

Badgers Mount Neighbourhood Plan

Final Vision Note – 10 October 2019

1.0 Introduction

This note summarises the discussions of the Vision Session held with members of Badgers Mount Parish Council and facilitated by Brendan O'Neill and Jon Dowty of O'Neill Homer, at Badgers Mount Memorial Hall on 5 September 2019.

The purpose of the workshop was to review the planning context and carry out a spatial analysis of the settlement as a background to discussing how the Badgers Mount Neighbourhood Plan (BMNP) could be used to protect existing assets and character, encourage positive change, and consult the community on a long term 'Vision' for the neighbourhood area.

The workshop was attended by:

John Grint	Chair BMPC and District Councillor
Geoff Dessent	Clerk BMPC
Alistair Dunlop	Chm BMNP SG
Cathy Southwood	BM Residents Association & BMNP SG
Roger King	BMNP SG
Tracey McCartney	Cllr BMPC & BMNP SG
Gordon Plumb	Cllr BMPC & BMNP SG
Jon Dowty	Oneill Homer (OH)
Brendan O'Neill	Oneill Homer
Simon Taylor	Sevenoaks DC

2.0 Presentation

The session started with a presentation on the purpose and key features of neighbourhood planning, the potential scope of a neighbourhood plan (NP) and the process for making the plan. Questions were answered throughout.

Neighbourhood planmaking can be broken down into 8 stages, the first three of which up to the pre-submission stage involve:

- I. developing a vision for the area that looks forward at least 15 years,
- II. testing the vision and proposals with the community and stakeholders, and
- III. agreeing the scope of the plan policies and preparing the evidence

These three activities are where the Steering Group (SG) and OH add the most value to the project. The remaining 5 stages are process driven and defined in legislation and planning practice guidance culminating in the Referendum. It is this democratic element which is distinctive to neighbourhood planning and central to ensuring the NP is grounded in the views of the majority of the local community.

A copy of the presentation has been shared with the Parish Council and is available to view on its website.

3.0 Planning context

The Sevenoaks Core Strategy (2011) & Allocations and Development Management Plan (2015) form the basis of the development plan for the District. In planning policy terms Badgers Mount is defined as:

- A Hamlet with a defined Green Belt Inset Boundary
- The Parish lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt. East of the Orpington By-Pass is within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Development will only take place where it is compatible with policies for Protecting the Green Belt and Kent Downs AONB (Policy LO1)
- Priority given to protecting rural character

With the exceptions outlined above, much of the Parish is designated Green Belt and AONB and as such the NP is operating in a complex planning environment. In addition, the NP should have regard to 'the reasoning and evidence' of the emerging Local Plan which is at an advanced stage and likely to be adopted prior to examination of the BMNP.

Two strategic allocations are proposed in the emerging Local plan (ST2 – 43 Chelsfield Depot and ST – 45 Calcutta Club/Polhill Business Centre) and the BMNP has the option to guide how these are to be developed through policies in the NP. Noting that since the Local Plan was prepared the Calcutta Club has been renamed 'Mumbai Central' and 'Chelsfield Depot' is known locally as the FM Conway Distribution Centre.

To this end the SG submitted a representation to Matter ED8 of the Local Plan examination confirming its intention to take the opportunity provided by the NP to enable the local community to *"shape the allocations and establish in policy the key design principles for the two sites"*.

Site A (see plan of Parish overleaf) the FM Conway Distribution Depot is located just to the south of Badgers Mount. Site B, the Mumbai Central /Polhill Business Centre is located 1 mile to the south of Badgers Mount at the southern end of the Parish.

The new Local plan also proposes to allocate a site outside the NP boundary for about 27 dwellings to the west of the A224 on land on the north side of Shoreham Lane. More significantly, the Local Plan proposes to allocate a further 300 dwellings at Fort Halstead in addition to the 450 already permitted. The SG confirmed that the construction of a new Crematorium at Oak Tree Farm will commence in 2020.

