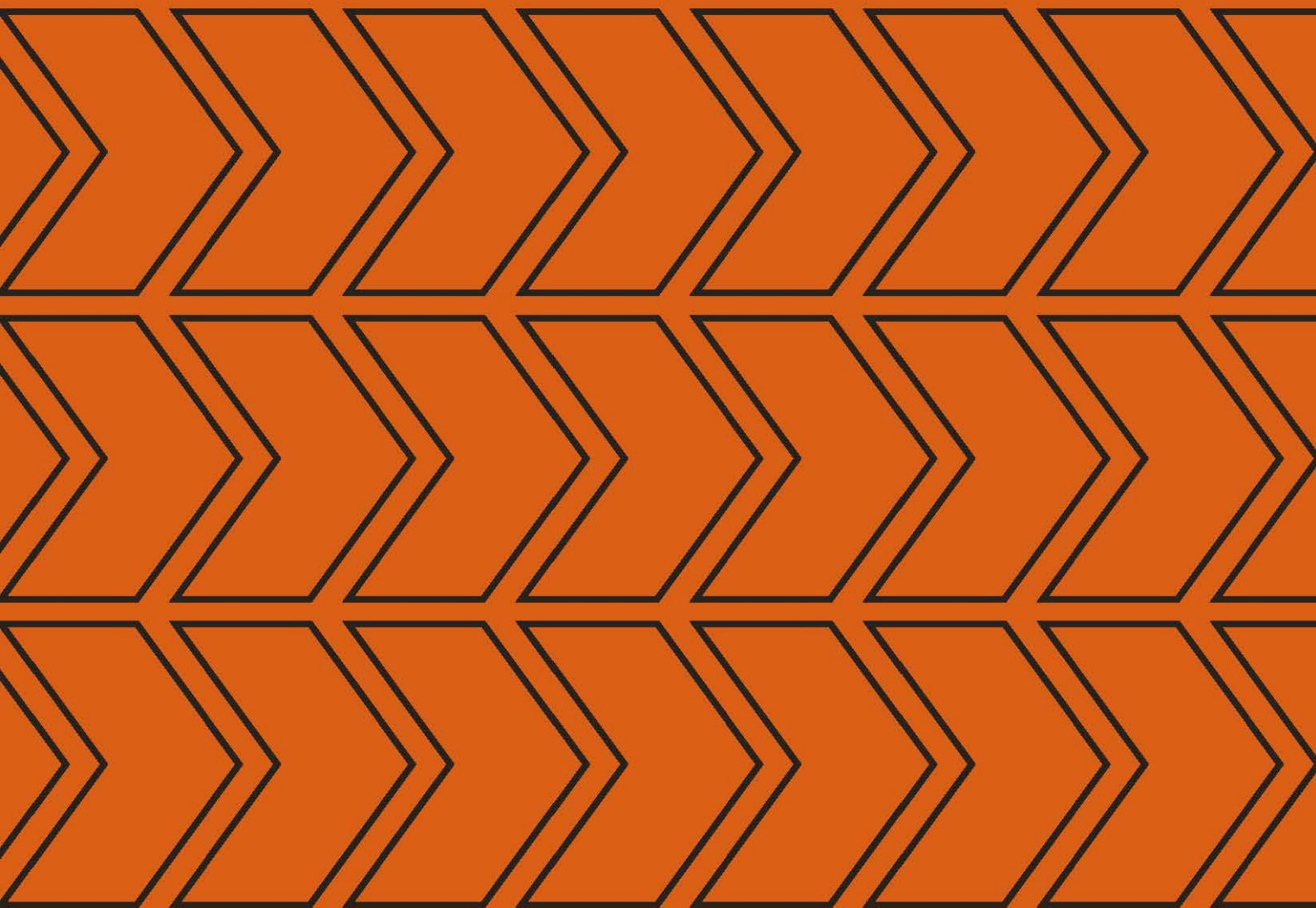
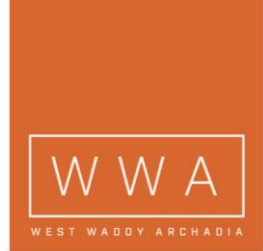


Representations on Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council's Draft Local Plan 2042 - Regulation 18 Consultation

December 2025



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TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED)

Representations on Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council's Draft Local Plan 2042 - Regulation 18 Consultation

On behalf of:

Hildenborough Parish Council

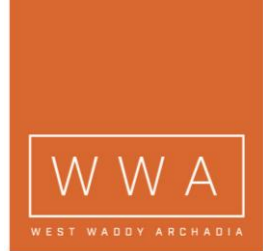
December 2025

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 These representations have been prepared by WWA on behalf of Hildenborough Parish Council in response to the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council Draft Local Plan 2024-2042 Regulation 18 Consultation.

1.2 The document sets out the key issues facing Tonbridge and Malling, putting forward a Spatial Vision and Strategic Objectives for addressing climate change and setting out the Council's Spatial Strategy for meeting future development needs, including proposed site allocations, design principles and development management policies by which planning applications will be judged.

1.3 This response has been formulated on the following emerging draft policies:

- Policy SP3: Settlement Hierarchy and General Development Principles
- Policy SP8: Managing Development in the Green Belt
- Policy SP9: Local Green Gap
- Policy CC1: Addressing Climate Change
- Policy CC7: Managing Development within Flood Risk
- Policy NE3: Landscape Character
- Policy NE6: Green and Blue Infrastructure
- Policy HE2: Listed Buildings
- Policy HE3: Conservation Areas
- Policy HE5: Historic Parks and Gardens (Designated and Non-Designated)
- Policy D2: Design Codes and Masterplans
- Policy INF1: Provision of Infrastructure and Services

1.4 These representations both comment on draft policies and the proposed allocations for Hilden Park and Hildenborough including:

- Site Allocation HI1 – 77 dwellings
- Site Allocation HI2 – 629 dwellings
- Site Allocation T03 – 30 dwellings
- Site Allocation T04 – 289 dwellings

2 NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (“the Framework”) sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

- 2.2 At the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should apply to both plan-making and decision taking (paragraph 11). For plan-making, this means:

- (a) *Plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas); and adapt to its effects;*
- (b) *Strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas, unless;*
 - i. *The application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type, or distribution of development in the plan areas; or*
 - ii. *Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework – taken as a whole.*

Plan making

- 2.3 For plan-making, this means Paragraphs 15 to 38 of the Framework relate specifically to ‘plan-making’.
- 2.4 Paragraph 15 states that the planning system should be genuinely plan-led. Plans should provide a positive vision for the future of each area including addressing housing needs.
- 2.5 Paragraph 20 requires that strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale, and quality of development, making sufficient provision for housing (including affordable housing).
- 2.6 Paragraph 36 states that plans and spatial development strategies are examined to assess whether they have been prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements, and whether they are sound. Plans are ‘sound’ if they are:
- (a) **Positively prepared** – *providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development.*
 - (b) **Justified** – *an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;*
 - (c) **Effective** – *deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and,*
 - (d) **Consistent with national policy** – *enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with policies in this Framework.*

Planning for housing

- 2.7 Paragraphs 61 to 84 relate specifically to ‘delivering a sufficient supply of homes’.
- 2.8 Paragraph 61 requires Local Planning Authorities to ensure that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay.
- 2.9 Paragraph 62 states that in determining the minimum number of homes needed, strategic policies should be informed by a local housing need assessment, conducted using the

standard method in national planning guidance as a starting point, unless exceptional circumstances justify an alternative approach which also reflects current and future demographic trends and market signals. In addition to the local housing need figure, any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas should also be considered in establishing the amount of housing to be planned for.

- 2.10 Paragraph 69 requires policy-making authorities to establish a housing requirement figure for their whole area, which shows the extent to which their identified housing need (and any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas) can be met over the plan period. Within this overall requirement, strategic policies should also set out a housing requirement for designated neighbourhood areas which reflects the overall strategy for the pattern and scale of development and any relevant allocations.
- 2.11 Paragraph 72 states that planning policies should identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites, taking into account their availability, suitability, and likely economic viability. Planning policies should identify a supply of;
- (a) *Specific, deliverable sites for years one to five of the plan period; and*
 - (b) *Specific, developable site or broad locations for growth, for years 6-10 and, where possible, for years 11-15 of the Plan.*
- 2.12 Paragraph 69 requires local planning authorities to identify land to accommodate at least 10% of their housing requirement on sites no larger than one hectare; unless it can be shown that there are strong reasons why this target cannot be achieved.
- 2.13 Paragraph 73 sets out that local planning authorities should provide compelling evidence to demonstrate that provision from unidentified sites (i.e., a windfall allowance) will comprise a reliable source of supply. This evidence should have regard to the strategic housing land availability assessment, historic windfall delivery rates and expected future trends.
- 2.14 Paragraph 77 states that supply of large numbers of new homes can be achieved through planning for larger scale development, such as new settlements or significant extensions to existing villages and towns - provided they are well located and designed and supported by the necessary infrastructure and facilities. Working with the support of their communities, and with other authorities if appropriate, strategic policy-making authorities

should identify suitable locations for such development where this can help to meet identified needs in a sustainable way. In doing so, they should:

- (a) *Consider the opportunities presented by existing or planned investment in infrastructure, the area's economic potential, and the scope for net environmental gains;*
- (b) *Ensure that their size and location will support a sustainable community, with sufficient access to services and employment opportunities within the development itself (without expecting an unrealistic level of self-containment), or in larger towns to which there is good access;*
- (c) *Set clear expectations for the quality of the development and how this can be maintained (such as by following Garden City principles), and ensure that a variety of homes to meet the needs of diverse groups in the community will be provided;*
- (d) *Provide a realistic assessment of likely rates of delivery, given the lead-in times for large scale sites, and identify opportunities for supporting rapid implementation (such as through joint ventures or locally led development corporations); and,*
- (e) *Consider whether it is appropriate to establish Green Belt around or adjoining new developments of significant size.*

2.15 In relation to the preparation of strategic policies, Paragraph 22 elaborates on the justification for these considerations. This states that where larger scale developments such as new settlements or significant extensions to existing villages and towns form part of the strategy for the area, policies should be set within a vision that looks further ahead (at least 30 years), to take into account the likely timescale for delivery.

