



WEST HILL

PUBLIC REALM AND LANDSCAPE STUDY

APRIL 2018

LD&DESIGN

WHPC
West Hill Parish Council



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Woodland Village



WEST HILL

Please drive slowly



INTRODUCTION

West Hill is known as the ‘Woodland Village’ and as its name suggests, most houses are nestled in mature mixed-native woodland. At the 2011 census, the population of the built up area of West Hill, was 1,727, comprising a mix of all ages, centred around a thriving village school and community hall. The woodland, its verges and network of Devon banks, alongside beautiful panoramic and framed views and a strong community spirit, are what makes West Hill special.

West Hill’s public realm and landscape comprises all the streets and public spaces within the village. These are particularly important because they provide the landscape setting that makes West Hill special, as well as providing a place for villagers to come together. The public realm has a key role to play in supporting the social life of a village like West Hill, ranging from chance encounters whilst out for a woodland walk, through to one off larger village events, such as the annual village fete. The public realm also helps to support the health and well-being of a village, by encouraging people to walk, cycle and undertake sporting activities.

The quality of the public realm is determined by the arrangement of buildings, how well the spaces are overlooked and enclosed and the character, quality, design and arrangement of surfacing, furniture, signage and planting. Importantly, in a village like West Hill, the quality of the public realm affects the perception and enjoyment of the villages remarkable landscape setting.

Following on from the consultation work carried out as part of the Ottery St Mary and West Hill Neighbourhood Plan, a Community Survey in 2017 helped the Parish Council gauge residents’ views about concerns and priorities to improve village life.

Whilst West Hill sits in an area of outstanding beauty, it also faces a number of issues relating to its public realm and landscape. One of the biggest challenges for

the village, is the lack of a large publicly accessible open space where all villagers can come together, such as a village green and/or playing fields. This lack of usable open space, also extends to a deficiency of other smaller spaces, such as incidental seating and picnic areas, community gardens and quasi public spaces such as a café courtyard or beer garden. In part, this issue has arisen through incremental expansion of the village over time and the village continues to face ongoing development pressures.

Another key issue is the through traffic that currently runs through the heart of West Hill. It is often fast moving, and although roads are typically designated as 20mph, because of housing set backs, rural identity, weak arrival thresholds and lack of cognitive signals to indicate that people may be walking around, vehicles do not typically proceed with caution. As a consequence, people do not always feel safe walking around the village, roads create severance and walking routes are poorly connected.

It is in this context that a public realm study was commissioned for West Hill. The brief was while preserving the unique character of West Hill and protecting the rural environment, to suggest ideas to enhance the village centre, improve safe walking routes and road safety, enhance existing spaces for public benefit, and consider the scope for providing open spaces for recreational activities.

This report has been prepared to facilitate a dialogue. It is acknowledged that some of the ideas would require detailed assessment and significant financial investment, indeed some of the proposals are on land that is privately owned. At this stage however it was felt that a broad long term view should be adopted and a vision should be, by its very nature, ambitious. The report is under active consideration by the Parish Council but no decisions have been made yet with regard to village enhancements and priorities.. Councillors, therefore welcome feedback from the community.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

OPEN SPACE AND COMMUNITY

Public Open Space

West Hill has a severe lack of publicly accessible open space. A number of the existing local green spaces allocated as part of the Neighbourhood Plan have limited access (Elsdon Wood), are closed outside school hours (the playing fields) or feel like places to move through, rather than stop and spend time (The Woodland Trust Wood). In addition, the network of more incidental type spaces, such as the seating area by the shops and by the war memorial, feel like leftover spaces with their enjoyment compromised by adjacent roads.

The EDDC Playing Pitch Strategy (2015) encourages the development of youth and mini pitches in West Hill and the Neighbourhood Plan identifies the following requirements:

- Outdoor sports pitches (none at present) require 3.3 ha
- Parks and recreation (none at present) require 0.88 ha
- Play space children (0.11 ha at present) require additional 1 ha
- Play space youth (none at present) require 1.1 ha
- Amenity open space (none at present) require 0.66 ha

Community

The principal community amenities in West Hill are clustered at the centre of the village and comprise the primary school, village hall, shops and post office. Alongside the play area, tennis courts and playing fields, these illustrate clearly where the heart of the village lies. Section 3 starts to demonstrate the opportunities for improvements in this key area.



