

Statement from Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council on Remaining Matters for July Hearing
Sessions related to the TWBC Draft Local Plan

Submitted via email 8th June 2022

Matter 7, Residential Site Allocations, Issue 10, Brenchley and Matfield

AL/BM2 – Land at Maidstone Road

Q3. How has the proposed area of residential development been established? What is it based on and is it justified?

Q4. Does site allocation AL/BM2 represent major development in the AONB, and if so, is it justified? How have the potential impacts of development on the character and appearance of the area, including the AONB, been considered as part of the plan-making process?

Q5. What is the justification for requiring additional car parking for the village hall?

Q6. How will pedestrian access to the site be achieved?

Q7. Is the site deliverable, having particular regard to land ownership?

These questions are mainly for TWBC and the landowners/developers to answer. However, the Submission Draft Neighbourhood Plan (PS_016, formerly CD 3.159) has a policy, H11, concerning this site in case it is allocated in the Local Plan.

There has been a recent application for Outline planning permission on this proposed allocation site: **22/00757/OUT Outline Planning Permission (Access Not Reserved) - Erection of 15No. residential dwellings, including affordable housing provision, additional car parking for Matfield Village Hall, the provision of open and children's play space, sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDs), new vehicular access and associated works. OS Plot 6860 West Side Of Maidstone Road Matfield Tonbridge Kent.**

The attached response to the planning application (with its associated plan) (Appendices 1 and 2) was sent to TWBC by the Parish Clerk on 5 May 2022 following a meeting of Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council on 3 May. Consideration by TWBC of the planning application is likely to have moved on by the time of the Local Plan hearing, and the Examiner may by then have issued his report on the draft Neighbourhood Plan. No doubt TWBC will be able to give details of the up-to-date position at the hearing. The Parish Council requests that the concerns raised in its response to the planning application, including the plan submitted with it, be fully taken into account in considering this allocation.

The additional car parking is needed not only as overspill parking for the village hall (bearing in mind that some of the area presently used for car parking by people attending events in the hall would become instead a through route to the playground and new car parking spaces) but also to serve the playground and public toilets and to ensure that the existing parking stress in the village does not worsen. Parish councillors can confirm that there are occasions when the village hall's car park is not able to accommodate all the cars for an event held there. At present the only area of off-street public parking in the village is on a small part of the village green, which is a registered common where parking needs to be limited in order not to damage the grass surface or impede access.

Matter 12, Transport Infrastructure, Issue 1 – Effects of Local Plan Growth

Q1. Have transport issues been considered at the earliest stages of plan-making, as required by paragraph 104 of the Framework?

In the view of Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council there has from the start been inadequate consideration of the effects of the increased traffic that will result from the massive expansion of Paddock Wood, together with development at Horsmonden and Matfield, on the lanes and villages in our parish, and how those effects should be mitigated.

Q2. How have the potential impacts of the development proposed in the Plan been tested, and how will the necessary highways mitigation be delivered? Is it clear to decision-makers, developers and local communities what will need to be provided, when and by whom?

There appear to be no mitigation proposals at all that will be provided in our parish. Already, at times, it is difficult to find a safe moment to cross the Maidstone Road in the centre of Matfield. Traffic queues during the rush hours stretch back a long way at Kippings Cross roundabout. Rat running on the lanes near the A21 severely impacts residents' quality of life, as well as damaging historic routeways which are an important feature of the High Weald AONB.

The Parish Council contends in particular that the measurements of pm rush hour traffic tailbacks on the A21 that the Borough Council's proposals rely on would be considerably higher if it were not for the rat running that takes place through the very narrow, winding lanes of Pembury and this parish, that local residents and the parish council have been complaining to National Highways about ever since the Tonbridge to Pembury dualling took place.

Traffic to the A21 from the proposed developments on the eastern side of Paddock Wood will want to travel through Brenchley and Matfield rather than across the whole of Paddock Wood to the A228. Traffic from the centre of Paddock Wood that is heading southeastwards on the A21 will also travel via Matfield, and possibly through Brenchley also if there is congestion at Kippings Cross. The Parish Council is not at all clear what measures are proposed to encourage traffic to use the A228 instead of these routes, or what evidence exists that such measures would be effective.

As a consequence of the proposed developments, and of those proposed allocations that have already been given planning permission, traffic calming measures, pedestrian crossings and/or speed cameras are required in both villages. It is unacceptable that, according to KCC, measures to reduce vehicle speeds and improve pedestrian safety will have to be paid for by existing residents of the parish, who are not responsible for the increased traffic that is being forced upon them and whose safety and quality of life are being badly affected.

