

Planning Statement

**Land at plot 19, Rhododendron
Avenue, Culverstone, Kent, DA13 0TU**

Permission in Principle for the erection of up
to 2 No. dwellings



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Project reference: PR4593

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been submitted in support of an application for the following development at Land at plot 19, Rhododendron Avenue, Culverstone, Kent, DA13 0TU (hereafter referred to as 'the Site'):

Permission in Principle for the erection of up to 2 No. dwellings

- 1.2 The proposed development affects the following Land Registry title(s):

Title Number	Description	Owner
K56371 (part of)	THE RAVENS RHODODENDRON AVENUE, MEOPHAM, GRAVESEND DA13 0TU	The Applicant

- 1.3 The application is accompanied by the following plans and documents:

- 4593.ON – Planning Statement
- 4593.ON – 01 Site Location Plan
- 4593.ON - Appeal Decision 3347410 (Wrotham Water Farm)
- 4593.ON –Appeal Decision 3370656 (Starwood)
- 4593.ON – Appeal Decision 3289541 (The Manor House)
- 4593.ON - 25 02326 PIP Delegated Report (Maples Cottage Decision)

2 Site Context

- 2.1 The subject 0.2-hectare site is located on the western side of Rhododendron Avenue, at the northern end of the Culverstone Valley Area. It was formerly paddock land used in connection with the adjacent stables and hay store building.
- 2.2 The Site backs on to a small cluster of large detached dwellings that front Wilson's Way to the west, as well as adjoins other detached properties that line Rhododendron Avenue to the south, north and east.
- 2.3 This Site is the subject of the following planning constraints and characteristics:
- Flood Zone 1
 - Harvel Wooded Downs Landscape
 - Metropolitan Green Belt

3 Relevant History

3.1 The following records are understood to be relevant to the Site:

[Change of use of stable block to create detached dwelling plus associated residential curtilage and use of existing vehicular access.](#)

Ref. No: 20240283 | Status: Application Permitted December 2024 (relates to the adjoining land that includes the stables).

[Outline application for the erection of a bungalow.](#)

Ref. No: 20020414 | Status: Application Refused. Appeal dismissed

[Outline application for the erection of a detached chalet bungalow.](#)

Ref. No: 20050994 | Status: Application Refused on the basis that the proposed development would result in harm to the Green Belt, be detrimental to the open and rural quality of the surrounding landscape and would be contrary to policy C14.

3.2 The Site has also been subject to pre-application advice on the 14th of October 2025 for the erection of two dwellings (PRE20250157). The LPA concluded that a proposal of this nature would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, would adversely impact the countryside, and is situated in an unsustainable location.

4 Proposed Development

4.1 The application entails the following elements:

- Permission in Principle application for the erection of up to 2 No. dwellings.

5 Planning Policy

- 5.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 require that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Court of Appeal has clarified that for a decision maker, this means establishing whether a proposal is in accordance with the development plan as a whole. The question of compliance with one policy should not dictate the outcome of a proposal in the absence of considering compliance with all other relevant policies. Decision makers are therefore tasked with identifying and understanding all relevant policies and material considerations in order to reach a properly informed planning judgment on a proposal, and to avoid an irrational or vulnerable decision that may be subject to criticism in a public law challenge.
- 5.2 Paragraph 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') reiterates what is said in Section 38(6), whilst paragraph 12 of the Framework is clear that the development plan is the starting point for decision making. Proposed development that accords with an up-to-date Local Plan should be approved, and proposed development that conflicts should be refused unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.3 Paragraph 39 of the Framework encourages local planning authorities to approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. It also encourages working proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area, adding that decision-makers should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.
- 5.4 Annex 1 of the Framework confirms that for the purposes of decision-taking, the policies in the plan should not be considered out-of-date simply because they were adopted prior to the publication of the Framework. It adds that due weight should be given to relevant policies in existing plans according to their degree of consistency with the Framework, with greater weight being given to those policies that are closer to the policies in the Framework.

Development Plan

- 5.5 It is understood that the Development Plan for the area within which the Site is located comprises the following documents:

- The Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (CS) (September 2014);
- Remaining Saved Policies of the Local Plan First Review (1994); and
- The Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2013 - 2030 (2016, revised 2020)

5.6 In the CS, the following policies are considered most relevant in the assessment of this application:

- CS01 - Sustainable Development Policy
- CS02 - Scale & Distribution of Development Policy
- CS11 - Transport Policy
- CS12 - Green Infrastructure
- CS18 - Climate Change
- CS19 - Design & Development Principles

5.7 In the Gravesham Local Plan First Review (LP), the following policies are considered most relevant in the assessment of this pre-application:

- P3 - Vehicle Parking Standards
- T1 - Impact of Development on the Highway Network.