In preparation, the SG have commissioned a Housing Needs Survey from Action in Rural Kent which should be available in December; prepared a stakeholder list of about 30 Organisations and has undertaken initial consultation with the community.

Halstead Parish are also preparing a NP. OH advised the SG that they should maintain close liaison with the Halstead NP group given the cross-boundary issues that are likely to exist, not least the dependency of BM residents on the services and facilities afforded by Halstead village.

4.0 Spatial analysis

A spatial analysis of the Parish was explored with the SG to enable an understanding of the underlying structure of the Parish and its relationship to its setting and the surrounding settlements. The following two plans are based on the discussions at the workshop.

Plan A: The Parish

Badgers Mount Parish is a hamlet about 5 miles to the north-west of Sevenoaks and between Sevenoaks, Bromley and Orpington. situated within the Knockholt and Halstead Wooded Downs Character Area, the Parish lies on the upper slopes of the North Downs within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and largely within the Metropolitan Green Belt.

The area forms a gateway to the historic Darent Valley which follows the river from its source in the Greensand Hills near Sevenoaks to the River Thames at Dartford.

The Parish boundary was redrawn in 2015 when Badgers Mount became a separate Parish from Shoreham and Halstead. The Parish contains about 260 dwellings and has a population of approximately 650 people with Badgers Mount being the main settlement.

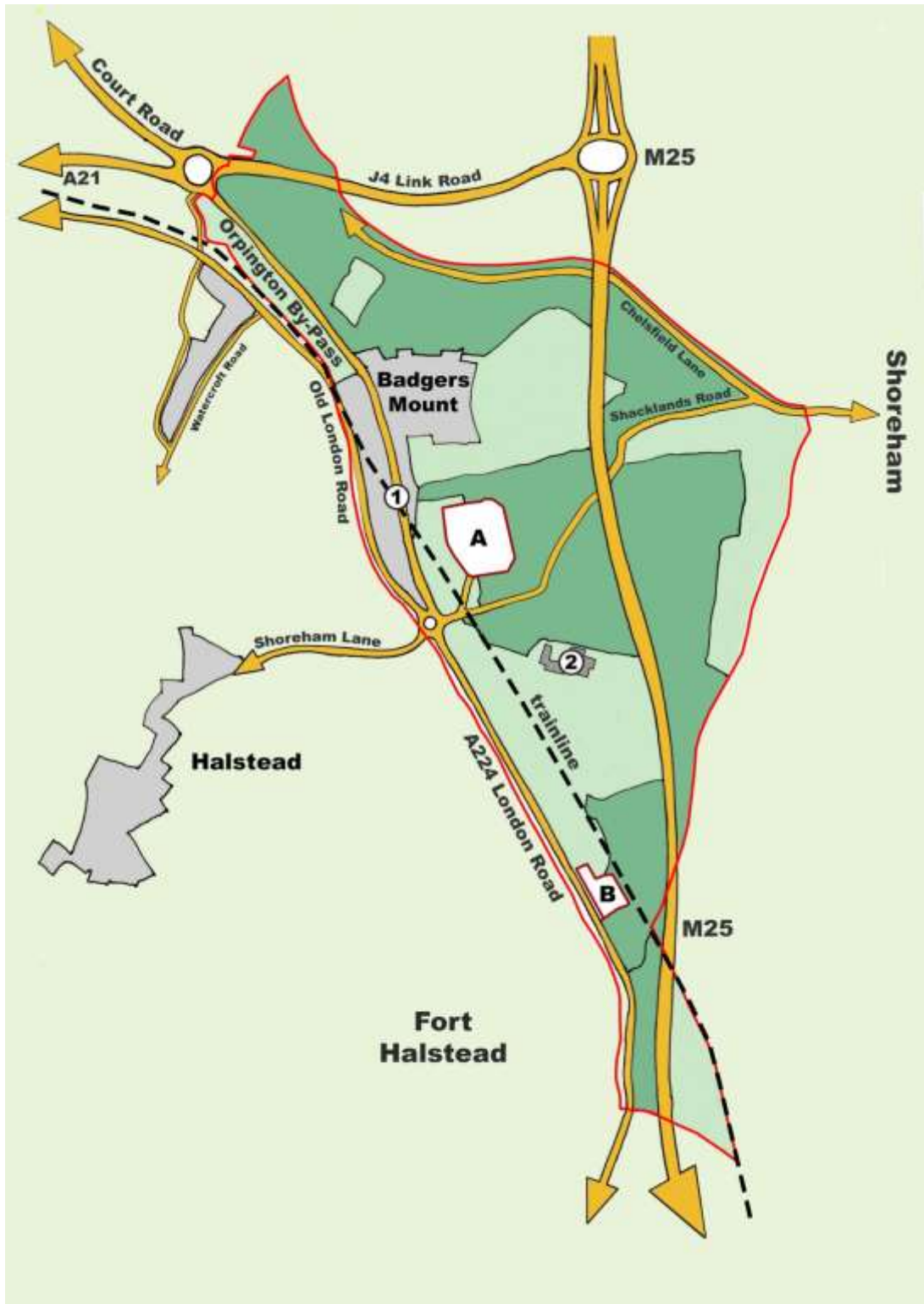
The triangular structure of the Parish is reinforced by the road network with three roads; the Old London Road, the A224 Orpington Bypass and the M25, all running north south through the Parish with the M25 J4 link road from the Orpington by-pass at the northern boundary, and the convergence of the A224 and the M25 at the apex of the southern boundary.