2.16 Paragraph 78 states that strategic policies should include a trajectory illustrating the expected rate of housing delivery over the plan period, and all plans should consider whether it is appropriate to set out the anticipated rate of development for specific sites. Local planning authorities should identify and update annually a supply of specific sites, sufficient to provide a minimum of five years' worth of housing against their housing requirement set out in adopted strategic policies. The supply of specific deliverable sites should in addition include a buffer (moved forward from later in the plan period) of:

- (a) *5% to ensure choice and competition in the market for land; or*

- (b) 10% where the local planning authority wishes to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable sites through an annual position statement or recently adopted plan, to account for any fluctuations in the market during that year; or*

- (c) 20% where there has been significant under delivery of housing over the previous three years, to improve the prospect of achieving the planned supply.*

3 REPRESENTATIONS TO DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND SITE ALLOCATIONS

3.1 These representations assess the Draft Plan against the tests of soundness set out in paragraph 36 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). In accordance with the Framework, a local plan should be positively prepared, justified, effective, and consistent with national policy. Our comments below consider whether the Draft Plan meets these requirements and identify areas where it is considered to fall short.

3.2 Paragraph 36 of the NPPF requires that a plan be:

- (a) **Positively prepared** – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development.
- (b) **Justified** – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
- (c) **Effective** – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and,
- (d) **Consistent with national policy** – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with policies in this Framework.

3.3 Our detailed policy-specific comments are set out below.

Policy SP3: Settlement Hierarchy and General Development Principles

3.4 The Draft Local Plan identifies Tonbridge including Hilden Park as a Principal Service Centre and Hildenborough is categorised as a Tier 3 - Primary Village. The Plan groups settlements into 5 Tiers (Principal Service Centre, Service Centre, Primary village, Secondary Village and Other Rural Settlement) and states that development will be supported across Tiers 1–4 subject only to other policy requirements in the Draft Plan or Neighbourhood Plans. This approach effectively treats settlements of very different sizes, roles, and capacities as equivalent when it comes to planning for growth.

3.5 This lack of clear differentiation between tiers is problematic. Principal Service Centres such as Tonbridge have greater capacity to accommodate significant growth due to its

existing infrastructure, services, and facilities, whereas villages in lower tiers (such as Hildenborough) are less able to support large-scale development. By failing to recognise these differences, the Plan risks prioritising locations where development cannot be delivered sustainably.

- 3.6 Furthermore, Tonbridge contains a considerable number of brownfield and previously developed sites capable of accommodating substantial new development. The Plan's current wording does not prioritise these sites, instead allowing development to be supported equally across all tiers, bar Tier 5 – Other Rural Settlements. This approach undermines the efficient use of land, limits the potential for regeneration of urban areas, and results in unnecessary pressure on sensitive greenfield sites in the lower-tier settlements, such as Hildenborough and Hilden Park.
- 3.7 Revising the draft Plan to differentiate between settlement tiers would ensure that growth is directed to locations where it can be most sustainably delivered, supporting the efficient use of land, regeneration opportunities, and the long-term sustainability of the borough. However, the locations of development proposed and allocated in the Plan do not align with the Settlement Hierarchy, and the Parish Council therefore object to Policy SP3 on the grounds that it is not effective.
- 3.8 Paragraph 5.57 of the draft Local Plan cites that Tonbridge and Hilden Park and the Medway Gap have continued to be assessed as 'wholes' – that is they function as standalone settlements, sharing services across named areas with close relationships in both proximity, services, and accessibility. The Local Plan goes on to explain (paragraph 5.58) that *'the more sustainable settlements are the higher numbered tiers, given that there are a greater range of services and facilities more easily accessible without the need to travel by car. The settlements with less facilities are at the bottom of the hierarchy, and it is expected that in these locations most people would travel by car to access services and facilities, given that public transport is minimal in these areas also.'*
- 3.9 It is the Parish Council's view that TMBC are incorrectly classifying Hilden Park as part of Tonbridge. It is a part of Hildenborough which is a village with high car dependency (as recognised by the Sustainability Statement), relying on surrounding settlements for key services including Tonbridge Town Centre. Major housing allocations in and around Hildenborough and Hilden Park (Sites HI1, HI2, TO3 and TO4) would intensify this

pattern, increasing peak-time and school pickup/drop-off traffic, congestion, safety risks, and air-quality pressures.

3.10 Furthermore, Hilden Park should be regarded as part of Hildenborough rather than Tonbridge. Physically, the built-up area of Tonbridge ends well before reaching Hilden Park, leaving a clear landscape break that separates the town from this area. Administratively, Tonbridge is an unparished town, whereas Hilden Park falls primarily within the governance area and community sphere of Hildenborough Parish, reflecting its longstanding association with the village. Historically, Hilden Park formed part of the wider Hildenborough estate landscape, and its name itself derives from the Hildenborough manorial lands, demonstrating that its origins and evolution are tied to the village rather than the urban expansion of Tonbridge. In addition, the physical development of HP has evolved eastwards away from the village and not from Tonbridge inwards. In practical terms, residents of Hilden Park and Hildenborough orient themselves towards Hildenborough for local services, schools, transport (including Hildenborough Station), and community facilities, reinforcing the functional connection to the village. Taken together, the physical, administrative, historical, functional, and community factors all demonstrate that Hilden Park belongs to Hildenborough rather than Tonbridge.

3.11 Appendix A of the Council's 'Sustainable Settlement Study' cites that Hildenborough has the following services:

- Fibre/superfast broadband
- Preschool/nursery
- Stocks Green Primary School
- BP/Harvest Energy Petrol Station
- Village Hall
- Westwood playground
- One Stop convenience Store
- Hildenborough Medical Centre
- Thomsons Pharmacy
- Post Office
- Library
- Other areas of open space
- St Johns Church
- Indoor Sports facilities
- Sackville Secondary School
- Pubs/cafes
- Employment areas
- Bus services

- 3.12 However, whilst the above may be a fair assessment of the services available at the current time at Hildenborough, Stocks Green Primary School, Stocks Green Nursery School, BP, The Flying Dutchman (which has not traded as a pub for 12+ months) and the Hilden Manor pub/restaurant are **all in Hilden Park**. And notably Sackville is an independent co-ed school for c. 200 students and not a multi form entry secondary school. Moreover, some of the existing Hildenborough facilities – One Stop and the Pharmacy for example - are likely to physically shift towards Tonbridge/Hilden Park if the proposed HI2 & TO4 Allocations proceed (because they would essentially both be extensions to Hilden Park); and that, in turn, **could seriously harm the vitality and character of the historic heart of the village**. The Parish Council therefore requests clear justification for Hildenborough’s categorisation within the settlement hierarchy, taking into account both planned growth and the implications for accessibility to key services.
- 3.13 In summary, the Draft Plan’s proposed allocations do not align with the settlement hierarchy or the capacity of settlements to accommodate growth. Tonbridge, as a Principal Service Centre, should be prioritised for larger allocations, while Hildenborough’s capacity is limited and should be treated with caution to protect local identity, sustainability, and the Green Belt. The proposed allocations fail to take adequate account of Hildenborough’s limited capacity and low sustainability, increasing car dependency and infrastructure pressures while undermining both the village’s identity and the integrity of the Green Belt. The Local Plan should therefore reconsider the scale and location of allocations in and around Hildenborough to ensure that growth is directed toward settlements capable of accommodating it sustainably.
- 3.14 Notwithstanding the above concerns, the Council’s approach in delegating allocations to Neighbourhood Plan Areas also lacks consistency as not all designated Neighbourhood Plan Areas have been assigned Housing Requirement Figures. Paragraph 70 of the NPPF (December 2024) states that within the overall housing requirement figure, “*strategic* policies should also set out a housing requirement for designated neighbourhood areas which reflects the overall strategy for the pattern and scale of development and any relevant allocations”. Hildenborough Parish is a designated ‘Neighbourhood Plan Area’ and has not been given a housing requirement figure. The Parish Council formally requested it on 11th July 2025 and The Council responded on 1st August saying: ‘*we have had some delays in our evidence base work and currently do*

not have sufficient information to be able to calculate an indicative figure for you. We anticipate having the evidence needed to do this in September and would appreciate your forbearance until such time.' The Parish Council chased The Council on 30th September, and they responded on 3rd October as follows: *'The report pack regarding the sites for Hildenborough will be published 1 week before the Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee meeting – which you will be able to locate at the below link from the 14th onwards'*.

- 3.15 NPPF Para 69 states that within this overall requirement, strategic policies should also set out a housing requirement for designated neighbourhood areas which reflects the overall strategy for the pattern and scale of development and any relevant allocations. It is a requirement for The Council to give The Parish Council the housing requirement figure for the Hildenborough Neighbourhood Area. Para 70 of the NPPF also states that where it is not possible to provide a requirement figure for a neighbourhood area, the local planning authority should provide an indicative figure. This figure should take into account factors such as the latest evidence of local housing need, the population of the neighbourhood area and the most recently available planning strategy of the local planning authority. The Council should therefore give The Parish Council their 'best estimate' if they cannot give the precise figure. For this reason, Policy SP3 is not currently consistent with national policy.
- 3.16 The Parish Council therefore asks for the Draft Settlement Hierarchy to be amended as follows:
- i. *Hilden Park* is removed from '*Tonbridge*' in the list of Principal Service Centres
 - ii. *Hildenborough* is removed from the list of Tier 3 Principal Villages
- 3.17 This would reflect reality and fully comply with national planning policy as far as Hildenborough and Hilden Park is concerned. And for the avoidance of doubt, the development plan should also make it clear that for Green Belt Purposes '*Tonbridge*' is a 'large built-up areas' and '*Hildenborough and Hilden Park*' a 'small town/settlements',

and if pertinent, Purposes b, c and d (as the case may be) are to be applied to any proposals affecting Hildenborough and Hilden Park.

- 3.18 Policy SP3 is currently unsound as it is not effective and not consistent with national policy

Policy SP8: Managing Development in the Green Belt

- 3.19 Policy SP8 sets out a detailed list of local criteria against which development proposals will be considered, to ensure that where development does take place, that it is high quality, well designed, and sustainable.
- 3.20 However, the proposed site allocations do not reflect, and in several cases directly contradict, the conclusions of the Council’s own Green Belt Assessment. The Green Belt Assessment forms a core component of the Local Plan evidence base. Its purpose is to provide an objective, transparent and consistent appraisal of how parcels of land perform against the five purposes of Green Belt as set out in national policy.
- 3.21 Sites identified for allocation, such as HI2 and TO3, are assessed in the Green Belt Assessment as making a strong contribution to key Green Belt purposes, including preventing the merging of neighbouring settlements; safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and preserving the setting and special character of settlements. Despite these findings, the Plan allocates such sites without a clear or reasoned explanation as to why their assessed Green Belt harm has been overridden. There is no robust audit trail demonstrating how the conclusions of the Green Belt Assessment have been weighed in the site selection process.
- 3.22 As a result, the allocations appear to be policy-led rather than evidence-led. The disconnect between the evidence base and the proposed allocations indicates that the Plan is not justified. The Local Planning Authority cannot reasonably commission such evidence and then disregard its conclusions without clear, logical, and proportionate reasoning. Selective reliance on evidence undermines the soundness of the Plan.
- 3.23 The National Planning Policy Framework is clear that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, which must be fully evidenced and justified through the preparation or updating of plans (paragraph 145). A Green Belt Assessment is a principal tool for testing whether such exceptional circumstances exist. Where the

Assessment concludes that land performs an important Green Belt function, allocating that land for development requires particularly compelling justification.

