

Land at Highfield Road,
Halfway

Planning, Design & Access Statement

on behalf of
New Homes and Land Ltd

December 2020



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1 Introduction

1.1 This Planning, Design and Access Statement has been prepared in support of an outline planning application relating to land at Highfield Road, Halfway made on behalf of New Homes and Land Limited. The description of the proposed development is as follows:

“Outline application for the development of up to 19 dwellings and all necessary supporting infrastructure including internal access roads, footpaths and parking, open space and landscaping, drainage, utilities and service infrastructure works. All detailed matters are reserved for subsequent approval except for access to Highfield Road.”

1.2 This Statement describes the site’s context, relevant planning history and the proposed development before setting out the design and access considerations. It then sets out the planning policy context to which the application should be considered which is followed by an appraisal of the material planning considerations.

1.3 The site is located on the edge of the existing built up area of Halfway and is not allocated for development in the Adopted Local Plan. However, Swale Borough Council has recently acknowledged that, as of 19 February 2019, it is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of housing land. In effect, the ‘Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development’ as set out in Paragraph 11d of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is triggered. This means that development which is not in accordance with the local plan should be approved unless the proposal clearly offends policies that protect areas or assets of particular importance, set out in footnote 6 of the NPPF, or the adverse impacts of the development would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

1.4 This planning application is accompanied by a raft of technical reports, which demonstrate that the proposals would not have any unacceptable adverse impacts. It is also demonstrated in these reports that this proposal represents a sustainable form of development, and thus planning permission should be granted in accordance with the ‘titled balance’ set out in Paragraph 11d of the NPPF.



The hawthorn tree group at the southern end of the site

Site and Surroundings

2.1 The site is located to the rear of residential properties on Highfield Road. It comprises of grazing paddocks and extends to approximately 1.47ha. It is bound to the north by residential gardens, to the east by Oasis Academy, to the south by further grazing paddocks and the west by a covered reservoir.

2.2 The site is an irregular shape with the main body of the site orientated north south. There is a western extension, perpendicular, to the main body of the site which is the most elevated part of the site.

2.3 Across the site are a number of tree groups and some individual trees. The larger tree groups are mostly found along the site's perimeter, where they enclose the site. The largest tree group is comprised of mostly hawthorn trees and is found in the southern part of the site

2.4 The site is on the edge of a residential area, with a extensive footpath network that connects to key local services and facilities at Halfway and Minster. The centre of Halfway is within 500m to the north, whilst the centre of Minster is located approximately 2.6 km to the east and the centre of Sheerness is located approximately 2.8km to the north-west.

2.5 South east of the site is land with consent for residential development of 700 dwellings, Application 18/503135/OUT.

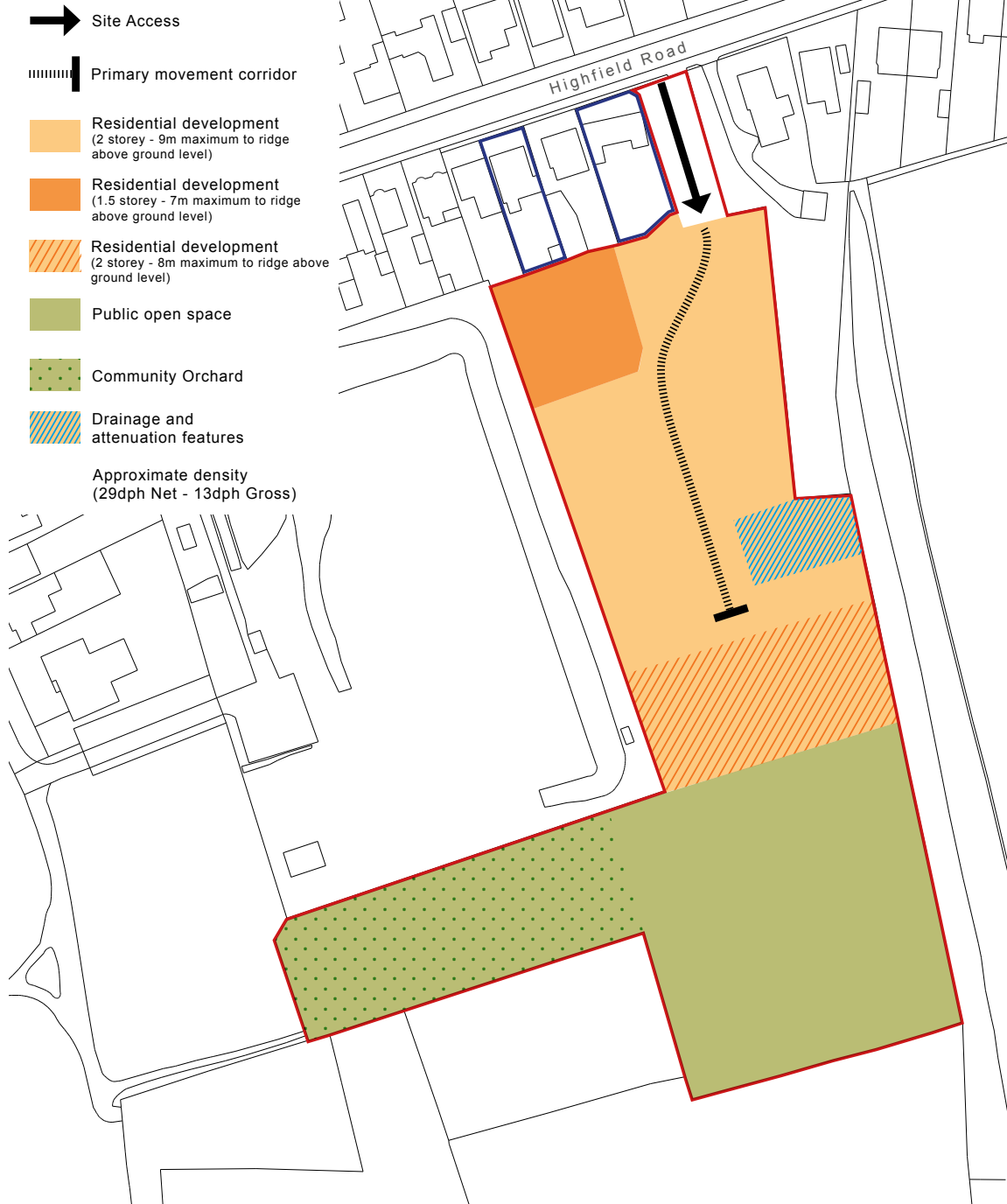
Planning History

2.6 Planning permission was granted in August 2018 for the change of use of the site from agricultural use to the keeping of horses. The permission also allowed for a stable block to be erected on site, measuring 14.4m in width x 7.5 m in length x 4.5m in height.

