

**Submission NEBD3-1 Mr Kim Fletcher on behalf of @ Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Council and Support Weald Schooling**

**1) Please confirm the evidence base document this comment relates to.**

PS\_097 Statement of Common Ground

**To which part of the document listed in the question 1 above does this representation relate to?**

**2) Chapter and (if applicable) sub heading:**

Full document

**3) Paragraph number or appendix:**

1, 1.1, 1.3, 1.4. Para 3.1A, 3.1F, 3.1G, 3.1K, 3.1M Para 4.1point 44, para 4.5,4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.12, para 7.0

**4) Do you consider the evidence base document on which you are commenting, makes the Borough Local Plan Submission Version (2020 – 2038) (please tick or cross as appropriate):**

**Yes No**

**Legally Compliant** Not Selected Selected

**Sound** Not Selected Selected

**5) Please give details of why you consider the Borough Local Plan Submission Version (2020 – 2038) is not legally compliant or unsound. Please be as precise as possible. If you wish to support the legal compliance or soundness of the Local Plan, please also use this box to set out your comments. The text box will automatically expand if necessary.**

Our contention is that this 'statement of common ground' only considers the education of students in the immediate vicinity of Paddock Wood.

It ignores the housing developments to the East of Paddock Wood, and the children who have to travel over 10 miles to a secondary school from the rural areas of TWBC and other boroughs. These children are shoe-horned into 3 over full schools, and this has now become 'custom and practice' by Kent County Council.

It also ignores the effect of the 2022 closure of High Weald Academy in Cranbrook which had been rebuilt in 2017 for 800 places. It was reopened as a Special Education Needs school for 150 pupils from across Kent in 2022, leaving space on the campus for a new school.

There is an opportunity to a) release the pressure of numbers on Mascalls, and (b) improve the choice of education across the Weald by building a satellite on an existing school campus in Cranbrook.

**6) Please set out what modification(s) you consider necessary to make the Local Plan legally compliant or sound, having regard to the Matter you have identified in question 5 above where this relates to legal compliance or soundness. You will need to say why this modification will make the Local Plan legally compliant or sound. It will be helpful if you are able to put forward**

**your suggested revised wording of any policy or text. Please be as precise as possible. The text box will automatically expand if necessary.**

A new school in Cranbrook should be examined against the wider needs of education across the Weald and TWBC, before this plan is executed, as circumstances have changed dramatically since 2021

New School in Cranbrook

- The site large enough is available in Cranbrook and is owned by DfE
- LAT has said the site is suitable and it would be interested in running a Mascalls satellite school
- The school would be 4/5FE with possibility to expand to 6FE
- Truly inclusive community School, as per the new Labour manifesto
- To include 'skills based subjects' as needed locally and in the Labour manifesto
- To have SEND provision within the school, Expertise is already onsite - KCC has pronounced that it needs mainstream SEN provision.
- Cranbrook School (selective grammar) would work collaboratively in some subjects and sports/sports land

This is an opportunity to address the issues faced by rural communities, by creating a new school at the vanguard of educational thinking.

It would give children the start in life, choosing a pathway which engages them passionately and plays to their strengths. This also offers the opportunity for children to follow professions which are so desperately needed in our communities.

This will appeal to the new Department of Education Guidelines for a Community school and follows some pathfinding schools elsewhere in Kent..

**7) Please use this box for any other comments you wish to make. The text box will automatically expand if necessary.**

**Consultation on TWBC Local Plan, new evidence base documents:**

Heading 3: Education PS\_097a, Statement of Common Ground (august 2024)

Covering Statement:

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It also ignores the effect of the 2022 closure of High Weald Academy in Cranbrook which had been rebuilt in 2017 for 800 places. It was reopened as a Special Education Needs school for 150 pupils from across Kent in 2022, leaving space on the campus for a new school.

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Para 1.1:

The list of developers in the agreement lacks those operating elsewhere in the Borough and catchment area: eg Hill Development, Berkeley, Fernham homes, Dandara.

