

# Willenhall Neighbourhood Development Plan 2016-2031

As submitted to Coventry City Council (July 2017)



Willenhall Neighbourhood Planning Group

# Foreword

Willenhall has a long history. For hundreds of years it was a rural area on the edge of Coventry.

However shortly after the Second World War it was transformed when the housing estate we know today was largely built. At the time it was an exciting and innovative development that won several design awards. It formed part of the comprehensive redevelopment of the city.

A strong community formed and thrived in the post war years. The area continued to grow and change. Some new housing was added and some older properties have recently been refurbished.

The make-up of the local community has also changed, and it now has a more diverse population.

But the neighbourhood is now over sixty years old. We need to start thinking about the future.

How should the area change? What does it need? What do we need to protect?

Local communities are now able to produce a neighbourhood plan for their area, putting in place proposals for its future development. Such a plan provides a powerful tool to ensure that local communities get the right types of development for them in the right place. This includes new housing or services and facilities. It can also protect important features, such as open spaces.

The Willenhall Community Forum therefore decided to prepare a neighbourhood plan to shape and influence future development in the area.

But it is felt really important that these proposals are shared and owned by the whole community in Willenhall.

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# 1. Introduction

## What is a neighbourhood development plan?

- 1.1 Communities now have new powers to shape development through neighbourhood planning, which is a new right introduced through the Localism Act 2011.
- 1.2 A neighbourhood development plan can set out a vision for an area and planning policies for the use and development of land. It will form part of the statutory planning framework for the area, and the policies and proposals contained within the neighbourhood plan will be used in the determination of planning applications.
- 1.3 A neighbourhood plan will therefore form part of the development plan for the area and will be used by the local authority and other stakeholders in decision making.

## Willenhall

- 1.4 Willenhall is a neighbourhood in south-east Coventry. It is a well defined area being bounded by four major transport corridors - notably the West Coast Mainline, the A46 Stonebridge Highway, the London Road (B4110) and Allard Way (A4082). The A45/46 Tollbar End roundabout lies immediately to the south of the neighbourhood. The housing estate is primarily accessed via St James Lane, which provides a spine road running through the area.
- 1.5 Willenhall was originally a small village that was absorbed into the city as it expanded. However it became a substantial housing estate shortly after the Second World War with the building of over 1,000 council houses. It was here that Coventry pioneered the Radburn style layout whereby the houses were designed to have their frontages facing directly onto communal green areas and access by road was provided to the rear. The Willenhall Wood Estate subsequently won several awards from the then Ministry of Housing and Local Government and the Civic Trust.
- 1.6 Today the area remains primarily residential with some partial redevelopment and infill over the intervening years resulting in a relatively high density layout. However there are substantial green spaces on the periphery of the estate with the Sowe Valley to the north and Willenhall Wood to the south.
- 1.7 According to the Census 2011 the area has a population of 7,910. The estate is very deprived with high levels of poverty, unemployment, poor health, crime and anti-social behaviour, and low educational attainment. Nevertheless there is a very strong community spirit that is supported by a network of voluntary and public sector organisations.

## **Governance**

- 1.8 Willenhall comes under the administrative area of Coventry City Council which, amongst other things, serves as the local planning authority. For general election purposes it is part of the Coventry South Constituency and for local elections it forms part of the Binley and Willenhall ward on the City Council.
- 1.9 The city's boundary with Warwickshire lies immediately to the south. That area comes under the administrative areas of Warwickshire County Council and Warwick District Council.

## **Willenhall Community Forum**

- 1.10 The Willenhall Community Forum has operated in the area for over 20 years. It is a consortium of local organisations that deliver services for the benefit of people living in the area. In particular it encourages a co-ordinated approach to the provision of leisure time pursuits, employment support, volunteering opportunities, learning and training courses and childcare services. These activities are aimed at improving the education attainments and economic wellbeing of local people as well as increasing the level of community cohesion.
- 1.11 The Community Forum utilises and maintains a range of local resources as part of its community work. This includes the Willenhall Village Green, Willenhall Focus Newspaper, Eureka Childcare and Willenhall Education, Employment & Training Centre, and Hagard Community Space.

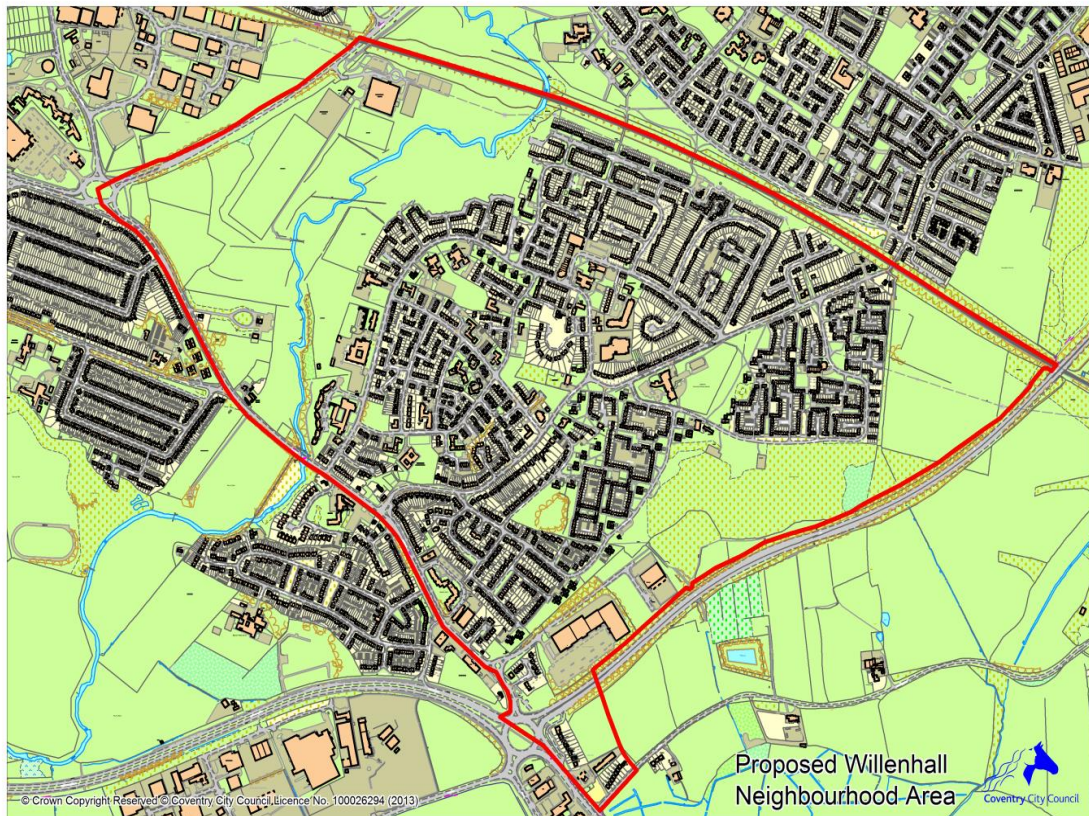
## **Background to the Willenhall Neighbourhood Plan**

- 1.12 Following the publication of the Localism Act 2011 the Willenhall Community Forum decided to prepare a neighbourhood development plan for the area. The first stage in the statutory process was to ask the City Council to designate the boundary of the neighbourhood plan, known as the neighbourhood area.
- 1.13 At the same time the City Council had to designate an appropriate organisation to prepare the neighbourhood plan, known in the regulations as the 'qualifying body'. Unfortunately the existing Willenhall Community Forum did not meet the required criteria as set out in the legislation. A new body was therefore formed by the Community Forum known as the Willenhall Neighbourhood Planning Group. Its constitution stated that the group has been established with the express purpose of promoting and improving the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of Willenhall.
- 1.14 Joint applications were therefore submitted to Coventry City Council to designate Willenhall as a neighbourhood area, and the Willenhall Neighbourhood Planning Group as the appropriate qualifying body to prepare the neighbourhood plan. The City Council

publicised the applications for a six week period and invited any representations by 8 August 2013. The City Council subsequently approved the neighbourhood area on 17 October 2013 and the Willenhall Neighbourhood Planning Group as the appropriate qualifying body on 6 February 2014.

1.15 The boundary of the neighbourhood area is indicated below.

### Diagram 1 – The Willenhall Neighbourhood Area



### The Plan Period

1.16 The neighbourhood plan will cover the period 2016 to 2031.

1.17 This corresponds to the end date for the emerging local plan prepared by Coventry City Council. It thereby allows consistency with their evidence base, especially the proposed housing requirement.

### Consultation on the Draft Plan

1.18 As part of the statutory process the Willenhall Neighbourhood Planning Group was required to invite representations on the draft plan prior to it being formally submitted to the City Council. This stage, known as pre-submission consultation, must include a period of at least six weeks to publicise the plan and bring it to the attention of people who live,

work or carry on business in the neighbourhood area, and invite comment. The Group was also required to invite representations on the draft plan from key stakeholders and statutory consultees, including the City Council. This formal consultation took place from 1 November 2016 to 2 January 2017. Following this consultation the draft plan was reviewed in the light of comments received and revised where appropriate.

## **Next steps**

- 1.19 This draft plan was formally submitted to Coventry City Council in July 2017.
  - 1.20 The City Council will publicise the submitted draft plan for a six week period and invite comments. An independent examiner will then be appointed to consider any representations and check that the plan meets certain basic conditions, including conformity with national and local planning policies. The examiner may suggest modifications to ensure this is achieved. The submitted plan can only proceed to a local referendum once the City Council is satisfied that the plan meets the basic conditions and is fit for this final stage. A majority of people voting must then support the plan if it is to be eventually 'made' by the City Council.
  - 1.21 Once 'made' a neighbourhood plan becomes part of the development plan for the area and it will become a major consideration when determining planning applications.
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## 2. National and Local Planning Context

### The Basic Conditions

- 2.1 The Localism Act 2011 stipulates that a neighbourhood development plan must meet certain basic conditions before it can come into force. These are:
- a) it has regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
  - b) the neighbourhood plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development;
  - c) the neighbourhood plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area;
  - d) the neighbourhood plan does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with EU obligations; and
  - e) prescribed conditions are met in relation to the neighbourhood plan and prescribed matters have been complied with. For example the ‘making’ of the neighbourhood plan is not likely to have a significant effect on a European site as defined in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2012.

### National Planning Policies

- 2.2 The Willenhall Neighbourhood Plan must therefore be developed with regard to national policy, most notably the National Planning Policy Framework. The Framework set out the Government’s planning policies for England and came into effect in March 2012. It contains core planning principles which must underpin all plan-making. It provides the basis for local planning authorities to prepare their local plans and for communities producing neighbourhood plans.
- 2.3 The Framework states that neighbourhood plans should support the strategic development needs of the wider area set out in the adopted local plan. They should not promote less development or undermine its strategic policies. It adds that neighbourhood plans should plan positively to shape and direct development that is outside the strategic elements of the local plan.
- 2.4 The Willenhall Neighbourhood Plan must also be mindful of Planning Practice Guidance, which was first published by the Government in 2014. The Guidance explains how national policy should be applied.

### The Development Plan

- 2.5 The Willenhall Neighbourhood Plan must also be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the adopted development plan for the area. This currently comprises the saved policies in the Coventry Development Plan 2001.



- 2.6 However the Development Plan was only meant to cover the period up to 2011. In addition the Government has introduced a significant number of changes to the planning system, such as the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance described above. Even though the Development Plan is therefore somewhat out of date, the Willenhall Neighbourhood Plan must broadly conform to it to meet the basic condition.
- 2.7 Whilst not a basic condition the neighbourhood plan has had more regard to the emerging local plan, especially the up-to-date evidence base that supports its preparation. Planning Practice Guidance states that a draft neighbourhood plan is not tested against the policies in an emerging local plan but the reasoning and evidence informing the local plan process is likely to be relevant to the consideration of the basic conditions against which a neighbourhood plan is tested. For example up-to-date housing needs evidence is relevant to the question of whether a housing supply policy in a neighbourhood plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development.
- 2.8 The emerging local plan will cover the whole city for the period up to 2031. Entitled ‘Coventry Local Plan 2011’, this will establish the key principles that will guide the location, use and form of development in the city. It will also identify land for housing and employment use to meet the identified need.
- 2.9 The emerging local plan was submitted to the Secretary of State (SoS) in April 2016. The public examination hearing sessions took place over 3 stages between July 2016 and January 2017. The City Council then undertook a period of consultation on proposed modifications, which closed at the end of April 2017. The majority of the proposed modifications were regarded by the City Council as minor in nature and none of them fundamentally affected either the overall objectives or direction.
- 2.10 Following this consultation process the proposed modifications and all received responses were sent to the Inspector for final consideration. If satisfied that the proposed changes overcome all outstanding issues of soundness then the inspector will issue the final report and the City Council will move towards adoption of the local plan. At this point it will replace the saved policies in the Coventry Development Plan 2001.
- 2.11 As far as possible the neighbourhood plan has therefore been prepared in parallel with the emerging local plan and the background evidence that has supported its preparation.

