

WILMCOTE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

1. Introduction.

1.1 David Holmes Planning Ltd has been instructed to advise Wilmcote Parish Council, who wish to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. In particular we are asked to advise about potential housing sites, which may be preferred by the community, and to assess their genuine availability in planning terms.

1.2 The total number of units involved is 50 to 75 but bearing in mind that some 11 can be treated as commitments the task is to identify land for 39 to 64 units.

1.3 We firstly consider the implications of the entire parish being in the Green Belt and then we consider landscape issues. We then look at the sites, which have emerged so far through community consultations and other sources, and advise as to their likely acceptability in planning terms. These sites have been numbered 1 to 19 (see Plan A) plus four at Pathlow, some 1.5km from the village centre. A two stage site selection process has been followed (refer to paragraphs 4.3, 4.4 and 5.1 to 5.5 below) and the “filtered” sites are enumerated on Plan B.

2. Green Belt: Implications for Wilmcote Parish Council’s preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan.

2.1 The entire parish area of Wilmcote and Pathlow is “washed over” with Green Belt designation. The national policy with regard to Green Belts is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework published in March 2012 (the NPPF). The policy is, essentially:

“... To prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; its essential characteristics are openness and permanence.”

Once defined Green Belts are intended to be permanent and only to be altered in exceptional circumstances through the preparation or review of a Local Plan.

- 2.2 Stratford on Avon District Council has advanced the preparation of a Core Strategy. It is intended to update and “roll forward” the Local Plan for the whole District, which clearly includes Wilmcote and Pathlow. This document has been submitted to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. He is likely to appoint an independent Planning Inspector to consider the Core Strategy’s fundamental soundness and its legal compliance with the framework of English planning law. It is anticipated that a Hearing will take place later in 2015. At the time of writing it is difficult to be more precise.
- 2.3 At the time of writing, the Core Strategy (draft) retains the principle of the Green Belt “washing over” Wilmcote and Pathlow. It is understood that no outstanding objections to this approach have been submitted.
- 2.4 It is important to note that Wilmcote is defined as a Local Service Centre in the Core Strategy thus implying that 50 to 75 new housing units could be required in the period up to 2031. This does point to a potential policy conflict between aspirations for housing growth and maintaining Green Belt policy.
- 2.5 It is therefore necessary to consider the Green Belt policy set out in the emerging Core Strategy. This says in full:

“The purposes of the Green Belt will be upheld by resisting inappropriate development within it, except in cases where very special circumstances are justified in accordance with the provisions of national planning policy.”

- a. **A small-scale development which meets a housing, employment or other need identified by a local community, in accordance with Policy AS.10 Countryside and Villages, subject to it not being harmful to the openness and character of the area.**
- b. *A small-scale extension to or the replacement of an existing building for the same use, as long as the extended or new building, and the activities involved, do not have a materially greater impact on the openness and character of the area.*
- c. **The limited infilling, partial or complete redevelopment, or change of use of a previously developed (“brownfield”) site, subject to it not having a materially greater impact on the openness and character of the area than the existing or previous development or activity on the site.** *The proposed location and type of development should be consistent with the overall development strategy for the District and the provisions of other policies in the Core Strategy where applicable.*
- d. *The construction of new buildings and the carrying out of activities as defined in national planning policy.*

It is proposed to remove the following areas of land from the Green Belt:

1. *15 hectares east of Birmingham Road (north of A46), Bishopton, Stratford-upon-Avon (see Proposal SUA.3).*
2. *7 hectares north of Arden Road, Alcester (see Proposal ALC.3).*
3. *7 hectares at Gorcott Hill, north of Mappleborough Green (see Proposal REDD.2).*

The boundary of the Green Belt is shown on the Policies Map.
The preparation of the Site Allocations Development Plan Document will include consideration of the need to identify Built-up Area Boundaries for those Local Service Villages where it is decided that site allocations should be made.”

NB – Our emphases.

This emerging policy does point to a future opportunity to identify built up area boundaries for those Local Service Villages where it is decided that site allocations should be made.

2.6 Stratford DC’s intention is therefore to prepare a Site Allocations Development Plan Document. This could, in principle, follow the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan and be incorporated formally into the Core Strategy as an expression of community preferences. This is a matter that will benefit from discussion and clarification with Stratford on Avon DC, initially at officer level.