Other Material Considerations

The Framework

5.8 In summary, the following paragraphs are considered most relevant as additional material considerations in connection with the proposed development:

- 11 – Presumption in favour of sustainable development
- 61 – boosting the supply of homes
- 73 – Importance of small and medium sites
- 84 – Rural housing
- 110 - Significant development to be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, and transport solutions to vary between urban and rural areas
- 116 – Highway safety and capacity
- 124 – Making effective use of land
- 125 – Criteria for making effective use of land
- 127 – Reflecting changes in the demand for land
- 128 – alternative uses of land to meet housing needs
- 129 – Achieving appropriate densities
- 154 – Exceptions to development in the Green Belt

- 155 – grey belt exception
- 187 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

5.9 It is noted that the application of all of the above paragraphs from the Framework is not dependent on whether an authority has a five-year housing land supply (5YHLS).

5.10 Further material considerations include the following:

- Supplementary Planning Guidance 2: Residential layout guidelines (adopted February 1996, updated June 2020) (RLG);
- Supplementary Planning Guidance 4: Kent County Council Parking Standards (2006);
- Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (2009) (LCA).

6 Planning Assessment

Key Issues

6.1 The following are considered to be the key issues in the assessment of this application:

1. Green Belt
2. Location
3. Land Use
4. Quantum

1. Green Belt

6.2 Paragraph 142 of the Framework states that the fundamental aim of the Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. Paragraph 153 states that when considering any planning application, LPAs should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. It adds that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in Very Special Circumstances.

Previously Developed Land (PDL)

6.3 Paragraph 154 (g) of the Framework sets out an exception to development in the Green Belt, which reads as follows:

Limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land (including a material change of use to residential or mixed use, including residential), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

6.4 PDL is defined as "land which has been lawfully developed and is or was occupied by a permanent structure and any fixed surface infrastructure associated with it, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed). It also includes land comprising large areas of fixed surface infrastructure, such as large areas of hardstanding which have been lawfully developed."

6.5 The Applicant contests that the Site should be considered PDL, despite the advice that has been given as part of PRE20250157. For simplicity, the definition

has been broken down into three individual tests to prove that the subject Site meets the required definition.

- 6.6 The first test is that the Site must be lawfully developed. This is accepted to be the case by the LPA as part of PRE20250157, and therefore meets the first test.
- 6.7 The second test requires the Site to be occupied by a permanent structure and any fixed surface infrastructure associated with it. Similar to before, the LPA agree that the stables are considered to be a permanent structure as part of 20240283.
- 6.8 The final test relates to the curtilage associated with the stables. Although the LPA suggest that all land within the curtilage should not automatically be included within the definition of PDL, it would be illogical for this to be the case at the Site.
- 6.9 The Site is lawfully a paddock and forms part of the curtilage in relation to the existing, adjacent stables. It is commonly understood that a paddock does not operate in isolation and is usually created in relation to a stable building. This can also be applied vice versa to the stable.
- 6.10 They clearly operate in unison for equine purposes, rather than in isolation, and therefore can logically be considered as PDL together. This is supported by appeal decision 3289541. In the appeal, the Inspector made the following comments in paragraph 25:

'The appellant contends that the site is a paddock for the grazing of horses. This has not been contested by the Council. As such, based on the evidence before me, as the site is currently in equine use, it falls within the definition of previously developed land.'

- 6.11 The LPA's pre-application response suggested that the Site could not be previously developed land, as was found to be the case with a site in Dartford that was the subject of an appeal decision (3312223). However, it is clear that the appeal decision was in relation to lawful agricultural land, which is not the case here.
- 6.12 It is therefore said that appeal decision 3289541, involving an equine development, is far more applicable to the subject application and should be given significant material consideration.
- 6.13 The final part of paragraph 154(g) stipulates that proposals must not result in 'substantial harm' to the openness of the Green Belt. Whilst the proposed

development would introduce additional built form, paragraph 154(g) of the Framework does not preclude development that results in an increase in built form. The relevant test is whether the proposal would give rise to a *substantial impact* on the openness of the Green Belt, having regard to both spatial and visual considerations.

