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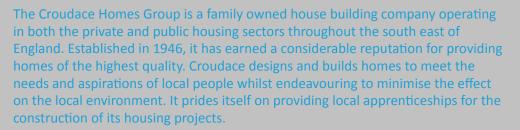
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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT**

This document has been prepared on behalf of Croudace Strategic and sets out the suitability and deliverability of 'Officers Meadow, Shenfield', hereafter referred to as 'the Site'.

This document is submitted in response to Brentwood Borough Council's (BBC) 'Strategic Growth Options Consultation' (SGOC, January 2015) and is supported by separate detailed representations (Barton Willmore, February 2015) on the potential growth options set out in the SGOC.

BBC previously consulted on a Preferred Options Local Plan (July 2013), which included a number of potential brownfield and greenfield/Green Belt site allocations. Officers Meadow was not included as a potential site allocation, as BBC did not consider it necessary to meet its housing target at that time.

However, since July 2013, and in response to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Council has updated it Evidence Base, and it is clear that the requirement for housing and job growth is much higher than previously identified in Preferred Options Local Plan (2013).

BBC's SGOC acknowledges this step change, and the subsequent need to identify additional allocation sites within the Green Belt for residential development. This document expands on the conclusions of BBC's own Evidence Base, and sets out the planning policy context and site specific information which demonstrates that the Site is suitable for development and should be included as a Strategic Green Belt allocation in future revisions of the Local Plan.

It is estimated that the Site could accommodate up to 480 dwellings (see Section 5) and it could therefore make a significant and positive contribution towards meeting future housing needs in the Borough, in the short term.

The remainder of this document provides:

- A description of the Site and its surrounds, including an assessment of existing local amenities and connections, and existing settlement patterns and character (Section 2);
- The current Planning Policy Context (Section 3);
- An appraisal of the Site, including initial technical studies, which demonstrates that the Site is suitable for development (Section 4);
- Information on the initial development proposals and 'Concept Masterplan' (Section 5);
- A summary of the Social and Economic Benefits of the proposed development (Section 6); and
- Suggested way forward (Section 7).

### **SITE DESCRIPTION**

The Site is circa 20.6 ha and lies to the north east of Shenfield, within the Green Belt, as defined by BBC's Local Plan Proposals Map (2005).

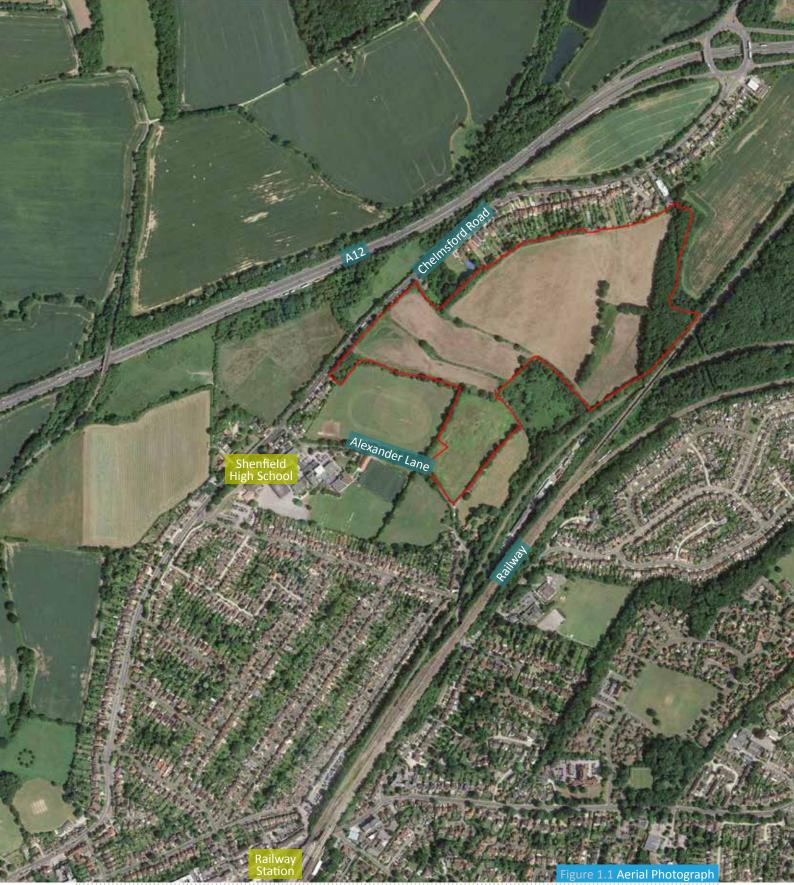
The Site is greenfield and comprises a series of open fields. It was formerly in agricultural use but is now mainly rough pasture / scrubland, although the southern field remains in limited farming use. The eastern part of the Site (approximately 1.55 ha) comprises a belt of Ancient Woodland now separated from the original Arnold's Wood by the railway. A public right of way (PROW) (FP 86) passes through the eastern part of the Site in a north-south direction, linking Alexander Lane and the Chelmsford Road.