Existing Open Space Provision

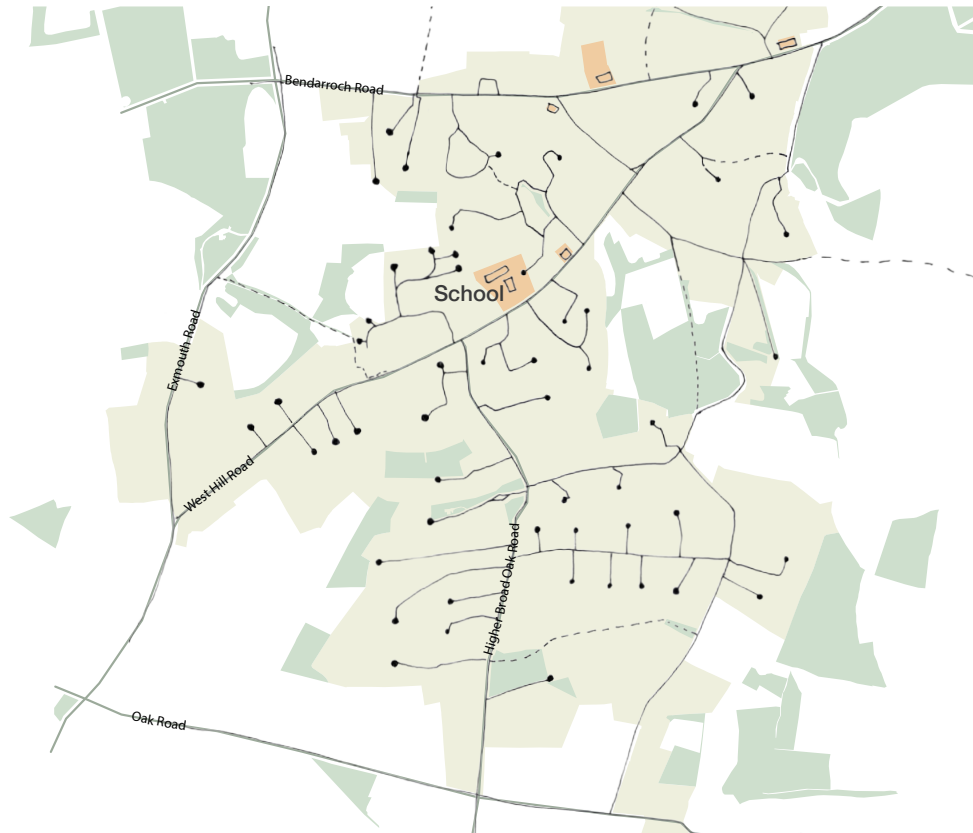


Existing Community Amenities



A clear heart to the village

ACCESSIBILITY AND MOVEMENT



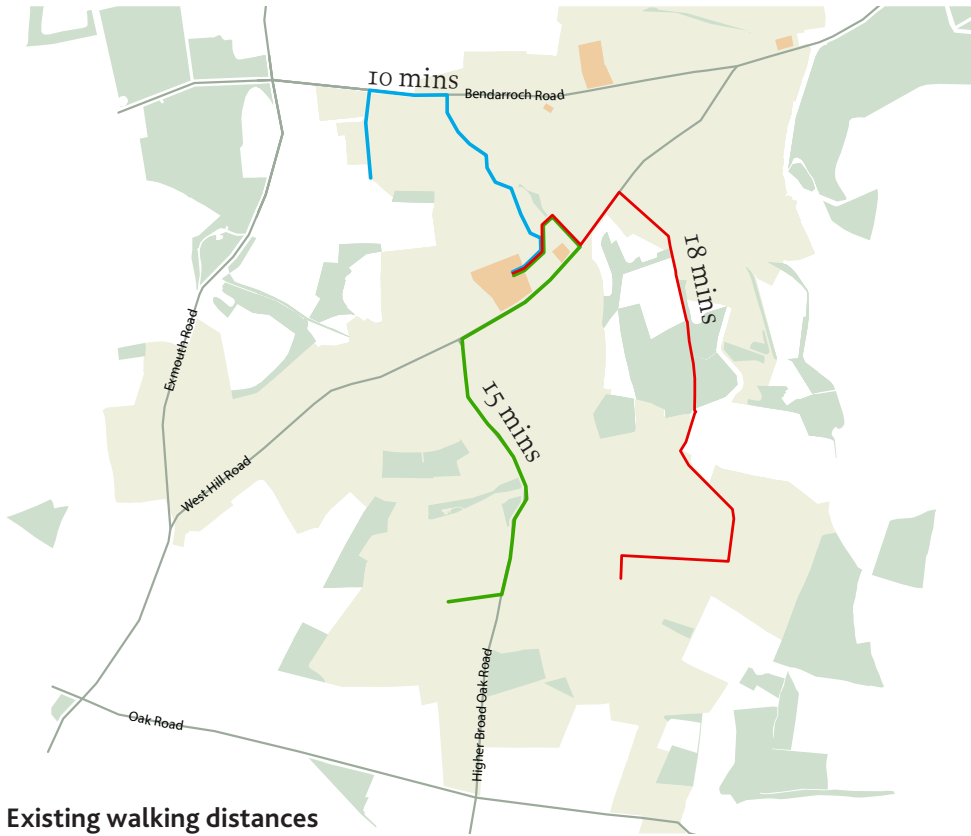
A village of cul-de-sacs

West Hill is a village of cul-de-sacs. Whilst people often enjoy the quiet intimacy this type of layout offers, it poses particular issues for pedestrian connectivity and more sustainable transport modes such as cycles or buses. National Planning Policy promotes direct pedestrian and cycle networks because they encourage people to take more active forms of travel, thus reducing car usage and improving health and wellbeing.



Existing footpaths are fragmented

For instance, studies have shown that 75% of parents driving their children less than two miles to school said they did this for convenience and to save time (Ramblers Association), therefore by enabling shorter walk times it encourages walking to school. In addition, in the UK it is reported that 14% of children aged two to 15 are obese and 28% are classed as “overweight or obese” (Health Survey for England).