We note that the traffic light signals and widening of the B2160 that were proposed as mitigation for the delays at Kippings Cross are not recommended for implementation (paragraphs 3.2.2 – 3.2.4, Local Plan Transport Assessment Addendum 2, CD3.166) on the basis that some studies of the A21 are being undertaken for a place in a later Road Investment Strategy period. That such studies are taking place comes as a surprise to the Parish Council, given that in response to planning application 21/00563OUT at the junction of Cryals Road with the A21, close to Kippings Cross, National Highways confirmed on 21 May 2021 that TWBC no longer needs to safeguard any land associated with the project to improve the A21 (attached at Appendices 3 and 4).

It should be unacceptable to propose to leave the increasingly severe problems that the proposed new developments at Paddock Wood will cause at Kippings Cross and on the parish's rural lanes unresolved on the basis that at some unspecified time in the future there might be a more comprehensive scheme, for which there are neither any concrete plans nor any guarantee that sufficient funding will ever be forthcoming.

Q3. What are the reasons for the preparation and submission of the Local Plan Sensitivity Test Addendum Report²⁰ and the Local Junction Capacity Sensitivity Testing Technical Note²¹?

Q4. Does the additional transport evidence support the level of growth proposed in the Local Plan and demonstrate that the necessary mitigation measures are achievable?

No, please see our response to Q2.

The Parish Council also questions whether the modal shift assumptions are realistic, given that

- Kent County Council is currently proposing to cut some bus routes that run through our parish, and
- While TWBC propose to use their powers of compulsion to deliver strategic highway links, this does not appear to extend to upgrading footpaths to create cycle routes. Therefore, projects to create off-road cycle routes will be come to nothing if just a single landowner on the route refuses permission.

Matter 13, Issue 5, Local Green Space

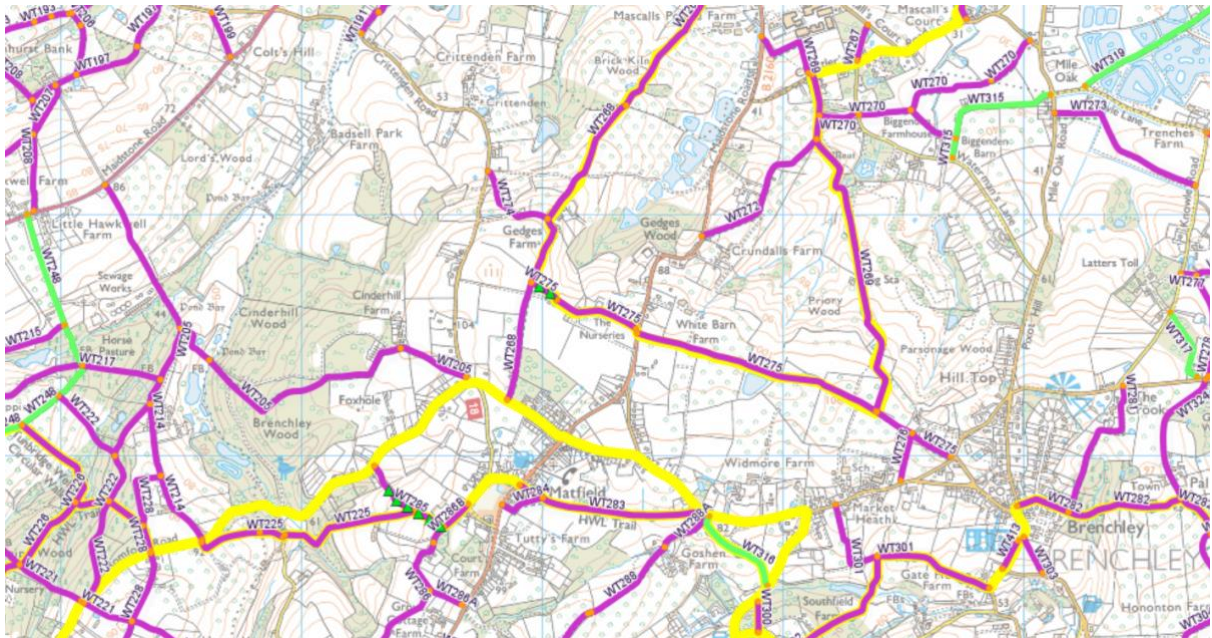
Q4. What is the justification for designating site 20? How is it demonstrably special to the local community, and does it represent an extensive tract of land?

The reasons why this site is demonstrably special to the local community are as follows.

Public enjoyment

1. It contains the only material area of woodland close to the centre of Matfield, and immediately adjacent to the Limits to Built Development, that has public access: public footpath WT268 runs through it approximately parallel to its western boundary. The footpath, which on the ground meanders slightly, runs approximately 3 to 10 metres inside its boundary.

