

Ashby de la Zouch Neighbourhood Plan Review 2011 – 2031



SUBMISSION VERSION, JANUARY 2025

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Foreword

1. In 2013, the Town Council of Ashby de la Zouch made the decision to commence the process of undertaking a Neighbourhood Plan.
2. After establishing a Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and holding numerous public meetings including general open events and specific discussions with groups of stakeholders; a number of Theme Groups were launched on the key issues that residents, professionals and representatives of local businesses and voluntary groups had identified as being important.
3. The Ashby de la Zouch Neighbourhood Plan passed Referendum on 22 November 2018 with a 92% 'yes' vote and a turnout of 22%. The Plan was Made (became a part of the Local Development Plan for North West Leicestershire District), by North West Leicestershire District Council on 29 November 2018 and has been used since then to help determine planning applications across the Neighbourhood Area based around the Plan's commitment to ensuring that any new housing meets a local need, that the important environmental areas are protected and that business development remains appropriate to the community.
4. In the time since the Neighbourhood Plan was Made there have been a number of important legislative changes which impact upon the neighbourhood planning process. The North West Leicestershire Local Plan, which was adopted in 2017, underwent a partial review in 2020 which was subsequently adopted in March 2021. Meanwhile the UK has left the EU, Planning Practice Guidance in relation to neighbourhood planning was updated in the summer of 2021 and updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) have taken place in 2018, 2019, 2021 and in September and December 2023.
5. As a result, the Town Council took the decision to review the Neighbourhood Plan in 2022 to see how the policies were working and whether any needed to be updated or added to. This Neighbourhood Plan reflects the outcome of that review with all of the changes from the first Neighbourhood Plan summarised in section 1 headed 'What changes have been made from the Made Neighbourhood Plan?'
6. I would like to thank Officers from North West Leicestershire District Council for their support as we have undertaken this work and for the grant funding received from Locality, without which the preparation of this Neighbourhood Plan would not have been possible.

David Bigby

Chair, Ashby de la Zouch Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

1 What changes have been made?

- 1.1 The following changes have been made to the Neighbourhood Plan (other than planning policy updates and formatting amendments) which was Made by North West Leicestershire District Council on 29 November 2018:
- 1.2 The Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has updated the Foreword to reflect the additional work that has been undertaken and the changed circumstances which led to the decision to undertake the Review.
- 1.3 The introductory chapters have been updated to reflect changes since the Made Neighbourhood Plan was prepared, including updating the socio-economic data to reflect 2021 Census data and the results from an updated Housing Needs Assessment.
- 1.4 Section 6 on Consultation has been updated to incorporate the results from further consultation and the process that was followed in reviewing the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.5 The policies from the Made NP are as follows:
- 1.6 Policy S1: Presumption in favour of sustainable development – policy removed but intent remains in the narrative.
- 1.7 Policy S2: Limits to Development – amended to reflect development activity since the first NP was made. Now Policy G1
- 1.8 Policy S3: Development proposals outside the Limits to Development – incorporated into Policy G1.
- 1.9 Policy S4: Design principles – now Policy G2 incorporating a design guide and codes document.
- 1.10 Policy S5: Support to be given to brownfield sites – deleted as covered within Policy G1
- 1.11 Policy H1: Sustainable housing growth – narrative retained but policy deleted as it is a statement rather than a planning policy.
- 1.12 Policy H2: Requirements for Masterplan – updated and now Policy H1 reflecting progress with the Money Hill development since the NP was Made.
- 1.13 Policy H3: Windfall sites – now Policy H2, but the same as in the Made NP.
- 1.14 Policy H4: Housing mix – updated to reflect the conclusions drawn from the new Housing Needs Assessment commissioned as part of the review of the NP. Now policy H3.
- 1.15 Policy H5: Affordable Housing – now Policy H4 and updated to reflect the findings from within the Housing Needs Assessment and to mirror the NPPF (2024) definition of major development.
- 1.16 Policy H6: Self build – still Policy H6 and amended to clarify that proposals will be supported

that are within the Limits to Development.

- 1.17 Policy E1: Employment land and buildings – still Policy E1. The policy has been extended and strengthened to identify conditions that must be met for employment premises to be lost.
- 1.18 Policy E2: Small and start-up businesses – incorporated into Policy E1 as above.
- 1.19 Policy E3: Connecting people to new employment development - incorporated into Policy E1 as above.
- 1.20 Policy TC1: Town centre uses – still TC1. The policy remains the same.
- 1.21 Policy TC2: Shop frontages – Policy reworded to clarify the requirements, but otherwise the same. Still Policy TC2.
- 1.22 Policy TC3: Residential development – The same policy, now TC4.
- 1.23 Policy TC4: Legible signage – now TC3. Slight change in words to clarify the intent.
- 1.24 Policy T1: Traffic management – still Policy T1, now widened to set requirements for the impact of development on the highway network.
- 1.25 Policy T2: Travel plans – still Policy T2 in the Review NP. Original policy strengthened to ensure its implementation does not lead to a diminished service elsewhere.
- 1.26 Policy T3: Safer routes to school schemes – deleted as not considered a planning policy.
- 1.27 Policy T4: Walking and cycling – still T4. The same policy as the Made NP.
- 1.28 Policy T5: Leicester to Burton railway line – still T5 and still the same policy, with the addition of support for a Railway Station in the town.
- 1.29 Policy HE1: Conservation Areas – deleted as not a planning policy but more a statement of intent.
- 1.30 Policy HE2: Areas of archaeological interest – incorporated into Policy Env 3 a) to make the policy site-specific by identifying and mapping the locations and boundaries of all heritage assets (national and local, using information in the Historic England and Leicestershire County Council databases; excluding buildings and structures) to which the policy should be applied, and b) to require development proposals affecting these sites to demonstrate that their value as heritage assets has been fully taken into account and weighed against the benefits of developing on that site.
- 1.31 Policy NE1: Local Green Spaces – now Policy Env 1. Sites designated remain the same, but the policy has been updated to reflect recent legislative changes.
- 1.32 Policy NE2: Open spaces, sports and recreation provision in new housing development – now Env 2. The objectives of the Made NP policies in respect of mix, ratios, types, etc. of

OSSRs to be provided in new development are now covered by the NPPF, North West Leicestershire Local Plan policy, and relevant Regulations. The new policy identifies all existing sites in the Plan Area fitting into the open space typologies used by NWLDC and aims to protect their functions and amenities. The list has been updated to cover sites omitted from the NWLDC Open Spaces audits, and includes all open spaces provided in new developments since 2017 and up to October 2023.

- 1.33 Policy NE3: Allotment provision – incorporated in Policy Env 2 as above.
- 1.34 Policy NE4: Nature conservation – Replaced (in part) by POLICY ENV 4 SITES AND FEATURES OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT SIGNIFICANCE a) to make the policy site-specific by identifying and mapping the locations and boundaries of all natural environment (biodiversity) sites (national, county and local levels of significance, using information in DEFRA, Natural England, Leicestershire County Council and local databases) to which the policy should be applied, b) to require development proposals affecting these sites to demonstrate that their value as natural environment sites has been fully taken into account and weighed against the benefits of developing on that site. It covers the previous objective of promoting/enhancing habitats by referring to the new measures for biodiversity net gain in the 2023 NPPF.
- 1.35 The second paragraph of NE 4 has been omitted. While supporting NWLDC policy En2 it adds nothing to it.
- 1.36 Policy NE5: Trees and hedgerows - Replaced (in part) by POLICY ENV 4 BIODIVERSITY AND HABITAT CONNECTIVITY. The new policy applies the new measures for habitat and species protection, and particularly for biodiversity net gain, in NPPF 2023 to all new development proposals across the Plan Area (i.e. not only those with existing designations). It adds protection for bats, based on the recently recognised county-level importance of the Plan Area for these animals, and applies current best practice. It also covers trees, hedgerows and woodland, and (following current best practice) designates a wildlife corridor to connect known habitat sites with one another and with open spaces in the town.
- 1.37 Policy CF1: Important community facilities – still Policy CF1 but updated to include a full list of community facilities and policy wording amended slightly to provide clarity.
- 1.38 Policy CF2: Assets of community value – now CF3. Th same policy as in the Made NP.
- 1.39 Section 13 – Monitoring and Review – the Local Plan Review is now advanced and so the monitoring cycle has been amended too from what was in Section 10 of the Made Neighbourhood Plan.

New policies:

- 1.40 Policy ENV 6 IMPORTANT VIEWS
- 1.41 Policy ENV 7 AREAS OF LOCAL SEPARATION - This policy was in the submission version of the 2018 NP but was deleted by the Examiner. Additional justification is provided, together

with a review of the extent of the Area of Separation, and the policy has been updated.

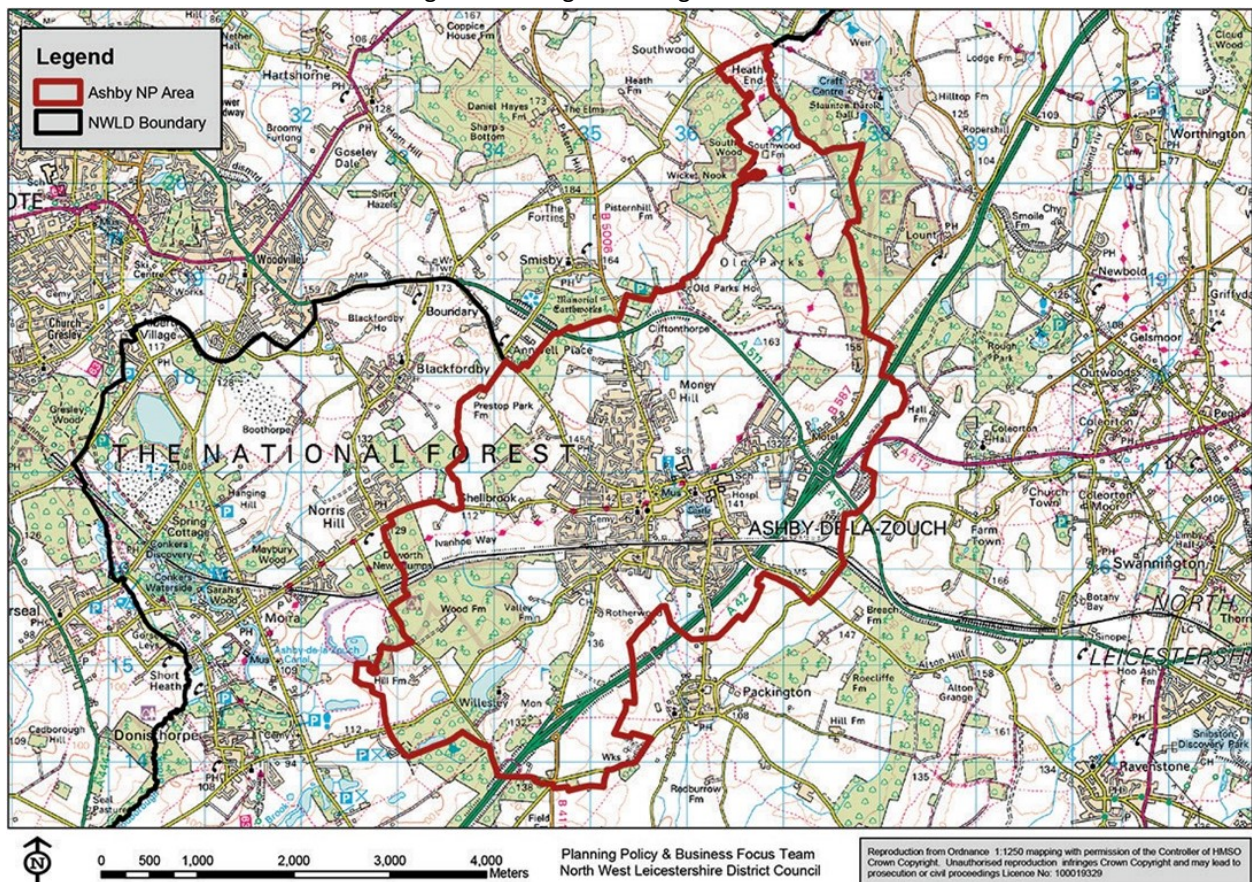
- 1.42 Policy ENV 8 FLOOD RISK - Added in response to the growing awareness of the correlation between of climate change and extreme rainfall events and flooding, and the need for the planning system to move from mitigation to resilience, the policy takes account of the local situation (topography, geology, existing built environment, historic events and predicted risk) in the Plan Area, and has regard for national strategies, the current NPPF and Local Plan policies.
- 1.43 Policy T2: PUBLIC CAR PARKING – added to reflect concern in the Parish that inadequate off-road parking facilities exist in the Town Centre.
- 1.44 Policy CF2: NEW OR IMPROVED COMMUNITY FACILITIES – introduced to help shape future infrastructure improvements locally.
- 1.45 Policy CF3: SCHOOLS – added to identify the criteria required to support school expansion or replacement.
- 1.46 Policy CF4: HEALTH AND WELLBEING – introduced to support enhanced medical facilities locally subject to specific criteria.
- 1.47 Policy E4: TOURISM – original policy deleted by the Examiner. New policy addresses issues raised and reflects similar policies in other Made NPs across North West Leicestershire.
- 1.48 Policy E5: BROADBAND – policy added to ensure that high speed broadband is included in new development.

2 About this Neighbourhood Plan

Background

- 2.1 The Localism Act of 2011 introduced the concept of Neighbourhood Plans. These plans give local communities a much greater opportunity to influence future development in their areas.
- 2.2 On 14 February 2014, North West Leicestershire District Council approved an application for designation as a Neighbourhood area. The area to be covered by the Plan is shown in Figure 1.
- 2.3 The Neighbourhood Area comprises the Council wards of Ashby Holywell, Ashby Money Hill, Ashby Ivanhoe, Ashby Castle and Ashby Willesley, which covers the town of Ashby de la Zouch and excludes Blackfordby.
- 2.4 Blackfordby has been excluded as it is a distinct settlement in its own right with its own planning and development requirements and has its own Neighbourhood Plan which was Made in 2022.

Figure 1 – Designated Neighbourhood Area



- 2.5 The Neighbourhood Plan sits alongside, and is aligned with, North West Leicestershire District Council's Local Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan cannot promote less development than in the Local Plan or undermine its strategic policies. Other than that, the Neighbourhood Plan is able to shape and direct sustainable development in the Neighbourhood Area. Once the Review document is approved, the policies it contains will take precedence over non-strategic policies in the Local Plan.

2.6 This Neighbourhood Plan has been written in line with the Basic Conditions:

- Having regard for national planning policy and guidance
- Contributing to sustainable development
- General conformity with strategic policies in North West Leicestershire's Local Plan
- Compatibility with EU and human rights requirements, implemented in England
- Conservation of habitat and species regulations.

2.7 Before being made, this Neighbourhood Plan Review must pass a local, community referendum if the Examiner determines that the changes are significant.

Neighbourhood Plan Group

2.8 The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group was re-established by the Town Council and began meeting in October 2022. This group continues to comprise Town Councillors, residents and representatives of the business community and voluntary sector.

2.9 The Group has worked hard to drive the process forward, assisted by YourLocale consultancy. The preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan must conform to guidelines laid down by central Government and involves consultation with not only the local community, but also the District Council and local businesses and landowners. There is a prescribed procedure with appropriate checks and consultations, which has been observed and followed.

3. Why Neighbourhood Plans are important.

- 3.1 A Neighbourhood Plan is an opportunity for local people to create a framework for delivering a sustainable future for the benefit of all who live, work or visit our area.
- 3.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) updated in December 2023 states that 'Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area. Neighbourhood plans can shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development, by influencing local planning decisions as part of the statutory development plan' (para 29). It helps to ensure that the right type of development is provided in the right locations; and to set planning policies that will be used in determining decisions on planning applications across the Neighbourhood Area.
- 3.3 A Neighbourhood Plan is part of the statutory Development Plan for the area and this statutory status gives Neighbourhood Plans far more weight than other local documents such as Parish Plans or Village Design Statements. But a Neighbourhood Plan must also comply with European (now consolidated into UK law) and National legislation and be in general conformity with local strategic planning policy. Whilst every effort has been made to make the main body of this Plan easy to read and understand, the wording of the actual policies is necessarily more formal so that they comply with these statutory requirements.
- 3.4 Robust evidence is the foundation on which a Neighbourhood Plan has to be based. This includes evidence of community engagement and consultation and how the views, aspirations, wants and needs of local people have been taken into account alongside stakeholder comment and statistical information to justify the policies contained within the Plan. A detailed Statement of Consultation has been produced to support this Neighbourhood Plan and will be available on submission of the Neighbourhood Plan to North West Leicestershire District Council.

4. Why we need a Neighbourhood Plan in Ashby de la Zouch

- 4.1 The Town Council is very keen to promote Ashby de la Zouch and to help ensure that planning decisions which affect the Neighbourhood Area will serve the best interests of the community in the years to come.
- 4.2 There is recognition that sustainable development is not only necessary but desirable, as without it our town and economy will stagnate, but we want to influence and direct the shape and nature of the development and where within our Neighbourhood Area it takes place.
- 4.3 A Neighbourhood Plan cannot be used to prevent development and we have been very clear from the outset that we will work within the broad housing requirements specified by North West Leicestershire District Council. Having a Neighbourhood Plan gives us the opportunity to identify the best ways to deliver development, directing it towards what the local community needs and wants, while protecting our natural environment and social and leisure assets and ensuring a more sustainable future for ourselves and future generations.
- 4.4 This Plan has been prepared by members of the community with these goals in mind. We have embraced the NPPF's core principle of "a presumption in favour of sustainable development" and have approached our task to achieve a Plan that is *"prepared positively, in a way that is aspirational but deliverable"* (NPPF December 2023 para 16).