Existing walking distances
(testing scenarios of home to school)



Direct walking distances
(comparison for reference)

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES



**Under-utilised woodland areas with lots of potential
(The Woodland Trust Wood)**



Opportunity to celebrate a remarkable woodland environment



**Existing village thresholds poorly defined
(why slow down?)**



**Outstanding areas of woodland with restricted access
(Elsdon Wood)**



Valuable playing fields and public open space at the heart of the village



Yet closed outside of school hours



A thriving junior football team



Cherished play areas and tennis courts



A strong community spirit



Yet few places to get together that are outside



Incidental seating areas feel like leftover spaces
(area by McColl's)



Incidental seating areas severed by roads
(The War Memorial)



Seating areas with uninspiring views
(The War Memorial)



The heart of the village dominated by car parks



The heart of the village is dominated by car parks (a valuable resource, but only at certain times of the day)



Walking routes typically shared with vehicles



Traffic does not slow because of housing set back and vegetated boundaries (as a result drivers don't recognise West Hill is a place for people)



**7 IDEAS
FOR POSITIVE CHANGE**

IDEA 1. REMOVE THROUGH TRAFFIC FROM WEST HILL ROAD



Create new village gateways



Existing (example shown - West Hill Road/Bendarroch Road)



Proposed (showing potential)

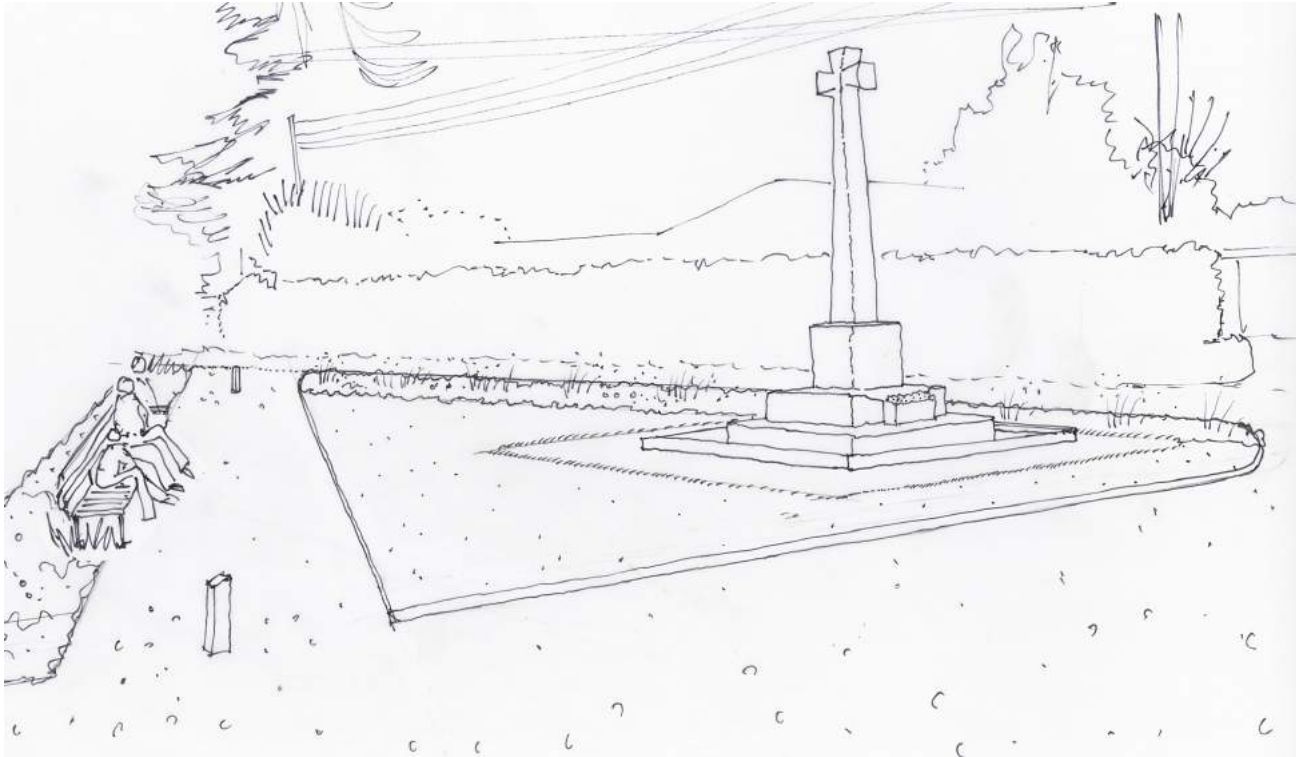
- Junction modification to adjust the existing road hierarchy
- Signage to clearly indicate access only (for residents, loading to shops, school drop off etc.)
- Cognitive signals to slow traffic and infer a local minor route to West Hill Road (could include top-dressing the tarmac, sett edging to thresholds and used to reduce perceived width of the road)
- Traffic calming to Bendarroch road - localised width restrictions/build-outs
- Attractive signage and clusters of trees/meadow to mark the gateway
- Lane markings removed to reduce vehicle speeds.