2. This footpath through the wood is in fact well used by local residents and very important to them. Identified by the High Weald AONB Unit as a historic routeway, it forms the most enjoyable and tranquil part of a short circular route using footpath WT275 and then the verge and pavements along the Maidstone Road back to the village. It is the first part of the off-road footpath route from the village to Paddock Wood, and it also forms the first part of the off-road route to footpath WT275, the ridge-top route leading through fields and orchards to Market Heath and Brenchley.



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3. The regular use of the footpath is evident from the following photograph taken in May 2022:



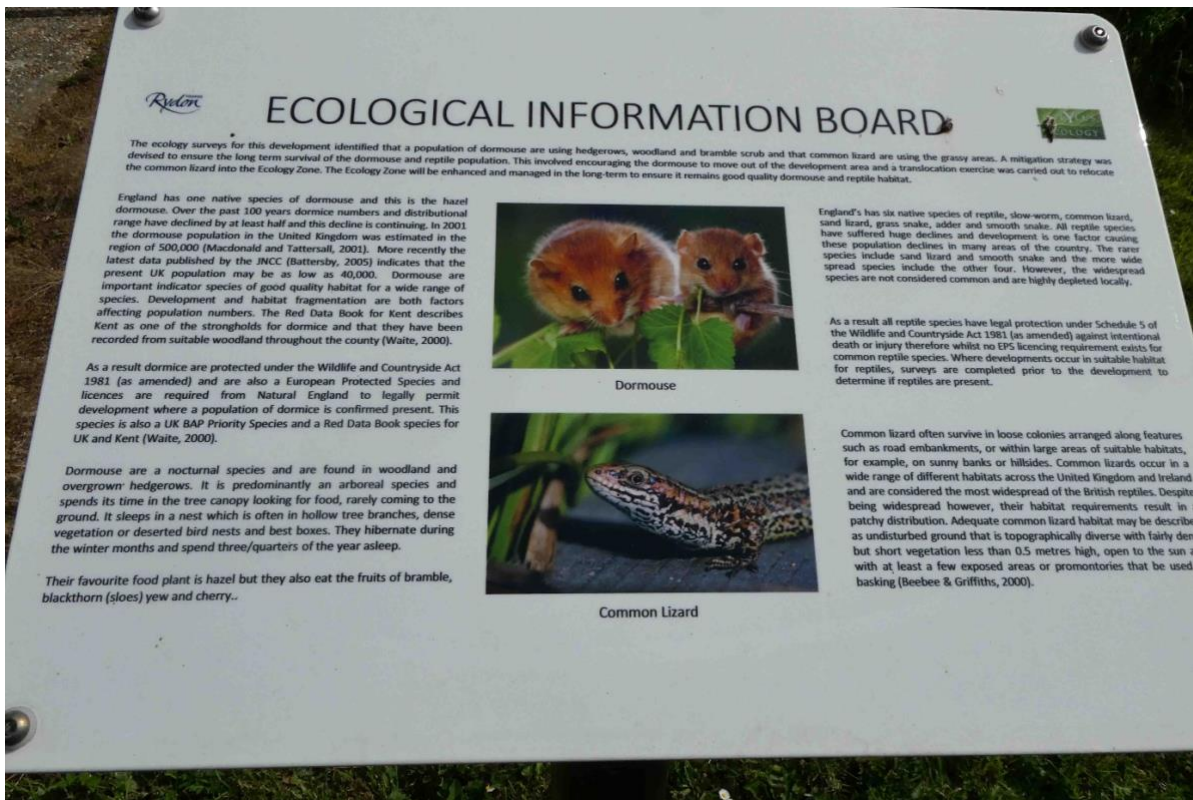
4. It is true that there is no official public access to the rest of the wood. However, local residents attest that children have been playing in the wood since the 1970s, building bike tracks, ramps and camps, and there are unofficial paths leading off the public footpath, as shown in this photograph:



5. However, extensive public access is not necessary for an area to be designated as a local greenspace (LGS) and local residents enjoy the woodland from the public footpath. The contrast that this tranquil wood provides from the roads in the village and from the rest of the footpath as it runs through fields, and the opportunities the wood provides to observe wildlife, make it special for Matfield's residents.

Richness of wildlife

6. Part, but not the majority, of this site is an ecological area under the Landscape and Environmental Management Plan (LEMP) that is secured under a S106 agreement for planning permission 17/01142/FULL for Rydon's recent housing development off the Maidstone Road. Rydon's signs emphasise some aspects of the biodiversity of this area.



