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BY EMAIL ONLY

Environment, Planning and Enforcement

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11 December 2020

Dear Mrs Ham,

Re: Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Neighbourhood Plan Pre-submission - Regulation 14 Consultation

Thank you for consulting Kent County Council (KCC) on the Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Neighbourhood Plan, in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.

The County Council has reviewed the Neighbourhood Plan and for ease of reference, has provided comments structured under the chapter headings and policies used within the Neighbourhood Plan.

2. Vision and Objectives

Community Provision

Sport and Recreation: The County Council welcomes the focus on active travel within the Local Plan. Government and Sport England strategies for sport are focussed on tackling inactivity and supporting under-represented groups to be physically active should be considered. The County Council would also recommend consideration is given to Sport England planning guidance and local data around physical activity levels¹.

¹ <https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/playing-fields-policy/>
<https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/aims-and-objectives/>
<https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/planning-tools-and-guidance/playing-pitch-strategy-guidance/>
<https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/planning-tools-and-guidance/facilities-planning-model/>
<https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/active-design/>

The County Council would also draw attention to the Sport England survey: “Active Lives Adult”, which is published twice a year (and replaced the “Active People” Survey) and the “Active Lives Children and Young People”, published annually. Both surveys provide a unique and comprehensive view as to physical activity in a neighbourhood, and can be analysed at a local authority level. The latest adult report is available² and data can be explored and filtered³. A summary of the “Active Lives Children and Young People” report is also available⁴.

The latest figures indicate that inactivity significantly impacts on an individual’s physical and mental health, as well as social and community development. Therefore, the Neighbourhood Plan should seek to ensure the provision of a mix of formal and informal areas/spaces (indoor and out) where people can be active, including walking and cycling routes, open spaces and water based activity, as appropriate.

3. Landscape and the Natural Environment

Minerals and waste: The County Council, as Minerals and Waste Planning Authority, recommends that reference is made to minerals (land-won) and minerals/waste infrastructure safeguarding, as set out by the policies CSM 5, CSM 7 and CSW 16 of the adopted (and recently partially reviewed) Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2013-30 (KMLWP). The Neighbourhood Plan area has the following safeguarded land-won minerals:

Superficial Deposits - Sub-Alluvial River Terrace Deposits
Crustal deposits - Sandstone -Tunbridge Wells Sand Formation

KCC recognises that the Neighbourhood Plan does not propose any additional allocations for development other than those identified in the emerging Tunbridge Wells Local Plan (TWLP). The need to safeguard minerals of known economic importance that are coincident with development allocations is being considered in the Local Plan process. However, the existence of safeguarded minerals should be referred to within the Neighbourhood Plan as an important consideration for any development in the area.

The only significant safeguarded minerals or waste management infrastructure in the Neighbourhood Plan area is the Southern Water Services Ltd site at Waterloo Road, Cranbrook. Any development within 250m of this site should have due consideration of the KMLWP.

Heritage Conservation: The County Council welcomes the references to the historic aspect of the Cranbrook landscape. The landscape present today is the result of many centuries of interaction between humans and nature and this is evident in the modern landscape in the form of tracks, lanes, field boundaries, woodlands and archaeological sites. The County Council would recommend that reference is made to the Historic Landscape Characterisation dataset (2017)⁵ created by the High Weald AONB Team, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and KCC. The characterisation is the most detailed assessment of the

² <https://www.sportengland.org/activelivesapr20>

³ [Active Lives Online tool](#)

⁴ <https://www.sportengland.org/news/active-lives-children-and-young-people-survey-academic-year-201819-report-published>

⁵ <https://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/local-plan/evidence/environment-and-landscape/historic-landscape-characterisation-2017>

historicity of the visible landscape and is an essential starting point for any consideration of historic landscapes in the area.

Sustainable Business and Communities: The County Council welcomes the focus on sustainability, the environment and climate change throughout the Neighbourhood Plan. Furthermore, KCC welcomes the Neighbourhood Plan's support of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's net-zero target of 2030, which in turn supports the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy target of Net Zero for the county by 2050.

The County Council would welcome reference to the Energy and Low Emissions Strategy (ELES). The ELES outlines Kent and Medway's ambition to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero emissions by 2050. Taking an evidence based approach, it identifies a pathway to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, eliminate poor air quality, reduce fuel poverty, and promote the development of an affordable, clean and secure energy supply for the county.