- 3.24 In addition, paragraph 147 of the NPPF requires local planning authorities to demonstrate that they have fully examined all reasonable options for meeting identified development needs before considering Green Belt release. This includes maximising the use of brownfield land, optimising densities in sustainable locations, and exploring non-Green Belt alternatives. Where sites that perform strongly against Green Belt purposes are allocated, the Plan must clearly explain why less harmful alternatives have been discounted. The absence of such an explanation suggests that the Green Belt Assessment has not been properly applied.
- 3.25 While the draft Plan places significant reliance on the proposed strategic allocation at Borough Green, the Parish Council recognise that this site is challenging. The site lies within the Green Belt and is subject to a number of constraints, including extensive areas of current and former mineral extraction, with mineral permissions remaining in place on parts of the site until at least 2030. In addition, the site is dependent on the delivery of major strategic infrastructure, including a new relief road linking the A25 (Ightham bypass) to the A20, alongside supporting community and employment infrastructure. The timing, funding and certainty of this infrastructure have not been adequately demonstrated.
- 3.26 For these reasons, the Local Plan fails the tests of soundness set out in paragraph 36 of the NPPF. The allocations within the Parish are not justified, as some are not supported by the conclusions of the Green Belt Assessment and they are not consistent with national policy due to the failure to demonstrate exceptional circumstances for Green Belt release.
- 3.27 The Draft Plan should therefore be amended either to remove allocations that conflict with the Green Belt Assessment or provide a robust and transparent justification explaining why other sites identified for release are required and why less harmful alternatives cannot meet identified development needs. In the absence of such changes, the proposed Green Belt releases should not proceed.
- 3.28 Policy SP8 is unsound as it is inconsistent with The National Planning Policy Framework.

Policy SP9: Local Green Gap

- 3.29 The Parish Council wishes to designate the area between Tonbridge and Hilden Park as a Local Green Gap in line with Policy SP9. The purpose of this designation is to retain the separate identities of the two settlements, prevent coalescence, and protect the long-term openness of the countryside between them. A Green Gap, would ensure that Tonbridge's built-up area does not physically merge with Hilden Park and Hildenborough, preserving the distinct character and setting of each community.
- 3.30 Within this proposed Green Gap, restrictive policies would apply, meaning that development would only be supported if it demonstrably maintains the integrity of the gap. Any proposals in this area would be expected to contribute positively to the landscape, biodiversity, or recreational value of the land, consistent with the criteria set out under the draft Policy SP9. This approach aligns with the strategy used for other settlements, such as Kings Hill, West Malling, and East Malling, where Local Green Gaps are designated to safeguard settlement patterns and prevent the erosion of local identity.
- 3.31 The Parish Council seeks to extend the Local Green Gap principle to the Tonbridge - Hildenborough and Hilden Park corridor to protect openness, community separation, and landscape quality, ensuring that both areas retain their distinctiveness and that any future development is carefully controlled.

Policy CC1: Addressing Climate Change

- 3.32 The PPG sets out that any local requirements for a building's sustainability and for zero carbon buildings should be based on robust credible evidence and assessed for impacts on viability.
- 3.33 Paragraph 6.34 and Policy CC1 seek to place a responsibility on the Plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address the causes of climate change, and this follows through into subsequent policies (CC4 and CC5). However, the two most significant interventions to deliver that objective would be reducing energy consumption in the existing building stock, and reducing total road traffic by distance travelled. Since the Plan does not have policies that would implement either of those outcomes, the net outcome of the Plan is likely to be to increase carbon emissions through the additional road traffic

associated with new development, unless that development is re-directed to existing built up areas, in particular Tonbridge Town centre.

- 3.34 As drafted, Policy CC1 aims for '*Prioritisation of brownfield land and reuse of existing buildings, structures and materials where available and feasible, minimising waste and maximising reuse of recycled materials during construction and designing for the reuse of materials at end-of-life strategy in accordance with Circular Economy Policy CC2*' yet the effectiveness of Policy CC1 is likely to be compromised **as the Plan currently has no policy for maximising the use of brownfield land, largely ruling it out as a source of land supply**. Additionally, many of the housing allocations are on sites, including HI1, HI2, TO3 and TO4, for which the car will inevitably be the principal mode of travel.
- 3.35 We agree with these objectives, but they must be supported by policies prioritising the regeneration of allocated brownfield sites in urban locations first, like Tonbridge Town Centre.
- 3.36 As drafted, Policy CC3 includes the requirement for all major applications to be supported by a full Energy and Climate Change Statement utilising accurate methods for operational energy use prediction. This requirement is also considered to be impractical and disproportionate in the case of an outline application where matters of appearance, layout and scale have been reserved for future determination under a reserved matters application. In such cases it is not feasible to utilise accurate methods to predict operational energy use. We previously recommended that the wording of the policy is reviewed in this context and the requirement for a full energy statement utilising accurate methods for operational energy use prediction should apply only where details of appearance, layout and scale are being sought for approval.
- 3.37 This Policy is currently unsound as it is inconsistent with the National Planning Policy Framework, and it is not appropriately justified.

Policy CC6: Water Efficiency

- 3.38 The Parish Council supports Policy CC6: Water Efficiency.
- 3.39 National policy states that 110 litres per person per day (l/p/d) is sufficient in water stressed areas. The Parish Council welcomes the fact that The Council are not seeking to introduce lower standards ahead of these, recognising that a consistent national

approach is the best way of ensuring improved standards whilst maintaining the delivery of new homes.

- 3.40 Whilst it is important for water companies to reduce the abstraction of potable water, the impact of new homes on abstraction is likely to be minimal with far greater gains being achieved through the prevention of leaks and improvements to the water efficiency of existing properties to ensure that they are as efficient as those built to the current standard of 110 litres (lpd).

Policy CC7: Managing Development within Flood Risk Areas

- 3.41 The Parish Council have no objection to Policy CC8 as drafted.
- 3.42 Paragraph 6.90 cites that The Council has undertaken a Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment which advises that the borough is at risk from fluvial, tidal, ground water, surface water, and reservoir flooding. Further work to understand flood risk will need to be progressed to help inform the Regulation 19 Pre-Submission Local Plan as Required.

Policy NE3: Landscape Character

- 3.43 Supporting Policy Text cites that all major development proposals must be supported by a Landscape Appraisal. Landscape assessments are undertaken using methodology and guidance from the Landscape Institute’s published Guidance for Landscape and Visual Assessment GVLIA3 2013 and the criteria for undertaking an LVIA are considerably more onerous than for a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA). Within an LVIA, the assessor is required to identify ‘significant’ effects in accordance with the requirements of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2017, whilst an LVA does not require a determination of ‘significance’ and may generally hold less detail. The Guidance does not make reference to Landscape Appraisals.
- 3.44 It is considered reasonable for the draft Policy NE3 to require the submission of an LVIA in support of all major applications, particularly given the specific nature of the allocations which encompass land released from the Green Belt.

Policy NE6: Green and Blue Infrastructure

- 3.45 Policy NE6 should require that proposals for major development must be accompanied by an acceptable Green Blue Infrastructure (GBI) plan for the site in accordance with a GBIS (Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy) and the Master Plan for the site in

accordance with the relevant Area Strategy. This should include stewardship arrangements for not less than 30 years to cover maintenance, management, and funding arrangements.

Policy HE3: Conservation Areas

3.46 The Parish Council acknowledges that a programme of reviewing the existing Conservation Area Appraisals and preparing new Conservation Area Appraisals for the few remaining areas which currently do not have an appraisal in place, is underway and will continue over the plan period. The Parish Council want to play an active part in the review of the Hildenborough Conservation Areas. And seriously consider the extension of the Hildenborough Village Conservation Area to afford better protection to the Listed Buildings lying to the south of the B245.

Policy HE5: Historic Parks and Gardens (Designated and Non – Designated)

- 3.47 The Parish Council have no objection in principle to Policy HE5 as drafted.
- 3.48 The Parish Council welcomes the acknowledgement that Non-Designated Historic Parks and Gardens are also relevant and worthy of protection. The specific reference made in Paragraph 8.47 relating to the non-designated Historic Parks and Gardens which are contained within the Kent Gardens Compendium is welcomed.
- 3.49 The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens (KCHPG) for Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, which is supported by TMBC, Kent Gardens Trust and English Heritage, has not produced a document for Foxbush and Mountains, such as those produced by Kent County Council for other locally registered parks and gardens on the KCHPG. The NDHA forms the setting of a number of Grade II listed buildings, including the former country houses of Foxbush and Mountains from which the NDHA takes its name.
- 3.50 It is odd that no reference has been made to the NDHA within the Heritage Impact Assessment which forms part of the Local Plan evidence base, particularly given the weight accorded to the designation in the assessment of planning application

21/02831/FL at Fosse Bank School. The Conservation Officer’s consultee response considered the proposal’s impact on the Historic Park and Gardens and cites:

‘The development as proposed would have, of course, a direct impact on the historic park and garden. *Though the statement identifies nature of harm (permanent and sizeable new built form) it then discusses mitigation as though this could negate that harm, and states that the cumulative harm of the school campus and C3 development would be of a moderate order of magnitude, though not fatal to its significance; it also states that harm would be limited, and finally that the NHDA would be sustained (in accordance with the NPPF definition of conservation). Paragraph 203 does not include an assessment of overall planning balance, but rather a ‘balanced judgment will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset’. As with the setting of Mountains, this proposal fundamentally alters the character of the open space of parkland and is a permanent change which includes severance of ownership and change of use. **Therefore, in our view, a not insignificant amount of harm would be caused.**’ Our emphasis underlined.*

- 3.51 The Parish Council concurs with this view and pointed out at the time that the applicants had caused considerable harm to the Historic Parks and Gardens prior to submitting their application. The Parish Council are therefore mystified why The Council are now proposing to cover the entirety of the Historic Park and Gardens with new homes, and fundamentally, irretrievably, and permanently alter the character of the gardens and open space of parkland? **If these Heritage assets are relevant and worthy of protection, then they must be protected and the new homes must be built elsewhere.** And if they are worthy of protection then they should be incorporated into the Hildenborough Village Conservation Area to afford them the additional protection they deserve.
- 3.52 The Parish Council would ask that subsequent studies should provide clarity on the specific special character to ensure that any development proposals affecting the setting and /or views into and out of any Historic Parks and Gardens should have particular regard to detrimental effects.

