

OTTERPOOL PARK GARDEN TOWN

Masterplan Appraisal: Summary Report

January 2018



Statement of Purpose

Savills have been employed by Shepway District Council to check the capacity of the draft Arcadis/Farrells masterplan for Otterpool Park Garden Town, understand constraints and opportunities and make suggestions for enhancing the masterplan proposals.

1. Introduction

Shepway District Council appointed Savills to undertake a review of a draft masterplan for Otterpool Park, in relation to place-making, masterplanning and viability matters. In particular this is to ensure that the masterplan maximises opportunities to create an attractive, vibrant and successful new town as well as delivering an appropriate number of new homes.

The appraisal process included the following:

- Review of site constraints using Savills GIS database. This included flood risk, landscape, nature conservation and heritage designations.

- Site visit to gain a greater understanding of the opportunities and constraints offered by the site, especially relating to its sloping topography and views from the Kent Downs AONB.
- Testing of Farrells masterplan areas to ensure the plan areas are correctly labelled and that the proposed housing numbers can be achieved based on the areas and densities set out.
- Review of the following drawings and documents to highlight any areas for improvement in terms

of placemaking and opportunities for increasing housing numbers

The review included the preparation of two alternative sketch options to the masterplan which allow for potential improvements to the layout in terms of placemaking, sustainability and development value.



2. Capacity Checks

Measurement Check

Our check of the various land use areas shown by Farrells on their masterplan showed that there were only negligible inconsistencies, which would not make a notable difference to overall housing numbers. There appeared to be a shortfall of 5.76ha in the stated green infrastructure space compared to that measured and checks will need to be made as the scheme progresses to ensure that this inconsistency is resolved.

Capacity Check

In its original expression of interest, Shepway District Council had identified an aspiration for up to 12,000 homes across the site. The Farrells masterplan stated that 7,294 residential dwellings (Use Class A3) would be provided by their masterplan, together with 706 'extra care' units, giving a total of 8,000 dwellings.

Using the measured areas for the residential parcels together with the mixed-use areas that also included residential units, Savills calculated the likely capacity of the masterplan. Based on past experience, we assumed that 80% of the residential parcels would be developable, ensuring that the remaining 20% would be available for other elements that need to be located within the parcel, such as Sustainable Drainage Features or unexpected constraints, relating to

ecology or levels for example. This approach differs from that taken by Farrells, who have allowed for such uses within the open space immediately surrounding each housing parcel.

Based on the assumption that the Farrells parcels would be 80% developable, Savills calculated that a total of 6,913 units could be delivered on the site. Using the Farrells assumption of the parcels being 100% developable, this resulted in an increase of units to 8,580.

Based on their more cautious approach to development within the site, Savills tested ways that the Farrells masterplan could deliver more homes whilst still assuming that parcels could only be 80% developable. This included the identification of a number of green infrastructure parcels that could be delivered for housing as well as increasing the density of the lowest density parcels from 15-25 dwellings per hectare (dph) to 30 dwellings per hectare.

By incorporating these changes, a further 929 homes could be provided, taking the total to 8,172. This provides satisfaction that even if the housing parcels are 80% developable, there are still means of increasing the housing numbers within the site to match the 8,000 proposed by Farrells.

To understand the optimum capacity for the site Savills also looked at the potential for including additional land parcels that are outside

of the current masterplan boundary. This included a review of areas previously covered by the AECOM (2017) study. The approach included a site visit, including driving roads and walking footpaths in the area, to review the visibility of the wider areas, including from the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This showed there could be the potential to develop additional land on the southern and western sides of the current masterplan. Whilst such development could be seen in distant views from the AONB, the early planting of new woodland belts could integrate wider development areas within the wider landscape. If all of these additional parcels could be delivered, there is the potential that they could accommodate over 3,500 additional units, giving a total of approximately 11,500 homes. This is judged to be a best-case scenario however, as it is likely that physical constraints will emerge that ultimately reduce this number. The other main constraint to development will be the desire of the current land-owners to progress these changes, especially if parcels are in multiple ownership.