The closest rail station is Knockholt located about 1 mile to the north west on the Old London Road. The rail service at Knockholt is part of the South Eastern Main Line, providing a regular daily link to London Charing Cross and Sevenoaks stations.

The hamlet of Badgers Mount, which is the main settlement in the Parish, is located on the western side of the Parish. The Polhill Arms, the oldest building in the settlement was completed in 1830; on the coaching route between London and Hastings. The railway line and Polhill Bank tunnel were constructed in 1868. The settlement grew significantly in the 1930's along the alignment of the Orpington By-Pass largely through speculative development and plot sales. Apart from the Memorial Hall (1) on Highland Road, the settlement has no facilities.

There are two further areas of significant developments within the Parish; the FM Conway Distribution Depot (A) in the south eastern corner of the settlement, and the Polhill Garden Centre and Shopping Village (2) to the south of this, both of which are accessed off the A224.

There are some further smaller pockets of development to the south along the A224 including the Mumbai Central/Polhill Business Centre site (B).



Plan A – Parish Context

The landscape character of the Parish is defined by broad blocks of woodland that extend across the M25 up to the eastern boundary, with some open areas of managed and scrub grassland to the south of the Polhill Garden Centre (1) and to the western side of Badgers Mount.

Topographically, the ridge that runs along the northern edge of the western side of the Downs and returns into Shoreham forming the Darent Valley creates the high ground that Badgers Mount sits on and gives extensive views across the valley onto the Downs from the east of the Parish, particularly along Shacklands Road.

One and a half miles to the east of Badgers Mount, is the settlement of Shoreham, a more traditionally planned village with a high street, village store, pubs and railway station. Shacklands Road which connects Badgers Mount to Shoreham is a lane with no pedestrian footpaths.

One mile to the south west of Badgers Mount, is the settlement of Halstead, another more traditionally planned village with a village store/newsagents, pubs and church. Shoreham Lane which connects Badgers Mount to Halstead is an unmarked, unlit narrow rural road with no pedestrian footpaths.

Adjacent to the southern apex of the Parish on the western side, Fort Halstead, the Defense Science and Technology Laboratory run by QinetiQ forms a substantial pocket of development in a woodland setting which may include 750 new dwellings to come forward in phases over the coming years.

The A224 is a cause for local concern in terms of road safety. Badgers Mount Residents Association (BMRA) has campaigned to reduce the speed limit on the A224 given the close proximity of residential and business properties to the A224, together with the absence of footways on the east side of the A224, designated pedestrian crossings and the lack of provision for cyclists.

