

Site Planning Appraisal

1 Proposals

- 1.01** To redevelop the existing dwellings of Willow Tree Farm and Holly Cottage to accommodate 16no superior 2 bedroom exclusive early-retirement accommodation for the "over 55s" age group, in a secured, central location in Meopham
- 1.02** The Site sits in the "Green Belt", and this report only reviews the implication of the proposals in terms of both the national, and local "Planning" requirements relating to the "Green Belt" - design proposals have been developed, and these can be made available in due course
- 1.03** It is acknowledged the National Planning Policy Framework of April 2019 remains to be adopted by Gravesham Borough Council - the Gravesham Local Development Scheme review is currently ongoing, and until it is finally completed, and adopted, the current outdated and incomplete GBC Policies remain subject to potential legal challenge

Item	Comment
2 Green Belt History	
2.01 The Street Conservation Area	1970 Introduced in January 1970, to the immediate north, and north-east of the Site
2.02 Metropolitan Green Belt	1971 Extended to include Meopham and its surrounding area
2.03 Meopham Secondary School	1975 Secondary School opened, with associated playing fields, external fencing, vehicular access, and associated parking, in the Green Belt to the west, south-west, and south of the Site
2.04 Meopham Medical Centre	1991 New Doctors' Surgery, Pharmacy, and associated parking opened in the Green Belt, in a relocation from Hook Green to expanded dedicated facilities to the south of the Site
2.05 Meopham Leisure Centre	1994 Commercial sports and leisure facilities opened providing Sports Hall, and floodlit external playing surfaces, complete with dedicated parking, to the west of the Site
2.06 Meopham Pre School Nursery	2003 Commercial premises and associated parking in the Green Belt opened to provide pre-school facilities, to the south-west of the Site
2.07 Meopham Medical Centre	2011 Extension to existing premises in the Green Belt, to the south of the Site
2.08 Planning Application for 2no dwellings to the north of Holly Cottage	2012 Planning Approval for development in the Green Belt refused - "... erodes the character of special Green Belt ..."
2.09 Planning Appeal for 2no dwellings to the north of Holly Cottage	2013 Planning Appeal for development in the Green Belt dismissed - 4no houses (existing Willow Tree Farm, and Holly Cottage, together with 2no proposed houses) forms a "terrace" frontage to the Site, and eliminates the "openness" of the Site
2.10 Planning Application for residential garden use for land to north of Holly Cottage	2014 Planning Approval for change of use in the Green Belt granted - Approval Condition planting to front boundary to site installed, and now an ongoing maturing visual barrier to the Site
2.11 Meopham Secondary School	2018 Original 1 and 2 storey premises demolished, and new 3 storey premises built in the Green Belt, to the south-west of the Site
2.12 Meopham Library	2018 New, dedicated self-contained single storey premises built in the Green Belt, re-using existing car parking, to the south of the Site, beyond the new School premises

3 Current Status

- 3.01** Local Authority Housing development numerical shortfall identified - subsequently reviewed and rejected by central government
- 3.02** Initial 8no detached residential units proposals submitted to Local Authority for consideration
- 3.03** Local Authority Policy Documents relating to Local Development Scheme issued
- 3.04** Further advice sought from Local Authority
- 3.05** National Planning Policy Framework
- 3.06** Latest proposals reviewed

Date

- 2013** Local Development Scheme adopted January 2015 by Local Authority, with anticipated completion due December 2017. Original timetable subsequently delayed, and re-scheduled in January 2017, with a formal adoption now due July 2021 - timetable currently in excess of 9 months behind programmed dates
- 2015** Dismissed by Local Authority
- 2018** Papers and reports compiled by the Local Authority published
- 2018** Matters incorporated into revisions of proposals
- 2019** Updated February 2019
- 2019** Current Local Authority Policy Documents and NPPF referenced

4 Green Belt Considerations

4.01 National Planning Policy Framework - 13 Protecting Green Belt Land

- 133** " ... the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence"