Para 1.3

There has not been true consultation with rural areas or neighbouring Boroughs, that send many children to Mascalls. This is despite a meeting between KCC and Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Council on April 23<sup>rd</sup> to discuss exactly this issue, when we were asked to come up with something 'innovative'.

At the meeting KCC confirmed they had no plan to deal with extra students resulting from VAT on private schools.

The following Private schools are attended by local children: Marlborough House in Hawkhurst, which will merge with Vinehall in 2025. St Ronan's in Hawkhurst, Dulwich in Cranbrook, Benenden School, Claremont in Bodiam, Bethany in Goudhurst, Sutton Valence school, Beechwood in Tunbridge Wells. It is inevitable that some pupils from these schools will swap to the state school sector, adding to the demand for places in an unplanned manner.

Para 1.4. Mascalls is planning to reduce their PAN to 8, even though there is increased pressure on secondary places across the Weald. Homewood (Tenterden) reduced their PAN, Cornwallis (Maidstone) is full with children from the developments south of Maidstone.

530 children left primary schools within 7 miles of Cranbrook in 2023, and it increases every year. 2 primary schools are due to double in size, Cranbrook and Marden.

Para 3.1. A.

KCC admit there is already a shortage of secondary school places, something we heartily agree on, even though this is the opposite of what they told us in April

Para 3.1 F.

Mascalls has a 9FE PAN (9 class entry of 30 pupils = 270), but will drop to a FE of 8, enabling them to expand with a further 3FE, taking them to an 11 form entry in September 2034 (appendix 2, part 1, page 41)

The site is not large enough take a 12 form entry.(Para 3.1 part I,) without impinging on the Persimmon land. (Para 3.1 .C)

In 2022, the children from the High Weald Academy were placed at Mascalls, Homewood, Cornwallis and Uplands (in Wadhurst). These are all 10 miles from Cranbrook but have not been identified separately. The next generation would be expected to go to a more local school than Mascalls. This would enable a reduction to a PAN of 8 at Mascalls, if there was a school elsewhere.

Para 3.1G

The indicative figures ignore completely the increase in pupil numbers attributable to housing developments elsewhere. **It focuses solely on the Paddock Wood area and that towards Tunbridge Wells**

Just 4 of the 13 rural parishes who send children to Mascalls have already had 1090 new houses completed. The Weald is busy with developers – In Cranbrook alone a further 303 are being built and a further 460 await planning permission.

#### Para 3.1 J

All the selective (Grammar) schools are already full, so there will not be places for the 182 selective pupils implied in this paragraph –  $521 - 339 = 182$

Cranbrook Grammar has added a new year group of 30, so  $182 - 30$  still leaves an extra 152 places, equivalent to 5FE

#### Para 3.1 K

The housing developments are happening NOW, so there is no point taking 2028/9 as a baseline, the primary school numbers are already increasing – LAT have announced plans to double Marden primary academy, and Cranbrook primary is supposed to be doubled in size, too. Delaying until 2028 will result in an artificially low, inaccurate, demand number.

#### Para 3.1 M

We would contend that the figures above show the demand WILL be higher as reasons 1, 2, 3 are not valid, when housing growth elsewhere is considered.

Equally, there is no allowance made for the VAT on school fees having an effect.

We are also aware of a high number of school refusers in The Weald – largely due to their experience in having to travel to very large secondary schools.

Making Mascalls bigger will only serve to exacerbate this situation. KCC said they did not have this data, or the number homeschooled, or a plan for private school pupils transferring to state education.

#### Para 4 – Implications of the Inspector's Initial Findings.

##### Para 4.1 point 44

The travel to school time is a major issue for several reasons.