IDEA 2. RE-ASSIGN ROAD SPACE TO CREATE IMPROVED SEATING AREAS



Existing - War Memorial on West Hill Road

- Existing setting to the war memorial poor, compromised by roads
- Over-design of junction creates unnecessary road space
- Seating poorly located with uninspiring views



Proposed - War Memorial on West Hill Road

- Re-model the existing space to improve the setting to the memorial and improve the quality and usability of the existing incidental open space
- Removal of secondary road access to School Lane and allow pedestrian access only
- Provide new planting to screen West Hill Road and create a more attractive setting
- Re-locate the seating to a more attractive location

IDEA 3. THE HEART OF THE VILLAGE DESIGNED FOR PEOPLE NOT CARS

AREA BY McCOLLS AND THE CAR PARK (OPTION 01)



Existing

- Incidental Seating area compromised by the road and grassed areas offer little function
- In-efficient layout with car parking



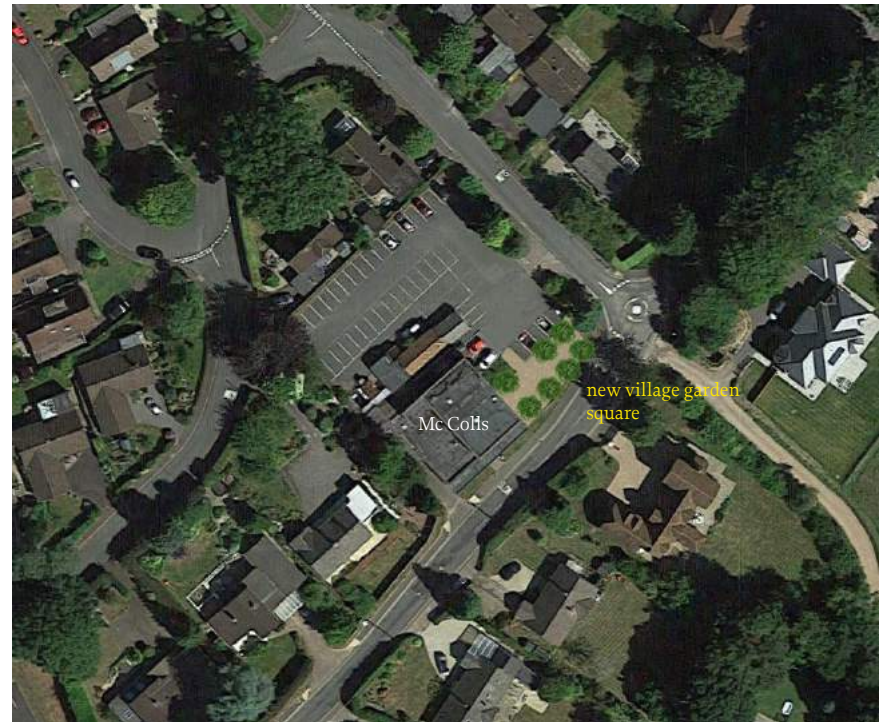
Proposed

- Re-align existing brick wall to extend seating area and create a direct access to the shops
- Introduce colourful planting to replace mown grass (character to compliment village woodland identity)
- Introduce trees, such as pleached beech or fruit trees to screen car park
- Introduce a large raised table to West Hill Road to slow traffic and infer pedestrian priority

AREA BY McCOLLS AND THE CAR PARK (OPTION 02)



Existing



Proposed - Re-configure the car park to create a new village garden square (although a feasibility study would need to be carried out it is felt that this option could be achieved with no net loss of car parking)



A new social space for the village
(character to compliment village woodland identity)



IDEA 4. TWO NEW PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS



Route A
Pedestrian connection to new housing areas and the north west of the village
(would require utilising an area to the back of the school)



A

B

CSW Building & M Construction Contractors

West Hill Primary School

West Hill Post Office

Google



Route B
New pedestrian connection to West Hill Road and the main village amenities