The County Council notes the consideration of risks resulting from climate change to Cranbrook and Sissinghurst in respect of the potential for flooding. KCC recommends consideration of the Climate Change Risk and Impact Assessment (CCRIa), which provides some more insight into the risks that Kent and Medway face from climate change⁶.

Draft Policy LN7.1 - Special Sites for Nature Conservation

Biodiversity: To provide greater certainty, the County Council recommends that where policy statements refer to 'should', this should be revised to 'will'.

KCC recommends that the information in the 'Green Spaces and Green Networks for People' map should be separated to ensure it can be clearly interpreted. This could either be by dividing up the parish into smaller sections presented in larger scale maps, or by providing two or three maps for the whole parish, with some of the information in each map.

Clarity should be provided within the legend 'Kent Council LNR and RNR', which should identify Local Wildlife Sites and Roadside Nature Reserves and should be separated into two categories. If possible, the map should identify the Roadside Nature Reserve in the parish which lies along the western boundary of Sissinghurst Park Wood and Crane Valley Local Nature Reserve.

The County Council questions the necessity for the buffers within the 'Green Spaces and Green Networks for People' map and the lack of policy reference to these buffers. The County Council recommends that reference to green networks for people is also captured within policy or supportive text to ensure the purpose of the map is clear.

The County Council is in principle supportive of the intention of Draft Policy LN7.1, but proposes the following amendments:

⁶ <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/environment-waste-and-planning-policies/environmental-policies/kents-changing-climate>

- a) Development proposals which have potential to impact on the statutory and non-statutory designated sites as shown on High Weald AONB Unit Map “statutory and non-statutory designated sites” on page 17 will demonstrate that they have ~~identified and considered their~~ assessed and addressed the potential impacts on the nature conservation interest of the sites.
- b) Proposals adjacent to such sites ~~should~~ will be buffered to avoid and minimise damage including from indirect impacts such as increased recreational pressure, which will be considered alongside more direct impacts.
- c) Such developments ~~should~~ will deliver a net gain in biodiversity. Firstly, within the development site, or if demonstrably not achievable, biodiversity net gain will be delivered within or very close to the parish. Planning conditions and obligations will secure the protection and appropriate management of nature conservation sites in perpetuity, in line with the High Weald AONB Management Plan aspirations.

Draft Policy LN7.2 - Special Ecological Protection & Enhancement

Biodiversity: There is a lack of connection between the aims of this policy and the information presented in the associated map. The supporting text refers to woodlands, ponds, hedgerows and watercourses, but the map shows a wider range of habitats, all of which currently make up the ecological network across the Neighbourhood Plan area. While these habitats are all of ecological value, their importance in the context of this policy could be refined; or, if the intention is to ensure that the habitats presented in the map are considered to all be important ecological assets for the parish (which is presumed is the case), this should be more clearly stated in the supporting text. Clarification of what is meant by ecological networks should also be provided, with geodiversity features indicated on the map. Proposed policy wording amendments are as follows:

- a) Developments which actively support and enable the protection, enhancement and active positive management to conserve and enhance ~~ecological~~ biodiversity and ecological networks ~~and geodiversity~~ will be supported. as identified on High Weald AONB Unit “Green and Blue Infrastructure and Ecological Networks” on page 19.
- b) Development proposals resulting in significant negative impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity will not be supported unless clear and significant biodiversity gains can be demonstrated as compensation. Biodiversity net gain should be determined by applying the biodiversity impact calculator, or whatever supersedes it in the future, such as DEFRA’s Biodiversity Metric 2.0 calculator.

Draft Policy LN7.3 - Ecological Connectivity

Biodiversity: The County Council recommends the following proposed policy wording amendments:

- a) ~~In considering~~ All development proposals will identify, consider and address, both individually and cumulatively, impacts on ecological connectivity, both individually and cumulatively. ~~should be identified and considered.~~
- b) Functional green infrastructure (including naturalistic planting of native species known to be beneficial for local biodiversity) around and through new developments

~~should~~ will enable permeability for wildlife ~~both around and through new developments.~~

- c) Where roads create potential barriers to species movement, overarching trees ~~should~~ will be protected to allow the movement of aerial and arboreal species (invertebrates, birds, bats, dormouse etc.)
- d) Planning conditions and obligations ~~should~~ will secure appropriate habitat management and continued ecological connectivity in perpetuity.

