

Neighbourhood Plan
Shenstone | Stonnall | Little Aston



Little Aston Neighbourhood Plan Review, 2024-2040

**Pre-Submission Consultation (Regulation 14)
Version - Draft Final**

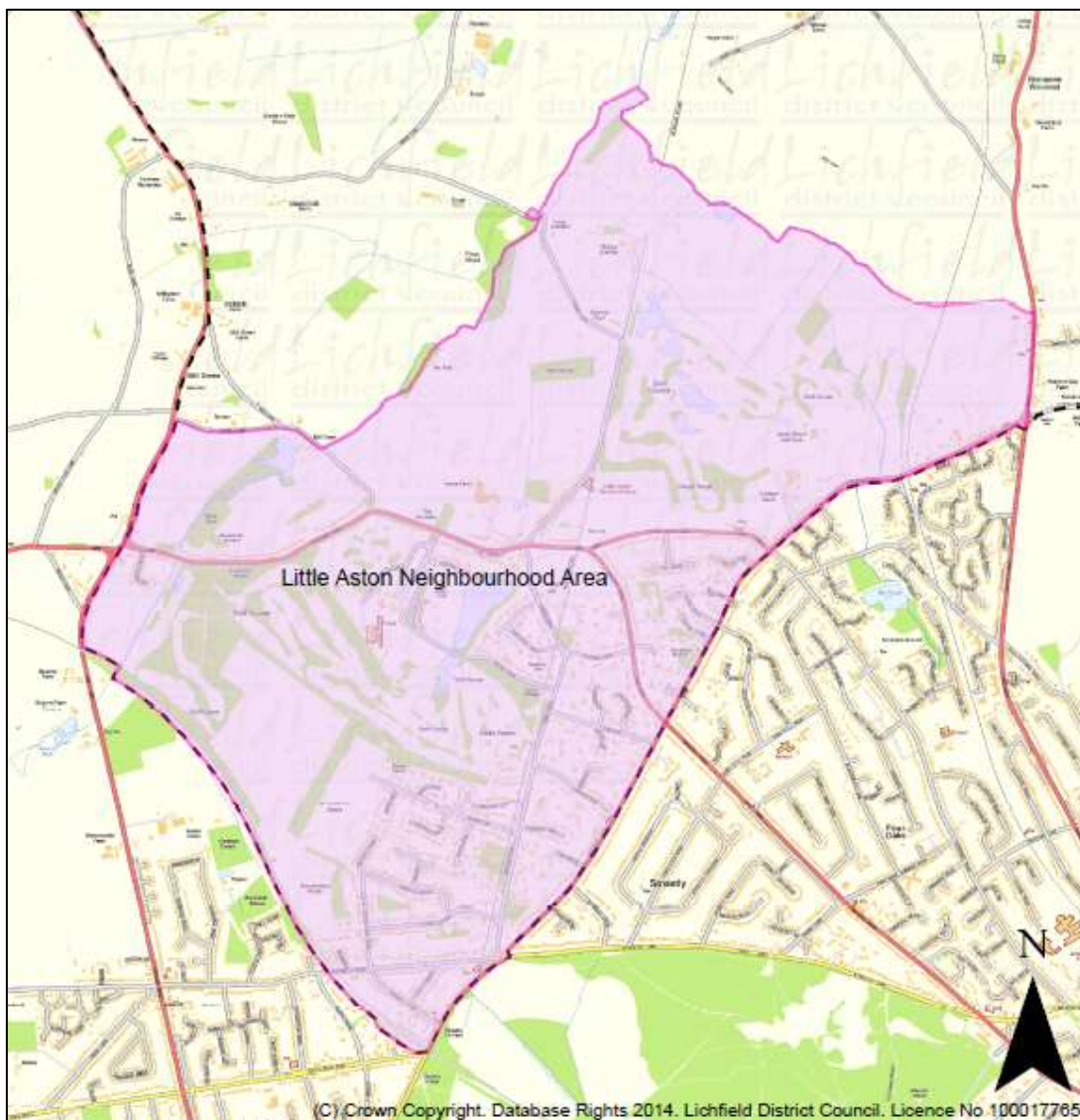
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document represents the Neighbourhood Plan Review for Little Aston. It represents one part of the development plan for the neighbourhood area over the period 2024 to 2040, the other part being the 2015 Lichfield District Local Plan.
- 1.2 Lichfield District Council, as the local planning authority, designated the Little Aston Neighbourhood Area in February 2013 to enable Shenstone Parish Council to prepare the Neighbourhood Plan and this subsequent review. The Neighbourhood Plan passed referendum in February 2016 and was made in April 2016. The Plan and this review has been prepared by the community through the Little Aston Neighbourhood Plan (LANP) Group.
- 1.3 The LANP is being prepared in accordance with the Town & Country Planning Act 1990, the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Localism Act 2011 and the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 (as amended). The LANP Group has prepared the plan to establish a vision for the future of the neighbourhood area and to set out how that vision will be realised through planning and controlling land use and development change over the plan period 2024 to 2040.
- 1.4 The map below shows the boundary of the Neighbourhood Plan area.



- 1.5 The purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan is to guide development and provide guidance to any interested parties wishing to submit planning applications for development within the designated Neighbourhood Area. The process of producing a plan has sought to involve the community as widely as possible and the different topic areas are reflective of matters that are of considerable importance to Little Aston, its residents, businesses and community groups. It has therefore given the community the opportunity to guide development within their neighbourhood.
- 1.6 Each section of the plan covers a different topic. Under each heading there is the justification for the policies presented which provides the necessary understanding of the policy and what it is seeking to achieve. The policies themselves are presented in the blue boxes. It is these policies against which planning applications will be assessed. It is advisable that, in order to understand the full context for any individual policy, it is read in conjunction with the supporting text.

National and local policy

- 1.7 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states:

'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. Neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies for the area, or undermine those strategic policies. (para 29)

Once a neighbourhood plan has been brought into force, the policies it contains take precedence over existing non-strategic policies in a local plan covering the neighbourhood area, where they are in conflict; unless they are superseded by strategic or non-strategic policies that are adopted subsequently.' (para 30)

- 1.8 The relevant Lichfield District Local Plan was adopted in February 2015 and covers the period to 2029. It has provided the strategic context for the neighbourhood plan.

Consultation

- 1.9 The LANP Group developed the 2016 Neighbourhood Plan through extensive engagement with the community. Working Parties were set up to focus on particular issues and themes, with four engagement events being held with the community.



- 1.10 Additional consultations were undertaken throughout the process by the Working Groups with key stakeholders.
- 1.11 The review of the 2016 Neighbourhood Plan was commenced in 2023. An engagement event in March 2024 presented the proposed amendments to the Neighbourhood Plan. Following feedback, the plan was amended.