Pre-application Discussions

2.7 A pre-application enquiry relating to residential development on the site was submitted to Swale Borough Council in August 2020 (Ref. 20/503959/PAMEET). As part of the pre-application discussions, a virtual meeting was arranged with Council officers which took place on 13 October 2020. The advice received has been considered in the formation of these proposals.

Site Parameters Plan



3 Proposed Development

3.1 The proposed description of development is:

“Outline application for the development of up to 19 dwellings and all necessary supporting infrastructure including internal access roads, footpaths and parking, open space and landscaping, drainage, utilities and service infrastructure works. All detailed matters are reserved for subsequent approval except for access to Highfield Road.”

3.2 The planning application site parameters plan is provided opposite and presents the key design principles for the proposed development. These are detailed further in Section 4 of this Statement.

3.3 An illustrative layout has also been prepared to show one way that the site could be developed in line with the design parameters proposed, whilst meeting Swale Local Plan policy requirements, design guidance and parking standards. The proposals include a balanced mix of dwellings, including detached, semi-detached and terraced properties. These would range from two to three bedrooms in size, with the precise mix determined through subsequent reserved matters applications.

3.4 A sensitive approach has been taken to the extent of the development area, with consideration given to the existing built form to the east and west and to landscape analysis of views, provided in the supporting Landscape and Visual Appraisal, which reveals that the only parts of the site where development could be visible from the wider views is the southern part. It is therefore proposed that this southern part of the site is used as a public open space to serve the development. This is proposed to comprise of an area of public open space, with natural play for children, and a community orchard.

3.5 The dwellings would be accessed via a proposed priority site access, which has been designed to the relevant KCC design standards including Manual for Streets (MfS).

Illustrative Layout

Plot	2 Bed	3 Bed	Parking spaces
1		●	3
2		●	3
3	●		2
4	●		2
5	●		2
6	●		2
7	●		2
8	●		2
9		●	3
10	●		2
11	●		2
12		●	3
13		●	3
14		●	3
15	●		2
16	●		2
17		●	3
18	●		2
19		●	3
Total	11	8	50
			4 visitor

A Pumping station

B Underground attenuation tank



4 Design Considerations

Use

4.1 The proposal will provide residential dwellings with associated amenity space, parking and landscaping as well as an area of public open space and community orchard.

Amount

4.2 The proposed development will comprise up to 19 residential dwellings across 0.65ha of net developable land with an average net residential density of approximately 29dph. This is appropriate for a site comprising a mix of 2- and 3-bedroom houses in a sustainable location within a short walk to the services and facilities in Halfway and Minster.

Appearance

4.3 Attention to detail coupled with high quality materials and construction, and a high standard of maintenance make the difference between successful and mediocre places. Doorways, porches, walls, fences, eaves detail, chimney and rainwater pipes are all important. There will be a focus on attention to detail and quality use of sustainable materials and construction techniques.

4.4 The precise selection of materials will be subject to condition and a reserved matters application. However, the materials should focus on a range of local materials, with a variety of colours and textures to ensure appropriate variety, but with a common theme local to the area. Architectural detailing should show a clear reference to the local vernacular style. A contemporary more modern approach is also appropriate, providing that it responds to vernacular proportions and materials and is part of a local mix.

4.5 A priority for such a development is to deliver a co-ordinated variety of architectural styles with a common palette of materials, colours and textures.



Layout

4.6 As you enter the site from Highfield Road, an attractive visual end stop has been created by a short terrace of three properties, which also overlook and frame a shared surface space accommodating parking. The entrance space is softened and enhanced by an area of green space with wildflower planting. Framing the green space are two bungalows.

4.7 Building frontages focus activity on to the main street, set-back behind soft landscaping, included low hedges and street trees, defining the public and private realm. Active frontage along the main access street provides good enclosure to the streets and informal surveillance to both public and private areas, such as the parking and areas of open space. As you continue along the central street, a second area of green open space is provided. This is also the location of the underground attenuation, with a pumping station, screened by new landscaping. Views from within the site lead to the new areas of informal public open space to the south, accessed by a further green space, again planted with native wildflowers and trees. This wide green space is framed by properties and also provides the main pedestrian access to the substantial areas of public open space and community orchards.

Scale

4.8 The majority of the proposed houses will be two storey and of a scale that remains in keeping with the surrounding established built form. This two storey housing will generally be up to 9m tall (maximum height to ridge above ground level) albeit the dwellings within the southern part of the proposed development area will be lower, at up to 8m tall, in response to the findings of the Landscape and Visual Appraisal undertaken in support of the application.

4.9 The houses in the north-west corner adjacent to existing residential properties will be up to 1.5 storey (7m maximum to ridge height above ground level) in the interest of minimising the impact on the residential amenity of the residents of those dwellings.