The Site is bound by Chelmsford Road (A1023) to the north-west, with a ribbon of residential properties with long rear gardens fronting Chelmsford Road to the north. Arable farmland and the elevated Great Eastern Main Line/Southend railway line lies beyond the eastern boundary. The most southerly field has a frontage of approximately 100m to Alexander Lane. The southern-most sections of the Site adjoin Shenfield High School playing fields.

Anglian Water (AW) owns an unkempt, largely overgrown area of land which projects into the south-eastern part of the Site. It is understood that the AW land functions as a Flood Detention Basin associated with the stream, which flows east-west through and alongside the southern parts of the Site before outfalling to watercourses beyond the Chelmsford Road. The stream is essentially a valley floor in the local landscape context and marks the low point of the Site, the main body of which falls gently from north-east to south-west.

In broad terms the Site is well contained by existing development and vegetation, rendering it visible from only a limited number of viewpoints.





# **2. SITE CONTEXT AND OPPORTUNITY**

The Council's previous Preferred Options document (July 2013) set out a settlement hierarchy for the Borough. It identified Shenfield as a Category 1 Settlement (Main Town) and correctly recognised that, alongside Brentwood, it offered the most scope for development in accordance with sustainable development principles, with a range of shopping, employment areas, secondary schools, health and leisure facilities, supported by shopping centres around the rail station and other local shopping parades.