5. About Ashby de la Zouch

- 5.1 Ashby de la Zouch is a historic market town of 15,120 people (2021 census for Neighbourhood Area, up from 12,530 in 2011) at the heart of the National Forest and on the borders of Leicestershire and Derbyshire.
- 5.2 Ashby de la Zouch has a vibrant Town Centre that forms the heart of the local community providing the principal focus for the Town's economic, social and leisure activity. The ancient castle, wide range of shops, cafes & restaurants running along Market Street and the wider town centre give Ashby its unique character. It is set within attractive countryside and sits at the heart of the National Forest, with the National Forest Way, a long distance walking trail and the Ivanhoe Way running through the town. Increasing and now established National Forest plantations can be found in the extensive countryside that surrounds the town. Residents have access to public footpaths and many open access areas for walking and cycling, for example at the Hicks Lodge Cycling Centre, with its extensive cycling and walking trails. There is a popular golf club and a wide range of other sporting facilities and clubs. Within the Town Centre there are extensive attractive public parks and green spaces at the Bath Grounds, Hood Park and Prior Park Fields.
- 5.3 Ashby stands at the intersection of the roads between Nottingham and Tamworth/ Birmingham (A42) and between Leicester and Burton upon Trent (A511). These provide easy access by road to the major cities in the East and West Midlands, leading to many of the town's

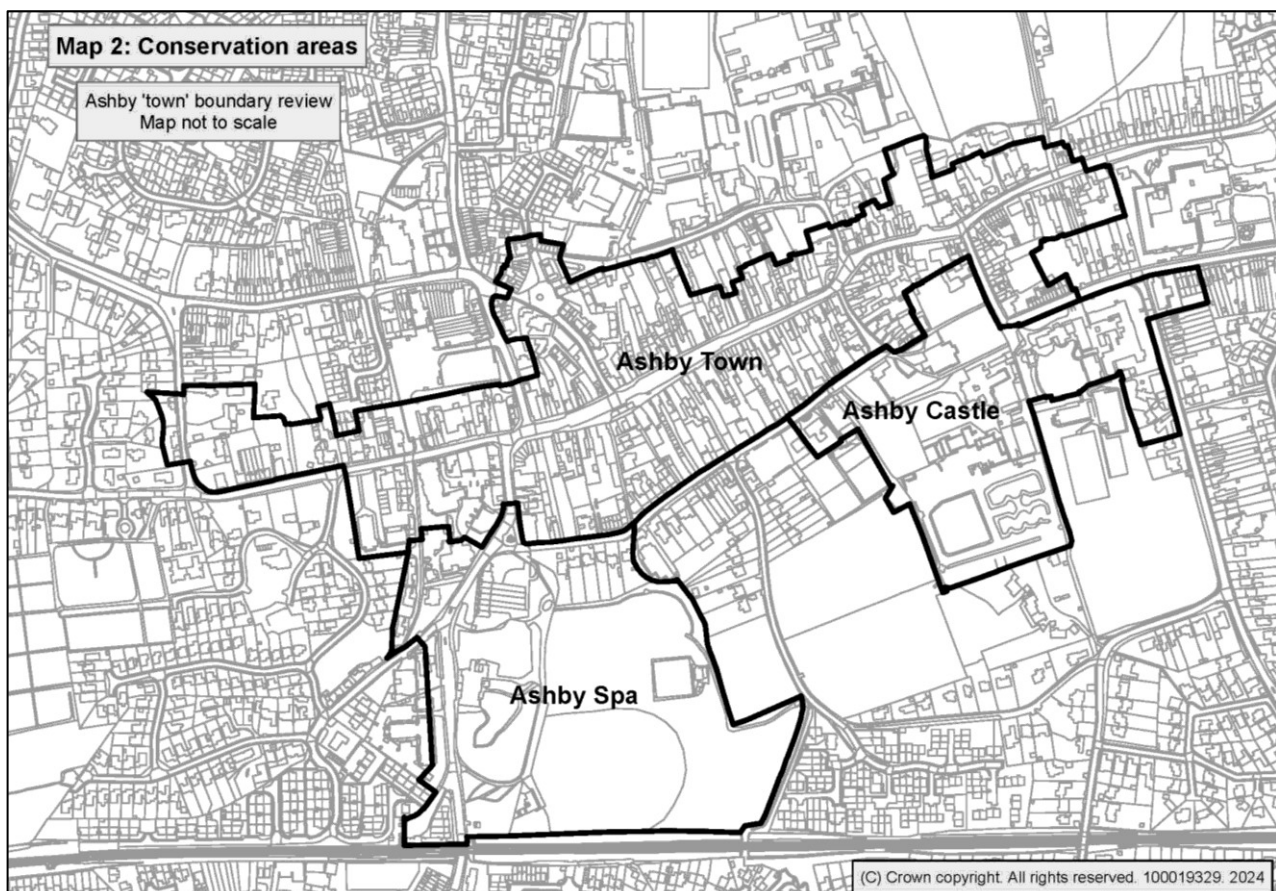


residents commuting to work around the Midlands. There is no railway station in the town, as the railway that connected Ashby with Leicester and Burton upon Trent closed for passenger transport many years ago. As this Neighbourhood Plan is being written, Network Rail are actively considering reopening the Coalville to Burton section of the line via Ashby

to passengers and dialogue is underway between the Town Council and Network Rail on the best site for a new station. At the present time Ashby is badly served by bus services, with no longer a local town-wide service previously covering the outlying estates and with very few services now connecting other destinations for employment, education, health services, shopping, recreation etc.

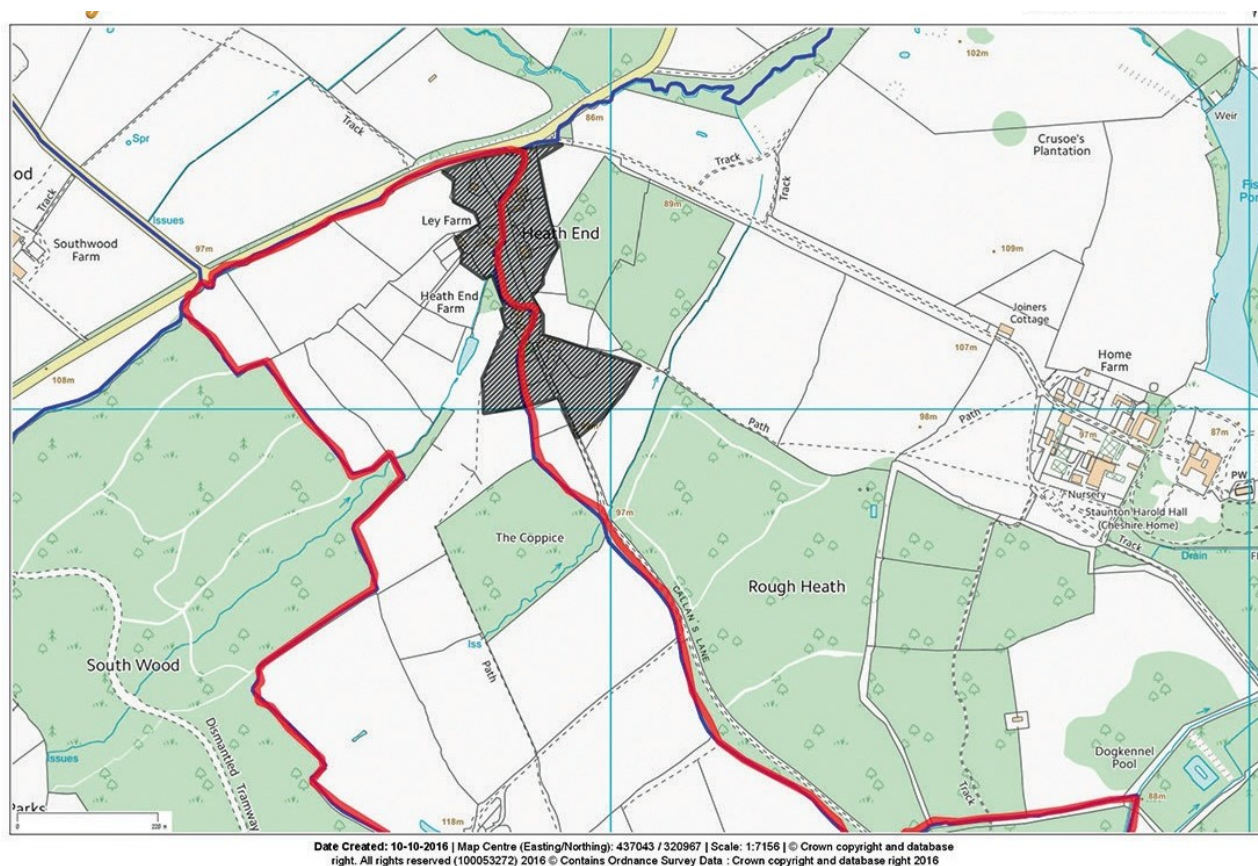
- 5.4 Employment in the town has changed in recent years with significant manufacturing employers like McVities, Arla Dairy and the Soap Factory closing. However, the two significant industrial estates, Ashby Park and Ivanhoe Business Park have been expanding.
- 5.5 The first documented record of the town is in the Domesday Book of 1086/87 and the town takes the second part of its name from the La Zouch family who held the castle and manor from circa 1160 to 1399. Ashby de la Zouch Conservation Area was first designated in November 1972. In August 2024 the District Council's cabinet resolved to divide the Ashby conservation area into the 'castle', 'spa' and 'town' conservation areas.
- 5.6 During the medieval period Ashby Castle was one of the chief influences on the town's development. The castle was slighted (partial demolition) by parliamentary troops in March 1646. The appearance of the Conservation Areas (Figure 2) is predominantly Georgian/ early Victorian townscape. However, many buildings contain medieval structures.
- 5.7 The current Ashby de la Zouch Conservation Area boundaries are shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2 – Conservation Areas



5.8 The Neighbourhood Plan area also contains part of the more rural Conservation Area of Heath End, which was first designated in 2002. The Heath End Conservation Area boundaries are shown in Figure 3 and are partly in the neighbouring parish of Staunton Harold Parish Meeting:

Figure 3 Heath End Conservation Area



5.9 Development within the Conservation Areas is carefully managed through the planning system and the Neighbourhood Plan reinforces this approach.

5.10 The 2021 Census recorded 15,120 individuals in the Ashby de la Zouch Neighbourhood Area, indicating an increase of 2,590 people or a 21% growth since the 2011 Census.

5.11 The attractiveness and location of the town means developers can achieve higher prices for properties in Ashby than in neighbouring towns.

5.12 The Housing Needs Assessment, commissioned as part of the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan which was published in July 2023 shows that house prices have consistently risen over the past decade with the average property price (currently £330,559) rising 58% in value. The entry level (lower quartile) house price grew from £137,000 in 2013 to £197,500 in 2022; a growth of 68%. The median house price rose by 52% in the same period (currently £297,000). Data suggests that property values in Ashby attract a 16-17% premium over prices in the wider district.

5.13 A review of 2021 census data (for the Neighbourhood Area) shows that:

5.13.1 Currently, the population profile slightly favours the under 45 age groups with more residents aged 0-44 (52%) than 45 and over (48%). However, the change in the population's age profile between the 2011 and 2021 Censuses shows that the 65-84 age group grew markedly (46%) within this period whilst the remaining groups grew at slower rates (14-19%). In terms of the overall trend the older age groups are growing at faster rates than the younger age groups.

5.13.2 Ashby's dwelling stock is characterised by larger detached and semi-detached homes (75% of stock). Recent completions have skewed the balance further toward larger detached homes.

5.13.3 Ashby's housing stock is dominated by 3-bedroom homes (39%) followed by larger 4-bedroom plus homes (34%). Smaller homes (1-2 bedrooms) form about 27% of the total.

5.13.4 The 2021 stock distribution is less balanced than that in 2011, showing growth in larger homes (grew from 25% to 34% in the intercensal period) and proportional declines across smaller dwelling sizes. This trend *towards* larger homes is likely to worsen affordability issues identified in the Neighbourhood Area.



6. Consultation

- 6.1 The process of engaging the community in preparing the Made Neighbourhood Plan was comprehensive.
- 6.2 The Neighbourhood Planning process was overseen by a Steering Group comprising 4 Town Councillors, a representative from Ashby Civic Society, a representative from Ashby Town Team, the Town Clerk and the Deputy Town Clerk.
- 6.3 The Neighbourhood Plan was launched in April 2013 with a series of drop-ins and workshops for members of the local community and other interested parties. Five theme groups were established from this consultation which included volunteers from the local community who looked in detail at the issues and prepared emerging objectives and policies alongside officers from the District and County Councils (who attended in an advisory capacity). A Reference Group consisting of the Chairs of each Theme Group reviewed and agreed the objectives and policies coming from the Theme Groups which formed the basis of the Plan.
- 6.4 After making the decision in September 2022 to formally review the Neighbourhood Plan, the first meeting of the re-established Steering Group took place in October 2022. The Steering Group consisted of five Town Councillors, the Deputy Town Clerk, and consultants YourLocale.
- 6.5 The Steering Group met throughout the process, driving the review forward, updating the evidence base and commissioning technical support where appropriate.
- 6.6 In promoting the review of the Neighbourhood Plan, a number of people came forward who expressed a desire to be involved, and they became a part of the Theme Groups and helped in the preparation of this review document.
- 6.7 The Theme Groups were established to look in detail at policies and supporting evidence relating to housing, the environment, transport, the economy and community facilities.
- 6.8 These groups consisted of members from within the community, people who live and work in Ashby, as well as representatives from groups within Ashby, such as the Civic Society and the Willesley Environment Protection Association. Their support has been invaluable in the creation of this Neighbourhood Plan review.

7. Vision

7.1 The Town Council has identified a vision for Ashby to help describe how the Plan area should look in the years to come. This vision remains relevant today. It is

7.2 “Ashby de la Zouch is a prosperous attractive and historic market town at the heart of the National Forest. Our vision is to build on that uniqueness and create a town that meets the needs of local people in terms of their enjoyment, health and wellbeing whilst making the most of its special qualities to attract businesses, visitors and shoppers from further afield”.

7.3 This will be achieved by the Plan's vision and objectives providing an aspirational and positive planning framework to deliver housing and economic development to meet local and District-wide needs and thereby creating a safe, clean, accessible and attractive town and countryside in which people can shop, work, live and pursue their leisure activities.

7.4 The town and surrounding countryside should offer something for everyone regardless of their age, lifestyle or status”. Key objectives the Plan will continue to address

- Protecting and enhancing the town’s heritage
- Maintaining a vibrant, attractive and sustainable Town Centre
- Designating settlement development limits
- Offering locally appropriate housing mix and design at defined sites
- Enhancing the provision of and protection for parks and green spaces
- Enhancement of environmental aspects including measures to prevent flooding
- Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- Protecting community assets
- Improving traffic management and road infrastructure
- Promoting walking and cycling
- Promoting employment, business growth and encouraging tourism
- Supporting enhanced community facilities in line with growing population
- Identifying priorities for section 106 funding

7.5 When using our Neighbourhood Plan to form a view on a development proposal or a policy issue the whole document and the policies contained in it must be considered together.

7.6 This Neighbourhood Plan will be kept under review and may change over time in response to new and changing needs and requirements.

8. Meeting the requirement for sustainable development

8.1 The NPPF states that there are three dimensions to sustainable development: social, environmental and economic, all of which are important and interrelated. It defines sustainable development as follows:

8.2 'At a very high level, the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. (Paragraph 7).

8.3 Development means growth. We must accommodate the new ways by which we earn our living in a competitive world. We must house a rising population, which is living longer and wants to make new choices. We must respond to the changes that new technologies offer us. Our lives, and the places in which we live them, can be better, but they will certainly be worse if things stagnate.

8.4 This Neighbourhood Plan is a key part of securing sustainable development. It is at its heart. This includes how much new development is required, where it should go, how it should be designed and how it impacts upon the Town. This encompasses all proposals for development from the very smallest, such as a minor extension to a house, to major housing, employment and infrastructure developments and seeks to safeguard environmental, health and social features, particularly walking and non-motorised transport as well as housing development.

8.5 The Neighbourhood Plan addresses the requirement for sustainable development in the following ways:

a) Economic

- To ensure effective broadband speeds in new development;
- To support appropriate small-scale business development;
- To encourage appropriate start-up businesses and home working; and
- To protect existing employment uses.

b) Social

- To safeguard existing open space for the enjoyment of residents;
- To protect existing community facilities; and
- To ensure that any new housing meets the needs of present and future generations.

c) Environmental

- To ensure that housing development does not harm, but instead positively reflects the existing and historic character of the area;
- To protect important open spaces from development;
- To ensure that the design of development enhances the Neighbourhood Area's special character and identity;
- To protect and, where possible, improve biodiversity and important habitats; and
- To make provision for improved pedestrian and cycling facilities.

8.6 This document sets out local considerations for delivering sustainable development across the Neighbourhood Area. Development proposals should meet the requirements of all relevant policies in this Neighbourhood Plan and be in line with District and national policies.

Neighbourhood Plan Policies

9 General Policies

- 9.1 Having developed over several centuries, Ashby de la Zouch is an attractive and historic settlement which retains many of its original features and is characterised by a bustling Town Centre with many shops, cafes, bars and restaurants.
- 9.2 There are many significant buildings of great importance within the Plan area which include both designated and un-designated heritage assets. Its economy is varied with a range of employers being based on the employment sites within the town and recent years have seen a growth in out-of-town retail outlets which pose a threat to the traditional shopping patterns of the town.
- 9.3 Ashby de la Zouch boasts a good range of recreation facilities including tennis, Hood Park Leisure Centre and Swimming Pools, football, rugby, cricket, bowls and golf as well as parks and play areas.
- 9.4 Ashby de la Zouch is within the local planning authority area of North West Leicestershire District Council in the County of Leicestershire and is well located within 9 miles of East Midlands Airport. It has a bypass to serve traffic passing from Birmingham to Nottingham (A42) or Leicester to Stoke. There are bus services to Coalville, East Midlands Airport and Burton-upon-Trent, but the public transport system has significantly reduced with the loss of other bus routes, and failed to keep pace with the requirements of the town. There is congestion at peak times and pressure on car parking spaces, which can make the roads within the Town Centre congested and can diminish the cross-town commuting and shopping experience for residents and visitors.
- 9.5 One of the key ways to achieve sustainable development is to direct development to the most appropriate and sustainable locations.
- 9.6 The area covered by the Neighbourhood Plan comprises the primary urban area of Ashby Town and hamlets interspersed with large areas of open countryside. Outside of the primary urban area it is mainly open and rural in nature.
- 9.7 North West Leicestershire District Council has defined a settlement hierarchy to “distinguish between the roles and functions of different settlements and to guide the location of future development”. The general principle is that the further up the hierarchy a settlement comes, the more sustainable it is and therefore the more suitable it is for development. The Local Plan states “with the general principle being that those settlements higher up the hierarchy will take more growth than those lower down and that the type of development proposed is appropriate to the scale and character of the settlement and its place in the hierarchy”.
- 9.8 Ashby de la Zouch (along with Castle Donington) is categorised as a ‘Key Service Centre’ in the Local Plan. This is the second highest in the hierarchy (after Coalville which is classed as the

Principal Town).

- 9.9 The Local Plan describes Key Service Centres as being “Smaller than the Principal Town in terms of population and also the range of services and facilities they provide, they play an important role providing services and facilities to the surrounding area and are accessible by some sustainable transport. A significant amount of development will take place in these settlements.
- 9.10 The Neighbourhood Plan raised concerns and reservations with regard to the scale of development identified for Ashby de la Zouch as set out in the Adopted Local Plan. The consultation shows that people are not opposed to some new development. They recognise the benefits it brings in terms of creating and supporting jobs and meeting the needs of the community for more affordable housing, for example. There is concern however that too much development will damage the countryside, encourage more (already very high) levels of journeys by car and place additional pressures on already stretched services such as schools and health care as well as local roads. It is also noted that Ashby de la Zouch has been the focus of considerable new development, especially housing and employment related, and that there are further commitments in the pipeline.
- 9.11 A key aspect of the Neighbourhood Plan (and of the Local Plan) is to identify the amount of new development (including the provision of new sites) needed in the Neighbourhood Area and ensure that it is proportionate, sustainable and meets local and District needs and requirements and does not have an adverse impact on the natural and historic environment and its recreational and amenity value, tranquillity, and diversity, biodiversity and wildlife.
- 9.12 In any new development where the developer intends introducing an estate management charge, the developer will be required to engage with the Town Council with regards to the possibility of adopting the communal land and/or play areas and taking on the maintenance of these areas, subject to appropriate commuted sums being agreed.

A) Limits to Development

- 9.13 The purpose of Limits to Development is to ensure that sufficient sites for new homes and economic activity are available in appropriate locations that will avoid overloading the transport infrastructure and impinging into the local countryside.
- 9.14 Limits to Development were established by North West Leicestershire District Council in 2002 and they made it clear that such a measure was important to clarify where new development activity was best located. They are used to define the extent of a built-up part of a settlement. They distinguish between areas where, in planning terms, development would be acceptable in principle, such as in the main settlements, and where it would not be acceptable, generally in the least sustainable locations such as in the open countryside. Such growth would risk ribbon development and the merging of hamlets to the detriment of the community and visual amenity of the Plan area’s surroundings.
- 9.15 A desire to preserve the integrity of the villages and hamlets within and adjacent to the

Neighbourhood Area and to maintain separation between each other and the built-up area of Ashby de la Zouch was highlighted as an important consideration through consultation.