## **Sustainable Development**

- 2.12 The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government’s approach to sustainable development which essentially is about enabling development to cater for the needs of current generations, but ensuring that development doesn’t mean worse lives for future generations. The neighbourhood plan must thereby be aware of the

economic, social and environmental consequences of its policies and proposals and achieve a positive outcome for each.

## **EU Obligations**

- 2.13 A number of EU obligations may be relevant to the Willenhall Neighbourhood Plan. The City Council has therefore ‘screened’ the plan to ascertain whether the policies and proposals give rise to significant environmental effects and trigger the need to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment. The City Council also assessed whether a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is required.
- 2.14 The City Council published the screening opinion in February 2017. This confirmed that the Willenhall Neighbourhood Development Plan does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment or an Appropriate Assessment under the EU Habitats Regulations.

## **Basic Conditions Statement**

- 2.15 As required by the legislation, details about how this draft neighbourhood plan meets the basic conditions are set out in an accompanying document known as the ‘Willenhall Neighbourhood Plan : Basic Conditions Statement’.
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# 3. Profile of Willenhall

3.1 This section provides some background information to set the scene.

## History

- 3.2 The former parish of Willenhall lay two miles south-east of Coventry between the River Sowe and the River Avon. The original centre of the village was at the junction of London Road (then called Weeping Lane) and St. James Lane (then named Newton Lane).
- 3.3 The land was given by Earl Leofric to St. Mary’s monastery. In 1279 the main tenant of the Priory was the Willenhall family, who were the principle tenants until the fifteenth century. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries the land reverted to the Crown and was granted to Sir Richard Lee who sold it to John Hales and it continued in the Hales family until the eighteenth century.
- 3.4 Along London Road a few buildings from the old village survive. At the corner of St. James Lane are two pairs of cottages, now with roughcast brick walls, but probably originally timber-framed and dating from the 17th century.
- 3.5 Until the last century the Willenhall inhabitants had few occupations other than farming. In 1921 there were just 25 houses and 129 inhabitants.



*Community art on the side of the Hagard Centre showing local history*

- 3.6 The parish was extinguished in 1932 when 464 acres in the north-west were transferred to Coventry County Borough and 308 acres in the south-east to Baginton civil parish in Warwick Rural District.
- 3.7 A heritage trail has been produced by the Willenhall Local History Group.

## Housing Development

- 3.8 About a hundred houses were built before the Second World War in the area of St. James Lane and London Road. Although the area remained largely agricultural there was a brickworks and many people were employed at the nearby Binley Colliery to the north.
- 3.9 Chapel Farm was demolished in 1941 to create the Chace National Service Hostel as temporary housing for war workers from around the country. A team of local builders constructed a series of hostel blocks and the village population increased by 1,000 as people from all over Britain came to work in factories such as Rootes and Armstrong-Whitworth as part of the war effort. After the war the hostel served as temporary housing for people seeking permanent homes in the city. It housed people of more than 15 nationalities who arrived either as refugees, or workers engaged in the reconstruction of Coventry. The multi-national mix of people included Poles, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Indians and Africans.



*Old postcard showing Remembrance Road*

- 3.10 In 1950 the then Coventry Corporation began to develop Willenhall Wood as one of its three new self-contained communities on the outskirts of the city. Along with Tile Hill and Bell Green, Willenhall was one of the first post war suburbs to be built in the city. These new estates were established near wartime ‘shadow’ engineering factories, so there were local employment opportunities even for those who did not yet own a car. These new estates were intended to be self contained communities surrounded by parks and woodland. Located at the heart of the estate was a primary school and a neighbourhood centre comprising a church, library, shops and other community buildings. The new parish church in Willenhall was St. John the Divine, which was designed by Sir Basil Spence. In common with the other estates, Willenhall comprised 1,276 houses built in a rectilinear fashion around village greens. The house types were varied to promote a mixed community but had regard to the waiting list statistics. This resulted in a high proportion of flats for single people and young families.
- 3.11 The Willenhall Wood estate comprising 650 dwellings followed in 1959. The earlier estates took little account of the car. These were parked on the street or in the few lock up garages that were available. However Willenhall Wood was the first large-scale Radburn-type planning layout in Britain. This was based on a pioneering planned community in New Jersey, America where peripheral roads allowed the houses and local amenities to have safe, vehicular free access. In Willenhall Wood the peripheral road of Middle Ride led to a series of cul-de-sacs within tight courtyards of houses. These were served by some parking and garages, which allowed entrances to the houses through small back gardens. At the front of the houses were village greens that connected the whole of the estate to local amenities without having to cross a road.



*Old postcard showing the original play area at Middle Ride*

- 3.12 The latter phases of Willenhall Wood involved a further 529 dwellings built between 1960 and 1965 to the south of Middle Ride. However as car ownership was increasing the design saw longer ribbons of houses built with large courtyards incorporated for car parking.
- 3.13 In the last twenty years there has been some piecemeal redevelopment of the estate including the former shopping precinct. There has also been further residential infill creating a high density layout.
- 3.14 In 2000 the former City Council housing stock was transferred to the Whitefriars Housing Group, which is now the largest social landlord in Willenhall.

### Current Population

- 3.15 According to the Census 2011 the population of the area is 7,910 with an average household size of 2.2 persons.



*Refurbished flats on Robin Hood Avenue*

### Assessing the housing need

- 3.16 As part of the evidence gathering a 'Housing Needs Assessment' for the Willenhall Neighbourhood Area was undertaken by AECOM Infrastructure & Environment UK Limited ("AECOM") in November 2015.
- 3.17 The background information that informed the housing needs assessment included:
- population and household size
  - age breakdown of population

- rate of change in the age structure of the population
- country of birth and length of residence
- rates of change in number of rooms per household
- trends in number of persons per room
- tenure (households
- rate of tenure change
- rental sector statistics
- household composition
- rates of change in household composition
- change in household numbers and size
- accommodation type (households)
- concealed families
- economic activity
- rates of long-term health problems or disability
- distance travelled to work

3.18 The full report is available at: [www.willenhallcommunityforum.com](http://www.willenhallcommunityforum.com)

## Local Business

- 3.19 Willenhall is primarily a residential neighbourhood and there are relatively few employers located on the estate.
- 3.20 The Airport Retail Park is located within the Willenhall Neighbourhood Area, which comprises modern retail warehouse accommodation (see later section on retail).
- 3.21 Immediately outside the neighbourhood area to the north there is the Seven Stars Industrial Estate and Asda Abbey Park Superstore. A short distance to the east is the Binley Industrial Estate on the former colliery site. The Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) global HQ is located about a mile to the east lay in Whitley. In March 2015 the company completed a £20m investment to double the size of its base. In January 2016 JLR put forward expansion plans for a 30 acre site on the opposite side of the A45 near Baginton Airport costing in the region of £200m. An adjoining 30 acre site would be used for JLR suppliers creating around 6,000 jobs in total. However this proposal has yet to receive planning permission.

## Health

- 3.22 According to data from Public Health England, Willenhall is classed as being ‘significantly worse’ than the national average in terms of: income deprivation; low weight births; child poverty; general health; limiting long term health or disability; overcrowding; provision of 50 hours or more unpaid care per week; pensioners living alone; older people in deprivation; children's and young people's admissions for injury; deliveries to teenage mothers; emergency hospital admissions for all causes; hospital stays for self harm;

hospital stays for alcohol related harm; life expectancy at birth for males and females; deaths from all causes, all ages; deaths from all cancer, all ages; deaths from circulatory disease, all ages; deaths from coronary heart disease, all ages; deaths from stroke, all ages; and deaths from respiratory diseases, all ages.

- 3.23 Health facilities within Willenhall include: The Willenhall Health Centre (including GP Surgery); Willenhall Oak Medical Centre; Dr. Kenyon & Partners; Pharmacist, x 2; Dentist; and Children's Centre.

## **Education**

- 3.24 Early Years Provision includes: Eureka Childcare x 2; Playdays Preschool; St Anne's Preschool; and Children's Centre – Woodlands Nest.
- 3.25 Willenhall has 3 Primary schools: St. Anne's RC Primary School; Stretton Academy Church of England; and Willenhall Community Primary. There is no provision for secondary education pupils within the neighbourhood area.

## **Retail**

- 3.26 Within Willenhall there is Heart of England Cooperative, a small supermarket, market and car boot sale.
- 3.27 The Airport Retail Park is located within the Willenhall Neighbourhood Area. It is located alongside the A46 Eastern Bypass, though is accessed via the London Road. The scheme comprises 102,500 sq ft of modern retail warehouse accommodation. It is anchored by a Curry's Mega Store and Dunelm Mill. The other occupants include Smyth's, Poundworld, B & M Discount Store, Carpet Right and Halford's. In June 2015 the City Council approved a planning application to erect an Aldi Superstore at the Airport Retail Park, which will be in addition to the above.

## **Social and Community Facilities**

- 3.28 There are a number of social and community facilities within the area. These include several religious buildings, sports clubs and social provision.
- 3.29 There are also a number of voluntary and public sector organisations active in Willenhall, which deliver various activities. This includes: the Coventry South Credit Union; Coventry Independent Advice Service; Inbetweeners Club; Youth Service; YMCA; Coventry Food bank; Probation Service; Willenhall Community Forum; and the Recovery Partnership.
- 3.30 The Alan Higgs Centre is a leisure centre, which is situated in about 80 acres of grounds off Allard Way. It opened in September 2004 and specialises in providing football, outdoor sports facilities and nature activities. In August 2016 Wasps RFC received



planning permission to build a £7million training centre at the centre. The plans will see three of the four football pitches at the site converted to use for rugby and an indoor kicking area constructed. In September 2016 the City Council agreed funding of £10.5million to build a 50m swimming pool on the site of the indoor pitch at the venue.



Community activities at the Hagard Centre

## Crime and anti-social behaviour

- 3.31 There are unacceptable levels of anti-social behaviour within Willenhall. It is believed that the housing layout can sometimes facilitate crime. There are high levels of domestic abuse within the area.
- 3.32 Willenhall is the location of the Chace Avenue police station that forms part of the Coventry Local Policing Team of the West Midlands Police and houses the Binley and Willenhall neighbourhood team. However the front counter at Willenhall Police Station was closed in 2015 as part of efforts to save money.

## Green Spaces

- 3.33 There are two strategic green spaces within the neighbourhood area, notably the Sowe Valley and Willenhall Wood.
- 3.34 The Sowe Valley is a continuous riverside green space stretching 8½ miles from Hawkesbury Junction Conservation Area in the north of Coventry to Whitley Grove Wood in the south of the city. It contains a way-marked footpath that passes many interesting

sites along its length and is a recognised wildlife and recreational resource that brings the ‘feel’ of the countryside into the city.

- 3.35 Towards its southern end the Sowe Valley passes through the Willenhall Neighbourhood Area and provides a valuable green space resource for the local community. There are many hedgerow trees present such as blackthorn, which are remnants of past agricultural activity. However the landscape here is mainly open rough grassland creating an informal open space. It is thereby popular for children’s play and walking.
- 3.36 The Sowe Valley currently has Green Belt status, though there is a proposal in the emerging Local Plan to re-designate it as Local Green Space. Part of it is also a Local Nature Reserve.
- 3.37 Willenhall Wood is also a Local Nature Reserve. It is situated south of St James' Lane between Middle Ride, Yarningale Road and the city boundary. It was purchased by Coventry City Council with other land in 1952.
- 3.38 It is mixed, deciduous, ancient and semi-natural woodland that covers 9 hectares. The wood contains a diverse canopy of oak, ash, wild cherry, silver birch and rowan. The shrub layer contains hazel, elder, hawthorn and natural regeneration of oak, aspen, birch and ash.
- 3.39 The wood contains a network of footpaths providing interesting informal walks with panoramic views across farmland to the south and open countryside from the eastern end. A 600 metre all-weather path has been installed on the east side to enable both local people and people with disabilities to gain greater access to the wood.



