

# **PLANNING STATEMENT**

## **South Gloucestershire Policies, Sites and Places DPD**

**In respect of:**  
Land at Lower Almondsbury  
**On behalf of:**  
Lower Almondsbury Green Ltd





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## 1.0 Introduction

1.1. The purpose of this document is to set out the planning policy case for the release of land at Lower Almondsbury from the Green Belt for housing development to assist the Council in meeting its specified housing needs. The Statement is structured as follows:

- Section 2 Site Description and Location
- Section 3 Policy
- Section 4 Analysis
- Section 5 Conclusion

1.2. In addition to the above, the Statement is supported by a number of supporting technical documents, which when combined with this document provide a robust evidence base for the site. This allows a decision to be made to allocate the site for housing development. These reports are as follows:

- **LDA Design Documents**
- Development Capacity Report
- Ecological Appraisal
- Heritage Appraisal
- Landscape and Visual Appraisal
- **Corun Associates Documents**
- Transport Assessment



## 2.0 Site Description and Location

### Site Description

- 2.1. The site is approximately 7.5 ha. It contains 5 fields of agricultural land used for grazing. A Conservation Area runs across the north of the site and a stream crosses through the site. Hedgerows, fences and stone walls contain the fields. The site is predominantly surrounded by a number of residential dwellings and their associated curtilage.

### Location

- 2.2. The site is found immediately outside of the development boundary of Almondsbury in South Gloucestershire. Almondsbury is identified within the Core Strategy as being located in the 'Northern Fringe' area of Bristol. Although the village of Almondsbury bounds the site on all sides, it is found on the edge of the Green Belt, of which surrounds Bristol.
- 2.3. Almondsbury is found immediately north west of Junction 16 of the M4/M5 interchange. This provides easy access to the surrounding areas of Bristol and the wider area of the South West. This existing infrastructure makes this site an attractive location for development where there would be a need for the Green Belt to be released.
- 2.4. No settlement hierarchy can be found for South Gloucestershire however Almondsbury is described within the Core Strategy as being a 'main built up area' within the Northern Fringe. Various other developments, described as 'main built up areas' are found to the south and southeast, these include the areas of Patchway and Bradley Stoke. Two business parks can be found to the south of the site running along the M5. The M5 creates a clear physical boundary between the Bristol urban area and the Green Belt.
- 2.5. A large proportion of the area surrounding Bristol incorporates the Green Belt. It is recognised that there is a need to expand into suitable locations within the Green Belt in order to meet housing needs for Bristol.



## 3.0 Policy

- 3.1. This Section sets out the relevant planning policies, which are seen to be relevant for the development on the identified site in Almondsbury.

### Local Plan Policies

- 3.2. The Local Plans consist of policies in the Core Strategy, the saved South Gloucestershire Local Plan policies. Emerging plans include the Policies, Sites and Places Plan DPD of which is currently at the consultation stage.
- 3.3. The Core Strategy 2006-2027 acts as the main policy document for South Gloucestershire. This addresses policies including; green infrastructure, sustainable development, accessibility and transport options, housing density, housing diversity, the appropriateness of the character and location of development.
- 3.4. The Policy Map, which forms part of the planning policy for South Gloucestershire, shows that this area is subject to Policy GB1 (Green Belt) and policy L4 (SPG for the Forest of Avon). It identifies part of the site as being located in the Almondsbury conservation area, which includes the historic village centre of Almondsbury.
- 3.5. The following Supplementary Planning Document and Guidance document are seen to be relevant to this Statement:
- Development in the Green Belt SPD.
  - Forest of Avon SPG.

### The NPPF

- 3.6. The NPPF provides policy on development both within and outside of the Green Belt, as well as policy, which guides development in rural areas. Paragraphs 84 and 85 are particularly relevant to this. Additionally Paragraph 55 should be considered. These issues are discussed in further detail in the following Section.

### The West of England Joint Spatial Plan

- 3.7. This is a statutory planning document currently in the process of being created in response to the housing requirement for the wider Bristol housing market area. It sets out the broad locations for development over the next 20 years. This is currently in its early consultation stage.



## 4.0 Analysis

4.1. This Section discusses the suitability of the site identified for development in context to its location. The previous Policy Section highlights some predominant points of consideration relating to this site. These following points are discussed in further detail within this Section.

- The site's location within the Green Belt
- Landscape impact
- Meeting the needs of the surrounding area
- Accessibility and highways
- Ecology issues
- Heritage
- Benefits for Almondsbury
- Demographic issues

### **The site's Location within the Green Belt**

4.2. Almondsbury is described within the Development in the Green Belt SPD as being "*washed over by the Green Belt*". The Local Plan Policy GB1 allows for "*limited infilling within the boundaries of settlement washed over by the Green Belt.*"

4.3. Paragraphs 84 and 85 of the NPPF highlights the principles that should be taken into account regarding the Green Belt boundary. Paragraph 84 sets out that Local Authorities should promote sustainable patterns of development "*channelling development towards urban areas within the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt.*"

4.4. The site is bounded on all sides by development in and immediately around Almondsbury. Development in this location would be in keeping with the pattern of development and the particular characteristics of the Green Belt in this area. Any development in this location would fill a 'gap' between the two parts of the village rather than any further development extending outwards from Bristol. Development in this location would keep Almondsbury compact and would not be seen as expanding further outwards as such. This would keep the distinct gap of the Green



Belt between the urban area of Bristol and the developed area of Almondsbury retained, therefore preventing any issues of urban sprawl.