Policy D2: Design Codes and Masterplans

- 3.53 Hildenborough Parish Council acknowledges the importance the Government attaches to improving the design of new homes and neighbourhoods. Design reviews and Design Codes can prove to be a valuable part of this.
- 3.54 Policy D2 requires the submission of a masterplan for all sites for significant non-residential development submitted in either full or outline. Design Codes are required for large sites as identified in the spatial strategy and on the Proposals Map (encouraged developments of 100 or more dwellings) and schemes proposing 500 or more dwellings will be referred to a design review panel.
- 3.55 The Parish Council consider that Design Codes should be required for all applications over 50 dwellings to ensure a consistent, high-quality approach to placemaking, architectural character, layout, and landscape integration. Furthermore, Design Reviews should be mandatory for all schemes of more than 50 dwellings. This approach is particularly important given the scale and sensitivity of the housing allocations now proposed, many of which are located on existing Green Belt sites. These sites will require careful consideration to ensure that the design of new development is appropriate, sensitive to the surrounding landscape, and well-integrated with existing communities.
- 3.56 The scale and location of these allocations mean that new development will have a substantial and long-term impact on the character and setting of the surrounding area. A robust and transparent design process, incorporating Design Codes and Design Reviews, is therefore essential to secure outcomes that are contextually appropriate, sustainable, and sympathetic to local landscape and settlement patterns. Requiring Design Codes and mandatory Design Reviews for schemes over 50 dwellings will help ensure that the number of dwellings delivered through these allocations is designed to a high standard, respects the sensitive Green Belt context, reinforces local distinctiveness, and results in high-quality, well-designed places for future residents.
- 3.57 The PPG (paragraph 017) identifies design review as a useful tool for improving design quality and notes that it should be proportionate, it is important to recognise that the significance of a development is not solely determined by scale. In the case of the proposed Green Belt allocations, the combination of site sensitivity and the number of dwellings justifies a clear requirement for both Design Codes and Design Reviews. A blanket application for smaller or less sensitive sites may be unreasonable, but for developments over 50 dwellings in this context, the policy is proportionate, necessary,

and justified to ensure that design outcomes are high quality and fully responsive to their setting.

3.58 The Policy is contrary to National Planning Policy.

Policy INF1: Provision of Infrastructure and Services

- 3.59 Kent County Council's Early Years and Childcare Sufficient Report 2025 notes a shortfall in the availability of such places in Tonbridge North and Hildenborough which has one of the lowest proportion of children accessing a place within the same district as their home address. Additionally, the most recent figures cite that for children aged 3 and 4 (the funded early education years), there is a shortage of places. This further suggests that some families may need to travel outside Hildenborough or use alternative providers.
- 3.60 The Interim Infrastructure Delivery Plan (2025) cites that the total primary need arising from developments in the area (we presume Hildenborough and Hilden Park though the Delivery Plan does not explicitly explain) is 5.8FE. However, the Regulation 18 Consultation provides no clear direction as to whether there is capacity available at existing schools to accommodate new pupils and/ or whether the provision of new residential development as part of the proposed Site Allocations would stimulate the provision of new schools and or school places.
- 3.61 No analysis is provided of the available school places by primary school across the borough. This is critical, as the acceptable commute for primary school aged children is significantly smaller than for secondary schools and other purposes. Any new housing development must be supported by accessible primary school provision. It is not sufficient for there to be available primary school spaces somewhere in the borough, the spaces must be in a school in reasonable proximity from the proposed housing.
- 3.62 The draft Plan cites that a primary school is proposed to be secured at Grange Farm site, North Tonbridge to provide additional capacity arising from developments in North Tonbridge and Hildenborough.
- 3.63 Additionally, the Delivery Schedule reports a proposal to expand existing primary school provision at South Tonbridge, but it does not identify which one on the basis that such

identification would need to be subject to feasibility work. The Interim Delivery Schedule cites that *‘Further work will be undertaken to inform the Regulation 19 Local Plan by KCC to confirm when and where necessary to clarify the above requirements’*.

- 3.64 Potential solutions to consider would include expanding the capacity of one of the Hildenborough Primary Schools to 2FE. The Parish Council understands that expanding Stocks Green Primary School is feasible but expanding Hildenborough CoE school is not.
- 3.65 It is unclear why The Council have not apportioned any specific primary or secondary school capacity within any of the allocations at this point. The Parish Council asks that the Council assess in more detail each of the Site’s impacts with the preparation of a health impact assessment and an educational provision assessment for each residential allocation to inform decision making at this stage of the Plan process.
- 3.66 The Policy is currently contrary to National Planning Policy.

Comments on the Proposed Development Allocation of Site HI1

- 3.67 Site HI1 is proposed for release from the Green Belt despite planning constraints remaining unresolved. The adopted NPPF requires exceptional circumstances, robust evidence, and a demonstration that all reasonable alternatives have been exhausted before Green Belt land is released. In the case of HI1, this has not yet been demonstrated.

The Green Belt Assessment conclusions are flawed and inconsistent with national policy.

- 3.68 The GBA assesses HI1 in isolation and recommends it as a potential release. This conclusion is based heavily on the presence of “washed over” development to the east and west and on perceived visual enclosure. HI1 forms part of the open rural setting of Hildenborough, and the Site’s release would contribute to outward incremental sprawl northwards along what is essentially a narrow (just 4.9M wide) rural country road.
- 3.69 **The GBA concludes that the Site is part of a sub-area that performs strongly against the NPPF purposes and its release would contribute to incremental outward sprawl.**
- 3.70 The Parish Council understand that altering Green Belt boundaries requires the Council demonstrating ‘exceptional circumstances’ and the Parish Council doubt that the Council’s case will stand up to scrutiny in this instance. The *‘washed over development’*

to the east for example, comprises the Grade II Listed St Raphael Medical Centre and Gardens (now known as Hollenden Park Hospital), and the ‘washed over’ development to the west 3 tennis courts on the recreation ground and a handful of rural buildings one would expect to find in the countryside (see Figure1 below). And two recent (May 2024) Appeal Decisions nearby on the former Gatehouse Nursery site in Coldharbour Lane, adjacent to the northeastern boundary of the St Raphael Centre, appear to support the Parish Council’s view.

3.71 Both applications proposed the removal of the former nursery buildings and polytunnels, and the erection of 2 & 4 new homes, respectively. And the Planning Inspector stated the following when dismissing both Appeals:

*‘28. The appellant considers the proposals to be a high quality, attractive design which would not harm the character and appearance of the site or the surrounding area. However, **this lack of harm is a neutral factor which would not weigh for or against the proposed development**’.*

*‘29. The proposals would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt in that it would result in new buildings within the Green Belt **which do not fall under any of the listed exceptions**. The Framework establishes that **substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt**, and the development **should not be approved except in very special circumstances**. **Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm are clearly outweighed by other Considerations**’.*

*‘30. I find that the other considerations in this case **do not clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt, in terms of a loss to openness and inappropriateness that I have identified**. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development in the Green Belt **do not exist**. Therefore, the development in both appeals conflicts with Policy CP3 of the CS which seeks to protect the Green Belt, along with paragraphs 152, 153 and 154 of the Framework’ (again, our emphasis).*



Figure 1: Aerial photograph of Site HI1. Note: the former Gatehouse Nursery site is partially visible in the top right-hand corner of the Photograph.

Flood risk evidence is incomplete and insufficient for allocation.

3.72 Although HI1 lies within Flood Zone 1, the Site and the adjacent section of Riding Lane both suffer badly from Surface Water Flooding, particularly during wet winter months. This is due to the naturally high-water table and to two brooks on the western side of Riding Lane converging in the north-eastern corner of the Recreation Ground, before crossing under Riding Lane and running north along the western boundary of the Site before turning east and continuing along the northern site boundary and then becoming a tributary of Hilden Brook. And Figure 2, below, shows the Annual Risk of Surface Water

flooding in his area pictorially (Source – The Government Website, and The Environment Agency’s updated (January 2025) National Surface-Water Flood Risk Data)

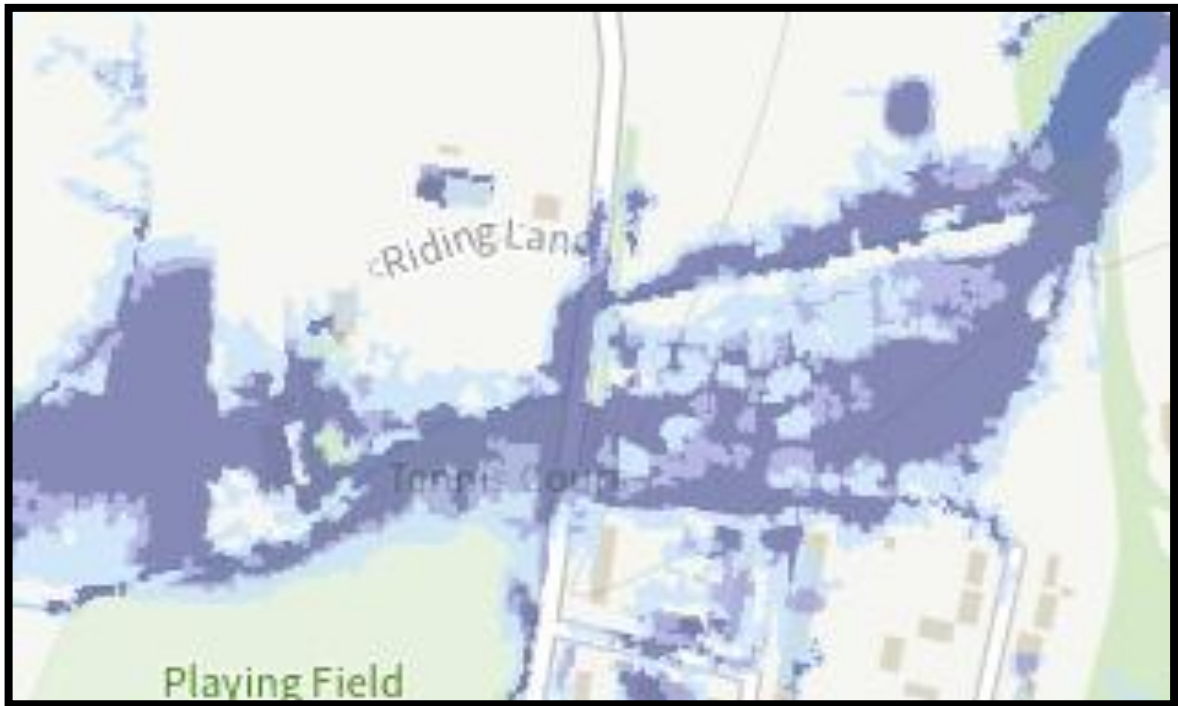


Figure 2: Annual Risk of Surface Water Flooding (Key High Risk: Dark Blue, Medium Risk: Mid Blue and Low Risk: Light Blue)

3.73 The Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment identifies HI1 as requiring further testing through a Level 2 SFRA. **Importantly, the SFRA scoping exercise categorises HI1 as ‘Least Preferable’ and states that ‘safe access and egress is not possible.’ This is a critical constraint.** Until a full Level 2 SFRA is completed, The Council cannot demonstrate that the Site is developable, deliverable, or safe over its lifetime. Allocating a site where fundamental flood-risk questions are unresolved is premature and contrary to the NPPF requirement to steer development to areas at lowest flood risk

Other Ground Risks

3.74 The Parish Council understands from former and current residents of the Riding Park Estate, that this Site was formally marshland and now houses the underground cess pits that serve the Riding Park Estate. The Parish Council have been unable to substantiate

this in the time available, but The Council must establish the full facts before confirming the allocation, because both issues could potentially rule the Site out.

