

COMMENT ON THE HARTEST NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN “HARTEST 2036”

(VERSION FOR PUBLIC COMMENT DATED MARCH 2017)

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May 15th 2017

INTRODUCTION

The Hartest Neighbourhood Plan (HNP) is commendable and assists in providing an important framework for the future sustainable development of Hartest. Many people have devoted considerable time and energy to this document and this is greatly appreciated.

As Hartest is designated a “hinterland village” in Babergh Core Strategy it is right and proper that development is encouraged but only in the context of a close functional relationship with existing patterns of development. This is stated on page 17 of the Hartest Neighbourhood Plan (HNP) and it is rightly a central theme to the document.

However, the overriding impression is that the HNP comes to the (unsupported) conclusion that there is little or no option for further development within or adjacent to the Built Up Area Boundary (BUAB) of the village and, instead, intimates that further development would be preferred in several “clusters” which are not well defined and inconsistently allocated. Given existing planning policies it is considered inappropriate to have a HNP plan which **does not recognise, in detail and with justification, opportunities to develop in and around the BUAB as a priority** as it provides housing close to the village amenities with maximum safety and access for the residents.

It is important to recognise that families that purchase properties in a village (BUAB) do so in order to benefit from its amenities. This necessarily results in higher housing density in such areas, and residents make a modest sacrifice of privacy for the benefits obtained through the nearby infrastructure and facilities. In contrast, families that purchase houses outside of the village (whether in a “Cluster” or not) do so explicitly for the benefits of being surrounded by open spaces and green fields. It is therefore inappropriate to focus new developments in to these outlying countryside areas (as a preference to the area adjacent to the BUAB) as this unfairly adversely affects those residents who have opted, specifically, to live in a rural setting.

There are large swaths of open land adjacent to the BUAB that would permit, at some time in the scope of the HNP, building of small, low-rise, low-cost buildings of the type identified as the main requirement for the village which could benefit from:

- Not impinging aesthetically on the core of the village
- Providing the type of low-cost housing required by the village as a priority
- Reinvigorating the core of the village with younger families with children
- Providing easy access to village amenities like the school
- Providing pedestrian access to these new developments will reduce car use, congestion and increased safety to all road users
- Having access to mains services and utilities

It is therefore recommended that the HNP includes the explicit statement (Policy HAR 2) that **“proposals for appropriate and sensitive developments to provide homes within and adjacent to the BUAB that are consistent with the requirements of the village will be acceptable in principle. Sites outside or not adjoining the BUAB will be considered as open countryside.**



SECTION 6 : HARTEST'S SPATIAL STRATEGY

Item (iii) of CS11 Criteria states (page 18) that there “are **limited opportunities for acceptable development within and adjacent to the Built Up Area Boundary (BUAB)**”. While development around the immediate environs of the Green have to be meticulously controlled, it would be beneficial to identify (on a map in the HNP) those areas within and adjacent to the BUAB that may be available for development, as planning guidelines direct development priorities to such core areas.

The draft HNP does not address potential BUAB flood risk in any detail, but public data from the Environment Agency shows that only small areas of the BUAB are regarded as having a significant risk (Item 6.3(i), page 17). **Of the ~68 acres potentially available for development adjacent to the BUAB, see map provided below in relation to Policy HAR 2), only 6.5% is affected by flood risk** as specified by the Environment Agency map.

Item (v) of CS11 identifies several key community needs. The Plan emphasises the need to increase the number of younger families and children in the village to make it more sustainable. As key village facilities are concentrated in the BUAB (Clinic and School) it is also important to recognise that **any development should be connected to this core area** by suitable footpaths and within reasonable walking distance. Otherwise access to these core facilities will be by road, further accentuating an existing problem for traffic and parking around the school, and greatly increasing the risk of death or injury to school children.

This further supports the need for a focussed assessment of housing development options within and adjacent to the BUAB. This is recognised to an extent in Section 7.15 of the HNP (page 30). The accompanying map shows the **location of paths that provide suitable access to the core facilities** and begs the question of availability and suitability for development of land adjacent to the pathways or in immediately adjacent areas that can be connected by new paths.