3. Development Appraisal

Development Appraisal of Farrells Masterplan Options

In analysing the viability of the project, Savills has carried out residual development calculations, assessing the potential value of the proposed residential dwellings, at current value levels; and assuming the commercial elements comprise serviced parcels giving flexibility to the potential occupiers and serviced sheltered apartment and assisted living parcels. It is assumed that some of the commercial areas will be occupied by retail, hotel and leisure uses. In order to demonstrate viability, an initial assessment of potential infrastructure costs was provided to us by Arcadis which was incorporated in our modelling; and in addition we have made allowances for marketing, professional fees, finance and a profit return taking into account the infrastructure expenditure, the residue being a surplus land value including acquisition costs.

The appraisal modelling takes into account very wide assumptions but provides a basis for updating as more detail is known and market forces and costs change.

It is assumed that infrastructure will be provided by the promoters who will then offer serviced parcels; we envisage up to four developers developing at any one time, which can be in different locations and indeed in different styles anticipating on average approximately 185 dwellings per annum, taking into account high demand and recessionary periods. With the rise in factory

built housing it is possible that more houses per annum can be constructed but the market housing will only be geared towards market demand at the time.

Market Demand

Currently the house market and development market are reasonably buoyant. The new homes market has been assisted by the government's Help to Buy mechanism and the house price growth statistics show a reasonable measure of growth in the south east and the prospects of further house price growth of about 11.5% over five years.

In terms of the local market, Ashford and Folkestone areas have shown growth in house prices in the past three years or so and the Finberry scheme on the eastern edge of Ashford has reflected some record breaking prices per sq ft, aided by a high standard of landscaping and the quality of design. The area has been helped by the facility of the High Speed train service.

The surrounding countryside, coastal facilities and train service will encourage demand but it is imperative that first impressions in particular are to a high landscape standard; this can be well illustrated by the Kings Hill development near Maidstone where a high standard of landscaping and open space management has maintained a high tone of values and development land which is sought after by most national and regional housebuilders.

Whilst there is some demand for apartments, particularly in the centre of the towns, the majority of demand for a location such as Otterpool Park be family housing which in turn will require shopping, leisure and good schooling facilities. There will be a muted demand for one and two bedroom flats and the possibility of some private rented stock, but we envisage that many of the apartment schemes will be more aligned to sheltered housing and extra care as the area will attract families, single persons to a degree, and retirees.

In terms of commercial uses, the south east office market is currently quite buoyant, although the majority of deals are less than 20,000 sq ft, with a noticeable drop in corporate activity being due to continued uncertainty around Brexit. Savills research shows that tech occupiers account for up to 27% of new leasing activity across the region and they believe that the life sciences sector will see significant take-up as demand remains strong.

The serviced office sector has also seen significant growth. A rise in rental values for light industrial premises is also self-evident due to a need for modern efficient stock and a lack of supply. We envisage that there should be flexibility in the size of commercial parcels to allow for a range of occupiers, but the construction will be occupier demand led rather than speculative.

4. Placemaking Appraisal

Savills appraised the Farrells masterplan according to recognised guidance in placemaking and the aspirations of garden cities. In particular, the settlement should deliver an attractive, socially integrated, viable and sustainable place that reflects its Kentish setting and has a distinct sense of place. It should be recognisable as a garden town combining 'the best of town and country' and provide a legible and logical structure to both residents and visitors. Sustainable living is essential, with homes set within easy commuting distance of employment, and cultural, recreational and shopping facilities. Walking, cycling and public transport should be preferable to car use.

The masterplan takes a constraint-led approach and is structured according to the retention of a series of large open spaces and green corridors. This seeks to minimise visual impact and effects on key wildlife habitats, the setting of listed buildings, the Sandling Park Registered Park and Garden and the Kent Downs AONB. The amenity

of existing residents at Barrowhill, Newingreen, Westenhanger and Lympe are also respected with green buffers around these rural settlements.

Whilst it is important that these environmental impacts are minimised, this respect for existing features could mean that the masterplan has missed the opportunity to create a stronger vision and structure and maximise opportunities to create a more sustainable settlement in the long term.

