

# LEOMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL

## LEOMINSTER AREA NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN EVIDENCE STATEMENT

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 As part of the requirements of developing a Neighbourhood Plan there is a need to ensure that enough development land has been allocated to meet the development aims of the Herefordshire Core Strategy.
- 1.2 This report outlines the evidence behind the current land allocation in the Neighbourhood Plan for Leominster, otherwise known as the Leominster Area Neighbourhood Plan (LANP).
- 1.3 The report includes development undertaken since the inception of the Core Strategy, development with permissions, details of the Southern Urban Extension site and a review of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment allocations (SHLAA).

### 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Leominster has always been a town that has been earmarked for additional residential development. The 1967 Leominster Masterplan (Appendix One) identified land suitable for development in the parish of Leominster.
- 2.2 The land allocations included the Buckfield Road Estate, now developed, the Baron's Cross Camp site, which now has planning permission for 414 dwellings, the currently proposed Southern Urban Extension land and a future south-west bypass route or outer ring loop road.
- 2.3 Policy LO1 of the Herefordshire Core Strategy states the following:

#### **Policy LO1 – Development in Leominster**

Leominster will accommodate a minimum of 2,300 new homes throughout the plan period, (2011-2031) of which a minimum of 1,500 dwellings will be provided in a single strategic urban extension to the south-west of the town. The remaining dwellings will be provided through existing commitments, smaller scale non-strategic sites within the existing built up area; those which come forward through the Leominster Neighbourhood Development Plan, or sites judged as having development potential which are identified in the *Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment*.

The Leominster Enterprise Park will continue to serve the employment needs of Leominster, which will include a further extension of up to 10ha to the south of the enterprise park. The release of the additional land will be phased across the plan period depending upon the availability or otherwise of land within the existing enterprise park.

In Leominster new development proposals will be encouraged where they:

- continue the development of the Leominster Enterprise Park and encourage proposals for suitable small scale employment sites within the town;
- maintain and enhance the viability and vitality of the town centre. Proposals for new retail, leisure or office development of over 400m<sup>2</sup> in gross floor space and located outside of the defined town centre will need to be supported by an impact assessment in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework to determine whether there could be any adverse impacts on the vitality and viability of Leominster town centre;
- ensure that developments do not exacerbate air pollution levels within the designated air quality management area at Bargates;
- ensure that development does not undermine the achievement of water quality targets in accordance with Policy SD3 and SD4; and
- have demonstrated engagement and consultation with the community including the town/parish council.

2.4 The table below outlines the minimum requirements for new development in Leominster during the Plan period:

<b>SITE</b>	<b>ALLOCATION</b>
Southern Urban Extension	1,500
Other sites	800
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,300</b>

2.5 The above table indicates that 800 new dwellings need to be provided in the existing settlement boundary round Leominster and in the various communities included in Policy RA2 (Brierley, Ivington and Wharton) within the Parish.

2.6 Section 3 outlines the residential situation as at the time of the Examination.

### **3. RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT ALLOCATIONS**

3.1 Leominster is required to provide a minimum of 2,300 additional residential homes by 2032.

3.2 The table below outlines the number of planning commitments in Leominster. It should be noted that the commitment indicated for the Barons Cross site is stated at 425. This has now reduced to 414, so actual commitments now total 634, not 645:

Status	Application Number	Site Address	Total
Active	DCNC2007/2869/F	44 Vicarage Street, Leominster	4
Active	141022	Land at Pinsley Road Leominster	29
Active	150812	Land off Westcroft, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8HG	30
Active	160761	Barn adjacent Comfordt House, Eaton Hill, Leominster, Herefordshire	2
Active	161592	Agricultural building at Ridgeway Farm,	1