2 LOCAL CONTEXT

History of Little Aston

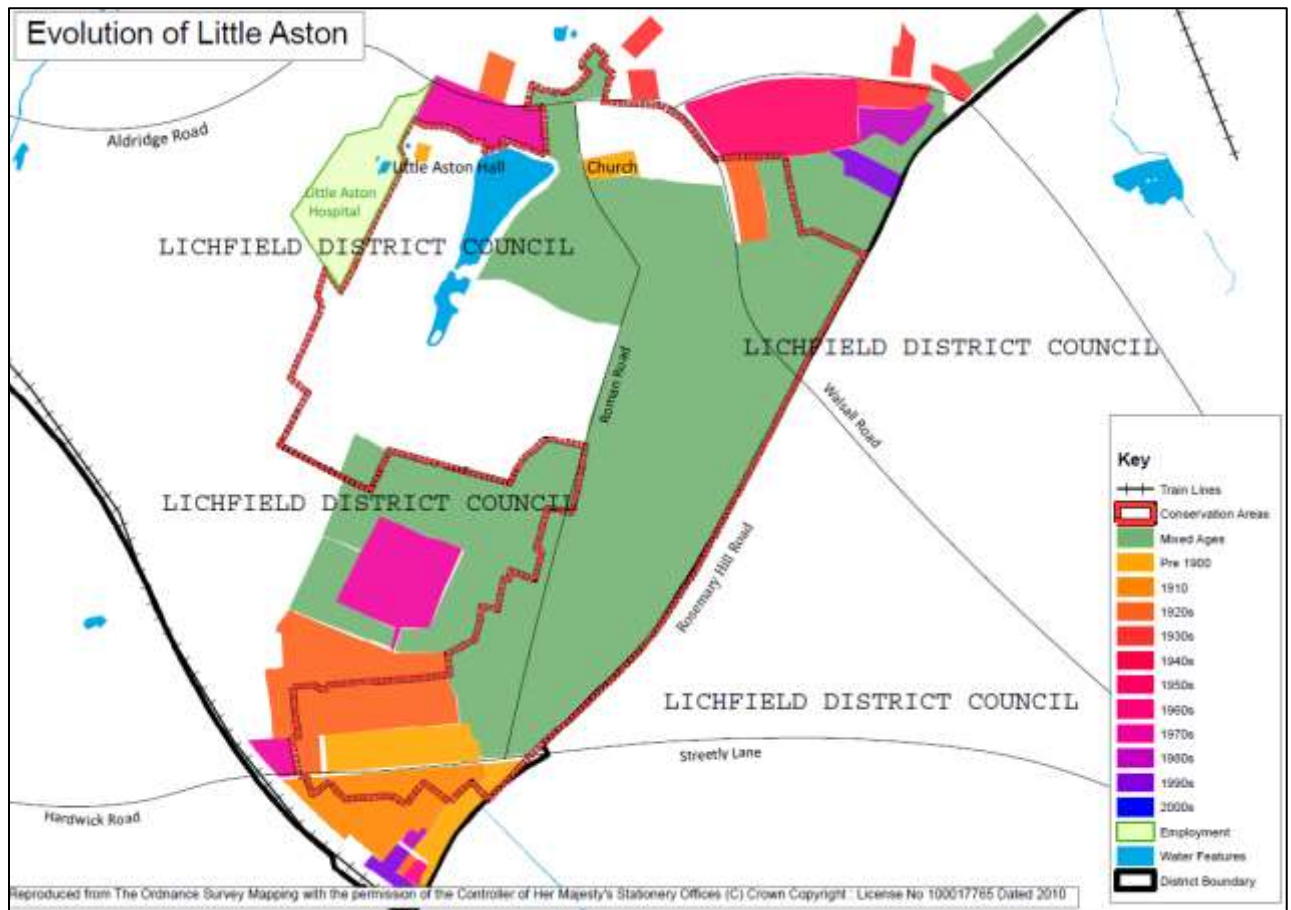
- 2.1 Little Aston has a long history that has shaped the community today.
- 2.2 In Roman days, Ryknild Street cut through the heart of Little Aston to link up with Watling St near Wall. It gives its name to Roman Road that runs through the Little Aston Park Estate.
- 2.3 The links with Shenstone and Stonnall can be traced back to the Domesday Book with the settlement of Aston mentioned with Fotherley and Woodend alongside Stonnall and Lynn Chesterfield within the parish of Shenstone. From 1774 onwards, with later Tithe and Enclosure maps, it is easier to track the development of the settlements and see the history of Little Aston unfold.
- 2.4 These maps showed various mills in Shenstone Parish with a significant mill at Little Aston on Mill Lane, on the River Bourne. It was a corn mill and a lease in 1830 showed it was owned by William Leigh. In 1838 a later Tithe Map shows Shenstone Parish comprising of 8,452 acres with William Leigh of Little Aston owning 2,590 acres (of which the hall and park amounted to 770 acres). The hall mentioned is Little Aston Hall that was built in 1730 in a Georgian style with a park and a lake.
- 2.5 The 1774 map also shows Little Aston Forge in Forge Lane downstream on the River Bourne from Little Aston Mill. There are records of a lease dated 1600 from Roger Fowke, Lord of the Manor of Little Aston, to a Philip Foley and that it produced over 100 tons of bar iron a year selling most of the output to the West Bromwich slitting mill. The forge went out of use in 1749 when converted to a mill. The last remains of the forge were destroyed by fire in 1902 and the area is now the location for a sewage works.
- 2.6 In 1818 when the Enclosure Act came into force, large areas of Little Aston Common adjoining Sutton Park were assigned to William Tennant, the then owner of Little Aston Park, which doubled the size of the estate. The estate was sold in 1828 to William Leigh who kept it until 1844 when it was sold to Edward Jervis. The hall was restyled and enlarged in 1857 (at a reputed cost of £35,000) and looked very much like the picture below taken in 1986.

Figure 2.1: Little Aston Hall



- 2.7 Little Aston became a separate ecclesiastical parish within Shenstone on consecration of St. Peters Church in 1874, with the church being built at the expense of Edward Jervis on land donated by him.
- 2.8 The Hall passed through various owners in the early 1900s until in 1925 the Little Aston Hall estate of over 1,500 acres was broken up, with the Hall and 118 acres surrounding it purchased by a Harry Scribbans and the remaining land sold piecemeal by auction leading to the current Little Aston Park estate as we now know it.
- 2.9 The Hall was lived in until 1949 and remained unoccupied from 1950 until 1954 when it became the Midlands HQ of Esso. From 1968 it served as a residential centre for GKN. In 1984 the site was developed, the hall converted into superior residential apartments and seven new blocks each of six apartments built in the grounds overlooking the lake. Further blocks of apartments, a residential care home and the private hospital have since followed.
- 2.10 Much of the rest of the Little Aston of today stems from 1910 onwards as shown on the map in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Evolution of development in Little Aston



Source: Lichfield District Council

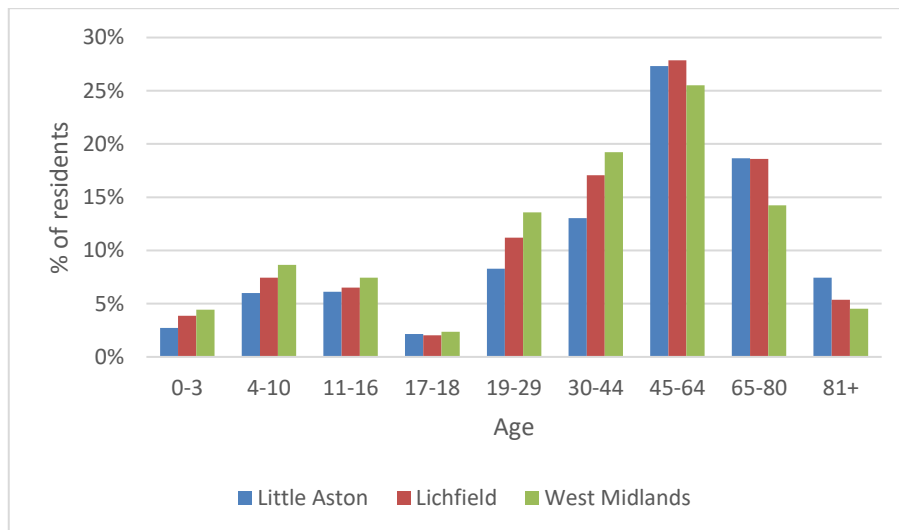
Profile of the community

2.11 Unless stated otherwise, the profile of the community has come from the 2021 Census.

Population

2.12 In 2021, the population of the ward was 3,059. Compared to Lichfield District, it has a high proportion of older people – 7.5% were aged 81 or over in Little Aston compared to just over 5% across the district. Little Aston also has a low proportion of young adults (19-44). This is shown in Figure 2.3.

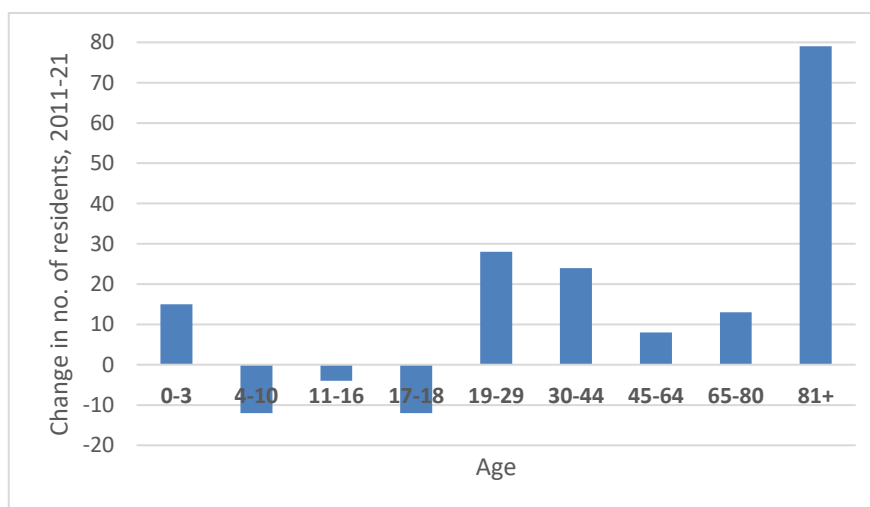
Figure 2.3: Population profile, 2021



Source: 2021 Census

2.13 Since 2011, the population of the ward has grown by 139 persons, a 4.8% change compared to 5.8% growth across Lichfield District as a whole. This slightly lower level of change is reflective of the restrictions on growth in Little Aston due to the presence of the green belt. What is particularly interesting is the change in population by age group.

Figure 2.4: Change in population, 2011-2021



Source: 2011 and 2021 Census

2.14 Little Aston experienced very strong growth in its older retired population (aged 81 and older) whilst also experiencing a decline in the number of young people (aged 4 to 18). This demonstrates not only an ageing population structure but also a declining number of families, despite the increase in the number of young adults (age 19 to 44). This is shown in Figure 2.4).

