

Response to Rother Local Plan Draft Reg 18 version

These are comments by the person who led the team for the Salehurst and Robertsbridge Neighbourhood Plan (SRNP) throughout its journey from inception to being made. I was a Parish Councillor during this period.

I am specifically commenting in relation to the sites identified in the draft Local Plan HELAA for possible inclusion or not as development opportunities for the parish of Salehurst and Robertsbridge.

My first point is a general one and applies to the process of consultation which has led to the creation of this draft plan.

Those parishes with made Neighbourhood Plans went through a lengthy and detailed local consultation process in order to arrive at the selection of development sites which formed the heart of their respective Neighbourhood Plans.

The chosen sites, four in the case of Robertsbridge, were selected from a larger number, 12, of sites which were thoroughly investigated by the SRNP Committee and all of them formed part of a very wide and thoroughgoing public consultation process. Indeed the public consultation process involving three public meetings /exhibitions and a parish wide very detailed consultation survey which was responded to by over two thirds of the households in the parish, tested the acceptability or otherwise of all 12 sites within the lens of creating a Neighbourhood Plan.

I would have thought that the Council's own preparation for the publication of this draft Local Plan would have benefitted from the input of those teams involved in the preparation of the respective Neighbourhood Plans, particularly in the area of the totality of sites put under the microscope of each individual NP process, including those which were not included in any made Neighbourhood Plan. However this knowledge and expertise does not appear to have been sought.

I feel strongly that because of the breadth of the examination of all the sites during the production of the SRNP, the conclusions that resulted from what was a much more intense as well as extensive local examination of the relevant sites than RDC could possibly undertake, should be taken very seriously in any examination RDC may undertake during the further preparation of the draft Local Plan. It would be a serious failing if the Rother Local Plan failed to take advantage of the substantial body of investigative work done for all made Neighbourhood Plans.

Therefore this submission will concentrate on the sites that were reviewed within the total scope of the SRNP, using your Site ID for each relevant site.

POTENTIAL SITES List:

SAL0012.

In a scoring of the three expressions of public opinion (two public exhibitions and one questionnaire) this site was ranked 11th out of the 12 sites presented for discussion.

This was for several reasons.

The site forms an important stretch of open green space in the centre of the village, being an intrinsic part of a green corridor running roughly north to south through the middle of the village, which is visible from various points within the village. Access by vehicles to the site is dangerous from both west and east. It would encourage more traffic along the most dangerous part of Bishops Lane to the east which includes two blind 90 degree bends and two bridges, one rail, one stream. It is a flood risk site. It is a very visible site and contains important features of the High Weald National Landscape.

This site therefore should not be in the Potential site list but in the Rejected list

SAL0022

In a scoring of the three expressions of public opinion (two public exhibitions and one questionnaire) this site was ranked 12th out of the 12 sites presented for discussion.

Development on this site would mean the loss of its current agricultural use. It forms a distinctive part, along with the already permitted part of the Grove Farm site, of the High Weald Natural landscape, in a location where it can be appreciated easily, given its proximity to George Hill and the permitted footpaths through it. It would increase traffic even further on a road (George Hill) which is heavily trafficked already and parked upon at key times of the day. It has an underground water main crossing the site and an underground electricity cable. It is a site of very variable topography, making it difficult to develop. (Evidence of this is obvious because of the lack of developer interest in the already permitted Grove Farm site, since that site was granted permission over five years ago: any future development of SAL0022 is entirely dependent on prior development of the already permitted site.)

This site therefore should not be in the Potential site list but in the Rejected list

SAL0028 and SAL0029

In the draft HELAA, this are referred to as having been 'considered through the Neighbourhood Plan'. This is not correct: site SAL0001 (which in the SRNP was in fact treated throughout as two sites) immediately to the north of these two sites was considered in the SRNP and was indeed allocated, and is included in your list of Identified Sites.

SAL0017

In a scoring of the three expressions of public opinion (two public exhibitions and one questionnaire) this site was ranked 5th out of the 12 sites presented for discussion.

This was a site assessed in the SRNP and was not found to be suitable because of the considerable difficulties of access, and it being a site which would yield a very low number of dwellings.

SAL0024

In a scoring of the three expressions of public opinion (two public exhibitions and one questionnaire) this site was ranked 2nd out of the 12 sites presented for discussion.

In terms of public acceptability, it ranked higher than a site (Grove Farm 1, coming 10th in the local ranking) which was later included in the actual SRNP as a result of the Inspector's report, which required the addition to the SRNP of a site which might yield some affordable homes. One reason for it being favoured was that there was overwhelming support for the Mill Site (SAL0003) being included in the SRNP, and such development would unlock development possibilities on site SAL0024. It was felt that a larger development on the combined sites might solve the overall attractiveness of the site for developers, given the substantial works required on the brownfield Mill Site to decontaminate and to restore the historic existing buildings.

This site therefore should not be in the Rejected site list but in the Potential list.

SAL0026

In a scoring of the three expressions of public opinion (two public exhibitions and one questionnaire) this site was ranked 6th out of the 12 sites presented for discussion.

This site was reviewed by the SRNP and was found to be unacceptable in terms of its access location, it being the furthest site the SRNP considered from the heart of the village, meaning it was the least sustainable of all sites considered.

Stephen Hardy
23 July 2024