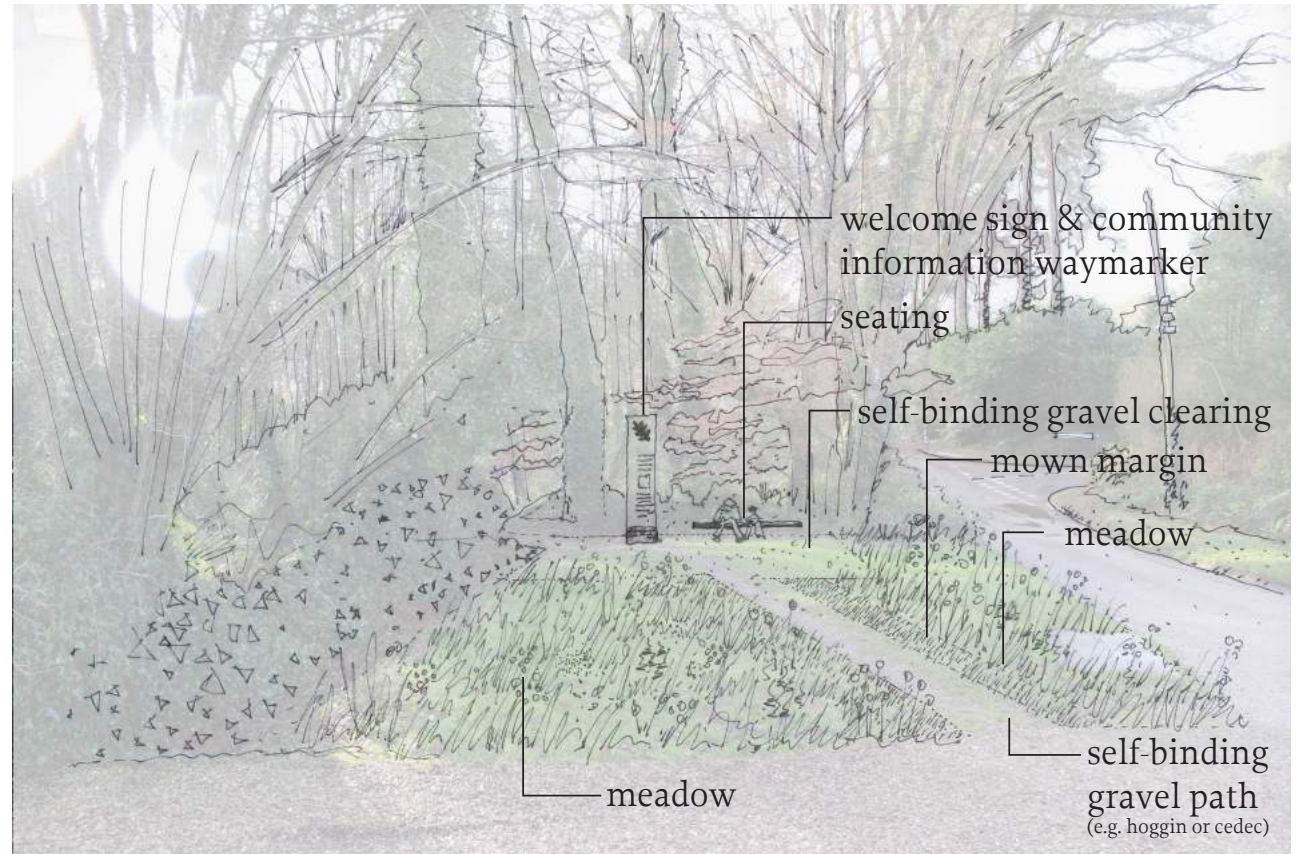
Enabling quicker routes to school, the play area, tennis courts, the village hall and the shops

IDEA 5. CELEBRATING THE REMARKABLE WOODLAND ENVIRONMENT

Create new welcoming arrival spaces



existing
(Woodland Trust Wood)



proposed

New play and social spaces



Opportunities for sculpture



Opportunities for engaging interpretation





Opportunities for waymarkers to denote village trails



IDEA 6. SHARED USE OF THE SCHOOL

PLAYING FIELDS AT WEEKENDS AND SUMMER EVENINGS





IDEA 7. A NEW OPEN SPACE FOR THE VILLAGE



- 1** Field to north of Ash Hill adjacent to Brackendown
- 2** Field at corner of Bendarroch Road and Exmouth Road
- 3** Field off track from Elsdon Lane past Elsdon House
- 4** Field to the north of Elsdon Lane
- 5** Field off Windmill Lane / Eastfield
- 6** Field to the north of Ash Hill adjacent to Brackendown (no.2)

The following sites were identified as opportunities for new village public open spaces. For each site an audit was undertaken to assess location, access, size, topography, drainage, landscape sensitivity etc. Refer to Appendix A for the full audit. It is acknowledged that all sites are in private ownership.

Potential sites

PREFERRED OPTION
FIELD TO NORTH OF ASH HILL ADJACENT TO BRACKENDOWN



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Area - 2.2895 Ha

Walking distance to village centre 20 min

FA Space Compliance - Excellent

Vehicular Access - Excellent (all pitch sizes)

Car parking potential - Good

Emergency Access - Good (with screening)

Ownership - Private

Flexibility for different uses - Good
(although suggest too peripheral for some)

Adjacent Land Uses - residential (4No.),
agricultural, woodland (opportunity to screen
all sides with planting, in particular housing)