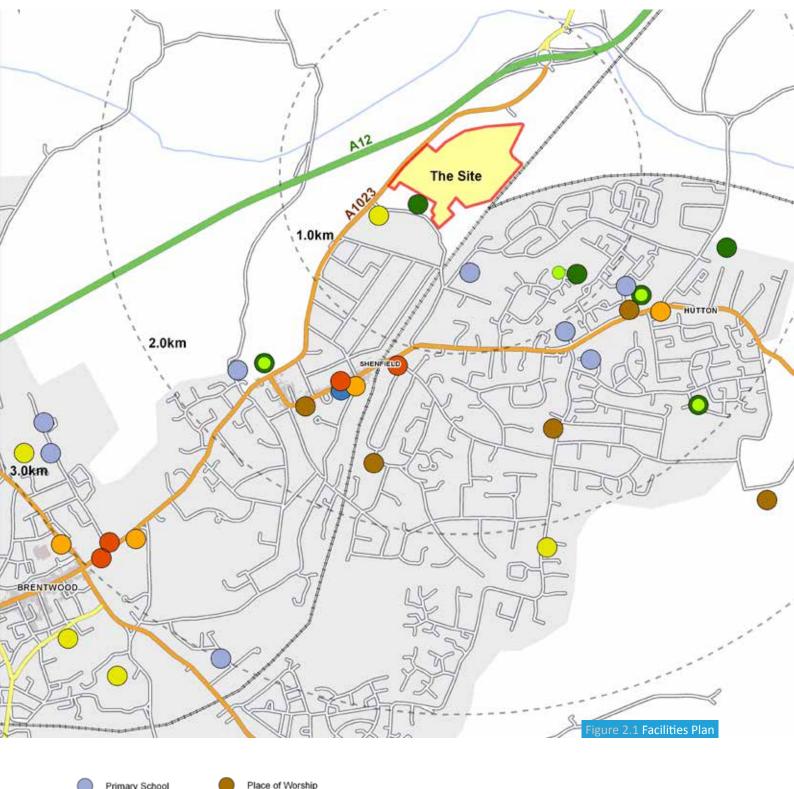
## LOCAL SERVICES AND AMENITIES

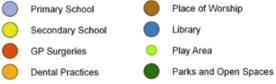
- The centre of Shenfield is an 'important local centre' (as defined in the adopted Local Plan 2005), and contains a wide range of retail and leisure outlets;
- There is a public library in Hutton Road, two dental and two doctor's surgeries within a 2km radius of the Site. In addition, six places of worship, four play areas and six parks/open spaces exist within a 2km radius of the Site;
- There are six primary schools within a 2km radius of the Site and four secondary schools within a 4km radius of the Site;
- According to Commissioning School Places in Essex (2013-2018) there will be 34 surplus
  primary school places in 2018 within a 2km radius of the Site. The projections take account
  of new housing (i.e. the estimated phasing of housing developments published by each
  Local Planning Authority in its housing trajectory figures). The document notes that housing
  requirements should be treated with caution as they will be subject to potential amendment
  through the period 2013 to 2018, as some housing requirements have not been subject to
  formal adoption by LPAs. If necessary, the proposed development would provide a financial
  contribution towards the improvement of primary schools within the catchment;
- As regards secondary schools, it is estimated that there will be 897 surplus secondary school places in 2018 within a 4km radius of the Site.





### DEVELOPMENT **OFFICERS MEADOW** FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT **S H E N F I E L D**



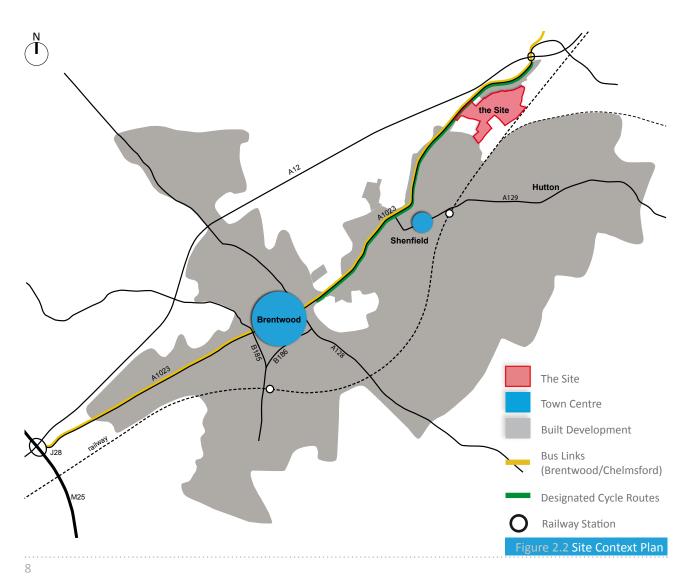


## ACCESSIBILITY

Shenfield is closely linked with Brentwood to the south and the settlement centre lies only 2.4km apart (Figure 2.2). The Site has direct access to Chelmsford Road (A1023) and is less than 0.8km from the roundabout junction with the A12, which in turn is only 6.4km from Junction 28 on the M25.

Shenfield Station is just over a 10 minute walk from the Site. Frequent and fast trains are available providing an excellent service to Liverpool Street Station, London in 23 minutes. Such services are likely to be significantly improved when Crossrail is fully implemented. Shenfield is set to become the eastern terminus of the 118km Crossrail route, which will cross central London in tunnel, terminating at Maidenhead to the west. Crossrail is likely to transform the way people travel in London and the South-East, and its completion would inevitably have positive implications for Brentwood/Shenfield.

