



Abbots Bromley Parish Neighbourhood
Development Plan

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Landscape Character & Built Environment



Community Consultation

July 2017

Background Supporting Document – 1

1. Introduction and Purpose

1.1 This study was undertaken by the Neighbourhood Plan steering group in October 2016. This work is seen as a critical part of the emerging evidence base for the Abbots Bromley Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan (ABPNP). Once finalised the report will be published as part of the evidence base alongside studies into other topic areas.

1.2 Since beginning the process of developing a plan in late 2015, the steering group has carried out two consultations. The first between January – March 2016¹ was a general scoping exercise with the aim of gathering information as to the issues that most concern residents. The results from this consultation were presented at the annual Parish Assembly in May 2016. The two most pressing issues raised with the group were that of housing provision and traffic/parking. The group decided to prioritise the housing issue first as a key step towards a draft plan. To do so it became apparent that further consultation would be needed to ascertain precisely what residents see as the issue surrounding housing within the Parish. A Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) was therefore sent out to all residents between August and October 2016. This was advertised using an information bulletin, posters and social media. The group also took the opportunity to have an NDP information stall at the annual Abbots Bromley Horn Dance in early September which was very well attended. This gave residents the opportunity to engage directly with the group, ask questions about the HNA process and return their forms if they wished.

1.3 Around 120 HNA questionnaires have been returned. Work is ongoing to collate the results but the initial indications are that residents would support a local housing need. There is particular support for housing needs for the elderly as well as young families.

1.4 The NDP group have agreed to bring forward this character assessment as a methodology for assessing site suitability for the delivery of housing through the NDP. Once agreed by the group it is anticipated that the assessment will be presented to the community at an exhibition around November/early December. Residents will be able to put forward their views at the event and these will be used to inform the final methodology. The exhibition will also be used to present the results and findings of the HNA.

1.5 It is anticipated that once the methodology is finalised that it will be used as the basis to assess the suitability of sites to be included as part of the draft plan.

¹ file:///C:/Users/71003886/Downloads/Neighbourhood_Plan_Working_Group_Draft_Report_for_21st_April_2016%20(2).pdf

2. The character of the Parish and village

2.1 The civil parish of Abbots Bromley is essentially comprised of the core village of Abbots Bromley, the surrounding hamlets of Heatley, Bromley Hurst, Bromley Wood and Radmore Wood, and many scattered farmsteads. The village of Abbots Bromley lies in the centre of Staffordshire, north east of Birmingham and midway between Stafford and Burton upon Trent, and is a thriving commuter-belt village with largely residential development supported by some retail businesses. The B5014/B5234 Uttoxeter to Burton upon Trent road runs through the village (north west-south east) and has influenced the development of the village, illustrated by its linear, ribbon-like form. Blithfield Reservoir (pictured below), opened in 1953, lies close to the south west of the village.



2.2 The village is largely a conservation area. The area was originally designated by Staffordshire County Council in November 1969. This was further appraised in September 1997 when recommendations for slight extensions to the original 1969 boundary were proposed, these were adopted in the Abbots Bromley Conservation Area Statement produced by East Staffordshire Borough Council. A re-appraisal commenced in November 2005 and coincided with the preparation of a Village Design Statement by the village, the latest iteration of the Appraisal was published in March 2009. The Abbots Bromley Conservation Area encompasses much of the built village. It predominantly excludes post war additions to the village periphery and incorporates open areas to the south, north-east and west of the village. Further information can be found in the appendix A.

2.3 Within the conservation area there are fifty-one listed buildings and structures, these include forty-eight Grade II listed buildings and structures and three Grade II*. There are no buildings of Grade I listed status however there is one Scheduled Monument, the Butter Cross near to the village green. Amongst the listed structures within the conservation area are the buildings of Abbots Bromley School on the High Street (below right), St Nicholas Parish church and the striking half-timbered Church House (below left).