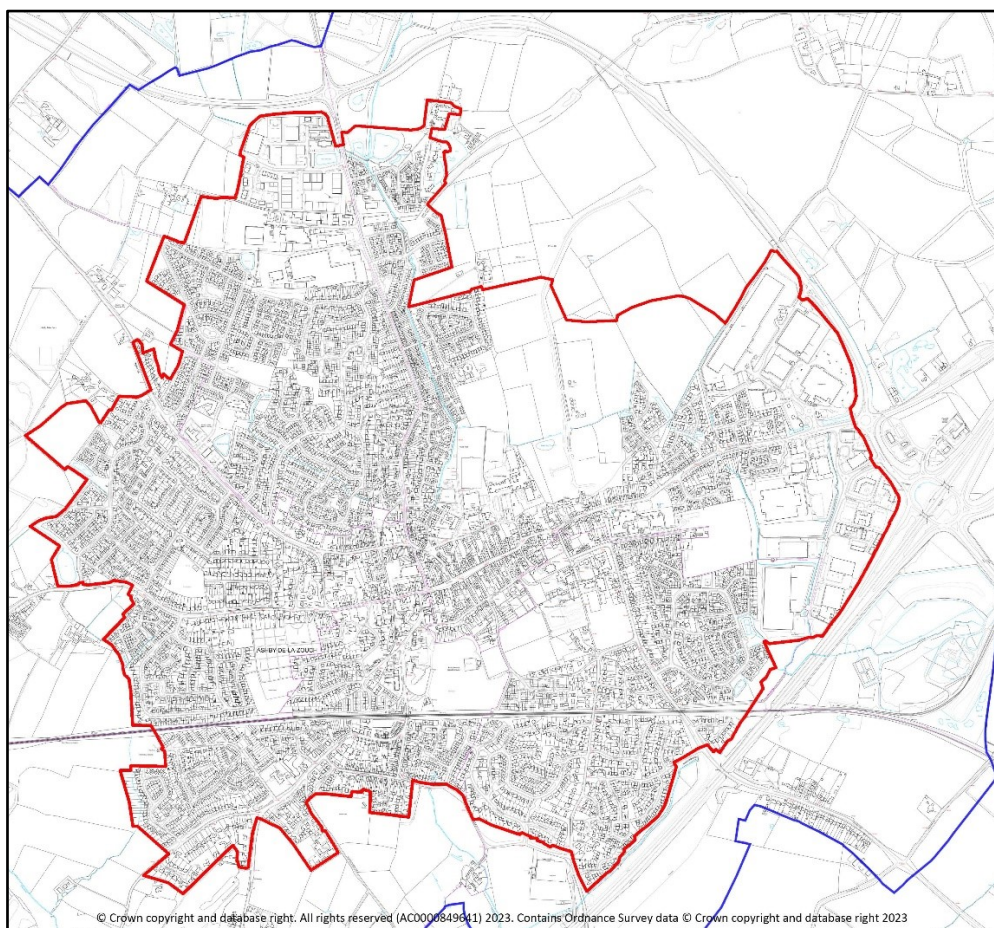
9.16 The Local Plan updates the Limits to Development for Ashby de la Zouch taking into account:

- a) Existing commitments by virtue of extant planning permissions for residential development on the fringes of the settlement;
- b) Residential and employment allocations within the Local Plan;

9.17 The Neighbourhood Plan has updated the Limits to Development from the Adopted Local Plan both to reflect recent development in the Town and proposed allocations in the review of the Local Plan. Within the defined Limits to Development an appropriate amount of suitably designed and located development will be acceptable in principle, although some sites within this area are protected from development.

9.18 Focusing development within the agreed Limits to Development will help to support existing services and facilities within the Town Centre and help to protect the countryside and the remainder of the Plan area from inappropriate development. They will also help retain the physical separation between settlements in order to maintain the physical identity of communities, and by so doing to help preserve the character of those communities.

Figure 4 Limits to Development



POLICY G1: LIMITS TO DEVELOPMENT – Within the Limits to Development as identified in Figure 4, development proposals will be viewed positively where they are in accordance with the other policies of this Neighbourhood Plan and relevant District and national planning policies and subject to accessibility, design and amenity considerations.

Land outside the defined Limits to Development will be treated as open countryside, where development will be carefully managed in line with local and national strategic planning policies.

B) Design

- 9.19 This Plan seeks to ensure that new building in the Plan area benefits from high quality design and that it blends sympathetically with existing architecture.
- 9.20 The built form of Ashby de la Zouch boasts an interesting mix of architectural styles which adds to the town's vibrancy and informs its character. In line with the NPPF, the Neighbourhood Plan encourages the use of innovative materials and design that is in keeping with the character of the area.
- 9.21 The Neighbourhood Plan expects that housing developments will be attractive, functional and sustainable places, having regard to Building for Life 12 - the industry standard for well-designed homes and a standard adopted by North West Leicestershire District Council.
- 9.22 Consultation has identified the importance of development reflecting the character of Ashby de la Zouch, particularly within the Conservation Areas and reflecting the National Forest throughout the plan area.
- 9.23 The overall character of the Conservation Areas retain its established Georgian/early Victorian visual context, but there are areas of poor townscape quality as identified within the Conservation Area Character Appraisals - primarily infill/redevelopment schemes undertaken in the second half of the twentieth century; the installation of late twentieth century shop fronts to earlier buildings and some past building repair work which was carried out without due consideration to good conservation practice. All of this has served to detract from the overall impact of the Conservation Areas.
- 9.24 It is important that future development builds on the positive aspects of Ashby's character and avoids the mistakes of the past.
- 9.25 The National Forest covers 200 square miles of the Midlands with Ashby de la Zouch at the centre of this designation. The aspiration is to create a new multi-functional forest to show the benefits that can come from having woodland near to where people live and work and to make the countryside more accessible. Ashby de la Zouch Town Council is working with the National Forest Company on the aspiration for Ashby de la Zouch to become a 'Forest Town'.
- 9.26 The National Forest Company's Guide for Developers and Planners identifies General Design,

Built Design and Green Infrastructure Principles to be incorporated into development, including the need for development to be: distinctive, sustainable, inspiring, integrated, people focused and connected. The position of Ashby de la Zouch in the heart of the National Forest has led consultees to promote the need for development to reflect these design principles. The Local Plan recognises the importance of the National Forest and through Policy En3 seeks to ensure that new developments contribute towards the creation of the forest through the inclusion of tree planting, appropriate siting and scale of development and respect for the character and appearance of the countryside.

- 9.27 A concern expressed through consultation is that development on a large scale within Ashby de la Zouch should not be of a 'standard' design that was not reflective of the local character. It is important to residents that a consistent approach to design is adopted, particularly in large scale development.
- 9.28 The section on transport identifies parking as a significant issue for Ashby de la Zouch. Development will be required to ensure that adequate off-road parking is provided in accordance with Leicestershire County Council standards.
- 9.29 The NPPF promotes the use of innovative design, and the Neighbourhood Plan Review supports this aspiration as long as it does not detract from the historic context of Ashby de la Zouch. The NPPF also notes that development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies.
- 9.30 A design guide was commissioned through AECOM as part of the process of preparing this Neighbourhood Plan Review and is available as appendix 2.
- 9.31 Policy G2 seeks to reflect the design principles which the community believes will help to achieve good design.
- 9.32 New development proposals must be designed sensitively to ensure that the high-quality built environment of the Neighbourhood Area is maintained and enhanced. New designs must respond in a positive way to the local character through careful and appropriate use of high-quality materials and detail. Proposals must also demonstrate consideration of height, scale and massing, to ensure that new development delivers a positive contribution to the street scene and adds value to the distinctive character of the Neighbourhood Area.

POLICY G2: DESIGN – All development proposals must demonstrate a high quality of design, layout and use of materials which make a positive contribution to the special character of the Neighbourhood Area.

Any new development application must make specific reference to how the design guidance and codes (see Appendix 2) and the National Forest Company's Guide for Developers and Planners has been taken into account in the design proposals. New development must consider the prevailing character area in which the proposal resides and seek to contribute to and enhance the existing character.

In addition to the specific requirements contained in the design guidance and codes, development

proposals will need to incorporate the following design guidelines for new development:

- a) Integrate with existing paths, streets, circulation networks and patterns of activity;
- b) Reinforce or enhance the established settlement character of streets, greens, and other spaces;
- c) Harmonise and enhance existing settlement in terms of physical form, architecture and land use;
- d) Relate well to local topography and landscape features, including prominent ridge lines and long-distance views;
- e) Reflect, respect, and reinforce local architecture and historic distinctiveness;
- f) Retain and incorporate important existing features into the development;
- g) Respect surrounding buildings in terms of scale, height, form and massing;
- h) Adopt contextually appropriate materials and details;
- i) Provide adequate open space for the development in terms of both quantity and quality;
- j) Incorporate necessary services and drainage infrastructure without causing unacceptable harm to retained features;
- k) Ensure all components e.g. buildings, landscapes, access routes, parking and open space are well related to each other;
- l) Make sufficient provision for sustainable waste management (including facilities for kerbside collection, waste separation, and minimisation where appropriate) without adverse impact on the street scene, the local landscape or the amenities of neighbours;
- m) Positively integrate energy efficient technologies;
- n) Ensure that places are designed with management, maintenance and the upkeep of utilities in mind; and
- o) Implement passive environmental design principles by, firstly, considering how the site layout can optimise beneficial solar gain and reduce energy demands (e.g. insulation), before specification of 'fabric first' energy efficient building services and finally incorporate renewable energy sources.
- p) Reflect the location and character of the National Forest both in terms of the provision of new native tree planting in accordance with National Forest planting guidelines and through design and the use of materials which respect the context of the Forest and create a National Forest identity.
- q) All new homes should be 'zero carbon' ready.

10. Housing

- 10.1 The 2021 Census recorded 15,120 individuals in the Ashby de la Zouch Neighbourhood Area, indicating an increase of 2,590 people or a 21% growth since the 2011 Census. This represents around 14.5% of the population of North West Leicestershire. Ashby de la Zouch has been the focus of much new house building, and it is reasonable to expect, if growth was determined by demand alone, that this trend would be likely to continue.
- 10.2 This chapter, along with the other chapters in the Plan, sets out the strategy and policies by which the housing needs within the Plan area over the Plan period will be met in a sustainable manner with due attention to good design, appropriate mix, preservation and improvement of the environment and sensitivity to the wider needs of the community. Provision of a high proportion of good quality affordable housing targeted to local demand is a priority.

A) Sustainable Housing Growth

- 10.3 The current Local Plan for North West Leicestershire identified a need for at least 9,620 new dwellings up to 2031 for the District as a whole. This need was not apportioned to the various communities that make up North West Leicestershire but the Local Plan made it clear that, as one of the identified Key Service Centres, Ashby de La Zouch would be required to take “a significant amount of development”. The Local Plan then proposed a number of new housing sites in the Neighbourhood Plan area in support of its role as an identified Key Service Centre.
- 10.4 These comprised 2,050 new houses on land north of Ashby de la Zouch (Money Hill), including the 605 homes on Money Hill and 70 homes at Woodcock Way which already had planning approval, and up to 153 homes at Arla Dairy which have since been granted planning permission. This represented 21% of the 9620 target for the District as a whole, a greater than proportionate share. At the time of writing planning permission has yet to be sought for approximately 1200 of this allocation.
- 10.5 At the time that the Local Plan was being prepared it was estimated that, allowing for completions, commitments and the likelihood that some sites would not be built out in the Plan period, there was a residual need for at least a further 600 dwellings. The 2050 houses allocated for Money Hill considerably exceeded that residual housing need.
- 10.6 The Town Council recognises the importance of meeting local housing demand and providing affordable housing opportunities especially for young people as well as considering the growing housing requirements for older people.
- 10.7 The Neighbourhood Plan accepts the need to meet the housing target set through the Local Plan but draws attention to the consultation findings that have revealed the growth ambitions of the residents of the Plan area are not significant. People value the historic and compact nature of the Plan area and have been concerned by the increasing amount of

development which has occurred over recent years that has reduced the level of open space and placed increasing pressure on the already overburdened transport network as well as other key services such as schools and health care, only partially mitigated by recent enhancements to these services, leading also to unsustainable levels of commuting by car.

- 10.8 Development in Ashby will be shaped by the policies within the Neighbourhood Plan and the Local Plan, taking into account the restrictions on development imposed by the River Mease Water Quality Management Plan and reflected in the Local Plan Policy En2 River Mease Special Area of Conservation.
- 10.9 The provisions contained within the Neighbourhood Plan will help to ensure that the required development, with associated improvements in infrastructure, is undertaken in a manner that provides a mix of high-quality sustainable homes to meet the needs of the community as its size, economic activity and aspirations grow during the period of this Plan. Infrastructure requirements will need to take into account ongoing maintenance as well as capital costs.
- 10.10 The 2017 North West Leicestershire Local Plan was amended by a partial review which was adopted on 16 March 2021. Once the Local Plan Review was adopted, work started on a new Local Plan for the period up to 2040 which is in its early stages of preparation. The Regulation 18 version of this Local Plan Review has identified a site for an additional 50 dwellings in Ashby in addition to the Money Hill allocation. This has been reflected in the updating of the Limits to Development in this Neighbourhood Plan.

B) Money Hill

- 10.11 Given the scale of development agreed for Money Hill, a Masterplan is in place to steer the overall layout of the site and to ensure the delivery of a range of facilities to serve the new community and its relationship with the Plan area.
- 10.12 Of particular importance is the need to ensure that the design principles are consistently applied across the Money Hill development. A separate, more detailed Masterplan and Design Code will be required for Money Hill Phase 2.

Policy H1: Money Hill – The residential allocation at Money Hill will be supported where the proposals are in line with the requirements of this Neighbourhood Plan, and in particular follow the design policy at Policy G2. Any new planning application should make specific reference to how the design guide and codes have been taken into account in the design proposals.

C) Windfall Sites

- 10.13 ‘Windfall sites’ are small infill or redevelopment sites that come forward unexpectedly and which have not been specifically identified for new housing in a planning document. These small sites often comprise redundant or underutilised buildings, including former farm buildings, or a restricted gap in the continuity of existing frontage buildings and can range from small sites suitable for only a single dwelling to areas with a capacity for several houses

(up to 10).

- 10.14 This type of development has provided a source of new housing in Ashby averaging about 7.5 dwellings a year. Though these sites cannot be identified, the high land values in the Plan area coupled with the level of vacant and underutilised land and buildings mean that they will continue to provide a reliable source of housing supply. However, if not sensitively undertaken and designed, such development can have an adverse impact on the character of the area. Such new development will generally increase car ownership and there is a need to ensure that it does not worsen traffic and parking issues.

POLICY H2: WINDFALL SITES – Development proposals for windfall housing within the limits of development will be supported where they are in accordance with relevant policies in the Neighbourhood Plan, especially G2 on design, and relevant national and District wide policies, and:

- a) help to meet the identified housing mix for the Plan area;
- b) respect the shape and form of the Plan area in order to maintain its distinctive character and enhance it where possible;
- c) retain existing important natural boundaries such as trees, hedges and streams;
- d) provide for a safe vehicular, cyclist and pedestrian access to the site and that traffic generation and parking impact including mitigation measures does not result in an unacceptable impact on its own, or in combination with other development proposals, on congestion, or road and pedestrian safety;
- e) do not result in an unacceptable loss of amenity for neighbouring occupiers by reason of loss of privacy, loss of daylight, visual intrusion or noise; and
- f) do not reduce garden space to an extent where it adversely impacts on the character of the area, or the amenity of neighbours and the occupiers of the existing dwellings.

D) Housing Mix

- 10.15 The North West Leicestershire Local Plan (2021) allows for local variation to take into account ‘population profiles, location, balancing recent local delivery, rebalancing the current mix and the turnover of properties at the local level as well as the nature of the development site and the character of the area’.
- 10.16 In order to determine the latest housing need for Ashby, a Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) was undertaken in 2023 and the information contained in that document (Appendix 1) has been used to update the evidence base for the policy. This Assessment was provided by AECOM through Locality funding.
- 10.17 The HNA notes that Ashby’s dwelling stock is characterised by larger detached and semi-detached homes (75% of stock). Recent completions have skewed the balance further toward larger detached homes. It also recognises that properties in the neighbourhood area

are dominated by 3 bedroom homes (39%) followed by larger 4 bedroom plus homes (34%). Smaller homes (1-2 bedrooms) form about 27% of the total.

- 10.18 The 2021 stock distribution is less balanced than that in 2011, showing growth in larger homes (grew from 25% to 34% in the intercensal period) and proportional declines across smaller dwelling sizes. This reflects a clear trend towards larger homes.
- 10.19 The HNA looked at population characteristics in Ashby. It noted that the population profile slightly favours the under 45 age groups with more residents aged 0-44 (52%) than 45 and over (48%). However, the change in the population's age profile between the 2011 and 2021 Censuses shows that the 65-84 age group grew markedly (46%) between these dates whilst the remaining groups grew at slower rates (14-19%). In terms of the overall trend the older age groups are growing at faster rates than the younger age groups.
- 10.20 The HNA concludes that this will potentially impact future housing need in Ashby in terms of size and type of dwellings required: smaller, more adaptable dwellings suited to older persons' needs are likely to be needed to meet some of this demand in future.
- 10.21 AECOM undertook a life-stage modelling exercise, which looks at the sizes of dwelling occupied by households at different life stages and projects the growth and decline of those age groups over the Plan period in order to understand what should be built. The results identified in the HNA suggests that new development would benefit from a strong focus on medium (3 bedroom) and smaller dwellings (2 bedroom). There is limited further need for the smallest 1-bedroom dwellings and larger (4 bedroom plus) homes over the NP period'.

POLICY H3: HOUSING MIX – New development must have regard to local housing needs as identified in the Housing Needs Assessment (2023) Appendix 1 or later document updating these findings.

The provision of 1 bed dwellings and those of 4 or more bedrooms in any development proposal will need to be justified against the conclusions of the HNA.

The provision of bungalows suitable for elderly people is supported and dwellings suitable for elderly people should be included in any development over 10 houses.

E) Affordable Housing

- 10.22 The NPPF (2023) defines Affordable Housing as: housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market (including housing that provides a subsidised route to home ownership and/or is for essential local workers).
- 10.23 This Policy H4 is aimed at redressing the historic under provision and disproportionate demand for affordable housing in Ashby de la Zouch. 25% of the current social housing waiting list across North West Leicestershire is for homes in Ashby de la Zouch. The objective is to offer more, and a greater range of, affordable housing that meets the present and future needs of Ashby and prioritise the needs of the town and its residents.

- 10.24 The need for this Policy is evidenced by the NPPF, paragraph 63, which requires local authorities to identify the required tenure of housing in specific locations and to plan for meeting this need. Policy H4 in the Local Plan for North West Leicestershire District Council sets specific targets for the delivery of affordable housing across the District, but allows for variations according to locally identified need. The NWLDC Local Plan (2021) requires a minimum of 30% of new homes on greenfield sites in Ashby de la Zouch in developments of 11 or more to be affordable, and a minimum of 15% of new homes on previously developed land in Ashby de la Zouch in developments of 30 or more to be affordable.
- 10.25 The HNA (2023) notes that Ashby has a slightly lower rate of home ownership compared to the wider district, though both the neighbourhood area and district have higher rates of owner occupation compared to the national average. Social and private rents make up a similar proportion of tenures in Ashby and the district, both being substantially lower than the average for England. Shared ownership tenures are more prevalent in Ashby than in the wider geographies. The higher owner occupation combined with fewer social and private rents could adversely impact affordability in the Neighbourhood Area.
- 10.26 The AECOM HNA looks at Affordable Housing need from two perspectives.
- 10.27 The first is the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing and Economic Needs Assessment (NHENA) conducted in 2022. This report identifies around 34 affordable rented dwellings per year over the Plan period (612) and 21 units of affordable ownership homes per year making a further 378 over the Plan period. The total affordable housing need across the neighbourhood area is therefore 990.
- 10.28 Using locally specific data to estimate Ashby's affordable housing need identified approximately 22 affordable rented units over the Plan period and a further 603 affordable ownership dwellings over the Plan period.
- 10.29 The narrative in the AECOM report acknowledges that this calculation, assuming that turnover would account for much of the affordable rented need, would do little to address the backlog in need reflected in 120 households that are on the Housing Register. It also fails to address need outside of the neighbourhood area so can be considered an underestimate of need.
- 10.30 The Affordable Housing situation is exacerbated by Right to buy sales since 2018/19 which has seen 34 properties lost to private sales and only 22 new build/acquisitions over the same period. A net loss of 12 rented Affordable Housing dwellings.
- 10.31 House prices have consistently risen over the past decade with the average property price (currently £330,559) rising 58% in value. The entry level (lower quartile) house price grew from £137,000 in 2013 to £197,500 in 2022; a growth of 68%. The median house price rose by 52% in the same period (currently £297,000). Data suggests that property values in Ashby attract a 16-17% premium over prices in the wider district.

POLICY H4: AFFORDABLE HOUSING – To support the provision of mixed, sustainable communities

and meet an identified need within the community:

Subject to viability, a target of 30% of high-quality affordable homes shall be delivered on new greenfield housing developments comprising 10 or more dwellings. On previously developed land the target shall be 15% above a threshold of 30 dwellings or 1ha. On-site affordable housing should:

- a) include a mix of types and tenure that reflects the type and nature of identified need;
- b) be integrated within the design and layout, such that they are externally indistinguishable from market housing on the same site.
- c) In legal agreements connected to planning consents that deliver affordable housing, nomination rights will normally be expected to give priority to applicants with a local connection to the Plan Area who are within the same category of need.