4.5. Paragraph 85 states that boundaries should be defined clearly *“using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.”* Almondsbury provides a clear physical boundary of which is permanent in nature. This helps to present the case for allocating land for development in alignment with the NPPF.

4.6. The Core Strategy identifies that under the following exceptional circumstances the release of land from the Green belt has been justified by the following:

- *“To meet future housing needs.”*
- *“To ensure sustainable patterns of development.”*
- *“To create and plan comprehensively for sustainable communities.”*

#### **Landscape Impact**

4.7. Analysis of the location, with the support of a Landscape Appraisal has established that the character of the surrounding area is of a built-up nature, the built-up form means that any development would have a limited effect on the wider landscape, particularly as the village is the predominant visual feature of the immediate surrounding area. The development boundary surrounds the northwest and east of the site, of which is developed in nature, with residential curtilage backing onto the site. To the south, outside of the development boundary is similarly characterised by residential development with good road access, which is already established. This demonstrates the current agricultural land use in this location is not in character with its built up surroundings, additionally that any new residential development would be in keeping with the surrounding area.

4.8. There are a number of opportunities, which help to establish appropriate ways the landscape can be maintained and enhanced through the development of this site. These include:

- Retention of the bounding hedgerows.
- Reinstating a historic orchard.
- The creation of amenity green space.
- Retention of the existing footpath which the two sides of the village.
- The opportunity to improve and create new green infrastructure in the area.



- 4.9. These opportunities are detailed further in the LDA Development Capacity Report.
- 4.10. In conclusion, there would be a number of opportunities to build on the existing landscape features of the site. This in turn would mean there would be minimal visual impacts as a result of using this site for development purposes.

#### **Meeting the needs of Bristol and the Surrounding Area**

- 4.11. It has been established that there are a number of towns and villages within a close proximity to Almondsbury including the neighbouring urban area of Bradley Stoke, which has one of the largest populations in South Gloucestershire (Census Data 2011). This is identified within the Core Strategy as a 'town centre' within the Northern Fringe.
- 4.12. The vision within the Core Strategy for the North Fringe of Bristol identifies it as a major economic driver in the South West and West of England (West of England Joint Spatial Plan), playing a key role for employment, commercial activity and education. It identifies that "*new neighbourhoods can provide opportunities within existing communities.*" This site would be suitable in providing a new neighbourhood within the existing community of Almondsbury, whilst allowing the village to be contained by a distinct physical boundary and form a clear pattern of development within the Green Belt.
- 4.13. The site is located nearby to a 'primary growth' location for the West of England. Additionally the Filton Enterprise Area is found within the Northern Fringe. Development within Almondsbury would complement existing and future development in the Northern Fringe as well as help to meet the demand for homes associated with this economic area. The housing strategy for this particular area of South Gloucestershire is for 100/yr.

#### **Accessibility and Highways**

- 4.14. The location of the site is particularly attractive due to its proximity to the M5 and M4 interchange. The site benefits from this existing infrastructure and multi-modal transport links into the centre of Bristol, the surrounding urban areas as well as wider links to the South West region.
- 4.15. The site enjoys good pedestrian access to the wider village along with its established range of facilities. The possibility for the establishment of green infrastructure would help to improve sustainable transport links as well as reduce the need for cars in the immediate area.





- 4.16. In terms of highways, the attached Corun Associates Report details the suitability of the local highway network to accommodate the levels of development proposed. It should be noted that this is calculated on up to 120 dwellings and whilst that number is not proposed, the purpose of determining 120 dwellings is to demonstrate that there are no capacity/ safety issues at a higher figure than the proposed.

### **Ecology**

- 4.17. Accompanying this document is the LDA Ecology Appraisal, which is an extended Phase 1 Assessment. In ecological terms, the site is not subject to any national or local level designation, nor was there any evidence found (either recorded or on site) that protected species were present. As a result, there are no ecological barriers to the development of this site.

### **Heritage**

- 4.18. The accompanying LDA Heritage Appraisal details that there are no archaeological issues associated with the site. In listed building and conservation area terms, these need to be considered and the findings of these issues are incorporated into the masterplan presented in the development capacity report.

### **Benefits for Almondsbury**

- 4.19. In terms of the benefits of development, the key starting point is Paragraph 55 of the NPPF which requires housing to be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. In this instance the vitality of Almondsbury and local communities will be enhanced by new development within the area.
- 4.20. It is established there are a good variety of shops and services within the centre of Almondsbury. These consist of the following:
- Two local B&Bs and two hotels located on the fringe of Almondsbury, identified as The Swan and the Almondsbury Interchange. Additionally The Bowl Inn is situated in Lower Almondsbury.
  - A local community shop central to Almondsbury.
  - Sports facilities including a town football club and North Bristol RFC on outskirts of the town. Within the town centre there is a cricket club and a sport and social complex.
  - A large garden centre, located to the south of the site on the edge of Almondsbury.