Plan B: The settlement

The settlement of Badgers Mount has been planned around the Old London Road and the A224 Orpington By-Pass creating two distinct character areas: ribbon development that faces onto the eastern side of the old London Road and onto both sides of the Orpington by-pass, and a block of development planned around Badgers Road, Johnsons Avenue, Milton Avenue and Highland Road that is set further back into the woodland. The dwellings facing onto the eastern side of the Orpington by-pass are a combination of frontages and rear gardens, and on the western side a number of dwellings are set back further from the by-pass along Sanderson's Avenue.

The architectural style and materials across the settlement is typical of the suburban character period with hipped roofs, clay tile and render, a mix of bungalows and two storey houses with a high proportion of detached dwellings.

Public realm character along the western side of the London Road and the eastern side of the Orpington by-pass is also suburban with curtilages defined by a combination hedgelines, fencing and walls with the highway having footpaths and verges.

To the east the character is more rural with Highland Road, Johnsons Avenue, Milton Avenue and Badgers Road being lanes with no footpaths road markings or street lighting.

The FM Conway distribution depot (A) is set back approximately 100m to the south of Highland Road.

The Parish contains a 'Rights of Way' network which provides east/west pedestrian connectivity (3). Footpath SR7 to the north and SR8 to the south run east west across the settlement connecting Halsted with Shoreham. SR8 starts from Shoreham Lane in Halstead just east of Beldham Haw and connects with SR7 via a short link (SR715) to the north east of Jenkin's Neck Wood. Similarly, SR7 connects the Old London Road to Shacklands Road via a tunnel under the M25 and through Barnett's Wood. Existing local roads on the 'Mount' provide north south links between both rights of way.