In exceptional circumstances commuted sums may be acceptable provided that such commuted sums shall be used to provide suitable affordable housing in Ashby de la Zouch or specialist accommodation in the wider district;

- I. At least 40% of the affordable homes provided shall be 1- or 2-bedroom dwellings;
- II. Affordable housing will be required to contribute to the provision of affordable homes that are suited to the needs of older people and those with disabilities; and
- III. Where First Homes are provided, they shall be at a discount of 30% subject to viability.

G. Self-Build

10.32 The NPPF calls for 'custom build' opportunities to be included in local plans as part of the housing mix. This is accommodated within the Neighbourhood Plan and referred to as 'self-build'. These opportunities offer benefits in terms of affordability, local engagement and encouraging bespoke design appropriate to the area. This will ensure the fit within the overall design of the scheme and provide flexibility to meet a range of different needs. In this type of development, new homes are built either by the future homeowner themselves (self-build), or to their specification by a small developer or local builder (custom build). The Neighbourhood Plan promotes this approach and encourages self-build opportunities to be incorporated into new housing developments.

10.33 The national self-build website - <http://www.nasba.org.uk/> - identifies a number of benefits to this type of development model when compared to conventional development:

- Better quality homes.
- More individual and contemporary architecture (but the style must still be in accordance with local planning policy).
- Cheaper to build than to buy the equivalent.

- More likely to be undertaken by local residents – thereby enhancing a sense of community.
- More likely to include sustainable and green technology.
- Homes that are tailored to the needs of their owners.
- More likely to involve local tradespeople in the construction.

POLICY H5: PROMOTING SELF-BUILD – Development proposals for self-build or custom build schemes that are in conformity with the Policies of this Neighbourhood Plan and are within the Limits of Development will be viewed positively.

11. The Natural, Historic and Social Environment

Local Green Spaces

- 11.1 The NPPF enables Neighbourhood Plans to provide special protection for green areas of significance to local communities through their designation as a Local Green Space. As set out in NPPF (2023) paragraph 102, this designation should only be used where various criteria are met, including where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves and is not an extensive tract of land. The North West Leicestershire 2011-2031 Local Plan did not designate any Local Green Spaces, explicitly delegating the making of such designations to Neighbourhood Plans.
- 11.2 An up-to-date, objective assessment (Appendix 4) of all Open Spaces – including Open Space, Sport & Recreation sites (OSSRs) – and all sites of known environmental significance in the Neighbourhood Area was carried out in 2023 as part of this Neighbourhood Plan Review. This assessment automatically also covered the Local Green Spaces designated in the 2018 Neighbourhood Plan as all of them are also *de facto* OSSRs and most have other environmental (historic, natural) significance.
- 11.3 All inventoried sites in Appendix 4 are covered by one or more of this Review Plan’s policies. The sites designated as Local Green Space in 2018 have been confirmed as such in this Review Plan and are covered by policy ENV 1; their high community value was demonstrated at the time (candidate sites were proposed by the community, formal consultation, examination) and has been confirmed in 2023. Evidence for the confirmed LGS designations is in Appendix 5, which records the process (Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, Ashby Town Council and residents working alongside an environmental consultant) used to evidence the Local Green Spaces against the criteria identified in the NPPF (December 2023).

POLICY ENV 1: LOCAL GREEN SPACES – Development proposals that would result in the loss of, or have an adverse effect on, the following Local Green Spaces (details Appendix 5; locations figure 5) will not be permitted other than in very special circumstances.

Hood Park (inventory reference 009)

Westfields Recreation Ground (018)

Ashby Cemetery (022)

Ashby de la Zouch Allotments (023)

Ashby Bath Grounds (025)

Bullen’s Field, Prior Park Road (025.1)

Memorial Grounds (026.1)

Prior Park Road Field (026.3)

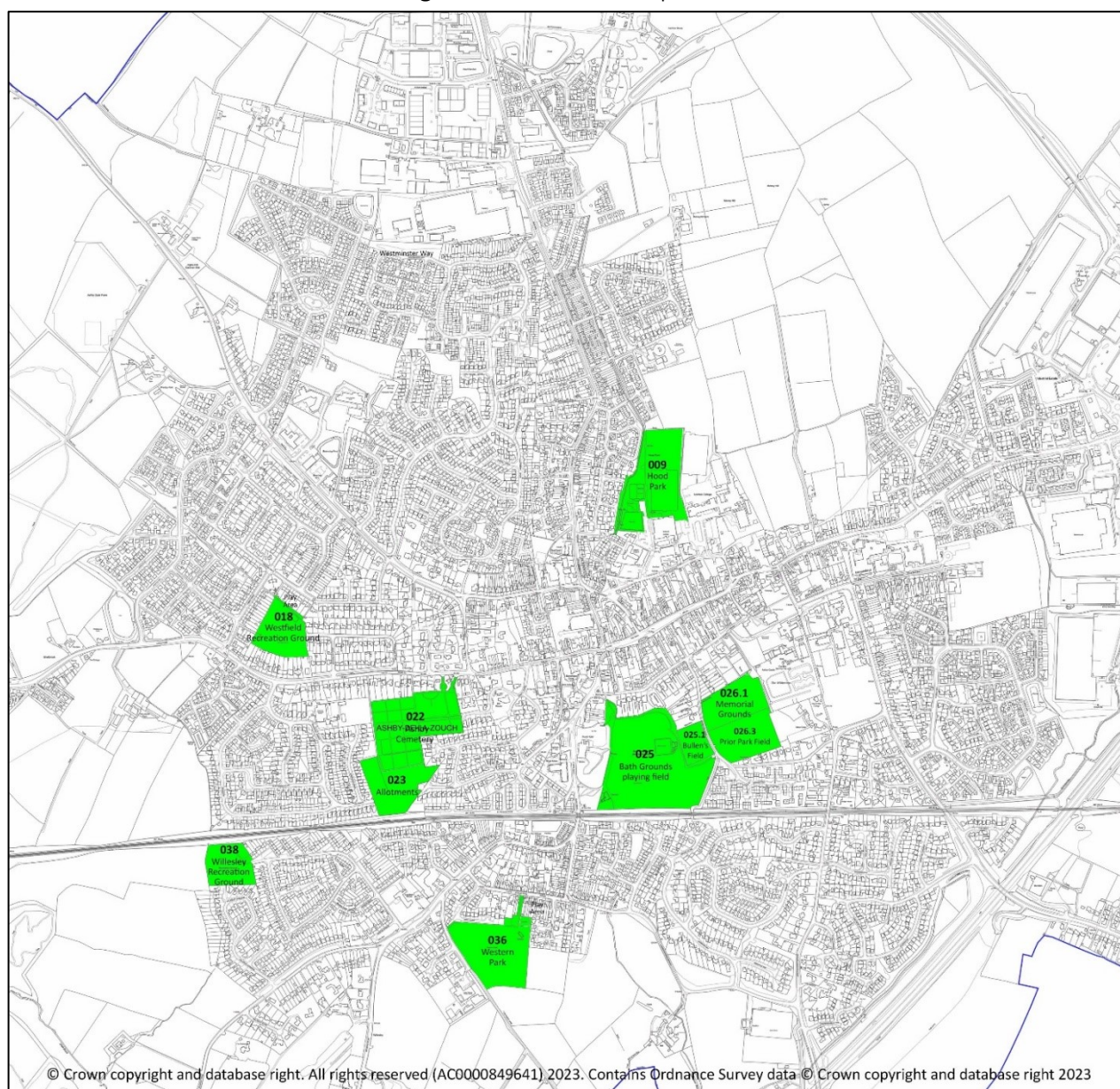
Western Park Recreation Ground (036)

Willesley Recreation Ground (038)

While most development proposals for new buildings on these sites will be harmful and inappropriate and will not be supported, exceptions will be made for proposals that would enhance the value or significance of the Local Green Space, including:

- Buildings providing appropriate facilities for sport and recreation, or associated with burial grounds/cemeteries, as long as the development does not conflict with the functions or values for which the Local Green Space has been designated,
- Extension or alteration of an existing building, provided that it does not result in a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building,
- Replacement of a building, provided the new building is for the same use and is not materially larger than the one it replaces,
- Development associated with enhancement and/or interpretation of the site's biodiversity or historical interest,
- Development required for flood risk resilience or mitigation.

Figure 5: Local Green Spaces



Open Spaces for sport, recreation and amenity

- 11.4 A group of sites scored highly in the inventory (Appendix 3) as open and green spaces with demonstrably high community value. They have been identified in fieldwork, community consultations and in Town Council records. Thirty-two were recognised as Open Space, Sport & Recreation sites in NWLDC's *PPG17 Open Space Sport and Recreation Study 2008* (part of the supporting documentation for the North West Leicestershire Council Local Plan, 2011-31). No more detailed or up-to-date audit or mapping appears to have been compiled as site-specific support for the current Local Plan policy IF3, while at the time of drafting of this Neighbourhood Plan Review (February 2024), no new audit had been undertaken as part of the evidence base for the emerging new Local Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan therefore checked and updated the status of all the 2008 open spaces and now identifies a further 35 (previously omitted, or new) open spaces with the characteristics and values of OSSRs using NWLDC's rationale for and hierarchy of open spaces typologies.
- 11.5 Also important to note is that six of the NWLDC 2008 audit list OSSRs were designated as Local Green Spaces by the 2018 Neighbourhood Plan and have been confirmed as such by this Plan Review, while one other is newly designated LGS by this Plan; these sites are therefore omitted from coverage by Policy ENV 2 (to avoid two policies with potentially incompatible objectives being applied to one site).
- 11.6 All the following sites' values as open space within and close to the built-up areas and/or their actual or potential value as community resources are recognised in Policy ENV 2. The policy is in general conformity with, and adds local detail to, North West Leicestershire *Local Plan (2011-2031)* Policy IF3, specifically the section 'Loss of Open Space', and has regard for National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023) paragraph 103.
- 11.7 The need for effective, continuous maintenance arrangements for publicly accessible, functional open spaces, irrespective of their public/private rights of access status, is recognised in Community Action 1.

POLICY ENV 2: IMPORTANT OPEN SPACES FOR SPORT, RECREATION AND AMENITY

1. The following open spaces (locations figure 6; details in Appendix 4) are of high local value for recreation, sport, amenity and other functions, within or close to the built-up area. Development proposals that result in their loss, or have a significant adverse effect on them, will not be supported unless the open space is replaced by at least equivalent provision in an equally suitable location, or unless it can be demonstrated that the open space is no longer required by the community.

NWLDC Open Space Audit sites

Local Open Space

Land off Marlborough Way (inventory reference 007)

Recreation Grounds

Ashby Rugby Club, Nottingham Road (014)

Schools

Ashby Hilltop Primary School grounds (020)

Willesley Primary School grounds (037)

Children's play areas [NB only four have play equipment or facilities; the appropriate typology for the rest is *Amenity Green Space*]

Repton Close amenity green space (005)
(*Amenity green space*)

Off Highgate – amenity green space (006/007)
(*Children's play area* 006 within 007 *Amenity green space*)

King Richard Way amenity green space and play area (011) (*Children's play area* and *Amenity green space*)

Astley Way amenity green space and play area (012) (*Children's play area* and *Amenity green space*)

Elm Avenue amenity green space and play area (013) (*Children's play area* and *Amenity green space*)

Rouen Way amenity green space (016) (*Amenity green space*)

Toulouse Place amenity green space (017)
(*Amenity green space*)

Woodside amenity green space (019) (*Amenity green space*)

Loudon Way amenity green space (021)
(*Amenity green space*)

Pentland Road amenity green space (027)
(*Amenity green space*)

Windermere Avenue amenity green space (028)
(*Amenity green space*)

Ulleswater Crescent amenity green space (030)
(*Amenity green space*)

Chapmans Meadows amenity green space and play area (031) (*Children's play area* and *Amenity green space*)

Rydal Gardens amenity green space (032)
(*Amenity green space*)

Stuart Way amenity green space (035) (*Amenity green space*)

Lockton Close amenity green space (039)
(*Amenity green space*)

Stowe Close amenity green space (048)
[erroneously as 'Stowell Close' in NWLDC audit]

Open Spaces designated by this Plan:

Bishop Hall Road (001); *Amenity green space*

Rushey Close (002); *Amenity green space*

Spring Meadow (003); *Amenity green space*

Meadow Lane (004); *Amenity green space*

Woodcote Primary School grounds (008); *Schools*

Woodcock Way (010); *Amenity green space* and *Children's play area*

Oak Crescent (013.1); *Amenity green space*

Ashby School Playing Field/The Range (015); *Schools/Amenity green space*

Trinity Close (024); *Amenity green space*

Ulleswater Crescent 2 (029); *Amenity green space*

Ashby Lawn Tennis Club (026.2); *Recreation ground*

Cotswold Way/Chiltern Rise (033); *Amenity green space*

Windmill Hill (034); *Amenity green space*

Stuart Way 1 (035); *Amenity green space*

Lower Packington Sports Ground (040); *Recreation grounds*

Ashby Church or England primary school grounds (041); *Schools*

Ashby Hastings School grounds (042); *Schools*

Ivanhoe College grounds (043); *Schools*

Huntingdon Road (044); *Amenity green space*

Woodside/Huntingdon Road (044.1); *Amenity green space*

Goose Pen Lane and Holy Well OS (045); *Amenity green space*

Dunbar Way to Weysford Lane (046/047); *Amenity green space*

Spring Farm (049); *Play area and Amenity green space*

Bernard Vann Crescent (050); *Amenity green space*

Moira Road (051); *Amenity green space*

Templar Road / Cliftonthorpe (052); *Amenity green space and Play area*

School Lane and Holy Well (053); *Amenity green space*

Dunbar Way/Abbotsford Road (054); *Amenity*

green space

The Croft (055); *Amenity green space*

Upper Packington Road (056); *Amenity green space*

Pennine Way/Wrekin Close (057); *Amenity green space*

Westminster Way (058); *Amenity green space*

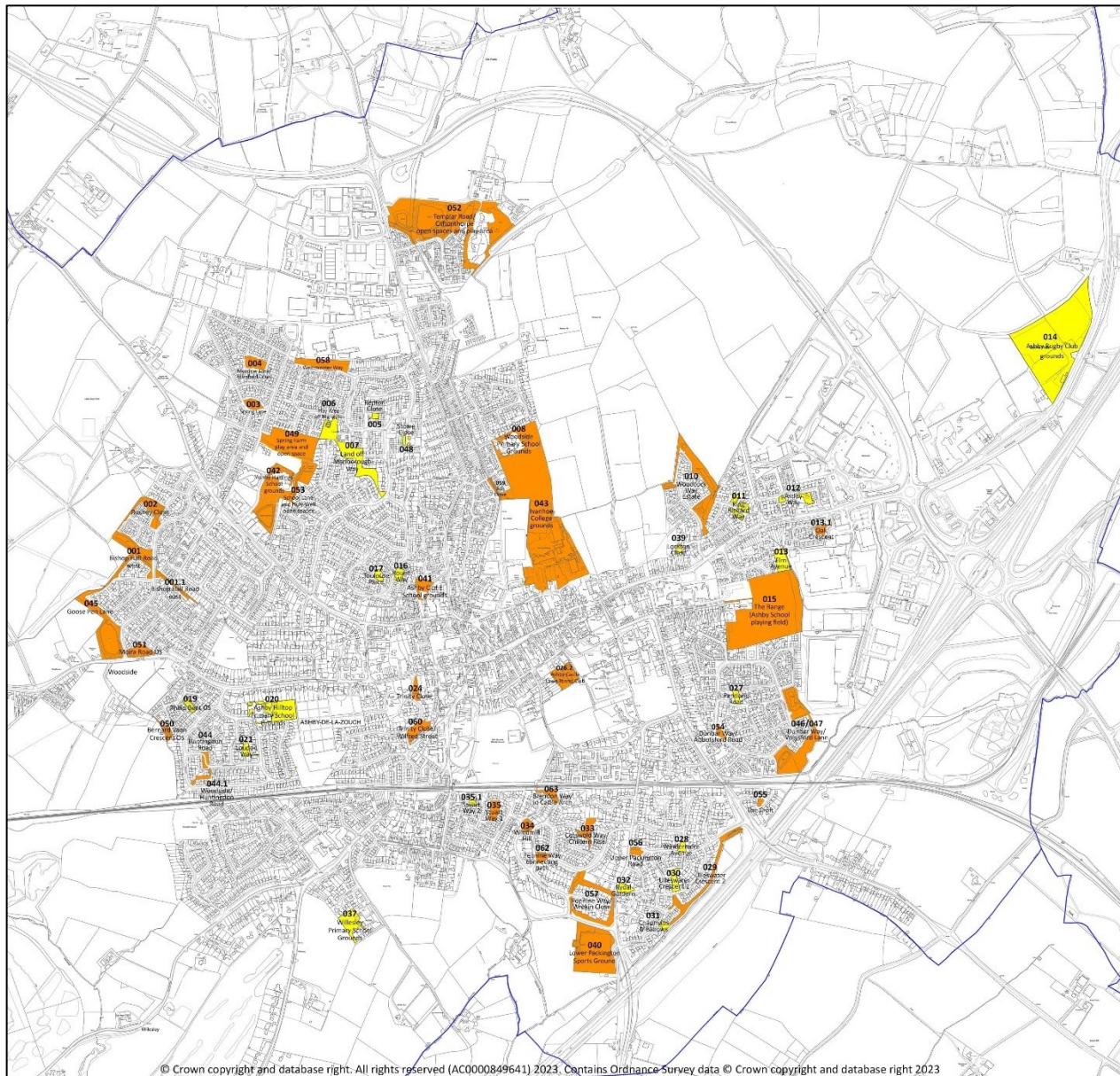
Ash Drive (059); *Amenity green space*

Pennine Way connecting path (062); *Amenity green space*

Brendon Way to Cattle Arch (063); *Amenity green space*

2. Land allocated as Open Space in approved new development proposals (residential and employment) will be protected as in (1) above immediately following completion of the development.

Figure 6: Important open spaces for sport, recreation and amenity

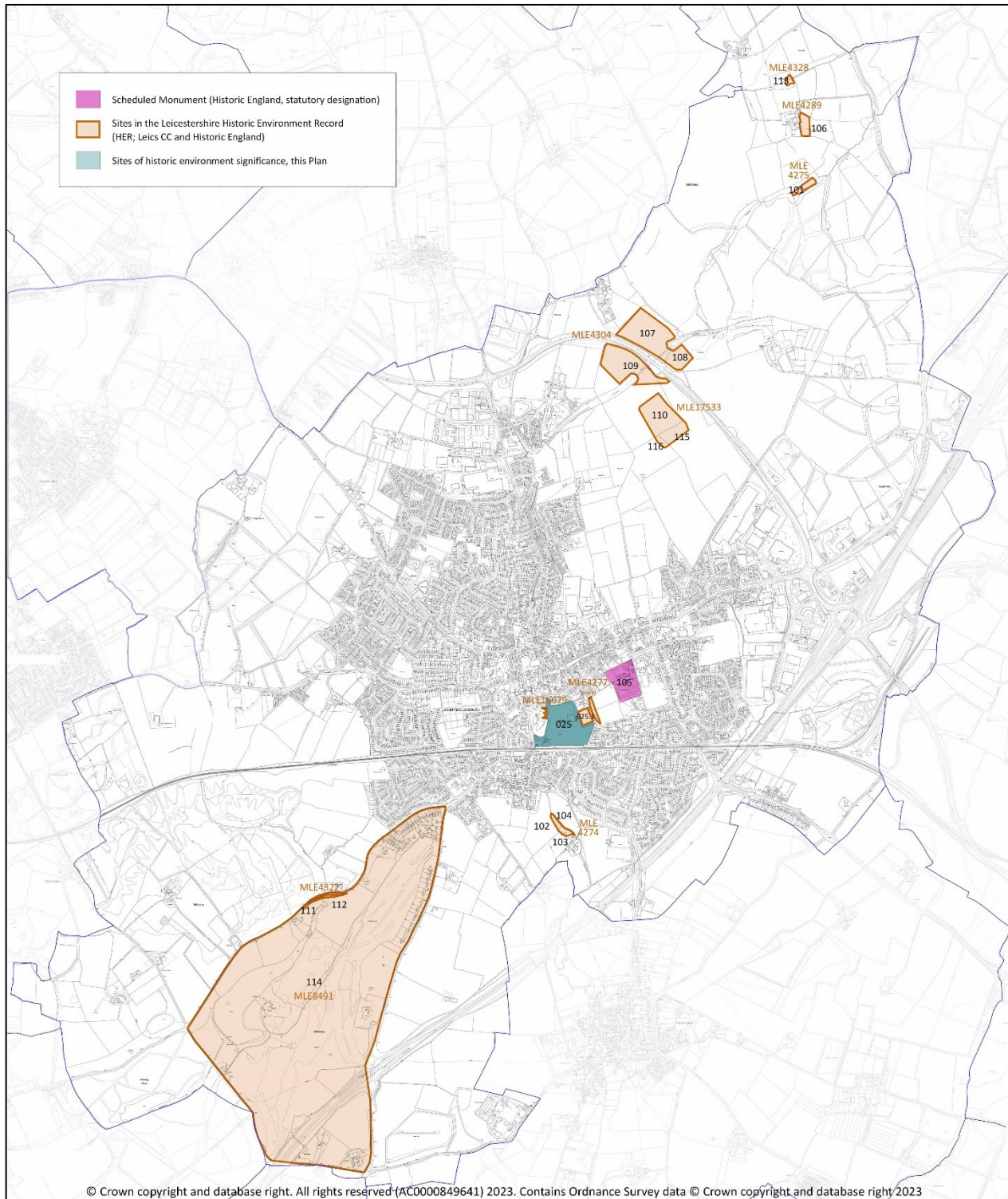


COMMUNITY ACTION 1: MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF IMPORTANT OPEN SPACES – The community expects all public open spaces mapped in figure 6 to be managed effectively to maintain or enhance their amenities, features or biodiversity, and to comply with public liability standards for safety, for as long as they continue to function as publicly-accessible open spaces.