1 Since incorporation into the Green Belt in 1971, there has been a significant, and continuous expansion of development, focussed in, and around Meopham School, all in the Green Belt (as listed in Section 2, above). The current impact on the original "openness" of the Green Belt, has been substantial, both in terms of its visual, and its spatial consequences in this area. No longer does the visual "openness", which once existed when the Green Belt was designated, through from the west of the countryside to Wrotham Road, and in the reverse direction, exist any longer - the site has become isolated and divorced from, and physically remote from, any current potential "openness" contribution to the Green Belt. Views from the west are blocked by the Leisure Centre, while views from the south-east, and the south, are now blocked by the recent Meopham School building. Additionally, the significant spatial qualities of, in particular, the new school building (3 storeys high), and the Sports Centre (double storey height shed), immediately adjacent to the Site, have already established there is no longer any spatial "openness" in this area (regardless of the impact of all the other local lower height developments). The effect of the spatial impact of these surrounding buildings, has been to isolate the Site within its own strong tree-lined boundaries, and isolate it physically from the Green Belt, thus eliminating any "openness" contribution that may have once existed. In respect of the original "openness" of the Green Belt in this area, the "harm" is already done - it is irreparable, and no subsequent development on this Site would further "harm" the now-remote "openness" of the local Green Belt. The damage has already been done, and it cannot either be un-done, or even made worse by this proposed development. Subsequent published Policy Documents indicate the support of "development" in this location - see "4.02 Gravesham Green Belt Study" comments below

134 "c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment"

140 " ... because of the important contribution which the open character of the village makes to the openness of the Green Belt, the village should be included in the Green Belt."

143 " Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances."

144 " ... that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt"

2 In a similar vein, the School-associated developments permitted have all not only impacted upon the "openness", in this area, but have also impacted upon the "permanence" of the Green Belt locally. As in Section 2, not only has a School been built since the Green Belt was created, but it has been subsequently extended, and recently redeveloped. The Library, which was once housed in the School, now has its own dedicated stand-alone building. In a similar vein, the Meopham Medical Centre has been both developed, and extended during the lifetime of the Green Belt in this location. All the individual (building) developments are of a "permanent" nature, and it is impossible to conceive that in the foreseeable future, all would be removed, and the ground returned to its original Green Belt status

3 The original premise of the "permanence" of the Green Belt has been lost due to the existing developments, and is most unlikely to ever be reinstated in the foreseeable future. The proposed development of this Site now makes no contribution to the "permeance" of the local Green Belt

4 Of the 5 purposes of the Green Belt, this Site only directly contributes in relation to this specific purpose. The adjacent school-associated development has "encroached" into the countryside, but as the development wraps around, and isolates the Site from the countryside, the Site has lost both its visual and physical connection with the "Countryside", and no longer plays any part in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

5 The village of Meopham Green was not considered to satisfy this requirement, and as such, was excluded from the original Green Belt designation, while this Site did. The adjacent Conservation Area, "The Street" is included in the Green Belt, and is part of the village of Meopham Green. The Site, while in the Green Belt, is still in the village of Meopham Green - it is not physically remote from Meopham Village, it is not isolated from Meopham Green, and if it is not in Meopham Green, then where is it? Being located in the Green Belt, does not preclude buildings from being in a village - it is a Site in the village (of Meopham Green), and it is in the Green Belt.

6 The proposals are in accordance with NPPF items 145 e) and g), as below, and are "appropriate" for this site

7 "Harm" to the "openness and permanence" of the Green Belt is recorded above in **4.01 133 1** and **2**

145 " ... should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are :
... **e)** limited infilling in villages;"

... **g)** limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), - not having a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the

4.02 Gravesham Green Belt Study

Parcel 20 West of Meopham Green and Culverstone

Purpose 1 - to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas

Purpose 2 - to prevent neighbouring towns merging

Purpose 2a - to prevent other settlements in the Green Belt from merging. " ... the narrow gap between Meopham Green and Hook Green makes the north eastern part of the parcel particularly important in preventing these settlements from merging with each other"

Purpose 3 - to safeguard the countryside from encroachment

Summary "There are opportunities to infill or partially or completely redevelop the area around Meopham School in accordance with national Green Belt policy if this does not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt

8 The Site sits in the village of Meopham Green, in the Green Belt. The Site is limited by the mature planting boundaries to the south, west and north, and the adjacent Listed Building, The George Inn, to the north. The proposed layout replaces Holly Cottage with a similar sized unit, and "infills" centrally to the street frontage with secured vehicular and pedestrian access gates into the redeveloped rear gardens of the existing dwellings

9 A 2014 Planning Approval permitted a change of use of a redundant tranche of land along the northern edge of the site, between Holly Cottage, and the George Public House to residential land. Subsequent investigations would indicate this land was taken out of agricultural use prior to 1940, as it once served as a garage (prior to the construction of Whitehall Garage, opposite the site on Wrotham Road, and then subsequently, part of the garden of Holly Cottage). The land has been previously developed and is suitable for " ... partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land ..."

10 As mentioned previously, previous and current substantial developments relating to the school site adjacent have isolated this Site from the "openness" of the Green Belt, therefore, the proposed development would have no impact upon the " ... greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development" currently has

Site Location

1 "Minimal/No Contribution"

2 "Minimal/No Contribution"

3 "Significant contribution" - The Site sits in the area referenced, but because any development here would be contained within the restrictions of existing developments surrounding it (The George Public House and private residential gardens to the north, the Leisure Centre to the west, and the recent School redevelopment to the south, there is no potential for expansion beyond existing development towards Hook Green)

The impact of the proposals in this respect, is not "significant", but "... no contribution"

4 "Significant contribution" - The proposals do not encroach into the countryside beyond existing developments

The impact of the proposals in this respect, is not "significant", but "... no contribution"

5 The Local Authority is promoting suitable development "around Meopham School" - immediately adjacent to this Willow Tree Farm Site. The proposals merit consideration for the reasons highlighted elsewhere

4.03 Gravesham Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study

MP6 Landscape Parcel - Meopham Green west
"Also within the parcel is Meopham School, a large complex of buildings together with playing fields contained within a strong boundary hedgerow

Development scenario "Small"

"The hedged area containing Meopham School, the Leisure Centre and other amenities is exposed to development, so further development within this area would be unlikely to have any significant additional impact on landscape character"

4 Summary of Assessment Results

"Summary of Landscape Capacity for Small-scale Development"

Table 2.3 Development Typologies

Small "Two storey residential dwellings - either terraced, semi-detached, or detached - with associated access roads, private gardens, and garaging"

4.04 Gravesham Borough Council, Gravesham Local Plan Regulation, Part 1 Site Allocations : Issues and Options

Option 4 Expansion of 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Tier Settlements

* "Some potential for meeting other special housing needs at the rural settlements"

* "Currently we have not identified any specific sites"

* "The allocation of a larger number of smaller sites could facilitate the speed of delivery"

4.05 Gravesham Borough Council, Gravesham Local Plan Regulation, Part 2 : Development Management Policies Document

Relates to previous NPPF document, and now needs to be reviewed to reflect latest 2019 NPPF requirements

1 Site Location

The Site is constrained to the west and south by the "school complex", and by residential gardens and the George Inn Public House to the north. To its northern, western, and southern boundaries there are strong boundary hedge and tree planting isolating the Site from the adjacent school complex and the Green Belt beyond

2 The photographs contained within the report (MP6a and MP6b) demonstrate there is no visibility at all into the site from the countryside (and by implication, also in the opposite direction, and by a site visit) it is impossible to see from the site beyond all the surrounding development out into the countryside - "Small-scale " development potential has been assessed as being "Medium" (for "Overall sensitivity assessment"), and Medium (for "Capacity for development") in this parcel

3 Of the 75no sites assessed and reported upon in the published Local Authority "Summary", only 1no site is considered to have more potential for development in the Gravesham Green Belt (equal assessment with 7no other sites)

4 The proposed development is for 2 storey detached residential apartments, with associated access roads, private gardens, and garaging

Included in the current comprehensive review by the Local Authority - most relevant published Option relating to Meopham Green

1 No known developments exclusively for the "early retirees" (over age 55) in any part of Gravesham, either current, or proposed

2 Proposed development of 16no superior 2 bedroom units restricted to over-age 55s as part of the housing mix in Meopham Green to assist with local repositioning of family unit occupancies in the village housing market