2.7 It is noted that the Core Strategy Green Belt policy suggests that:

- Small scale development meeting a need identified by the local community and
- Limited infilling or re-development of previously developed (“brownfield”) land

May be acceptable in Local Service Centres washed over by Green Belt. This is subject to a general proviso that development should not be harmful to the openness and character of the area. This approach is broadly consistent with the NPPF.

2.8 It is worth mentioning the potential availability of a Community Right to Build Order to give the Community even greater control. This is considered separately below (paragraph 5.6)

3. Landscape issues.

3.1 The villages of Wilmcote and Pathlow are clearly rural in character. This character has been assessed by Warwickshire County Council using Countryside Commission guidelines. The parish is split with Wilmcote being within the Avon Valley Landscape Character Area (LCA) and Pathlow within the Arden Landscape Character Area (LCA).

3.2 The general character of the Avon Valley LCA is said to be dominated by,

“... Narrow meandering river corridors with riverside trees and grazing meadows”.

By contrast the Arden LCA (Vale Orchard Belt) is identified by ,

“... An open, rolling, intensively farmed landscape of large poorly defined fields and orchards and prominent hilltop woodlands.”

3.3 The principal waterway in Wilmcote parish is, of course, the Stratford upon Avon Canal, which descends a flight of locks from north to south off the Arden plateau down into the Avon valley. It does, together with the parallel railway line form a strong landscape feature. It also has value in nature conservation terms as north of Featherbed Lane it contains a Local Wildlife Site (LWS). The canal is, of course, a human construct but it has developed natural characteristics, which are attractive and valued locally.

3.4 Wilmcote village pre-dates the construction of the Stratford upon Avon Canal and it appears to have been established closely associated with a small watercourse which is generally parallel to the west of the route of the canal. The route of this old watercourse is marked by tree cover (eg. willows, poplar) associated with a riverine environment. The village is closely related to this water source and the old village is defined as a Conservation Area. There are also some listed buildings

associated with the old village. It is important in planning terms to be aware of these heritage assets and the take account of a general presumption in national planning policy guidance to avoid harmful impact on such assets and their settings.

- 3.5 It is interesting to note the findings of a recent Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) carried out for Stratford On Avon District Council in 2012 by consultants Peter Brett Associates. It covers the whole District but it does comment on Wilmcote's landscape sensitivity that:

“There may be one broad location for further growth around the settlement. Land to the south of Glebe Estate/Stone Pits Meadow.”

The land in question may not, in practice be available but since it has been identified as part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy it should not be entirely discounted at this stage.

4. Visual assessment of villages in relationship to local landscape.

- 4.1 The village of Wilmcote has a small old nucleated core focussed on Mary Arden's House and the parish church (St Andrews). It extends to the east towards Wilmcote Station and significantly further to the west along Aston Cantlow Road in an increasingly linear fashion.
- 4.2 In the interests of sustainability it is sensible to avoid further linear extensions further away from the village's central service core whether to the west or east. There are strong linear (broadly north-south trending) features defining the eastern edge of Wilmcote. The canal and railway have attractive features, which should be protected. Similarly open “valley” land to the immediate west of the canal is

important to retain as part of the setting of the Wilmcote Conservation Area.

- 4.3 By a process of default this tends to filter out all but relatively central sites ie 5-11. These are all considered in more detail in Section 5 of the report (below). Plan B sets out the main features of a visual analysis of Wilmcote.
- 4.4 Pathlow is discounted on the basis that any isolated development would be inherently unsustainable.

5. Sites considered.

5.1 These are shown on Plan A attached.

1. Land off Marsh Road: This has very poor access onto Aston Cantlow Road. This has been identified as having potential for nature conservation by the WCC Ecology Unit as mature woodland.

2. Land off Marsh Road: Very poor access.

3. Land off Marsh Road: These are rear gardens. There are access issues.

4. Poor access.

All of the above sites are, in any event, not well related to the central core of village services and are thus unlikely to be considered sustainable. They were, therefore, rejected at the “first filter” stage.

5.2 The following sites are better related to the village centre:

5. Visually exposed to the north.

6. Part of this site (playing fields owned by Stratford on Avon DC) could be suitable but a land swap (probably with parcel 11) would be necessary to achieve adequate recreational facilities to replace it. If this was possible it would provide better located facilities closer to the school.

7 & 8. These sites are both potentially feasible. They are fairly well visually self contained with reasonable access.