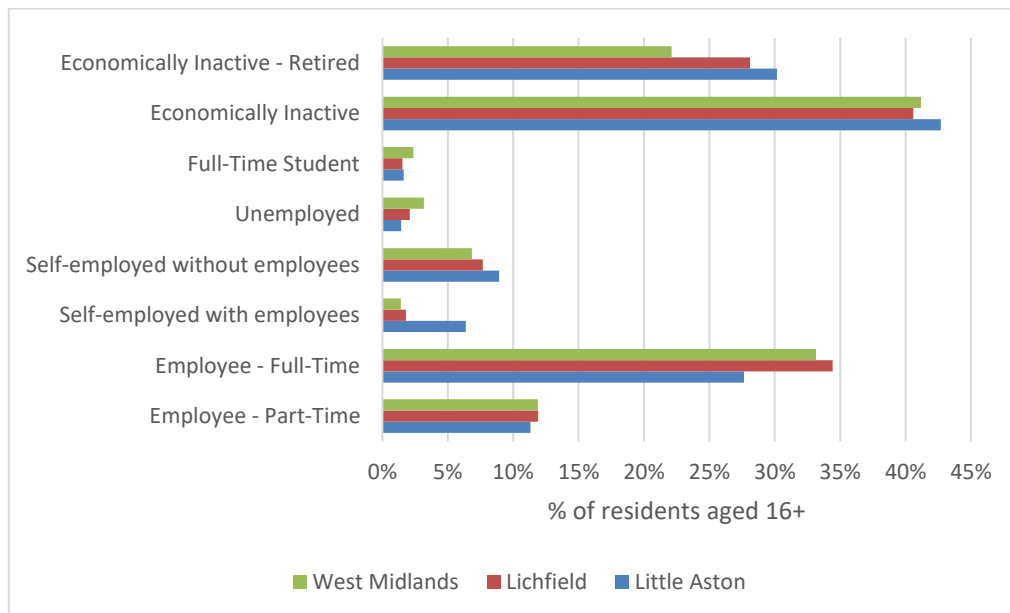
Work

2.15 What is noticeable about Little Aston’s population aged 16 or over is that it has a comparatively low proportion of people in full-time employment. Those that are economically inactive are comparatively high, reinforcing the high number of retirees in the ward.

2.16 What Little Aston does have a strong representation in is self-employed people, both with and without employees. This demonstrates that there is a strong entrepreneurial aspect to the working population.

2.17 This is shown in Figure 2.5.

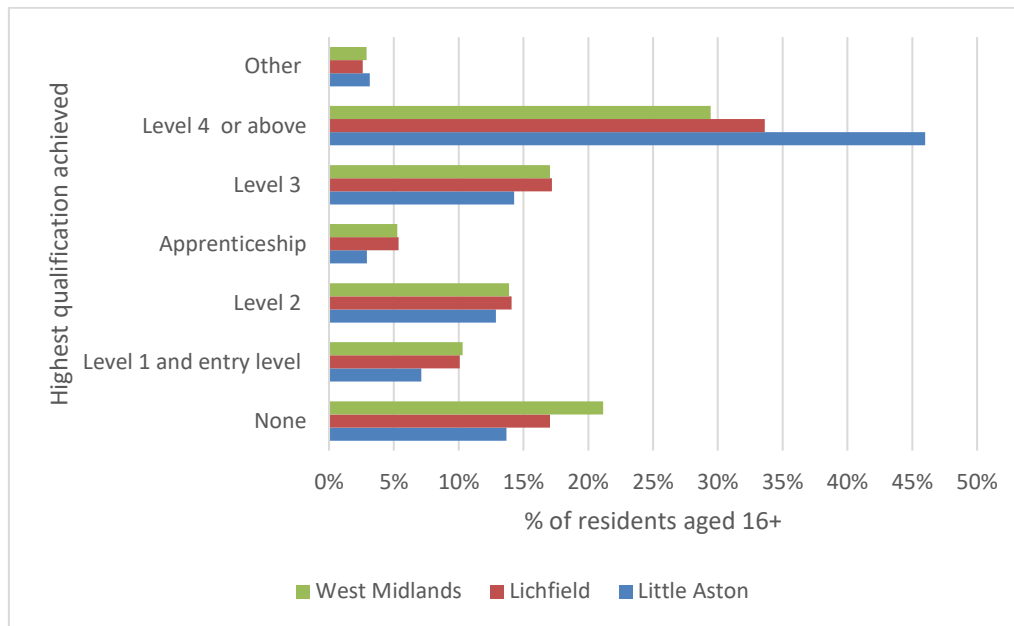
Figure 2.5: Economic activity, 2021



Source: 2021 Census

2.18 Figure 2.6 shows that nearly 50% of the population is educated to Level 4 or above, i.e. degree level. By contrast, the proportion of those with no qualifications is well below the district average.

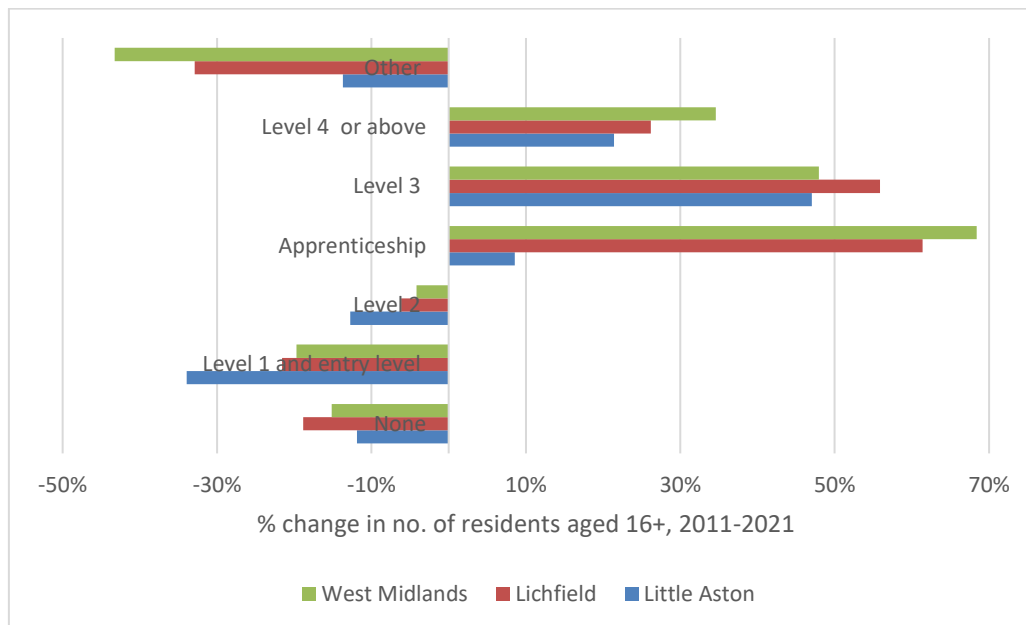
Figure 2.6: Qualifications of residents aged 16 and over



Source: 2021 Census

2.19 However, as Figure 2.7 shows, growth since 2011 of those with Level 4 qualifications or higher has been below average. By contrast, the fall of those with Level 1 qualifications has been well above average.

Figure 2.7: Change in qualification of residents aged 16 and over, 2011-2021



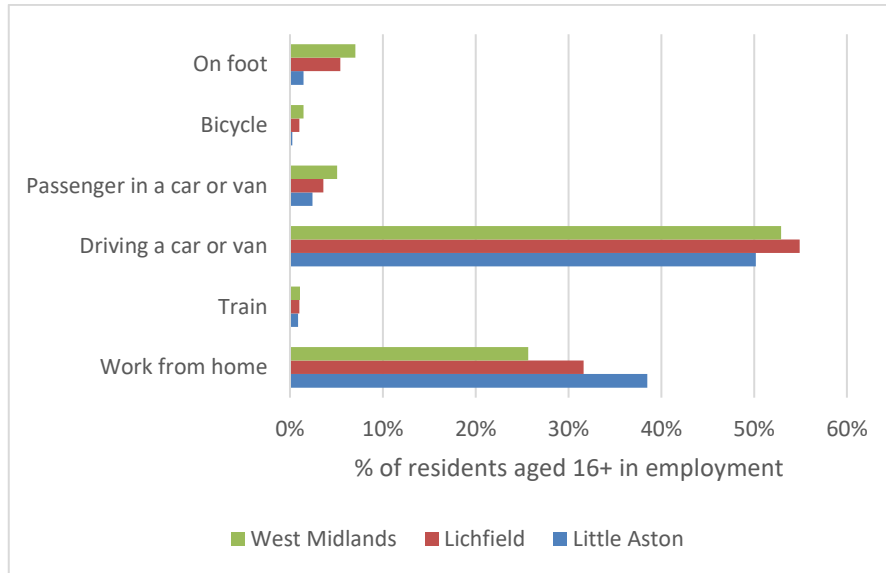
Source: 2011 and 2021 Census

2.20 The large majority of those in work travel to work by car, and do so as the driver of that car. Whilst there are both rail and bus links serving the area, there is only one bus route and this does not link to Blake Street station, with the station itself being some distance from the main residential areas of Little Aston. As such, it is not surprising that the proportion of those who use the train or bus is lower than the district average.