Sites of historic environment significance

11.8 A number of sites in the Plan Area (open countryside and built-up areas) are heritage assets with historical significance at national, county, district and local levels.

Figure 7: Sites of historic environment significance



11.9 They comprise all surviving sites of relevance to Planning decision-making with *extant and visible* archaeological or historical features, or proven buried archaeology as recorded in the *Historic England* and *Leicestershire Historic Environment Records* (HER) databases,

together with one further eligible site identified by local historians to form part of the evidence-for the Neighbourhood Plan. The features for which the identified sites have been selected and notified are recorded in the environmental inventory (Appendix 3). The map (figure 7) shows their locations. Policy ENV 5 adds local detail to the Local Plan, is in general conformity with Local Plan policy He1, and has regard for National Planning Policy Framework 2023 paragraphs 194-195 (as Heritage Assets).

POLICY ENV 3: SITES OF HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SIGNIFICANCE - The sites mapped in figure 7 (details in Appendix 4) have been identified as being of local or wider significance for history. The features are extant and have visible expression or there is proven buried archaeology on the site, and they are locally valued.

Development proposals that would detrimentally affect or remove the identified features will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that the benefits arising from the proposed development achieves substantial public benefits that would outweigh the harm or loss of the feature concerned.

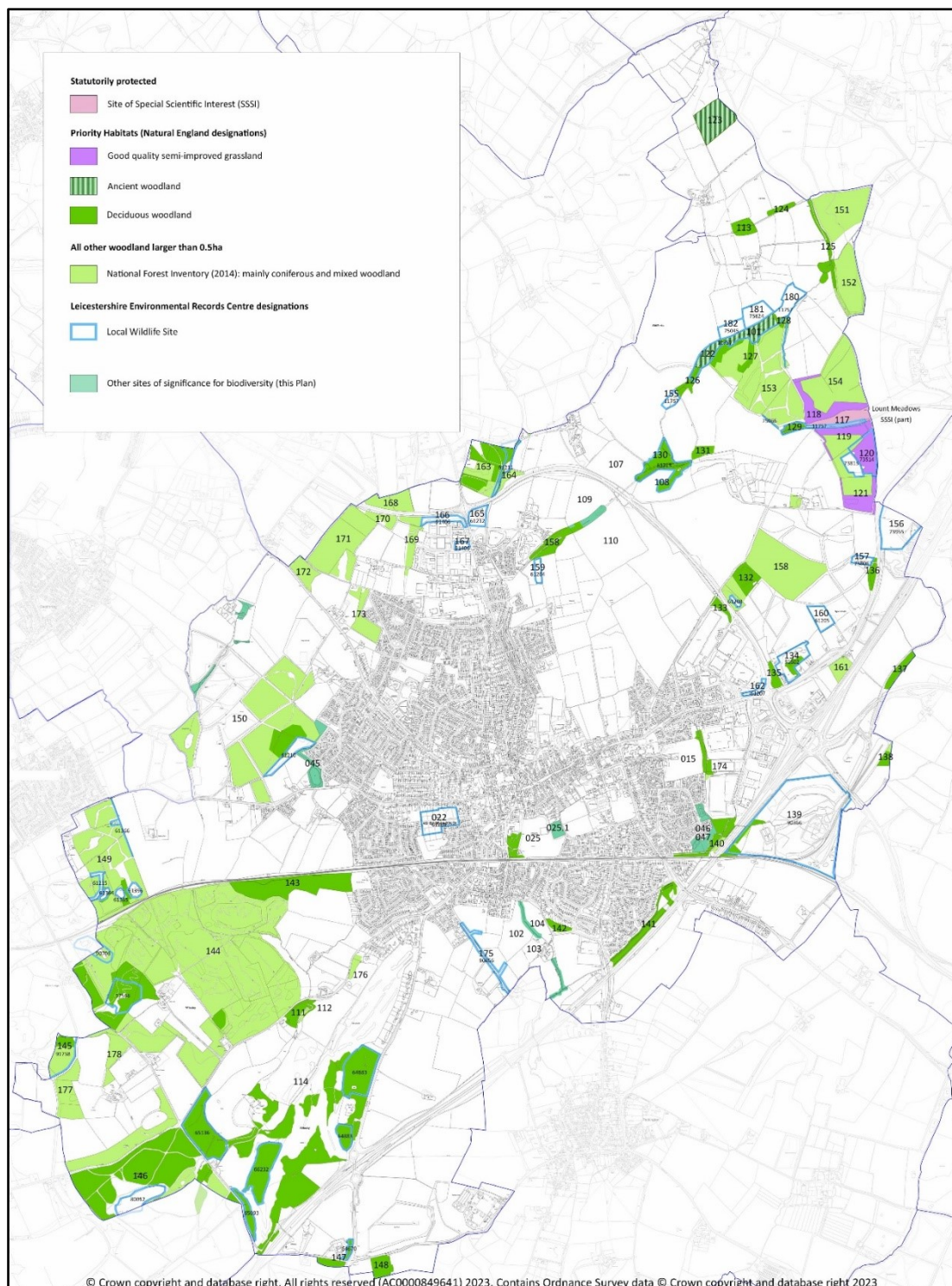
Sites and features of natural environment significance

11.10 Although some 40% of the whole Plan Area is built on (the historic town, housing estates, 19th-century mining settlements and extensive industrial and commercial areas) the rest is open countryside with a variety of habitats with locally high biodiversity and recreational value. Paradoxically, much of this richness is the result of 19th and 20th century industry, especially mining and quarrying, whose disused sites have either been restored as woodland or have undergone natural or deliberate 'rewilding'. 18th and 19th century landscaping of the large estates of local landowners (surviving as woodland and pasture) also contributes to local biodiversity.

11.11 Recent development pressure, meanwhile, has meant that the area has been quite comprehensively surveyed by national and County ecologists; recording and recognition, with in many cases designation, of sites, habitat areas and individual species and features has resulted in high levels of understanding of the biodiversity significance of the Plan Area. Residents value this richness of wildlife, both for its intrinsic importance to national biodiversity and as an important defining character of the local landscape and environment. Part of the intention of policies ENV 4 and ENV 5 is therefore to emphasise that the *environmental* objective of *sustainable development* (National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023) paragraphs 8 and 11) should be given due and equal weight against, for example, the *economic* objective when planning policy is being made and decisions taken, perhaps especially in Ashby because the Plan Area is under pressure from strategic housing and commercial development. The requirement for biodiversity net gain and use of the metric for demonstrating it (Planning Practice Guidance 7 July 2021; Environment Act 2021; National Planning Policy Framework, 2023) should be fulfilled in all planning proposals, and its deliverability scrutinised when planning decisions are made.

POLICY ENV 4: SITES AND FEATURES OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT SIGNIFICANCE – The sites and features mapped here (figure 8; details in Appendix 3) have been identified as being of at least local significance for the natural environment. They are ecologically important in their own right, and are locally valued. The significance of the species, habitats or features present should be balanced against the benefit of any development that would adversely affect them. Development proposals on the identified sites will be expected to include evidence-based, measurable proposals for delivering *biodiversity net gain* at a minimum 10% (unless exempted).

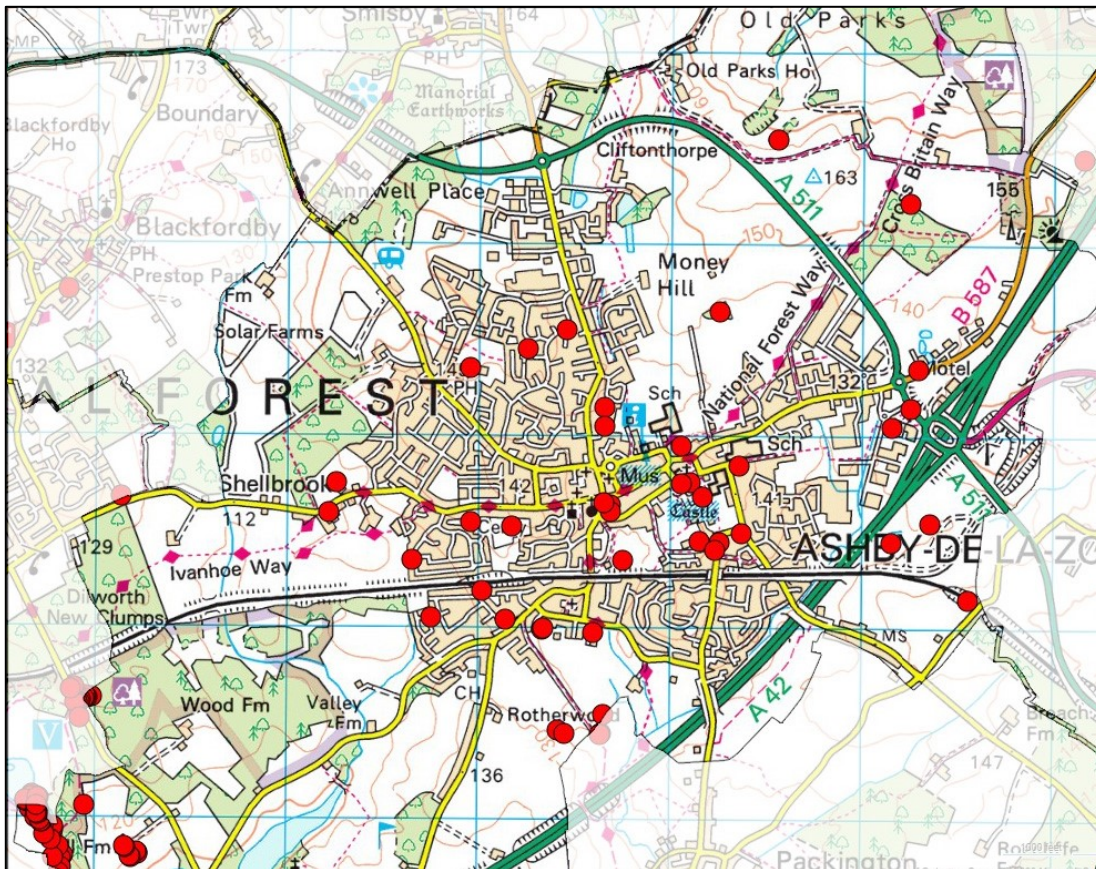
Figure 8: Sites of natural environment significance



Biodiversity across the Plan Area

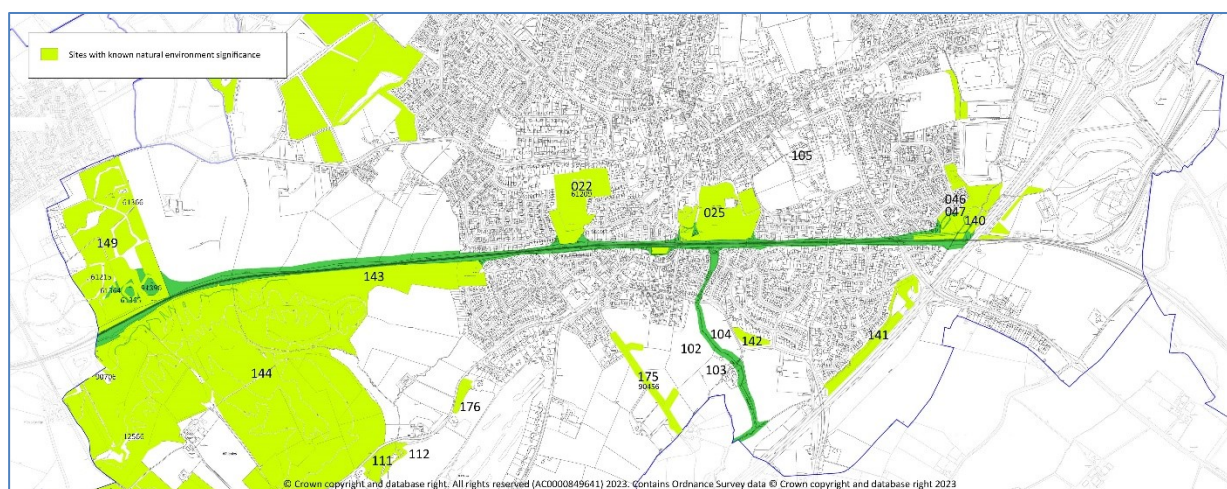
- 11.12 It might be said that Ashby de la Zouch is a 'typical' area of the English Midlands because it has only one nationally important wildlife site, and thus that its biodiversity is relatively unimportant when weighed against economic and residential development in the Planning system. This would be a misunderstanding of the concept of biodiversity. England's biodiversity is entirely and only the sum of the wildlife in all of its individual parishes: Ashby is as important in this regard as every other Neighbourhood Plan Area, and residents want it to play its essential part in protecting what remains of England's threatened and diminishing biodiversity.
- 11.13 The Plan Area, both the town and areas in the surrounding countryside, has records of at least eight species of bats, making Ashby a significant location for these statutorily protected animals. By referring to this county level site-specific data, policy ENV 5 adds local detail to national legislation and policy and to the relevant NWLDC policies.

Figure 9.1: Bat records in the Plan Area (Leicestershire Environmental Record Centre mapping)



- 11.14 Connectivity is an essential component of biodiversity. Isolated populations of animals and plants are at risk of destruction or of simply 'dying out'. Wildlife Corridors aim to re-connect populations and habitats within parishes and more widely. A wildlife corridor along the wooded railway land providing connectivity between the main groups of biodiversity sites in the west of the Plan Area, the open spaces in the town and out to the east is mapped in figure 9.2.

Figure 9.2: Wildlife corridor



11.15 While policy ENV 4 delivers site-specific compliance in the Neighbourhood Area with the relevant North West Leicestershire Council policies, the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, the Habitats and Species Regulations 2017-2019 and the UK Environment Act 2021, this policy (ENV 4) does the same for strategic planning and future development proposals across the Plan Area. It also refers to the DEFRA *Guidance* of July 7, 2021 in respect of the use of the *biodiversity metric* approach to assessing the value of a development site to wildlife. The policy is explicitly supported by National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023) paragraphs 180 (a) and (d); 181 and 185, and on 186(a), on which this policy's wording is partly based. The community also expects all planning strategies, proposals and decisions affecting the Plan Area to comply with the requirements of the *Climate Change Act* 2008, to follow the spirit of the *Paris Agreement* (UK ratification 2017) and the UK's *25 year environment plan (2018)*, and to plan for *biodiversity net gain* through the mechanisms described in the *Environment Act 2021*.

POLICY ENV 5: BIODIVERSITY AND HABITAT CONNECTIVITY– All new development proposals will be expected to safeguard habitats and species across the Neighbourhood Area, including those of local significance, and to deliver biodiversity net gain. If significant harm to biodiversity cannot be avoided (through relocating to an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, in addition, dealt with through onsite or offsite enhancement (via biodiversity net gain at 10%) or compensation, planning permission should be refused, in conformity with paragraph 186(a) of the NPPF (December 2023).

Ashby de la Zouch is located within the heart of the National Forest. All planning decisions where woodland, trees or hedgerows are a consideration (for any reason) should take this into account. Development proposals that adversely affect trees, woodland and hedges of environmental (biodiversity, historical, arboricultural) significance, or of landscape or amenity value, will be resisted. New development should be designed to retain such trees and hedges wherever possible. Where destruction cannot be avoided, developers will be required to plant replacement trees and/or hedges on site or to provide compensatory planting elsewhere in the Neighbourhood Area.

Hedgerows should be retained and protected. Where loss is unavoidable, it should be minimised

and compensated for by replacement planting of locally-appropriate native species. Development which does not provide a net gain in length and species diversity of hedgerows will not be supported.

When fulfilment of biodiversity net gain involves trees and hedges, compensatory plantings should be of suitable native or ornamental species (depending on the location) and should take account of current best practice regarding plant disease control and aftercare.

Development proposals close to locations where bats are known to occur (figure 9.1) and which involve demolition, extension affecting roof-space or roofline, or changes to eaves, chimneys, ridge, soffits, slates/tiles, must include a record of consultation with the Leicestershire Environmental Records Centre team and demonstrate that their recommendations have been taken into account in the proposal.

In addition, and to comply with current legislation and guidance, all development proposals in the Plan Area should take account of the possibility of bats, their roosts and commuting and foraging habitats, in and adjacent to the development site. They should:

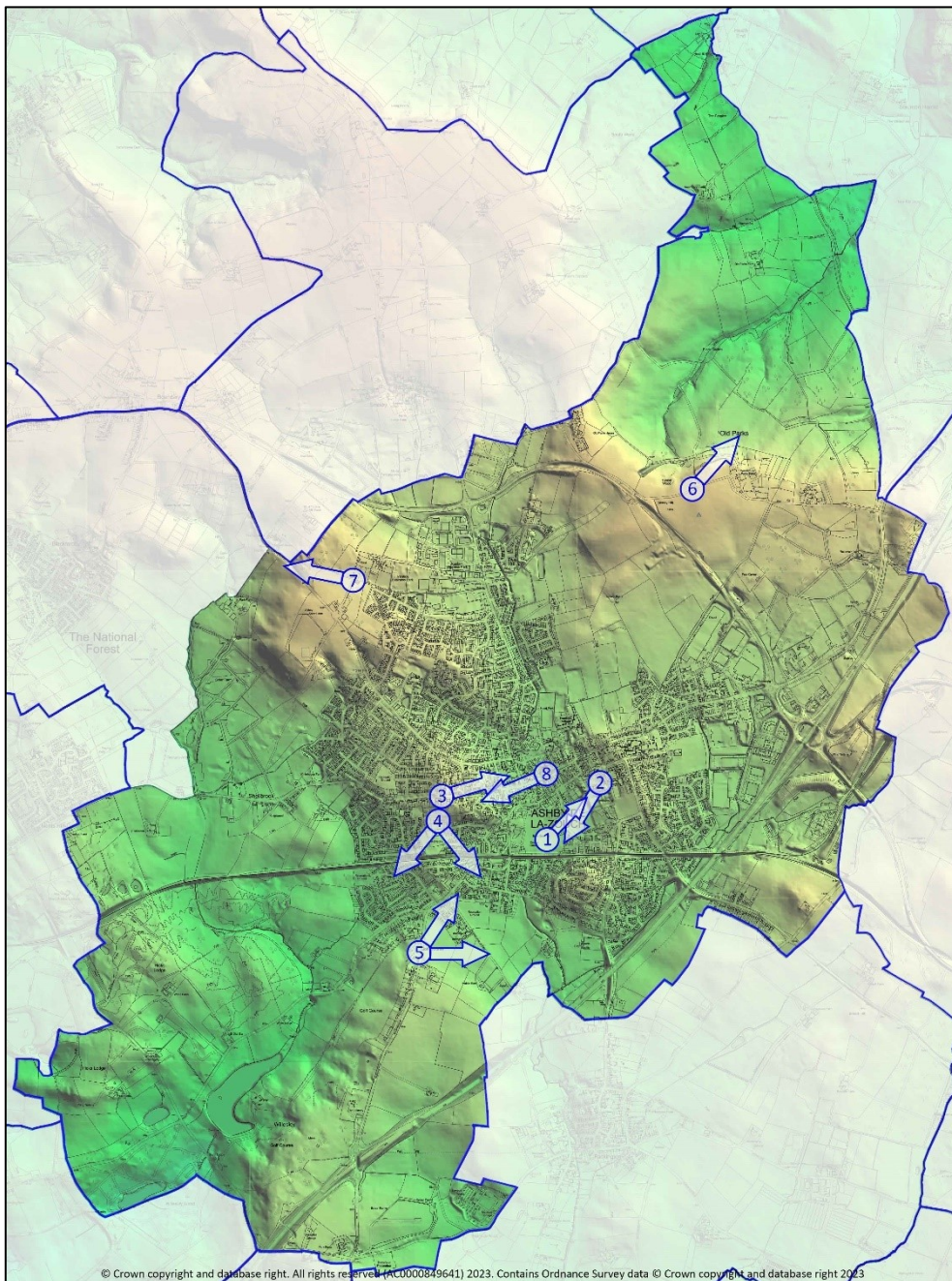
- in known bat habitat areas, not incorporate exterior artificial lighting (on buildings or open areas) unless demonstrably essential
- in known or potential bat habitat areas, not remove trees unless demonstrably essential
- in all locations, apply mitigation methods in the design and location of artificial lighting using current best practice in respect of dark buffers, illuminance levels, zonation, luminaire specifications, curfew times, site configuration and screening
- in all locations, incorporate integral or external bat boxes in an agreed ratio of boxes to number of buildings or site size.

