

Southborough and High Brooms Neighbourhood Development Plan

Examiner's Clarification Note

This Note sets out my initial comments on the submitted Plan. It also sets out areas where it would be helpful to have some further clarification.

For the avoidance of any doubt, matters of clarification are entirely normal at this early stage of the examination process.

Initial Comments

The Plan provides a clear vision for the neighbourhood area. It addresses a range of issues which relate closely to its character and appearance. The presentation and layout of the Plan is very good. The Plan is supported by excellent photographs and maps.

Section 3 provides a clear relationship between the Vision for the Plan, the objectives, and the resulting policies. Furthermore, the Conformity References at the end of each policy demonstrate how the policy concerned delivers the objectives of the Plan and are in general conformity with the policies in the Local Plan. This is best practice.

The Plan is helpfully underpinned by four technical appendices

Points for Clarification and observations

I have read the submitted documents and the representations made to the Plan. I have also visited the neighbourhood area. I am now able to raise issues for clarification with the Town Council and for the Borough Council.

The comments made on the points in this Note will be used to assist in the preparation of my report and in recommending any modifications to the Plan to ensure that it meets the basic conditions. I set out specific clarification points and observations for the Town Council and the Borough

Questions for the Parish Council

Policy SHB1

This policy provides a positive spatial strategy for the neighbourhood area and will focus sustainable development within easy reach of its commercial and community facilities.

On what basis did the Town Council decide to identify development which would be supported beyond the Limits to Built Development (in Part B)? Is it practicable to attempt to identify a definitive list of such development? Would the opening element of Part B of the policy be sufficient given the contents of national and local planning policies and other policies in the submitted Plan?

Policy SHB2

The policy addresses local housing needs in a positive way.

The final sentence of Part Ai of the policy does not provide clarity either to the Borough Council or to the development industry. Is there any evidence to justify the 5% figure quoted?

Policy SHB3

This is an excellent, locally-distinctive policy which is underpinned by the equally-impressive Design Guidance and Codes. In the round, it is a first-class local response to Section 12 of the NPPF.

Policy SHB4

This is another excellent locally-distinctive policy. Its non-prescriptive approach has regard to Section 14 of NPPF and the Written Ministerial Statement of December 2023 on local energy efficiency standards.

Policy SHB6

I looked carefully at Southborough High Street and the other Neighbourhood Centres during the visit. Their importance to the local community was self-evident. The policy acknowledges the importance of economically vibrant mixed-use centres.

What is the intended purpose of the reference to permitted development rights in Part C of the policy? Should that purpose be explained in the Justification?

Policy SHB7

This is an interesting and locally-distinctive policy.

I note the commentary in paragraph 7.22 of the Justification. Nevertheless, Part A of the policy reads as a process matter rather than a land use planning policy. In addition, how would the Town Council expect the Borough Council to apply the policy through the development management process either generally or in a proportionate way? For example, the application of the approach towards the development of a new café/bar/restaurant would be relatively clear, whilst its application to a modest rear extension of an existing retail unit would not be clear.

It would be helpful if the Town Council expanded on its intentions.

Policy SHB9

This is a very good and locally distinctive policy which responds positively to Section 15 of the NPPF.

Policy SHB10

I looked at a selection of the various Local Green Spaces (LGSs) during the visit. I note that the policy is underpinned by the details in Appendix C. This is best practice.

I note that several of the proposed LGSs are within the Green Belt and/or the High Weald National Landscape? Has the Town Council assessed the added value of designating the parcels of land concerned in accordance with Planning practice guidance D: 37-010-20140306 and ID: 37-011-20140306?

What is the size of LGSs 13 (Southfields Park Skinners School Football Rugby Grounds), 27 (Camp Field) and 37 (David Saloman's Estate (gardens))?

The policy simply lists the proposed LGSs without including policy wording. Was this approach deliberate?

Policy SHB11

This is another very good and locally distinctive policy. In this case it is underpinned by the details in Appendix D.

Policy SHB15

This is a good policy which seeks to improve opportunities for community and cultural facilities, sport, and recreation. Part C of the policy acknowledges that the use and/or viability of existing services may alter in the Plan period.

Implementation and Plan Review

Section 11 of the Plan addresses these matters in a very positive fashion. It anticipates the adoption of the emerging the Local Plan.

Question for the Borough Council

I note the details in the March 2025 Local Development Scheme about progress on the Local Plan. Is there any further update on the Plan and the timescale for its adoption?

Representations

It would be helpful if the Town Council would respond to the comments from Kent County Council, the owner of Camp Field, Southern Water and Applause Rural Touring.

The Borough Council also makes a series of comments and suggested revisions to the Plan. It would be helpful if the Parish Council would respond to those comments.

Protocol for responses

I would be grateful for responses to the matters raised in this Note by 3 September 2025. Please let me know if this timetable may be challenging to achieve. It is intended to maintain the momentum of the examination.

If certain responses are available before others, I would be happy to receive the information on a piecemeal basis. Irrespective of how the information is assembled please could it all come to me directly from Borough Council. In addition, please can all responses make direct reference to the policy or the matter concerned.

Andrew Ashcroft

Independent Examiner

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4 August 2025