SUGGESTED PLANT SPECIES

Native Trees for Boundary Strengthening and POS

- Acer campestre
- Betula pendula
- Crataegus monogyna
- Prunus avium
- Quercus pedunculata

Ornamental Trees for Amenity and Public Open Space

- Carpinus betulus 'Fastigiata'
- Liquidambar styraciflua
- Prunus 'Tai Haku'
- Pyrus 'Chanticleer'

Fruit Trees for Orchard (varieties of)

- Eating Apple
- Cooking Apple
- Pear
- Cherry

Native Hedges for Boundary Strengthening

- Acer campestre
- Cornus sanguinea
- Corylus avellana
- Crataegus monogyna
- Sambucus nigra

Native Shrub Mix for Boundary Strengthening and Screening

- Cornus sanguinea
- Corylus avellana
- Crataegus monogyna
- Euonymus europaeus
- Viburnum opulus
- Sambucus nigra

Ornamental Hedges (Residential Gardens)

- Abelia grandiflora
- Escallonia hybr.
- Griselinia littoralis
- Viburnum tinus

Ornamental Planting (Residential Gardens)

- Aucuba japonica
- Bergenia cordifolia
- Ceanothus thyrsiflorus
- Cistus grandiflorus
- Euonymus fortunei
- Hypericum Hidcote
- Lavandula angustifolia
- Pittosporum tenuifolium
- Rosa hybr.
- Spiraea japonica
- Yucca filamentosa

Amenity Grass

- Emorsgate EG22
- Strong Lawn Grass Mixture

Wildflower/Rough Grass

- Emorsgate EM1
- Basic General Purpose Meadow Mixture

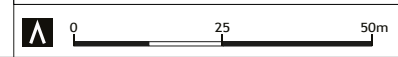
ECOLOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS (The Ecology Partnership)

- (A) Creation of new high distinctiveness habitats such as orchard, lowland meadows, native hedgerows, treelines, and ponds, to be managed in the long term for biodiversity;
- (B) Installation of specialist bird and bat boxes on retained mature trees along the site boundary;
- (C) Creation of log piles and reptile hibernacula to provide safe refuge and hibernation sites for reptiles, amphibians, and, hedgehog;
- (D) Incorporation of small holes at the base of any proposed garden fencing to facilitate access to gardens for hedgehogs.



Site Boundary	Proposed Soft Landscape	Native Hedge
Proposed Dwellings	Amenity Lawn	Ornamental Hedge
Proposed Hard Landscape	Rear Gardens	Orchard Grass (Rough under trees)
Vehicular Access (Tarmacadam)	Ornamental Tree Planting	Contours (0.25m)
Pavement (Permeable Block Paving)	Native Trees (POS & Strengthening to Boundaries)	Mown Path through Rough Grassland
Private/Shared Drive (Permeable Block Paving)	Fruit Trees (Orchard)	Pumping Station
Paths to Properties (Block Paving)	Ornamental Shrub Planting	Underground Attenuation Tank
Parking (Permeable Block Paving)	Native Shrub Planting	
Existing Vegetation	Wildflower Meadow	
Existing Vegetation - Retained and Managed	Rough Grassland with Mown Path	
Trees Removed (Refer to Arboricultural Survey, Impact Assessment & Method Statement)		

Landscape Strategy



Landscaping and Open Space

4.10 A Landscape Strategy has been prepared by Michelle Bolger Expert Landscape Consultancy as part of the Landscape & Visual Appraisal (LVA) and is shown on the previous page.

4.11 The Landscape Strategy complements the Illustrative Site Layout Plan and provides a recommended strategy for the development and management of the site. It includes key recommendations with regards to the management of vegetation and open spaces within the site and suggested species for the proposed planting. Ecological recommendations and the findings of the Arboricultural Impact Assessment, with regards to tree removals, are also highlighted on the Strategy drawing.

4.12 The key proposals shown on the Landscape Strategy are:

- **Community Orchard** – Orchards are one of the key characteristics of LCA 13 Central Sheppey Farmlands and taking opportunities to restore or create new orchards is a guideline for change within this LCA. As well as enhancing local landscape character, it is anticipated that the orchard would also become a valuable community resource.
- **Retention & Strengthening of Boundary Vegetation** – The most important tree groups, those around the perimeter of the site, and within Group G3 (below), which enclose the site visually, would be protected, managed and, where required, strengthened with new planting.
- **Management of Tree Group G3** – Younger trees within Group G3 at the southern end of the site could be thinned out to allow the creation of a mown path running through the tree group without harming its effectiveness in screening the site from the south.
- **Creation of New Habitats** – New habitats which would be provided include the orchard and areas of wildflower meadow which would be managed for long term biodiversity. More detailed measures would include the provision of specialist bird and bat boxes, and the creation of log piles and reptile hibernacula to provide safe refuge and hibernation sites for reptiles.
- **Amenity Planting** – Street trees, native shrubs and ornamental shrub & hedgerow planting would establish a landscape framework to public and private areas across the site and an attractive landscaped setting to the new homes.



5 Access Considerations

Vehicular Access

5.1 The site is to be served by a newly created vehicular access point on the northern side of the site on Highfield Road. This will take the form of a priority site access, designed to the relevant design standards including Manual for Streets (MfS).

5.2 The access provides a 5.5m wide carriageway and 6m junction radius. A 2m wide footpath is proposed running along the eastern side of the road. Given the scale of development a footpath on only one side (eastern side) of the road is considered necessary. However, the access design shows that a potential 2m wide footpath on the western side of the access road can also be provided. The access bellmouth benefits from dropped kerbs and tactile paving to facilitate pedestrian movements across the access.

5.3 The access benefits from a minimum visibility splay of 43m, which is in line with the requirements of Manual for Street for a 30mph road and can be provided within the adopted highway boundary.

Pedestrian Accessibility

5.4 The proposed vehicular access on Highfield Road will also serve to provide pedestrian access into the site from the north. The site connects to the pedestrian network on Highfield Road, which benefits from footpaths and street lighting on either side of the road and enables trips to be made by foot to key local services and facilities. Pedestrian routes surrounding the Site are extensive, which are complemented by a number of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) around the Site, heading in a variety of directions.