Bus services run along the Chelmsford Road and provide regular links to Brentwood and Chelmsford. A dedicated cycle route exists along the Chelmsford Road which links the Site with Brentwood and Shenfield to the south. As previously mentioned a public footpath traverses the Site.



## **ENHANCING LOCAL SERVICES AND AMENITIES**

All the above demonstrates that the Site has strong accessibility credentials, and it is a highly appropriate location for further development to meet the Borough's housing needs. The increase in residents created through the development of the Site will bring substantial social and economic benefits to the area, as well as the existing local services and amenities.

The development of the Site also offers the potential to provide further community facilities, or, where relevant/necessary, contribute towards there enhancement. This is explored further in Section 6.

## **EXISTING DENSITIES**

Whilst the existing densities within Shenfield are relatively low, the NPPF requires LPAs to set their own approach to housing densities to reflect local circumstances. Whilst existing local character is an important consideration, other 'local circumstances' and policy considerations also need to be considered:

- Optimising the potential of Sites to accommodate development and make efficient use of land;
- Sustainability of the area and the level of accessibility to local facilities and public transport;
- The conclusions of Site specific technical work.

Section 5 sets out further information on proposed densities.

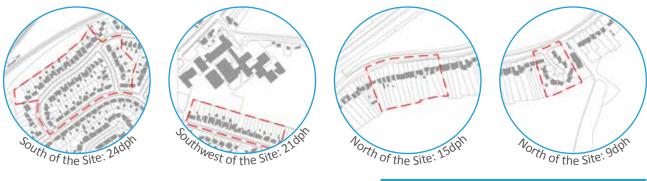
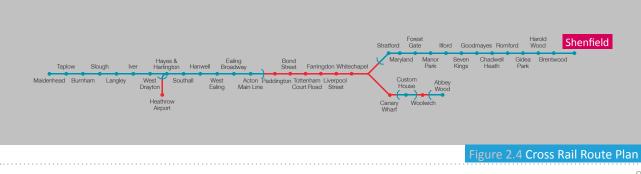


Figure 2.3 Existing Densities adjacent to the Site



## **3. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT**

As set out in Section 1, this document is supported by detailed representations produced by Barton Willmore (February 2015), in response to BBC's SGOC. We do not propose to repeat these representations in detail here, but provide a summary of our relevant comments in order to provide justification for the release of the Site for development.

### **HOUSING TARGETS**

The SGOC includes a proposed housing target of 360 dwellings per annum (dpa). Whilst we support the proposed increase in housing targets since the previous Preferred Options Local Plan (POLP, July 2013), BBC has not yet identified its full Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) taking account of trend/demographic forecasts, as required by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, March 2012). As a result of our own subsequent work, we identify that the housing figure is likely to be significantly higher.

### **GROWTH OPTIONS**

The SGOC sets outs a number of "Broad Areas" for potential growth, based on strategic Transport Corridors. Whilst we do not object to the growth areas identified, there are many other factors to take into consideration, including:

- The ability of the transport corridors to accommodate additional growth, either as existing or through improvements to the existing network. There is no evidence available in this regard;
- The sustainability of individual settlements, including the availability of facilities and services. A settlement hierarchy was included within the POLP (July 2013);
- The capacity of the landscape to accommodate development. The Landscape Capacity Assessment (2006) is current being updated, and a Green Belt Assessment is being produced;
- The capacity of infrastructure/ the ability to improve existing infrastructure to accommodate additional development. BBC is commencing work on its Infrastructure Delivery Plan;
- The availability of suitable sites for development. The SHLAA (2011) is currently being updated.

The SGOC confirms that there are insufficient brownfield sites available within the "Broad Areas" to meet the proposed housing target. Suitable greenfield/ Green Belt sites will therefore need to be identified in order to meet emerging growth targets.