*Willenhall Woodland Trail*

- 3.40 During the summer months many wild flowers bound the footpaths including greater stitchwort, common speedwell, nipplewort and hawkweed. The most outstanding feature is the display of bluebells during May and June concentrated in the eastern end of the wood.
- 3.41 Willenhall Wood was the site of a plane crash in 1994 when a Boeing 737 came down as it headed to Coventry Airport, killing all five crew. Willenhall residents believe the pilot crashed in the trees to avoid hitting nearby homes.
- 3.42 In addition there are several smaller green spaces distributed amongst the housing. These include: Arnhem Corner; Wroxhall Drive; Middleride; Brookstray; and Stretton Avenue.



*Open space between St James Lane and Middle Ride*

## 4. Community Engagement

### Initial Consultation

- 4.1 As part of the initial preparation of the neighbourhood plan the Group utilised a consultation exercise initiated by the City Council in 2015.
- 4.2 An event known as Appreciative Inquiry was used to provide some initial input into the emerging neighbourhood plan. In particular it provided some evidence of the needs and opinions of the local community and the various stakeholders represented.



*Participants at the Appreciative Inquiry Event*

- 4.3 Participants were asked to consider future aspirations for Willenhall. The following emerged during the discussion:
- increased community safety, with a reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour;
  - young people need to feel safe and supported with adequate and positive activity for them to do;
  - to have good quality, affordable social housing;
  - good community cohesion with all ethnic backgrounds living together harmoniously;

- the health and well-being of local people is addressed with good support from the relevant organisations and services; and
- to have good governance whereby the local community can influence the decision making process with associated good communications about what is happening in the area.



Display at the Appreciative Inquiry Event

- 4.4 This initiative provided the starting point for the preparation of the neighbourhood plan.
- 4.5 In March 2016 a copy of the first draft of the plan was distributed to various government agencies and local stakeholders, such as Coventry City Council and Whitefriars Housing. These bodies were invited to attend a presentation at WEETC and/or comment on the initial draft plan.
- 4.6 Based on the feedback from the various consultees, some alterations were made to the initial draft plan

## Pre-Submission Consultation

- 4.7 The pre-submission consultation period lasted from 1 November 2016 until 2 January 2017.
- 4.8 A copy of the notice announcing the publication of the draft neighbourhood plan and the opportunity to comment was distributed by email to 90 stakeholders, partners and local residents. This fulfilled the statutory requirements to contact the consultation bodies specified in paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.

- 4.9 A notice was also placed in the local newsletter known as the Willenhall Focus and about 3,000 copies were distributed throughout the neighbourhood area. A leaflet was produced containing a brief summary of the draft plan contents and the consultation details. This was distributed at various community events and meetings. Meetings took place with local groups including the Craft Group, History Group and Men's Shed.
- 4.10 Posters were displayed at 40 local businesses including shops, beauticians, restaurants and pubs also community venues such as local churches, health centres and the library.



*Banner displayed at the entrance to WEETC in Robin Hood Road*

- 4.11 The plan and associated public materials stated that a copy of the plan could be inspected on the website: [www.willenhallcommunityforum.com](http://www.willenhallcommunityforum.com). Hard copies of the plan were also made available for inspection at the:
- WEET Centre
  - Hagard Community Space; and
  - Willenhall Library.
- 4.12 The group only received 10 responses. This comprised 5 responses from local residents and 5 responses from various organisations.
- 4.13 All the respondents were broadly happy with the overall content of the neighbourhood plan and there were no fundamental criticisms or areas of concern. There were also several detailed comments which were assessed and, where appropriate, the draft plan amended accordingly.

## Consultation Statement

4.14 Further details about all the engagement undertaken is provided in the consultation statement, which is a separate document that accompanies this plan. As required by the Regulations the consultation statement specifies:

- details of who was consulted on the proposed neighbourhood plan;
  - an explanation of how they were consulted; and
  - a summary of the main issues and concerns raised throughout the consultation.
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## 5. Key Issues

### Evidence Gathering

- 5.1 A number of issues emerged from the evidence gathering.
- 5.2 Willenhall was a prize winning council housing estate that was largely constructed in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Over the intervening years there has been some piecemeal redevelopment of the estate including the former shopping precinct.
- 5.3 In 2011 Willenhall had a population of 7,910. Between 2001 and 2011 there was a significant decrease across the 65-84 age band. Conversely there was a significant increase in the proportion of children and people aged 25-44, which suggests that many families may have moved to or formed within the area. There was also a significant increase of one family households with dependent children.
- 5.4 Willenhall is home to fewer people born outside the UK (18.8%) than Coventry as a whole, but is nevertheless higher than the national average. Data on ethnic origin shows that Willenhall's residents are 81.5% white with 11.4% of the population classing themselves as Black African.
- 5.5 The level of owner occupation is significantly lower than the Coventry average. As of November 2015 the average house price in CV3, Willenhall's postcode area was £182,291. This compares with a lower Coventry average of £172,724. Conversely the proportion of social rented housing is significantly higher. However properties in Willenhall rent faster than across Coventry indicating higher levels of demand.
- 5.6 The proportion of dwellings that are detached houses, semi-detached or bungalows is significantly lower than the national average. The proportion of flats is significantly above both local and national averages.
- 5.7 Levels of unemployment are significantly above local and national averages. The proportion of working-age residents who are long-term sick or disabled significantly exceeds Coventry and England averages.
- 5.8 Willenhall is classed as being 'significantly worse' than the national average in terms of general health, limiting long term health or disability, overcrowding, deliveries to teenage mothers, and life expectancy at birth for males and females. It is also significantly worse in terms of deaths from all cancers, circulatory disease, coronary heart disease, stroke, and respiratory diseases.
- 5.9 There is a good range of services and facilities, though these are being increasingly centralised or re-organised as a consequence of Government cutbacks



## Community Engagement

- 5.10 Some additional key issues emerged from the initial community engagement.
  - 5.11 There are disproportionate levels of poverty and fear about the impact of benefit reductions.
  - 5.12 There are financial problems associated with underemployment and low pay. Amongst young people there are high levels of unemployment and a lack of accessible employment opportunities. There is a lack of training matched to the skills required by employers.
  - 5.13 There are unacceptable levels of anti-social behaviour and a lack of things for young people to do. Poor housing design in places sometimes facilitates crime. There are high levels of domestic abuse.
  - 5.14 Services and facilities are moving away from the Willenhall area and being centralised in the city centre, making them less accessible to some users. Provision needs to be more co-ordinated.
  - 5.15 The community needs good transport links to places outside the Willenhall area, including employment opportunities in the adjoining areas and the city centre. Residents complain about the condition of local roads including pot holes.
  - 5.16 The housing was not thought fit for purpose. More affordable housing was felt necessary, especially for young families.
  - 5.17 Local schools that are full and there is pressure for local primary school places. A family may have children attending different schools.
  - 5.18 The open spaces need to be protected and better managed. Energy use and fuel poverty needs to be addressed.
  - 5.19 The local community want to be empowered with good local governance and decision making. There is a need for a new community centre, which could accommodate various activities and social facilities.
-

## 6. Vision and Objectives

- 6.1 The National Planning Policy Framework states that neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and deliver the sustainable development they need.
- 6.2 In order to address the key issues that emerged from the evidence gathering the following vision and objectives have been identified.

### Vision

- 6.3 The vision is:

Willenhall will be a vibrant, healthy and safe neighbourhood. It will have a strong community comprising people of all ages and backgrounds who live, work and play together.

### Objectives

- 6.4 What became clear in the consultation with local residents was a strong desire to have an active and strong neighbourhood with good community cohesion and social interaction.
- 6.5 The National Planning Policy Framework states that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve places which promote:
- opportunities for meetings between members of the community who might not otherwise come into contact with each other, including through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres and active street frontages which bring together those who work, live and play in the vicinity;
  - safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion; and
  - safe and accessible developments, containing clear and legible pedestrian routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas.

These are key principles that new development in Willenhall should adhere to.

- 6.6 Planning Practice Guidance adds that the health, wellbeing and quality of life of those who will be using an area will be influenced by its cohesion. The vitality of neighbourhoods is enhanced by creating variety, choice and a mix of uses to attract people to live, work and play in the same area. Interesting and safe neighbourhoods often have a mix of uses which involves different people using the same parts of a building or place at different times of the day, as well as different uses happening in

various parts of a building or space at the same time. Neighbourhoods should also cater for a range of demographic groups especially families and older people.

- 6.7 A mix of uses will be successful when they are compatible one with another and interact with each other positively avoiding opportunities for conflict. To encourage a mix of uses that are both vibrant and safe buildings can be designed so as to facilitate different access arrangements at different times.
- 6.8 If community cohesion is to be successfully achieved in Willenhall a key component must be meaningful partnership between the various service providers and agencies.
- 6.9 The objectives for the neighbourhood plan are therefore as follows.

1. To provide a mix of house types and tenures to meet the need
2. To ensure all future development is designed to a high quality
3. To have a thriving and diverse local shopping centre
4. To provide a mix of services and facilities to enable people to have all their needs met within the area
5. To improve health and well-being
6. To make it easier for people to travel inside and outside the area
7. To protect and improve important green spaces

- 6.10 These objectives will be delivered through the policies and proposals outlined in Section 7.
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## 7. Policies and Proposals

- 7.1 The National Planning Policy Framework states that forums can use a neighbourhood development plan to set planning policies that can be used to determine planning applications submitted for the area.
- 7.2 The following policies are therefore designed to deliver the vision and objectives outlined in the previous section and be used in decision making by Coventry City Council and planning inspectors when assessing planning applications.
- 7.3 Each policy contains supporting justification to substantiate the approach being adopted. In accordance with the statutory requirement to meet the basic conditions, each policy has regard to:
- the need to be in general conformity with national planning policy, most notably the National Planning Policy Framework;
  - the need to be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the Coventry; Development Plan 2001, but also to be mindful of the emerging Coventry Local Plan 2016;
  - the findings from the evidence base including the bespoke research; and
  - the views expressed by the local community during the various consultation initiatives.

### Objective 1: To provide a mix of house types and tenures to meet the need

- 7.4 To significantly boost the supply of housing, the National Planning Policy Framework states that local planning authorities should use their evidence base to ensure that their local plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in their housing market area.
- 7.5 The emerging local plan states that the current housing requirement for Coventry and Warwickshire between 2011 and 2031 is estimated as being about 88,000 dwellings. Of this total Coventry is assessed as needing 42,400 dwellings because the requirements of the existing population projections based on the Government's forecasts, Coventry and Warwickshire's Joint Strategic Housing Market Assessment, and the anticipated economic growth in jobs.
- 7.6 A City Council led assessment of land availability within Coventry has identified that there is enough land for 24,600 dwellings. Through discussion and negotiation with neighbouring authorities the remaining 17,800 dwellings have been redistributed to the Warwickshire Districts.
- 7.7 Of the 24,600 houses to be found within Coventry's boundary it is estimated that 16-17,000 dwellings could be accommodated on brownfield sites, with the balance of 7,000-8,000 dwellings needing to be found elsewhere.