5.5 With respect to cyclists, roads within Halfway Houses do not benefit from vehicle-free cycle paths although the roads are mostly wide enough to accommodate both cyclists and vehicles. The residential highways in the area surrounding the site benefit from streetlighting to allow for safe movement of cyclists throughout all periods of the day.

5.6 Whilst no off-road cycle paths are located within the immediate vicinity of the site, the Borough Council have produced a cycling brochure which highlights the roads suitable for cyclists on the Isle of Sheppey. The brochure details that Swale are proposing a new shared footway / cycleway dissecting southern Sheerness in a west to east direction. The northern sea front has an existing segregated cycleway spanning from the Tesco Superstore to the west to Barton's Point Coastal Park to the east.

5.7 The entirety of the town of Sheerness and village of Minster are accessible by bike from the site within 20-minutes. Queenborough and Rushenden can also be reached within a 20-minute cycling time distance. Within Sheerness and Queenborough, railway stations can be reached by bike and both benefit from secure and covered cycle parking spaces.

5.8 Cyclists will be able to reach National Cycle Network (NCN) route 174 from the A2500 located approximately 3.2km to the southwest of the site. NCN route 174 can be used for access to Sheerness to the north and Kemsley/ Sittingbourne to the south.

Public Transport

5.9 As noted above, both Sheerness on-Sea and Queenborough railway stations are within cycling distance of the site. Future residents of the site are more likely to use Queenborough station (a 10-minute cycle) due to its closer proximity and there being more hourly services than Sheerness-on-Sea.

5.10 Queenborough railway station, operated by Southeastern railway, provides frequent services to London Victoria to the West and Canterbury to the East. Destinations closer afield including Sheerness-on-Sea, Sittingbourne and Rochester can also be reached directly from Queenborough. Services during a weekday run on average every 30 minutes to London Victoria and on average every 30 minutes to Canterbury. Access to London Victoria and Canterbury can both be used as a node for travel further afield.

5.11 The closest bus stops are located approximately 450m north of the site on Minster Road. There is both a westbound and eastbound bus stop at this location.

5.12 There are currently five bus services that serve these bus stops. The 334 service operates half-hourly Monday-Saturday and hourly on Sunday. It links the site with Sheerness, Sittingbourne and Maidstone. The 360 service operates hourly Monday-Saturday and every two hours on a Sunday and links the site with Leysdown, Minster West and Minster. The 367 service operates five times a day Monday-Friday and 4 times a day Saturday and links the site with Sheerness, Minster and Warden Point. The 368 service operates hourly Monday-Saturday and links the Site with Minster, Queenborough and Rushenden. Finally, the 750 service operates four times a day Monday-Friday and links the Site with Sheerness, Minster and London.

5.13 Further details of the public transport services within the locality are provided in the accompanying Transport Statement.

Car Parking

5.14 The illustrative layout envisages that car parking will be provided using a mix of provision including on plot and parking courts. The Swale Borough Council Parking Standards SPD recommends the following:

- 1 & 2 Bed Houses: 1 to 2 spaces per unit
- 3 Bed Houses: 2 to 3 space per unit
- 4+ Bed Houses: 3 space per unit
- Visitor parking: 0.2 spaces per unit

5.15 Cycle parking will be provided at 1 space per bedroom and should be accommodated within the garage or another secure area of the curtilage.



The site contains a number of stable blocks associated with the grazing use of the site

6 Planning Policy Context

6.1 This section sets out the most relevant planning policy considerations related to the proposed development.

6.2 Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan for Swale borough comprises the Swale Borough Local Plan (adopted July 2017), and the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan (adopted July 2016). The latter does not contain any policies which are directly relevant to the proposals.

6.3 In addition to the development plan, the National Planning Policy Framework (referred to here as the Framework) represents the Government's statement of national planning policy.

National Planning Policy Framework

6.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) sets out the Government's planning policies. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Sustainable development means development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Framework is a key part of the Government reforms to make the planning system less complex and more accessible, and to deliver sustainable growth.

6.5 Paragraph 8 defines sustainable development as comprising of three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways:

- **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
- **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
- **an environmental objective** – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

6.6 So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, Paragraph 10 explains that at the heart of the Framework is a **presumption in favour of sustainable development**.

6.7 This is set out in Paragraph 11 and, in relation to decision making, this means:

- c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or
- d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
 - i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
 - ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

6.8 Footnote 6 clarifies that the policies referred to in d) i. are those in the Framework relating to habitats sites and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a National Park or defined as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets; and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.

6.9 Footnote 7 clarifies that the reference to policies which are out-of-date in d) includes, for applications involving the provision of housing, situations where the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites (with the appropriate buffer, as set out in paragraph 73); or where the Housing Delivery Test indicates that the delivery of housing was substantially below (less than 75% of) the housing requirement over the previous three years.

6.10 In the context of the application site, Paragraph 38 emphasises the importance of local authorities taking a positive approach to proposals. It adds that ‘decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.’

6.11 Regarding residential development, Section 5 highlights the significance of delivering enough homes with Paragraph 59 discussing the importance of having a sufficient supply and variety of land. Paragraph 73 explains that ‘local planning authorities should identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years’ worth of housing against their housing requirement set out in adopted strategic policies.’ An additional buffer of 5%, 10% or 20% should be included, with the latter appropriate where there has been significant under delivery of housing over the previous three years, to improve the prospect of achieving the planned supply. Footnote 39 clarifies that, from November 2018, this will be measured against the Housing Delivery Test, where this indicates that delivery was below 85% of the housing requirement.

6.12 Section 9 promotes sustainable transport. Paragraph 109 states that ‘development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.’

6.13 Section 11 sets out how development is expected to make effective use of land. Paragraph 117 explains that ‘planning decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions.’ Paragraph 123 adds that ‘where there is an existing or anticipated shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs, it is especially important that planning policies and decisions avoid homes being built at low densities, and ensure that developments make optimal use of the potential of each site.’