Development in the Plan Area will be expected to protect and enhance the identified wildlife corridors (figure 9.2) and other potential habitat links. It should not create barriers to the permeability of the landscape for wildlife in general, or fragment populations of species of conservation concern.

Important views

- 11.16 Consultation during the Neighbourhood Plan's preparation identified a widely held wish to protect what remains of Ashby's countryside setting, in particular its visual relationship with the surrounding landscape and the extensive areas with public countryside access and its location in the National Forest.
- 11.17 One of the main ways in which residents expressed this wish was by describing several highly valued views within the town and toward it from the surrounding countryside, and other views from high ground across the whole parish. These consultation findings were further defined by the environmental inventory, which although principally aimed at identifying sites of environmental significance also confirmed the sightlines of the suggested views and mapped them (figure 10).

Figure 10: Important views



POLICY ENV 6: IMPORTANT VIEWS – The following views (map figure 10, details Appendix 5) are important to the setting and character of the town and its setting within the wider landscape. Development proposals should respect and whenever possible protect them. Development which would have an adverse impact on the identified views will not be supported.

1. From the Bath Grounds northeast over Bullen's Field to Ashby Castle and the parish
2. From Ashby Castle over a series of green open spaces (including Bullen's Field) into attractive open countryside
3. From Kilwardby Street, east along Market Street into Ashby town centre, with the historic St Helen's church on the hilltop in the distance
4. View south (SSW – SSE) from Ashby Cemetery to Willesley and toward Packington and Packington Nook

5. Northeast and east from Measham Road over parkland / open countryside with mature trees and old ridge and furrow pasture (in the distance) toward the outskirts of Ashby
6. Northeast from near Money Hill across high open countryside to the parish boundary in the direction of Staunton Harold
7. From the west side of Ashby, one of several views from the high ground of the Ingles Hill area westward into rural open countryside
8. From Market Street, west to Holy Trinity church. This view and #3 together help to define the layout and character of Ashby's historic town centre

Areas of Local Separation

11.18 Despite its size as a small town and the presence of large employment sites to the east and north, Ashby is still largely surrounded by typical Leicestershire/Derbyshire landscapes, and the nearest villages are separated from the town's outer edges by open countryside, much of it attractive, pastoral or wooded. This separation is very highly valued by residents. National planning policy recognises the desirability of preventing the coalescence of geographically distinct settlements like Ashby, Packington, Blackfordby and Smisby through the effects of strategic or uncontrolled development. Policy ENV 7 provides management of development from Ashby toward the surrounding villages. There is significant developer interest in development between the town of Ashby and surrounding villages. Adjacent settlements are in close enough proximity that further development in the space between them would compromise their geographical separation and potentially lead to their coalescence.

Figure 11 (a): Land offered for the 2021 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment

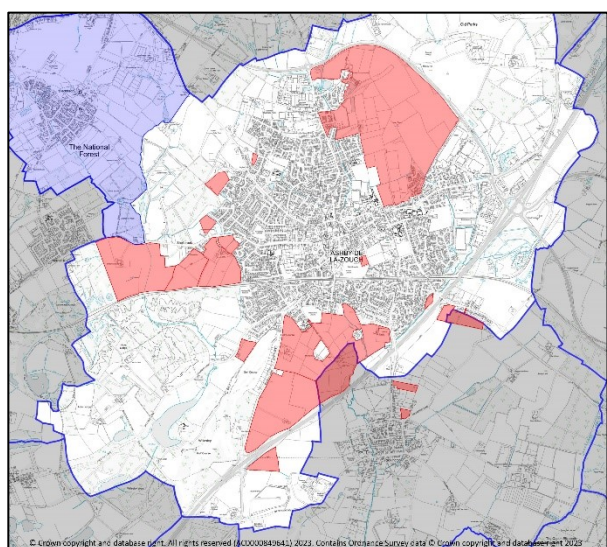
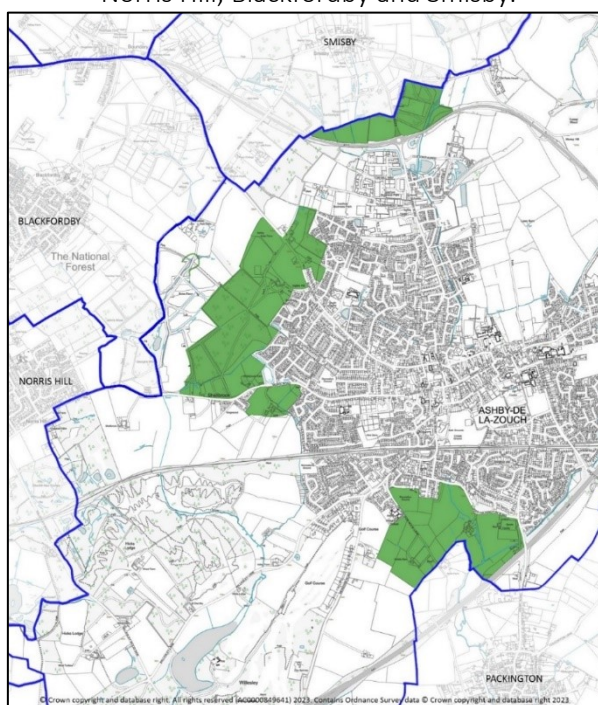


Figure 11 (b): Areas of Local Separation to prevent the coalescence of Ashby de la Zouch with the neighbouring settlements of Packington, Shellbrook, Norris Hill, Blackfordby and Smisby.



- 11.19 This is the national precondition for an Area of Separation designation and policy-making, and it is indisputably the situation in the parts of the Neighbourhood Area where the Area of Separation is proposed. The justification for the policy is that the community(s) of the currently separate settlements wish to retain their individual geographical identities and the separation between them by managing (not precluding) development, and that the level of developer interest is sufficient to warrant an Area of Separation policy.
- 11.20 Figure 11 (a) shows the extent of developer interest in Ashby as indicated by the latest Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (2021).
- 11.21 Areas of Separation are not classed as a strategic policy in the emerging Local Plan for NWLDC.

POLICY ENV 7: AREAS OF LOCAL SEPARATION – The land shaded green in figure 11(b) is designated as Areas of Local Separation between Ashby de la Zouch and, respectively, Packington, Shellbrook, Norris Hill, Blackfordby and Smisby. Within these areas only the types of development recognised in National Planning Policy as appropriate for open countryside will be supported. Development will not be permitted if, either individually or in combination with other proposals, it would produce any significant coalescence of the settlements or reduce their geographical separation.

Flood risk

- 11.22 Even if international cooperation and national strategies and policies eventually succeed in halting the human and industrial contributions towards climate change, the effects of recent and current warming on weather events will likely persist for decades. It is therefore desirable to plan for at least a medium-term future, in which weather events will continue to become more extreme, by putting in place measures that manage the effects of climate change on flooding for the lifetime of this Plan and beyond. This objective is explicitly supported by the Environment Agency (EA) draft *National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England* (2019), in which the strategic emphasis shifts from mitigation to resilience; in other words from requiring new development to reduce its adverse effects on flood risk and to avoid creating or adding to flood risk at all.
- 11.23 In light of this, it is particularly important that the location and technical standards of all new development proposals in the Plan Area should in future be judged on their mitigation or exacerbation of flooding locally in a climate change world. Recent experience in Ashby highlights the need for this rigour in the way development proposals are scrutinised, determined and enforced: extreme rainfall associated with an intense low pressure weather event in autumn 2023 overwhelmed the flood management infrastructure designed into a relatively new housing development, overflowed into a watercourse and led to the flooding of properties downstream.

Balancing pond in recent new development full and overflowing into watercourse, causing flooding downstream in locations never previously flooded



- 11.24 To complement this objective of policy ENV 8, the community will support proposals to improve the infrastructure within the built-up areas for managing flooding from watercourses and from surface water run-off events, providing this is not unduly detrimental to the historic built environment, biodiversity sites, or open and green spaces.
- 11.25 The policy supports the North West Leicestershire Council *Zero Carbon Roadmap* 2019, and is in general conformity with North West Leicestershire Council Local Plan (partial review written statement, adopted 2021) Policy Cc2.

POLICY ENV 8: FLOOD RISK RESILIENCE – Development proposals in the areas indicated in Figure 12, will be required, where appropriate, to demonstrate that the benefit of development outweighs the harm in relation to its adverse impact on climate change targets, and on the likelihood of it conflicting with locally applicable flood mitigation strategies and infrastructure.

Proposals to construct new (or modify existing) floodwater management infrastructure (ditches, roadside gullies, retention pools, etc.), including within or close to the built-up areas, will be supported, provided they do not adversely affect important open spaces or sites and features of natural or historical environment significance.

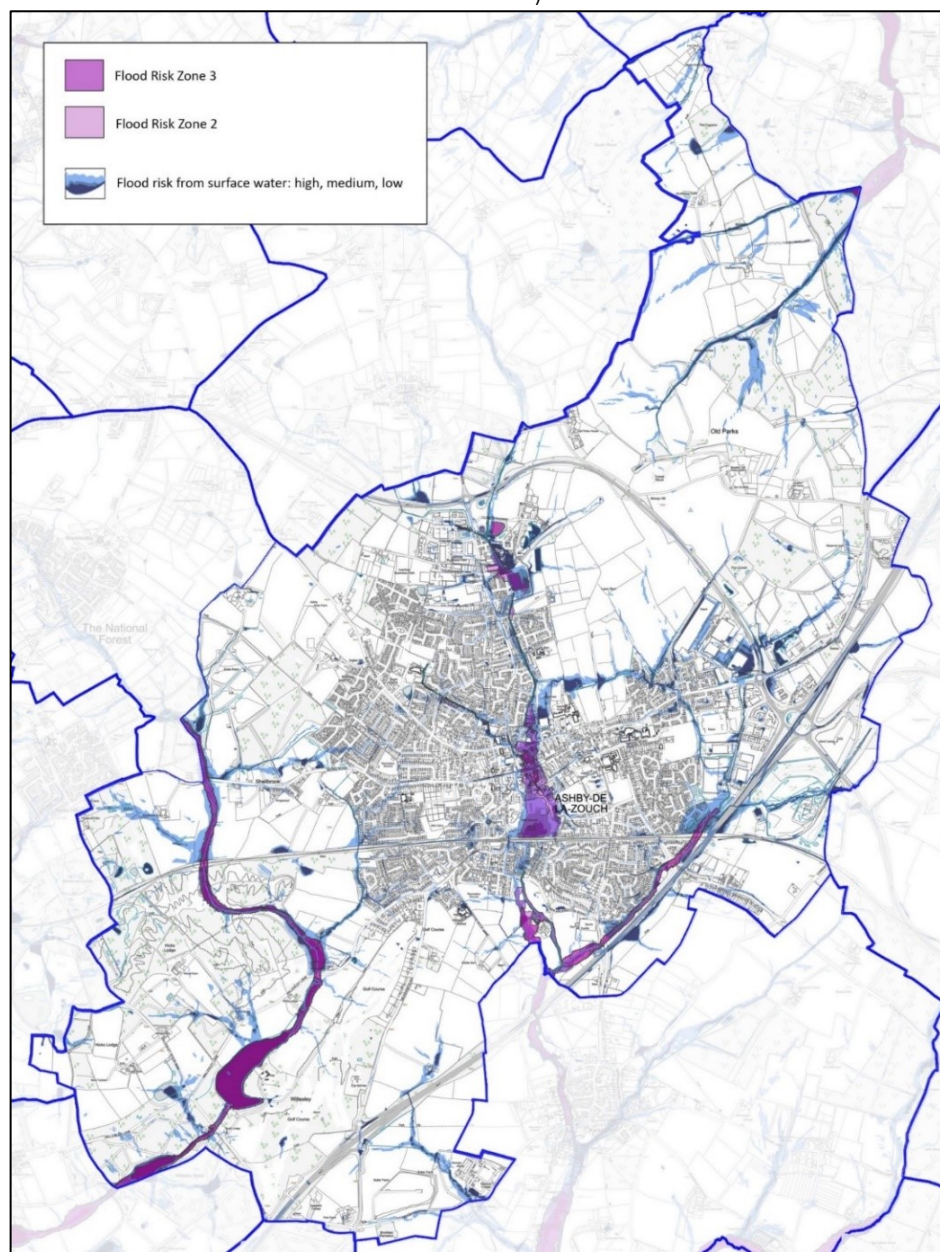
Development proposals in the Plan Area of one or more dwellings and/or for commercial, retail, employment or agricultural development should demonstrate that:

- if in a location susceptible to flooding from rivers or surface water, no alternative site is available;
- its location and design respect the geology, flood risk and natural drainage characteristics of the site and immediate area and is accompanied by a hydrological study, where appropriate, whose findings must be complied with in respect of design, groundworks and construction;
- it includes a Surface Water Drainage Strategy, where appropriate, which demonstrates that

the proposed drainage scheme, and site layout and design, will prevent properties from flooding from surface water, including allowing for climate change effects, that flood risk elsewhere will not be exacerbated by increased levels of surface water runoff, and that the development will not threaten other natural habitats and water systems;

- its design includes, as appropriate, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) with ongoing enforceable maintenance provision, other surface water management measures and permeable surfaces;
- proposed SuDS infrastructure includes, where practicable, habitat creation comprising e.g. landscaping, access and egress for aquatic and terrestrial animals, and native species planting;
- it does not increase the risk of flooding to third parties; and
- it takes the effects of climate change into account.

Figure 12: Flood risk in Zones 3 and 2 and from surface water (Environment Agency mapping, combined)



Renewable Energy Generation Infrastructure

- 11.26 Residents of Ashby wish to play their part in supporting all appropriate initiatives for achieving the necessary shift to a carbon-neutral world. The topography of the Neighbourhood Area, combined with the extent and location of existing residential and employment area of built environment and the Area's location in the National Forest, makes the adding of site-specific local detail to national and North West Leicestershire District Council policies beyond the technical expertise of the Neighbourhood Plan Qualifying Body.
- 11.27 This Plan therefore remains silent on the matter, and the community accepts that NWLDC Policy Cc1 will apply. This decision will be Reviewed if the community determines that the equivalent policies in the new Local Plan require it.

12. Sustainability

- 12.1 This chapter headed 'sustainability' captures those subjects that, together, help to sustain the local community, be it through business that helps to provide local employment opportunities, community facilities that bring people together or transport and travel options that enable alternatives to motorised journeys.

a. Employment and economic growth

- 12.2 Employment and economic growth are key to sustainable, vibrant and prosperous communities.
- 12.3 The Plan area has a strong and competitive economy and work force as evidenced in the high and growing number of companies based there as well as the sustained levels of investment in its economy and low levels of unemployment.
- 12.4 The Plan area is a very attractive and supportive location for businesses to be based and grow. It enjoys a strategic location with excellent road and air networks. It also benefits from a high-quality business infrastructure, including a number of purpose built and modern industrial estates. Its distinctive, historic and attractive built and natural environment, set within the heart of the National Forest, is also a major plus.
- 12.5 As a consequence, it is home to many hundreds of businesses and offers employment and business opportunities not only for the Parish but the wider area. It is also close to key economic growth areas such as East Midlands Airport and Donington Park. These growth areas provide opportunities for jobs, trade and investment for Ashby de la Zouch residents and businesses, which the Plan seeks to maximise.
- 12.6 The population is skilled with the proportion of the population with a degree being about half again the national average, for example. The population is also entrepreneurial as reflected in the high number of people self-employed and business startups. Many residents, however, who wish to work in the plan area struggle to do so. Many have been unable to find work in the Plan area and have to travel long distances, often by car due to a lack of public transport, to their workplace.
- 12.7 Consultation shows that residents, businesses and other stakeholders wish to see Ashby de la Zouch continue to offer a high quality and sustainable business environment and infrastructure, that allows businesses to form, grow and prosper. There should also be a focus on supporting residents to benefit from the employment and investment opportunities, including through self-employment.

Employment land and buildings

- 12.8 The Plan area is home to many hundreds of businesses spanning a wide and diverse range of sectors including the services sector, manufacturing and a growing number in the

warehousing sector. The vast majority of these are small, employing less than ten people, but include some very large employers.

- 12.9 To make sure that the Plan area continues to provide sustainable, accessible job opportunities and to benefit from economic growth, it is important to ensure the continuing availability of a choice of sites and premises. To achieve this, the Plan seeks to protect suitable employment sites. This is especially important as recent years have seen a gradual loss of employment sites to other uses, such as the former ARLA dairy site, which was granted planning permission for over 150 homes and the former biscuit and soap factories.
- 12.10 Employment uses are generally to be found scattered across the Plan area. This includes sites which have been granted planning permission for employment use, such as a major (26 hectares) site of the former Lounge disposal point, which is currently under construction. For the purposes of the Plan, employment land and buildings includes existing employment uses as well as commitments.
- 12.11 Whilst it is important to protect the existing stock of employment land and buildings, the Plan recognises that there may be circumstances where this may not be appropriate, for example, where a site or building was not designed, nor can be easily adapted, to modern business needs. This also accords with national and local planning policy which advises against the protection of employment sites where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for that purpose.
- 12.12 In 2010 an independent assessment of the main employment sites (both existing and commitments) in North West Leicestershire was undertaken on behalf of the District Council. This included some sites in the Plan area. This looked at sites in terms of a number of factors to assess whether the sites continued to meet market requirements:
- accessibility by road;
 - accessibility by public transport;
 - external environment; and
 - internal environment.
- 12.13 This concluded that the vast majority of the existing major employment sites in the Plan area were worthy of retention, a conclusion the Plan supports
- Ashby Business Park, Nottingham Road (south);
 - Ivanhoe Business Park, Smisby Road;
 - Flagstaff Industrial Estate, Nottingham Road (north);
 - Smisby Road Industrial Estate; and
 - Nottingham Road Industrial Estate.
- 12.14 It is also noted that in addition to the major employment sites considered as part of the 2010 study, the site Land north of Ashby de la Zouch (Money Hill) is to include a major (16 hectare) employment area and further development is taking place off Corkscrew Lane. The precise

extent and scope of this employment area has yet to be fully established but is likely to have a significant impact on employment provision in the Plan area.

- 12.15 The Plan recognises that in addition to these major employment areas there are several smaller employment sites to be found across the Plan area. Many of these businesses are situated in residential areas or in the countryside where they operate and flourish without issue. These sites play an important, and growing, role in the economy of the Plan area. It is national and local planning policy that they should be retained for employment purposes wherever possible and appropriate, which this Plan supports.

POLICY E1: EMPLOYMENT LAND AND BUILDINGS – There will be a strong presumption against the loss of commercial premises or land within the Neighbourhood Area (Use Classes B2, B8 and E(g)). Applications for a change of use to an activity that does not provide employment opportunities will only be supported if it can be demonstrated that:

- a) The commercial premises or land in question has not been in active use for at least 6 months and the commercial premises or land in question has no potential for either reoccupation or redevelopment for employment-generating uses. This will be demonstrated through the results both of a full valuation report and a marketing campaign lasting for a continuous period of at least 6 months; or
- b) The location is better utilised to provide local community services, facilities or other environmental benefits; or
- c) The business is relocated to a more suitable location within or close to the Neighbourhood Area.