- 6.14 At the technical details stage, there would be scope to limit the scale, height and siting of any additional development, for example, through a compact arrangement of modest, single-storey dwellings (or even just a single dwelling). With appropriate control over footprint and layout, the resulting impact on openness is unlikely to be substantial. On this basis, it is reasonably foreseeable that a scheme could accord with paragraph 154(g) of the Framework.
- 6.15 Overall, based on the evidence provided, the subject Site is considered to be PDL. Therefore, it is quite possible that as part of the second detailed stage, the proposal will not prove to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, benefitting from the exception under paragraph 154(g) of the Framework.

Grey Belt

- 6.16 The Applicant also considers that the proposed development is an exception under paragraph 155 of the Framework, which sets out that the development of homes in the Green Belt should not be regarded as inappropriate, subject to compliance with all criteria.
- 6.17 It is therefore necessary to assess the proposal against paragraph 155 of the Framework to determine whether it could be appropriate under the 'grey belt' exception:
- a) The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;*
- 6.18 In the Framework, grey belt is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of the purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143.
- 6.19 As established above, as part of the assessment under paragraph 154(g), the Applicant considers the Site to be PDL by virtue of the Site being paddock land and therefore forming part of the curtilage associated with the adjacent stables.

- 6.20 If it is not accepted by the LPA that the Site is PDL, the following is an assessment against the grey belt definition contained within Annex 2 of the Framework, starting with an assessment against Green Belt purposes (a), (b) or (d) in paragraph 143.
- 6.21 Regarding purpose (a), the erection of up to two dwellings will not contribute to the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas because: (i) it is not adjacent to a large built-up area (only Culverstone, but this is a village, and the NPPG advises that villages should not be considered large built-up areas); (ii) the proposal is modest in scale, constituting a 'minor' development; (iii) it is contained within the existing Site boundaries and is not considered to extend beyond the extent of PDL; (iv) the Site is bounded by Rhododendron Avenue to the east, Castle Wood to the north, Blueberry Cottage to the west and The Ravens to the south, preventing any sprawl; (v) the subject Green Belt is the Metropolitan Green Belt, which is part of the outer edge of Green Belt surrounding London. In this context, London is the most relevant large built-up area, and consequently, the Site does not contribute strongly to purpose (a) (a matter that is shared by a Planning Inspector in an allowed appeal relating to a site in Tonbridge and Malling, appeal ref. no 3347410). The Site, therefore, does not strongly contribute to purpose (a).
- 6.22 The definition of purpose (b) refers to the need 'to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.' As stated above, only villages exist nearby, so it cannot be said that the Site contributes to this purpose.
- 6.23 The definition of purpose (d) refers to the need 'to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.' Again, given that only villages exist nearby and no heritage harm is likely to be identified, there is no conflict with purpose (d).
- 6.24 Thirdly, grey belt excludes land where the application of policies relating to areas in footnote 7 to paragraph 11(d)(i) (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development. The Site does not fall within any of the other designations referred to in footnote 7.
- 6.25 Having established that the Site meets the definition of grey belt land, it is necessary to consider the second element of the criteria (a) of paragraph 155, namely whether its loss would fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan.
- 6.26 The Site is small in relation to the totality of the Green Belt, which covers 77% of the Borough. It is therefore correct to suggest that the minor proposal would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remainder of the

Green Belt across the area of the plan. The Site therefore complies with criterion (a) of paragraph 155, regardless of whether it is considered PDL.

b) There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;

6.27 Footnote 56 of the Framework, which concerns criterion (b), explicitly states that in the case of applications involving the provision of housing, a demonstrable unmet need means the lack of a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites or where the Housing Delivery Tests were below 75% of the housing requirement over the previous three years.

6.28 As per PRE20250157, the LPA confirm that currently, it can only demonstrate a land supply for 3 years, rather than the required 5, as well as a three-year delivery rate of 59% (below the required 75%).

6.29 The lack of housing land supply and delivery is considered to be sufficient evidence to demonstrate an unmet need for the type of development which is proposed at the Site, adhering to criterion (b) of paragraph 155.

c) The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework; and

6.30 Paragraph 110 of the Framework states that significant development should be focused on locations which are, or can be made, sustainable and also accepts that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and that this should be taken into account in decision-making.

6.31 Firstly, the development cannot be described as a significant development as it falls short of what would normally constitute a major development, given less than 10 dwellings are proposed, and the Site is less than 1 hectare in size. The first aspect of paragraph 110 does not, therefore, apply to this development.

6.32 For information, as a less than significant development in a rural area, the Site is located approximately 800 metres from the nearest bus stops at Ridley Turning, equating to a walk of around 10 minutes via Heron Hill Lane. These stops provide access to a range of local and strategic bus services connecting the Site with nearby settlements, education facilities and town centres.