- Almondsbury C of E Primary School which has a capacity of 300 pupils and an intake of 45/year. The catchment area is identified as incorporating the wider area of Almondsbury. This is located immediately adjacent to the site.
- A church.
- A doctor's surgery and dentist.

4.21. Additional housing in Almondsbury would help to benefit the local economy by increasing the local spending power. The central location of the site in Almondsbury allows all areas of the town to be accessed easily via pedestrian routes and minimises the journey lengths for employment, shopping, leisure, education and other activities.

4.22. It is anticipated that the services within Almondsbury that could support a modest increase in the population arising from the development, reducing the need for public transport or any increased car use. Furthermore the transport assessment supports this by stating that the site will help to reduce single occupancy car travel amongst prospective residents.

4.23. As well as increasing the local spending businesses within the immediate local area help to provide a range potential jobs in various industries for the residents of the development, for example hotels and pubs provide hospitality and catering jobs, whilst the Almondsbury Forge Works and Garden centre also provide work opportunities for the local community. Additional employment opportunities can be found immediately outside of Almondsbury at Aztec West.

4.24. The town is well served by a bus service running every half an hour from along Church Road in the centre of Almondsbury towards Cribbs Causeway and Chipping Sodbury. Bus stops are located within walking distance from the site via existing pedestrian links and help ensure transport remains sustainable within the area.

4.25. In terms of highways infrastructure, as detailed on the attached masterplan and as set out in the Transport Assessment, the site offers considerable opportunities for providing expansion space for the school for providing additional space for parking adjacent to the school site. This has been historically discussed with a number of parties and LAG is keen to continue such discussions on the site as the PSP moves forward.

#### **Demographic Issues**

4.26. Data used to form the core strategy Community Profile identifies there is a higher than average proportion of older residents in Almondsbury. New development would



help to rebalance the demographics in the area by providing a range of house types attracting younger populations as well as families into the area. This would help to establish a sustainable and balanced community.

- 4.27. New housing development would provide a good supply of housing. It would provide a mix of different types of housing including Market housing and affordable housing. It is established in the South Gloucestershire Community Profile that Almondsbury has a limited range of social housing for rent. Providing affordable housing could help meet this need. A supply of new housing would create a greater choice of dwelling types and encourage a greater mix of communities where people would have the choice to upsize or downsize within the local area.



## 5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1. The purpose of this Statement has been to set out the planning policy case for the release of land at Lower Almondsbury from the Green Belt in order to assist the Council in meeting its specified housing needs. This Statement considers the merits and suitability of this location. It then goes on to analyse these against relevant planning policy.
- 5.2. In the first instance a review of the site and its location has been undertaken. This looked at the characteristics of the site in its current state and the characteristics of the immediate and wider area. The site was identified as having good transport links to the immediate surrounding area. The area surrounding the site was characterised as being part of the developed area of the village of Almondsbury.
- 5.3. A number of points were raised of which were specific and relevant to the site. These were identified as the following:
- The Site's location within the Green Belt
  - Landscape impact
  - Meeting the needs of Bristol and the surrounding area
  - Accessibility and highways
  - Ecology
  - Heritage
  - Benefits to Almondsbury
  - Demographic Issues
- 5.4. The site was identified as being located within the Green Belt. The village of Almondsbury has been established to be 'washed over by the Green Belt'. The site is very much surrounded by the settlement and the surroundings were characterised by residential development and its associated curtilage.
- 5.5. The NPPF guides that development should be directed towards towns and villages within the Green Belt. It can be concluded that the location is appropriate due to its contained nature and close proximity to the existing development of Almondsbury.
- 5.6. Analysis of the landscape suitability concludes that development would cause limited visual harm to the surrounding landscape and therefore development would be



suitable in this location. This was supported by a landscape assessment carried out on the site.

- 5.7. It has been established that development in Almondsbury would help to meet the housing needs of Bristol and the surrounding area. A number of economic opportunities for growth were identified in the Core Strategy within the 'Northern Fringe' where the site is located.
- 5.8. Analysis identified that the site benefits from good transport infrastructure to the immediate and surrounding area, this helped to establish that the site is well suited for development.
- 5.9. The analysis of the above issues demonstrates that the site identified provides a number of opportunities for sustainable development, of which support the local and wider needs of the Bristol urban area. Development in this location would not cause any harm or conflict with the Green Belt principles of which are established by the NPPF, more so development would be very much in keeping with the surrounding character of the local area. Any development would enhance the area through providing a range of benefits for the local community including both economical and social benefits.

This Statement has highlighted a number of opportunities and merits of development and has developed a case for the site to be released from the Green Belt in order to help meet the Council's housing needs within the District.





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