Business Development

- 12.16 The Neighbourhood Plan supports businesses to create jobs and investment. It recognises that there is a need to ensure that all local people, especially in the Plan area and the wider Parish, have the opportunities needed to access jobs and meet the needs of employers. This is key to a sustainable economy and a vibrant community.
- 12.17 The Plan supports actions aimed at connecting local people to new job opportunities and preventing barriers such as training or transport that restrict them doing so. This benefits both businesses and local people.
- 12.18 Within the Plan area there is a small and growing number of small businesses. They are key to a sustainable, diverse and vibrant economy and community, and the Plan is keen to encourage their establishment and growth in appropriate locations.
- 12.19 Often these can operate in residential areas from a home office or a small workshop without causing nuisance or detriment to the environment.
- 12.20 Though such types of development do not necessarily need planning permission, where it is required the Plan is generally supportive of their provision when it is in a suitable and appropriate location. This could include the conversion of existing or redundant buildings

outside of the defined Limits to Development for uses such as agriculture, tourism, and home-working uses that are appropriate to a rural location.

POLICY E2: BUSINESSES DEVELOPMENT – New employment development proposals, including those for new, or the expansion of, existing small businesses will be supported, where they:

- a) Fall within the Limits to Development, unless it relates to small scale leisure or tourism activities, or other forms of commercial/employment related development which specifically benefits a countryside location; and
- b) Where possible, be sited in existing buildings or on areas of previously developed land; and
- c) Are of a size and scale not adversely affecting the character, infrastructure and environment of the town and the neighbourhood plan area, including the countryside and National Forest; and
- d) Provide sufficient on-site parking; and
- e) Ensure that no significant or adverse impact arises to nearby residents or other sensitive land uses from noise, fumes, light pollution or other nuisance associated with the work activity; and
- f) Where appropriate, be well integrated into and complement existing businesses; and
- g) Provide safe and attractive transport links, especially by foot, cycle and public transport such as through Travel Plans and enhanced bus provision to the Town Centre and key services.

Development proposals for new or the expansion of existing small businesses, where in conformity with other provisions in the Local Development Plan will be supported.

Home working

- 12.21 The benefit of supporting home working is that it helps to promote employment activities whilst reducing the dependency on the car for journeys to employment sites outside the Plan Area.
- 12.22 There is a need to recognise the high levels of people who work from home. In the 2021 Census, 2,656 (34.6% of the working population) said that they worked mainly or from home. The benefit of supporting home working is that it helps to promote business activities, encouraging local employment and reducing the dependency on the car for long journeys to employment sites outside the Plan Area. Co-working spaces might also be an option, for example in a vacant retail unit. Some home workers may prefer to hold a meeting in person away from their home environment. This type of activity would help drive footfall into the Town Centre.
- 12.23 The intention of Policy E3 is to recognise that people may not have a suitable space within their home from which to run a business or to work from home, or they may wish to distinctly and deliberately separate their work and living space. Policy E3 supports the construction of extensions, the conversion of outbuildings, and the development of new free-standing buildings in gardens from which businesses or homeworkers can operate. This is intended to maximise the opportunity for home run enterprises or home working to be created and supported along with homeworkers in the long term in Ashby de la Zouch, recognising the reality of employment patterns and work habits that have emerged since

Covid and would apply where a material change of use occurs, such that planning permission is required. This reflects positive support for entrepreneurial activity in line with the NPPF and North West Leicestershire Local Plan.

POLICY E3: HOMEWORKING - Proposals for the use of part of a dwelling for office and/or light industrial uses, and for the erection of small-scale free-standing buildings within its curtilage, extensions to the dwelling or conversion of outbuildings for those uses, will be supported where:

- a) Such development will not result in unacceptable traffic movements and that appropriate parking provision is made;
- b) No significant adverse impact arises to nearby residents or other sensitive land uses from noise, fumes, light pollution, or other nuisance associated with the work activity; and
- c) Any extension or free-standing building would not detract from the quality and character of the building to which they are subservient by reason of height, scale, massing, location or the facing materials used in their construction.

The provision of co-working spaces in appropriate vacant buildings are supported.

Tourism

- 12.24 Ashby is a beautiful rural parish to which walkers and other visitors are attracted. Nestling in the heart of the National Forest, Ashby is home to the historic 15 Century Ashby de la Zouch Castle and the Ashby Museum. Ashby Lido on North Street is the only outdoor swimming pool in Leicestershire and attracts a large number of visitors during the summer months.
- 12.25 Ashby is keen to extend a welcome to visitors whilst ensuring that their visit has a positive impact on residents - for example, in the context of traffic.
- 12.26 It is felt that the tourist offer to visitors can be enhanced over the lifetime of the plan.

POLICY E4: TOURISM - Development proposals for tourism and leisure facilities, including the addition of new serviced tourism facilities in the town, will be supported where they provide enhancements to existing services and where they:

- a) Do not have a detrimental effect on the distinctive rural character of the Plan Area;
- b) Do not have a significant adverse impact on the surrounding infrastructure, particularly local road networks and water supply and sewage;
- c) Benefit the local community, through, for instance, provision of local employment opportunities and improvements to local service provision, and are proportionate to the size of settlement in which they are located;
- d) Where feasible, the development involves the re-use of existing buildings or is part of farm diversification;
- e) Meet the requirements of the National Forest tourism growth plan and Sustainable Tourism Accommodation Design Guide (STAG).

The net loss of tourism and leisure facilities will not be supported unless they are no longer viable or alternative provision is made available.

Broadband Infrastructure

- 12.27 Concerns about the broadband and mobile phone signals in the parish featured prominently in community consultation. As in other rural areas, where many work from home and a lack of public transport can mean that some older people become isolated, communication technology is important.
- 12.28 The modern economy is changing and increasingly requires a good communications infrastructure as a basic requirement to maximise technological advances. High-speed Internet connectivity is driving business innovation and growth, helping people access services and opening up new opportunities for learning. This is particularly important in settings where better broadband enables improved access to an increasing number of on-line applications and services provided by the public and private sector. This can help to reduce social exclusion and create business opportunities.
- 12.29 Additionally, just as few would have predicted the technological transformation of the past few years, there will undoubtedly be further advances in the future. It is crucial that Ashby is able to accommodate and deliver new technology as it arises. The need for further development of high-speed broadband infrastructure to serve Ashby Parish as technology develops is very important. This could include investigating alternative methods of broadband provision such as Fixed Wireless Access.

POLICY E5: BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE - Every individual dwelling and new employment premises will should have the necessary ducting and infrastructure within the site and building(s) so as to be able to provide gigabit broadband connections.

Proposals to provide access to gigabit broadband connections (including future developments at present unforeseen) and improve the mobile telecommunication network that will serve businesses and other properties within the Neighbourhood Area will be supported.

This may require above ground network installations, which must be sympathetically located and designed to integrate into the landscape.

b. Town Centre

- 12.30 A strong town centre is vital for vibrant, sustainable and thriving communities. It is at the heart of a community. Ashby de la Zouch Town Centre is the main destination for shopping from within the Parish and further afield, but this position is threatened by the growing cluster of out-of-town retail outlets and supermarkets near junction 13 of the A42 (Nottingham Road Retail Park). The Town Centre has a distinctive retail offer with a good proportion of independent retailers. As well as shopping, the Town Centre provides a wide range of uses which contribute to its character.

- 12.31 It provides a valuable service in meeting the day-to-day shopping, social and other important needs of residents as well as providing opportunities for investment and local employment, close to where people live. It also reduces the need to travel and acts as a focal point for local life and interaction.
- 12.32 The NPPF seeks to ensure that town centres remain vibrant, viable and safe. It states that “Planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation’ (Paragraph 90).
- 12.33 Ashby de la Zouch is an historic, vibrant and attractive town. It is where the majority of the shops in the Plan area are concentrated and has a good range of other centrally located facilities with a leisure centre, outdoor swimming pool, library, museum and very popular primary and secondary schools. Although these cater well for the everyday needs of local residents and help to make the Town Centre an attractive venue for visitors, these facilities are under increasing pressure. The growth in on-line retail, the cost of travel, lack of public transport and the proliferation of out-of-town retail centres have all had an impact on the Town Centre.
- 12.34 Over the years, the town centre has retained its traditional character and street pattern; this is reflected in much of it being designated as a conservation area” (i.e. the ‘town’ conservation area), reflecting its historic and architectural interest.
- 12.35 In 2015, North West Leicestershire District Council as part of the development of the Local Plan commissioned independent experts to undertake an assessment of the vitality and viability of the main centres in the District, including Ashby de la Zouch. The conclusions were that “Ashby was shown to be performing well, with a low vacancy rate, a well-maintained town centre and a good variety of retailers with a mix of national multiples and specialist independents”. This view was supported by the Leicestershire Market Towns Research. The review concluded that there is scope to enhance the centre’s offer in terms of its service provision, particularly hotels, restaurants and cafes, which are increasingly sought to complement the overall shopping experience and will help increase dwell times.
- 12.36 A Retail and Leisure Capacity Study (RLCS) in 2019, followed by a Retail Study Update report (2020), took account of more up to date population information and also assessed the potential impact of the Covid pandemic. The former concluded that, “The town centre is attractive, and it contains a high number of independent operators providing a unique offer for local residents and visitors. Ashby de la Zouch town centre appears to be performing well, even with the out-of-centre competition at Nottingham Road Retail Park.” However, since these studies were undertaken, like many other town centres, Ashby has lost several high street banks and several national high street comparison chain stores. These have tended to be replaced by convenience stores and new facilities such as hairdressers, a beauticians, nail bars and a public house.

- 12.37 This Local Plan has Ashby, alongside Coalville, at the top of the retail hierarchy in the District, although Coalville town centre is the District Council's priority for further retail development.
- 12.38 Consultation reveals that ensuring that Ashby de la Zouch Town Centre remains an attractive, and sustainable place in which to work, live and shop and with a vibrant night-time economy remains a top priority.
- 12.39 Residents, however, have expressed concern over the appearance of new or rebranded shop fronts, which are out of keeping, and transport issues, in particular public transport, loading, unloading, congestion and car parking. In 2019 there was a loss of 100 parking spaces with the closure of the Royal Hotel car park. A new 150 space public car park is expected to be provided within walking distance of the town centre in 2025 as part of the Money Hill development. Residents are also concerned that core shops are being replaced with other uses such as office accommodation and hot food take-aways, and this is having an adverse impact on the role and attractiveness of the Town Centre.
- 12.40 It is also apparent that the amount of out of centre retail floor space in Ashby has more than doubled in the last 10 years with the extension of Tesco, developments at Dents Road such as Aldi, Wickes and Pets at Home and the new M&S and B&M stores at Ashby Business Park. These stores all sell products previously the preserve of Town Centre shops and have provided a retail offer in competition with the Town Centre.

Town centre uses

- 12.41 Town Centre boundaries are important, because they help to define the character of an area and control the uses within and outside of the boundary.
- 12.42 Their use is encouraged in the NPPF as well as local planning policy, including the Local Plan, which defines a Town Centre boundary for Ashby de la Zouch to reinforce and protect its key Town Centre role and function.
- 12.43 The Plan also supports other complementary uses such as food and drinking establishments where they would not adversely affect the key role and function of the Town Centre and the amenities of residents and other people visiting the Town Centre. This includes evening and nighttime uses. Care however needs to be taken that this would not lead to an over concentration of such uses. Consultation has shown that there is a concern that there is already an over concentration of hot food takeaways, and this is having an adverse impact on the amenity of the Town Centre.

POLICY TC1: TOWN CENTRE USES – Ashby de la Zouch is and will remain a retail, leisure and service Town Centre.

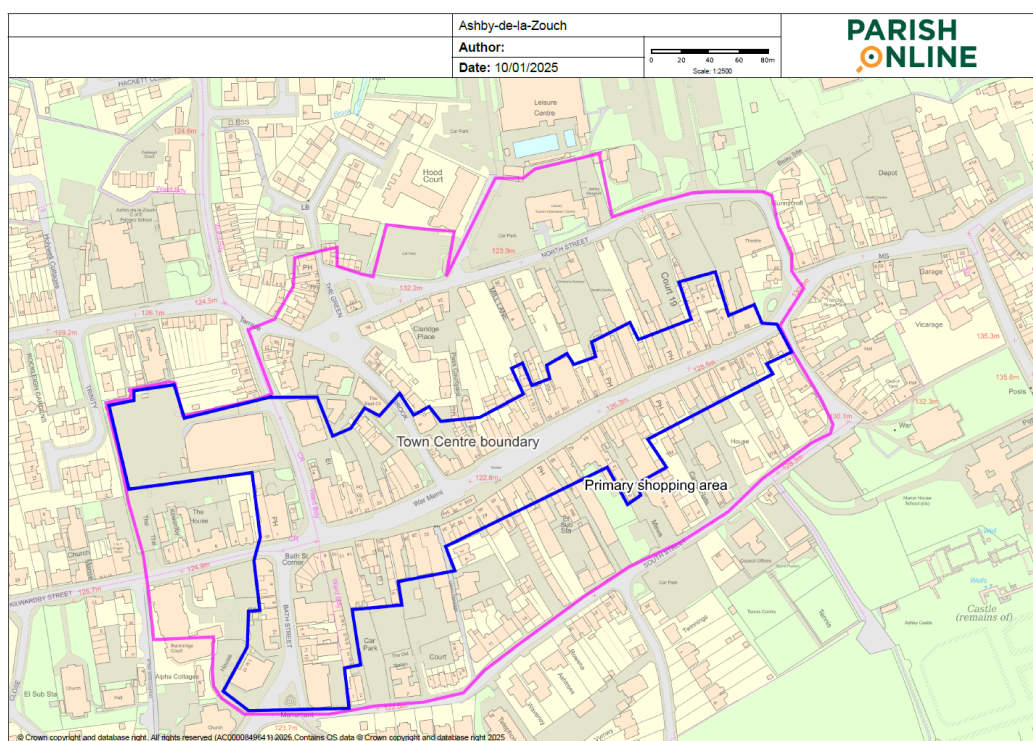
Development proposals for retail uses across the Town Centre (as defined in figure 6 on the Town Centre and Primary Shopping Area map), and for uses outside the Primary Shopping Area such as leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural, and community, will need to demonstrate that they:

- a) Are of a scale appropriate to the character of Ashby de la Zouch and the role and function of its Town Centre;
- b) Conserve, and where possible, enhance the character and distinctiveness of Ashby de la Zouch in terms of design; and
- c) Protect, and where possible, enhance its built and historic assets, and its wider setting.

Establishing a Primary Shopping Area for the Town Centre

- 12.44 The NPPF requires a network and hierarchy of town centres to be defined (NPPF, 2023, paragraph 86 a)). A Primary Shopping Area is an area where core (Class E) shopping uses such as greengrocers; bakers etc. will be principally concentrated. The Primary Shopping Area in Ashby de la Zouch has been defined within the Local Plan and this definition is supported by the Neighbourhood Plan, as are Policies Ec10 and Ec11 within the Local Plan.
- 12.45 In Ashby de la Zouch Town Centre, the concentration of retail shopping is along Market Street, in the Market Hall, along Bath Street, Bath Street Corner and parts of Derby Road and Brook Street. The development of 'Mews' style shopping areas has been a particular feature of Ashby Town Centre over recent years with Coxon Mews, Mill Lane Mews and Pass Courtyard in particular proving to be popular places to shop. The development of further 'Mews' style courtyards is seen as offering an attractive addition to the retail offer within the Town Centre and will be supported.
- 12.46 The Local Plan provides a detailed schedule of existing retail uses within Ashby Town Centre at the time of its preparation and specifically addresses the clustering of hot food takeaways within the Town Centre.

Figure 13: Town Centre and Primary Shopping Centre



Shop Frontages in the Town Centre

- 12.47 Concern has been expressed that the visual appearance of shops and businesses in the Town Centre has declined, resulting in a less attractive street scene and diminishing the impact of the traditional buildings within it.
- 12.48 Well-designed shopfronts and frontages to buildings make an important contribution to the character of the Town Centre as well as to individual buildings across it. The retention of historic shopfronts is particularly important. Alongside high-quality contemporary design, they make an important contribution to the special architectural and historic interest of the retail area.
- 12.49 Where existing shopfronts are of indifferent or poor-quality design, replacement with shopfronts of high-quality design and materials which complement the design and proportions of the host building will be encouraged.
- 12.50 Run down or broken shopfronts should be repaired rather than replaced where they make an important contribution to the local distinctiveness of the building or area.
- 12.51 This policy complements NWLDC's Shop Fronts and Advertisements Supplementary Planning Document, adopted in June 2019.

POLICY TC2: SHOP FRONTAGES – Development proposals to alter or replace existing shopfronts, create new shopfronts or to alter the frontages within the defined Town Centre will need to demonstrate that they:

- a) Conserve or enhance the special qualities and significance of the building and area; and
- b) Relate well to their context in terms of design, scale and material.

Poorly designed development proposals to remove, replace or substantially alter shop fronts or the frontages of buildings will not be supported.

The use of Ashby heritage paint pallet and branding including logo and typeface is supported.

Signage and lighting

- 12.52 The majority of the shop premises within the Town Centre are of Georgian and Victorian origin and reinforce the strong visual characteristic of the locality. Consultation has shown that there is a desire to retain and maintain the traditional appearance of the buildings and this is supported by an approach of strictly controlling signage and lighting.
- 12.53 The Town Centre is located within the Conservation Area and the requirement to maintain the traditional appearance will ensure the existing heritage assets are conserved and enhanced.

- 12.54 The use of inappropriate external lighting has the potential to erode the traditional feel of the Town Centre. Consultation has also indicated that residents are concerned about an increase in brightly illuminated signage and advertising within shop windows.
- 12.55 All signage should be kept to a minimum and must be designed to fit sympathetically with the local character. Internally illuminated box signs that are fixed externally to a building are not in keeping and will not normally be permitted.

POLICY TC3: LEGIBLE SIGNAGE – New signage will only be supported where it is in keeping with the character of the Town Centre.

Proposals incorporating ‘Swan neck’ external lighting or the use of signs with internal illumination (either of the whole sign or of the lettering) or brightly illuminated shop window advertisements will not be permitted.

Residential development in the Town Centre

- 12.56 The Plan also recognises the importance of residential development within the Town Centre to ensure its vitality and promote sustainable living.
- 12.57 Many people already live within the Town Centre, and the Plan wishes to encourage more people to do so.
- 12.58 It is considered that residential accommodation on the upper floors of retail, commercial and other uses in the Town Centre could make an important contribution. Vacant space over shops and other uses in the Town Centre is commonplace within Ashby de la Zouch. Their re-use would prove a cost-effective means of creating additional housing in the Town Centre. There would also be wider benefits to sustainability and the vitality of the Town Centre whilst complementing its core role and function. These benefits would however need to be balanced against other considerations such as the amenity of the proposed residential property and adjoining properties, as well as design, access and parking issues, which need to be in accordance with Leicestershire County Council standards as specified in Policy G2

POLICY TC4: RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT – Within the Primary Shopping Area and outside flood zones 3 or 3a, proposals to develop upper floors of premises for residential use will be supported subject to parking, design and amenity considerations and, where it would not result in the loss of, or adversely affect an existing retail use.

c. Transport

- 12.59 Transport is primarily a means to an end, and the fundamental purpose of all modes of transport (by foot, cycle, car etc.) is to enable people to access those locations, goods and activities they want or need.
- 12.60 Good quality, accessible and sustainable transport is key to supporting the vitality and viability of a community, and of achieving a good quality of life.

- 12.61 The Plan area is strategically and conveniently located on the main transport network with good road connections, including to the M1, M5, M42, M40 and M6 motorways. It is also less than 10 miles away from a major airport – East Midlands. It has a reasonable network of footpaths although cycle ways could be improved, and there are some forms of public transport such as limited buses and taxis (though it does not have a rail station). Levels of car ownership are relatively high (88% of households had access to a car in 2021 which is an increase from 84% in 2011). Consultation feedback has indicated concerns about inadequate Town Centre car parking.