2.4 Abbots Bromley today is probably best known for the annual Abbots Bromley Horn Dance. Famous worldwide and attracting visitors from as far afield as Canada and New Zealand, its early origins are not recorded. The dance takes place on Wakes Monday, following an ancient formula related to Abbots Bromley's earlier annual fair, and so is always performed on "the Monday following the first Sunday after the 4th of September". The twelve dancers, of whom six carry the reindeer antlers and the rest depict other traditional characters, collect the horns from St Nicholas Church early in the morning, and then proceed to follow a circuit of the parish, dancing at certain points around the village, and finally returning the horns to the church late in the evening.



3. Visual Character²

3.1 Abbots Bromley sits amid a landscape of rolling hills punctuated by clumps of woodland and scattered with farmhouses and lanes connecting with the nearby Staffordshire villages of Admaston, Newborough and Kingstone. It also sits within the Needwood Plateau.

3.2 The village lies at an elevated position between 80 and 150 metres above sea level on a slight ridge, which provides views to the north and south from different points within the village. At the west and east ends, the landscape dips away slightly, further supporting the notion of the village lying along a ridge.

3.3 There is a clear view across the valley below to the more level landscape of Rugeley and Cannock Chase beyond. To the north, small pockets of woodland are scattered across the landscape, the most significant in terms of size being the historic Bagot's Park and Marchington Woods.

3.4 Geologically, Abbots Bromley sits above an interesting landscape of Triassic period keuper marl, a deep red clay with lenses of sandstone, overlain by glacial deposits of sand, gravels and additional clay. The landscape of Abbots Bromley is crossed by small streams, the largest being the river Blithe, which runs through the western side of the parish feeding the Blithfield Reservoir. In conjunction with the streams, a number of ponds have formed, some naturally and some in response to past excavations for clay (or marl), sand and gravel.

3.5 The topography of Abbots Bromley is scattered with woodland including the large area of Bagot's Forest and the smaller Marchington Woods to the north of the village.

3.6 The village takes a linear form, closely hugging the main through road (B5014 Bagot Street/High Street) with small areas of development aligned along the lanes, which branch from either side of the street into the village hinterland.

3.7 The undulating landscape in which the village of Abbots Bromley lies, rises slightly on the south side of the village to form another low ridge and the village nestles in between the two. The main thoroughfare of Bagot's Street/High Street takes the natural route through this 'mini' valley mirroring the axis of the ridgeline. The route linked (and still links) the towns of Uttoxeter, Burton upon Trent and Lichfield and Abbots Bromley held a central position in this topographic triangle.

² <http://www.eaststaffsbc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/docs/planning/conservlistedbuild/appraisaldocs/AbbotsBromleyCAAJul15.pdf>

3.8 The approach to the village is primarily from either the north west (B5014 – Bagot Street), the south (B5014 – Lichfield Road) or the east (B5234 – Ashbrook Lane). Further approaches to and from the village include, from the north, Harley Lane and School House Lane; from the east, Ashbrook Lane, and from the south, Hall Hill Lane and Goose Lane. Several mainly modern cul de sac roads lead off from Bagot Street (Mires Brook Lane and Paget Rise) with the older, historic Church Lane leading off to the south to the Church of St Nicholas.

4. Character Assessment Studies

4.1 A number of pieces of work have been carried out that document and characterise the history and landscape of Abbots Bromley village and wider Parish. These include (but are not limited to):

- Abbots Bromley Conservation Area Appraisal (July 2015)
- Abbots Bromley Village Design Statement (March 2006)
- Abbots Bromley Nostalgia Group³

4.2 Alongside this local assessment there has been other work carried out by East Staffordshire Borough Council through the Local Plan⁴ A key piece is the Historic Environment Character Assessment: East Staffordshire, August 2013. In terms of Abbots Bromley the document makes the following comment:

- *Abbots Bromley was identified as one of the 23 medieval market towns forming part of the Staffordshire Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) project. The project only covered the extent of the built townscape and did not consider the historic landscape beyond the settlement envelope in any detail.*
- *The landscape in the immediate hinterland around Abbots Bromley is dominated by post medieval field systems which were created incrementally through the gradual enclosure of the medieval open field system. These fields, identifiable from the morphology of the field boundaries which exhibit either a reverse 'S' curve (fossilising the line of the medieval plough) or as dog-legs, are shown as 'Piecemeal Enclosure'. They are particularly located to the north, east and west of the village. The origins of the fields are closely associated with the village's economy during the medieval period. Around Abbots Bromley these fields were probably enclosed from at least the 16th century, with some fields not being created until the 18th century⁶⁴. This represents a move away from communal farming towards the creation of individual holdings and often a change towards a more pastoral economy. A number of small farmsteads dominate to the south of the village and appear to be associated with this landscape, possibly originating as the foci for new holdings created during the post medieval period.*

³ <http://www.abbotsbromleynostalgia.co.uk/>

⁴ <http://www.eaststaffsbc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/docs/planning/planningpolicy/localplan2012-2031/Local-Plan-2012-2031-FINAL.pdf>

- *To the south of Abbots Bromley a rectilinear field pattern dominates whose origins are not clearly understood, but which may also have been created from at least the post medieval period. Beyond the immediate hinterlands there are areas where the field morphology suggests that they were planned out by surveyors. These fields lying to the north east of the village were created following an Act of Parliament passed in 1799 for the enclosure of an area of land known as 'Near Wood'. Only two historic farmsteads stand in this area, testimony to the lightly settled landscape to the north of Abbots Bromley. Moors Farm has a regular courtyard plan form reflecting its early 19th century origins.*
- *A dispersed settlement pattern of historic farmsteads dominates the wider landscape around Abbots Bromley. The majority of these complexes are concentrated along a network of narrow rural lanes to the south of the village; some of which may have early origins. Leafields Farm, a Grade II Listed farmstead lying to the west of Abbots Bromley has been dated to the early 19th century. A Grade II Listed 18th century barn stands at High Elms off Port Lane. The pattern becomes more dispersed to the north, north west and east of Abbots Bromley. Radmore Wood to the north east represents a cluster of farmsteads and other dwellings the majority of which were established in the 20th century. Small-scale planned paddocks continue to dominate the historic character of this landscape, which existed by at least the late 19th century. Two large farmsteads, with historic origins, continue to dominate the character of Dunstall to the north, which is first mentioned in documentary sources in the 14th century. To the east stands Grange Farm, whose Grade II Listed farmhouse has been dated to the 18th century. The small hamlet of Mill Green lying to the south comprises an historic farmstead (Mill Green Farm) and a cottage. The farmstead retains its regular courtyard 'U' plan form, which may have originated from the late 18th century. It is possibly associated with the remains of a corn mill and its extant mill pond which lies to the north west of the farm. Documentary sources suggest that a mill may have stood on this site since the medieval period. Overall the historic landscape character of the hinterland around Abbots Bromley is generally well preserved. There are some areas where greater numbers of field boundaries have been removed, but overall the integrity of the landscape is still legible.*

Archaeological Heritage assets

- *Little is currently known about the wider landscape around Abbots Bromley in the prehistoric or Roman period, although this is likely to be a result of limited field work and study rather than evidence of the absence of past activity.*

- *A low earthwork platform was observed within a field to the east of Abbots Bromley. It is suggested that this may represent the site of a property of unknown date; a late 12th century penny was found nearby, but cannot be proven to represent evidence of occupation. Nothing further is currently known of this site although it suggests the potential for archaeological remains to be present within this area.*

4.3 Through their Environmental Land Management remit Staffordshire County Council manage many aspects of the County's landscapes including nature and wildlife conservation, archaeology and historic buildings, rights of way, country parks and picnic areas. Therefore the *Staffordshire Landscape Character Assessment, Planning for Landscape Change* document is also relevant to Abbots Bromley in the following areas as summarised:

- *The Character Area as a whole is a rolling plateau of Triassic mudstones divided by the valley of the River Dove, which forms the boundary between Staffordshire and Derbyshire. That part within Staffordshire lies in the interfluvium of the rivers Dove, Trent and Tean. A mantle of boulder clay has given rise to heavy stagnogley soils and brown earths, generally poorly draining and varying in reaction from base poor to base rich. Streams have cut through the clay to create the rolling landform in which valleys accommodate and often hide dispersed hamlets and villages. The land is of average agricultural quality, at Grade 3. It is very much a mixed farming area, two thirds of which is down to grass to support dairying with some beef and sheep farms. The arable cropping comprises mainly combinable crops including cereals and oilseed rape. 2. There have been a few finds of prehistoric artefacts in the area, but there is nothing to suggest settlement. The eastern half of the area formed the forest of Needwood, the first documentary evidence for which occurs in the 1120s, although it must have existed earlier. It was used by the Ferrers family for hunting, with the woodland managed for construction and fuel. In the third quarter of the thirteenth century it passed to the Duchy of Lancaster and in 1399 to the Crown. Much land was emparked during the medieval period, and it is likely that the woodland was managed as wood pasture, and grazed by cattle. It was noted for the quality both of its oaks and its pasture, and for its dense growth of hollies. 3. The slopes and valleys, which surround Needwood's central plateau, contain many villages and hamlets with historic links to the forest. To the north, south and west are valley settlements such as Marchington, Yoxall and Abbots Bromley which have a variety of timber-framed buildings demonstrating their woodland dependence. Woodroffe's, on the edge of the forest near Marchington, is an excellent*

example of the quality of carpentry that was achieved, and Abbots Bromley's famous annual horn dance may still echo former forest rights. Newborough was laid out on the edge of the forest in the middle ages as an attempt to generate income from settlement by the forest's owner, Robert de Ferrers. However the attempt failed and the tiny village still lies along four sunken tree-lined lanes converging on the central green.

- *There was much enclosure of commons and wastes throughout the area in the eighteenth century, often followed by attempts to improve the land for arable cultivation. New roads, often perfectly straight, were built at this time. The gradual erosion of Needwood culminated in the disafforestation and enclosure of the remaining core of 9400 acres under an Act of 1801. The felling of trees began immediately, although it took 20 years to complete. A contemporary survey indicates that 58,621 oaks and 148,170 hollies were felled (Greenslade and Kettle, 1967). A description of a walk to the Swilcar Oak in 1802 notes that 'Here the devastation had begun - oaks and hollies were piled upon the ground; it was like crossing a field of battle. The hollies were bought up with great avidity by Manchester traders, being a wood particularly useful in printing cottons.' (Ibid.) 5. The landscape that has emerged at Needwood is characterised by a very regular pattern of well cared-for hedged fields, straight roads and regular conifer plantations with isolated neat brick farms, bounded abruptly to the north by prominent and extensive ancient woodlands on the scarp slope above the river Dove. This is, next to the Churnet Valley, the most important concentration of ancient and ancient seminatural woodland in the county, and also a successful commercial forest in the ownership of the Duchy of Lancaster. It is noted for the quality of its pedunculate oak 122 and larch (*Larix* spp.), and also for the occurrence of wild service tree (*Sorbus torminalis*) and small leaved lime (*Tilia cordata*). Distinctive species of the understorey include spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*), spurge laurel (*Daphne laureola*) and wood spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*), here at the northern edge of its range. 6. A number of landscaped parks and gardens were created here during the nineteenth century, and they have a considerable effect locally in increasing tree cover. The late Georgian red brick New Church, and nearby large Victorian farmstead on the wide road crossing the plateau, both illustrate the type of building which now characterise this landscape. On the east of the plateau Rangemore, a late nineteenth century village built at the expense of industrialist M. T. Bass, also demonstrates Victorian vernacular styles. 7. In the north and west of the area the plateau between the Rivers Blythe and Trent was also a royal hunting reserve after the Norman Conquest but did not have so enduring an influence on*

settlement as Needwood. The village of Hilderstone has good examples of the deep red and brown brick used in cottages in the area and it winds down a ridge between two streams forming a street village, a type common throughout the Midlands. The area is characterised by a small to medium scale pattern of semi-regular hedged fields, and a number of moated sites perhaps suggest extensive medieval woodland. Hedgerow decline is very apparent in places, with consequent increases in scale. In the extreme west a narrow band of Triassic sandstone, extending from Sandon to Downs Bank and beyond, imparts a distinctive remnant heathland character.