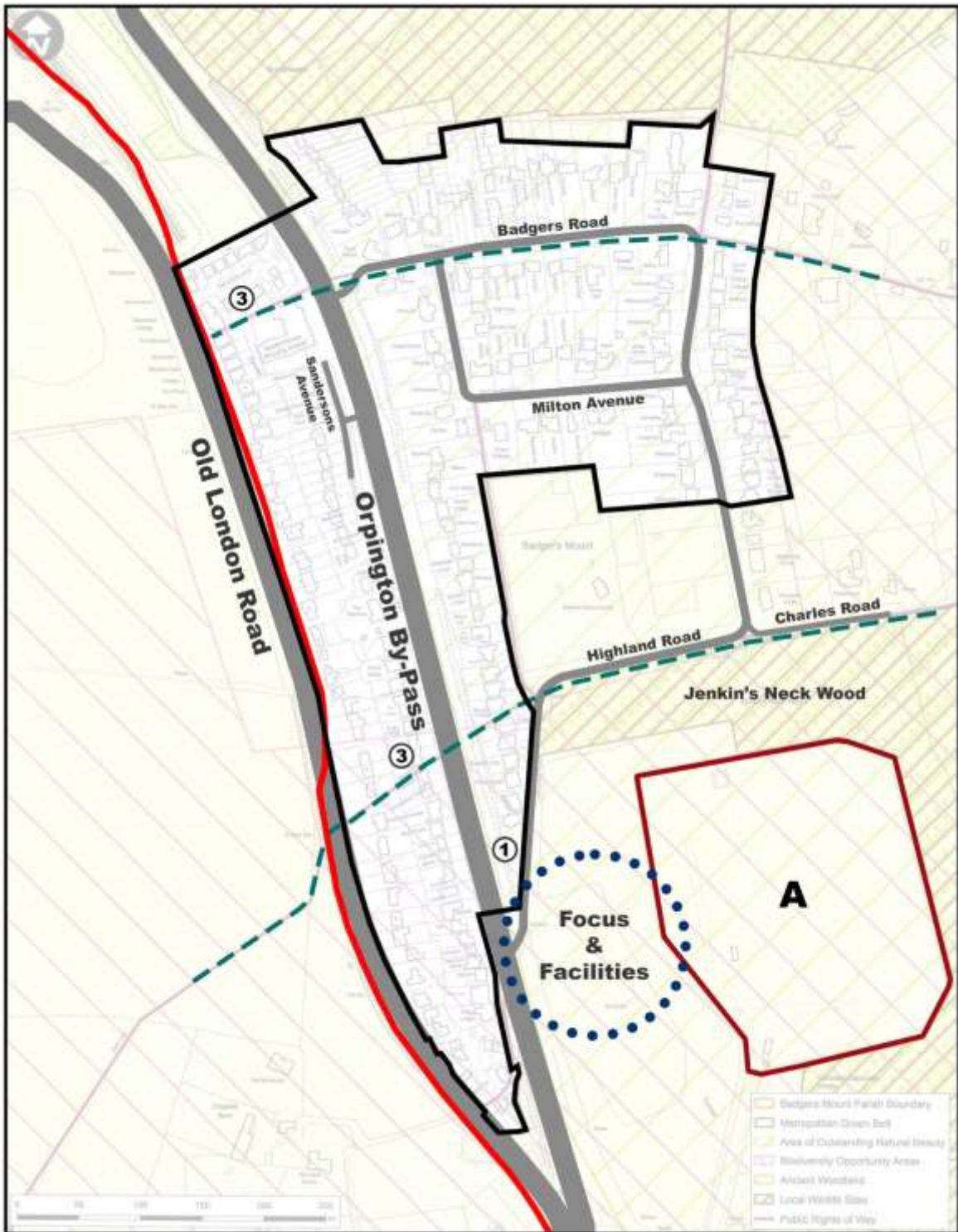
5.0 Observations

The planning of Badgers Mount around the development of the road network and its generation through speculative development over a relatively short period of time set it apart from Halstead and Shoreham which have greater historic depth and structure. It also lacks the facilities these other settlements have and a sense of place.

The Orpington by-pass and Old London Road pass by the settlement with no real sense of either entering or having arrived in Badgers Mount. There are no spaces or events such as the Shoreham Lane/Station Road junction in Halstead or the High Street/Mill Lane junction in Shoreham to give Badgers Mount a sense of arrival or focus. This lack is reinforced by the absence of any facilities such as a pub, church, shop or green to provide spaces and activities that foster a shared sense of identity in a community.

Connectivity within the settlement and with the adjoining villages is also poor and while there is an east/west network of rights of way, given the lack of footpaths, cycleways and a safe pedestrian environment, local travel is almost entirely dependent on the car. There is however a cycle lane to and from Knockholt Station and an occasional local bus service (Service 431) but not at peak times.

The SG recently commissioned two high level studies on Transport and Ecology to inform the NP.



Plan B – Settlement Context

The transport study confirms that footways accessing the A224 appear to encourage pedestrians to cross the A224 at inappropriate locations and accessing a bus stop located on the A224 in the vicinity of Badgers Road was problematic.

The Study confirms, accident data indicates a high number of collisions in the Parish and there is scope for further road safety improvements and that it would be reasonable to expect any major development in the Parish to address road safety concerns. It also recommends that the NP should attempt to secure more and better sustainable transport infrastructure by identifying gaps in current pedestrian, cycle and public transport provision.

The Ecology Study confirms the Parish is likely to support a wide range of wildlife associated with the woodlands and the open fields that characterise the undeveloped parts. Dormice are likely to be present in the woodland, as are a range of bat species including some of the commoner species (pipistrelles, brown long-eared bats and noctules) and possibly some of the country's rarest species such as Bechstein's bats or possibly Alcaethoe bats. In addition, Slow-worms and potentially grass snakes are likely to be found around the woodland edges and around gardens and, although there are few natural ponds in or around the Parish, common newt species, frogs and toads may be present around garden ponds.

The Study recommends that records should be obtained from the Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre to enable a targeted assessment of ecology to be undertaken where development pressures and change are most likely.