Topography - Level

Drainage - Waterlogging evident

Landscape Sensitivity - Moderate/Low

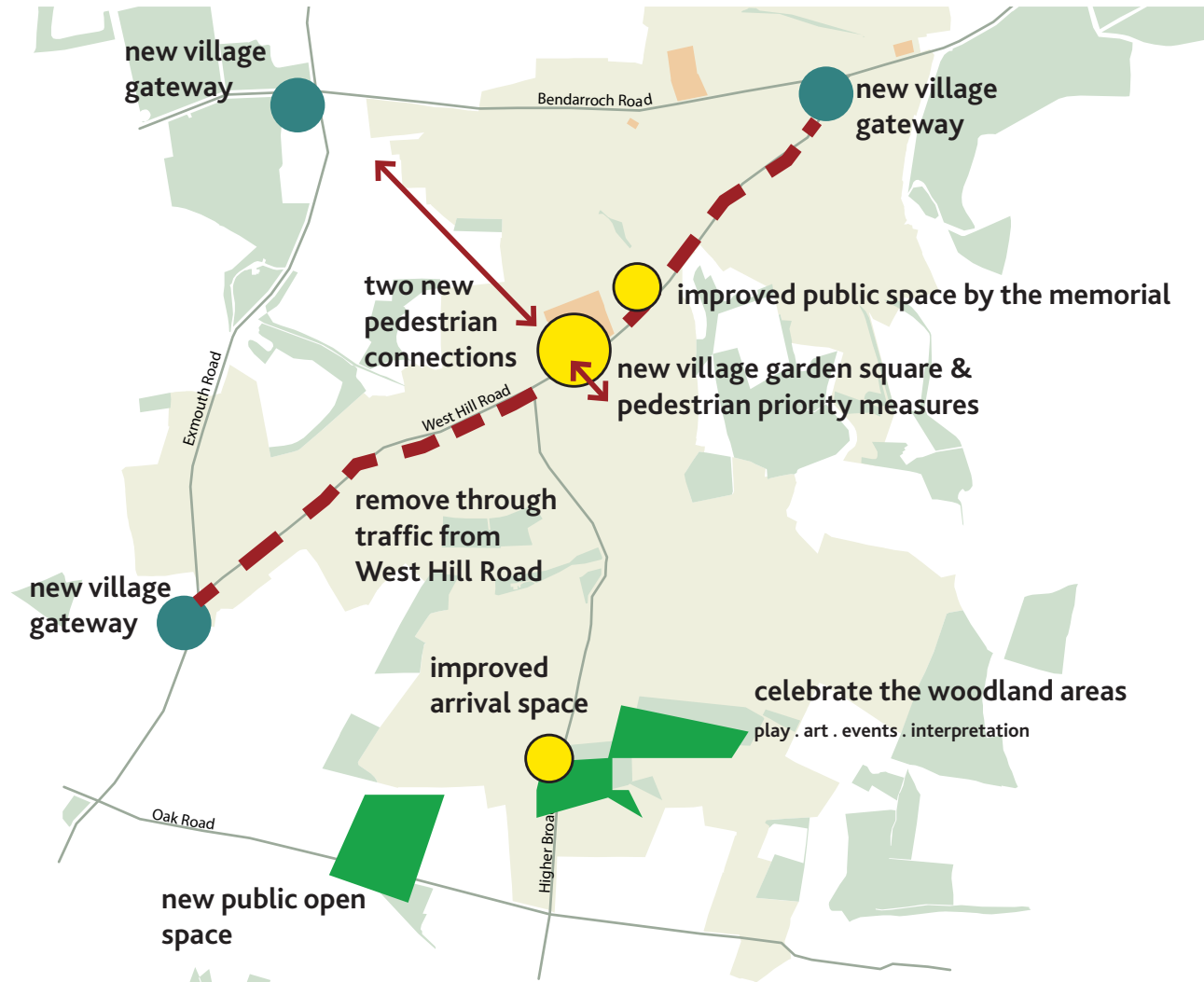
Residential amenity impact - low

(preferred site for football use and occasional
larger scale village events, good size and
minimal residential amenity impact)

FEASIBILITY TESTING



BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER



WHAT NEXT?

■■■■■ The improvements proposed to the public realm and open spaces for West Hill are ambitious. They provide a long term vision for West Hill and are intended to provoke discussion and feedback from local residents, the school and businesses alike. This is the start of the conversation not the end.

Delivering public realm and transport projects in an area of this nature, requires intense collaboration, creativity, technical rigour and strong leadership. It will also be a costly endeavour and partnerships and other mechanisms through the delivery process will be required. Representatives from West Hill Parish Council, East Devon District Council, Devon County Council, The Woodland Trust, West Hill Primary School, West Hill Village Hall, local businesses and residents will all need to be engaged.

To conclude, West Hill is undoubtedly a village with a unique and special character. Ironically, it has a strong green identity, yet few opportunities for the villagers to come together or stop and enjoy this remarkable setting. With the impetus behind the newly formed Parish Council and emerging Neighbourhood Plan, now is the perfect time for the community to seize the opportunity for positive change.

People can give their feedback to the Parish Council via the Clerk by emailing clerk@westhillparishcouncil.gov.uk or post to West Hill Parish Clerk, Manana, Higher Broad Oak Road, West Hill, Ottery St Mary EX11 1XD

Appendix A

This section includes the assessment of the six sites identified as potential for a new public open space/playing fields.