- 7.8 These figures are for the city as a whole. There is no specified housing requirement for the Willenhall Neighbourhood Area within the emerging Local Plan. However the Housing Needs Assessment undertaken by AECOM interrogated a wide range of data sources which, taken together, have informed the key trends in housing demand for the neighbourhood plan. This included recommendations on the overall quantity of housing growth probably required over the plan period.
- 7.9 The AECOM study identified four separate projections of dwelling numbers for Willenhall between 2011 and 2031 based on:
- a figure derived from the Coventry and Warwickshire Joint Strategic Housing Market Assessment Final Report (November 2013) from 2011 to 2031 (which gives a total of 1,180 dwellings, or 59 per year);
  - the Government’s 2012-based household projections, extrapolated to Willenhall translated from households to dwellings, and rebased to actual 2014 population (which gives 1,102 dwellings, or 55 per year);
  - a projection forward of dwelling completion rates 2001-2011 (which gives 426 dwellings, or 21 per year); and
  - a projection forward of dwelling completion rates 2011-2015 (which gives 136 dwellings or 14 per year).
- 7.10 AECOM then assessed the likely impact of various factors on the above. This included age structure and population; economic performance; house prices; migration; supply in housing market; waiting lists and need for affordable housing; vacancy rates; overcrowding; and rental market.
- 7.11 Based on the data on the quantity of dwellings required and the market factors affecting those quantities, AECOM recommended that unconstrained housing need for the neighbourhood area (i.e. that does not reflect supply-side constraints) in the period 2011-2031 would be approximately 1,300 net additional dwellings, or around 65 dwellings per year over the plan period.
- 7.12 However between April 2011 and March 2016 a number of proposals for residential development have received planning permission. These are listed below.

**Table 1: Residential Planning Applications (April 2011 to March 2016)**

Reference	Description	Decision	Date
OUT/2014/1740 Land off Middle Ride	Erection of up to 257 dwellings, demolition of 1-8 Field March with vehicular access to Middle Ride, emergency access to St.James' Lane and public open space (Outline with details of access submitted)  <a href="http://planning.coventry.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=756738">http://planning.coventry.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=756738</a>	Outline Approval	28/08/2014

OUT/2015/0040 Land Adjacent To And Containing 483 London Road	Erection of 12 dwellings (outline application with details of access, layout and scale) comprising four 2 storey dwellings and eight 2.5 storey dwellings.  <a href="http://planning.coventry.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=764247">http://planning.coventry.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=764247</a>	Outline Approval	13/04/2015
FUL/2011/2271 Land at Stretton Avenue and Chace Avenue	Erection of 26 apartments and houses together with associated access road, parking areas and landscaping.  <a href="http://planning.coventry.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=730484">http://planning.coventry.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=730484</a>	Full Approval	10/02/2012
FUL/2013/1615 Land Adjacent to 90, 98 and 106 Yarningale Road	Demolition of garages and erection of 2 flats and a double garage.  <a href="http://planning.coventry.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=749415">http://planning.coventry.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=749415</a>	Full Approval	09/12/2013
FUL/2013/1837 Land adjacent to 5 Chepstow Close	Erection of two dwelling houses.  <a href="http://planning.coventry.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=750150">http://planning.coventry.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=750150</a>	Full Approval	07/11/2013
FUL/2013/1851 Land adjacent to 10 Littlethorpe	Erection of two dwellings.  <a href="http://planning.coventry.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=750201">http://planning.coventry.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=750201</a>	Full Approval	05/11/2013
OUT/2011/2108 Land east of 25 St James Lane St James Lane	Erection of two dwelling houses (outline application with means of access and layout to be discharged).  <a href="http://planning.coventry.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=728104">http://planning.coventry.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=728104</a>	Outline Approval	12/01/2012

Source: Coventry City Council (April 2016)

- 7.13 From the above it is estimated that 303 dwellings have been given full or outline planning permission. As a consequence there is a net requirement for 1,000 dwellings over the remainder of the plan period.
- 7.14 However it is important to note that this figure represents the estimated housing need in Willenhall and does not reflect supply-side constraints such as the availability of suitable land to build upon. Most importantly it is not considered possible to accommodate the forecast need entirely from within the neighbourhood area owing to various physical and environmental constraints.
- 7.15 The emerging local plan includes a site allocation for residential development that is located within the neighbourhood area. Table 4.2 indicates that land at London Road/Allard Way (Site reference H2:9) will be used for 200 dwellings. Spread over two adjoining sites the proposed development is required to retain and reuse the locally listed pumping station and lodge. The local plan stresses that important hedgerows must be retained and the biodiversity/ecological impacts managed. The provision of at least 2.5ha

of publicly accessible green space will be required as part of the development. Policy GB1 removes this allocation from the Green Belt.

- 7.16 In addition the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (known as the SHLAA) undertaken by the City Council in 2015 indicated potential capacity for a further 98 dwellings within the neighbourhood area at:
- Dunsmore Avenue - 6 units
  - Stretton Avenue - 35 units
  - Chase Avenue - 53 units
  - London Road - 5 units.
- 7.17 Policy H3 in the emerging local plan states that, wherever possible, new developments should also be:
- a) within 2km radius of local medical services;
  - b) within 1.5km of a designated centre within the city hierarchy (policy R3);
  - c) within 1km radius of a primary school;
  - d) within 1km of indoor and outdoor sports facilities;
  - e) within 400m of a bus stop; and
  - f) within 400m of publicly accessible green space.
- 7.18 There are possibly other smaller windfall opportunities that have not been captured by the assessment or are too small to be included. For example as a consequence of the proposed rationalisation of various community buildings and the creation of a new community hub (see ‘Social and Community Facilities’ later in this section) the sites currently occupied by the Willenhall Education Employment and Training Centre in Robin Hood Road would become surplus to requirements. It is proposed that the redundant building meets the above criteria listed in Policy of the emerging be demolished and the brownfield site redeveloped for housing.
- 7.19 This approach is in accordance with Policy CO2 in the emerging local plan. This states that under such circumstances the first consideration will be whether there is still a local need for services currently or last provided on that site. As the overall proposal in Willenhall is to provide more effective and co-ordinated services within the proposed community hub, there is clearly not a need for the redundant building to remain in community use. In accordance with Policy CO2 the replacement facility will:
- continue to serve the community;
  - be of appropriate scale and character; and
  - be of high quality design.
- 7.20 Subject to the community hub being developed, the redundant brownfield sites will then be redeveloped for housing.
- 7.21 Nevertheless the combined total of land with planning permission, allocations in the emerging local plan and windfall sites would still leave a shortfall of around 674 dwellings to meet the estimated housing need as indicated in Table 2.





**Table 2: Estimated Shortfall in Housing Provision**

	Number of Dwellings
Estimated housing need for the neighbourhood area (2011-2031)	1300
Full or outline planning permission already granted (2011-2016)	303
Allocation in the emerging Local Plan at London Road/Allard Way	200
Estimated windfall sites from SHLAA	98
Estimated redevelopment of WEETC site	<u>25</u>
Total housing provision	<u>626</u>
Estimated shortfall to meet need	674

- 7.22 This demonstrates that the overall provision does not meet the full estimated need arising in Willenhall from within the neighbourhood area.
- 7.23 However there is no specific obligation in the emerging local plan to meet unconstrained need in full from solely within Willenhall.
- 7.24 The estate is already built at a very high density and there are few opportunities for further development. The only way in which the estimated housing need could be met from within the neighbourhood area is by encroaching on the Sowe Valley to the north-west. This currently has Green Belt status and is a Local Nature Reserve. Although the emerging local plan proposes to change the designation of the valley from Green Belt to Local Green Space, most forms of development will still be restricted. Willenhall Wood lies to the south-east. This is ancient woodland and is designated as a Local Nature Reserve. There are therefore substantial environmental constraints to large scale development within the strategic open spaces in the neighbourhood area.
- 7.25 The following policy therefore outlines the scale of residential development that can be accommodated within Willenhall that will contribute towards the estimated need. It also indicates where this development will be located.

**Policy 1 - Scale and Distribution of Housing Development**

1. Provision will be made for a minimum of 323 additional dwellings in the neighbourhood area between 2016 and 2031.
2. This provision will be distributed as follows:
  - a) London Road allocation in the emerging Coventry Local Plan 2016 (200 dwellings)
  - b) Small scale windfall development (123 dwellings)

- 7.26 To deliver a wide choice of high quality homes, widen opportunities for home ownership and create sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities, the National Planning Policy Framework states that local planning authorities should:

- plan for a mix of housing based on current and future demographic trends, market trends and the needs of different groups in the community
- identify the size, type, tenure and range of housing that is required in particular locations, reflecting local demand
- where they have identified that affordable housing is needed, set policies for meeting this need on site, unless off-site provision or a financial contribution of broadly equivalent value can be robustly justified (for example to improve or make more effective use of the existing housing stock) and the agreed approach contributes to the objective of creating mixed and balanced communities.

7.27 Policy H4 in the emerging local plan deals with securing a mix of housing. It states that the City Council will require proposals for residential development to include a mix of market housing which contributes towards a balance of house types and sizes across the city in accordance with the latest Strategic Housing Market Assessment. In assessing the housing mix in residential schemes the policy adds that the City Council may take into account developments in neighbourhood plan areas where there is an up-to-date local housing needs assessment which provides a more appropriate indication of housing need.

7.28 In their assessment AECOM examined local factors specific to Willenhall with a potential impact on neighbourhood plan housing characteristics.

**Table 3: Factors that potentially impact on housing characteristics**

Factor	Conclusion
Affordable housing	Subject to consultation with Coventry Council, it would appear that (subject to any decreases in existing provision through Right to Buy) affordable housing contributions required of developers within the Plan area should normally be directed to other parts of Coventry where the need is greater, and the new dwellings to be provided in the plan area should consist of open market dwellings.
Demand for smaller dwellings	Provide within range of new dwelling sizes a limited proportion of smaller dwellings (1-2 bedrooms), for which there is evidenced demand, but note existing high levels of provision, so monitor carefully levels to be provided to ensure no oversupply.  Providing these smaller units will also be an effective response to the increase in private renting seen locally, and would offer the opportunity for the (albeit limited) older population to downsize locally.  For smaller units aimed at older people downsizing, bungalows are likely to be in greater demand than flats.
Housing type	To provide a wider range of dwellings and a more balanced community, the neighbourhood plan area may wish to encourage the provision of more detached and semi-detached homes, which would complement the large number of existing smaller terraced units and flats.  These detached and semi-detached homes would be an effective response to the recent increase in families within the plan area.

Need for larger/family households	In order to provide a greater balance/mix of dwellings, and to cater for the significant increase in families with children evidenced by the Census data (including ethnic minorities), within the range of new dwelling size, there is likely to be a need for a significant proportion of larger, family sized dwellings (i.e. 3-5 bedroom units).  As per conclusion above, these could be detached or semi-detached.
Need for specialist housing for the disabled and/or elderly	The high levels of people with disabilities living locally suggests that the neighbourhood plan should support the provision of new housing adapted for disabled residents, as well as supporting improvements and adaptations to existing socially-rented properties.  The group should aim for new housing for disabled residents to be located in easily accessible locations close to services and facilities such as shops.

Source: AECOM using SHMA, Census and home.co.uk

- 7.29 The following policy outlines the mix of residential development required in Willenhall to meet the identified housing need.

#### Policy 2 - Mix of Housing

1. A proposal for residential development should include a mix of market and affordable housing in accordance with the identified housing need in Willenhall.
2. A scheme will be supported if it provides a range of dwelling sizes that include:
  - a) a limited proportion of smaller dwellings (1-2 bedrooms) including units suitable for the disabled and older people if located close to existing services and facilities; and
  - b) a significant proportion of larger, family sized dwellings (3-5 bedroom units) comprising detached and semi-detached properties.

#### Objective 2: To ensure all future development is designed to a high quality

- 7.30 Whether considering proposals for constructing new dwellings, or extending or refurbishing existing properties, steps should be taken to improve their individual design and their appearance in the street scene. Where appropriate the same principles should apply to other forms of development in the area.
- 7.31 Policy DE1 in the emerging local plan states that all development proposals must respect and enhance their surroundings and positively contribute towards the local identity and character of an area. It adds that all development will be expected to meet the following key principles:
- a) respond to the physical context of the site;
  - b) consider the local distinctiveness and identity of the site but also have regard to opportunities to enhance the local built and natural environment through new development and enhanced design;

- c) where appropriate, retain and incorporate into the layout the protection of important views, including key views of the three spires;
- d) preserve or enhance the character and setting of the historic built, landscape and where appropriate archaeological environment;
- e) preserve or enhance the character and setting of major road, rail and canal corridors;
- f) clearly define the boundaries between public and private spaces and enclosure of space;
- g) provide attractive, safe, uncluttered, active and easily identifiable, high quality public spaces;
- h) make places that interconnect and are easy to move through;
- i) ensure places are easily understood by users, with clear routes and distinct physical features;
- j) seek high quality design and attention to detail in the layout of developments, individual buildings and infrastructure in terms of function and impact, not just for the short term, but over the lifetime of the development;
- k) be adaptable to changing social, technological, economic and market conditions and ensure that developments maximise the use of the site;
- l) promote diversity through mixes of uses within a site or building, which work together to create vital and viable places;
- m) be proactive in responding to climate change and adopt sustainable and low carbon construction principles in terms of their design, layout and density;
- n) consider green infrastructure at the earliest stage in the design process, to ensure that it is well planned, designed, managed and maintained. It should also be well integrated and serve multiple purposes (as appropriate);
- o) support the integration of through routes for public transport and incorporate suitable bus priority measures as appropriate;
- p) minimise adverse impact on important natural resources;
- q) conserve, restore or enhance biodiversity; and
- r) respect and enhance landscape quality including trees, hedges and other landscape features of value.