Heritage considerations require further assessment.

- 3.75 HI1 lies adjacent to the Grade II Listed Hollenden Park Farmhouse, and the Grade II Listed St Raphael Medical Centre and Gardens (now known as Hollenden Park Hospital). However preliminary desk-based analysis suggests that intervisibility may be limited and mitigation might be possible, but this would need to be confirmed.

Access constraints and transport impacts remain unresolved

- 3.76 Access to the Site is proposed from Riding Lane, a semi-rural road lacking footways, street lighting and cycle infrastructure. This raises some serious concerns about pedestrian access, cyclist safety and the ability of the Site to support sustainable travel. At the allocation stage the Local Plan must already demonstrate that no “insuperable” highway problems exist, and the current Strategic Transport Assessment has **not confirmed this**. And that’s a concern, because we are aware of at least two previous attempts to redevelop this site (in 1973 & 1997, respectively) which have both been refused on **Green Belt and Highways grounds**
- 3.77 Moreover, the proposed site allocation is 77 dwellings and at the very least that would require a secondary site access for emergency vehicles. And it’s very doubtful that could be safely accommodated on Riding Lane too.
- 3.78 A former farm gate adjacent to the Riding Park Estate in the south-eastern corner of the Site – where the red arrow is pointing in Figure 1 – could potentially be re-opened and utilised for this purpose. However, there is now a row of mature trees growing on the Estate side of this former entrance, and ownership of the land on which the trees are growing is uncertain. And the Riding Park Residents are aware of this possibility and are strongly against it; and parking on the Estate is at a premium, particularly overnight and at weekends, and during these periods vehicles park on both sides of the Estate roads and the gap between the parked vehicles is ‘tight’; and if vans are parked on both sides of the road the gap may not be wide enough for fire engines to get through.
- 3.79 Of more concern is the width of Riding Lane, and the potential impacts the additional traffic associated with the development would have, particularly in the proximity of the pharmacy and library (where traffic is already effectively reduced to single lane due to

parked vehicles), the busy B245 road junction, and Hildenborough CoE School during pickup and drop off times.

- 3.80 Therefore, The Council’s detailed Transport Assessment must be carried out as soon as possible to establish if these significant transport and accessibility issues can be satisfactorily overcome or are insurmountable.

Landscape & Biodiversity harm is understated

- 3.81 The Landscape Sensitivity Assessment acknowledges that although parts of the northern edge of Hildenborough have a residential context, development at HI1 would create some notable adverse effects on key viewpoints, particularly from site access points. The Parish Council concurs with this view, particularly if the trees and hedgerow along the Riding Lane frontage need to be removed to facilitate clear sight lines and a new footpath to make the site sustainable.
- 3.82 In the wider context of Kent, Hildenborough’s broader area is recognised as being strategically important for the conservation of Great Crested Newts (GCNs), a European Protected Species. HI1 Site straddles four of Natural England’s/Defra’s ‘*Core Strategic Opportunity Areas*’ (CSOA’s) where ‘*GCNs have been found & recorded during surveys as part of the GCN District Level Licensing Scheme*’; and the Site is also surrounded by other CSOA’s. The Scheme’s aims is to effectively connect GCN populations, increase numbers and improve habitats; and The Parish Council & Kent County Council both supported a planning application (TM/23/01695/FL) by Hollanden Park Oast to construct a new 200m² pond for GCN’s on a ‘*wildflower meadow*’ immediately to the north of the Site (subsequently approved & constructed). And to put the location of the new pond into context, it is situated approximately 60m NNE of the smaller of the two ponds that are

visible at the top of Figure 1, and the larger (partially hidden by trees) and smaller ponds themselves are sited approximately 25m & 50m north of the Site boundary, respectively.

- 3.83 The confirmed presence of GCN's is a material planning consideration and has significant implications for the developability of Site Allocation HI1.

Conclusion

- 3.84 The Parish Council have reviewed the HI1 Site allocation with an open mind and can understand how it could have been deemed '*suitable for development*' by Officers carrying out a predominantly desk-based analysis, and unfamiliar with the Site's nuances.
- 3.85 But the site-specific issues are such that The Parish Council doubts the Site will pass The Council's own detailed site analysis in advance of the Regulation 19 Consultation, which for the avoidance of doubt must include a stringent viability test and confirmation that the necessary infrastructure improvements will be funded and delivered in good time.
- 3.86 The Parish Council will review the Level 2 SFRA, and the detailed transport analysis when it is available for further consideration of the Site's suitability for allocation.

Comments on the Proposed Development Allocation of Site HI2

- 3.87 **The Parish Council strongly and unequivocally objects to Site Allocation HI2.**

The allocation is contrary to National Policy and is unjustified.

- 3.88 Site HI2 is proposed for Green Belt release in the emerging Local Plan despite clear evidence from the Council's own commissioned Green Belt Assessment (GBA) that most of the land performs a strong Green Belt function. National policy requires that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where *exceptional circumstances* exist and where the harm has been fully assessed and justified. In the case of HI2, the Council's evidence directly contradicts the decision to release this land. **The Parish Council therefore strongly objects to the allocation as it is not justified, is not consistent with national policy, and cannot be considered sound.**

Green Belt Harm Is Clearly Identified in the Evidence Base

- 3.89 The Council's own Green Belt Assessment shows that the majority of HI2 should not be released. Sub-parcels HI-02 and HI-03 (as shown at Figure 3 below) are explicitly identified as having a strong overall contribution to the Green Belt and consequently are **not recommended for further consideration.** The Assessment goes further by stating

that releasing HI-02 alone would nearly result in Tonbridge merging with Hildenborough, significantly undermining the Green Belt’s essential role in preventing sprawl. Releasing HI-02 in combination with HI-03 would, according to the Assessment, lead directly to the physical merging of the two settlements, creating an irregular and indefensible Green Belt boundary and harming the integrity of the wider area. It is evident that these parcels play a critical role in separating Tonbridge, Hilden Park, and Hildenborough.

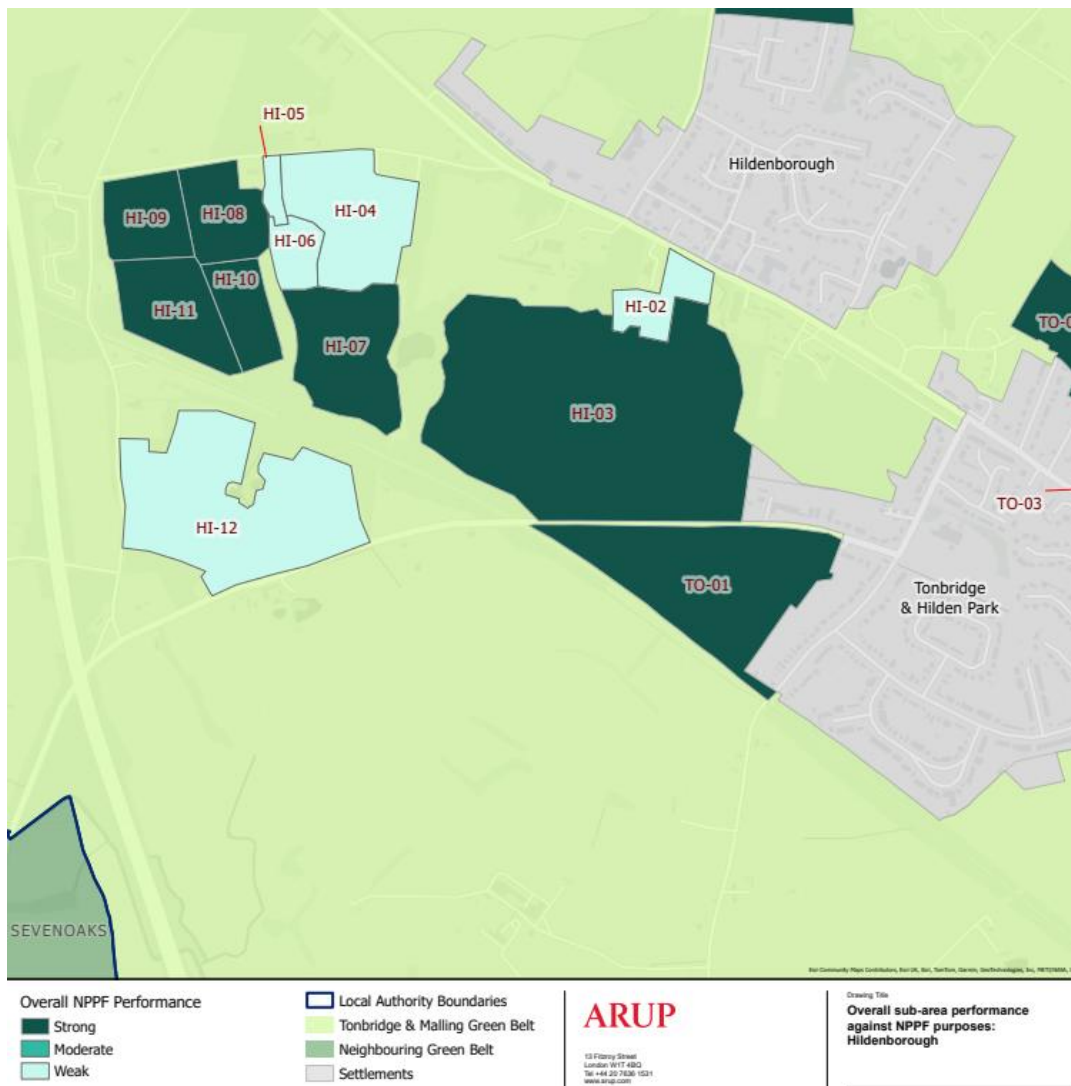


Figure 3: Extract from Green Belt Assessment

3.90 Despite this, the Council has included both parcels in the allocation without justification and runs directly counter to the findings of the Council’s own evidence. While TO-01 performs slightly less strongly, it remains integral to the openness of the wider Green Belt

and its removal would compound the cumulative harm. It is for these reasons that the Parish Council strongly objects to their proposed allocation.