**OPTION 2:
FIELD AT CORNER OF BENDARROCH ROAD AND EXMOUTH ROAD**





Area - 0.789 Ha

Walking distance to village centre
8 min (with new footpath) and 12 min (without)

FA Space Compliance - up to U11/12
Vehicular Access/parking potential - Good

Ownership - Private

Flexibility for different uses - Reasonable
(although suggest too peripheral for some)

Adjacent Land Uses - residential, agricultural, woodland

Topography - Gently sloping

Drainage - No visible drainage issues

Landscape Sensitivity - High (protected NP view over Otter Valley and Sidmouth Gap)

Residential Amenity Impact - Low

(dismissed due to landscape sensitivity at this prominent village gateway)

**OPTION 3:
FIELD OFF TRACK FROM ELSDON LANE PAST ELSDON HOUSE**





Area - 0.63 Ha

Walking distance to village centre - 11 min

FA Space Compliance - up to U9/10

Vehicular Access - moderate (requires work)

Car Parking potential - Poor

Emergency Access - Poor

Ownership - Private

Flexibility for different uses - reasonable

Adjacent Land Uses - residential, agricultural, woodland

Topography - Flat

Drainage - No visible drainage issues

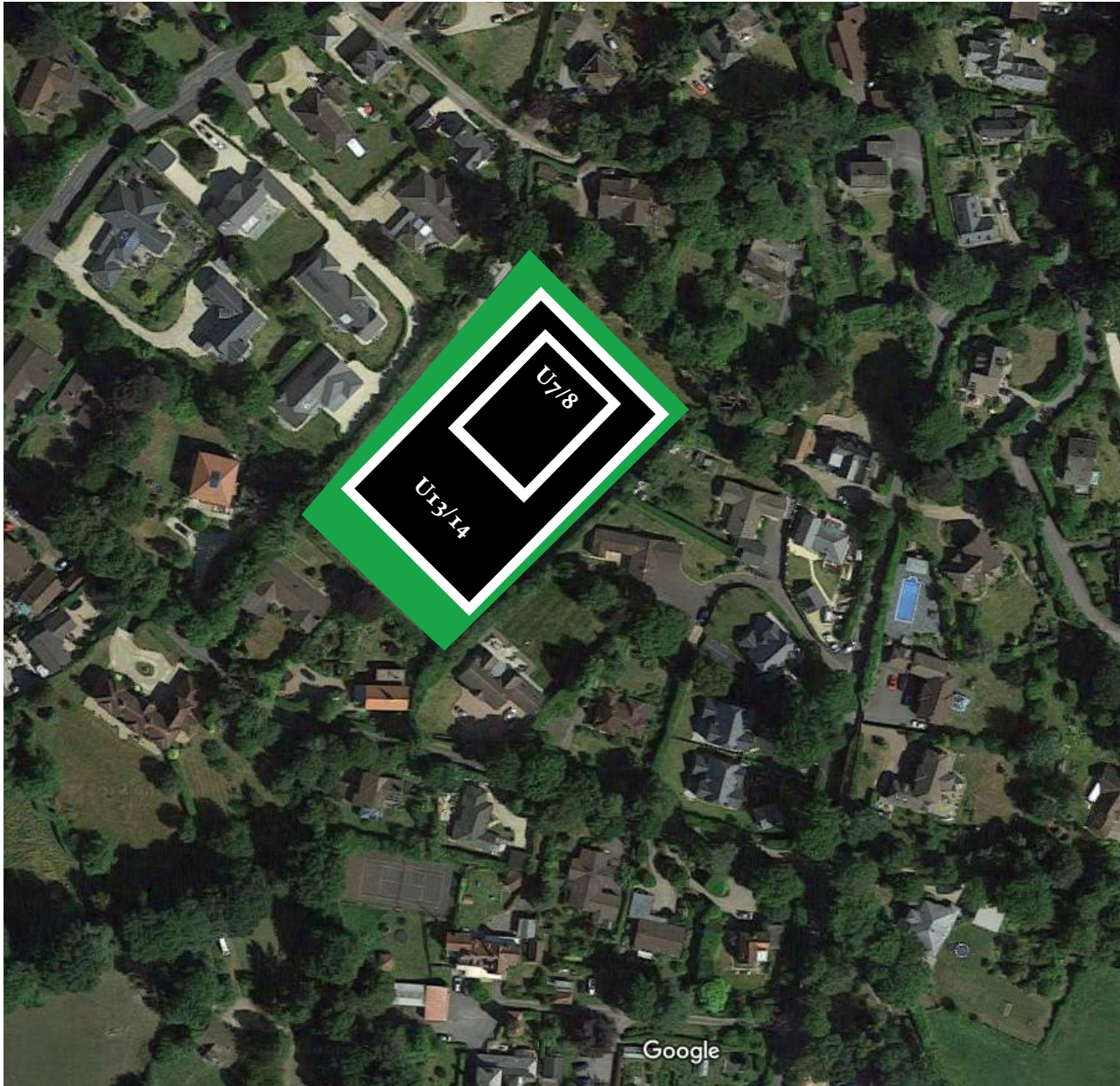
Landscape Sensitivity - low/moderate, enclosed site but off a public right of way

Residential Amenity Impact - Low

(dismissed due to size and access issues)

**OPTION 4:
FIELD TO THE NORTH OF ELSDON LANE**





Area - 0.79Ha

Walking distance to village centre - 5 min (Excellent)