		Ludlow Road, Leominster, Herefordshire	
Active	161456	26 High Street, Morris Mews, Leominster	3
Active	141006	Land off Ebnal Close, Leominster, Herefordshire	4
Active	NC100122/RM	Barons Cross Camp, Cholstrey Road, Leominster, HR6 8RT	424
Active	161133	Land at Church View, Ivington, Leominster, Herefordshire	2
Active	161189	Land adjoining Hengrave Green, Ivington, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0JL	7
Active	161486	Land at Pinfarthings, Off North Mappenors Lane, Leominster, Herefordshire	21
Active	161692	51 West Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8EP	3
Active	161753	Badgers Court, 27-31 South Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8JQ	2
Active	161937	Site at The Birdcage, Barons Cross Road, Leominster, Herefordshire	2
Active	162359	Land to the rear of Howard Cottage, Barons Cross Road, Leominster, Hereford	2
Active	162547	Land at Copper Beech Close, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8LE	1
Active	163562	Land between Wharton Cottage and Bannut Tree Cottage, Wharton, Leominster, Herefordshire	6
Active	150052	Land off Ginhall Lane, Leominster	12
Active	160226	Land adjacent 87 Bridge Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8EA	1
Active	160553	Land at Brick House Farm, Brierley, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0NT	4
Active	160811	Brierley Court Hop Farm, Brierley Lane, Brierley, Leominster, HR6 0NU	8
Active	160812	Land at West Winds, Cholstrey Road, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8RT	23
Active	152465	Land at Longlands, Monkland Road, Barons Cross, Leominster, Herefordshire	2
Active	140665	Land at Laundry Lane, Leominster, Herefordshire	41
Active	N111284/F	Former Orphans Printing Press, Laundry Lane, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8JT	10
			644

The table below indicates the completed developments, which total 128.

Completions 2011/12			
Application Number	Site Address	Parish	Completed 11/12
DCNC0009/1210/F	Neuralia Worcester Road Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 8AS	Leominster	1
DCNC2009/0543/F	5 Broad Street Leominster Herefordshire HR6 8BS	Leominster	4
DCNC103644	Land at New Street, Leominster,	Leominster	24

	Herefordshire		
DCNC2008/1950/F	Land to the rear of Bargates and off Wesfield Walk, Leominster, Herefordshire.	Leominster	10
NC91583/F	Site Of Former Primrose Travel, Etnam Street, Leominster, Herefordshire	Leominster	7
N103144/F	11a West Street, Leominster, Herefordshire	Leominster	2
N112703/F	Pinsley Guest House, 29 Broad Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8DD	Leominster	1
NC101226/F	Minerva Place, 6 Hereford Terrace, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8JR	Leominster	1
NC100823/F	Meadway, Portna Warden Lane, Barons Cross Road, Leominster Herefords	Leominster	1
N120402/F	7 Broad Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8BT	Leominster	1
		TOTAL	52
	52 - 2 losses on completed sites = 50 completions (net)		
Completions 2012/13			
Application Number	Site Address	Parish	Completed 12/13
DCNC0009/0931/F	Marsh Mill, Bridge Street, Leominster, Hereford HR6 8DZ	Leominster	4
N101946/F	Archer House, Ryelands Road, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8PN	Leominster	1
N102072/F	Copper Beeches, 126a South Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8JN	Leominster	7
N113544/F	Land behind Buckfield Keep, Baron Cross Road, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8QX	Leominster	1
N111461/F	Land at, 19/21 Burgess Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8DE	Leominster	2
N102899/F	42 Broad Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8BS	Leominster	1
		TOTAL	16
	16 - 1 loss on completed sites = 15 completions (net)		
Completions 2013/14			
Application Number	Site Address	Parish	Completed 13/14
N102919/F	2/3 Foundry Place, West Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0DE	Leominster	2

N121878/F	Outbuildings at Eaton Hill, Ludlow Road, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0DG	Leominster	2
NC100512/F	The Hyde, Hyde Ash, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0JS	Leominster	1
N121341/F	Former Print Works, 11 to 13 School Lane, Leominster, Herefordshire	Leominster	1
NC101226/F	Minerva Place, 6 Hereford Terrace, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8JR	Leominster	4
N113291/F	18 Etnam Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8AQ	Leominster	1
N121431/F	Site Adj 4 Grange House, Pinsley Road, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8AE	Leominster	1
DCNC0009/0931/F	Marsh Mill Bridge Street Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 8DZ	Leominster	3
N112179/F	Chapel Cottage, Ivington Green, Ivington, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0JN	Leominster	1
N113460/F	43 Broad Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8DD	Leominster	2
N102892/F	7 Drapers Lane, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8ND	Leominster	1
130248	Hollymount, 1-2 Pierrepont, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8RA	Leominster	1
130425	Black Horse Coach House, 74 South Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8JF	Leominster	1
130556	The Vergers House, Church Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8EQ	Leominster	1
131262	Flat at 21 High Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8LZ	Leominster	2
140117	The Anchorage, Wharton Lane, Wharton, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0NX	Leominster	2
		TOTAL	26
26 - 3 losses on completed sites = 23 completions (net)			
Completions 2014/15			
Application Number	Site Address	Parish	Completed 14/15
132399	Tamarisk House, 2 Pinsley Road, Leominster, Herefordshire	Leominster	1
132489	Brook Hall, 27 Broad Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8BT	Leominster	2
130414	Barn at Eaton Hall, Stoke Prior, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0NA	Leominster	1
130707	Moat Cottage, Bridge Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8DX	Leominster	2