Three of these sites would have total capacities of around 45 units (site 6 = 15 units, 7 = 5 units, 8 = 25 units). It should be noted that only the eastern portion of site 6 is recommended. The western portion has been identified as having potential nature conservation value by WCC's Ecology Unit. The additional site suggested by Peter Brett Associates may also be practical, subject to availability. It would have substantial capacity (up to 150 units) and being of such a scale may be able to offer scope for cross subsidy to include affordable housing. It would however be arguably "too big" given the scale of Wilmcote's requirement for new housing.

5.3 Sites 9 & 10 are both within Wilmcote Conservation Area and are therefore in principle, not recommended. However, site 10 although in the Conservation Area and adjacent to a listed building (Masons Arms) may, we are advised, be the subject of development interest on the part of the landowner (Enterprise Inns – pubco and developer). It is arguable that the site is, at least in part, "brownfield" in character (car park). This raises the possibility that carefully designed housing development of a limited scale (no more than five dwellings) could be acceptable in principle. Arguments would be likely to be finely balanced. Criterion (c) of the Core Strategy policy (cited in full at

paragraph 2.5 above) could be held to be offended on the basis that there would be a greater impact on the openness and (possibly) character of the area than at present. However, subject to careful design it could provide some additional, probably fairly high quality, housing (approximately five units).

Site 11, if developed for housing, would have two adverse effects. It would impact on the setting of the church in the Conservation Area. Being rising ground to the south there may well also be an issue with regard to the residential amenity enjoyed by residents of Swanfold. However, it may be appropriate for a “land swap” with Site 6 to provide open space / recreation facilities more conveniently located adjacent to the school.

5.4 Sites 12 to 17 are discounted as they would have a harmful effect on the landscape and the setting of the historic village centre. Sites 18 & 19 would both harm the setting of Wilmcote with regard to its defining eastern green corridor. None of these sites has adequate access. These were all therefore rejected at the first filter stage.

5.5 Sites at Pathlow have been discounted due to their lack of sustainability at first filter stage.

5.6 Community Right to Build.

The Community Right to Build allows local communities, such as Wilmcote, to undertake small-scale, site-specific, community led developments. The new powers give communities the freedom to build new homes, shops, businesses or facilities where they want them, without going through the normal planning application process. To get the go ahead, the proposal must:

a. have the agreement of more than 50% of local people that vote through a community referendum

b. meet some minimum requirements (for example, they should generally be in line with national planning policies and strategic elements of the local plan).

Members of the community will need to set themselves up as a corporate body with the purpose of furthering the social, economic and environmental well being of the local community. The developments would then be managed by this corporate body. Any benefits from any development, which come to the body, must be retained or used for the benefit of the community.

While it will be for communities themselves to identify suitable land, sources of finance and secure local agreement for their proposals, the government is funding a package of support to help communities that want to use the right.

A new fund has been set up to assist community groups with the costs of using the right, run by the Homes and Communities Agency. The fund is worth £17.5 million over three years, and is for schemes in England, excluding London, where separate arrangements are in place.

Alongside the funding support, Government has also launched a new support hub called “My Community Rights” (<http://mycommunityrights.org.uk/>) managed by Locality. This gives a variety of guidance and practical advice to community groups wishing to use the right.

The Community Right to Build forms part of the neighbourhood planning provisions contained in the Localism Act 2011. (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted>) It became law on 6 April 2012 as part of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations. (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/637/content/made>)

