

Stretton Road, Wolston

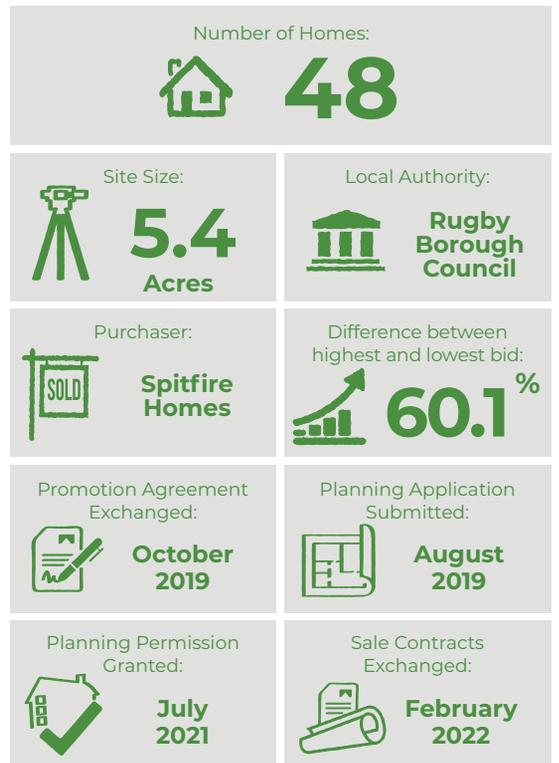
Rugby Borough Council



A residential development of 48 homes on a 5.4 acre site in the Warwickshire village of Wolston providing a reconfigured 6.4 acre allotment site.

Wolston is a large village inset from the West Midlands Green Belt within Rugby Borough Council. The site itself was part of a larger allotment gardens, that had been in cultivation since the turn of the twentieth century and were let by our client a Trust to the Parish Council.

5.4 acres of the site was bounded by built form on three sides and was in the settlement boundary for the village with the remaining allotments located within the green belt.

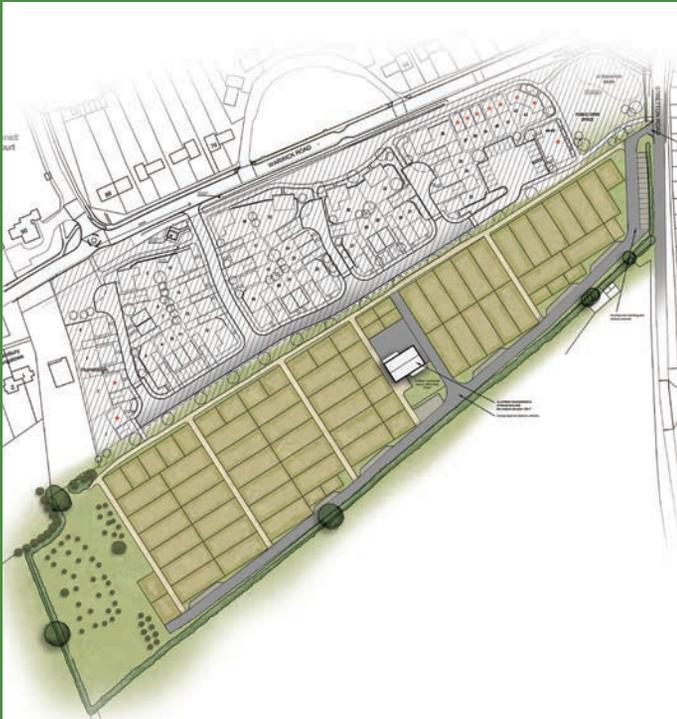


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The entirety of the allotments constituted Public Open Space and as per Rugby Borough Council's adopted local plan, they could only be redeveloped if the proposal met very strict criteria. In addition, the site was designated as an Asset of Community Value (ACV).

The overall allotment gardens were proportionately very large in comparison to Wolston, with a number of uncultivated plots. Numerically based on the council's own Open Space, Playing Pitch and Sports Facilities study, the 5.4 acre site could be redeveloped and still leave a surplus of allotment provision within the village. The allotments were let on a rolling one year lease making access to any grant funding challenging and despite the best efforts of the Parish Council and a very active Allotment Association, the allotments were showing signs of their age and there were long term viability concerns about the site continuing as an allotment garden into the future.

This background created the opportunity for a redevelopment of part of the site for new homes that would not only provide much needed new homes for the community, including 30% affordable but also to secure the future of the allotments within the village.

Given the existing use of the site and the obvious sensitivities of its redevelopment. Community engagement and in particular engagement with the Parish and Allotment Association were front and centre for our planning strategy.

In the run up to a planning application we met regularly with the Parish Council and Allotment Association as well as holding a formal Public Consultation Event. These meetings helped to shape our proposals for the site and continued throughout the life of the application. Initially alongside the housing development an alternative allotment site was proposed elsewhere within the village. There were understandable concerns about this from the Parish Council and Association as it would result in fragmented allotment provision in the village. As dialogue with these bodies continued, it became evident that their preference was to see the remaining allotments redeveloped with all plot holders relocated to the reconfigured site. Plans for this were developed with the Parish and Association including the detailed specification of the allotments and a new management and community building on the site.

The dialogue with the Parish Council went beyond just the new allotments with detailed discussions held about the housing mix, drainage, public open space among other subjects. The culmination was a high quality residential development for 48 homes and a reconfigured allotment site with a long list of benefits including:

30% affordable housing

50% of open market housing to be offered exclusively to residents of Wolston in the first instance;

A high quality 76 plot reconfigured allotment site with central management and community building and store;

A new 35 year lease for the allotments with minimum 20 year term;

The establishment of a £100,000 Community Benefit Fund.

This proposal secured the support of the Case Officer at Rugby Borough Council and attended Planning Committee in November 2020 where the Parish Council spoke in support of the application with the Allotment

Association providing support in writing. Despite this, members disappointingly voted to refuse planning permission for the housing site whilst somewhat ironically permitting the allotment reconfiguration. Although members did acknowledge the delivery of the reconfigured allotments were inextricably linked to the new housing.

Unperturbed by this Rosconn launched an appeal the following month. The appeal was conducted by way of virtual hearing in May 2021.

Engagement with the Parish and Association continued throughout the appeal process and we were able to develop a factual Statement of Common Ground with both parties providing helpful background for the Inspector and also agreeing that there is an over provision of allotments in Wolston and that in policy terms, the appeal site was effectively "surplus to requirements". Confident in the merits of our case, we also submitted a full costs claim against the decision taken by Rugby Borough Council. The appeal was subsequently allowed in July 2020 with our full costs claim also being successful.

Rosconn in conjunction with the Trust's agent jointly marketed the site and swiftly identified Spitfire Homes as the preferred purchaser following an extremely competitive bidding process. Given the sites ACV status, an opportunity also had to be given to local community groups to purchase the site. We continued to work very closely with the Parish Council, Spitfire and the Trust through the sale process as a raft of legal documents needed to be settled to secure the new allotments, surrender the existing lease and grant a new lease. This included a licence being granted to the Parish Council to occupy the majority of the housing site for allotment storage whilst the new allotments are delivered minimising inconvenience for plot holders.

The site is a shining example of the tenacity of the Rosconn team and our ability to engage constructively with local communities on complex sites.

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