DCNC0009/0931/F	Marsh Mill Bridge Street Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 8DZ	Leominster	7
NC100512/F	The Hyde, Hyde Ash, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0JS	Leominster	1
141632	29/31 West Street, Leominster, Hereford, HR6 8EP	Leominster	2
		Total	16
16 completions - 2 losses = 14 completions (net)			
Completions 2015/16			
Application Number	Site Address	Parish	Total completed 2015/16
141534	Land at 78 Castlefields, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8BJ	Leominster	1
091268	Land to the rear of the Nook, Etnam Street , Leominster	Leominster	6
141814	Tickbridge Farm, Tickbridge Lane, Hamnish, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0QL	Leominster	1
141791	Land between 21 Hopyard Close and 22 Portna Way, Leominster, Herefordshire	Leominster	6
150647	Land at 87 Bridge Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8EA	Leominster	2
151173	19 School Lane, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8AA	Leominster	1
		Total	17
16 completions - 1 loss = 16 completions (net)			
Completions 2016/17			
Application Number	Site Address	Parish	Total completed 2016/17
160914	17 - 19 High Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8LZ	Leominster	1
153326	2a Rainbow Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8DQ	Leominster	2
152990	Land to rear of Howard Cottage, Barons Cross Road, Leominster, Herefordshire	Leominster	5
150791	The Hen House, Ivington Road, Newtown, Leominster, Herefordshire	Leominster	1
161511	Ground Floor, 1 Cygnus House, Black Swan Walk, Leominster, Herefordshire	Leominster	1
143541	Westcroft Cottage, Hyde Ash, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0JS	Leominster	1
160509	1 Cygnus House, Black Swan Walk, Leominster, Herefordshire	Leominster	1

142841	The Orangery, Vicarage Street, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 8DS	Leominster	1
		Total	13
13 completions - 2 losses = 11 completions ( net)			

3.3 The table below is a summary of completions:

<b>SUMMARY OF COMPLETIONS FOR THE PARISH OF LEOMINSTER(NET)</b>	
2011/12	50
2012/13	15
2013/14	23
2014/15	14
2015/16	16
2016/17	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>129</b>

3.4 The residual requirement for Leominster to allocate, based on the Core Strategy Policy LO1 is 800. The table below indicates that a total of 38 additional dwellings left to find:

Dwelling Required	800
Dwellings completed since 2011	129
Permissions granted	644
<b>Additional Dwelling Required</b>	<b>27</b>

3.5 The table below identifies recent applications for additional dwellings. Please note that approval is awaited for some of these applications:

<b>APPLICATION</b>	<b>ADDRESS</b>	<b>DWELLINGS</b>	<b>APPROVED</b>
P163445/174078	Land at Eaton Hill	1	Yes
P163601	Hay Farm Lane	1	Yes
P164109	45a – 47 West Street	7	Yes
P170275	Land adjoining The Hop Pole	3	No
P170276	Land at The Hop Pole	4	No
P170277	Land fronting Mill Street at The Hop Pole	6	No
P171264	Copper Beech Close	1	Yes
P171574	44/44a Etnam Street	3	Yes
P171601	8 School Lane	1	Yes
P171903	Land adjacent to 54 Green Lane	2	Yes
P172109	Land at Eaton Close	1	Yes
P172667	Flats at 28 High Street	1	Yes
P172818	29-31 West Street	1	Yes
P173013	Barn at Ivington	2	Yes
P173082	Land at Parkgate	1	No