SECTION 7 : HOUSING

Outside of the BAUB, the HNP has proposed the definition of “Clusters” and, by extension, proposing that development would be preferential in such clusters. They are separated by “Visually Important Gaps”. The aim of the proposal appears to be to avoid, where possible, ribbon development of the village.

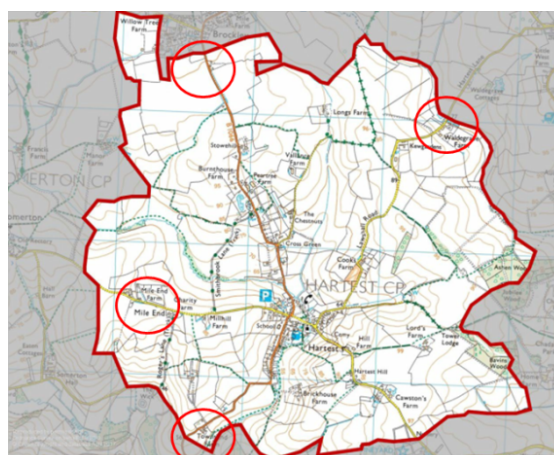
The policy, as written, is ambiguous and could lead to unintended consequences. The implication appears to be that one or two dwellings per cluster could be considered reasonable. If one or two dwellings are allowed in one of these “clusters”, a developer could subsequently propose another one or two in the same area using the NHP as a justification which, being in accordance with Neighbourhood Plan policy, would have to be allowed unless material considerations indicated otherwise. Further, when the cluster is ‘full’, adjoining sites would have to be considered because the clusters are so poorly defined and it could not be argued that a site within the cluster is sustainable but the adjoining site, possibly outside a vaguely defined line, is not.

An important observation, which is not made in the HNP, but illustrated on the accompanying map, is that along the roads (particularly north of Hartest along the B1066, **development has resulted in staggered plots on either side of the road**. This almost inevitably results in **each house retaining its frontage as open countryside** and also results in no “ribbon development”, even though many plots have outbuildings. **A far stronger characterisation of the area is provided by the off-set plots and visually important gaps rather than clusters**. The HNP could usefully add a statement that, as this an established development pattern that avoids ribbon development while minimising visual impact on the character of the area and wider landscape setting, where **future developments are acceptable, they should follow this pattern**. This form of development would respect the existing settlement pattern of the village in accordance with CS11 and paragraph 58 of the NPPF. It should therefore replace the cluster concept.



The designation of “Clusters” in the draft HNP is necessarily ambiguous and arbitrary and does not recognise the significance of the staggered developments described above. As a result, **the Cluster concept is not regarded as valid** when designating specific areas for acceptable development (and, by extension, excluding others).

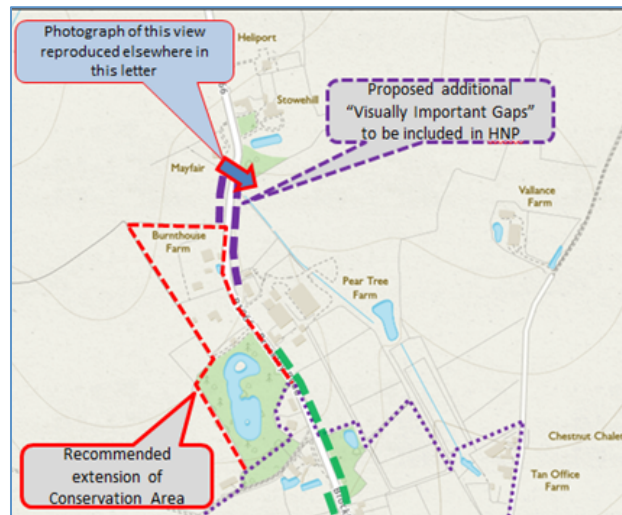
For example, houses to the west of Hartest (Mile End) are not designated in to clusters, although they have a density and number that is comparable to existing proposed “clusters”. Others could also be “possible”, as shown on the map. If the concept of clusters is to be used (and we contend that this is flawed and should not be used), there should be no



attempt to identify particular clusters. It is far too prescriptive and anomalies are inevitable. Rather, a criteria-based policy approach could be used.