FA Space Compliance - up to U13/14

Vehicular Access - moderate

Car Parking potential - Good

Ownership - Private

Flexibility for different uses - reasonable

Adjacent Land Uses - residential, agricultural, woodland

Topography - Flat

Drainage - No visible drainage issues

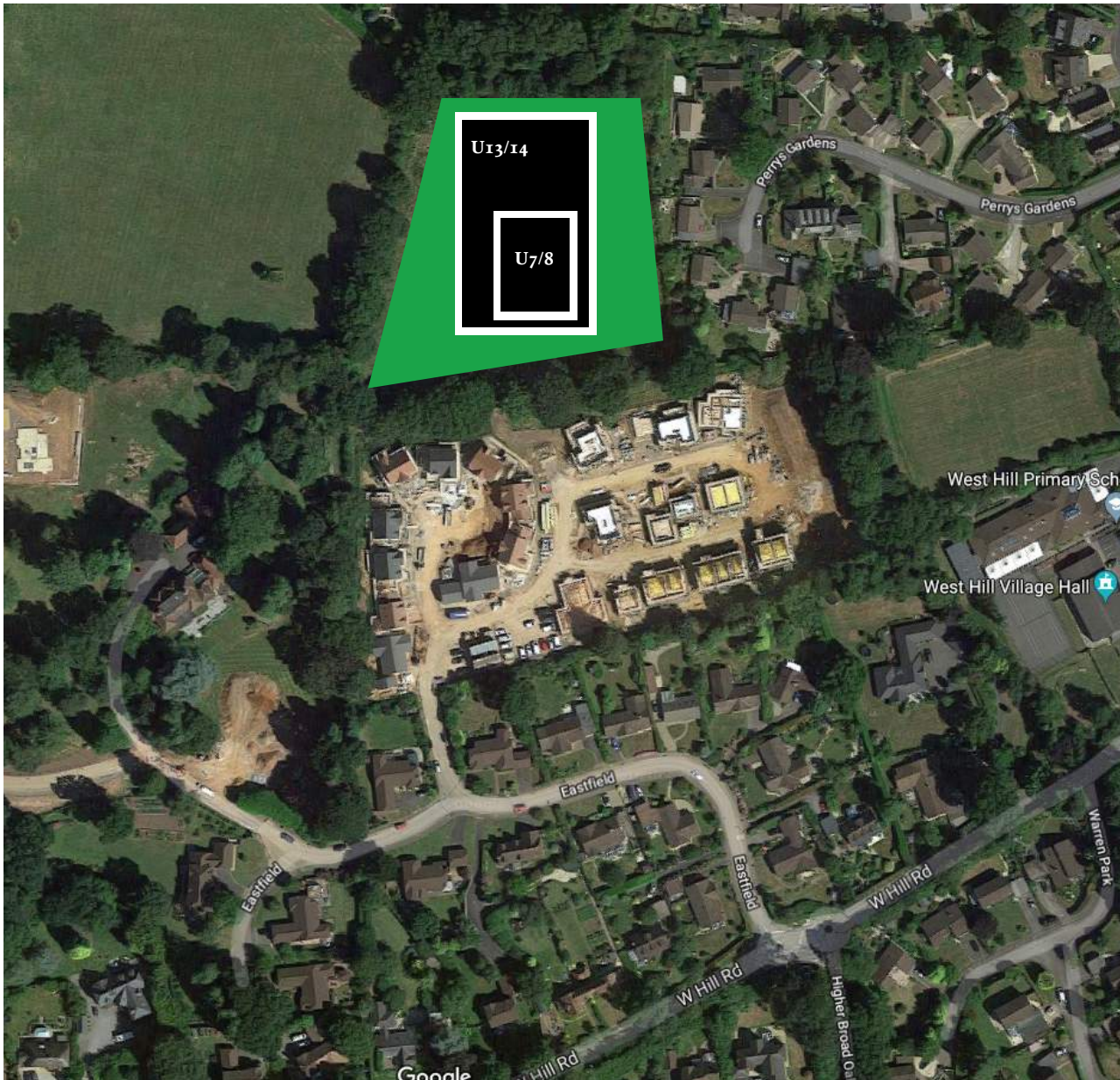
Landscape Sensitivity - low/moderate, enclosed site in a residential area

Residential Amenity Impact - Moderate/high

(dismissed due to potential impact on residing and adjacent residential properties, however this is subject to consultation)

**OPTION 5:
FIELD OFF WINDMILL LANE / EASTFIELD**





Area - 1.28 Ha

Walking distance to village centre
5 min (or 2 min with new footpath connection)

FA Space Compliance - up to U13/14

Vehicular Access/parking potential - Good

Ownership - Private

Flexibility for different uses - Good

Topography - Sloping

Drainage - Waterlogging evident

Landscape Sensitivity - Low

Adjacent Land Uses - residential, agricultural

Residential Amenity Impact - Moderate/high

(dismissed due to drainage and topography issues and resistance due to likely future residential development)

**OPTION 6:
FIELD TO NORTH OF OAK ROAD/ASH HILL ADJACENT TO BRACKENDOWN - WEST OF OPTION 1**





Area - 2.37 Ha

Walking distance to village centre 20 mins

FA Space Compliance - Excellent (all pitch sizes)

Vehicular Access/parking potential - Good

Emergency Access - Good

Ownership - Private

Flexibility for different uses - Good (although suggest too peripheral for some)

Topography - Level

Landscape Sensitivity - Moderate/low (opportunity to screen all sides with planting)

Adjacent Land Uses - Agricultural Land

Residential Amenity Impact - Low

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