P173338	Rear of 30 West Street	3	Yes
P173506	Land at 15 Mill Street	1	No
P174477	Barn at Lower Hyde	1	No
P174737	43-45 High Street	2	No
P180198	Land adjoining Glaslyn, Barons Cross Road	4	No
	<b>TOTAL APPROVED</b>	<b>24</b>	
	<b>TOTAL AWAITING</b>	<b>22</b>	

- 3.6 The above table indicates that 19 additional dwellings have been approved to date in 2017/18 with a further 22 awaiting approval. This totals 41 additional dwellings which is 3 more than required by the Herefordshire Core Strategy.
- 3.7 This therefore suggests that Leominster has met the 800 additional dwellings required by Policy LO1 of the Herefordshire Core Strategy already.
- 3.8 However, it is accepted that some of those being applied for may not receive planning approval and some permissions will not be delivered. Therefore the following sites, identified by the Herefordshire's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) 2011, indicate options where additional housing and development could possibly be provided:

<b>SITE &amp; REFERENCE</b>	<b>CAPACITY</b>	<b>SUITABILITY</b>
Site west of Morrisons filling station (adjacent to Barons Cross Road) HLAA/243/001	Capacity – 36 Area – 0.91ha Greenfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site included in LANP.</li> <li>• It is suitable, achievable and available.</li> <li>• 1-5 year timescale.</li> </ul>
Land adjacent to Ashfield Lane/Havelock Road Leo/41	Capacity – 6 Area – 0.14ha Greenfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site included in LANP.</li> <li>• It is suitable &amp; achievable. Availability, don't know</li> <li>• 1-5 year timescale.</li> </ul>
Land north of Morrisons filling station (adjacent to Barons Cross Road) Leo/48	Capacity – 11 Area – 0.26ha Brownfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site not included in LANP.</li> <li>• It is suitable &amp; achievable. Availability, don't know</li> <li>• 1-5 year timescale.</li> </ul>
Land to the rear of Drapers Lane Leo/61	Capacity – 5 Area – 0.12ha Brownfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site not included in LANP.</li> <li>• It is suitable &amp; achievable. Availability, don't know</li> <li>• 1-5 year timescale.</li> </ul>
Former Arrow Hire premises and adjacent land. O/Leo/018	Capacity – 10 Area – 0.41ha Brownfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site not included in LANP.</li> <li>• It is part suitable &amp; part achievable. Availability, don't know</li> <li>• 1-5 year timescale.</li> </ul>

#### **4. THE SOUTHERN URBAN EXTENSION**

- 4.1 Policy LO2 of the Herefordshire Core Strategy requires an average of 35 dwellings per hectare.
- 4.2 It is estimated that the current development land allocated in the LANP is as follows:
- 80 hectares for development and required infrastructure (schools, community buildings etc)
  - 8 hectares for the new link road.
- 4.3 The above allocation excludes all the open space and green space, including Cockcroft Hill, that is currently identified within the Plan as outlined on the Leominster Town Policies Map.
- 4.4 The Leominster Town Policies Map also identifies Cockcroft Hill as a Local Geological Site. Further information on its history and significance is contained in Appendix One.

#### **5. GREEN OPEN SPACES**

- 5.1 Core Strategy Policy LO2 includes the requirement for the “retention of the highly sensitive landscape areas and geological features of Cockcroft Hill (which encompasses Ryelands Croft) by retaining this site as natural open space” (Policy LO2 page 91 Core Strategy).
- 5.2 Paragraph 77 of the Local Green Space designation in the National Planning Policy Framework states the following:

The Local Green Space designation will not be appropriate for most green areas or open space. The designation should only be used:

- where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
- where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

- 5.3 The following areas have been designated as Local Green Space in the LANP:

- a. The Grange
- b. The Priory precinct
- c. Cricket pitch (off Mill Street)
- d. Playing fields and sports centre (off Bridge Street)
- e. Cemetery, Hereford Road
- f. Ginhall Green

- g. Recreation ground, Leisure Centre and school playing fields, east of South Street
- h. Skate Board Park ground and Sydonia Park
- i. Millennium Green and riverside walk
- j. Cockcroft Hill
- k. Easters Wood
- l. Riversides such as spaces in the former Priory lands on the south side of the river Kenwater
- m. Picnic Area behind the Priory and Breathing Space garden
- n. Booth Memorial Garden
- o. Small park on Ryelands Road
- p. Areas of open spaces throughout Buckfields
- r. Linear walk along river behind Ridgemoor
- s. Orchard south west of Morrison's.