## A12 CORRIDOR

The "Broad Area" of the A12 corridor includes Brentwood and Shenfield. Shenfield scored highly in the Settlement Hierarchy included within the POLP (July 2013), with Brentwood and Shenfield being identified as the only 'main town' settlements in Tier 1 of the settlement hierarchy, with the POLP (para 2.13) concluding:

Brentwood and Shenfield offer the most scope to development in accordance with sustainable development principles

Brentwood and Shenfield are considered sustainable locations for growth, given excellent transport links access to jobs and services and town centre facilities

For this reason, it is considered that Brentwood and Shenfield should provide for an adequate proportion of housing needs in the Borough.

The allocation of Green Belt sites on the edge of the Shenfield will ensure that it receives a proportionate amount of development. Such allocations would:

- Make a substantial contribution to meeting local housing need, in an area that is likely to be in high demand following the introduction of Crossrail;
- Secure an effective and balanced supply of dwelling types and tenures;
- Ensure that the economic vitality of the settlement is maintained and enhanced.

It is considered that the Site is the most appropriate Green Belt site on the edge of Shenfield to meet this need. Notably, it is one of two only greenfield sites within the SHLAA (October 2011) deemed to have potential for residential development in Shenfield, the other being a small infill plot. The remainder of this document sets out the findings of initial site specific technical work, and a 'concept Masterplan', which demonstrates that the Site can suitably accommodate residential development and community facilities to benefit Shenfield as a whole.

# 4. SITE APPRAISAL

## LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

A Preliminary Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) of the Site and its surroundings has been carried out to assess whether development could be accommodated without detriment to views from adjacent areas or wider areas of countryside and to identify any environmental constraints and opportunities which might influence the most appropriate form of development.

In brief the LVA identified/concluded:

- The topography of Site is gently sloping and suitable for development;
- A number of trees within the Site are covered by Tree Preservation Order (TPO 27/96);
- The Ancient Woodland belt occupying the eastern part of the Site also has County Wildlife Site status;
- The Site is generally well contained in the wider landscape by built development to the north and north-west; a railway embankment and woodland to the east; the urban edge of Shenfield and vegetation to the south; vegetation and road corridor to the west;
- The Site boundaries are predominantly well screened by mature trees and vegetation so that partial views into the Site are limited to near distance;
- The key landscape characteristics on the Site (Ancient Woodland: individual mature trees and stream) should be retained and enhanced as part of any development and should form the landscape framework for new screen planting, open space and green corridors;
- Development on the Site would not have a detrimental impact on the landscape and visual amenity of the Green Belt generally.

## ECOLOGY

As set out above, Ancient Woodland is present in the north east corner of the Site. This forms part of Arnold's Wood Local Wildlife Site, the majority of which lies to the other side of the railway line. There are no other identified statutory or non-statutory ecological designations present within the Site.

A Phase I preliminary habitat survey has been carried out on the Site. Further Phase II studies will be carried out as necessary. Opportunities are available for habitat creation and faunal enhancement such that the proposals have the potential to give rise to net gains for biodiversity.

### **ACCESS AND CIRCULATION**

A preliminary appraisal of the potential vehicular access strategy has been undertaken. It is envisaged that the principal vehicular access will be provided from Chelmsford Road (A1023) and that subject to more detailed investigations a secondary/emergency access could be provided onto Alexander Lane.

Essex County Council has been consulted upon the principles of access and this is reflected in the proposals. A future Transport Assessment will have regard to the preliminary consultation with ECC as the Highways Authority, and would follow National guidance.

A sequence of proposed pedestrian and cycle routes will provide connections to local services, amenities and bus stops and will enhance and complement existing routes, and connect into the existing PROW network.

### **FLOODING AND DRAINAGE**

A small part of the Site adjoining Chelmsford Road lies within the Environment Agency Flood Zones 2 and 3. However the majority of the Site lies within Flood Zone 1 where there is the lowest probability of flooding and where new development should be steered.

A preliminary drainage strategy will be prepared, which will involve the controlled discharge of surface water to existing watercourses and connection to existing public foul mains. Studies are ongoing, but in terms of foul drainage, Anglian Water has confirmed no capacity issues with the existing network. Further studies will confirm if any further upgrades are required in order to accommodate the proposed development.