6.33 Ridley Turning is served by Route 308, which provides bus connections between Gravesend and Sevenoaks, passing through Meopham, Culverstone Green and Vigo Village. Services towards Sevenoaks typically depart at 07:11, 09:41, 11:11,

12:41, 14:31, 17:13 and 18:13, with return services towards Gravesend departing at 10:04, 11:29, 12:59, 14:29, 16:33, 17:31 and 18:31, providing connectivity throughout the day on weekdays, as well as Saturdays.

- 6.34 In addition, several school-oriented services operate from Ridley Turning on weekdays, further enhancing accessibility. These include Route 306, which provides connections between Gravesend and Vigo Village with morning departures at 08:01 and afternoon services at 15:25. The 223 service provides access to Weald of Kent Grammar School, departing in the morning at 07:04 and returning at 16:59.
- 6.35 Further school day services include Route 418R, linking New Ash Green, Meopham, Vigo Village and Wrotham, with a morning departure at 07:46 and a return service at 15:26, as well as the VIGO1 service, which provides access to Gravesend Grammar School and Denton, departing at 07:28 with a return journey at 16:17.
- 6.36 Taken together, the proximity of the Site to Ridley Turning and the range of bus services available to ensure convenient access to local villages, schools, employment areas and town centres, reduces the reliance on the private car and supports the Site's accessibility, despite also being in a rural location.
- 6.37 In a recent Permission in Principle in Sevenoaks at the land North West Of Maple Cottage, Maplescombe Lane, Farningham, Kent (25/02326/PIP), the Officer accepted that, even though the Site was within a 7-minute drive to Eynsford, Farningham and West Kingsdown, it could still be considered to be in a sustainable location, taking account of the full wording of paragraph 110 of the Framework.
- 6.38 Moreover, in a recent appeal decision in Gravesham (3370656), the Inspector confirmed that despite the site being situated approximately 1 mile from the centres of Shorne and Higham, it could still be considered to be within a sustainable location, taking account of its rural setting. Bus stops were a similar distance from and of a similar frequency to those relating to the Site.
- 6.39 The Inspector added that although the roads may not be desirable to cycle or walk due to not being sufficiently lit and there would be some reliance on private vehicle use, it was concluded that the proposal still offered a genuine choice of transport modes, commensurate with the site's rural location, which is directly applicable to the subject Site.

- 6.40 It is considered that, by virtue of the minor nature of this proposal affecting a rural site, the proximity to nearby transport connections, and with likely required car journeys being brief, the Site should be considered to be in a sustainable location.
- 6.41 Lastly, criterion (d) is considered not relevant to this application since, at less than 10 dwellings, it does not constitute 'major development' with the Site being under 1 hectare.
- 6.42 For the above reasons, the Applicant is of the view that the proposed development of the Site would use grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan. It would help to meet the significant unmet need for housing within GBC (and nationally) and be located in a sustainable location. The proposed development is therefore appropriate in the Green Belt by virtue of the 'grey belt' exception.

2. Location

- 6.43 The location of the Site and its sustainability have been explored in detail in part 1 of this assessment under 'Green Belt', and it is considered to have been established that the Site is in a suitable location for housing.
- 6.44 Whilst not located within the nearest settlement boundary, the Site is not isolated in the countryside, but is adjacent to other housing (including a recent approval for the conversion of the stables to the south). Furthermore, as part of the second detailed submission, the dwellings can easily be contained within the existing brownfield site, acting as an infill, rather than contributing to any further encroachment into the land in the countryside that is not previously developed.
- 6.45 Regardless, the housing land supply position means any policies that seek to focus residential development within settlement boundaries are out-of-date. Furthermore, any policies that strictly limit or prevent development in the countryside are out-of-date as well, as building on settlement edges is often a consequence of being unable to meet housing needs in settlement boundaries. Any such policy conflicts must therefore be given no weight.

3. Land Use

- 6.46 The Site is bounded to the east by Rhododendron Avenue, beyond which lie several large detached dwellings known as Bankside, Willimijo and Woodcroft.
- 6.47 To the south is a detached dwelling known as The Ravens, which is within the Applicant's ownership.

- 6.48 A large, detached dwelling known as Castlewood lies to the north, with Blueberry Cottage and Denhams located to the west.
- 6.49 In a wider context, Culverstone Green, Meopham and Vigo Village comprise predominantly residential dwellings that are situated on large plots that line the highway.
- 6.50 It is considered that the provision of up to two additional residential units would not be out of keeping with the use of the surrounding land on the basis that it is predominantly surrounded by dwellings. This reinforces that the Site does not represent an isolated location.