6.14 Section 12 of the Framework seeks to ensure the achievement of well-designed places. Paragraph 124 explains that ‘good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.’

6.15 Paragraph 127 requires 'planning decisions to ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.'

6.16 Section 14 sets out how the planning system is to meet the challenge of climate changes, flooding and coastal change. Paragraph 165 states that "developments should incorporate sustainable drainage systems unless there is clear evidence that this would be inappropriate. The systems used should:

- a) take account of advice from the lead local flood authority;
- b) have appropriate proposed minimum operational standards;
- c) have maintenance arrangements in place to ensure an acceptable standard of operation for the lifetime of the development; and
- d) where possible, provide multifunctional benefits."

6.17 Section 15 sets out how planning decisions should conserve and enhance the natural environment. Paragraph 170 explains this should be achieved by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland; ...
- d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
- e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability...

Swale Borough Local Plan (2017)

6.18 The Swale Local Plan was adopted in July 2017 and covers the period up to 2031. The following policies are considered relevant:

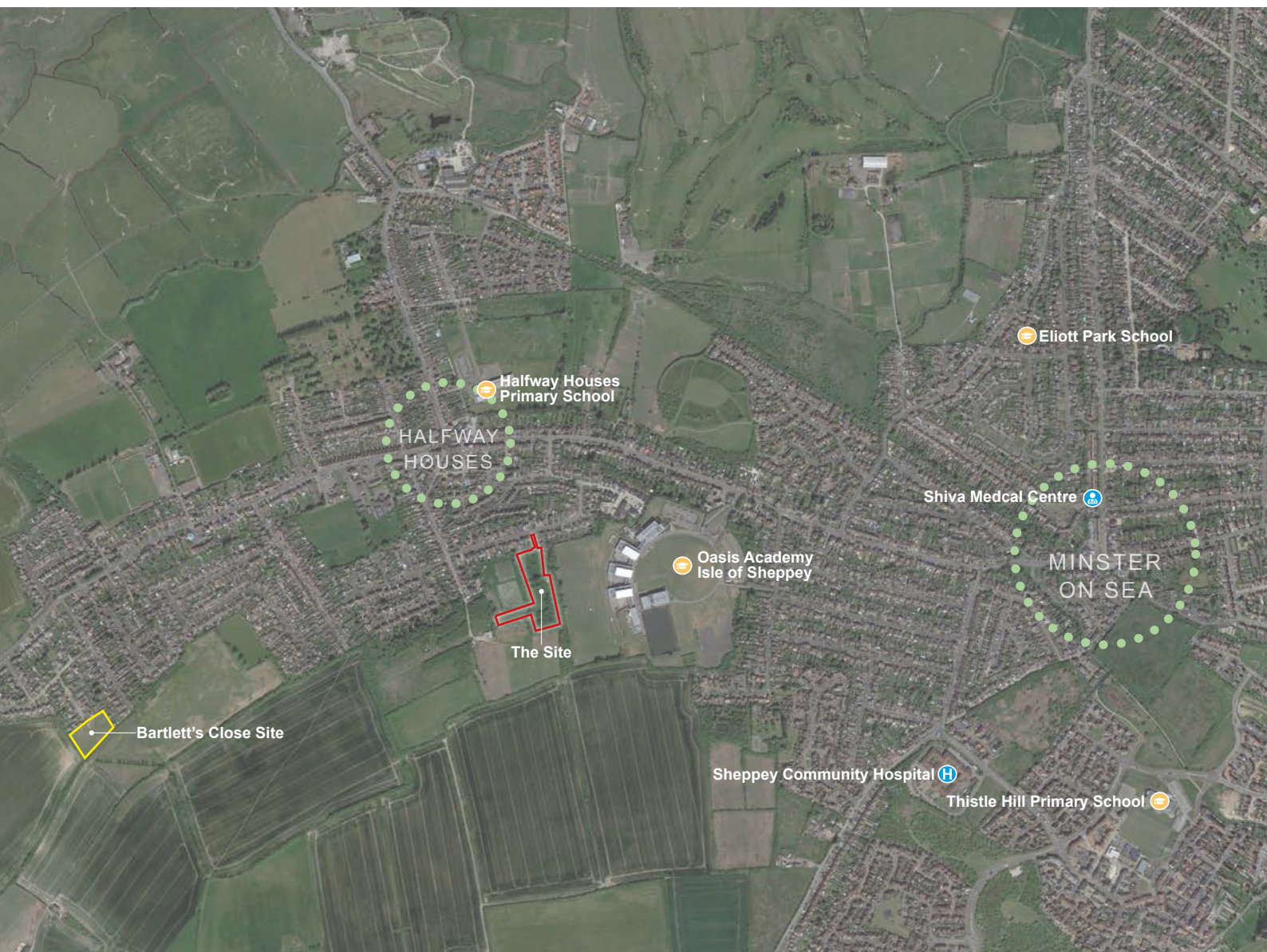
- ST1 Delivering Sustainable Development in Swale
- ST2 Development Targets for Jobs and Homes 2011-2031
- ST3 The Swale Settlement Strategy
- ST4 Meeting the Local Plan Development Targets
- ST6 The Isle of Sheppey Strategy
- CP2 Promoting Sustainable Transport
- CP3 Delivering a Wide Choice of High-Quality Homes
- CP4 Requiring Good Design
- CP5 Health and Wellbeing
- CP6 Community Facilities and Services to Meet Local Needs
- CP7 Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment – Providing for Green Infrastructure
- DM6 Managing Transport Demand and Impact
- DM7 Vehicle Parking
- DM8 Affordable Housing
- DM14 General Development Criteria
- DM17 Open Space, Sports and Recreation Provision
- DM19 Sustainable Design and Construction
- DM21 Water, Flooding and Drainage
- DM24 Conserving and Enhancing Valued Landscapes
- DM25 The Separation of Settlements – Important Local Countryside Gaps
- DM28 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation
- DM29 Woodlands, Trees and Hedges