Draft Policy LN7.4 - Protection & Enhancement of Priority Habitats

Biodiversity: The intention of clause (a) in the policy is unclear – the County Council proposes the following amendments to provide better clarity, but is happy to discuss further if necessary:

- a) Priority habitats within and adjacent to development proposals will be identified, considered and protected in line with their status. ~~In considering development proposals impacting priority habitats, their nature conservation value should be identified, considered and protected in line with their status.~~
- b) Development proposals resulting in the loss of irreplaceable priority habitats such as ancient woodland, traditional orchards and veteran trees will be refused.
- c) Development proposals adjacent to ~~such~~ priority habitats ~~should~~ will be buffered to minimise damage. Planning conditions and obligations ~~should~~ will secure the protection and appropriate management of these habitats in perpetuity, in accordance with the relevant designations.

Draft Policy LN7.5 - Protection of Priority Species

Biodiversity: The County Council recommends the following proposed policy wording amendments:

- a) Development proposals ~~should~~ will be supported by complete independent ecological surveys carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist according to nationally accepted standards.
- b) ~~In considering~~ Development proposals ~~impacting~~ will identify and address impacts to ~~consider and protect~~ legally protected and priority species in line with their nature conservation value ~~should be considered and protected in line with their~~ and status. Such developments ~~should~~ will deliver a net gain in biodiversity.
- c) Development proposals will include bat-sensitive lighting design.
- d) Planning conditions and obligations ~~should~~ will secure all necessary avoidance, mitigation and compensation measures to ensure species protection and appropriate habitat management in perpetuity. ~~in accordance with the species designation, and prior to starting development work, developers will be expected to join the district level licensing scheme.~~

The County Council suggests the removal of the last sentence of clause (d) as district level licensing is one option available for great crested newt compensation. Developers are still able to use the traditional licensing approach and this may be more appropriate for some sites.

The County Council recommends reference to bat-sensitive lighting design requirement. Supporting text should be added to refer to the guidance document *Bat Conservation Trust & Institute of Lighting Professionals' Guidance Note 08/18 Bats and artificial lighting in the UK*.

Draft Policy LN7.6 - Biodiversity Enhancements

Biodiversity: The County Council recommends the following proposed policy wording amendments:

- a) Development proposals that include ~~ing~~ biodiversity enhancements (over and above the requirements to avoid, mitigate and compensate for impacts on habitats and species) will be favoured.
- b) As a minimum, new developments ~~should~~ will include integrated bat and bird boxes ~~connected to suitable habitats (including~~ and naturalistic planting of native species known to be beneficial for local biodiversity. ~~with sensitive lighting design.~~ Planning conditions and obligations ~~should~~ will secure biodiversity enhancements on development sites in perpetuity.

Draft Policy LN7.9 - Protecting the Historic Landscape Character

Heritage Conservation: The County Council is generally supportive of this policy. However, clause a) implies that the historic character of the landscape is only visible in the treescape, ancient hedgerow, watercourse network and species-rich roadside verges. The historic landscape has rather more components to it than this, though, and includes the patterns of tracks, lanes, field boundaries and archaeological sites that help define the form of the modern landscape. The patterns of tracks and lanes are particularly important as these show the communications routes that linked communities and those communities in turn with places of work. New development should be encouraged to incorporate these patterns in their masterplans as this helps the new development integrate into the existing communities more effectively.

Draft Policy LN7.13 Local Green Space Designations

Heritage Conservation: The draft text identifies a large number of local green spaces that the Neighbourhood Plan wishes to conserve. As the text notes, some of these are of historic importance. The Kent Gardens Trust has recently assessed a number of green spaces and gardens for their historic significance and the method they used would be helpful for the Neighbourhood Plan in assessing the importance of the spaces to be protected⁷.

4. Design & Heritage

Heritage Conservation: In reviewing the heritage of Cranbrook parish, the text at present begins with the Anglo-Saxon period. It is true that the landscape today is largely a product of the Anglo-Saxon and later periods, and in particular the medieval period, but the earlier use

