

Hawkhurst Parish Council's Response to TWBC's Consultation on the Council's Response to Inspector's Initial Findings

Hawkhurst Parish Council (HPC) recognises the importance of TWBC having an up-to-date Local Plan. Therefore, in general, we are supportive of the decision to remove the Tudeley Village strategic site in order to move forward with the Local Plan process. However, we are mindful that this approach will necessitate an early review of the Local Plan requiring TWBC to start the process of site allocations in order to meet the housing needs for the period post 2034.

Given that Hawkhurst is the only settlement where the housing allocation has increased due to modifications (SLP Mod 4), HPC is keen to understand the process that will be used to determine future housing need.

To date, TWBC has chosen not to undertake an assessment of housing need for individual settlements when deciding on site allocations for the new Local Plan. Instead, the decisions around allocations were driven by responses to the calls for sites. This has resulted in significant development in Hawkhurst (and Cranbrook). This population growth has not been matched by infrastructure and bears no relation to employment or educational opportunities in the local area. This lends weight to the concern that there is no holistic approach to development, otherwise, surely, we would not be suffering from a lack of appropriate facilities to match the proposed growth in housing.

Demand and Need are two very different beasts. Need is focused on local workforce having to live within the area, coupled with local families urgently looking to house themselves; whilst demand is developers looking for opportunities and the same for owners of second holiday homes and portfolio renters. We are being overwhelmed by the latter.

By the lack of a joined-up approach, we are in danger of acquiring an aging population within Hawkhurst due to the lack of a range of schooling open to all, public transport to match the need to move schoolchildren, a chaotic road network choking the village today and getting worse with each new development, no public parking space (or indeed room for more), few shopping outlets and lastly a sewage and fresh water infrastructure that hardly copes with the housing we have today.

Therefore, HPC would like reassurances that any future allocations in Hawkhurst and the surrounding area will be based on genuine local need and take into account the views of our residents, who increasingly feel disillusioned with the planning process.

HPC is currently updating its Neighbourhood Development Plan and has made the decision not to allocate sites. We recognise that it is the role of TWBC to determine strategic policies, but we would wish to see more consideration given to the wishes of Hawkhurst residents, as expressed through the NDP, when it comes to determining the nature of any future allocations. This includes appropriate parking allocations for new developments. There needs to be a recognition that the vast majority of residents of Hawkhurst are reliant on private cars. Cramped parking provision results in cars and vans parking on the roads.

In terms of the modifications in Hawkhurst, HPC objects in the strongest terms to the decision to modify allocation AL/HA5 - Land to the North of Birchfield Grove. We are mindful that the Planning Committee supported the officer's recommendation to grant planning permission for this site. However, HPC and Hawkhurst residents have long opposed this proposed development. We remain convinced that this is not a suitable location for the medical centre or the housing.

We note that the stated reason for this change in the Summary of Proposed Modifications is to "*ensure delivery of the medical centre*". However, the decision to grant planning permission for application 22/02664/HYBRID means that this has not been achieved. It was expressly stated at the Committee Meeting in November 2023 that once the outline permission was granted, there was no provision to make the housing conditional on the delivery of the medical centre. The only requirement was that the land was made available with appropriate services. This is also the only requirement of the modified policy AL/HA5. Whilst HPC's preference would be for this entire allocation to be deleted and the committee's decision to grant planning permission to be revisited, at the very least, the housing should be conditional on the delivery of the medical centre.

The Local Plan Development Strategy Topic Paper - Addendum dated January 2024 asserts that "there is no other suitable site at Hawkhurst to deliver the new medical centre." There seems to be no detailed argument about why the land north of Birchfield Grove is the only site for the medical centre, simply an assertion that it is. Even the Doctors' own business case states that the Birchfield Grove site is the preferred site rather than the only site that will meet the required needs. HPC's view is that it would be better to site the medical centre with the

community hospital, land is available, and the synergies of co-location in this case are obvious. If the existing Wish Valley and Northridge surgeries are closed, most patients will drive to any new medical centre no matter where it is located so it may as well be in a place where health services can support each other.

HPC maintains its view that Birchfield Grove is not a suitable access point for this development. An industrial volume of traffic of all sorts is going to attend the new Medical Centre. This quantum of traffic cannot be accommodated safely either in Birchfield Grove or at the junction with Rye Road. How are both the future patients, staff and supporting fleet of vehicles for a centralised surgery (let alone for the 70 new houses) going to flow unrestricted into the Rye Road? The whole idea defies both belief and common sense.

Requirement 9 of the revised policy refers to the impact of traffic on the Hawkhurst crossroads and Flimwell crossroads. However, it is essential that the impact of traffic on this section of the Rye Road is given proper consideration.

Given that the access to this site is through the landscape buffer created as part of the development of Birchfield Grove, how can residents have confidence that the open space, protected landscapes etc. that contribute to the requisite Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) will not simply be eroded as the developer decides that further housing would provide a more suitable edge to the settlement?

This concern regarding the future governance of the land used to meet BNG targets, of course, applies to more than just this particular allocation.

HPC is also concerned that there appears to be no recognition that the Birchfield Grove site comprises wood pasture and parkland habitat. As a consequence, our understanding is that the baseline BNG evaluation is undervalued, raising questions over the extent of any gain that is achievable.

HPC supports the proposed modification to delete allocation AL/HA8 (March's Field at Limes Grove).