The Plan will seek to protect smaller local green spaces and infilling will be discouraged. Redevelopment of amenity open spaces will only be permitted when the open space fails to perform at least one of the following functions:

- It has local significance, for its beauty;
- It is of historic significance;
- It is of value for recreation (including as a playing field);
- It is significant for its tranquillity;
- It is significant for the richness of its wildlife.

5.4 The table below outlines the adherence of the NPPF criteria relating to the designated Green Open Spaces:

<b>OPEN SPACE</b>	<b>NPPF CRITERIA ADHERENCE</b>
The Grange	Important open space adjacent to the Town Centre and residential areas which provides both formal and informal recreational opportunities, play area, dog walking, access to footpaths and is of historical importance. Extremely important to the local community.
The Priory Precinct	Part of the Priory Church and steeped in heritage and history. Important open space adjacent to the Town Centre and residential areas which provides informal recreational opportunities, play area, dog walking, access to footpaths and is of historical importance. Extremely important to the local community.
Cricket Pitch (off Mill Street)	An important recreational space close to the town centre which provides an opportunity to take part in formal, organised recreation.
Playing fields and sports centre (off Bridge Street)	An important recreational space close to the town centre which provides an opportunity to take part in formal, organised recreation.
Cemetery, Hereford Road	Local Cemetery which is still in use and provides a haven to wildlife as well as a place for residents to pay

	their respects.
Ginhall Green	Important amenity space for the Buckfield Estate which provides access to walks, play areas and informal recreation. It has a community orchard, wildflower meadow and stretch of ancient hedgerow.
Recreation ground, Leisure Centre and school playing fields, east of South Street.	An important recreational space close to the town centre which provides an opportunity to take part in formal, organised recreation especially for pupils, residents and visitors.
Skate Board Park ground and Sydonia Park	An important open space which serves a number of residential developments, provides informal recreational opportunities and access to a skate park.
Millennium Green and Riverside Walk	Important tranquil open space which provides a haven for wildlife, contains a community orchard, dog walking opportunities and access to the footpath network which leads out from Leominster town centre.
Cockcroft Hill	Important landscape access and views. Informal recreational area for residents and visitors alike.
Easters Wood	Important local woodland which is easily accessible for the community and important in sustaining wildlife.
Riversides such as spaces in the former Priory lands on south side of the River Kenwater	Beautiful river walks through the town providing access to the open countryside. Of historical and heritage value as this helped sustain the original Priory.
Picnic Area behind the Priory and Breathing Space garden	Former garden to the Priory Monks. Tranquil, beautiful area steeped in history, close to the river and offering informal recreation. Also used to host local events. An important space for local wildlife to flourish.
Booth Memorial Garden	Important open space to the rear of B&Q which enables residents and visitors to enjoy the river and a small piece of tranquillity. The adjoining footpath, part of the Herefordshire Trail, is a haven for wildlife including slow worms.
Small park on Ryelands Road	Important open space for local residents, which is in close proximity to residential dwellings.
Orchard at top of Green Lane	Part of the entrance to Leominster valued by the Buckfield Estate community and other nearby residents
Area of open space throughout Buckfields	Important open space access to local community throughout this development.
Linear walk along river behind Ridgemoor	Beautiful river walks through the town providing access to the open countryside.
Orchard south-west of Morrison's	Valued by the local community and other nearby residents. Traditional orchard designated priority habitat.

## **6. SETTLEMENT BOUNDARY**

- 6.1 The settlement boundary has been developed based on the ability to meet the development targets within the existing settlement boundary plus the development requirements of the SUE,
- 6.2 Appendix Two is a map that was published on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2004 in the Local Media. The proposed settlement boundary is broadly in line with this map which had been developed by a local developer and outlined the proposed route for the Southern Link Road.
- 6.3 Further proposals have been developed by Bidwells and Mosaic which broadly reflect the proposed settlement boundary to the south as well,
- 6.4 The settlement boundary has also been developed to try to preserve the character of the Town and enhance its wellbeing whilst acknowledging that the town will grow over the next 20 years by around 40%. 400 additional school places will need to be provided and additional infrastructure delivered.
- 6.5 The settlement boundary provides more than enough development land to enable Leominster to meet and surpass its development targets contained in the Core Strategy and it ensures that the majority of the surrounding countryside is protected from unwanted and unnecessary development.