Principle of Development

7.1 The site is situated on the edge of Halfway adjacent to the built-up area defined for the settlement. It is not currently allocated for development but is in a highly accessible and sustainable location as acknowledged by an Inspector on a recent appeal decision (Reference W/4001086) which granted outline planning permission for a development of 17 dwellings on land within the countryside to the south-east of Bartlett's Close, Halfway (approximately 1km west of the application site). The Inspector's decision identified the following in relation to the site's location:

8. Based on my site visit, the future occupiers of the development proposed would have good accessibility to the local facilities and services at Halfway, which the Council states forms part of the West Sheppey Triangle and which is identified as a Tier 3 'other Urban Centre' settlement in Swale's settlement hierarchy. These facilities, which include shops, services, education and healthcare facilities, would be within reasonable walking distance of the proposed new housing and would also be accessible by cycling or the use of public transport, given the close proximity of nearby bus stops on Queenborough Road. In addition, the future occupiers of the proposed housing would be within reasonable walking or cycling distance of the nearest train station and bus services, which would provide access to the employment centres locally on the Isle of Sheppey or further afield in Sittingbourne and beyond.
9. Overall, given the close proximity of Halfway and the availability of nearby public transport links, the future occupiers would have good access to local services, facilities and employment opportunities. I am satisfied, based on my site visit and on the evidence before me that these could be reached by sustainable transport means and the future occupiers of the development proposed would not be reliant on the use of a private vehicle.

The site's location in relation to village centres, key services and the Bartlett's Close site



10. I therefore conclude that when assessed against the development plan as a whole, the development proposed would be in a suitable location and would not be contrary to policies ST1, ST3, ST6 and CP3 of the LP or Paragraphs 8 and 11 of the Framework, which when read together seek to ensure that development takes place in suitable locations which have good access to local services and facilities and public transport links and future occupiers would not be reliant on the use of a private vehicle.”

7.2 Paragraphs 11 and 73 of the NPPF require that the Council meets the full, objectively assessed needs (OAN) for housing as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas. In addition, the Council should annually update its supply of deliverable housing sites to ensure that there is enough to provide a five-year supply against its housing requirements with an appropriate buffer.

7.3 The Council's latest housing supply position was confirmed in February 2019 following the publication of a Housing Delivery Test. This demonstrated that the Council could only meet 74% of its requirement. As a result, a 20% buffer (rather than a 5% buffer) must be applied to the housing land supply figures in assessing the five-year Housing Land Supply, with the figure currently standing at 4.6 years, should an allowance for windfall be included, and 4.1 years without such an allowance.

7.4 In these circumstances the NPPF advises that the 'tilted balance' is engaged as those policies that are most important for determining the application are considered 'out of date'. This includes Local Plan Policy ST3, ST6, DM24 and DM25. The presumption in favour of delivering sustainable development applies as outlined in Paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF.

7.5 In relation to Paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF, point (i) provides that planning permission should be granted for development unless the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or (ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole.

7.6 Focusing to begin with on point (i), the application site is within the 6km buffer zone of the Swale and Medway Special Protection Areas (SPAs) which an area of particular importance as identified in footnote 6 of the NPPF. Consideration has been given to this in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal submitted with the Planning Application and it is considered that the site is not functional linked land to the SPA. Should the Council consider mitigation is still necessary, the Applicant is prepared to agree to a SAMMS payment to ensure there would be no adverse impact on the integrity of the SPA. As such, being within the 6km buffer zone of the SPA would not represent a reason for refusal, and the application must be considered against paragraph 11 d) ii.

7.7 In relation to point (ii) any residual adverse impacts are more than outweighed by the clear planning benefits of the proposed development. Those benefits are considered below, having regard to the overarching objectives of achieving sustainable development as set out in Paragraph 8 of the NPPF:

Social Objectives

- The development proposed would deliver 19 housing units of various sizes and types which would contribute to the choice and needs of different groups of the community and would be a social benefit making an important contribution to the Councils' housing supply shortfall.

Economic Objectives

- The development would provide jobs during the construction phase and the additional expenditure of the future occupiers would support the viability of local shops and services.

Environmental Objectives

- The development would be in a location which has good access to local services, facilities, employment opportunities and public transport links, and would therefore promote sustainable transport methods.
- The development will provide an area of public open space, incorporating a community orchard and area for informal play providing further social benefits.
- The proposals also incorporate measures to enhance biological diversity and mitigate any perceived loss to habitat via the implementation of extensive landscaping proposals.
- Sustainable construction methods and features such as provision for Electric Vehicle charging will be incorporated into the development proposals.

The benefits are considered further in the sections that follow.

Meeting the Need for Housing

7.8 In line with paragraph 23 of the NPPF, Council's should provide a clear strategy for bringing sufficient land forward, and at a sufficient rate, to address objectively assessed needs (OAN) over the plan period, in line with the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Authorities should use their evidence bases to assess market needs and identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable housing sites. Demand for housing in the Swale housing market area is very high.

7.9 Paragraph 68 of the NPPF emphasises the important contribution that small and medium sized sites can make to meeting the housing requirement of an area since they are often built-out relatively quickly. It also advises that Local Planning Authorities should "support the development of windfall sites [such as the application site] through their policies and decisions".

7.10 It is also relevant to note that the Council is required, under paragraph 75 of the NPPF, to prepare an action plan because housing delivery has fallen below the housing requirement. The Council's most recent Housing Delivery Test Action Plan (July 2019) have emphasised that the Council will be seeking to rectify the shortfall by generally seeking to support proposals for housing on sites not identified in the local plan or within the confines of a settlement that support sustainable development and respect the development strategy in Bearing Fruits. The application site achieves both by delivering sustainable development, as identified in this Statement, and also respects the development strategy.