North of Hartest the “Peartree Cluster” has been proposed, although its boundaries are vague. It has the lowest density of buildings of the four proposed clusters and is characterised by a preponderance of open paddocks.

Another group of buildings is located to the north of the “Peartree Cluster” including Mayfair, The Hanger and Stowe Hill. It is important that these two areas do not become amalgamated by infill building and therefore it is recommended that **Visually Important Gaps should be designated between these two groups of buildings**. This is discussed in more detail below in relation to HAR11 and HAR12, but the map shown in HNP does not extend far enough to make this distinction. It should.



The cluster policy as proposed does not comply with the NPPF, Paragraph 55. This provides support for the Core Strategy hierarchy of settlements, with Hartest being a ‘hinterland village’, and development within the village potentially supporting services in larger, higher-order settlements nearby. It does not support the provision of houses remote from settlements, even if there are existing remote houses nearby.

POLICY HAR 1: Settlement Planning Policy

When consideration is given to the arbitrary and ambiguous definition of the “Clusters” identified in the report it is regarded as inappropriate to mention them by name in this Policy.

An alternative more appropriate wording may be:

“To be considered “well related”, sites should be adjacent to the Built-Up Area Boundary (subject to the natural environmental constraints set out in this Plan).”

Sites that do not meet the above criteria will be treated as countryside and development proposals in these areas will need to have regard to other relevant national and local planning policies.”



POLICY HAR 2 : Housing Development Within The BUAB

The overriding impression is that the HNP comes to the (unsupported) conclusion that there is little or no option for further development within or adjacent to the Built Up Area Boundary (BUAB) of the village and, instead, intimates that further development would be preferred in several “clusters” which are not well defined and inconsistently allocated. Given existing planning policies it is considered inappropriate to have a HNP plan which **does not recognise, in detail and with justification, opportunities to develop in and around the BUAB as a priority** as it provides housing close to the village amenities with maximum safety for the residents’ access.

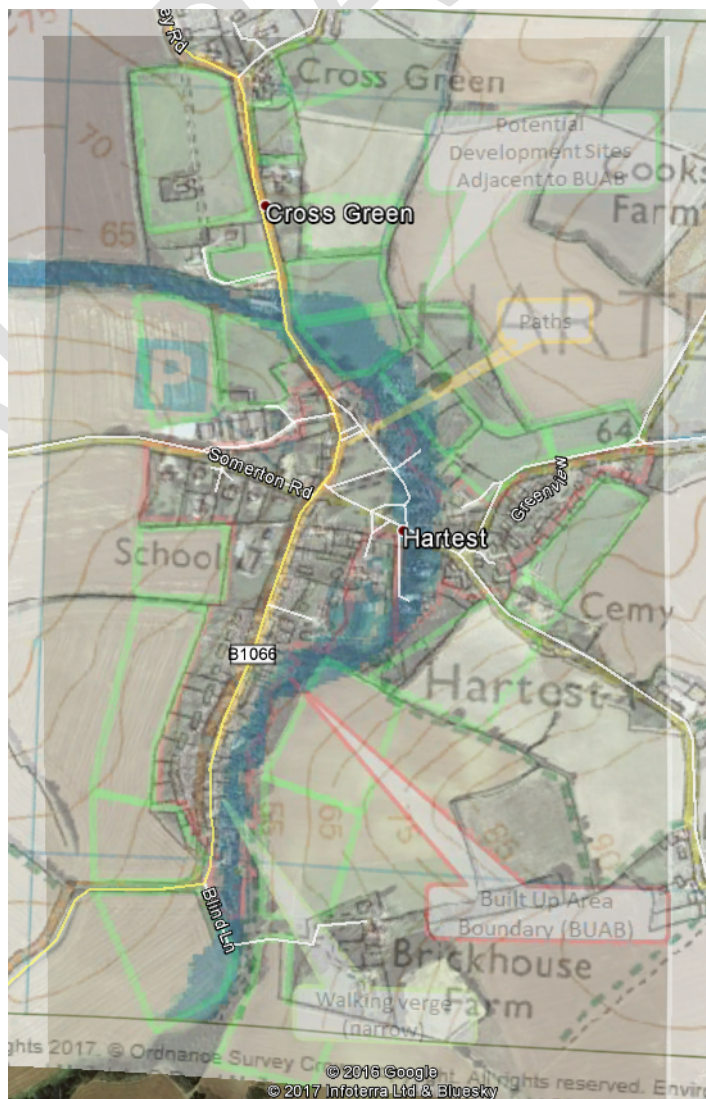
There are large swaths of open land adjacent to the BUAB that would permit building of small, low-rise, low-cost buildings of the type identified as the main requirement for the village which will benefit from:

- Not impinging aesthetically on the core of the village
- Providing the type of low-cost housing required by the village as a priority
- Reinvigorating the core of the village with younger families with children
- Providing easy access to village amenities like the school
- Providing pedestrian access to these new developments will reduce car use, congestion and increased safety to all road users
- Benefit from main sewer and other utilities and services

The area shown in green on the accompanying map (areas potentially available for development adjacent to the BUAB) amount to ~68 acres (~27.5 hectares) Of this area, only 6.5% is affected by flood risk as specified by the Environment Agency map.

It is therefore recommended that the HNP includes the explicit statement (presumably in Policy HAR 2) that “**proposals for appropriate and sensitive developments to provide homes within and adjacent to the BUAB that are consistent with the requirements of the village will be given priority over similar proposals made outside of that area**”.

While it is recognised that the illustrative potential development areas shown on the accompanying map (in green) may not be available for development at the present time, this may change in the scope of the HNP (to 2036). **This should be explicitly discussed in the HNP.**



POLICY HAR 3 : Housing Development Outside The BUAB

While it is commendable that a distinction is drawn between the (higher) density of housing that may be developed adjacent to the BUAB and a lesser density in more remote areas, the metrics of a maximum of 3 houses in areas adjacent to the BUAB appears to be too restrictive. Given the large potential areas adjacent to the BUAB that “could” be developed, **wouldn’t a “housing density” metric be more appropriate** and provide more guidance to developers?

Proposals for new housing development outside the Built-Up Area Boundary will be permitted where they take the form of:

1. single dwellings and small groups of up to 3 dwellings outside, but adjacent to, the Built-up Area Boundary; or
2. one dwelling or a pair of semi-detached dwellings on an undeveloped plot within a closely knit ‘cluster’ as defined in Policy HAR1 adjacent to or fronting an existing highway

Development adjacent to the BUAB will also benefit from access to mains utilities, such as sewers. Areas remote from the BUAB (including most of the notional clusters mentioned in the draft HNP) rely on soak-away and septic tanks which increases environmental risk, particularly in the heavy clay substrate that dominates and typifies the HNP area.

POLICY HAR 4 : Housing Mix

While the policy clearly states that smaller more affordable homes are a priority for the area, it is somewhat **surprising that no preference is made for single-story or bungalow-style houses which may benefit older or infirm residents**. Perhaps this could be included in the HNP either in HAR 4 or in a more appropriate place?

POLICY HAR 5 : Replacement Dwellings

The policy provides the opportunity to replenish the types of houses that are recognised as being required in the village, being smaller, more affordable dwellings.

HAR 5 allows for up to 3 dwellings replacing a single dwelling in specified circumstances. Para 55 of the NPPF states that new isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided. HAR 5 would result in potentially 2 new isolated homes in the countryside per replacement dwelling (one true replacement plus 2 new ones), so would be contrary to the NPPF.

In accordance with adopted local policy, **replacement dwellings must be of similar size to existing and there must be no increase in the number of dwellings on the site**. Similarly, draft **Development Management policies on this subject requires replacement dwellings to be ‘one for one’**. So, provided they are on a ‘like for like’ and ‘one for one’ basis, replacement dwellings are acceptable in principle.