1. Bus companies are unreliable and unable to provide seating for all children, leading to safety concerns.
2. Journeys can start at 07:15 at the bus stop

3. The buses are not monitored, so there are opportunities for bullying and antisocial behaviour, particularly at the beginning of a year. Primary school children, used to classes of 17 – 20 are intimidated to enter a school with a PAN of 9FE, 270 pupils in their year alone.
4. The timing of buses home preclude access to after school clubs, activities and sports.
5. Distance prevents friendship groups forming as the weekend public transport is not up to it.
6. Working parents have extra difficulties trying to collect far away children.
7. Buses are not environmentally friendly.
8. Asking a child to spend up to 2 hours per day for 5 years on a bus is not a good use of their time.
9. Long fruitless hours on a bus damages community cohesion. The idea of belonging to a neighbourhood, and therefore caring about it, is destroyed by long commutes.
10. Surveys reveal that children living in rural areas face disadvantage when compared to children living in a more urban setting when it comes to education provision
11. Surveys also record a clear disadvantage when looking at increasing distances children have to travel to and from school:

Increased levels of absenteeism/lower levels of attainment/poorer employment prospects

#### Para 4.5

All the schools mentioned are even further from the Weald than Mascalls.

The option of a standalone new school does not appear to have been considered. An early document said there was 'No place' for a new school.

Leigh Academy Trust run Snowfields, the SEN school on the old High Weald site in Cranbrook. They have indicated that there is space on the campus for a new school and a willingness to run it as a satellite of Mascalls.

This opportunity was not on the table when this planning was done, but it is now, and it needs to be explored vigorously.

#### Para 4.7

Had more consultation been done with the surrounding boroughs and parishes, the development numbers and damage done by the closure of High Weald would have been clearly recognised.

It is accepted that the once highly successful High Weald was allowed to become poorly run, so parents who could afford the bus fares, found the more appealing schools, all mentioned above. However, this left the children who had the poorest start in life and no choice of school, to remain in a failing environment. The school had to close, but it is time to start again with a different ethos.

#### Para 4.8

The idea that there was surplus capacity does not ring true. Pupils were 'shoe horned' into schools, which subsequently closed their lists. Some have thrived, but others fell by the wayside as they were not academic enough due to their poor start.

It is important to separate a desk exercise of numbers from the impact on families and future wealth when considering schools and style of education.

#### Para 4.9

Seems to admit that there were insufficient places for the HWA students so Mascalls increased their PAN to 9FE. Homewood increased, but then decreased when their Ofsted rating fell due to safeguarding issues.

It takes NO account of the huge housing development in the Weald

#### Para 4.12 / 4.13

All other schools have been ruled out, except for the lifeline afforded at the Cranbrook site, which we understand could grow into a 6FE school.

This solution offers children and families in The Weald exactly what they need (and address the issues listed against para 4.1 point 44 mentioned above). It will also reduce pressure on the other schools, especially Mascalls in Paddock Wood, and traffic in this area.

#### Para 7.0 Joint Working

There has been no joint working outside the signatories of these documents, see paragraph 1.1

The comment 'The parties are aware of local concerns about the capacity of the local education facilities and whilst it is a shared position between the parties *that none of these concerns are sound*, or make the proposed expansion of Paddock Wood unsustainable, the parties will look to work with those stakeholders and ensure the development seeks to address the concerns of existing communities' is contemptuous. It is condescending to the people who live in these areas.

It shows a mindset of relying on developers to solve societal problems, a lack of consultation or understanding of the needs of rural communities, when there are viable alternatives.

A new school in Cranbrook should be explored far more deeply before this plan is executed as the circumstances have changed dramatically since 2021

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**8) If your representation is seeking a modification, do you consider it necessary to participate at the examination hearing session when it takes place? (please tick or cross as appropriate)**

Yes, I wish to participate at the examination hearing session

**9) If you wish to participate at the examination hearing when it takes place, please outline why you consider this to be necessary.**

Education needs to be wider than just the TWBC area. Para 7 dismisses our concerns as not being sound, because there has not been consultation outside TWBC officers and local developers. The Rural areas need a voice in these discussions to clarify and challenge the desktop views.