Settled plateau farmlands

These are landscapes of rolling plateaux, on which boulder clay overlies Triassic mudstones. The soils, which are generally non-calcareous stagnogleys, support dairying with some mixed farming in a semi-regular pattern of hedged fields, with scattered woods, often of ancient origin, and areas of remnant heath. There is a dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and farmsteads, with urban influences in places.

Visual character

This is an open landscape of large-scale regular and irregular fields with extensive views from the raised, undulating plateau landform out to the surrounding countryside, except where conifer and broadleaved plantations restrict views and act as constant skyline features. Few hedgerows and a generally low density of hedgerow trees emphasise this open nature, although locally, remnant heathy woodland of ancient origin, containing oak, holly and silver birch, or woodland estate planting, help to reduce the scale and contain views. There are belts of mature broadleaved trees which intersect the open areas, and new tree planting has been carried out along tracks, although the use of exotic species has sometimes been inappropriate. Intensive arable and improved pasture farming has reduced the level of diversity, with breakdown of field boundaries to wire fences, stunted individual oaks and individual thorn. There is little access into these areas except tracks to large isolated estate farms with large modern agricultural buildings

Characteristic landscape features

Ancient heathy oak woodland and new plantations; pronounced rolling ridge and valley landform; large farms; intensive mixed pastoral and arable farming; large scale fields; parkland.

Incongruous landscape features

Large numbers of fence-lines replacing hedgerows; gappy hedgerows; large farm buildings; stunted hedgerow oaks; exotic tree species.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the loss of characteristic landscape features, the poor condition of those features that remain, and the introduction of incongruous features, as listed above. The representation of semi-natural vegetation characteristic of this landscape type (e.g. ancient woodland, wood pasture and unimproved grassland) is also relatively poor.

Potential value of new woodland planting

Very high, to decrease the scale of the landscape and restore some structure to an area of intensive farming losing much of its hedgerow pattern. The planting of larger woodlands would be particularly appropriate as would the strategic siting of new native woodland to reduce the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland. This landscape type therefore qualifies as a priority under two of the key actions in the government's England Forestry Strategy.

Factors critical to landscape character and quality

The critical factors which currently limit landscape quality are the loss of characteristic landscape features, the poor condition of those features that remain, and the relatively poor survival of characteristic semi-natural vegetation (e.g. ancient woodland and semi-natural grasslands). The area around Abbots Bromley has been identified as a 'landscape at risk' of sudden loss of quality. This landscape character type is locally sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change.

4.4 Natural England – National Character Area Profiles. Within their profiling Abbots Bromley sits within NCA 68. Needwood & South Derbyshire Claylands (NE390). The following summarises:

- *Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands National Character Area (NCA), though divided by the River Dove's wide flood plain, is predominately a rolling plateau that slopes from the southern edge of the Peak District to the valley of the River Trent in the south-west. Also in the south are frequent plantations and ancient woodlands of the former Forest of*

Needwood. Elsewhere, the extensively hedged and pastoral landscape is dominated by mixed farming and features a dispersed pattern of villages and other settlements. Hedgerow trees also contribute to the wooded character of this NCA. Internationally important wetland habitats that include Chartley Moss and Pasturefields Saltmarsh nature reserves occur in the west of the area. Part of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site and The National Forest are situated on the eastern side of the NCA. To the north and west respectively are found small parts of the Peak District National Park and Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

- Blithfield Reservoir and the River Dove provide important sources of public water supply for parts of Staffordshire and Leicestershire and also water for agricultural purposes. Running west to east, the A50, A51 and A52 form the main transport corridors through the area. They provide the main link to the settlements of Ashbourne and Uttoxeter. A good network of rights of way and other trails and paths, along with ease of access from the surrounding conurbations of Derby and Burton-upon-Trent, means that the area is important for recreation. Future challenges for the area include management of flooding, maintaining the character of the farmed landscape and settlements, safeguarding water quality, and expansion of woodlands and the restoration of existing wood pasture and parkland.*

Statement of Environmental Opportunities

SEO 1: Conserve and enhance the essential character of this mainly pastoral mixed farm landscape with its distinctive field and settlement patterns, hedgerow trees, varied hedgerow types and heritage assets, enhancing and expanding the network of farmland habitats and improving access opportunities while sustaining food provision.