2.21 A significant proportion of people (38%) work from home, up from 7% in 2011. This has been a common feature over this period for most communities due to increases in self-employment and changing working practices as a result of the Covid pandemic.

2.22 This is shown in Figure 2.8.

Figure 2.8: Mode of transport to work



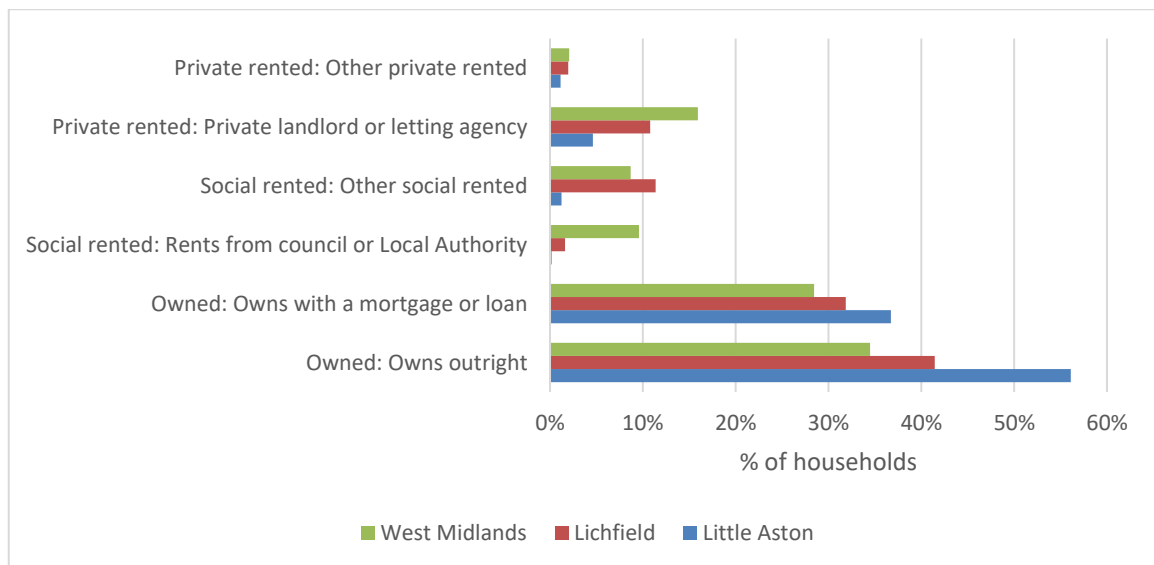
Source: 2021 Census

Housing

2.23 Little Aston is dominated by owned properties. In particular, more than 55% of households own their property outright which is well above the district average. This has increased by nearly 30% since 2011. By contrast, rental levels are low which may explain the low proportions of young adults in the area, being the most likely group to rent.

2.24 This is shown in Figure 2.9.

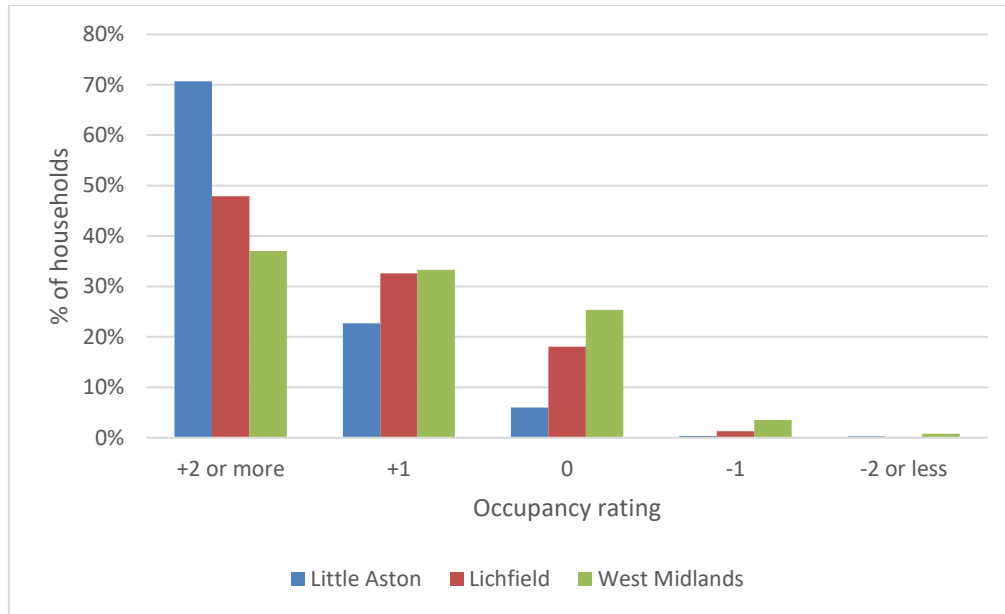
Figure 2.9: Housing tenure



Source: 2021 Census

2.25 This is reinforced when looking at the occupancy rating that properties in Little Aston have. The occupancy rating measures the number of spare bedrooms based on the number of people in the household and the number of bedrooms that the property has. So a rating of +2 means that a property has two spare bedrooms whereas -2 means it has two bedrooms fewer than needed for that household. Figure 2.10 shows that it has a far higher proportion of properties with at least two spare bedrooms than the district.

Figure 2.10: Occupancy rating



Source: 2021 Census

Local infrastructure

Education

2.26 There is only one school in the neighbourhood area, Little Aston Primary School. Figures from the Department of Education suggest that the school is close to capacity, however it is not thought that this has reached a critical situation and, given the expected levels of growth, is not likely to become a critical issue over the lifetime of the plan.

2.27 All secondary education is provided outside the neighbourhood area. There is a local school bus that picks up in Little Aston to take pupils into Lichfield. There are other local secondary schools in the neighbouring boroughs of Birmingham and Walsall.

Healthcare

2.28 There are no doctors' surgeries in Little Aston nor have there been any for the last 20 years. Most people are registered with practices in Birmingham. However, feedback from the community has not suggested access to a GP practice to be a problem.

2.29 There is one dental surgery in Little Aston. There is also the private Spire Little Aston Hospital that has 37 private beds and also provides some NHS treatments on behalf of Good Hope Hospital, Sutton Coldfield, which is the major hospital for Shenstone Parish and all surrounding areas.

Public Transport

- 2.30 There is only one bus route (Sutton Coldfield to Aldridge/Walsall) that passes through Little Aston, although there is also a school bus which runs from Streetly to Lichfield.
- 2.31 The main Lichfield-to-Birmingham cross-city rail line stops at Blake Street rail station on the extremity of Little Aston, across the border in Birmingham. There is free car parking at the station but insufficient car parking spaces to meet peak demands.
- 2.32 The Lichfield via Hill Hook and Mere Green to Sutton Coldfield bus service passes close to the eastern boundary of the Little Aston neighbourhood area.

Walking and Cycling

- 2.33 There are no cycle paths at present in the neighbourhood area. There are two public footpaths that pass through Little Aston - one that cuts across Little Aston golf course to the Chester Road and one that starts by the old forge in Forge Lane, running along the line of Ryknild Street to the Birmingham Road at Shenstone Wood End.

Road Networks

- 2.34 Throughout the development of the original Neighbourhood Plan and this review, traffic has been a major issue for the community. Concerns have been expressed at speeding traffic and at the high number of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) using the A4026 (Blake Street/Little Aston Lane) as a 'rat run'.
- 2.35 The particular concerns of the community are:
- Speeding traffic along Blake Street, Little Aston Lane and Aldridge Road along with the high number of HGV's using this route as a rat run.
 - The situation of Mill Lane as a derestricted road having no footpaths being used by fast moving traffic despite restricted visibility, bends and a relatively new housing development.
 - The junction at Little Aston Park Road and Hardwick Road being impeded by a fence that restricts visibility for cars pulling out.
 - The entrance/exit from Little Aston Hospital being on the crest of a rise.
 - The need for a pedestrian crossing on Walsall Road for pupils travelling to Little Aston Primary School.
 - The need for an all red period within the traffic lights at the Rosemary Hill – Little Aston Lane – Clarence Road – Blake Street junction to facilitate pedestrian crossing, particularly for the elderly, and for pedestrians with children, push chairs or dogs.

Local Plan policy

- 2.36 The 2015 Lichfield District Local Plan covers the period to 2029. It identifies Little Aston as a 'rural settlement' and recognises that such settlements should be able to "adapt to accommodate their future needs and to become more locally sustainable without compromising the character of their village and its surrounding environment" (paragraph 17.93). Where a neighbourhood plan can identify and justify small scale growth that is desired and needed by the local community, then this will be permitted. This is reflected in Policy Rural 2 ('Other Rural Settlements').