7.32 The neighbourhood plan has built on this city-wide policy in the emerging plan to highlight the local circumstances prevalent in Willenhall.

7.33 Willenhall is a clearly defined neighbourhood sitting inside four major transport corridors that make it distinctive from the surrounding suburbs of Coventry and the adjoining Warwickshire countryside. It was largely developed as a self contained post war Council housing estate comprising over a 1,000 dwellings with shops and community buildings at its centre. It was constructed at a relatively high density and in places laid out on 'Radburn' lines. In the last twenty years there has been some piecemeal redevelopment of the estate including the former shopping precinct. However it still largely follows the pattern and style of the original planned development. So despite the incremental changes over the years it retains its original 'feel and character', which has reinforced the

sense of community. Any new construction should be sympathetic to this and avoid introducing different styles and a piecemeal approach.

## Connecting Places

- 7.34 Planning Practice Guidance states that many of our streets already exist and the way they are changed or managed will not fall within planning controls. However it adds that planning policies and decisions should look to create streets that support the character and use of the area. The Guidance adds that development proposals should promote accessibility and safe local routes by making places that connect appropriately with each other and are easy to move through. Attractive and well-connected networks encourage more people to walk and cycle to local destinations. For this reason the Guidance states that streets should be designed to be functional and accessible for all, to be safe and attractive public spaces and not just respond to engineering considerations.
- 7.35 The scale of residential development proposed within Willenhall may give some concern. However the Guidance suggests that more people on the street can lead to improved personal security and road safety. It adds that research shows that the presence of pedestrians causes drivers to travel more slowly and safely. The Guidance says that the transport user hierarchy should be applied within all aspects of street design – consider the needs of the most vulnerable users first: pedestrians, then cyclists, then public transport users, specialist vehicles like ambulances and finally other motor vehicles.
- 7.36 Home Zones are one way to achieve a good balance between the needs of the local community and drivers in residential streets, by allowing through vehicle movement at low speeds, prioritising walking and cycling as travel modes and providing space for residents to meet, relax and play. Home Zones with restricted speeds within residential area give greater priority to non-motorised users and improve the quality of life of residents by making them places for people instead of just being thoroughfares for vehicles. (See: Circular 02/2006: 'The Quiet Lanes and Home Zones (England) Regulations 2006')
- 7.37 In particular efforts should be made to improve the connectivity of the local shopping area and services and facilities to cyclists and pedestrians, and deter dependence on the motor car for short trips.

## Car Parking

- 7.38 Linked to the above is car parking, which is a big issue in the area. The original estate was designed when car ownership levels were very low and parking provision was not therefore required to a significant degree. However the estate is now trying to adjust to vastly increased car usage and parking requirements. As a consequence there are now problems associated with parking in appropriate places, such as on pavements

causing problems for pedestrians or obstructing safe traffic flow and access for emergency vehicles.

## **Crime**

- 7.39 The National Planning Policy Framework states that neighbourhood plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the area. It adds that planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments, amongst other things, should create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion.
- 7.40 Planning Practice Guidance states that designing out crime and designing in community safety should be central to the planning and delivery of new development. The prevention of crime and the enhancement of community safety are therefore matters that the City Council should consider when exercising its planning functions. The emerging local plan states that well designed and maintained streets and public spaces can reduce anti-social behaviour and crime including the perception and fear of crime.
- 7.41 The community engagement with Willenhall residents and stakeholders revealed that there are unacceptable levels of anti-social behaviour. It was also felt that some housing design facilitates crime. In places there are problems associated with the existing layout, particularly the poorly designed pedestrian routes that lack natural surveillance and do not feel particularly safe for those people using them.
- 7.42 Secured by Design (SBD) is a police initiative to guide and encourage the design and build of new homes that incorporate crime prevention measures. The advice provided by the specification has been proven to reduce the opportunity for crime and the fear of crime. It therefore creates safer, more secure and sustainable environments. Secured by Design is owned by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and is supported by the Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). For more information see: <http://www.securedbydesign.com/>

## **Storage facilities**

- 7.43 The current refuse collection arrangements require each household to have three separate wheelie bins for normal waste, green waste and recycling material. Their presence in the street scene outside of collection days can create a sense of an uncared for and unkempt neighbourhood. Occasionally this is simply down to bad neighbours who do not return wheelie bins to their property after they have been emptied. However in some instances there are insufficient storage facilities. Any new properties should include easily accessible and hidden storage facilities for wheelie bins.

## Environmental measures

- 7.44 Much of the area suffers from low income, a consequence of which is that many households struggle with fuel poverty finding themselves unable to maintain a comfortable and warm home. It is crucial that new development and refurbishment seeks to address this issue through ensuring new development achieves high levels of energy efficiency, and by encouraging proposals for local energy generation through renewable technologies.
- 7.45 The emerging local plan states that 15.7% of households in Coventry experience fuel poverty and this will need to be challenged through improvements to the existing housing stock and ensuring new homes are energy efficient. It states that schemes like those recently brought forward in Willenhall will be supported and encouraged. These make valuable contributions to reducing fuel poverty and supporting improved health and wellbeing of occupants.
- 7.46 Policy 5 below brings together all the aforementioned features that need to be considered and incorporated in the design of all new development. It is in addition to Policy DE1 in the emerging local plan.

### Policy 3 - Design of New Development

Where appropriate new development should be designed to incorporate all of the following features:

- a) be of a scale and form which would be in keeping with Willenhall and would not result in the loss of amenity for existing residents;
- b) provide adequate levels of car parking, which should be designed to minimise its visual impact and avoid the creation of extensive parking courts;
- c) create well defined, attractive and secure streets and spaces, faced by active frontages and benefiting from good levels of natural surveillance and lighting;
- d) incorporate the principles of 'Secured by Design' or any equivalent standard which might amend or replace it in the future;
- e) integrate refuse and recycling storage facilities to mitigate the visual impact they may have on the public realm; and
- f) achieve high levels of environmental performance including energy efficiency measures to minimise overall running costs.

### Objective 3: To have a thriving and diverse local shopping centre

- 7.47 Policy R3 in the emerging local plan identifies a hierarchy of centres that comprises the city centre, major district centres, district centres and local centres. In all these centres:
- a) a balance will be sought between shops (Class A1) and other community uses in order to protect the vitality and viability of the centre as a whole;

- b) proposals that reduce the concentration of A-class uses below 51% will not be approved;
- c) a residential element will be promoted and encouraged so long as it does not undermine the functionality of the centre; and
- d) improvements to the environment and accessibility will be promoted and encouraged.

- 7.48 The list of Local Centres listed in the policy includes the Willenhall. It states that these centres will contain an appropriate scale of development which:
- a) supports their immediate locality (a 1km radius) for day-to-day convenience shopping;
  - b) some service and restaurant uses;
  - c) social, community and leisure uses; and
  - d) small scale office uses will also be acceptable.

- 7.49 The Willenhall Local Centre accommodates the majority of the neighbourhood area's local retail and community facilities. It is an important social and economic asset. In addition to providing these essential local services, it also plays an important role in maintaining and strengthening community relations, providing residents with central meeting places where they can relax and engage with each other, and thereby supports social interaction and community cohesion. Furthermore it is relatively accessible to local people, especially those without access to a car. It is therefore critical that this centre continues to prosper, and that new development enhances its vitality and viability. There is now competition from the superstore at the Airport Retail Park. As such, the Local Centre requires a degree of protection and where possible, investment and improvement by the public and private sectors.

#### Policy 4 - Willenhall Local Centre

1. A proposal for development that results in the loss of a shop in the Local Centre will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that:
  - a) the unit is no longer economically viable and an alternative retail user cannot be secured; and
  - b) the proposed new use would provide a tangible community benefit.
2. A proposed new shop or extension will be supported provided it does not:
  - a) generate unacceptable noise, fumes, smell or other disturbance to nearby houses;
  - b) lead to traffic congestion or adversely affect traffic flows on the adjoining road; or
  - c) cause parking problems for adjoining residential and non-residential uses.
3. A proposal for development that supports the vitality and viability of the Local Centre will be supported including:
  - a) the provision of a more diverse range of retail units;
  - b) better car parking with new or extended car parks where possible;
  - c) improved public transport, and walking and cycling facilities;
  - d) improved traffic management;
  - e) improved footway and road surfaces;



- f) improved shop fronts, include necessary security measures; and
- g) rationalised and improved street furniture (including seating, lighting, signage and safety barriers).

4. Retail development elsewhere in the neighbourhood area will be only be supported where it can be demonstrated that it would not harm the vitality and viability of the Local Centre.

The boundary of the Willenhall Local Centre is shown on Proposals Map 1.

**Objective 4: To provide a mix of services and facilities to enable people to have all their needs met within the area**

- 7.50 The National Planning Policy Framework point out that the planning system can play an important role in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy, inclusive communities.
- 7.51 The Framework adds that in order to deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:
- plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;
  - guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs;
  - ensure that established shops, facilities and services are able to develop and modernise in a way that is sustainable, and retained for the benefit of the community; and
  - ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services.
- 7.52 The emerging local plan similarly seeks to safeguard and improve social, community and leisure premises and provide support for the development of new facilities where there are identified gaps in provision. It states that the local plan will:
- guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services;
  - allow established facilities to develop and modernise in a sustainable way; and
  - ensure that the location of housing, economic uses, community facilities and services are considered and promoted in an integrated way.
- 7.53 The local plan adds that this should be done with a view to locating facilities in a defined centre that makes them easily accessible by foot, bicycle or public transport and fully accessible by all sections of the community and facilitating more integrated communities. They should be provided in buildings and facilities which are flexible and adaptable to

communities' needs and sited to maximise the shared use of premises to facilitate their longevity.

- 7.54 Policy CO1 in the emerging local plan thereby puts forward a sequential approach for the consideration of future social, community and leisure facilities. Proposals will be considered on the basis of:
- a) the appropriateness of their proposed location in relation to their scale and intended catchment;
  - b) compatibility with nearby uses;
  - c) accessibility by a choice of means of transport; and
  - d) compatibility with other plan policies.
- 7.55 To support compatibility with nearby uses community premises it adds that such uses should be appropriate to their surroundings in terms of scale, character and mix of uses, and should not harm residential amenity, the environment, or result in adverse transport impacts. It points out some facilities within residential neighbourhoods can have an impact on residential amenity which may need to be carefully managed. For example it states that the hours of operation will need to be balanced against the needs of service providers and users of the premises against impacts on neighbouring residents.
- 7.56 The emerging local plan also highlights that proposals should promote active frontages and encourages linked trips and shared services wherever possible. They should satisfy this sequential approach in order to ensure that centres remain as the focus for not only retailing but also community uses, which ensures that the centre has adverse mix of uses and addresses any unmet local need.