SEO 2: Manage the area's diverse range of woodlands, veteran trees, wood pasture and parklands to enhance landscape character and safeguard their biodiversity value, while seeking opportunities to enhance access. Plan, with emphasis on The National Forest, for new opportunities to plant woods and new areas of wood pasture to expand existing sites; and create short rotation coppice to enhance timber and biomass provision, increase carbon storage, regulate water flow and quality, and reduce habitat fragmentation.

SEO 3: Protect the historic and cultural features of Needwood and the South Derbyshire Claylands, in particular the traditional settlement patterns of remaining villages, traditional farmsteads and the country estates that provide a strong sense of place.

SEO 4: Manage and enhance the network of rivers, flood plains and wetlands, increasing the landscape's ability to naturally and sustainably manage flood and drought risk and provide other ecosystem services such as water supply and food provision, while recognising the needs of individual species and habitats.

Key Characteristics

A dispersed historical settlement pattern, particularly in the higher pastoral farmlands that fringe the Peak District to the north, with the older villages generally sited along the valleys or valley sides, and more recent crossroad settlements on the higher ground. Buildings are usually of red brick and clay tile roofs, and local sandstone. Timber frame buildings are rare with notable examples at Somersal Hall and the village of Abbots Bromley. There are market towns at Ashbourne, Stone, Tutbury and Uttoxeter, and the more significant urban areas of Burton-upon-Trent and the City of Derby extend into the eastern boundary of the NCA.

Ecosystem

Water availability: Blithfield Reservoir and the River Dove provide significant volumes of potable water and this is supplied to parts of Staffordshire and Leicestershire. The area also provides large volumes of water for agriculture.

Regulating water quality: Several significant rivers run through the area, including the River Dove and the River Trent. The ecological status of the NCA's rivers and waterbodies is mixed. Surface and groundwater supplies from the catchment of the regionally significant Blithfield Reservoir are assessed as good. Opportunities to increase the value of this service include landscape-scale improvements in soil management, more informed nutrient management and an expansion of wetland habitats adjacent to watercourses and in flood plains.

Regulating water flow (flooding): Within the river valleys there is a high risk of flooding, particularly associated with the lower part of the River Dove which runs through the middle of this NCA and has several vulnerable settlements along its course. There is scope for mitigating existing flood risk through a combination of measures including expanding and managing semi-natural wetland habitats, improved soil management and sustainable urban drainage schemes.

Cultural services (inspiration, education and wellbeing)

Recreation: There is a good network of public rights of way combined with trails, cycle routes and canal towpaths in addition to historic parklands and woodlands in the Needwood area. Blithfield Reservoir and The National Forest are popular locations for recreational visits.

Maintaining and improving the existing rights of way network and the Staffordshire Way long-distance route.

Creating new or improved links between urban areas and the wider countryside, particularly between Derby and land to the west, and between Burton-on-Trent and the Needwood area of The National Forest.

Manage and expand the access network of rights of way, cycle routes, canal towpaths and access land, and enhance recreational opportunities.

Improving links to or within the wider network of canal towpaths and cycle routes.

Promoting, increasing and enhancing areas of permissive access to woodland, wildlife sites, historic parks and other open spaces.

Utilising opportunities to achieve the objectives of the Staffordshire, Derby and Derbyshire Rights of Way Improvement Plans.

Major rivers/canals

Within the catchment the following rivers/canals are identified by length:

Name	Length km (miles in brackets)
<i>River Trent</i>	<i>31 (19)</i>
<i>River Dove</i>	<i>30 (18)</i>
<i>River Blithe</i>	<i>25 (15)</i>
<i>River Derwent</i>	<i>3 (2)</i>

Source: Natural England (2010)

Appendix A – Map showing the conservation area of Abbots Bromley within the Parish setting

