



Marlborough

Area Neighbourhood Plan

SUPPORTING STATEMENT ON HOUSING PROPOSALS (JANUARY 2021)

Introduction & Background

1. This statement has been prepared by the Marlborough Area Neighbourhood Plan Project Steering Group (PSG) on behalf of Marlborough Town Council and Mildenhall and Savernake Parish Councils. Together, they are preparing the first Marlborough Area Neighbourhood Plan (MANP). The statement accompanies the draft ('pre-submission') version of the MANP that we have published for public consultation.

2. We have prepared the statement to explain to the local communities of Marlborough, Mildenhall and Savernake, as well as to Wiltshire Council, to AONB policy makers and to our neighbouring parishes, how we have arrived at our proposals in Policy MARL1. In this policy we propose to allocate land in five locations within or on the edge of Marlborough to provide 180 new homes, half of which will be affordable homes.

3. The neighbourhood planning regulations require the MANP to take account of national policies and to be in general conformity with Wiltshire's planning policies. Those policies are currently set out in the Wiltshire Core Strategy, but Wiltshire Council is bringing forward a new Local Plan up to 2036 and we are aiming to match our plan to that new plan. When they are adopted, the policies of both plans will be used by Wiltshire Council to determine planning applications in our area.

4. In the end, the responsibility for deciding if the MANP meet these requirements rests with a combination of the Town Council and Parish Councils, with Wiltshire Council and with an independent examiner. Together, we have to agree at the independent examination of the final version of the MANP that its policies meet the requirements. If we do, then the MANP can proceed to its referendum.

What does Policy MARL1 do?

5. The policy is titled 'Delivering Affordable Homes in Marlborough' and proposes to allocate land offered by developers at Elcot Lane, Cherry Orchard, Barton Dene and at Kelham Gardens, as well as smaller extension to the recent Salisbury Road scheme. We have successfully persuaded the owners of the land at Elcot Lane and Salisbury Road (the Crown Estate) and at Barton Dene (Marlborough College) to deliver 50% of the homes as affordable, rather than the normal Wiltshire 40% level. The other two smaller brownfield sites will deliver at the 40% level. For each site, the policy sets out the key development principles to ensure successful, sustainable schemes are brought forward.

How many affordable homes do we need?

6. Addressing affordable housing is one of the local community's biggest concerns about the future of the MANP area. Our high house prices are driving away younger, economically active, people. We have heard from our public and private employers that they are increasingly concerned about their staff, especially those on lower pay grades, not being able to afford housing in the town and having to commute many miles, usually by car. We

know as well that our population is aging, and the increasing number of new homes built especially for older people will only accelerate this trend. More affordable housing will help make the town more sustainable in future years and it should help younger people stay or come to the town, to help reverse that trend.

7. Last year, we commissioned a housing need study which shows that access to affordable homes in our area is a bigger problem than in most of the rest of Wiltshire. It calculated that we would need to build over 600 affordable homes over the next few years to fully address the problem. We know that is not possible in and around an historic town set in an AONB, but we wanted to go some way to tackling the problem.

How are affordable homes delivered?

8. These days, providing affordable homes in places like Marlborough can only be brought about by requiring developers of housing sites to deliver a proportion of new homes as affordable homes. Even then, 'affordability' in planning terms will rarely mean genuine affordability when compared with local incomes. And no owner of land on the edge of our town is going to want to make the land available for only affordable homes, as the value of housing land is simply too high. But this is how the planning system operates and we have to use the MANP to secure the maximum number of homes that we can within our environmental constraints.

9. What that means is that if around half of new homes are to be affordable, we need to plan for double that number. Our study showed that if we aimed to allocate land for around 100 new affordable homes, this would begin to make a real difference compared to recent years. Using the normal Wiltshire 40% approach, we would have to plan for at least 250 new homes. As it is, we have secured 86 affordable homes from allocating only 180 new homes, with another 10 affordable homes to be delivered at the former Police Station.

What is stopping us delivering more homes?

10. We are lucky to live in one of the country's most historic towns in one of its most scenic landscapes, the North Wessex Downs AONB. But there is a cost, which is the constraint on building into the countryside, and most of us have accepted that, especially if we have benefited from an age when buying our houses was much cheaper. As a result, the town has only seen occasional housing growth in recent decades – Newby Acre in the 1970s, Barton Park in the 1990s and the recent Salisbury Road scheme. House prices have therefore continued to rise above the norm.

11. We have a duty to protect the scenic beauty of the AONB but it covers the whole of the MANP area. It is not possible to avoid building in the AONB and our rural market town past means that we don't have the type of large, old industrial ('brownfield') sites that can be redeveloped inside the town. Even when such sites have been redeveloped, they have tended to be built especially for older people.

How have we arrived at our answer?

12. We have therefore had to weigh up the value of delivering affordable housing on the one hand, with protecting our special AONB landscape on the other. In our judgement, the right balance is struck by planning to grow the MANP area by 180 homes. Even at this scale, the site allocations represent a very modest increase of less than 4% on top of our existing 4,500 homes and would average just 11 new homes a year being built through to 2036.

13. To reach our target we have prioritised brownfield land that lies within the town boundary, leading to the proposed allocation of two sites at the former Training Centre on

Cherry Orchard and at the former gas works on Kelham Gardens. Together, they will deliver 45 homes. They are the only available sites suited to housing development as the other sites we looked at are either in active employment uses, which we want to protect for local jobs, or were not being made available by the landowners.

14. We therefore needed to find some other sites on the edge of the town and our studies show that the sites at Elcot Lane (50 homes), at Salisbury Road (50 homes) and at Barton Dene (40 homes) are capable of accommodating development that will not significantly harm the surrounding landscape. At both Elcot Lane and Salisbury Road, our proposals will extend recent housing schemes in sustainable locations.

15. Importantly, both the Crown Estate and Marlborough College have agreed to our proposed higher 50% affordable housing level, including homes for lower paid staff of the College. At Barton Dene, the College has also been willing to make land available on the site to enable the relocation of the Marlborough Medical Practice from George Street to an equally convenient but larger building to better serve the town and surrounding villages. Our local community surveys have shown delivering a new surgery to be a high priority.

Summary

16. There are no easy answers to planning for new homes in an area like ours. We have not taken our responsibility lightly to plan sensibly and within the requirements of neighbourhood plans, we believe that we have struck the right balance. Marlborough must become more sustainable as a town if it is to retain its shops and services, which in turn help maintain our very special heritage. Access to affordable housing for younger people and low-paid workers is becoming increasingly difficult. Our proposals can be accommodated by our AONB landscape without causing any significant harm and will provide a supply of new homes for the next fifteen years.