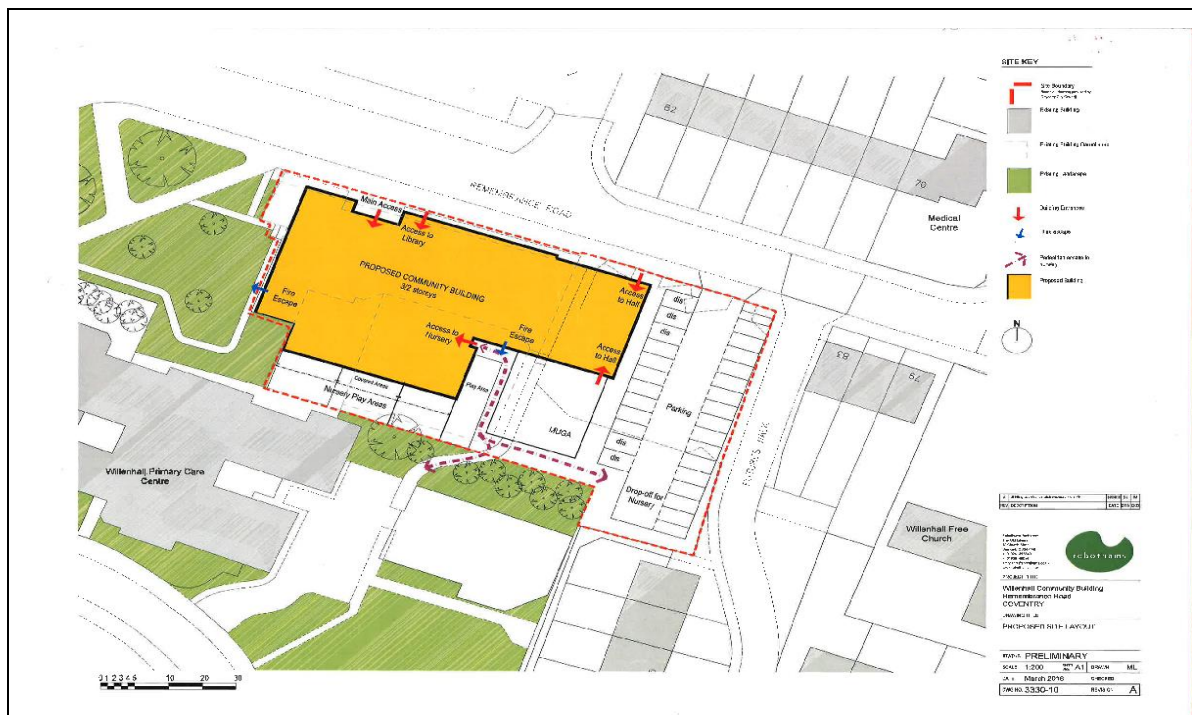
## **New Community Hub**

- 7.57 Since 2010 the City Council has seen a significant reduction in its resources as the Government attempts to balance the public sector budget. The City Council therefore decided to take a new approach to delivering and enabling services recognising that it is not possible to carry on as before. The new approach requires closer partnership working with statutory and voluntary agencies as well as the local community.
- 7.58 The City Council therefore introduced a new programme known as Connecting Communities. This focused on a redesign of City Council services so they are delivered together in one place in the communities and neighbourhoods where there is most need, and within the resources available. City Council services within the scope of this programme included libraries, youth centres and services, children's centres, play centres, community centres, public conveniences and adult education.
- 7.59 As part of Phase 1 of the Connecting Communities Programme the City Council put forward a number of proposals about potential changes to services to help save £1.2m in 2016/17. This included a proposal to end delivery of library services (and not renew the lease) from the current Willenhall Library facility and to have a more cost effective

community library located within the Hagard Community Space. This proposal was implemented in 2016 and appears to have been a successful move. It indicates that having services under one roof can be beneficial and supports the idea of integrating services within one building.

7.60 Phase 2 will explore opportunities that exist for co-production or for communities to take a new or increased role in the delivery of City Council services as part of the programme. This will help the City Council develop ideas on how to save a further £3.8m in 2017/18. A Transition Fund was established by the City Council to support those groups and organisations that need one-off funding to get new projects off the ground as part of the programme. The purpose of the fund is to provide some mitigation of the impact of City Council service reductions – not to replicate those services through grant but to kick start, empower and enable communities and partners to run services in new ways on a sustainable basis.

7.61 Against this background the Willenhall Community Forum has worked closely with the City Council to review the existing provision of social and community services in the area. As a consequence of this assessment a proposal has come forward to co-locate services into a new bespoke building in the heart of Willenhall. This assessment involves a feasibility study of the demolition of the Willenhall Education Employment and Training Centre (WEETC) and the Hagard Community Space. This will allow the construction of a new building, known as the Willenhall Community Hub, on the site of the latter in Remembrance Road.



Location of the proposed Community Hub in Remembrance Road

- 7.62 In addition to the voluntary sector activities run by the Community Forum, the City Council currently house their South Adult Education offices at the WEETC. The City Council also hold their training and education services, especially adults with learning difficulties, at the same venue. The feasibility study will assess relocating all these services into the new Community Hub. It also has the potential for incorporating the City Council's Children and Social Care offices, which are presently based in Stretton Avenue. It may also accommodate facilities for young people.
- 7.63 This could be achieved as the adjoining Chace Extended Learning Centre in Robin Hood Road has been closed and demolished. Willenhall Community Forum run the WEETC building on the site next door (which was previously Chace Primary School), which was brought back into use by the community on a 30 year lease. However the building is now getting old and is proving costly to upkeep and manage. The Social Care office of the City Council also adjoins this land and could be made available for disposal. All this land is owned by the City Council. If the Community Hub goes ahead these sites would become surplus to requirements and could collectively be re-used as a windfall opportunity for residential development. The sale of the land would bring in capital receipt monies to the City Council that could contribute to funding the new purpose built centre to accommodate all these community services and facilities.
- 7.64 However the initial feasibility work has indicated that even if all the money raised from the disposal of this redundant land were to be ring fenced to funding the proposed Community Hub, there would still be significant shortfall to cover the full cost of constructing the building. The Willenhall Community Forum, who would build and manage the Community Hub, would therefore need to maximise any Community Infrastructure Levy and/or Section 106 monies raised by the City Council in the neighbourhood area, and secure external grant funding to pay for the new building.



Willenhall Community Hub - Concept Image 1 (View from Shopping Area)



*Willenhall Community Hub - Concept Image 2 (Top View)*

7.65 As part of the initial feasibility work the City Council commissioned architectural drawings in 2016 to look at an indicative layout and design concept for the proposed Community Hub. This feasibility work is on-going.



*Willenhall Community Hub - Concept Image 3 (Nursery)*

7.66 The intention behind the proposal is not only to co-locate services, but also to move away from ‘silo’ working and create a true cohesion in partnership working. Next to the Hagard site there is also the medical centre and work needs to take place to take a more joined up approach to the services that are provided for the residents of Willenhall that would benefit each organisation e.g. family parenting, older people, young teenage mums as well as all the medical services that are provided. It could offer joined up services in one location in a more holistic manner. This proposal will enhance the

partnership working that is already taking place and further cement a closer working relationship between service providers. It also delivers the aims of the City Council's Connecting Communities Programme.

- 7.67 The new Community Hub would also give the Willenhall precinct a much needed lift. It adjoins the Village Green, which is proposed as a Local Green Space (see Policy 10). It would therefore help create a focal point that would bring the people together and support the neighbourhood plan's vision of improved community cohesion and more social interaction.

#### Policy 5 – Willenhall Community Hub

1. A Community Hub will be built on the site of the Hagard Community Space in Remembrance Road. This will incorporate a range of integrated community services delivered by statutory bodies and the voluntary sector.

The location of the Community Hub is shown on Proposals Map 1.

2. Subject to the community hub meeting all the required provision, the following sites will be surplus to requirements and redeveloped for residential use:

- a) the Extended Learning Centre in Robin Hood Road;
- b) the Willenhall Education, Employment and Training Centre in Robin Hood Road; and
- c) Children and Social Care offices in Stretton Avenue.

The boundaries of the above sites is shown on Proposals Map 2.

## **Education**

- 7.77 The local community has expressed concerns about the local primary schools being full and the pressure for places. A family may have children attending different schools. Aside from splitting up siblings, the logistics of getting them to school on time each morning can be very problematic. Given that a further 323 additional dwellings could be constructed over the plan period with a resulting population increase of about 2,200, there are understandable community fears about the capacity of local schools to cope.
- 7.78 The National Planning Policy Framework states that the Government attaches great importance to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places are available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. It adds that local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. They should:
- give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools; and
  - work with schools promoters to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted.

- 7.79 In order to support sustainable development the emerging local plan recognises the importance of maintaining an adequate and appropriate supply of education provision. It adds that opportunities should be taken to ensure schools are located in sustainable locations that complement neighbouring uses. They should be within easy access of local communities as well as offering opportunities to generate linked trips by being located close to other social and community provisions and local retail and service offers as well as being easily accessible by a range of transport options. An assessment of overall educational provision has therefore been addressed as part of the preparation of the emerging local plan.
- 7.80 The emerging local plan also suggests that, where possible, schools and their grounds should be utilised for other community provisions such as social, cultural, leisure and indoor sports facilities. This will help to develop a schools position at the centre of the community with significant benefits to local residents. It can also help ensure the effective use of resources and help minimise travel distances for users.

#### Policy 6 – Education

Residential development will be supported if it creates additional primary school provision or the improvement of existing facilities within the neighbourhood area.

#### Objective 5: To improve health and well-being

- 7.81 People in Coventry experience high levels of health inequality, with those in the most deprived areas suffering more ill health and dying younger. Men in the most affluent areas will live an average of 10 years longer than those in the most deprived. The evidence gathered demonstrated that Willenhall is significantly worse than the national average for a whole host of health indicators, and this was a concern expressed during the public consultation.
- 7.82 Planning Practice Guidance states that local planning authorities should ensure that health and wellbeing, and health infrastructure are considered in neighbourhood plans and in planning decision making. It adds that public health organisations, health service organisations, commissioners and providers, and local communities should work effectively with local planning authorities in order to promote healthy communities and support appropriate health infrastructure.
- 7.83 The emerging local plan states that plans to help Coventry develop and grow must also help the people of the city to enjoy happy, active lifestyles in healthy environments. The City Council has a key aim of improving the health and wellbeing of all people living in Coventry and this is affected by several areas of the emerging local plan, from housing to public realm and jobs to transport.

- 7.84 The emerging local plan states that the City Council has pledged to reduce health inequalities. It adds that one of the challenges the City Council faces in promoting healthy eating is the availability of foods high in fat, salt and sugar in local neighbourhoods, including the prevalence of hot food takeaways in some areas.
- 7.85 Coventry is one of seven cities in the UK to become a Marmot City – working to improve the health of all residents and reduce any health inequalities. By being a Marmot City and through the emerging local plan Coventry will:
- a) improve active travel – better networks for walking and cycling
  - b) cutting air and noise pollution through fewer car journeys and reducing the speed of vehicles
  - c) improve good quality open and green spaces – quality sports pitches and parks
  - d) reduce the fear of crime in open areas
  - e) provide good, accessible play spaces
  - f) improve the quality of food in local areas – reducing obesity and encouraging people to eat fruit and vegetables
  - g) protect and improve allotments and managing the number and location of takeaways
  - h) improve the energy efficiency of housing – reducing fuel poverty to help a growing number of people over the age of 65
  - i) providing quality, affordable housing designed to tackle climate change.
- 7.86 To reduce health inequalities the City Council will therefore look at the issues that affect wellbeing such as transport, housing, employment, income, environment and community. These conditions vary drastically across the city. However the impacts of development on the health and wellbeing of local people will be assessed by the City Council at the planning application stage.
- 7.87 The emerging local plan adds that the health of Coventry people is a key asset for our economy but the percentage of working days lost to sickness absence in Coventry is worse than the rest of England. Healthier people lead to a more productive workforce and employment can take families out of poverty. The barriers to employment include transport, low skills, childcare and poor health which can be tackled by improving the built environment and increasing communities and social value.
- 7.88 In February 2016 it was announced that ten new housing developments in England are to be built under an NHS scheme with healthy living in mind. Clinicians, designers and technology experts will work together to create the "healthy new towns". Plans include homes with virtual access to GP services, safe green spaces to play and fast-food-free zones around schools. The aim is to help town planners 'design out' the factors that promote obesity and 'design in' health and wellbeing.
- 7.89 Although Willenhall is not one of the areas included in this new initiative, it is felt important that the principles of embedding health in planning decision making is crucial if the dire health problems in Willenhall are to be successfully addressed.