Flood Risk Concerns and an Incomplete Evidence Base

3.91 Significant parts of HI2 fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3, and there is additional risk from surface-water flooding. **The Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment identifies the eastern portion of the site as one of the “Least Preferable” locations for development and concludes that safe access and egress cannot be achieved.** This is a fundamental constraint that directly affects the ability of the site to comply with national planning policy. Moreover, the evidence base is incomplete: the site requires a Level 2 SFRA before any conclusions can be reached regarding its suitability. Allocating the site in advance of this essential work is premature and unjustified. The Parish Council therefore strongly objects to Site Allocation HI2 on this basis too.

Significant Heritage Constraints Are Overlooked

3.92 Site Allocation HI2 contains land with recognised heritage sensitivity and lies adjacent to multiple designated and non-designated heritage assets. The Heritage Impact Risk Assessment which forms part of the evidence base identifies sub-parcels within the site as falling within the Moderate Risk Category, where *“harm to heritage assets would remain even after mitigation”*. Despite this conclusion the Heritage Assessment makes no reference to the extensive Foxbush and Mountains Non-Designated Historic Park and Garden, despite its well-established heritage value and its role as the setting for several Grade II listed buildings. This omission is particularly striking given the weight accorded to the same designation in the assessment of recent planning applications within the area.

3.93 Furthermore, the northern portion of HI2 lies within the Hildenborough Conservation Area, where the Conservation Area Appraisal stresses the importance of the southern landscape edge to its rural character. The Plan at Figure 10 of the Conservation Appraisal (included below) shows the key features of the Conservation Area which forms part of the townscape appraisal. The Conservation Area Appraisal states that *‘... the hedge and trees lining the southern edge of London [should be Tonbridge] Road are a prominent*

landscape feature enhancing the setting of the listed buildings and reinforcing the rural character of the village. These form an edge to the Conservation Area.'

3.94 The Appraisal goes on to state 'The Landscape setting is important to the character of the Conservation Area with the trees visible over the houses from a number of vantage points. Within the Conservation Area tree belts and woodland run the length of the southern side of the London [Tonbridge] Road forming an edge to Conservation Area and providing a verdant setting for the listed buildings along Tonbridge Road. These trees can also be seen from Mount Pleasant and [Half] Moon Lane providing a green vista.' This makes clear that the contribution of the Site is not dependent solely on direct or continuous visual permeability, but on the presence of a continuous green backdrop which reinforces rural character, long views, and the setting of heritage assets.

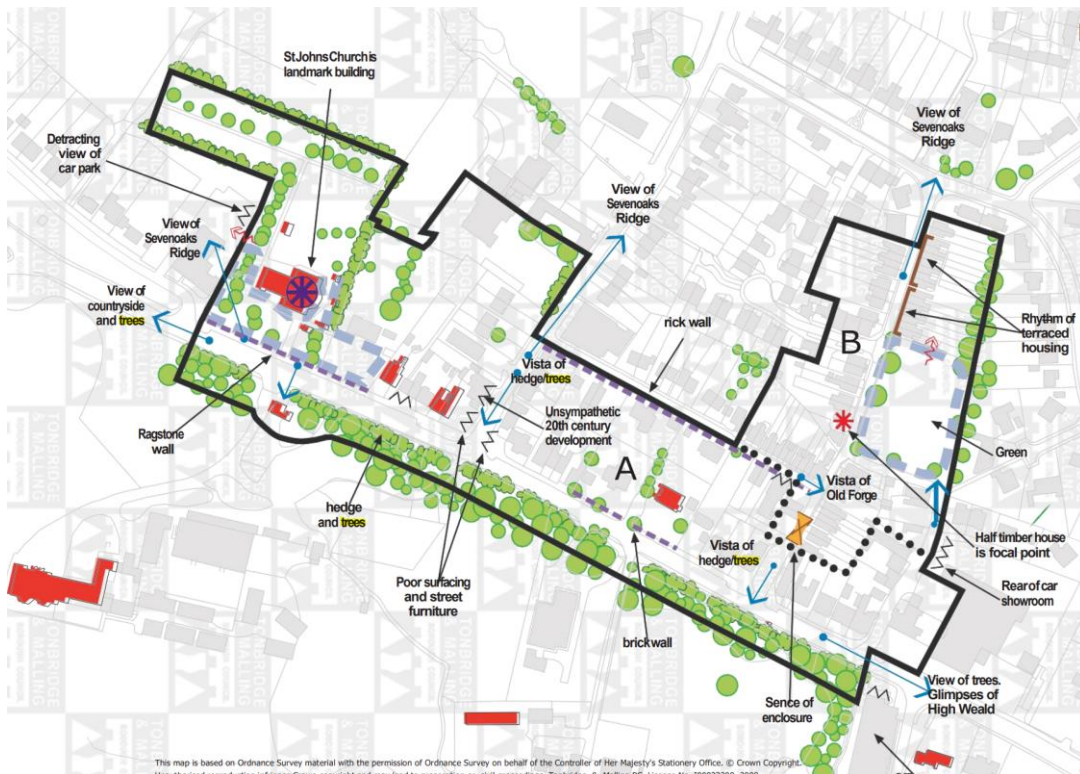


Figure 4: Extract from Hildenborough Conservation Area

3.95 The Conservation Area Appraisal is explicit in that the landscaping to the south of the Conservation Area is essential to its character. Any development that removes or

significantly alters the landscape is highly likely to be viewed as harmful and potentially unacceptable.

- 3.96 Any access arrangement to/from Tonbridge Road (part of the busy B245) would also likely require the loss of important vegetation that contributes to the Conservation Area's character to achieve the required visibility splay—an element directly related to location and amount of development. Significantly, an appeal decision dated 2005 (APP/H2265/A/04/1170042) identified the inability for an adequate visibility splay to be achieved from the existing Chequers Farm access in a north-westwards direction and that removal of the frontage vegetation would certainly be required. Moreover, any additional development would impose further pressure on the B245, and its cumulative impacts would require detailed analysis.
- 3.97 In the Parish Council's view, development of this scale and distribution would cause harmful change to Heritage assets and the character of the Conservation Area and therefore is strongly opposed.

Landscape and Setting Impacts

- 3.98 The allocation would result in significant and unacceptable harm to the landscape, the form of the settlement, and the integrity of the remaining Green Belt. The site includes land with parkland characteristics, including mature oaks and historic landscape features and on this basis, the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment identifies '*only limited capacity for small-scale development in this area*', which is inconsistent with the substantial scale of growth proposed in HI2. Development at any larger scale would materially erode the gap between Hildenborough and Hilden Park/Tonbridge, creating coalescence and undermining the rural edge of the village.
- 3.99 Furthermore, it is noted that the trees bordering the southern side of Tonbridge Road are protected by Tree Preservation Order Area 81/10077/TPO. Any proposal to remove, damage or otherwise conduct works to these trees to facilitate a new access would require the prior consent of the Local Planning Authority and be subject to rigorous scrutiny. The removal of TPO-protected trees should only be permitted where it can be clearly demonstrated that there are no reasonable alternatives and that the loss of protected trees is justified by an overriding need. To enable any point of access from Tonbridge Road into the Site, the resulting loss of trees protected for their collective amenity value would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area, and the

Conservation Area in particular. It is noted that an application in 2011 (TM/11/01847/TPOC) allowed the felling of some dying Horse Chestnut trees along the northern boundary of the Site allocation, but the Supplementary Report for the Area Planning Committee confirmed that the replacement Oak trees continue to be subject of the group TPO.



Figure 5: Extract from Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council Protected Tree Map

- 3.100 As can be seen from Figure 5 above, the removal of vegetation along Tonbridge Road to create access and the necessary sight lines would expose views into the Site and significantly alter the character of the approach into the Conservation Area.
- 3.101 Natural England/Defra are currently classifying the entirety of the northern and southern parts of HI2 Site as CGN 'Fringe' and 'Core' Strategic Opportunity Areas, respectively. But a pond within Parcel HI-02 is highly likely to function as CGN breeding or foraging habitat too, as CGN's have been established in the two Oakhill Ponds on the northern side of the B245 for some time, and have recently (Summer 2025) been confirmed as - being present in the West Wood Pond to the west of the proposed HI2 allocation too as shown in Figure 6 below. The Habitat Suitability Index (HIS) on West Wood Pond was undertaken by Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (on behalf of Natural England),

and the confirmed presence of Great Crested Newts on the southern part of the Site, and in the Oakhill and West Wood Ponds has significant implications for the developability of Site HI2.