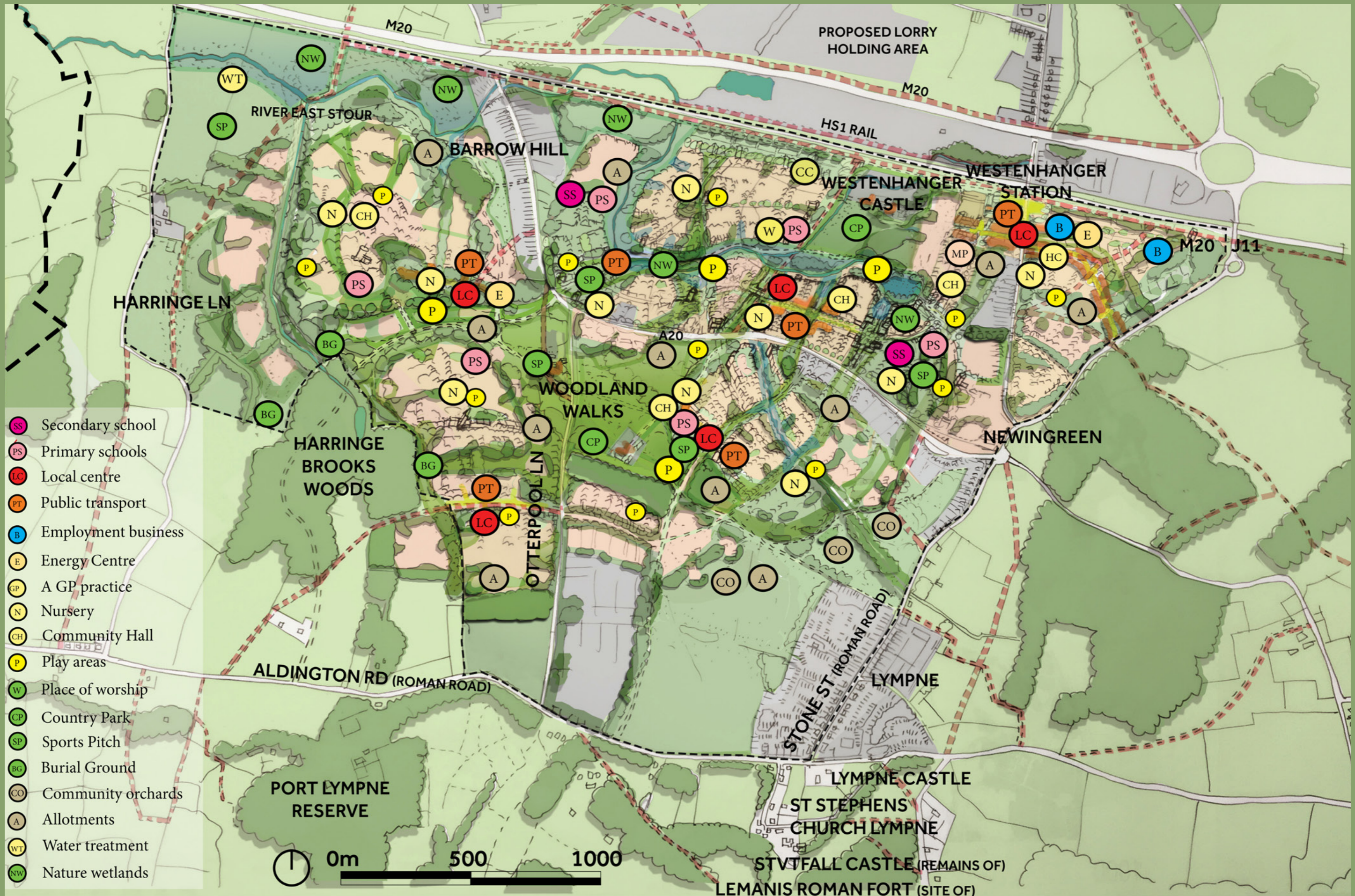
Opportunities for enhancements include:

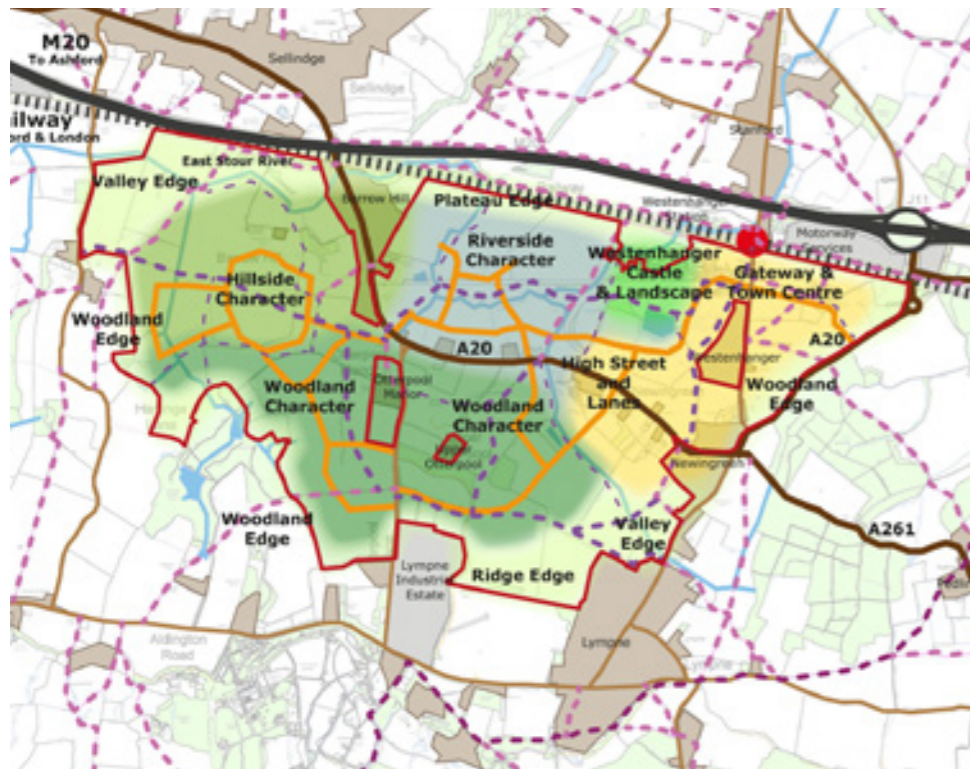
- Densities could be increased to a minimum of 30 dwellings per hectare (net).
- Additional dwellings could be provided around the existing hamlets of Newingreen, Barrowhill and

Westenhanger by reducing/eliminating proposed GI buffers.

- Consideration should be given to including additional land parcels outside of the current application boundary. The inclusion of properties on Stone Street, Westenhanger should be considered from the outset as they are currently constraining the street layout in the proposed town centre.
- The current position of the railway station is not accessible to the southern and western parts of the proposed town. This has had a resultant impact on the associated location for the town centre and is likely to result in a town structure that is not as conducive to walking and cycling as it should be. A much more logical and sustainable solution would be to relocate the town







- Railway and Station
- Motorway (M20)
- A road (A20 / A261)
- Existing Primary Road Network
- Proposed Primary Road Network
- Existing Public Right of Way
- Saxon Shore Way
- Proposed Primary Foot and Cycle paths
- Proposed Foot and Cycle paths

5 | Extracts from Otterpool Park draft Framework Masterplan Report: Access and Movement - All Routes (bottom) + Green Infrastructure (top)

centre and railway station to the west of Westenhanger Castle, with a high street running in a north-south direction to also extend the 'centre' of the town further south.

- The A20 currently appears to create a physical barrier through the middle of the proposed town in an east-west direction, separating much of the housing from the town centre and railway station. The A20 and Stone St could be diverted or downgraded, with new north-south and east-west connecting streets introduced.
- The Lymgne Industrial Park to the south of the site currently appears to generate lorry trips between along Otterpool Lane and the A20. If this could be relocated it would providing additional land for housing on a brownfield site as well as reducing heavy lorry usages of these key roads through the new town.
- The secondary schools currently occupy sites relatively close to the town centre and railway station. It would be preferable for these sites to be used for housing, thus maximising sustainable housing locations. The schools could instead be located on the edge of the town, with the playing fields providing a green transition between the site and surrounding countryside.

- Green infrastructure currently has the potential to act as a barrier between neighbourhoods. Whilst green corridors and spaces should form an integral part of the masterplan it would be beneficial if key streets could continue through some of the green corridors, providing social connectivity and safe (overlooked) means of walking and cycling throughout the town.
- There is the potential to improve the main 'gateways' to the town, to the south of the M20 Junction 11 on the eastern side and south of Barrowhill to the west.
- The proposed business park to the east of the town may not present a particularly attractive or vibrant gateway, especially if units are vacant or not built at the same rate as adjacent housing. It would be preferable if employment uses could be distributed more widely around the town centre forming part of a wider mixed use area.
- The western gateway is currently occupied by a secondary school and open space to the north of Otterpool Manor. This area presents the opportunity to create a more legible introduction to the town that also potentially directs vehicle users from the west into the town centre and downgrades the A20.

Savills proposed two alternative layouts incorporating some of these opportunities as a basis for further discussion.