7.11 In this regard the site adjoins the built-up settlement boundary of Halfway. As noted above by the Inspector on the Bartlett's Close decision, Halfway itself forms part of the West Sheppey Triangle which is a Tier 3 'Other Urban Local Centre' settlement within the Council's settlement strategy which is considered to provide a reasonable range of services. Policy ST6, the Isle of Sheppey area strategy states that the focus of development and long-term change is at settlements within the West Sheppey Triangle. The site relates well to the existing urban settlement of Halfway and the West Sheppey Triangle which itself is considered to be sustainable as it has access to shops, services, education and healthcare facilities.

7.12 This fragile housing supply situation increases the importance of permitting residential development on windfall sites such as this whilst the shortfall remains, in line with paragraph 68 of the NPPF.

Housing Mix

7.13 The proposal will allow a range of unit sizes to be provided, with the illustrative layout including 2 to 3-bedroom houses and bungalows. The precise mix will be determined at the reserved matters stage.

7.14 There is no provision for affordable housing due to the fact that Policy DM 8 of the Local Plan sets out that on the Isle of Sheppey, the affordable housing percentage sought will be 0%.

7.15 Paragraph 6 of Policy DM 8 sets out possible exceptions to the adopted 0% requirement for the Isle of Sheppey and states that 'If evidence demonstrates that economic conditions, or the proposed characteristics of the development or its location, have positively changed the impact of viability of the provision of affordable housing, the Council will seek a proportion of affordable housing closer to the assessed level of need, or higher if development viability is not compromised.'

7.16 It is not considered that there is any evidence that would demonstrate that the economic circumstances on the Isle of Sheppey have improved since the adoption of the Local Plan in 2017 to be able to sustain the provision of affordable housing in this location. This conclusion is supported by the Inspector's decision on the land west of Barton Hill Drive appeal (reference: APP/V2255/W/19/3238171) dated 2 March 2020.

Amenity of Neighbours

7.17 Whilst the detailed design of dwellings will be considered at the reserved matters stage, the submitted parameters plan and illustrative layout demonstrate that a suitable amount of separation can be provided between the proposed new properties and the nearest neighbouring properties so as not to have any significant effects on the neighbours' natural lighting, outlook or privacy.

7.18 The proposed development will have no overbearing impact and will not lead to a heightened sense of enclosure, on neighbouring properties by reason of the siting and height of the new buildings and the separation provided between them and the adjoining properties.

7.19 Whilst the proposal will introduce housing on a parcel of land where none exists at present, the site is located adjoining a primarily residential area and is bounded by residential properties and a school. Activity associated with the new houses will be relatively low and will not cause any significant disturbance to the surrounding neighbouring properties given the site's context.

Highway impact

7.20 As noted above, the site benefits from a sustainable location and is located close to services and facilities in Halfway and Minster. Moreover, bus stops are located a short walk from the site on Queenborough Road and are served by two high frequency routes. In addition, it is within walking and cycling distance of a number of key local destinations, including railway stations at Queenborough and Sheerness and therefore, there is a potential for the uptake of sustainable travel modes.

7.21 A Transport Statement has been submitted with the application and provides further detail on the accessibility of local services and facilities. It also demonstrates that the site can be adequately serviced by all anticipated delivery, service and refuse vehicles, and that private car trip generation associated with the proposed development will be minimal and will not have a material impact on the surrounding highway network.

Character and Appearance of the Countryside

7.22 The application proposals have been informed by a Landscape and Visual Appraisal conducted by Michelle Bolger Expert Landscape Consultancy. To inform the extent of development and height limits, a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) analysis has been undertaken.

7.23 The results of the ZTV analysis have been reflected in the Parameters Plan and as a result development has been restricted to the northern part of the site where it would meet the guidelines for development established in the Landscape Capacity Study. Development would be situated behind a ridgeline and it would utilise and strengthen the existing vegetation structure, as shown in the Landscape Strategy (described in Section 4), which would screen development from the south.

7.24 The LVA also finds that the proposed development would not impact upon the wider character of the Central Sheppey Farmlands or disrupt the undeveloped character of the ridge which itself is a defining feature of the Farmlands. It would achieve the relevant guidelines for the Central Sheppey Farmlands and strengthen one of its key characteristics via the planting of a new orchard.



A community orchard is proposed in the western part of the site

7.25 Furthermore, the separate identities and character of settlements would be maintained as is required by the purposes of the Important Local Countryside Gap (Policy DM 25). The proposal would result in the loss of a small area of open and undeveloped land. However due to the contained nature of the site and the location of the proposed houses within it, harm to the open and rural character across the wider ILCG has been avoided. This echoes the conclusions of the Inspector in the aforementioned Bartlett's Close appeal decision.

7.26 Overall, the development is considered to be consistent with National and Development Plan polices relating to landscape matters

Trees and Landscaping

7.27 The application is accompanied by a Tree Survey and Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement, which demonstrate that only a few lower quality and semi mature trees would need to be removed to accommodate the development, and this loss would be more than compensated for by new planting.

7.28 In this respect, the details of the proposed landscape strategy, as set out in Section 4 of this Statement, demonstrate that how retained vegetation in the southern part of the site can be strengthened and enhanced through positive management and planting of native species, including a new orchard which is one of the key characteristics of the local landscape. This will add provide positive landscape changes and biodiversity gains and also add a significant amenity value to new and existing residents of the area.

Sustainability

7.29 Whilst the detail of the construction of the proposed dwellings will be determined at the reserved matters stage, it is expected that the development will seek to adopt a fabric first approach to construction, with high performance thermal insulation used to significantly reduce the heating energy demands with increased air tightness in the building envelopes. Energy efficient lighting and appliances, electric vehicle charging points and flow restrictions on water supplies are also expected to be used.