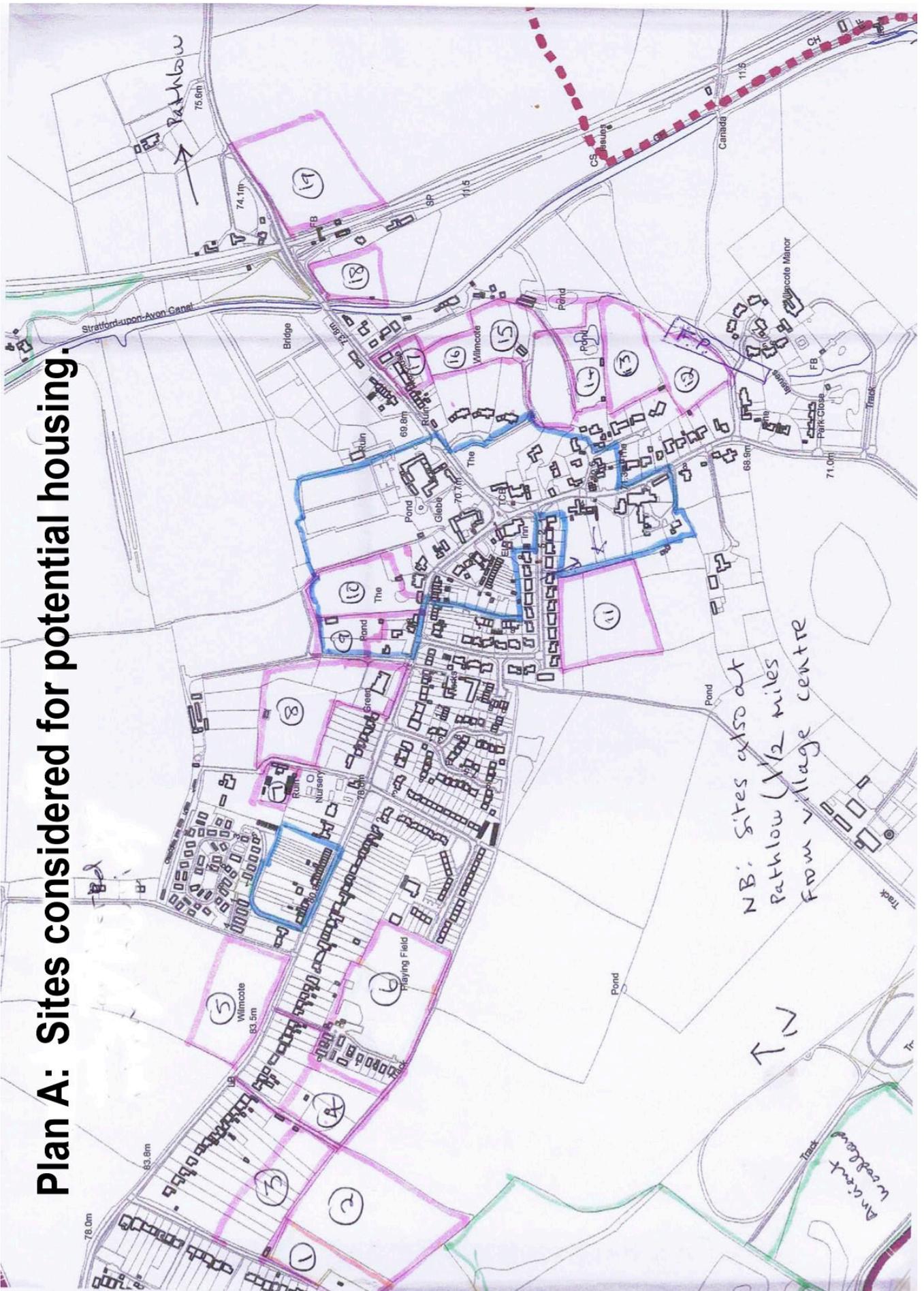
6. Conclusions and Recommendations.

- 6.1 The Parish Council (PC) should give further consideration through its proposed Neighbourhood Plan to seeking to promote the development of parcels 6,7 & 8 for around 45 units, plus possibly site 10 for five units at parcel 10. (Total: 50 units)
- 6.2 The PC could also consider a larger opportunity for up to 150 units to the south of site 6, although this is not currently recommended.
- 6.3 Whilst the PC is encouraged to engage with the planning system in a positive fashion its recommendations need to be consistent with national and local planning policies. In this case it is very important to be fully aware of the effective duty not to cause harm to the openness and character of the (Green Belt) area. It is also important to respect Conservation Area designations, the green “corridor” to the east of the village and various nature conservation designations.
- 6.4 It is recommended that the sites identified are now put to a consultation process with officers of SDC and, subject to the feedback from that exercise, incorporated into a draft Neighbourhood Plan for a next round of consultation.