3 VISION

Challenges for Little Aston

- 3.1 The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to address, as far as is possible, the challenges that face the community of Little Aston neighbourhood area. In summary these challenges are:
- An ageing population that has particular demands in terms of their accessibility to services.
 - A declining population of working age, with many unable to afford the high house prices which are partly a function of the stock of large, detached properties.
 - Maintaining Little Aston's identity as a distinct community that its residents enjoy living in.
 - Ensuring that development (particularly infill and backland development) maintains the character and density of the surrounding built form.
 - Addressing the problems caused by its busy, sometimes urban roads, particularly pedestrian safety and severance.

Vision for Little Aston

- 3.2 The 2016 Neighbourhood Plan was based around the following principles about the future of Little Aston:

- **'Rural'**
- **'Exclusive'**
- **'Quiet'**
- **'Distinct'**

- 3.3 It is evident that the community wishes for Little Aston to stay very much as it is today. Given this, the vision for Little Aston at the end of the plan period (in 2040) is largely the same:

'By the end of the plan period in 2040, Little Aston will be much as it is today, an attractive, affluent suburb with high quality housing and a pleasant, leafy environment. Any new housing will have been restricted to infill developments and be of a similar density and character to neighbouring properties. Claverdon Park will have been incorporated into the Little Aston Conservation Area.

Plans for additional community facilities on the land to the North of Little Aston Lane have been developed and funding identified from a variety of local and national sources to allow development to proceed, incorporating new community facilities and spaces. This provides the community with a focal point whilst protecting the rural edge of Little Aston from unwanted development.

Whilst traffic flows continue to be extremely heavy throughout the neighbourhood area, crossing to reach the shops has been made easier for pedestrians. Rat running and speeding traffic, both major threats to pedestrian, equestrian and cycle safety, have been reduced through the provision of effective traffic calming measures, a common speed limit throughout the neighbourhood area, effective enforcement and technological advances.

Meanwhile, improvements have been made to the network of pedestrian and cycle paths, both for access and leisure. A series of circular cycling/walking/jogging/horse-riding routes have been developed. These are well used for recreational purposes, steps having been taken to minimise traffic flows and speeds along the rural lanes including designating Forge Lane as a Quiet Lane.'

4 CANNOCK CHASE SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION

- 4.1 Part of the designated Neighbourhood Plan area is within 15 kilometres of the Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC). This is a nationally important designation which reflects the considerable ecological value of the area and the need to protect it. Development within the 15km radius could increase the number of people wanting to visit the SAC area and therefore potentially have a detrimental impact on the sensitive ecological network.
- 4.2 It is therefore necessary to have a policy which recognises that all development must be capable of demonstrating that it will not have a detrimental impact.

POLICY LAS1: CANNOCK CHASE SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION

- A. Before development is permitted it must be demonstrated that alone or in combination with other development it will not have an adverse effect whether direct or indirect upon the integrity of the Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC) having regard to avoidance or mitigation measures.**
- B. In particular, any development that results in a net increase in dwellings within a 15km radius of any boundary of Cannock Chase SAC will be deemed to have an adverse impact upon the Cannock Chase SAC unless or until satisfactory avoidance and/or mitigation measures have been secured.**

5 HOUSING

Residential infill and backland development

- 5.1 Backland development is defined as development on land behind the rear building line of existing housing or other development, and is usually land that has previously been used as gardens, or is partially enclosed by gardens.
- 5.2 Infill development involves the development of a small gap in an otherwise built up frontage. It usually consists of frontage plots only and often comprises side gardens of existing houses.

Policy Justification

- 5.3 One of the particular issues raised by the community of Little Aston has been the over-bearing nature of some infill and backland developments. With the presence of the green belt across much of the neighbourhood area, new housing is predominantly to come through infill development. Moreover, with the density policy covering Little Aston Park (see Policy LAS3), the issue arises most acutely in the built-up areas within the remainder of the neighbourhood area. In the past there have been some infill and backland developments which have been permitted at very high densities, creating issues in terms of amenity for neighbouring properties. Adverse impacts can include the following:
- Loss of amenity, overshadowing, overlooking
 - Loss of sunlight/daylight
 - Noise
 - Loss of green links/trees/hedgerows/vegetation
 - Visual intrusion
 - Loss of space between buildings
 - Loss of parking
 - Single long driveways serving multiple properties¹
 - Difficulties with recycling and waste collections/bin storage

- 5.4 Paragraph 72 of the NPPF states that:

"Local planning authorities should consider the case for setting out policies to resist inappropriate development of residential gardens, for example where development would cause harm to the local area."

- 5.5 It is considered important that infill and backland development, whilst generally acceptable within the built-up area, must be designed so that it sits appropriately within its surroundings. It is acknowledged that, if development is of a different mix of housing, e.g. 2- and 3-bed dwellings in a predominantly 4- and 5-bed dwelling area, then densities may differ slightly. However, it is vital that the design of such developments does not have a negative impact on the amenity of existing residents in the neighbouring properties. In particular, it should be ensured that such properties have reasonably sized gardens, based on the size of the property.
- 5.6 The objectives of this policy are to ensure that:

¹ This has been observed on development in Little Aston Lane

- infill development respects and reflects the character of the area and the existing street scene;
 - backland development respects and reflects the character of the area;
 - safe and attractive residential layouts are promoted; and
 - local distinctiveness and identity are promoted.
- 5.7 The particular issues that must be considered in demonstrating that an infill or backland scheme is acceptable are as follows:
- 5.8 **Plot width** – plots must be of sufficient width to allow building(s) to be sited with adequate separation between dwellings. The width of the remaining and the new plot should be similar to that prevailing in the immediate area.
- 5.9 **Building line** – where the prevailing depth of existing dwellings is a feature of the area new development should respect that building line.
- 5.10 **Visual separation** – new dwellings must have similar spacing between buildings to that commonly found on the street frontage. Where houses are terraced the new development should normally adjoin the adjacent property(s).
- 5.11 **Building height** – new buildings should reflect the height of existing buildings. Where existing buildings are of a uniform height, new buildings should respect that height.
- 5.12 **Daylight and sunlight** – new buildings should not adversely affect neighbouring properties by seriously reducing the amount of daylight available through windows or by obstructing the path of direct sunlight to a once sunny garden or window. Blocking direct sunlight from reaching neighbouring properties can cause overshadowing and is not acceptable.
- 5.13 **Parking and access arrangements** – satisfactory arrangements will be required for parking and access. Generally parking areas to the front of the property using the front garden will not be acceptable unless, this is the prevailing pattern of parking in the locality.
- 5.14 **Boundary treatment** – boundary treatment along the frontage should reflect that prevailing in the area. Proposals for open frontages or the use of the frontage for parking will not be acceptable in areas where enclosed front boundaries prevail.
- 5.15 Development should also be informed by the Lichfield Design Code, prepared by Lichfield District Council, which will be adopted as supplementary planning guidance.

Policy

POLICY LAS2: RESIDENTIAL INFILL AND BACKLAND DEVELOPMENT

Outside of the Little Aston Park density policy area, as shown on the Policies Map, planning permission for residential development proposals on infill and backland sites will be permitted subject to the following criteria:

- **Proposals should reflect the character of the surrounding area and protect the amenity of neighbours. It should reinforce the uniformity of the street by reflecting the scale, mass, height and form of its neighbours.**
- **Proposals that would lead to over-development of a site or the appearance of cramming will be resisted. It should be demonstrated that development is of a similar density to properties in the immediate surrounding area.**

- **New buildings should not adversely affect neighbouring properties by seriously reducing the amount of daylight available through windows or by obstructing the path of direct sunlight to a once sunny garden or window.**
- **Development must not unacceptably reduce the level of private amenity space provision for existing residential properties.**

This policy also applies to applications for two or more properties on a site previously occupied by a single property.

6 LITTLE ASTON PARK

- 6.1 With Little Aston Park being such a unique place within the wider Little Aston area as it meets the built-up area of Sutton Coldfield, it is considered important that its particular assets are maintained and enhanced. The Policies Map shows the full extent of the entire Little Aston settlement area; the area of Little Aston Park extends to most of the density policy area, but does not have its own formal policy boundary.

Density of development in Little Aston Park

Policy Justification

- 6.2 The special character of Little Aston Park is determined by the extensive mature tree cover and low density and individual design of dwellings in large plots. It represents a high quality environment.
- 6.3 In recognition of this, the 1998 Lichfield Local Plan included Policy SA.6 in respect of Little Aston Park. Specifically this policy sought to protect the special character of the area by requiring all new dwellings to be accommodated within plots of at least half an acre. Saved Policy SA.6 was to be considered through the Local Plan Allocations process, however, the community of Little Aston has made it clear that it considers the policy should continue to apply and as such be addressed through the Neighbourhood Plan.