There are no other sites identified in Meopham Green or Hook Green to match this Site's potential, nor are there any known sites available in the "inset" Village areas of Meopham Green or Hook Green

3 Site is immediately available, subject to due process

1 Remains to be completed - April 2018 Document, Sections 2.8.12 and 2.8.13

5 Site Photographs

5.01 Aerial view, 1940



5.02 Aerial view, 1960



- 1 "Historic" view of (the future) Conservation Area "The Street", "Willow Tree Farm", "Holly Cottage", and historic car/vehicle garage to northern tranche of the Site all visible. Current perimeter planting boundaries clearly defined, and confirmation Site is no longer in agricultural use
- 2 "Open" countryside of future Green Belt clearly demonstrated

- 1 Similar outlook, with 20 years of plant growth only impacting upon its "openness"
- 2 Car/vehicle garage now removed, and ground cleared of previous structures - no evidence of use, but certainly not available for "agricultural purposes"
- 3 "Whitehill Motors" Garage and surrounding 1960's-1970s housing opposite yet to commence

No aerial shot of the Site has been found immediately prior to the introduction of the Green Belt, but it is presumed that the nature of the surrounding countryside has not changed significantly - no change to its "openness", and only ageing of maturing trees to boundaries occurring

5.03 Aerial view, 1990



5.04 Aerial view, 2018 (latest view currently available)



- 1 Boundaries to the Willow Tree Farm Site now well developed
- 2 Further "Sheds/Garages" to Willow Tree Farm now in existence. Northern tranche of land to site appears to be redundant, with a pedestrian route through to the Leisure Centre site
- 3 Meopham Medical Centre currently under construction
- 4 Original School development of building, roads and car parking, sports courts and pitches, and associated landscaping all now in existence
- 5 School boundary at A227 Wrotham Road established, but neither continuous nor well defined

- 1 Leisure Centre completed. Meopham Medical Centre extension completed. Meopham Library stand-alone building completed. Pre-School Nursery completed. Temporary buildings in playing field not yet installed
- 2 Latest School development now visible - original building complex partially demolished, with remaining parts awaiting demolition and completion of both hard and soft landscaping and fencing
- 3 Planting belt to define boundary to School site on A227 Wrotham Road now well established, with a pronounced deep solid belt of planting to the east of the Meopham Medical Centre - only very limited views through from Wrotham Road at the entrance into the School site
- 4 Northern, western, and southern boundaries of Meopham School site also now well established, creating a well defined "package" of land which was once "fully open" to the surrounding countryside of the Green Belt

5.05 Perimeter view, 2019 - taken from the playing field, looking east to the Leisure Centre, with the Site behind



5.06 Perimeter view, 2019 - taken from the car parking area outside the Pre-School Nursey, looking north to the new School building. The Site behind, is no longer visible



- 1 Leisure Centre restricts views into the Site, and isolates the Site from the "openness" of the Green Belt
- 2 Perimeter tree planting to the Site defines its location, but the view is blocked by the Leisure Centre
- 3 Playing surfaces, fences, floodlighting, parking and street lighting relating to the Leisure Centre all isolate the Site further from the "openness" of the Green Belt
- 4 Original "openness" relationship and the contribution of the Site to the "openness" of the Green Belt to the west is no longer a reality, in either direction. Due to its isolation, the Site no longer contributes to the "openness" of the Green Belt
- 5 The original "permanence" of the Green Belt, when implemented, has been lost due to the significance and nature of the permitted developments, with no foreseeable likelihood of the original "permanence" being re-introduced

- 1 The new School building completely blocks and views into the Site, and isolates the Site from the openness of the Green Belt
- 2 Perimeter tree planting to the Site defines its location, but the view is totally hidden by the new School building
- 3 Extensive car parking surfaces, fences, formal landscaping and street lighting relating to the new School building all isolate the Site further from the "openness" of the Green Belt
- 4 Original "openness" relationship and the contribution of the Site to the "openness" of the Green Belt to the south is no longer a reality, in either direction. Due to its isolation, the Site no longer contributes to the "openness" of the Green Belt
- 5 The original "permanence" of the Green Belt, when implemented, has been lost due to the significance and the nature of the permitted developments, with no foreseeable likelihood of the original "permanence" being re-introduced