## Policy 7 - Health and Well-being

1. A proposal for development will be supported if it promotes the health and well-being of the local community.
2. Where appropriate a proposal for development should have regard to the need to:
  - a) lower air and noise pollution by encouraging fewer car journeys and reduce the speed of vehicles travelling in and through the area;
  - b) provide accessible leisure and sports facilities;
  - c) provide informal green spaces including areas suitable for dog walking;
  - d) provide opportunities to grow fresh fruit and vegetables, and protect allotments and communal gardens;
  - e) limit the number and location of takeaways in the area, and create fast-food free zones around schools;
  - f) help people live independently, especially older people;
  - g) enable children to have safe and accessible places to play with friends and to safely walk or cycle to school; and
  - h) encourage digitally enabled local health services that share physical infrastructure and staff with schools and community groups.

## Objective 6: To make it easier for people to travel inside and outside the area

- 7.90 The National Planning Policy Framework states that transport policies have an important role to play in facilitating sustainable development but also in contributing to wider sustainability and health objectives. It states that encouragement should be given to solutions which support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and reduce congestion.
- 7.91 The Framework adds that plans should protect and exploit opportunities for the use of sustainable transport modes. Therefore developments should be located and designed where practical to:
- give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements, and have access to high quality public transport facilities;
  - create safe and secure layouts which minimise conflicts between traffic and cyclists or pedestrians, avoiding street clutter and where appropriate establishing home zones; and
  - consider the needs of people with disabilities by all modes of transport.
- 7.92 One of the objectives in the emerging local plan is to maintain and enhance an accessible transport network. This will be achieved by:
- a) providing a transport network that enhances the city's accessibility, efficiency, safety and sustainability;
  - b) continuing to improve links with the city centre and better connection to green spaces within Coventry; and

c) increasing the range of opportunities for people to access arts and culture, sports and leisure, music and events, and other activities.

- 7.93 These various measures are all pertinent to Willenhall. Whilst steps are being taken to provide as many local services and facilities within the area, there has been some centralisation meaning the some organisations that provide services in the area are now based in the city centre. Whilst they remain accessible to some by public transport, others may experience difficulty. Green spaces are reasonably accessible with the Sowe Valley and Willenhall Wood nearby. However many social and leisure facilities require a trip outside the area, as does a trip to a retail superstore. For example the superstore available at the Airport Retail Park may not be accessible to all within the neighbourhood area.
- 7.94 However perhaps the biggest transport issue within Willenhall is accessibility to jobs. By its nature Willenhall is primarily a residential housing estate and there are very few employment opportunities within the neighbourhood area. The emerging local plan states that the existing bus network primarily follows the radial network of roads across the city, and whilst this supports good access to the city centre, it does not necessarily support the demand for orbital trips such as those between residential and edge of town employment sites. It says that more recently operators have introduced orbital services which have helped to address this issue.
- 7.95 The levels of unemployment within Willenhall are unacceptably high and yet there are potential job opportunities at nearby locations such as the Binley Industrial Estate, Coventry Airport, Middlemarch Estate, Jaguar Land Rover, Seven Stars Industrial Estate, former Peugeot site, etc. It is clearly important to ensure that these are accessible to the local population, especially young people. Similarly links need to be forged with these potential employers to ensure that local training opportunities are providing the unemployed to with the relevant skills to capitalise on these opportunities.
- 7.96 Policy JE7 in the emerging local plan states that planning applications for new employment development (including changes of use and the expansion of existing operations) will be required to demonstrate how job opportunities arising from the proposed development will be made accessible to the city's residents, particularly those in the most deprived areas and priority groups.
- 7.97 If these issues are to be addressed there needs to be a inter-agency approach that involves the City Council, public transport providers, local schools and developers to develop a long term sustainable strategy for improvements to the highway network and the management of traffic in and around Willenhall.

## Policy 8 – Transport

Proposals for improvements to the highway network and the management of traffic in and around Willenhall will be supported if they:

- a) provide better access to and increased use of public transport to the city centre and surrounding employment opportunities;
- b) improve links within the existing built-up area for walking, cycling and bus provision especially to the Local Centre and Important Open Spaces;
- c) ensure through vehicular traffic keeps to appropriate routes; or
- d) provide 'safer routes to schools' schemes.

## Rail Station

- 7.98 The 'Coventry Rail Story – A Rail Investment Strategy for Coventry' (September 2013) states that the construction of HS2 will release capacity on the West Coast Mainline. This enables consideration of hitherto non-feasible options such as new stations on the West Coast Main Line. The Strategy says that a priority for assessment is the Willenhall/Binley area to the east of Coventry, close to 2 key development sites at Coventry and Warwickshire Gateway (15,000 jobs), and London Road gateway, Stoke Aldermoor Strategic Regeneration Area, and Coventry Airport.
- 7.99 The emerging local plan states that the West Coast Main Line provides excellent rail links between Coventry, London and Birmingham. Building on this the City Council has developed a rail investment strategy that sets out a case to radically improve rail services that support the economic travel to work area.
- 7.100 It states that existing stations at Tile Hill and Canley predominantly cater for local rail services between Coventry and Birmingham. However it points out that additional local rail stations on the West Coast Main Line to the east of the city serving Willenhall and Binley would allow some of the strong local rail service demand to be met and support the regeneration and economic growth of this part of the city. It adds that this will need to be considered in the context of wider strategic rail industry plans which plan for capacity on the busy West Coast Main Line. The emerging local plan adds that options are also being explored for a new station in the south of the city to support new development growth. These stations are also identified in the West Midlands Strategic Plan.
- 7.101 Policy AC6 then states that "Proposals for additional local railway stations on the east-west and north/south rail corridor within Coventry will be supported where they are proven to be viable, support growth objectives and are consistent with the relevant national, regional or local rail strategies". It adds that further details are set out in the Coventry Connected SPD and Coventry Rail Investment Strategy.
- 7.102 A local station would significantly increase the accessibility of local employment opportunities to the residents of Willenhall and would be widely welcomed. However the location and design of the eventual site needs to meet certain criteria.

### Policy 9 – Rail Station

The development of a local rail station on the West Coast Main Line will be supported providing that it:

- a) meets the needs of Willenhall residents;
- b) does not generate unacceptable noise, fumes, smell or other disturbance to nearby properties;
- c) does not lead to traffic congestion or adversely affect traffic flows on the adjoining roads; and
- d) does not cause parking problems for adjoining residential and non-residential uses.

### Objective 7: To protect and improve important green spaces

- 7.103 One of the principal aims of the neighbourhood plan is also to address the physical and mental health needs of the local community, and support community well-being. The provision of a range of formal and informal green spaces is clearly fundamental to meeting this need. Furthermore the nature and layout of Willenhall lends itself to a strategic approach to its green spaces embracing type, quality and accessibility utilising a network of footpaths in and around the estate.
- 7.104 The Framework explains that access to high quality green spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. It adds that existing green space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:
- an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
  - the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
  - the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.
- 7.105 There are two substantial green spaces within the neighbourhood area. The first is the Sowe Valley, which is a continuous riverside green space that stretches from the north of Coventry to the south. It is one of several strategic green wedges that are extensive and continuous tracts of open land that extend through the built-up area of the city, to and from the countryside beyond. They have particular value in environmental quality within the urban areas, assisting nature conservation and providing people with access to the open countryside around the city by walking and cycling. Towards its southern end the Sowe Valley passes along the northern edge of the Willenhall Neighbourhood Area and thereby provides a valuable resource for the local community.
- 7.106 In the adopted local plan the Sowe Valley is designated as Green Belt. However the emerging local plan argues that they do not fulfil the purposes of Green Belt. It is

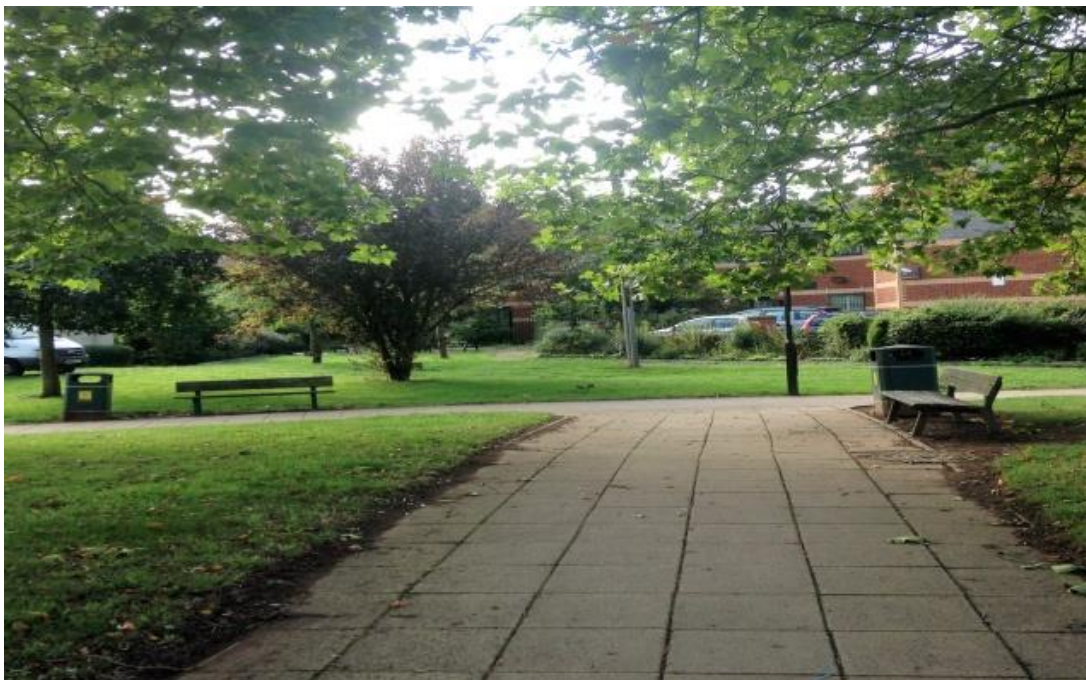
therefore proposed to remove the Sowe Valley from the Green Belt and re-designate it as Local Green Space.

7.107 The second significant open space is Willenhall Wood, which is a Local Nature Reserve situated on the southern side of the neighbourhood area.

7.108 In between these substantial open spaces the housing estate has been constructed at a relatively high density. However it incorporates smaller open spaces that break up the urban fabric and provide valuable green lungs. In addition these green spaces provide visual amenity in an otherwise built up area, as well as opportunities for social interaction for all age groups. They are thereby valued by the local community and worthy of retention.

7.109 The National Planning Policy Framework introduces the concept of Local Green Spaces. Through the preparation of neighbourhood plans the local community are invited to identify for special protection green areas of particular importance to them. By designating land as Local Green Space new development is ruled out other than in very special circumstances. It adds that Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or reviewed, and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period. The Framework points out that the designation will not be appropriate for most open spaces. Any such designation:

- must be reasonably close to the community it serves;
- is demonstrably special to the local community in terms of, for example, its beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
- should not be an extensive tract of land.



*Willenhall Village Green*

- 7.110 A site that satisfies these criteria is The Village Green, which is located at the centre of the estate at the junction of Robin Hood Road and Stretton Avenue. In 2003 John Russell, then Chairman of the Willenhall Local History Group, led a scheme to turn this piece of wasteland into a Village Green. The local community worked together to create a beautiful amenity out of this wilderness. The Green was officially opened in 2005. Since then it has been the focus of community and social events, such as the Remembrance Day Service. It provides a pleasant place for people to sit and relax. Sadly John Russell died in 2011 but the green space is a fitting legacy for a person totally dedicated to the Willenhall community.
- 7.111 The Village Green:
- is close to the community it serves being located within the Local Centre where most of the social, community and retail facilities are located, and adjoins the site of the proposed community hub;
  - is demonstrably special to the local community because it is an attractive landscaped area comprising mature trees, footpaths and seating, offers some tranquillity in an otherwise built-up area, provides an opportunity for social interaction at the heart of the neighbourhood, and is the venue for various social and community events and activities; and
  - it is a small tract of land.
- 7.112 This area is therefore designated as a Local Green Space and protected accordingly. In view of its prominent location at the heart of the estate it is also important that this site is maintained to a high standard.

#### Policy 10 – Willenhall Village Green

1. The Village Green located at the junction of Robin Hood Road and Stretton Avenue is designated as a Local Green Space.
2. The development of this Local Green Space should not be permitted other than in very special circumstances.
3. A proposal that enhances the recreational, landscape or biodiversity value of the site will be supported.

The boundary of the Local Green Space is shown on Proposals Map 1.

