front building. The proposed scheme will not lead to tandem development as the properties at Courtlands create an existing building line. The new dwellings will therefore be side by side, rather than one built behind the other. Additionally, the access will serve both plots and run to the front of plot 1, rather than alongside one property to reach another in the rear. Both buildings will have a primary frontage at the rear elevation, which follows the existing relationship at Courtlands, where the dwellings face down the hill with access to the rear.

5. The design and layout minimises exposure of existing private boundaries to public areas, and avoids the need for additional physical security measures

The built form of Plot 1 will be closer to Grass Hill than the existing property. The frontage along Grass Hill however, is very well screened by existing planting and the new property will therefore have minimal exposure to this public area. There are no gates, cameras or security railings proposed.

6. The proposal does not cause a significant detrimental impact to the amenity of adjacent and nearby occupants

The properties are designed to maximise the use of the contours and significant tree screening to avoid any overlooking of the adjoining properties. The proposed dwellings have less impact on the amenity of adjacent and nearby occupants than the existing dwelling.

The proposal therefore complies with Policy H11.6, but also with H10: Private and Communal Outdoor Space.

7. The emphasis is on the provision of family-sized housing

The RBLP recognises a need for family-sized housing in Reading, which it defines as a dwelling with 3-bedrooms or more. Both proposed dwellings will have 3-bedrooms and therefore comply with this policy.

8. The development provides biodiversity net gain wherever possible, and would not have an adverse impact on biodiversity in terms of the fragmentation of blocks of gardens, which as a unit or in association with adjacent green space are deemed to make an important contribution to biodiversity and contribute to the green network

The proposed development sits substantially on the site of an existing house but by splitting the built form, the designs allow for the provision of biodiversity net gain with additional tree and hedge planting. In addition, it is proposed to install 5no. bat tubes on the new buildings, 5no. bird boxes on adjoining trees and habitats suitable for reptiles, all in accordance with the recommendations of the accompanying Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

The existing garden area does not form part of a larger block of gardens and is unlikely to contain a “mosaic of habitats”.

9. The proposal does not prejudice the satisfactory development of a wider area.

There is no wider area to develop so this policy is not relevant to this proposal.

6. FURTHER POLICY ASSESSMENT

6.1 All other RBLP policies have been considered and the scheme's compliance with them is discussed in the following section.

EN13: Major Landscape Features and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The application site sits to the east of an area designated at the Thames Valley Major Landscape Feature. The RBLP proposals map shows this feature running up the length of Grass Hill track. Policy EN13 states that planning permission will not be granted for any development that would detract from the character or appearance of a Major Landscape Feature.

The collective tree cover along this hillside is the dominant landscape feature. The proposed development has been carefully designed to fit suitably within the area on the site that is situated away from trees and indeed, the proposed build form has significantly less impact on existing trees than the existing dwelling. No trees are proposed for removal and an additional semi-mature tree is proposed for the gap that exists between the protected Ash and Atlantic Cedar. There is only 30% increase in built form on the site and with the separation of the built form into two dwellings, it is clear that the proposed development will not detract from the character or appearance of the Major Landscape Feature.

EN5: Protection of Significant Views with Heritage Interest

The location of the site falls within two significant views with heritage interest. As shown on the map at Policy EN5, the relevant views are: 1. View from McIlroy Park towards Chazey Barn Farm, the Thames Meadow and the Chilterns Escarpment, and 3. View upstream from Caversham Bridge.

The site is not visible from View 3, due to existing trees and properties on the escarpment. The site may be visible from View 1, but it is over 2.6km away. There is already a dwelling on this site within the view (see Figure 4), but as identified earlier, the new dwellings are so located as to be screened by existing mature trees, which will have a positive effect on the view.

H2: Density and Mix

The application proposes two self-build properties, which will be designed, built and subsequently lived in by the applicants. RBLP Policy H2 states that *"Residential proposals for ten houses or more (excluding houses that are to be provided as affordable homes) will consider making appropriate provision for plots as self- or custom build wherever viable and achievable, based on the number of entries on the self-build register"*.

It is not clear from the Council's website how many names are currently on the register, but the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 (section 2 subsection 2) makes clear that the Council has a statutory requirement to grant suitable development permissions in respect of enough

self-build units to meet the demand for each base period. While this application is not for 10 houses or more, the provision of two self-build dwellings will go some way to meeting the Council's requirements for delivery of self-build units in the Borough.

H3: Affordable Housing

An affordable housing viability appraisal is submitted with the application which demonstrates that providing a payment in accordance with the policy would make the development unviable.



7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1** The application proposes the erection of two 3-bedroom dwellings, which would provide a net addition of one dwelling on this site.
- 7.2** The proposal would comply with the nine strands of RBLP Policy H11 and therefore the principle of develop is acceptable. The two dwellings would make a positive contribution to the character of the area and the relationship of the existing built form by continuing the existing building line that runs from Courtlands to the east, curving to the north with the three properties on Grass Hill. The built-up coverage of the plot and housing density are suitable to the character of the area and all existing trees and boundary treatments are to be retained.
- 7.3** All of the trees that collectively contribute to the Major Landscape Feature designation will be retained and a net gain in biodiversity has been identified as achievable.
- 7.4** The proposal does not have a material impact on the amenity of neighbouring properties and importantly, it would contribute towards Reading Borough's need for more family-sized housing.
- 7.5** The proposal therefore represents sustainable development that accords with the development plan and in accordance with guidance in the NPPF, the application should be approved without delay.

8. APPENDIX A – PLANNING POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Reading Borough Local Plan 2036

Relevant policies have been referred to as headings within the Principle of Development and Policy Assessment sections above.

National Planning Policy Framework

The following policies from the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) are particularly relevant to this statement. These policies have been shortened for ease of reference:

Paragraph 2: Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan², unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

²This includes local and neighbourhood plans that have been brought into force

Paragraph 7: The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

Paragraph 8: There are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.

Paragraph 10: So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Paragraph 11: Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

For decision-taking this means:

- approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay;

Paragraph 47: Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Paragraph 68: Small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement of an area, and are often built-out relatively quickly.