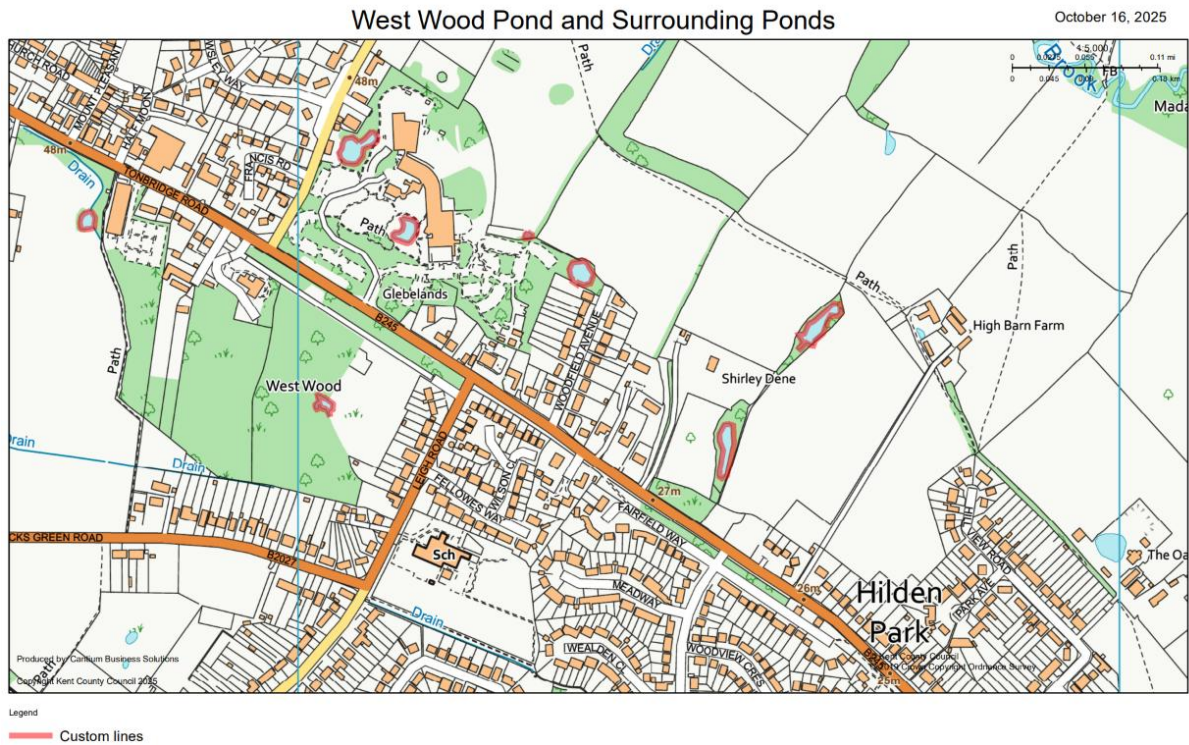


Figure 6: Plan showing location of West Wood Pond in vicinity to the site allocation

3.102 **In the Parish Council’s view, large-scale development at HI2 is wholly inappropriate and harmful, and is therefore strongly opposed.**

Education and Early Years Capacity and GP services

3.103 The evidence shows that local education infrastructure is already under considerable pressure, with no clear solution identified to accommodate further growth. The Interim Infrastructure Delivery Plan identifies a primary requirement of 5.8 Forms of Entry generated by development in the area, yet the Local Plan offers no clarity on whether this need can be met through existing schools.

3.104 The Parish Council understands that Stocks Green Primary School may be capable of expansion, but Hildenborough Church of England School is not, and no new school provision is embedded within any of the Parish’s allocations. Although a new primary school is proposed at Grange Farm in North Tonbridge, it is intended to address needs

generated in North Tonbridge itself and not the substantial additional requirements arising from Hildenborough/Hilden Park allocations.

- 3.105 In this context, the Local Plan fails to demonstrate how education demand arising from HI2 will be accommodated. The Parish Council therefore also strongly objects to the allocation on the grounds of inadequate and unjustified infrastructure planning.

Wastewater Capacity and Deliverability

- 3.106 The wastewater network represents a substantial and unresolved constraint.
- 3.107 The Interim Infrastructure Delivery Plan confirms that several of the sub-parcels within HI2, including LAA references 59653 and 68332, are subject to limited network capacity. Off-site upgrades will be required, and these works depend on the water company’s investment cycles which extend beyond the control of landowners and developers and often involve multi-year delays. As a result, occupation of the full number of dwellings would need to be phased, undermining the certainty and deliverability of the allocation.
- 3.108 Given these capacity constraints and uncertainties, the Parish Council strongly objects to the allocation.

Fragmented Land Parcels and Ownerships

- 3.109 HM Land Registry records showed the respective land ownerships on 9th December 2025 to be as follows:
- Title number: TT55076 (LAA Ref part 68432?) Chequers 1 PTE. Ltd (controlled by Mr Sebastian Tibbles, with Corinthian Mountfield Ltd acting as site promoters)
 - Title No K138552 (LAA Ref part 68432?) - Chequers 2 PTE. Ltd (as above)
 - Title No K788187 (LAA Ref part 68432?) - David and Victoria Grimshaw
 - Title No TT160821 (LAA Ref 59653) – Mr Andrew Golding
 - Title No K824832 (LAA Ref 59615) - Golding & Co. Limited (but the entry implies that Fernham Hornes exercised an option to purchase on 5th July 2023)
 - Title No K513770 (LAA Ref 59692) - Raymond Victor Chadwick, deceased but the Parish Council understands that this land has recently been transferred to Mr Chadwick’s heirs, and he previously owned Golding & Co., and Companies House are showing Mr Andrew Golding as currently being an active Director of the company.

Mixed Delivery Timelines and Weak Deliverability

- 3.110 The Land Availability Assessment demonstrates that the Site comprises several parcels with inconsistent timescales. The southern parcel is currently expected to come forward in the short term (1–5 years), whereas the northern parcels are not anticipated to come forward until 11+ years into the Plan period. This fragmented delivery and ownership profile increases uncertainty and weakens confidence that the entirety of the allocation can be delivered within the Plan period. Such inconsistency raises significant concerns about the soundness of allocating HI2. The Parish Council therefore objects on the grounds that the Site is not deliverable.
- 3.111 Furthermore, it has been brought to our attention that Mr and Mrs Grimshaw have no intention of developing their land which occupies a strategic central position in the northern part of the Site – see Figure 7 below - and therefore do not endorse its inclusion within the development Site HI2.

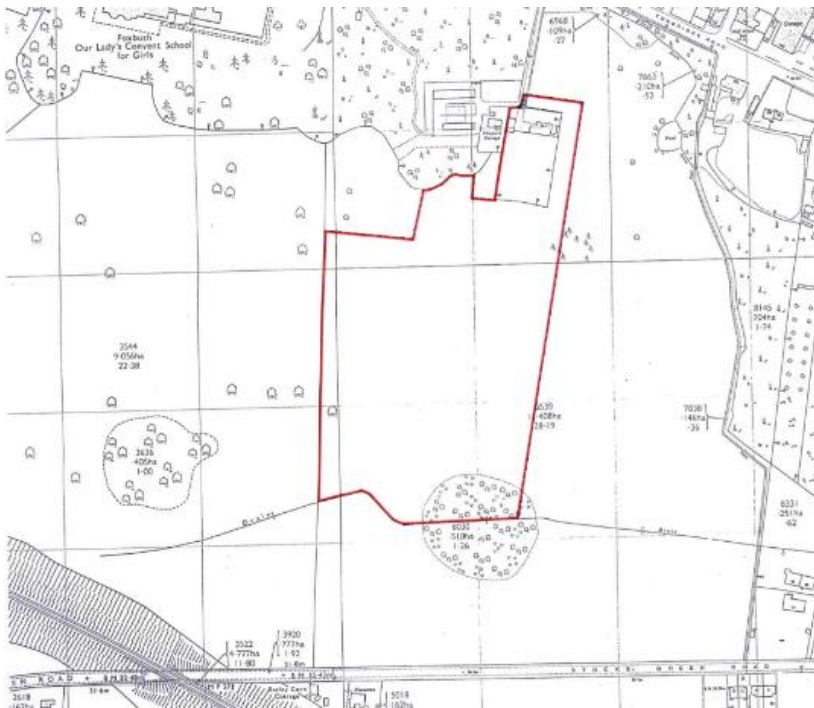


Figure 7 – Extract from Land Registry Title Plan No K788187 showing Mr & Mrs Grimshaw’s Landholdings which have been withdrawn from the HI2 Site Allocation.

Serious Access and Movement Constraints

- 3.112 Site Allocation HI2 suffers from substantial access constraints that have not been addressed in the evidence supporting the Draft Plan. The location of the railway line and

the presence of Flood Zones 1, 2 & 3 all restrict the feasibility of a safe vehicular access to the northern part of the Site from Stocks Green Road, which is itself a narrow country road lacking footways and cycle facilities, and is itself constrained to the west by an equally narrow listed railway bridge.

- 3.113 A new site access from Tonbridge Road in the north would require the removal of mature trees and vegetation that contribute directly to the character and setting of the Conservation Area. And a previous appeal decision (APP/H2265/A/04/1170042) confirms that an adequate visibility splay is not possible from Tonbridge Road in a north-westwards direction from the existing Chequers Farm access.
- 3.114 Furthermore, any proposed new access into the Site from along Tonbridge Road would also raise safety concerns given the proximity of the Site frontage to Mount Pleasant and the existing Chequers Farm access. An excessive concentration of access points would increase vehicle conflict, reduce driver reaction time, and harm highway safety. It would also erode the visual continuity and character of the street frontage, which is currently enhanced by landscaping and mature trees.
- 3.115 Turning to the southern part of the Site, the curvature of the road and existing development along the southern side of Stocks Green Road may prevent adequate visibility splays being provided on the Railway Field (LAA Ref 59692) part of the Site. And the elevated Railway line to the southwest and existing development along Leigh Road both rule out alternative access points.
- 3.116 The SFRA scoping report also indicates that safe access and egress cannot be achieved for parts of the site, and we strongly concur with that view.
- 3.117 A Highways Technical Appraisal (which we understand was submitted to the Council at the time) was carried out by Les Henry Associates on behalf of the Hildenborough Village Preservation Association and Stocks Green Road Residents jointly in October 2018, when 109 dwellings were being proposed on Railway Field (LAA Ref 59692) which

comprises the eastern parcel of the southern part of site HI2. And, amongst other things, the Technical Appraisal concluded that:

- *The proposed development would generate in the region of 800 vehicular trips to the highway network each weekday*; and
- *'The development proposals will significantly harm highway safety as traffic generated by the development cannot be adequately served by the highway network*.'

The current HI2 allocation is for **629 Dwellings, which is a 577% increase on the 2018 proposals** and if everything else was equal the proposed development would generate circa '**4,600 vehicular trips each weekday**'. And the Hildenborough/Hilden Park highway network today is essentially the same as it was in 2018, and if the highway network couldn't adequately serve an additional 800 trips per day in 2018, **then it is very clearly not going to be able to serve the proposed HI2 development in the draft Local Plan.**

3.118 The Parish Council therefore objects strongly, as safe site access must be demonstrated at the allocation stage, and the evidence suggests that this is not possible for HI2.

Conclusion

3.119 For all the reasons set out above, the proposed Site Allocation HI2 is fundamentally flawed. It has mixed ownerships, conflicts with national policy on the basis that the Site performs an essential Green Belt function, is subject to unresolved flood risk constraints, has serious deficiencies in the evidence base relating to heritage, education, wastewater infrastructure, landscape, biodiversity and access, and is likely not deliverable within the timescales required.

3.120 In addition, Mr & Mrs Grimshaw have now confirmed that they have no intention of developing their land which effectively forms the nucleus of the northern part of the Site, and its omission has serious master planning repercussions, particularly for site access

and internal accessibility, as well as the permanent loss of a significant number of the proposed new dwellings.