Neighbourhood Plan policies must comply with national and local policies and, because HAR 5 allows for one house to be replaced by up to 3 houses, it would not comply.

POLICY HAR 6 : Affordable Housing on Rural Exception Sites

HAR 6 necessarily addresses affordable housing on rural exception sites. CS20 specifies that rural exception sites will be allowed where they are adjacent to or well-related to the settlement boundary. As it stands, **HAR 6 does not comply with CS20 because it does not give these restrictions**.

However, based on the text of section 7.23 (page 35) of the HNP, surely the Policy **should firstly and predominantly address affordable housing “appropriately located close to the heart of the village”** and therefore adjacent to the BUAB. HAR 6 should specify that **Rural Exception Sites will only apply where they are adjacent to or well-related to the BUAB**.

SECTION 8 : NATURAL ENVIRONMENT



View from B1066 between Stowhill and Burnt House Farm

POLICY HAR 9&10 The proposed extended SLA north of Hartest is strongly supported. This is appropriate as the area now incorporates the high ridge north of Cross Green which affords sweeping views over open countryside that is characteristic of the Hartest neighbourhood in general and its agricultural heritage in particular. Hartest village is not visible as it is located in the valley that is along this sight-line. This is illustrated by the accompanying photograph from GoogleEarth StreetView which shows an horizon to Shimpling and Stanstead of over 6km. **The proposal complies with NPPF paragraph 109 regarding protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.**

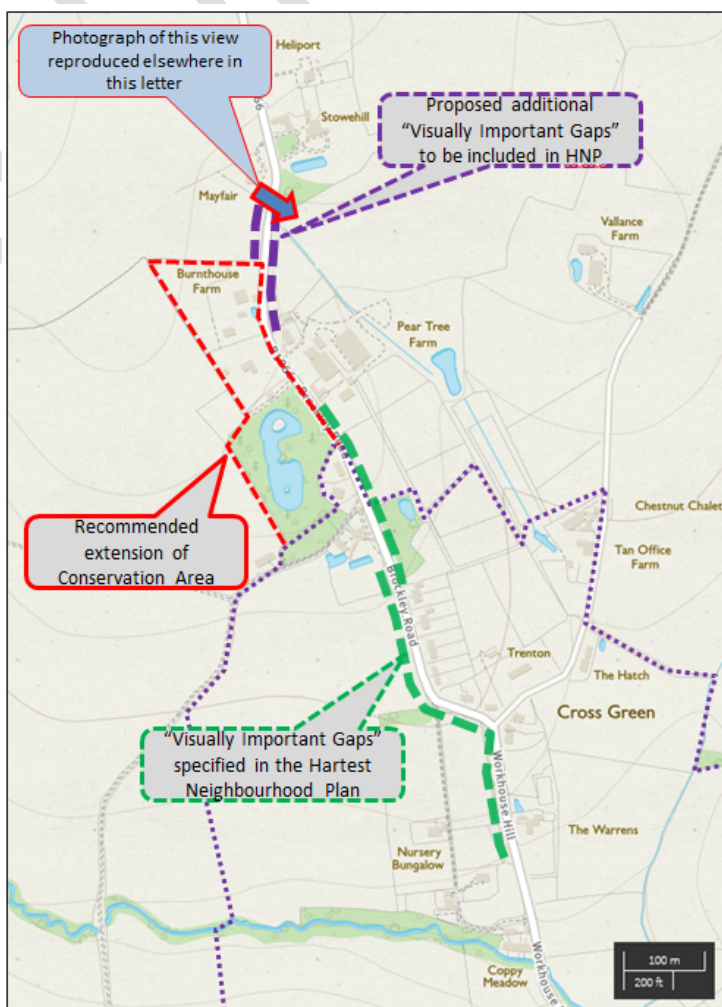
The statements encouraging planting of hedgerows and similar initiatives is highly commendable (HAR 8).

POLICY HAR 11- Protection of Important Views

When approaching Hartest from Brockley, the view illustrated above is the first panorama that is available after crossing relatively flatter ground to the north of Hartest. **Designation of this area as part of the SLA will help to preserve this “introduction to the village of Hartest”** which is highly evocative.