### ARCHAEOLOGY

An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment has been undertaken and concludes that apart from a Second World War bomb crater, there are no records detailing heritage assets within the Site. However, given the proximity of a Roman Road, there is potential archaeological interest within the Site which might warrant further, more intrusive investigation.

### NOISE

A noise level survey has been undertaken. Railway noise and road traffic noise from the Chelmsford Road and the A12 does have an impact on noise levels, but all of the Site lies within noise exposure areas that can be suitably mitigated, and these will be taken into account through the design process for the Site.



# **5. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS**

## **CONSTRAINTS & OPPORTUNITIES**

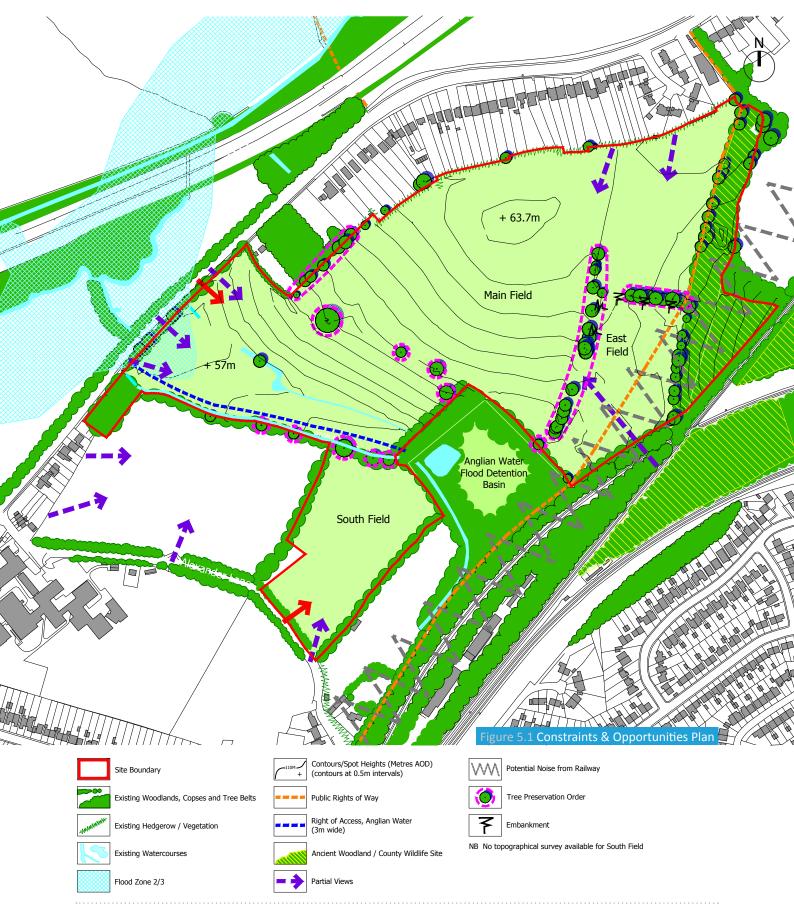
#### Constraints

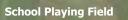
- Green Belt designation covers the whole Site;
- Topography: High point on Site with long distance views to south west (medium sensitivity);
- Views: The Site is generally well contained with some occasional glimpsed views from adjoining roads/residential back gardens;
- Existing vegetation: Ancient Woodland/County Wildlife Site. Mature trees (inc. TPOs) on the Site;
- Public Right of Way: FB86 passes through the Site;
- Anglian Water access to Flood Detention Basin;
- Watercourses;
- Flood Zones 2 and 3: Slight impact;
- Rear gardens of neighbouring residential properties along boundary: Sensitive edge; and
- Potential noise: From railway line and Chelmsford Road.