6.0 A Vision for BM

The discussion that followed this analysis considered the qualities and shortcomings of Badgers Mount with the following key observations;

- The Parish lacks a strong sense of place and identity.
- There is a lack of facilities to provide a community focus such as local shop, playground or community greenspace.
- There is a strong green infrastructure setting to the Parish which is important to its character and local biodiversity.
- Traffic and road safety are issues which resonate with the community.
- The shortage of low cost/affordable housing.
- Development in the Parish will be limited by the Green Belt and its AONB setting
- The key developments within the Parish over the coming Local Plan period are likely to be the two allocations proposed by SDC
- Consideration should be given to development outside the Parish boundary that may affect the Parish

Given this context, the starting point for the BMNP is to decide whether it wishes to play a part in shaping the allocation for the sites proposed by SDC as strategic allocations. The discussion at the workshop concluded that:

Site B - Mumbai Central/Polhill Business Centre; Is too remote from the settlement. Residential development on this site would be difficult to integrate with its poor pedestrian connectivity and reliance on car access. It is closer to Fort Halstead than to Badgers Mount and its location on the A224 with access to the M25 may support

its continued value as a mixed use/employment site. The BMNP may still wish to influence the development of this site if it is to be allocated in the Local Plan on this basis.

Site A - FM Conway Distribution Depot: There is a close relationship between this site and Badgers Mount. If it is to be allocated, the development could be either standalone or integrated with Badgers Mount and the BMNP SG will need to take a view on this.

An integrated development could provide opportunities to improve the sense of place and identity, provide facilities and a community focus, and provide additional open space and green infrastructure. This could include planning for the potential transfer of the woodland to the east of this site, currently owned by SDC to BMPC, to provide a more comprehensive community asset.

If it is decided that the BMNP should be used to encourage positive change in this way, a starting point for a 'vision' for the NP should consider the following three questions;

1. Which existing features of the Parish should be protected and/or enhanced?
2. What amenities and/or facilities are required to support the community?
3. How should the new development be integrated with the existing settlement?

7.0 Actions

- 7.1 The BMNP SG to agree a vision for the NP.
- 7.2 The BMNP SG to meet with the SDC and the Kent Downs AONB Unit to obtain their preliminary view on the Vision and scope in the context of the Planning Policy Technical Note overleaf *
- 7.3 Once agreement is reached with SDC & KD AONB, or as a result of the feedback to 7.2 the NP scope is adjusted, the principles of the vision to be tested through a public consultation event and used to inform the PC representation to the LP examination (Matter ED8).
- 7.4 The Consultation to obtain the community views on facilities and amenities that may be incorporated into a more comprehensive scheme.
- 7.5 The landowners that may be affected by site A and B proposals to be identified through a Land Registry search.
- 7.6 Share ideas with adjacent Parishes, and particularly ideas regarding pedestrian connectivity with the Halstead NP group.
- 7.7 Commission further Transport and Ecology inputs as required and on the advice of OH.

*** Planning Policy Technical Note:**

Once the direction of travel of the plan is agreed by the SG, OH recommend this note is shared informally with SDC and the Kent Downs AONB unit to obtain a preliminary view on the following:

A. Whether a more comprehensive proposal which extends the current boundary of Site A would be considered to be 'major development' (for the purposes of NPPF paragraph 172) and to obtain a view from both the SDC and the Kent Downs AONB on whether the proposal in principle would (should a planning application ultimately come forward for a comprehensive scheme) meet the 'exceptional circumstances' test of paragraph 172.

B. Whether 'very special circumstances' exist (NPPF paragraph 144) to justify such a proposal in the Green Belt, and whether it is appropriate (or indeed possible in law) for the NP to allocate land for a more comprehensive proposal in the GB **or** whether the boundary of a more comprehensive allocation should be addressed in policy in the new Local Plan. If the latter, then the PC/SG will need to make such a representation when it attends the EQ8 Examination Hearing.

C. Should the BMNP SG agree that Site B would not be promoted for housing through the NP, then it should request SDC indicate informally how the loss of this quantum of housing in the Parish is likely to be made up, and whether the two proposed allocations in the Parish are in effect being treated by SDC as a response to NPPF paragraph 65.

These are important matters of principle and planning law which OH can assist the SG to address.

Oneill Homer

10th October 2019