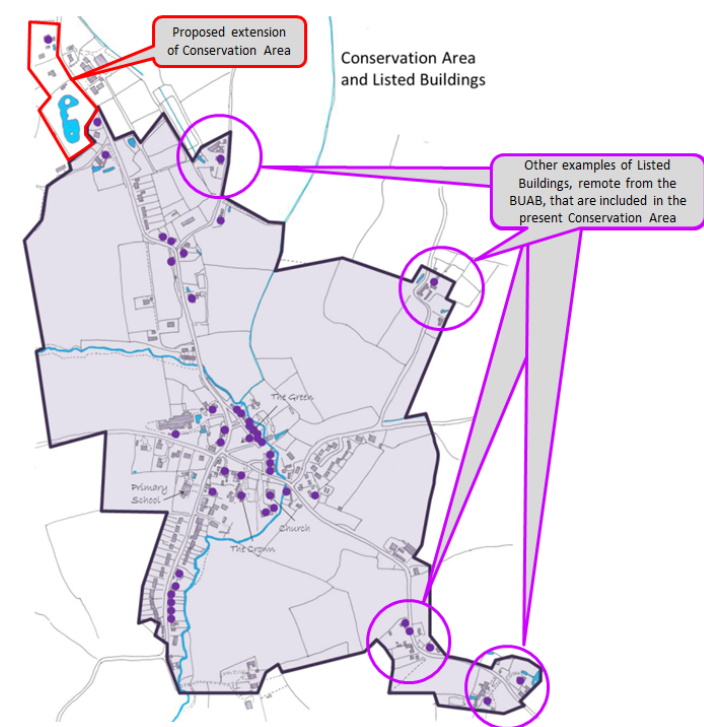
POLICY HAR 12- Settlement Gaps

The Hartest Neighbourhood Plan identifies “Visually Important Gaps” on a map on Page 49. The map does not illustrate the entire plan area north of the village and it is therefore recommended that the map be completed to cover the entire Hartest Plan Area (page 7) and that **the existing gaps between Burnt House Farm and Stow Hill-Mayfair be designated as a “Visually Important Gap”** in common with the others along the B1066.



SECTION 9: HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT AND DESIGN

The proposal of “Community Action 2” is welcomed. There would appear to be a strong case for **northward extension of the current Conservation Area to include Burnt House Farm** (Grade 2 Listed), located in a very prominent position overlooking much of the northern views of the village. There are overwhelming precedents for the proposed extension, as Burnt House Farm is located in a similar peripheral location as others in the Conservation Area including Long Farm, Tan Office Farm and others remote from the BUAB. The proposed extension of the Conservation Area complies with NPPF paragraph 127.



POLICIES HAR 14&15

These are important and useful guides to future development and how it should enhance and complement the existing buildings and character.

POLICY HAR 16 - Economic Development

Although the draft HNP implies that there are limited development opportunities adjacent to the build-up area there are, for example, over 20,000 square feet of farm buildings on a site of approximately 2 acres at Place Farm, about 150 yards from The Green. These buildings are within the Conservation Area, and thus they have no permitted development rights for conversion to dwellings.

Using the HNP's criteria of 98 square metres (~1000 sq.ft) per dwelling, this sustainable brownfield site should be capable of containing up to 20 new homes where there is already a mass of buildings. However the proposed NP prefers an economic development use which could result, for example, in a haulage yard or other business that may profoundly affect the ambiance (and safety) of the area immediately adjacent to The Green, and the roads throughout the village. Unless a suitable business use is secured, **this important site would only be permitted a maximum of three dwellings under HAR 3, a clear waste of an opportunity** and contrary to normal policy or logic.

In addition, the policy as drafted would allow the change of use of modern farm buildings – those constructed after 2013 - to a commercial use, whilst presently they have no permitted development rights, further introducing development into the countryside.

SWOT ANALYSIS

It is recommended that **ribbon development should be regarded as a THREAT**.