Opportunities

- Proximity of new housing to Shenfield local centre. Provide new green links through the Site (pedestrian/cycleways) connecting to the north/south public right of way, Chelmsford Road and Alexander Lane;
- Affordable housing and family market housing;
- New areas of open space and play facilities to be shared by the local community;
- Watercourses: potential green corridor/SUDS;
- Enhance structural landscape (trees/vegetation) across the Site using native species to enhance biodiversity;
- Retain existing mature trees as key features for creating a series of green spaces across the Site;
- Improved connectivity and contributions to existing public transport facilities through a sustainable Travel Plan; and
- Off-site contributions to enhance local community and educational facilities where appropriate.

### DEVELOPMENT **OFFICERS MEADOW** FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT **S H E N F I E L D**





Alexander Lane

Anglian Water

×.

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000

1

A12

Shenfield High School

> Shenfield Railway Station



## **ILLUSTRATIVE MASTERPLAN**

The illustrative Masterplan demonstrates how the Site could be developed and sets out the main design principles for access (vehicular and pedestrian), developable areas, open space and landscape strategy.

The main design elements are summarised below:

- Provide a sustainable development on the edge of Shenfield with safe pedestrian/cycle connections to the centre as well as to nearby schools, minimising the need for car journeys and promoting a healthy, active lifestyle;
- Integrate the development into the existing landscape and adopt an environmentally sensitive approach, minimising the impact on the surrounding Green Belt and adjacent County Wildlife Site;
- Create an east/west green corridor across the Site, linking the existing public footpath to Chelmsford Road and comprising a multifunctional open space alongside the stream. This linear open space could accommodate surface water attenuation basins and provides an opportunity for enhanced biodiversity and informal recreation;
- Create a substantial north/south green corridor along the eastern edge of the Site which includes the ancient woodland, the East Field, two main groups of TPO trees (G2&G3) and the public footpath;
- Provide a new access road from Chelmsford Road potentially linking through to Alexander Lane;
- Reinforcement of existing hedgerow/tree screen along northern boundary to preserve the privacy of neighbouring residential properties fronting Chelmsford Road;
- The existing mature trees will be retained and protected, providing a mature, attractive setting for the development. The spaces around these trees will be designed as informal open space and play areas to encourage a variety of outdoor activities for all ages;
- Provide a high quality development in terms of buildings, urban form and spaces, which is both distinctive and in keeping with the character of Shenfield;
- Create a safe and attractive place in which to live, which fosters a sense of community.

## **PROPOSED DENSITIES**

The overall deliverability of the Site will depend on the detailed layout and proposed densities. Subject to detailed design, density of development will vary across the Site responding to the character of Shenfield and identified constraints and opportunities. It is envisaged that higher densities could appear in the central and southern parts of the Site and lower density housing in the northern part.

The table opposite sets out net density ranges for the Site. Net density is based on the developable area, excluding areas of open spaces, landscape buffers and drainage features. The Site could deliver between 360 and 480 dwellings depending on the density applied. Whilst the net density would be higher than neighbouring development the overall gross density would only be between 17 and 23 dph because of the provision of significant areas of open space on the Site.



Developable Area	Density in dph		
	30	35	40
12ha	360	420	480



# **6. COMMUNITY BENEFITS**

Paragraph 152 of the NPPF confirms that LPAs should seek opportunities to achieve the Economic, Social and Environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and net gains across all three.

### **COMMUNITY/SOCIAL BENEFITS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

There are a number of potential community benefits which could arise from the proposed development, including contributions towards existing community facilities and/or the provision of a community facility on site.

It is understood that BBC is exploring the potential to extend the current area of Merrymede Country Park located to the south of the Site. The proposed development could potentially provide a proportionate contribution towards such improvements, which would provide a greater area of public open space to serve both new and existing residents of Shenfield/Brentwood.

It is also understood that Shenfield High School wish to enhance existing sports/recreational facilities. There is also the opportunity to provide improved recreational facilities to serve Shenfield High School by relocating and expanding them elsewhere, with the existing playing fields (approximately 4.4ha) to the south west of the Site then being utilised for residential development. This would maximise the number of units capable of being delivered on Site, meaning there is less reliance on the development of other, less sustainable sites in order for BBC to meet its housing requirements. However, the playing fields will only be developed if the school can secure alterative, improved facilities prior to the development taking place.