- 6.4 The Little Aston Rural Masterplanning Report² stated at paragraph 105 that:

"This policy has been successful in retaining the 'leafy character' valued by most residents and its removal could in the longer term significantly erode that character. It is considered therefore that it is essential to retain the policy."

² Lichfield District Council (2011) *Lichfield District Rural Planning Project: Little Aston*



- 6.5 It is therefore considered important that the policy is retained within the Neighbourhood Plan to ensure that the existing character of the area is retained and in particular that the tree canopy of the area, which is important both from local and more distant viewpoints, is maintained.

Policy

POLICY LAS3: DENSITY OF DEVELOPMENT IN LITTLE ASTON PARK

- A. The special character of Little Aston Park is determined by the extensive mature tree cover and low density and individual design of dwellings in large plots.**
- B. Development in the Density Policy area defined on the Policies Map will only be allowed where the special character of the area is protected by the retention of all existing important established and mature trees and vegetation and by the provision of a rustic and pastoral setting for new and existing dwellings.**
- C. All new and existing dwellings within subdivided plots must be accommodated within plots of at least half an acre (excluding long driveways) and retain the existing relationship of dwellings to the woodland setting.**

Design

Policy Justification

- 6.6 The nature of Little Aston Park as it has developed over a number of decades is for properties to be very large and detached, set down long driveways with significant screening and landscaping between neighbouring properties. The properties themselves, outside of their size, do not show a significant degree of uniformity, instead showing a range of styles and architectural features.
- 6.7 There are some members of the community, particularly within Little Aston Park, that wish to demonstrate innovation in architecture of new properties. This does not have to mean styles that are wholly not in keeping with the surrounding properties but developments that show off some of the best features of modern architecture within what is a rural, leafy setting.
- 6.8 The opportunity for new or replacement properties to demonstrate innovative design is therefore encouraged. This must not be in such a way that it has a detrimental impact on the appearance of Little Aston Park, particularly if it is not well screened from neighbouring properties. However, the use of different designs and materials will be encouraged.

Policy

POLICY LAS4: DESIGN OF DEVELOPMENT IN LITTLE ASTON PARK

- A. Development proposals for new or replacement dwellings in the Little Aston Park density policy area (Policy LAS3) that show innovative design will be encouraged.**
- B. Such design should ensure that the residential amenity of neighbouring properties is not impacted and that the extensive mature tree cover making up Little Aston Park's woodland setting is retained.**
- C. The design of new dwellings must comply with the requirements of Policy LAS3 and any district-wide design code policy prepared by Lichfield District Council.**

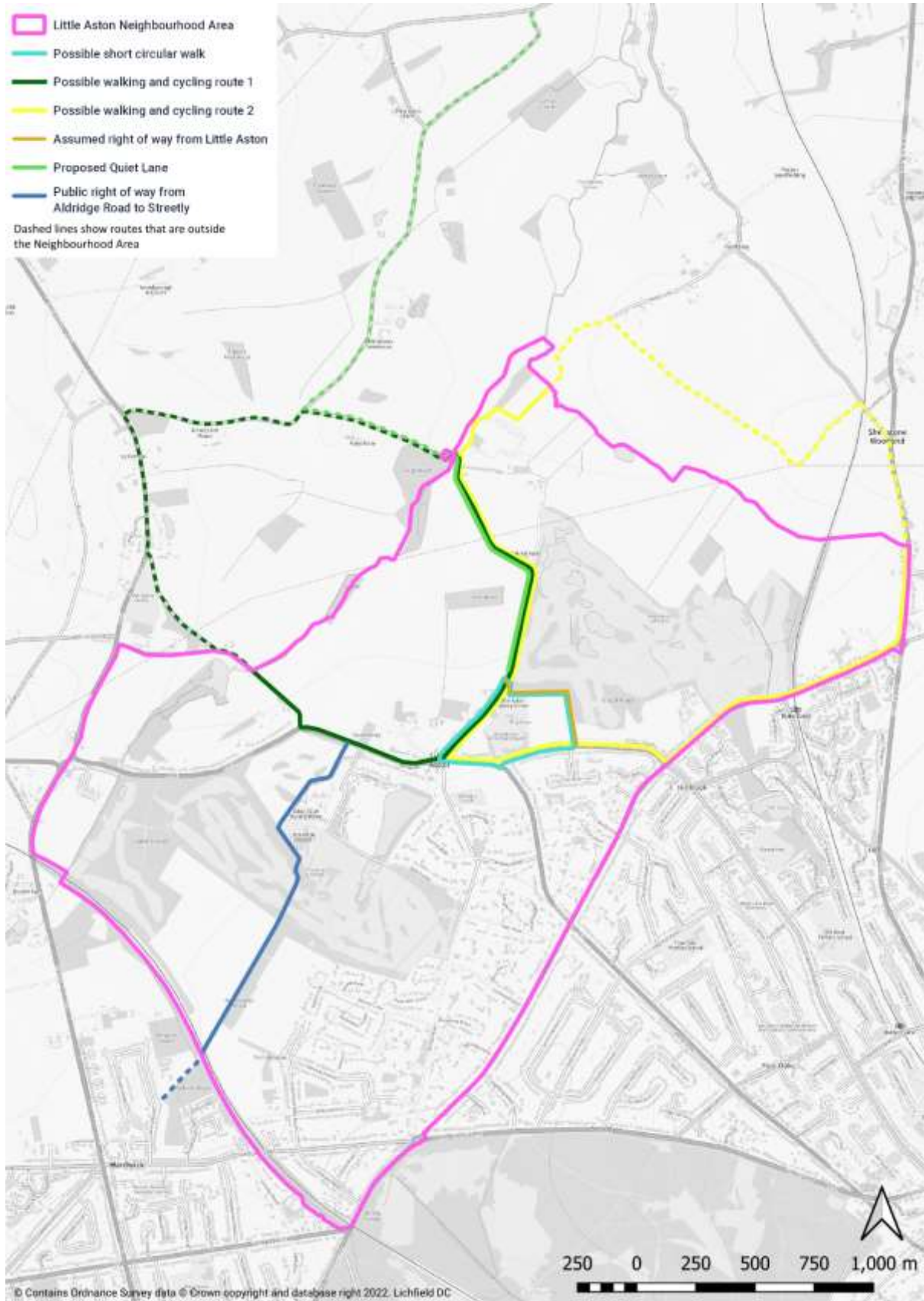
7 MOVEMENT

Walking and cycling

Policy Justification

- 7.1 The community has identified the need to improve pedestrian and cycle networks as important for Little Aston. The current dominance of the car (as shown in Figure 2.8) has resulted in significant safety concerns for those travelling on foot or by bicycle. This is both in terms of day-to-day access to school, work, services and public transport links but also for those wishing to walk/run or cycle for leisure purposes.
- 7.2 There are some specific schemes that have been identified that will serve to improve access for pedestrians and cyclists, both for access and leisure. These involve the creation of a series of circular cycle/jogging/walking routes of varying lengths that will improve access into the countryside for residents of the built-up area of Little Aston:
- Short circular walk (1.6km) – solely for walking, this route goes along Little Aston Lane and Forge lane and around the Little Aston Recreation Ground.
 - Walking and cycling route 1 (medium, 5.3km) – this route is for walking and short cycles. It is predominantly on-road, going along Forge Lane, Mill Lane, Aldridge Road, Wood Lane and Chester Road.
 - Walking and cycling route 2 (long, 7.1km) – this route is for longer walks/jogging and cycles. It is partly on-road along Blake Street, Birmingham Road (B5127) and Walsall Road but has large sections that are off-road or along a minor road (Forge Lane) to join it up.

Figure 7.1: Circular walking and cycling routes



- 7.3 As shown in Figure 7.1, part of the two longer routes are partially outside the neighbourhood area boundary. As such they are shown for illustrative purposes only and are not affected by any part of this plan. However, the Parish Council – which has jurisdiction over the area covering the whole route - is committed to working with landowner partners to deliver any improvements.
- 7.4 The provision of these links is likely to require funding to provide the necessary physical improvements for improved safety and ease of access, particularly for vulnerable road users. On the parts of the routes that are on-road, signage (both on the roadside and on the road itself), or other acceptable measures, should be used to alert motorists to the presence of pedestrians and cyclists.
- 7.5 Funding will need to come from a number of sources. These include grants from organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, through the Local Transport Plan and other funding streams available through Staffordshire County Council (as the highways authority) and through developer contributions.