Traffic Management

- 12.62 The traffic situation within the Plan area has been identified as a significant issue for many involved in the development of the Plan, not only residents, but also employers, visitors and other interested parties. The road network in the Plan area has developed over many years, and much of it was not designed for, nor suited to, modern vehicular movements. At the same time, a significant and a growing amount of vehicular traffic, including heavy goods vehicles, passes through the Plan area. Therefore, many of its roads are congested, particularly along the A511 and the main roads into and through the Town Centre. This is one of the main negative aspects of living, visiting and working in the Plan area.
- 12.63 Whilst it is recognised that there has been some investment in the transport network in the Ashby area and further improvements are planned such as Junction 13 of the A42, there is concern that this investment in the transport infrastructure has failed to keep up with the growth of the Plan area.
- 12.64 In addition, planned and anticipated further development, if not properly managed and planned, will put the transport infrastructure, especially the road system, under even greater pressure especially along the A511 and in and around the Town Centre. The Town Council expects the Highways authority to request adequate s106 funding to provide the necessary improvements to the network relating to any future development.
- 12.65 Improvements in access and safety on Nottingham Road, Wood Street and Market Street (including the potential introduction of a 20 mile per hour zone) have also already been highlighted as a priority given the go ahead of the Money Hill development.
- 12.66 The need for a Zebra Crossing on Kilwardby Street, if there is further development off Moira Road; possible one way or cul-de-sac and safety measures at the junction of Market Street and Brook Street and improved pedestrian access to the Bath Grounds on South Street, if there are additional developments serviced by South Street or Prior Park Road, have also been highlighted as priorities.
- 12.67 Whilst the formulation of transport policy at the local level is primarily a matter for North West Leicestershire District Council and Leicestershire County Council (as the highway authority), the Plan does support and strongly encourage actions that can be taken to

improve vehicular and highway safety especially along and around existing and future hot spots, including those identified above.

POLICY T1: TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT - With particular regard to the highway network of the Plan Area and the need to minimise any increase in vehicular traffic all development must:

- a) Be designed to minimise additional traffic generation and movement through the town; and
- b) Incorporate sufficient off-road parking; and
- c) Provide any necessary improvements to site access, communal parking and the highway network either directly or by financial contributions; and
- d) Where practicable, improve and create footpaths and cycle ways to improve access to key services and the countryside.

Public car parking

12.68 Any proposed new developments should include adequate off-street parking arrangements and garages to mitigate this issue.

POLICY T2: PUBLIC CAR PARKING - Development proposals that would result in the loss of existing off-street car parking will not be supported unless it can be clearly demonstrated that:

- a) There is no longer any potential for the continued use of the land for car parking;
- b) That the loss of parking will not aggravate an existing shortfall of spaces in the vicinity; or
- c) Adequate and convenient replacement car parking spaces are provided elsewhere in the vicinity.

Promoting Travel Plans

12.69 Travel Plans are a commonly used and proven means to reduce travel by car and promote more sustainable means of travel especially by public transport.

12.70 They are a package of actions specifically designed by, and tailored to, a workplace, school or location such as a new housing development or major employer.

12.71 Travel Plans generally include measures to promote walking, cycling and public transport, but can include car sharing schemes; cycling facilities; a dedicated bus service or restricted car parking allocations.

12.72 There is an emphasis on reducing reliance on the private car, particularly single occupancy car travel.

12.73 It is considered that the characteristics of the Plan area, including higher levels of congestion especially at peak times and relatively poor public transport network (especially between the Town Centre and nearby residential and employment areas) mean that it is especially suited to a Travel Plan based approach to help achieve a shift to walking, cycling and public transport.

POLICY T3: TRAVEL PLANS – The Plan promotes and encourages the use of Travel Plans, including proposals for travelling between housing, employment, community, social, health and welfare and educational uses to deliver sustainable development. Development proposals, which the Highway Authority considers would generate a significant amount of travel, should be supported by a Travel Plan which does not diminish the service to other parts of the community and must be fully implemented. Travel Plans must be designed to deliver opportunities for the use of sustainable transport modes tailored to that development and the wider travel needs of the Plan area, including where appropriate, a reduction in Town Centre traffic.

Promoting Walking and Cycling

- 12.74 Reliance on the car in the Plan area is very high and many of the journeys (even short ones) are made by car.
- 12.75 Encouraging people to walk or use a bicycle for short journeys and leisure purposes can bring significant benefits not only in terms of reducing congestion on roads, but also cutting carbon emissions and creating healthier communities.
- 12.76 Cycling and walking has great potential in the Plan area. It is relatively compact but has a poor network of footpaths and cycleways. The only purpose-built shared-use provision for cyclists and pedestrians is along the busy A511. There is some evidence that residents are increasingly taking up walking and cycle riding for leisure and other purposes. The Ashby Cycling and Walking Strategy (2022) has a number of proposed cycle and walking routes which add local detail to the North West Leicestershire Cycle Strategy SPD.
- 12.77 The consultation has shown these footpaths and cycleways are highly prized and cherished by residents, who wish to see them protected and, wherever possible, enhanced.
- 12.78 The consultation and the analysis undertaken as part of the development of the Plan highlighted some areas for improvement in the present network. Through this work, gaps in the network have become apparent; especially between residential areas and the Town Centre, as well as between residential areas the main employment sites, essential community facilities, such as schools, and the countryside. It has identified the desire and strong case for a dedicated joint footpath and cycleway that circumnavigates the Parish. Another significant area of improvement highlighted was the maintenance and condition of some footpaths and cycleways, which can hinder their use. Also, where possible cycleways should be made available for horse use. The Sustrans guidance on Horses on the National Cycle Network (Technical information note No. 28 September 2011) provides recommended design criteria regarding cycleways and the width needed to permit horses to safely share paths with walkers and cyclists. The development of the National Forest Green Web is an improved network of footpath and cycleways across the Heart of the Forest including improved connections to Ashby and the potential Ashby Station.

- 12.79 An Ashby de la Zouch cycling strategy has been developed in partnership with Leicestershire County Council, North West Leicestershire District Council and the Heart of the Forest Forum 'Access and Connectivity sub-group'. This sets out proposals for promoting and supporting cycling in Ashby de la Zouch and the wider area; the findings of which this Plan supports. The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for North of Leicester Area is scheduled for Adoption in Spring 2025.
- 12.80 New developments should seek to promote and enhance the network of linked footpaths and cycle ways within the Plan Area. Using the opportunities created by developments to protect 'green lungs' that connect the Town Centre with the surrounding countryside.

POLICY T4: WALKING AND CYCLING - Provision of new and/or enhancement of existing footpaths, with a maintenance contract that is implemented, and cycleways in the neighbourhood area, appropriately associated with new development, will be expected. Where appropriate, priority should be given to (i) the creation or improved links between main residential areas and the Town Centre, surrounding countryside and community facilities such as schools, health services and the Hicks Lodge Cycle Centre, (ii) creation or improved links between main residential areas and main employment areas; (iii) the joining up of footpaths and safe cycleways into a comprehensive network and iv) the creation of the Green Web network of leisure routes between Ashby and the Heart of the Forest.

Leicester to Burton Railway Line

- 12.81 The Leicester to Burton railway line is an important train line, part of which runs through the Plan area. It currently serves freight trains and has not carried passengers for many years.
- 12.82 No mainline or branch passenger railway stations are present in the Plan area. The nearest railway station is at Burton upon Trent, approximately 15km from Ashby de la Zouch Town Centre.
- 12.83 The reintroduction of passenger services would make an important contribution to a reduction in motor vehicle usage and would enhance Ashby's position as a transport hub and a tourism location. This Plan seeks to protect the line and its infrastructure so that it can be re-opened for passenger use in the future.
- 12.84 However, it is recognised that the decision whether or not the line should close is largely beyond the scope of this Plan. Should the line close, its route along the Valley adjacent to several towns, villages and employment areas, could make it ideal for a walking and cycling way. Whilst not supporting the closure of the line, its future use for this purpose is supported through the Neighbourhood Plan in the event of the line's closure.

POLICY T5: LEICESTER TO BURTON RAILWAY LINE – The Plan supports the provision of public transport services on the Leicester to Burton rail line. Proposals that threaten the integrity of the Leicester to Burton railway line and its infrastructure for potential re-use for public transport services will not be supported. However, should the line completely cease being used for rail

purposes the Plan supports its re-use as a footpath, cycleway or for some other form of public transport.

d. Community Facilities

- 12.85 The consultation shows that the Plan area has a good and wide range of community facilities such as churches, schools, sport centres, medical centres and sports related buildings, which generally meet the day to day needs of the community. However, it does not now have an adequately sized and equipped community hall available for use by local organisations and individuals for the holding of various events, meetings, entertainment and the like.
- 12.86 The major new development allocations at Money Hill in the District Local Plan, for 2050 dwellings and 16 hectares of employment land, will bring major pressure on all essential Ashby community services and facilities. The impacts and their implications must be fully addressed by the Money Hill Masterplan as required in the Local Plan before full development takes place.
- 12.87 There was also concern about the gradual decline in community facilities, such as the recent closure of the local hospital. This has resulted in residents having to travel further to access these facilities. This presents problems, especially for those who rely on public transport to access these.
- 12.88 There was a further concern about the impact that development will have on the capacity, especially of schools and medical facilities, which will have major implications for the future. With a growing and ageing population and reductions in public transport, access to such locally based services will become increasingly important.

Important Community Facilities

- 12.89 Consultation shows that these facilities are highly valued and prized by the local community. They are a key ingredient in the generally high quality of life in the Town and its strong sense of community and identity. The community wishes to see them protected and enhanced. They would also like to see a greater range of facilities. Some facilities need to be refurbished or improved.

POLICY CF 1: IMPORTANT COMMUNITY FACILITIES – Development proposals that result in the loss of, an important community facility identified below will not be supported except where

- a) the building or facility is replaced by an equivalent or by better provision in terms of quantity and quality in an equally suitable location, or
- b) (ii) it is demonstrated through a viability assessment (paid for by the applicant) that it is no longer required by residents in the Plan area or its continued community use is no longer viable and the site has been actively marketed for over a year as a community facility.

The following facilities have been identified as being especially important to the community:

Community administration, tourism & entertainment:

- Post Office
- Library and Town Information Centre
- Town Council office
- Fire Station
- Ashby Cemetery
- Ashby Allotments
- War Memorial Garden
- Town Hall Market
- St Helen's Heritage Centre
- Venture Theatre
- Lyric Rooms
- Ashby Museum
- Ashby Castle

Religious facilities:

- St Helens (Church of England)
- Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church
- Holy Trinity Church
- Ashby Baptist Church
- Ashby Congregational Church
- Ashby Methodist Church
- Ashby Christadelphian Church
- The Alliance Church

Secondary and primary schools:

- Ashby School
- Ivanhoe School
- Ashby Hill Top Primary School
- Ashby Willesley Primary School
- Ashby de la Zouch Church of England Primary School
- Woodcote Primary School
- Ashby Hastings Primary School
- Lewis Charlton Learning Centre

Sports & Recreation:

- Hood Park Skate Park
- Hood Park Leisure Centre
- Open air swimming pool/lido
- Ashby Castle Lawn Tennis Club
- Ashby Bowls Club
- Ashby Hastings Cricket Club
- Willesley Park Golf Club
- Ashby Ivanhoe Football Club
- Ashby Rugby Football Club
- Hicks Lodge Cycle Centre (part in Neighbourhood Area)
- Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at Westfields Recreational Ground

Health, Social Services and care centres:

- Ascebi House Medical Centre;
- Fernleigh Care Home
- Hood Court Centre

New and Enhanced Community Facilities

12.90 Consultation confirmed the importance of enhancing the range of community facilities and amenities in the Plan Area. Residents recognise their value as a focus for community life and interaction; they are also important for the good health and the long-term sustainability of the community. In particular there is a need to maintain existing sports facilities, provide additional community meeting spaces and increase facilities for teenagers.

- 12.91 A key theme across community facilities, transport and economic development discussions in creating this plan, has been the need to link the villages with safe transport routes and to create new facilities across the Plan Area for cyclists, walkers and horse riders.
- 12.92 Community consultation has highlighted a broad consensus that the type and capacity of community facilities and services should evolve in an appropriate manner to serve population growth and changing demographics resulting from new housing development.
- 12.93 Improving the Town's present facilities is supported.
- 12.94 In the case of the major Money Hill allocations the Town Council will work in consultation with NWLDC, the developers, local community and stakeholders to address fully the impacts on local community services, facilities and the environment to ensure comprehensive proposals and resources are detailed in the Masterplan, in accordance with the North West Leicestershire Local Plan, for meeting the impacts and needs that result before any further development is approved.

POLICY CF2: NEW OR IMPROVED COMMUNITY FACILITIES - Proposals that improve the quality and/or range of community facilities will be supported where the development:

- a) Respects local character, residential amenity and highway safety; and
- b) Will not result in unacceptable traffic movements that generate increased levels of noise, fumes, smell or other harmful disturbance to residential properties including the need for additional parking which cannot be catered for within the curtilage of the property;
- c) Is of a scale appropriate to the needs of the locality and provides safe and convenient access for residents who wish to walk and cycle; and;
- d) Takes into account the needs of people with disabilities.

Assets of Community Value

- 12.95 The Localism Act 2011 defines an 'Asset of Community Value' as "a building or other land (whose) main use has recently been or is presently used to further the social well-being or social interests of the local community and could do so in the future". The Localism Act states that "social interests" include cultural, recreational and sporting interests.
- 12.96 The designation of a community facility as an Asset of Community Value provides an important means to help protect buildings and land that are important to the local community and which they wish to protect from inappropriate development.
- 12.97 If formally designated as an 'Asset of Community Value', the Town Council and other community organisations will be given the opportunity to bid to purchase the asset on behalf of the local community if it comes up for sale on the open market.
- 12.98 Whilst there is no requirement to have a policy relating to Assets of Community Value in a Neighbourhood Plan, its inclusion can give such an Asset greater protection through the planning system. It also sends out a clear message that the community wishes to protect buildings and land that are important to them.

12.99 Some Assets of Community Value have already been designated in the Plan area, such as the Bath Grounds and Ashby Town Hall Market, and other designations may come during the lifetime of the Plan.

POLICY CF3: ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE – Development proposals that support the longevity, appreciation and community value of an Asset of Community Value will be encouraged. Development proposals for change of use that would result in the loss of an Asset of Community Value will not be supported.

Schools

12.100 The consultation identified a need for school pupils to be encouraged to walk, cycle or use bus services to get to school.

12.101 This would help reduce the peak traffic volumes arising at the start and end of the school day and minimise the environmental, safety and accessibility issues arising from the high number of cars parking near schools, including at and close to the school gates.

12.102 This could include initiatives such as Safer Routes to School Schemes, or similar, which bring together a package of measures such as 20 mph zone, safer crossing points, cycle storage facilities and enhanced signing, lining and lighting in an area.

12.103 Leicestershire County Council will look to the availability of school places within a two-mile (primary) and three-mile (secondary) distance from the development. If there are not sufficient places then a claim for Section 106 funding will be requested to provide those places.

POLICY CF4: SCHOOLS Proposals for the expansion of existing schools are supported where it can be demonstrated that:

- a) They would have appropriate vehicular access, and do not, taking account of appropriate mitigation measures, have a severe impact upon traffic circulation;
- b) They would not result in an unacceptable loss of recreational space available to the school; and
- c) The development would not result in an unacceptable loss of amenity to residents or other adjacent users.

Proposals for the creation of a new school would be supported where it can be demonstrated that the development:

- a) Would be safely accessible for pedestrians and cyclists, and would be well related to bus routes and/or there is adequate provision for waiting school buses to park;
- b) Has appropriate vehicular access, and does not, taking account of appropriate mitigation measures, have a severe impact upon traffic circulation;

- c) Would not result in an unacceptable loss of open space, amenity to residents or other adjacent users, and;
- d) Is accompanied by a Safer Routes to Schools Scheme.

The use of a Community Use Agreement will be required to prevent facilities being underused and to help ensure a viable and sustainable business model over the longer term.

Health and Wellbeing

- 12.104 In 2016, the Castle Medical Group moved into a purpose-built premises on Burton Road, Ashby de la Zouch and the practice's population was 14,500.
- 12.105 Since then, the practice's population has increased to 17,900 due to the on-going building developments and the closure of North Street Surgery in October 2019.
- 12.106 It is anticipated that the population of Ashby de la Zouch will continue to grow with the development of the Money Hill site which will include a total of 2,050 dwellings. The first phase of this development commenced in 2024 with 605 dwellings planned and Castle Medical Group could see their patient population increase to 19,800 (based on 3 people per dwelling) over the next 2 years. Future phases will see the patient population increase to 24,100.
- 12.107 The practice team consists of a mix of clinical skills and 6.3 Whole Time Equivalent GPs. With the continuing population growth, increasing complexities of co-morbidities and increasing life expectancies Castle Medical Group needs to expand its premises and clinical team. If expansion does not happen the quality of the healthcare provision available could be impacted having a detrimental effect on patients in Ashby de la Zouch.

POLICY CF5: HEALTH AND WELLBEING - Proposals for additional GP premises or an expansion of existing premises that increase the accessibility of health and wellbeing services for residents living in Ashby de la Zouch will be supported providing that the development:

- a) Would not lead to an unacceptable impact on highway safety, taking account of any mitigation measures and would not cause unacceptable disturbance to residential amenity in terms of noise, fumes or other disturbance; and
- b) Will include adequate parking provision, including that for essential medical personnel.

e. Infrastructure

- 12.108 Consultation shows that the Plan area has a good and wide range of community facilities such as churches, schools, sport centres, medical centres and sports related buildings, which generally meet the day to day needs of the community. However, it does not now have an adequately sized and equipped community hall available for use by local organisations and individuals for the holding of various events, meetings, entertainment and the like.

- 12.109 However, the major new development allocations at Money Hill in the NWLDC Local Plan, for 2050 dwellings and 16 hectares of employment land, will bring major pressure on all essential Ashby community services and facilities. A separate, more detailed Masterplan and Design Code will be required for Money Hill Phase 2. Planning permission has already been granted for the first Phase. Planning permission for Phase 2, comprising some 1200 houses, has not yet been applied for. The impacts and their implications of Phase 2 must be fully addressed in the respective planning applications and mitigated through appropriate planning conditions and s106 agreements.
- 12.110 There is also concern about a gradual decline in community facilities, such as the recent closure of the local hospital. This has resulted in residents having to travel further to access these facilities. This presents problems, especially for those who rely on public transport to access them. There was further concern about the impact that development will have on the capacity of local facilities, especially schools and medical facilities with major implications for the future. With a growing and ageing population and reductions in public transport, access to locally based services will become increasingly important.

POLICY CF6: INFRASTRUCTURE - New developments must:

- a) mitigate any negative impacts of that development on local services, residents and the environment (i.e. arising from lost local facilities such as relocation to out-of-town shopping centres, increased demand pressure on local services and congestion),
- b) contribute towards the cost of meeting the increased community service and facility needs such as community centres, leisure/care centres, and convenience stores/cafes, resulting from that development and ensuring access to those services.

The following infrastructure enhancements as identified through this Neighbourhood Plan Review, are supported, as appropriate:

- New homes to be 'zero carbon' ready with integrated energy efficiency technologies as per Policy G2: Design.
- Improved footpaths and cycle ways and the provision of new ones (Policy T2: Traffic Management and Policy T4: Walking and cycling).
- The provision of a Railway Station in Ashby as identified in Policy T5.
- New Community Facilities as referenced in Policy CF2 including new facilities across the Plan Area for cyclists, walkers and horse riders.
- New School subject to the criteria identified in Policy CF4.
- New Medical facilities as expressed in Policy CF5.

In the case of the major Money Hill Phase 2, the full impacts and their implications on local community services, facilities and the environment must be fully addressed in the respective planning applications and mitigated through appropriate planning conditions and s106 agreements.

13. Monitoring and Review

- 13.1 The Neighbourhood Plan Review will last up to 2031. During this time, it is likely that circumstances will change.
- 13.2 The Neighbourhood Plan will be regularly monitored. This will be led by Ashby Town Council, on at least an annual basis. The policies and measures contained in the Neighbourhood Plan will form the core of the monitoring activity, but other data collected and reported at the Ashby Town Council level relevant to the delivery of the Neighbourhood Plan will also be included.
- 13.3 The Town Council proposes to formally review the Neighbourhood Plan to coincide with the review of the North West Leicestershire Local Plan or after five years if this cycle is different.