- 7.113 Whilst not eligible for designation as a Local Green Space, there are other important open spaces in and adjoining the built-up area that warrant protection.
- 7.114 On the periphery it includes:
- Middle Ride – This public open space curves round the outer edge of the Willenhall Wood Estate with Willenhall Wood as its backcloth. Its name recalls the history of the

area when the nobility living at Coombe, who owned all the land, would lead hunting parties in the woods. This is an area that includes an equipped play area for children in a natural green space which leads into the woods behind. The hut at Middle Ride, a valuable community resource, was originally the site office for George Wimpey and Co, the builders of the Willenhall Wood Estate. After the builders had left, the hut was donated to the people of Willenhall Wood.

- The Brookstray – This is an area of public open space between the Willenhall Estate and the River Sowe, directly overlooked by the Closes leading off Robin Hood Road. It forms part of the Sowe Valley and therefore currently has Green Belt status, though the new Local Plan proposes to redefine the whole green wedge as Local Urban Green Space. It comprises an expansive area of grassland. There has been a children’s play area in this location since the estate was first built. In 2010 this was remodelled on the theme of a medieval castle. The Brookstray is used for community events and recreational activities.

7.115 Within the built-up area there are some significant areas of grassed public open space. This includes:

- Arnhem Corner – This purpose built public open space was created as part of the Woodlands self-build housing project in 1950.
- The Canyon in Wroxhall Drive
- Area to the rear of Laneside and Ridgethorpe that includes a footpath linking St James Lane and Middle Ride.



*Middle Ride Play Area*

7.116 To a degree these could be regarded as featureless areas of grass, but it has to be remembered that the surrounding housing often has no garden. These areas therefore provide valuable opportunities for local children to play outdoors. They also

enable physical exercise, encourage social interaction, and provide areas for dog walking. In addition they provide a landscape function for the setting for high rise development and improve visual amenity.

- 7.117 There are also small incidental open spaces, school grounds and private gardens distributed around the estate.
- 7.118 All of these green spaces are highly regarded by the local community, who want to see them protected from development. Furthermore there are also concerns amongst the local community about the quality of their management as well as issues about crime and anti-social behaviour. The local community would like to see their role as a recreational, landscape and wildlife resource enhanced.
- 7.119 Policy GE2 in the emerging Local Plan states that *“Development involving the loss of green space that is of value for amenity, recreational, outdoor sports and/or community use will not be permitted”*. The only exception to this policy is where an assessment indicates there is no longer a demand, a deficiency would not be created, or the loss would be replaced with the provision of something of an equal or better value. Policy GE3 seeks to protect sites that are important for biodiversity, geology, landscape or archaeology. This includes Local Nature Reserves and Ancient Woodlands. Biodiversity will be encouraged particularly in areas of deficiency, in areas of development and along wildlife corridors.



*The Canyon in Wroxhall Drive*





*Public open space at Arnhem Corner*

- 7.120 As well as valuing these areas on an individual basis green spaces also have a collective value. The sum of these green spaces can be greater than the sum of the individual parts. Planning Practice Guidance states that planning should promote a network of green spaces and public places. Development should promote public spaces and routes that are attractive, accessible, safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all users – including families, disabled people and elderly people. It adds that a system of open and green spaces that respect natural features and are easily accessible can be a valuable local resource and helps create successful places. A high quality landscape, including trees and semi-natural habitats where appropriate, makes an important contribution to the quality of an area.
- 7.121 The term green infrastructure refers to a strategic network of green spaces, such as woodlands, parks, amenity landscaping, ponds and rivers, and the links between them. The city’s Green Infrastructure Study outlines a vision for a well managed and well connected, multi-functional green space, delivering a wide range of benefits to those living, working and visiting the city, and improving the attractiveness of the city as a whole.
- 7.122 The emerging local plan adds that local networks of high quality and well managed open spaces help to create urban environments that are attractive, clean and safe, and can play a major part in improving people’s sense of wellbeing. It goes onto to say that the development and maintenance, to a high standard, of a well-connected and multi-functional green infrastructure network, is essential. The emerging local plan states that part of the challenge will be to identify and secure funding to ensure that the investment and improvements made to the city’s green infrastructure have a lasting impact and generate optimum value for public and private money.

- 7.123 Green infrastructure will also have an important role to play in helping the city adapt to climate change. This will include moderating urban temperatures, storing excess rainfall, increasing surface porosity to ease drainage, providing shade via tree canopies, and providing green oases in urban areas. It notes that the Sowe Valley corridor increases the sustainability credentials of the city, promoting health and wellbeing, biodiversity and resilience to climate change.
- 7.124 Policy GE1 in the emerging local plan states that new development proposals should make provision for green infrastructure to ensure that such development is integrated into the landscape and contributes to improvements in connectivity and public access, biodiversity, landscape conservation, design, archaeology and recreation. This includes the creation of new habitats wherever possible to assist with species movement, to provide a source of locally grown food through allotments and community gardens, to provide sustainable and active travel routes for people, to provide shade and counteract the urban heat island effect, and to assist in improving public health and wellbeing. It adds that a key element of the city's approach to green infrastructure will be the continued development of a network of green spaces, water bodies, paths and cycle ways, with priority given to those parts of the city where there is an identified deficiency of green space.
- 7.125 Willenhall is blessed with substantial green space on the periphery of the estate. However the quality and accessibility of these is of some concern to the local community. Within the estate there are a few small green spaces, which are relatively isolated. Where possible measures to improve the network of green spaces will be encouraged as part of any new development.

#### Policy 11 – Important Open Spaces

1. The following are designated as Important Open Spaces:

- a) Middle Ride;
- b) The Brookstray;
- c) Arnhem Corner;
- d) The Canyon in Wroxhall Drive; and
- e) Area to the rear of Laneside and Ridgethorpe.

2. A proposal for development on an important open space will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that:

- a) it would support the existing function or improve the overall quality of the open space; or
- b) the loss is in accordance with the criteria listed in Policy GE2 in the emerging Coventry Local Plan 2011.

3. A proposal for development should protect and contribute to the network of all open spaces in the area.

## 8. Implementation, Monitoring and Review

### Assessing Planning Applications

- 8.77 Once made the Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the overall development plan for the area, and its policies will be a major consideration when the City Council is assessing planning applications.
- 8.78 Section 142 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 came into force on 1 October 2016. At the request of a neighbourhood forum, this provision requires a local planning authority to notify the group of any relevant planning applications in their neighbourhood area.
- 8.79 The Willenhall Community Forum will therefore assess and, if appropriate, comment on planning applications being determined by the City Council. In particular the Forum will consider whether the proposals conform or conflict with the policies in the neighbourhood plan.

### Implementation

- 8.80 The neighbourhood plan contains a number of proposals for Willenhall over the plan period. Their successful implement will depend on effective partnership working and securing funding from a variety of sources. Partnership working will be a fundamental requirement in the successful implementation of the neighbourhood plan.
- 8.81 Funding will be sought from developers through a combination of S106 Agreements and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for infrastructure and local facilities that is linked to new development. In April 2013 the Government brought into force legislation that requires local planning authorities operating the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to pass on 25% of the money raised from new development within a neighbourhood plan area to the local community itself. The community can then decide how the money is spent. This will only apply once the City Council has adopted a CIL charging schedule and the Willenhall Neighbourhood Plan has successfully been through a local referendum and brought into force.
- 8.82 The Willenhall Community Forum and its partners still continue to apply for external grant funding. It will also seek to influence other budget decisions by the City Council and other key stakeholders on matters such as housing, open space and recreation, economic development and training, community facilities and transport.

### Monitoring

- 8.83 In conjunction with the Willenhall Stakeholders Group, the Willenhall Community Forum will monitor and, if appropriate, undertake a review of the neighbourhood plan.

8.84 An annual monitoring report will therefore be prepared and considered by the Forum.

This will cover:

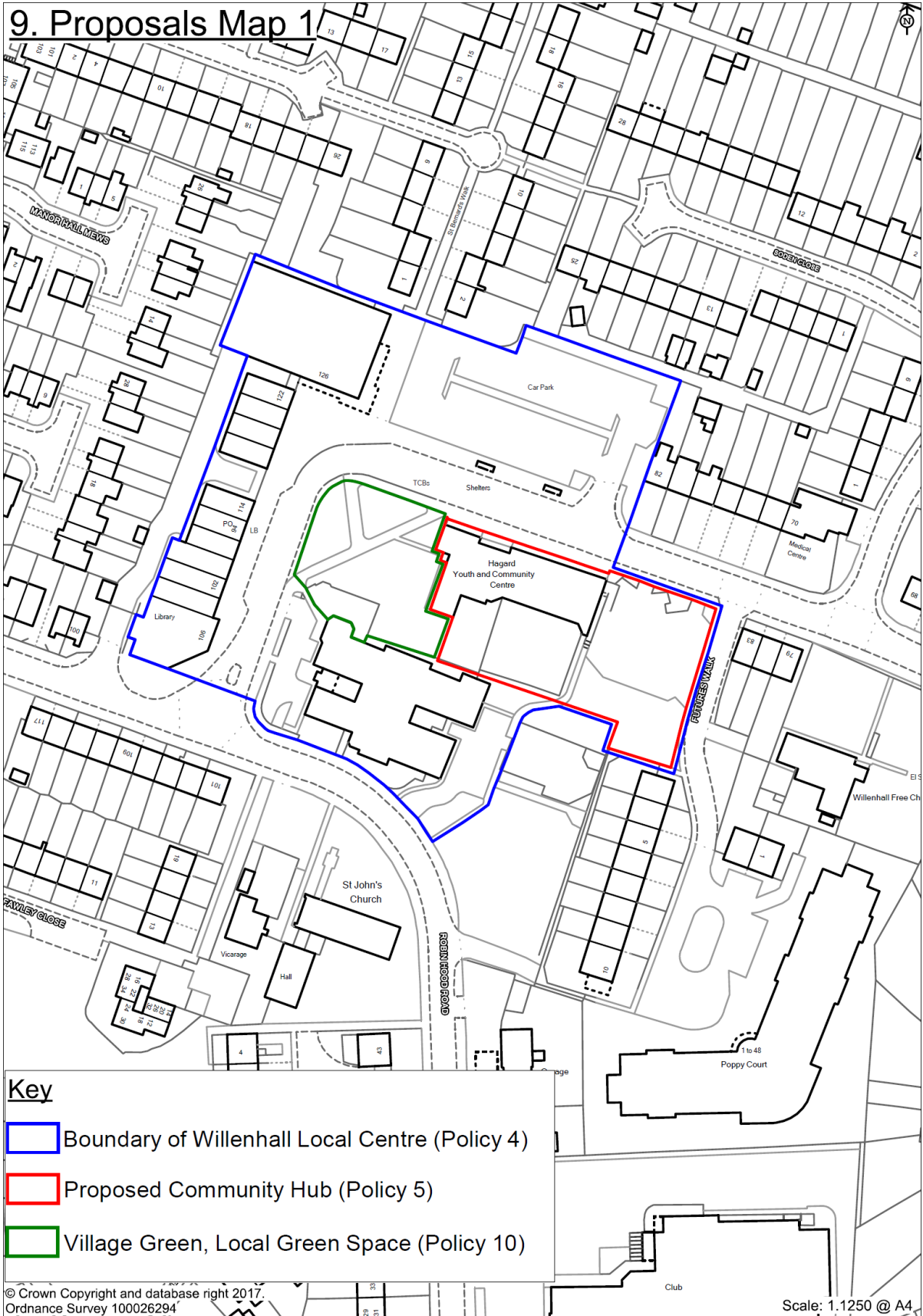
- the effectiveness of the policies in the neighbourhood plan when assessing and determining planning applications;
- the success or otherwise of implementing the proposals in the neighbourhood plan;
- any changes in national planning policy that could supersede the policies in the neighbourhood plan;
- the latest statistical information such as meeting the housing requirement across the city or the need for more affordable homes;
- the implications of the emerging local plan being prepared by Coventry City Council; and
- any changing circumstances within the village

8.85 As the local planning authority, the views of the City Council will be sought on these matters.

8.86 The annual monitoring report could thereby conclude that a partial or comprehensive review of the neighbourhood plan is necessary and trigger the process accordingly.

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# 9. Proposals Maps



## 9. Proposals Map 2