7. The Protected Species Report (PSR) produced by Corylus Ecology for planning application 17/01142/FULL (attached, Appendix 5) showed that there were several other species of interest there and in the adjacent woodland (i.e. including the rest of the site proposed as LGS20). Eight and possibly nine species of bat were identified and the site was considered to be of **Neighbourhood**

Importance for its bat assemblage (PSR 4.4.8). Badger latrines were found. The development site was considered to be of **Neighbourhood Importance** for its reptile population (PSR 4.2.1). The dormouse population within the Survey Area was considered to be of **Local Importance** (PSR 4.3.8).

8. Other wildlife that local residents enjoy seeing and hearing in the woodland include green and lesser spotted woodpeckers and deer.

9. While it is accepted that the woodland, which consists partly of semi-natural and partly of plantation woodland, does not qualify as ancient woodland, the Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey conducted for 17/01142/FULL recorded wild service-tree and scaly male fern (Ancient Woodland Vascular Plants) there, together with over 40 spikes of common spotted orchid. This is one of only a very few sites within the parish which are known to support a substantial population of common spotted orchid and the other sites are a long walk from the village. Wild service trees are also very rare within the parish.

10. It is surely such places, with a historic routeway running through them, of neighbourhood importance for biodiversity and very close to the settlements they serve, that are expected to be protected by the Local Greenspace designation.

Local and Not an Extensive Tract of Land

11. The objectors contradict themselves in arguing that the site is not local while at the same time saying that it is adjacent to the LBD.

12. The NP Examiners' decisions referred to by the objectors in their responses to the Pre-submission Regulation 19 consultation do not set a legal precedent and the circumstances of each site and the community it serves will differ. In the case of Sedlescombe NP, the Street Farm land already had planning permission for some housing to be built upon part of it at the time of the NP examination and the Examiner only removed the part that was to have housing built on it from the designation, while confirming the designation of the rest of the land as LGS. The Examiner's report did not reject the site on grounds that it was an extensive tract.

13. The Examiner's report for the Alrewas NP in fact rejected the argument that had been advanced by objectors that one of the two proposed LGS sites was an extensive tract of land: "I note that a representation has been received in objection to the designation of the Canal and Riverbank Local Green Space. However, in respect of the size of this Local Green Space, I find that relative to the size of the settlement of Alrewas and taking into account its irregular shape, it does not appear as an extensive tract of land". Both sites were confirmed as LGS.

14. In the cases of Tatenhill NP and Oakley and Deane NP the Examiners rejected the sites referred to for various reasons that do not apply in this case. In the case of the Brixworth NP it is not possible to tell from the documents that are now available to the public whether the circumstances that led to the removal of the three sites referred to were comparable to those in this case.

15. In this Borough, Hawkhurst's "Made" Neighbourhood Plan designates a site of 7.81ha, Little Switzerland, as LGS.

Brenchley & Matfield Parish Council's views concerning the site

16. This site was put forward by local residents as a potential LGS during the early stages of production of the Neighbourhood Plan and taken forwards as such by the Parish Council. While the

landowners objected at Regulation 14 stage, the Parish Council did not consider that these objections justified removing the site's designation. No objection to the site's designation was lodged at the Regulation 16 stage.

17. It is true that the site was promoted by its landowners as a potential development site during the Call for Sites, and that in 2016 one parish councillor thought it might make a suitable site for a new primary school, though it was one among several sites he was suggesting might be suitable. The Tenax Schools Trust has since then made it clear that at present it has no plans to move or rebuild Brenchley and Matfield Primary School. The opinions of one councillor cannot bind a council and there was never any decision by the Parish Council to recommend the site for development. TWBC has consistently rejected the site as an allocation for housing development and the Parish Council supports TWBC's decision to designate it as a LGS.

Q8. Have any Local Green Spaces been identified in Neighbourhood Plans which have either been through examination or formally made since submission of the Local Plan?

At the time of writing for this hearing statement, the draft Brenchley and Matfield Neighbourhood Plan is undergoing examination and the Examiner's report is expected imminently. As well as the Local Greenspaces designated under the draft Local Plan the draft Neighbourhood Plan designates some additional Local Greenspaces.

Issue 6, Retention and provision of Open Space

Q2 What are the standards in Policy OSSR2 based on and are they justified and effective?

No, they are designed for major conurbations and are not justified and effective for villages such as Brenchley and Matfield within the High Weald AONB, where there tend to be several small developments rather than major ones, with the result that under the standards proposed by TWBC even quite a substantial relative increase in population will fail to trigger new investment in sports and recreation facilities. The Parish Council repeats its recommendation that the Fields in Trust guidelines should be used for settlements within the High Weald AONB.