Further community benefits include:

- Provision of the most needed type of family housing in a highly sustainable location;
- Provision of play areas and extensive open space, for the benefit of existing and future residents;
- Strengthening Shenfield's vitality and viability, which will shortly benefit from the arrival of Crossrail;
- Delivery of affordable homes to meet local need;
- Development of a site that would be well contained within the landscape, thereby meeting housing need, but protecting more sensitive and visual sites within the landscape.

The above would need to be considered in line with the relevant planning "tests" on S106 set out withing Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations (as amended) 2010.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS**

The Site is located on the edge of Shenfield which offers a wide range of retail, leisure and community facilities. Shenfield already benefits from excellent transport links which are likely to be further improved in the foreseeable future.

The Site lies within comfortable walking distance of the centre of Shenfield and its railway station in particular. By virtue of its location and the intention to provide new and improved pedestrian/ cycle routes, development of the Site would play a significant part in reducing reliance on the car

for local journeys. The arrival of Crossrail will further improve the sustainability of the Site. The surface water drainage strategy for the Site is based on SuDS principles and all necessary utilities/ services are understood to be available. This would ensure that there is no increase in flooding as a result of the proposed development.

It is acknowledged that there will be some adverse impacts on the Site by virtue of the loss of a greenfield Green Belt Site and the introduction of built form. However, the Site is well enclosed and visual impacts will therefore be limited. The proposals will ensure appropriate ecological mitigation is provided to ensure limited impacts on wildlife and habitats, and overall biodiversity enhancements.

When compared with other greenfield/Green Belt sites currently being put forward for potential development in BBC's SGOC (January 2015), it is considered that the Officers Meadow Site offers the most compelling case for delivery a highly sustainable development at a scale which would satisfy environmental, social and economic objectives.

### **ECONOMIC BENEFITS**

The following summary highlights the substantial positive impact the proposed scheme will have on the local economy.



# **7. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS**

BBC's SGOC (January 2015) acknowledges that it will need to allocate greenfield/Green Belt land to ensure it has a sufficient supply of housing sites over the proposed plan period. Shenfield is identified as a Category 1 settlement which can accommodate growth in the Borough, and should therefore receive a proportionate amount of BBC's housing requirement for the Plan period.

BBC's SHLAA (October 2011) and subsequent Preferred Options site assessment (2013), both conclude that the Site is suitable for development in the short term (5-10 years). Furthermore, the initial site specific technical work summarised within this document supports BBC's conclusions, and collectively they demonstrate that the Site is 'suitable' 'available' and 'achievable'. The Site is therefore considered 'Deliverable'.

More importantly, the Site is considered to be 'Deliverable' for the following reasons:

- The Site has strong sustainability credentials and significant locational advantages, being on the edge the built up area of Shenfield and well contained within the landscape;
- Investigations into Ecology, Access, Landscape, Drainage Archaeology, Utilities/Services, and Noise have indicated that there are no obvious barriers to the development of the Site;
- Apart from new housing, both market and affordable tenures, the release of the Site for development could deliver a wide range of community benefits;
- The Site is currently not in any beneficial use and is available for development in the immediate future, and can therefore contribute to BBC's housing supply in the short term;
- The Site is held in two ownerships and is under the control of a single development company (Croudace Strategic Limited) under Option agreements;
- Croudace is a long established house building company with considerable experience in promoting and delivering developments containing a wide range of new dwellings throughout the South-East;
- Croudace is keen to secure the delivery of new housing at Officers Meadow at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Croudace Strategic will continue to:

- Undertake further technical studies to gain a greater understanding of the opportunities and constraint of the Site, and to demonstrate it Suitability for development;
- Explore the potential to expand the present Site to include the school playing fields, should this be supported by the school/local community;
- Continue to engage with BBC through the Local Plan process.

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