4. Quantum

- 6.51 The maximum number of proposed dwellings at the Site (2) is considered to be appropriate when compared to the size and shape of the defined Site. Each dwelling will have adequate space for landscaping, access and amenity space.
- 6.52 The number of units proposed reflects a modest and proportionate level of development that avoids over-intensification. Detailed layout and amenity considerations will be addressed through a subsequent Technical Details Consent application.
- 6.53 The surrounding properties are predominantly detached on extensive parcels of land. The proposed density, at approximately 10 dwellings per hectare, is considered to align with the established character of the surrounding area.
- 6.54 This is considered to be in accordance with policy CS19 of the CS, which states that all new housing will be developed at a density that is consistent with achieving good design and does not compromise the distinctive character of the area in which it is situated.

7 Planning Balance

- 7.1 It is considered that the proposal is an appropriate development in the Green Belt by virtue of being PDL and therefore in accordance with paragraph 154 (g) of the Framework.
- 7.2 If GBC does not agree with the Applicant's standpoint, it is considered that the proposed development is in accordance with paragraph 155 of the Framework and meets all the necessary tests to be considered a 'grey belt' exception to development in the Green Belt.
- 7.3 Moreover, the proposal represents an appropriate use of the land when considered against the surrounding context of Culverstone Green. Furthermore, a lack of five-year housing land supply and a lack of delivery means that the proposed development would positively contribute to Gravesham's delivery targets. The presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11(d) of the Framework) is therefore triggered for two reasons. When this is the case, significant weight must be given to the provision of additional housing, as many appeal decisions confirm.
- 7.4 In a recent 'Permission in Principle' appeal decision (3354156) for 5 houses, an Inspector found that the location was unacceptable, but on balance, with a 3.31 year housing land supply (i.e. better than Gravesham's), plus consideration of the Framework's acknowledgement that "small sites can make an important contribution to meeting housing requirements of an area", these factors were given significant weight and should also apply to the subject proposal.
- 7.5 In a more recent 'grey belt' decision in Gravesham, an Inspector found in favour of the appellant. If the LPA is to respond positively to development (as required by paragraph 39 of the Framework) then the Applicant expects that the LPA can glean several clear merits from that decision and apply them to this proposal to justify an approval, rather than source (as they did so for the pre-application response) several out-dated and irrelevant appeal decisions to justify a negative stance in the pre-application response.
- 7.6 Even if the LPA find otherwise and that the development does not benefit from the PDL or grey belt exception in Green Belt policy, this must amount to a **strong** reason for refusing the development as part of the planning balance exercise in paragraph 11(d) of the Framework.

- 7.7 Whether the LPA conclude that the development would appropriate or inappropriate development in the Green Belt, the LPA is still required to assess the proposal against paragraph 11(d) of the Framework. The starting point is that planning permission should be granted, unless either one or both of the subsequent criteria are met.
- 7.8 For part (i) of paragraph 11(d) that Applicant is of the view that even if the LPA find that the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt (i.e. that it fails to be a PDL or grey belt exception), it cannot be said to form a strong reason to refuse the development, because any such harm to openness must only be limited, plus, at the second, detailed stage, the quantum could be limited to one single-storey dwelling, for example. Paragraph 11(d) clearly allows for inappropriate developments in the Green Belt to still be permitted.
- 7.9 For part (ii) the Applicant considers that it would be possible to ensure there are no harms or disbenefits and the following are considered to be clear benefits of the proposal:
- The additional housing will make a positive contribution to the Council's housing needs;
 - As a small housing site, it could be delivered quickly;
 - The provision of housing would bring economic benefits in the short term, through employment and investment related to construction activity, and in the longer term, through the spending power of local residents that would benefit local shops and businesses;
 - It would result in a better use of previously developed land that is otherwise likely to remain vacant for the considerable future, given the extant permission to redevelopment the adjoining stables site;
 - Framework support for this proposal is provided in paragraphs: 61, 73, 124, 125, 127, 128 and 129.
- 7.10 On other matters, the scale of the proposal is considered to be in keeping with the size of the Site as well as nearby dwellings. It will not result in an over-intensification or over-development of the Site.
- 7.11 With there being no **strong** reason for resisting the development on Green Belt grounds, it is considered that there are also no adverse impacts of allowing the proposal and certainly not to the extent that these would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. The presumption in favour of sustainable development applies and permission should be granted.