Policy

POLICY LAS5: PROVISION OF FOOTPATHS AND CYCLEPATHS

- A. Proposals to provide dedicated footpaths and cyclepaths, and signage to alert motorists to the presence of pedestrians and cyclists along particular routes will be encouraged.**
- B. In particular, the provision of circular cycling and walking routes as shown in Figure 7.1 and on the Policies Map will be supported in order to provide improvements for access and leisure purposes.**

Public transport

Policy Justification

- 7.6 Many people identified the fact that public transport services for Little Aston were poor. In particular, access to Blake Street Station from Little Aston is limited by public transport.
- 7.7 The improvement of bus services is a costly exercise and the limited levels of growth expected in Little Aston do not provide a mechanism to secure the levels of funding needed to expand routes or the frequency of existing services.
- 7.8 However, the specific need for a new bus stop on the north side of Aldridge Road, to serve Little Aston Hospital, was identified. This will help to improve access to the Hospital. There potentially is space to locate this outside the electricity sub-station.
- 7.9 Any developer contributions will be used to fund the provision of a bus stop incorporating a full bus shelter at this location.

Policy

POLICY LAS6: PROVISION OF NEW BUS STOPS

- Proposals to provide new bus stops and shelters along existing bus routes will be supported. In particular, the provision of a new bus stop on the north side of Aldridge Road will be strongly supported.**

Pedestrian safety

- 7.10 Throughout the Neighbourhood Plan process, traffic has been a major issue for the community. The specific issues of concern were identified in Section 2. Any solutions will obviously enhance pedestrian safety along the main roads identified.
- 7.11 Shenstone Parish Council is very aware of these concerns and had already contributed to specific traffic surveys undertaken by Staffordshire County Council Highways Department at selected 'hot spots'.
- 7.12 Concerns have been expressed at speeding traffic and at the high number of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) using the A4026 (Blake Street/Little Aston Lane) as a 'rat run'.
- 7.13 Additionally the community would like to see an improved crossing at the traffic lights at the Blake St, Rosemary Hill/Clarence Road/Little Aston Lane junction. At peak times with traffic turning in all directions there is no break in the traffic light sequence to enable pedestrians (particularly those with young children/pushchairs or dogs) to cross safely. A simple 'All Red' sequence would achieve this. This will be pursued via Action Staffordshire.
- 7.14 Furthermore, the Little Aston Park Road/Hardwick Road/Burnett Road junction has previously been acknowledged as a priority issue but a much-needed solution has yet to be put in place.
- 7.15 In order to assist schoolchildren walking to Little Aston Primary School, a need has been identified for a pedestrian crossing on Walsall Road to allow pupils to cross to and from Forge Lane. This should be close to the existing bus stop to also enable pupils alighting from the bus to cross safely.

POLICY LAS7: PROVISION OF PEDESTRIAN SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

Proposals to address issues of pedestrian safety that are of concern to the community will be supported.

Proposals which are likely to create unacceptable safety issues for pedestrian movement will be refused.

Quiet Lanes

- 7.16 A Quiet Lane is a nationally recognised designation of single-track road with no line markings or footpaths and with low traffic flows that is shared by motorised and non-motorised traffic. They are routes where visitors and locals can enjoy the natural surroundings and use them for activities such as cycling, horse-riding, jogging and walking. However, the idea is not to restrict motor vehicles on these rural routes, but to encourage considerate use of the road, so they can be shared and enjoyed by all.
- 7.17 An official Quiet Lane will have advisory signs at either end to show motorised users clearly that the road is a shared space. The sign indicates to drivers that other more vulnerable users may be using the road. The guidance in the Highway Code to drivers states, '..You should drive slowly and carefully and be prepared to stop to allow people extra time to make space for you to pass them in safety'.
- 7.18 As shown on Figure 7.1, Forge Lane is considered to fulfil the criteria for being designated a Quiet Lane. This is not a planning designation as it relates to highways, therefore designation would be undertaken by Staffordshire County Council (SCC) in its role as highway authority. Shenstone

Parish Council will work with SCC to explore the potential for designating Forge Lane a Quiet Lane. This should ideally be complemented by traffic calming between Little Aston Primary School and Walsall Road.

8 ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY FACILITIES

- 8.1 Additional community facilities are seen as highly desirable in terms of providing a physical location where sporting and other community activities can take place. The preferred location is along the north side of Little Aston Lane, which would also serve to protect the rural edge of Little Aston from development that is out of keeping with the area that represents the link between the built-up and rural parts of the neighbourhood area.
- 8.2 Suggestions of possible uses at an additional community facility have included:
- a cricket pitch and nets;
 - a pitch-and-putt golf course;
 - additional community meeting space;
 - a skateboard park;
 - hard courts for netball, volleyball and basketball.

Policy Justification

- 8.3 This represents an important aspiration for Little Aston. However, at the present time, the preferred location for such a facility, on the north side of Little Aston Lane, has not been secured. There will need to be ongoing negotiations with current landowners. If this is not successful then alternative locations will be considered although work on the Neighbourhood Plan has not identified any alternatives that are appropriate to provide additional community facilities in an easily accessible location.
- 8.4 The Village Hall is raising funds to create an additional meeting area at the Hall, which has been granted planning permission. However, additional land will be required if further expansions are to be considered.
- 8.5 Whilst a location is being identified, further work is required to identify and secure the necessary funding.
- 8.6 Meanwhile, subject to sufficient local support, drive and commitment, a Working Group involving all interested parties (e.g. Shenstone Parish Council, Little Aston Village Hall, Little Aston Recreation Ground, etc) should be set up to:
- canvass local opinion on the nature and scale of such a development;
 - draw up plans based on this research; and
 - seek out sources of funding to allow development to proceed.
- 8.7 It may be appropriate to secure such provision through the use of a Community Right to Build Order.
- 8.8 Any proposals which either create the opportunity to provide for such needs or potentially jeopardise this opportunity will be considered within the light of the aspiration for such provision at this location.
- 8.9 It should be noted that if an additional community building can be secured on the north side of Little Aston Lane, then its location in the Green Belt means that 'exceptional circumstances' must be proven, unless its use is as a facility for outdoor sport or outdoor recreation (NPPF paragraph 154). A community hall is unlikely to fit that description. However, it should also be noted that,

given the proposed expansion of the Village Hall, it is primarily additional external recreation space that is being sought to complement this internal space.

Policy

POLICY LAS8: PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY FACILITIES

- A. Proposals which directly provide or assist in the provision of additional community facilities on land north of Little Aston Lane, shall be supported.**
- B. In accordance with national green belt policy and Core Policy 1 of the Local Plan Strategy any proposals must ensure that:**
 - **the uses proposed do not conflict with the purposes of green belt land; and**
 - **the openness of the green belt is preserved.**
- C. In respect of preserving the openness of the green belt, it must be ensured that any building is not excessive in scale and height and is designed in a way that minimises its visual impact. Unless the building is to provide appropriate facilities for outdoor sport or outdoor recreation then exceptional circumstances must be proven for its location in the green belt, in line with national planning policy.**
- D. Such proposals will be expected to demonstrate how they have engaged with any working group or equivalent that has been set up in Little Aston to ascertain what facilities should be provided.**
- E. Proposals for the development of additional community facilities at an alternative location will be considered favourably if they are in a location that is generally accessible by foot and within or adjacent to the built-up area of Little Aston.**

9 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Wildlife-friendly development

Policy Justification

- 9.1 The design of individual buildings and of neighbourhood scale green and open spaces, including private gardens, will help to ensure that existing habitats present in Little Aston can thrive and a range of new habitats can be created. This is in line with the requirement of the Environment Act 2021 for all new development (excluding small householder proposals) to achieve net biodiversity gain of at least 10%.
- 9.2 Planting is an important aspect of development and habitat creation. Not only does a well-considered planting scheme provide high quality landscaping, it is a fundamental aspect of enhancing biodiversity that otherwise would be lost. Planting schemes should ensure that tree species should be carefully selected to be responsive to landscape and historic character and to suit the planting location . Planting should not simply consist of trees but a range of shrubs and grasses too and should seek to include native species.
- 9.3 Protecting species present in the area is also important. Examples of the simple solutions that well-thought out design can easily incorporate are:
- Integral bird and bat boxes under the eaves of the new houses, or artificial nests sited in places away from windows and doors, can create vital new roosting sites to support populations of birds and bats.
 - Boundaries between dwellings can be made hedgehog friendly by including pre-cut holes for hedgehogs to more effectively move across neighbourhoods to forage.
 - New planting schemes can support bees and other pollinators by including nectar-rich plants.



Bricks that allow birds to nest

Credit: actionforswifts.com



Hedgehog-friendly fencing

Credit: The Landscaper Magazine

- 9.4 Development is encouraged to be informed by the full list of considerations in Natural England's 'Green Infrastructure Framework 2023'³.

³ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/Home.aspx>

POLICY LAS9: WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY DEVELOPMENT

- A. All development proposals should aim to protect existing habitats and species, including hedgerows and mature trees. In particular, developments required to deliver measurable biodiversity net gain (a minimum of 10%) and that propose the removal or reduction of existing habitats will be expected to deliver biodiversity net gain on site.**
- B. The incorporation of design features into new development that encourages local wildlife and biodiversity to thrive will be supported.**
- C. As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should be designed to retain trees, shrubs and hedgerows of arboricultural, habitat and amenity value on-site and to conserve and enhance connectivity to the wider green and blue infrastructure networks. Where practicable, any new planting should consist of species of trees, shrubs and grasses that will be resilient to climate change and can be incorporated in a way that would allow their use as stepping stones for wildlife.**

Low energy and energy efficient development

Policy Justification

- 9.5 The Climate Change Act 2008 committed the UK to an 80% reduction in CO2 emissions by 2050. In June 2019, an announcement was made by Government to reduce this further to almost 100% by 2050. This will be a major task that will require everyone to be engaged, from households and communities, to businesses and local and national government.
- 9.6 In 2016, the residential sector alone accounted for over 16% of the UK's annual greenhouse gas emissions (source: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy). The total emissions from all building types will therefore be much greater. Standards for ecologically sustainable homes and developments are established through Building Regulations and Lichfield Local Plan policies. As far as requirements for residential development is concerned, Local Plan Policy SC1 (Sustainability Standards for Development) refers to the Code for Sustainable Homes which is no longer part of national policy. In order for built development to make a meaningful contribution towards achieving net zero by 2050, development needs to go as far as possible to minimise energy use and maximise efficiency. New development is therefore encouraged to ensure that new properties are designed so that they are ready to receive the technologies that are crucial to minimising their energy use, e.g. underfloor heating to increase the effectiveness of heat pumps, orientated south to maximise the potential from solar panels if installed, etc. Technological advances are coming on to market all the time (e.g. there are now solar panels which incorporate refrigerant filled coils on the back that can be connected to the equivalent of a ground source heat pump) and therefore policy must facilitate the appropriate adoption of the best technologies available at the time.

POLICY LAS10: LOW ENERGY AND ENERGY EFFICIENT DESIGN

- A. To mitigate emissions that worsen climate change it is essential that all buildings in the Little Aston Neighbourhood Area minimise energy use and emissions and maximise energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy to meet their needs.**
- B. All new buildings, conversions, extensions, retro-fits and refurbishments in Little Aston will demonstrate how they have been designed to incorporate measures to adapt to climate change. The following measures shall be incorporated into development:**
- **Wherever possible, new buildings shall be designed and orientated to maximise the opportunities for both natural heating and ventilation, reducing exposure to wind and other elements and energy from solar and other installations on roofs;**
 - **Proposals involving both new and existing buildings shall demonstrate how they have been designed to maximise resistance and resilience to climate change for example by including measures such as solar shading, thermal mass, heating and ventilation of the building and appropriately coloured materials in areas exposed to direct sunlight, green and brown roofs, green walls, etc;**
 - **Use of trees and other planting, where appropriate as part of a landscape scheme, to provide shading of amenity areas, buildings and streets and to help to connect habitat, all designed with native plants that are carefully selected, located and managed so they are adaptable to meet the predicted changes to the climatic conditions; and**
 - **All development shall minimise surface water runoff to prevent off-site flooding through the design of a suitable SuDS-based drainage system, and shall incorporate sufficient mitigation and resilience measures for any likely increase in flood risk that may occur due to climate change.**

Renewable energy and energy efficiency measures affecting heritage

Policy Justification

- 9.7 As identified in Policy LAS10, it is imperative that all development, be it new build, refurbishments, extensions or re-builds, seeks to minimise its energy footprint and maximise the energy it uses from renewable sources. Solar energy capture via solar panels is one of the easiest ways this can be achieved. For heritage buildings (listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets) and development in conservation areas, it is important that development proposals conserve and enhance the historic environment.
- 9.8 In the past, the requirement in the NPPF to conserve and enhance the historic environment has meant that proposals for solar panels have either been refused or have gone through a lengthy planning application process with significant uncertainty to the applicant regarding their potential for securing consent. This partly reflected the design of the first wave of solar panels which were often obtrusive and very visible. In areas such as the Little Aston Conservation Area, this could have an unacceptable impact. Potentially for these reasons, installation of solar panels in the Conservation Area has been low. Today however, solar panels are being designed to be far less obtrusive than their predecessors. The use of such solar panels can, in most instances, mitigate the impact on the Conservation Area.

- 9.9 Similarly, modern designs of heritage-sensitive double glazing are extremely slimline and are far more in keeping with heritage buildings than in the past. Proposals for the use of such windows instead of the traditional approach of replacing single glazed windows with similar windows is supported.

POLICY LAS11: RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY MEASURES AFFECTING HERITAGE

In order to mitigate emissions that worsen climate change, the sensitive retrofitting of energy efficiency and renewable energy generation measures in historic buildings will be encouraged, including the retrofitting of heritage buildings and buildings in the Little Aston Conservation Area, provided that it safeguards the historic characteristics of these heritage assets. This could include solar panels and heritage-sensitive slimline double glazing where it is demonstrated that such interventions would not result in harm to the significance of listed buildings or the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Light pollution

Policy Justification

- 9.10 One of the identified issues in the Little Aston neighbourhood area is light pollution. In a relatively rural location, where the topography makes certain parts of the neighbourhood area highly visible, poorly designed and located lighting can have a disproportionate polluting effect.
- 9.11 The Little Aston Neighbourhood Plan recognises the guidance notes on the reduction of light pollution provided by the Institute of Lighting Engineers⁴. This guidance should be followed in seeking to comply with Policy EE4. Specifically, any development away from the built up area should accord with the guidance Environmental Zone E2 which covers appropriate lighting in rural or small village locations; within the built-up area it should accord with the guidance Environmental Zone E3 which covers appropriate lighting in small town centres or urban locations.
- 9.12 It will be a requirement of any form of development which proposes external lighting to minimise the amount of light that is visible from outside the property. Lighting in public areas, particularly street lights, should be provided in the form of downlighters which serve to minimise the amount of light that is visible away from the area of the street intended to be lit.

POLICY LAS12: LIGHT POLLUTION

- A. New development will be required to demonstrate how it has minimised light pollution created through its proposed use.**
- B. Where lighting of public places is proposed, the use of downlighters will be required.**
- C. There will be a presumption against development which will still create high levels of light pollution even after the above criteria have been addressed.**

⁴ Institute of Lighting Engineers (2000) *Guidance Notes for the Reduction of Light Pollution*

10 NON-LAND USE ACTIONS

- 10.1 There are a number of issues that have been raised through the process of preparing the Neighbourhood Plan that are not directly related to land-use matters (although several indirectly relate to the use of land in some form). As such, they are not matters that can be addressed directly by the provision of a planning policy in the Neighbourhood Plan. However, this is not to say that these are not important matters and it is important that a strategy for dealing with these matters is assembled and taken forward. In doing so, this will help to achieve the vision and objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 10.2 It is worth noting that Lichfield District Council has a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule and, with a Neighbourhood Plan in place, Shenstone Parish Council receives a proportion of the CIL receipts from development within the neighbourhood area. This source of funding can be channelled towards infrastructure projects within the neighbourhood area as well as other sources of funding.

Extension to the Conservation Area

- 10.3 The existing Conservation Area covering Little Aston Park currently excludes an area immediately to the west encompassing Roman Lane, Alderhithe Grove, Barns Croft, Royston Chase, Fallow Field and Vercourt. This area is known as Claverdon Park.
- 10.4 In total there are 82 dwellings in Claverdon Park, comprising houses and bungalows built in the 1970s. The roads all have a distinct style and character and the owners of the properties are bound by restrictive covenants that are upheld by Claverdon Park Management Company Ltd. All properties are set in individual plots of land, the smallest starting from one-third of an acre and upwards. The whole aspect is open plan and indeed a significant part of Claverdon Park is only accessible via Little Aston Park which itself is within the existing conservation area.
- 10.5 It is considered by this part of the community that the area needs to be maintained and protected in its present form. It is considered to represent a similar type of area in character to Little Aston Park, therefore it is considered that the same restrictions on development should apply.
- 10.6 It is considered that Claverdon Park could represent an extension to the existing Conservation Area. It is not considered appropriate to take this forward as part of this Neighbourhood Plan but any future proposals to extend the Conservation Area to include Claverdon Park will be supported in principle.

Signage

- 10.7 Signage has been identified by many people as lacking on Little Aston. This is both to alert motorists to the most appropriate routes and also for tourists visiting the area. In addition it was felt by many that visually attractive signage (for example, finger posts) helps to make Little Aston a more attractive place.
- 10.8 It should be noted that there are statutory guidelines that have to be adhered to for signage placed in the public highway, therefore further consultation with the Highway Authority is necessary in such circumstances.
- 10.9 Support will therefore be given to the use of high quality signage around the neighbourhood area. Any developer contributions will be used, along with grant funding or direct provision by the highway authority, to ensure that any new signage is specific to Little Aston in its appearance.

POLICIES MAPS

