

# ROTHERWICK PARISH COUNCIL

## Draft Hart Local Plan, Regulation 18 Consultation - April 2017

Rotherwick Parish Council has considered the Draft Hart Local Plan and supporting information, and is pleased that the policies proposed generally align with the Rotherwick Neighbourhood Development Plan. Rotherwick Parish Council is also pleased that the plan aims to protect and enhance the natural and historic environment, and conserve the countryside and open spaces, whilst preserving the separate character of settlements and heritage assets.

The Parish Council has a few comments for consideration against the Draft Local Plan, which are detailed below.

### Gaps Between Settlements

Coalescence of neighbouring parishes with Rotherwick has been a concern for the Parish Council, particularly with regard to Hook and Newnham. This concern was also expressed by residents during consultation on the now adopted Rotherwick Neighbourhood Development Plan.

The Parish Council are concerned that development in the countryside allowed in Policy MG5 could adversely affect the separation between Hook and Rotherwick, particularly to the north of Hook along the B3349.

Consistent with the vision of the Draft Local Plan to respect the separate character of Hart's settlements and maintain the countryside between, a 'Gap' between Hook and Rotherwick is requested to be added to policy MG6.

This new gap would extend from the gap shown between Hook and Newnham, along the northern settlement boundary of Hook and the southern settlement boundary of Rotherwick village to the B3349. The inclusion of this important gap would be seen as a significant improvement to the Draft Local Plan.



Figure 1 – Additional Gap Between Settlements

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## **Affordable Housing**

The lack of clarity around the definition of 'local', for the application of SC9, raises concern regarding potential future development in the countryside. The Draft Local Plan identifies a significant need for more affordable housing across the District, while the spatial strategy anticipates several instances where communities might be considered local to one another, e.g. Murrell Green, Hook, Newnham and/or Rotherwick.

The Parish Council recommends that the 'local' definition should be defined as 'local need from the host settlement' to ensure that the policy is not ambiguous.

## **Murrell Green**

Rotherwick Parish Council does not support the introduction of a new settlement at Murrell Green, the reasons for which are set out below.

The consultation around the 'Refined Options for Delivering New Homes' in 2016 included a new settlement at Winchfield. The resulting responses and associated conclusions can only be considered in this context. If there are other options for a new settlement then a separate consultation should be held to select the most appropriate location, if it is not Winchfield.

It is understood that alternative sites were put forward for consideration in the Local Plan by developers as a result of the request for potential sites by Hart District Council. A site that was submitted by Bell-Cornwell was 'Rye Common New Settlement' (SHL 181, Land South of Little Rye Farm). This has the potential to provide a new settlement in a far more sustainable manner than Murrell Green and provide a much improved environment for future residents.

The introduction of a new settlement at Murrell Green has many disadvantages, including: the amalgamation of Hook and Hartley Wintney, increase in traffic on the congested A30 and environmental issues for future residents.

### i) Coalescence

Whilst it is recognised that gaps are proposed between the new settlement, Hook and Hartley Wintney, these are relatively small and still result in the urbanisation of the area around the A30 and effectively becomes one large urban settlement. This view is supported by CPRE in their assessment of the Draft Local Plan.

### ii) Traffic

The road network around the A30 is already very congested around this area, with sections of single and dual carriageway causing bottlenecks. Additional traffic, new junctions and necessary speed restrictions will exacerbate this issue and increase air pollution.

If the necessary infrastructure improvements are not made along with the development then there is also the potential for a significant increase in displaced traffic taking unsuitable alternative routes through neighbouring parishes/settlements which is a safety concern.

## iii) Environment

The NPPF states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: *“preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability”*

The proposed Murrell Green site does not meet this criteria for a number of reasons. The site is located between the A30, M3 and railway line giving rise to high levels of air pollution. It has been recognised that living within 500m of busy roads significantly increases the likelihood of poor health (including recent studies published in The Lancet).

The Environment Agency’s website indicates that the area immediately adjacent to the site has been used for landfill purposes in the past. There is a possibility of part of the site being contaminated and also the potential migration of pollutants, the extent of which cannot be known at this time.

The applicants for the previously refused solar farm at Trimmers Farm commented that the close proximity to high voltage electricity pylons is undesirable for housing from an electromagnetic radiation perspective, and the potential associated health effects.

There is a high pressure gas main running through the middle of the proposed site (registered with HSE as a Major Accident Hazard Pipeline). Whilst exclusion zones may be included during the site design this does not fully mitigate the risk.

## iv) Previous Planning History

Previous application for nearby solar farm was rejected for the following reasons;

*By virtue of its visual impact and wider landscape views the proposed development would have an unacceptable urbanising impact, harmful to the rural character of the area and to the wider setting of the designated heritage assets of the listed and locally listed buildings within the zone of theoretical visibility and the Odiham Conservation Area. The proposed development would seriously detract from the amenity and consequent recreational value of the nearby public right of ways, especially public rights of way 501 and 729, by reducing their rural character and detracting from significant views.*

It is not clear how the development of a new settlement would not cause significantly more harm than the previously proposed solar farm which was refused.

## v) Infrastructure

It is difficult to understand why a new site at Murrell Green most appropriately balances the need for new houses and the limitations on existing infrastructure. The Draft Local Plan does not provide evidence as to why the balance within the spatial strategy is appropriate to the needs of the district. The Draft Local Plan fails to integrate the delivery of housing with the necessary associated infrastructure so it is difficult to evaluate if the plan is sustainable.

The more significant constraints for infrastructure are seen as inadequate roads, train capacity and utility provision, such as adequate foul drainage. These issues are much more challenging and long term in nature, than the provision of additional doctors surgeries for example.

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## **Murrell Green Conclusion**

The proposed Murrell Green site for a new settlement is not sustainable from a number of perspectives. If a new settlement is required to meet the projected housing figures then alternative sites with fewer constraints should be consulted on.

The need for a new settlement must also be considered in the context of the housing target in relation to the 2016 SHMA. The Murrell Green development offers the potential for 1800 new homes in the plan period, which equates to the difference between the current housing target of 10,185 and the SHMA figure of 8,022. Therefore it could be argued that a new settlement is not required. This is further questioned when considering urban extensions that may be approved or allowed on appeal and the addition of brownfield sites and current office conversions. All of these will increase housing delivery and strengthen the argument against a new settlement.