7.30 The increase in home-working practices has been accelerated through the recent Covid 19 pandemic. There is a realistic possibility that the pandemic has/will result in a shift in employer's attitudes towards allowing their staff to work from home and the benefits of reduced travel where this is not deemed essential. Not only has there been a change in working practices but also retail in which home deliveries are now commonplace for comparison and non-comparison goods. The wide availability of products and the short timeframes for delivery that are offered (in some cases same-day delivery) mean that more and more people are choosing to buy products online as a more attractive and convenient means of shopping.

7.31 Provision will be made for the development to be served by the necessary communications infrastructure to facilitate home-working.

Drainage and Flood Management

7.32 A flood risk assessment and drainage strategy accompanies the application. The site is located in Flood Zone 1 and therefore zoned as being in an area least at risk from flooding.

7.33 The drainage strategy includes proposed Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) features to ensure that surface water is suitably managed to reduce the risk of flooding on site and on surrounding land. Surface water will be directed to an underground cellular tank with a controlled pumped outfall which will be used to accommodate the 1 in 100 year rainfall event with a 40% allowance for climate change. This system will connect to an existing surface water sewer in Highfield Road via a new offsite sewer.

7.34 Foul drainage from the development will be via a new offsite sewer connecting to the existing foul sewer to the north of the site.

Biodiversity

7.35 The application is supported by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal which demonstrates that the site is a low ecological value, with the majority being species poor grassland that is unsuitable for species such as reptiles and dormice. The scrub around the edges is of higher value albeit still limited.

7.36 The proposed development will not therefore result in negative effects on features of conservation interest.

7.37 It does however provide an opportunity to enhance biodiversity and in this respect a letter is provided at Appendix 1 to this statement which provides the results of a biodiversity net gain assessment. This demonstrates that the illustrative proposals, and notably the landscape strategy, have the potential to achieve a 20% net gain in biodiversity in terms of habitat area, utilising the Defra metric, which is a substantial increase. In this respect, it is noted that the that the Inspector on the Barton Hill Drive appeal (reference: APP/V2255/W/19/3238171) considered that the achievement of a least 10% net gain carried substantial weight in favour of that proposal (paragraph 53 of the Appeal Decision refers).

8 Conclusions

8.1 The site is situated on the edge of Halfway just beyond the built-up area defined for the settlement. It is not currently allocated for development but is in a highly accessible and sustainable location. The Borough Council does not have a five-year housing land supply and housing delivery has been substantially below (less than 75% of) the housing requirement over the last three years. In the circumstances the 'tilted balance' is engaged and planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

8.2 The proposed development provides an opportunity to deliver an additional 19 dwellings in an area where there has been consistent under delivery of new homes. Given the national imperative to increase the supply of housing land this social benefit should be given significant positive weight.

8.3 This Planning, Design and Access Statement also demonstrates that the proposed development will provide multiple other planning benefits, which also carry further positive weight, including:

- jobs during the construction phase and the additional expenditure of the future occupiers would support the viability of local shops and services.
- good access to local services, facilities, employment opportunities and public transport links.
- an area of public open space, incorporating a community orchard and area for informal play.
- measures to achieve a significant net gain in biodiversity via the implementation of extensive landscaping proposals.

- Sustainable construction methods and features such as provision for Electric Vehicle charging.

8.4 Overall the proposal would constitute a sustainable form of development, as required by national policy, and as such planning permission should be granted on the basis of the 'titled balance'.

James Delafield

JB Planning

By email only

3rd Dec 2020

Re: Development Biodiversity Impact Calculator – Land South of Highfield Road, Minster

The Ecology Partnership was commissioned by JB Planning to undertake a biodiversity calculation assessment of the proposed development site south of Highfield Road, Minster, Isle of Sheppey.

National policy guidance is provided by National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how they should be applied. Section 15 of the document is entitled 'Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment'. Specifically, this section highlights the following:

"Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- *" minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures"*

In line with the above legislation, the following report assesses the current and projected biodiversity of the site based on the most recent illustrative masterplan, in order to determine whether there will be a net gain in biodiversity as a result of the outline proposals. Initial calculations were carried out using the Defra Biodiversity Metric 2.0 Calculator Tool. This uses the Defra metric to assess development losses and gains to

determine if net-gain is deliverable within a development. This calculation used illustrative proposals for the site and the results are summarised below.

Headline Results		Return to results menu
On-site baseline	<i>Habitat units</i>	4.86
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	1.93
	<i>River units</i>	0.00
On-site post-intervention <small>(Including habitat retention, creation, enhancement & succession)</small>	<i>Habitat units</i>	5.92
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	1.93
	<i>River units</i>	0.00
Off-site baseline	<i>Habitat units</i>	0.00
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	0.00
	<i>River units</i>	0.00
Off-site post-intervention <small>(Including habitat retention, creation, enhancement & succession)</small>	<i>Habitat units</i>	0.00
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	0.00
	<i>River units</i>	0.00
Total net unit change <small>(including all on-site & off-site habitat retention/creation)</small>	<i>Habitat units</i>	1.06
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	0.00
	<i>River units</i>	0.00
Total net % change <small>(including all on-site & off-site habitat creation + retained habitats)</small>	<i>Habitat units</i>	21.73%
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	0.00%
	<i>River units</i>	0.00%

The results indicate that under the illustrative proposals there will be a 21.73% net-gain of biodiversity in terms of habitat area and no change in terms of linear habitats. Existing linear habitats around the site perimeter are being retained and new linear habitats within the site are assumed to comprise ornamental hedges, which the calculator grants a distinctiveness of very low (0).

In order to achieve this net-gain, it is recommended that an Ecological Mitigation and Enhancement Plan be produced to detail the specification of any ecological enhancements and how they should be managed long-term to achieve the target habitat conditions.

It should be noted that the results of this report are only valid for the illustrative masterplan from which that proposed habitats were measured, any significant alteration to the masterplan will therefore require a reassessment.

If you require any further details, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alexia Tamblyn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Alexia Tamblyn MA (Oxon) MSc CEnv MCIEEM FRGS

Managing Director



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