David Holmes

30 July 2014

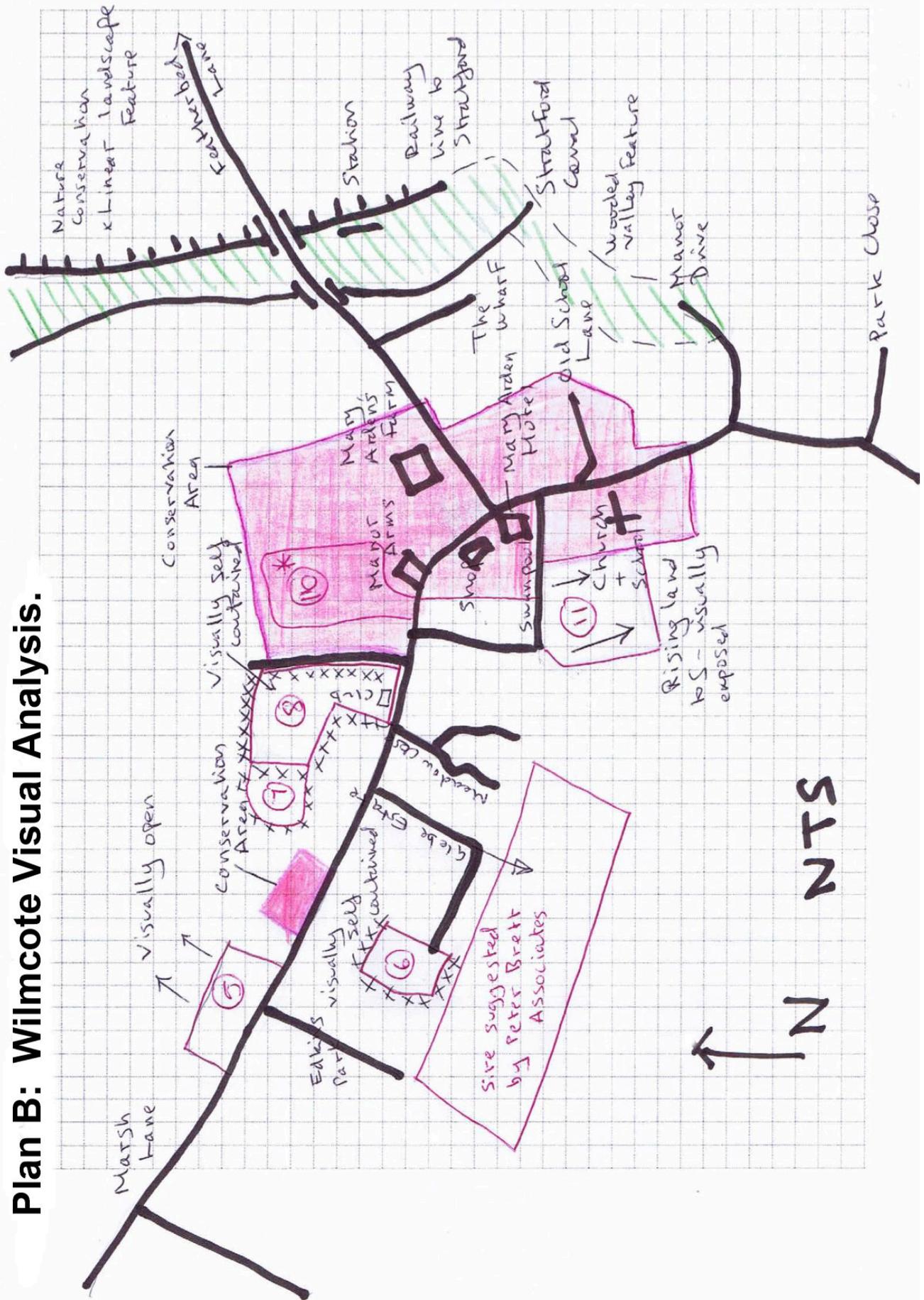
Plan A: Sites considered for potential housing.



Plan A – Notes

- Sites 1 to 4 : Inadequate access.
- Site 5 : Unacceptable visual impact – open views to the north.
- Site 6 : Possible (east half only).
- Sites 7 & 8 : Possible.
- Site 9 : Impact on Conservation Area.
- Site 10 : Possible in part (“brownfield” element)
- Site 11 : Potential open space (land swap with 6)
- Sites 12 to 17 : Unacceptable landscape impact, also difficulties with access.
- Sites 18 & 19 : Unacceptable impact on landscape and nature conservation, also poor access.
- Sites at Pathlow : Unacceptable unsustainable location (1.5km from the village core), isolated development in the Green Belt.

Plan B: Wilmcote Visual Analysis.



Plan B – Notes

Sites identified on Plan A as a result of first filter.

Sites 6, 7 & 8	:	recommended	:	45 units
Site 10	:	possible	:	5 units
Site 5	:	not recommended		
Site 11	:	possibly a land swap with 6 to replace playing fields.		
Site 6	:	Eastern half only, western half has nature conservation value as advised by WCC Ecology Unit.		