⁷ <https://www.kentgardenstrust.org.uk/research-projects/reports/?proid=1>

of the landscape of Cranbrook must be included. This has contributed to the historic character of the parish, and archaeological remains relating to these earlier uses can still be found. Numerous Mesolithic and Neolithic flint artefacts have been found across Cranbrook, reflecting the use of the Weald by hunter gatherer populations for thousands of years. The Romans certainly exploited the Weald as evidenced by the Rochester to Hastings Roman road that runs through the parish and which survives archaeologically in many places, for example at Folly Gill. The Romans also began the exploitation of the Weald for iron. Roman iron production is evidenced by the scheduled monument at Little Farningham Farm, which may be the best example of a Roman iron working site, certainly in Kent. There is no other known Roman site in Cranbrook but it is probable that landscape features such as ponds and streams may yet prove to have Roman origins. Iron production was greatly expanded during the Elizabethan period when the invention of the blast furnace allowed the rapid expansion of the industry. Many examples of iron working sites survive across the Weald, both as archaeological sites and as place names (eg Furnace Farm, Hammer Pond etc) and many more no doubt remain undiscovered. Cranbrook itself is known to have been the site of such a furnace.

Section 5.4 of the Tunbridge Wells BC Historic Environment Review reviews the heritage of Roman and Medieval iron working in the Weald which is both extensive and important and should be drawn on for the text.⁸ The Review should indeed be drawn upon much more systematically for the Neighbourhood Plan, as at present the review of the heritage of the parish is very partial and does not underscore the essential contribution that it makes to the character and beauty of the landscape. A clearer period by period review of the heritage, highlighting the known sites and drawing on the Historic Environment Review as appropriate, would enable the heritage of the parish to play its full role in securing the character of Cranbrook in the future, whilst allowing users of the Neighbourhood Plan to understand its conservation needs.

Draft Policy DH1.12 Protection of Agricultural Heritage Assets

Heritage Conservation: The draft text rightly commits the Neighbourhood Plan maintaining the dispersed settlement pattern that is prevalent in the Weald and to permitting a degree of sympathetic development in farmsteads. Historic England (together with KCC and the Kent Downs AONB team) has published guidance on historic farmsteads in Kent that considers how rural development proposals can be assessed for whether they are consistent with existing character of the countryside. Consideration and reference should be made to this guidance⁹.

Draft Policy DH1.13 Cranbrook Windmill

Heritage Conservation: The County Council welcomes the incorporation of a policy that relates specifically to the (KCC-owned) Cranbrook Windmill.

⁸ (https://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/343808/Historic_Environment_Review.pdf)

⁹ <http://www.kentdowns.org.uk/publications/kent-downs-aonb-farmstead-guidance>

It could be expanded by referring to the authentic design characteristics of the exterior ('character'), the internal milling machinery and records of the former internal layout ('operation') and the historic fabric of the building ('structure').

KCC also welcomes the commitment within the Neighbourhood Plan to protect the mill's wind (clause b) as this is something that is often forgotten leading to the mill's operation being compromised.

5. Access and Movement

Draft Policy AM4.2 - Pedestrian Priority and Public Rights of Way

Public Rights of Way (PRoW): This policy is welcomed and supported, though an additional paragraph should be inserted into the 'Policy Supporting Text' to clearly highlight the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). This is because the ROWIP is a statutory policy document, setting out a strategic approach for the protection and enhancement of PRoW.

The Neighbourhood Plan should ensure that reference to the ROWIP is clearly highlighted. This will enable successful partnership working to continue, helping to deliver improvements to the PRoW network in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst.

Given the value of the PRoW network to the local community, there should be a requirement for development applications to show recorded PRoW on their plans. Where PRoW would be directly affected by new development, proposals should illustrate how the PRoW network will be positively accommodated within the site.

Additional text should be inserted into the policy, recommending that applicants for new developments engage with the KCC PRoW and Access Service at the earliest opportunity. This would allow the County Council to review proposals for access improvements and consider appropriate developer contributions for PRoW network enhancements, which would ensure there are sustainable transport choices available that provide realistic alternatives to short distance car journeys.

The PRoW and Access Service would welcome engagement with the Parish Council to consider local aspirations for access improvements, the delivery of these projects and potential sources of funding for the works.

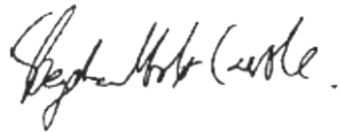
Glossary of Terms

PRoW should be revised to state:

"A way over which the public have a right to pass and repass, including; Public Footpaths, Public Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open to All Traffic"

KCC would welcome continued engagement as the Neighbourhood Plan progresses. If you require any further information or clarification on any matters raised above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Stephanie Holt-Castle'.

Stephanie Holt-Castle

Interim Director - Environment, Planning and Enforcement