## **7. COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

- 7.1 The Plan does not go into detail about potential commercial development within Leominster but especially within the town centre the Plan would hope to encourage growth.
- 7.2 There are a number of opportunities which could and should be pursued in the long term, especially if the number of new dwellings identified within the Core Strategy is to be delivered within the Plan period.
- 7.3 There is some commercial development potential within the town centre and potential sites identified to date include part of Broad Street car park, the Dales site, Mill Street, Central car park provided additional parking could be provided elsewhere close to the town centre and the bus station site.
- 7.4 There is also some development opportunities along Cursneh Road leading into New Street.

## Retaining Cock Croft Hill, Leominster, as open space

Herefordshire Council's Core Strategy identifies Leominster from among the county's five (5) market towns as the town earmarked for the greatest level of urban expansion in the coming years. It is intended that Leominster will see more houses built than that planned for the 4 other towns put together.

The town is to accommodate a minimum of 2,300 new houses over the plan period 2011-2031 of which 1,500 dwellings will be provided in a single urban extension to the south west of the town.

Even before the core strategy and Leominster own Area Neighbourhood Plan proposals were published the successive local planning authorities and the local community have been firm in their desire to retain Cock Croft Hill an attractive open space at what was known historically as the 'Town's End'.

**The hill, agricultural land, is bisected by well-used public and permissive footpaths,** including the former 'Hop Pickers' Path' from Leominster down to the valley of the River Arrow. Leominster boasts one of the most active '**Walking for Health**' groups in the country and is a '**Walkers Are Welcome Town**' where walking activity plays a major part of the town's tourism offer and local recreation. Cock Croft Hill is an important 'green gateway' from the town for riverside walks in the Arrow Valley and scenic tracts of local countryside accessible on foot. This rural margin of Leominster flourishes with rich biodiversity: a large swathe of the land has been farmed organically and by low-input methods. It has benefitted from the Government's Stewardship Scheme in which one of the key objectives was to maintain the right conditions for curlews to nest and breed in the wetter land of the valley bottom. A bonus for local and visiting walkers has been the creation of several new permissive paths, kiss-gates and footbridges.

**The Leominster Area Neighbourhood Plan (2017)** seeks "retention of the highly sensitive landscape areas and geological features of Cockcroft Hill (which encompasses Ryelands Croft) by retaining this site as natural open space." Among the Plan's stated main aims is "creating a greener Leominster" and protecting important green spaces. It states: "The key issue for our Plan is how we retain the green spaces that we value, improve them, enhance their biodiversity and add new spaces. Our Plan sets out a range of policies and proposals to do this within a **Green Infrastructure Framework** – a network of green spaces, rivers, and streams that, interspersed between our town and villages, will connect places and people to support our Health and Leisure, Transport, and Jobs and Business themes." Cock Croft is within a '**Green Infrastructure Enhancement Zone**' identified on maps in the Plan.

**Local residents** have consistently stressed Cock Croft Hill's great value to local amenity and through their outspoken **Hereford Road Action Group** have carefully monitored and made representations on planning applications affecting the hill. In 1999 following an inquiry on the Leominster Local Plan the planning inspector rejected proposals for housing development to the west of Hereford Road on the slopes of Cockcroft Hill as being detrimental to the countryside and local amenity. In 2012, in its plans to demolish separate junior and infant school building, Herefordshire Council planned to build a single **new Primary School building** partly on agricultural land on the slopes of Cock Croft Hill. The council's intention was to sell off part of the adjacent (and ample) grounds of the two old

schools for housing development. Residents, supported by their local councillors, objected and Herefordshire Council subsequently withdrew the plan. The new Primary School was later built entirely within existing school land avoiding encroachment on to Cock Croft. Permission was given with this condition attached:

*Amendment of Condition 2 of 130940/CD Reason: To ensure adherence to the approved plans **and to protect the general character and amenities of the area** in accordance with the requirements of Policy DRI of the Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.*

In 2015 local planners refused permission for three dwellings at the foot of the hill (at Townsend Cottage, Hereford Road). Their decision was upheld by on appeal in February 2016.

*(Notes compiled by Pete Blench, for 'Walkers Are Welcome Leominster', February 2018)*