- 3.121 **The Parish Council therefore strongly urges the Borough Council to remove Site HI2 from the Local Plan.**

Comments on the Proposed Development Allocation of Site TO3

The Allocation Is Contrary to National Planning Policy and is Unjustified

- 3.122 Site Allocation TO3 is unsound as it directly conflicts with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework and is not supported by the evidence base. The Site lies within land that has been assessed as performing a demonstrably **strong Green Belt function**, yet the draft Local Plan proposes releasing it without establishing exceptional circumstances or demonstrating that the harm to the Green Belt has been minimised. In The Parish Council’s view, the allocation is therefore fundamentally contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework.

Green Belt Assessment Confirms the Site Should Not Be Released

- 3.123 The Council’s Green Belt Assessment (GBA) makes clear that sub-parcel TO-07, which includes the land proposed for Site Allocation TO3, plays a vital role in safeguarding the countryside and maintaining the integrity of the wider Green Belt.
- 3.124 The GBA concludes that removing TO-07 in combination with surrounding parcels [including the site allocation] would represent a significant encroachment into open countryside, undermine the openness of the Green Belt, create highly irregular boundaries, and in some cases form an isolated ‘island’ of retained Green Belt. The Assessment notes that these changes would diminish the Green Belt’s ability to prevent sprawl and protect rural character. On this basis, the GBA explicitly states that the sub-parcels **should not be taken forward for development**. Allocating TO3 therefore runs directly counter to the Council’s own assessment, and The Parish Council objects to the allocation on this basis.

Heritage Considerations

- 3.125 Site Allocation TO3 lies to the north of the Grade II listed Hilden Cottages at 83 and 85 London Road. Initial desktop analysis suggests that existing vegetation may limit direct

intervisibility and The Parish Council recognises that a sensitively designed scheme may avoid direct harm to the listed buildings.

Landscape and Settlement-Form Harm

- 3.126 The Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) confirms that development of TO3 would give rise to significant adverse effects in several key viewpoints, despite some screening from existing tree cover and landform. The landscape evidence consistently demonstrates that the Site has capacity only for very small-scale development, yet the allocation proposes a scale of development that is incompatible with the sensitivity identified.
- 3.127 And the entirety of T03 is also covered by two of Natural England’s/Defra’s ‘*Core Strategic Opportunity Areas*’ (CSOA’s) where ‘*GCNs have been found & recorded during surveys as part of the GCN District Level Licensing Scheme*’. And, as before, the confirmed presence of GCN’s is a material planning consideration and it has significant implications for the developability of Site T03.

Local Resident’s Comments

- 3.128 Residents cannot understand why The Council have allocated this Site for housing in the draft Local Plan. They point out that a popular public footpath crosses the southernmost part of the Site, and that the developable parts of the Site are not capable of taking the number of dwellings proposed.
- 3.129 Residents are also concerned that some trees have recently been felled on the Site, and they believe that the Site Owner’s strategy is to obtain an access route in principle, south from Site TO3 via Hilden Avenue to the B245, to facilitate or enable future development of their substantial landholdings to the north. And the Residents also stress that the trees on the Site do an invaluable job of slowing down and retaining rainwater during the wet winter months and other periods of sustained heavy rain.

Conclusion

- 3.130 Site Allocation TO3 was explicitly rejected by the GBA, and The Parish Council strongly agrees with the Green Belt Assessment that this Site plays a ‘*vital role in safeguarding the countryside and maintaining the integrity of the wider Green Belt*’. The Parish Council

also strongly agrees with the Landscape and Visual Appraisal, that development of Site TO3 ‘*would give rise to significant adverse effects in several key viewpoints*’.

- 3.131 Additionally, the allocation overestimates the Site’s development potential and fails to respect the area’s landscape sensitivity and CSOA status.
- 3.132 National planning policy dictates that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where ‘*exceptional circumstances exist*’ and ‘*the harm has been fully assessed and justified*’. But in this instance, The Council’s own evidence strongly contradicts the decision to release this land and acknowledges that significant harm will result to the integrity of the wider Green Belt if the Site Allocation proceeds.
- 3.133 The Parish Council therefore strongly objects to the allocation of Site TO3 on the grounds that it is not justified, is inconsistent with national planning policy and cannot be considered sound.

Comments on the Proposed Development Allocation of Site TO4

The Allocation Is Contrary to National Planning Policy and is Unjustified

- 3.134 Site Allocation TO4 is unjustified and contrary to national planning policy because the draft Local Plan fails to demonstrate exceptional circumstances for the release of this Green Belt land. The proposed allocation is based on selective interpretation of the Green Belt Assessment and does not establish that the harm caused by development has been minimised or that alternative, less harmful options have been properly explored. The Parish Council therefore considers that the allocation cannot be justified in policy terms and conflicts directly with the NPPF.

Green Belt Assessment: Evidence Confirms the Wider Land Performs a Strong Green Belt Function

- 3.135 The Council’s Green Belt Assessment (GBA) confirms that the wider cluster of sub-parcels surrounding TO4—extending across TO-03 to TO-10—forms an important and continuous area of Green Belt that prevents sprawl between Hildenborough and Tonbridge and Hilden Park and safeguards the countryside. The GBA is explicit that releasing this larger northern cluster would result in disproportionate and irregular sprawl, creating a highly irregular Green Belt boundary and undermining openness over a wide area, including land visible from the ridgeline. However, TO-02, TO-03 and TO-04 sub parcels (which encompass the Site Allocation TO3) are described as being somewhat

visually enclosed and more closely related to the settlement edge. This may be the case, but there are also important views from the ridgeline across these sub-parcels and Tonbridge, to Bidborough Ridge, and those views will be permanently lost if these sites are developed.

Heritage Impacts

- 3.136 The site lies immediately north of the Grade II Listed Barn west of Latters Farmhouse, and development on TO4 would inevitably alter the rural setting of this heritage asset. While it may be possible to design a scheme that avoids direct physical harm, this does not negate the fact that the allocation could erode the open agricultural landscape that forms part of the building's setting. The Parish Council would be keen to understand the proposals for theoretical mitigation to support the allocation.

Landscape, Biodiversity and Settlement-Form Harm

- 3.137 The Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) acknowledges that while some visual effects may be partially contained, several viewpoints in and around the Site would still experience significant adverse landscape change if TO4 were developed. The LVA is clear that while there may be capacity for limited small-to-medium scale development, the magnitude of change associated with the proposed allocation would exceed what the landscape may be able to reasonably accommodate.
- 3.138 The entirety of T04 is also covered by Natural England's/Defra's '*Core Strategic Opportunity Areas*' (CSOA's) where '*GCNs have been found & recorded during surveys as part of the GCN District Level Licensing Scheme*'. And, as before, the confirmed presence of GCN's is a material planning consideration and has significant implications for the developability of the Site T04.
- 3.139 The allocation therefore overestimates the site's development potential and fails to respect the area's landscape sensitivity, settlement pattern, and the amenity of the Public Right of Way that crosses the site. Full development at the scale proposed would alter the semi-rural character of this part of Hilden Park, encroach into the countryside, and contribute to cumulative coalescence pressures between Tonbridge, Hilden Park, and

Hildenborough. This represents a clear conflict with the evidence base and provides strong grounds for objection.

Access constraints and transport impacts remain unresolved

- 3.140 The housing allocation for Site TO4 is 289 new homes, and development of this magnitude will have a significant impact on the already stretched local highway network for the reasons already explained. And as stated previously, the Local Plan must demonstrate that no “insuperable” highway problems exist at allocation stage, and the current Strategic Transport Assessment has not confirmed this. Therefore, The Council’s detailed Transport Assessment must be carried out as soon as possible to establish if the transport and accessibility issues can be satisfactorily addressed including the cumulative impacts on the B245 and the wider road network.

Conclusion

- 3.141 Site Allocation TO4 has Policy concerns, transport and accessibility issues, landscape and biodiversity sensitivities and the Site’s development would likely contribute to harmful settlement expansion. But notwithstanding this, the Parish Council is amenable to considering the evidence base further to justify the Site’s suitability for allocation.

4 OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The draft Local Plan entirely overlooks the fact that Hildenborough and Hilden Park is essentially a one road settlement. The B245 road junctions already suffer from bad congestion and excessively long waiting times during morning & evening peaks and school drop off/pick up times, and long tailbacks into Tonbridge (including weekends) are depressingly regular too. And it's not just the impacts of the 1,025 new homes proposed for Hildenborough and Hilden Park that seriously concerns The Parish Council, it's also the significant amount of additional traffic from the Coblands and North Tonbridge allocations that would inevitably need to utilise the B245 too. Any additional development would impose significant further pressure on the B245, and this cumulative impact would require detailed assessment.
- 4.2 Hildenborough Parish Council objects in the strongest and unequivocal terms to the proposed allocation of Site HI2. The allocation is fundamentally unsound, unjustified, and inconsistent with national planning policy. It directly conflicts with the findings of the Council's own evidence base, particularly the Green Belt Assessment, which identifies the site as performing a strong and essential Green Belt function and warns that its release would lead to settlement coalescence and serious harm to openness and landscape character.
- 4.3 The allocation is further undermined by unresolved and significant constraints relating to flood risk, heritage impact, access, infrastructure capacity, wastewater provision, and deliverability, none of which have been adequately addressed at this stage of plan-making. Exceptional circumstances for Green Belt release have not been demonstrated, reasonable alternatives have not been exhausted, and the cumulative harm arising from development at this scale would significantly and demonstrably outweigh any purported benefits. For these reasons, the Parish Council strongly urges Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council to remove Site Allocation HI2 from the Draft Local Plan before it progresses to the next stage.
- 4.4 Notwithstanding this firm objection, the Parish Council has sought to engage constructively with the Draft Local Plan by providing detailed comments on all other proposed site allocations affecting Hildenborough and Hilden Park. In doing so, the Council has recognised where impacts may be more limited, where issues may be capable of mitigation, or where modifications to scale, layout, access, design, or

supporting infrastructure could make certain smaller or less harmful sites more acceptable should the Borough Council remain determined to allocate development in Hildenborough.

- 4.5 In addition, the Parish Council has provided comprehensive comments on all relevant draft policies within the Plan, assessing them against the tests of soundness and identifying where policies are supported, where clarification or amendment is required, and where policies are considered inconsistent with national planning policy. Taken together, these representations are intended to assist the Borough Council in producing a Local Plan that is sound, evidence-led, and capable of delivering development in the most sustainable and least harmful locations.
- 4.6 The Parish Council would like to be kept informed of all forthcoming consultations upon the Local Plan and associated documents.