

Rother Local Plan 2025–2042

Development Strategy and Site Allocations

Regulation 18 Consultation

January 2026

Response Form

8 week public consultation period: 26th January – 23rd March 2026

Rother District Council is inviting residents, businesses, and stakeholders to take part in a vital consultation on its emerging Local Plan.

The consultation period runs for eight weeks from Monday 26th January to 5:00pm on Monday 23rd March 2026.

The Draft Local Plan and all of its supporting evidence base documents can be found and commented on via the Council's website at www.rother.gov.uk/draftlocalplan2026.

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If you are using this form, please state which consultation question(s) you would like to respond to. These questions are found in the draft Local Plan. They also have been attached to the end of this form for your reference.

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Please write your comments below. Please indicate in the left-hand column which question you are responding to. This will help ensure that your response is considered correctly. Please continue on a separate page or sheet of paper if necessary.

Question Number	Your Comments
56) Do you have any comments on the proposed site allocations in Hurst Green, detailed in Policies HG1 to HG4?	<i>See response over pages.</i>

Response to Question 56: Do you have any comments on the proposed site allocations in Hurst Green, detailed in Policies HG1 to HG4?



Rother District Council Local Plan 2025-2042
Regulation 18 Consultation

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Summary of Objection to proposed site HG4

This representation addresses the proposed allocation of the possible HG4 site (Land at The Lodge, London Road, Hurst Green) for 150 dwellings at 35 dwellings per hectare. Having carefully considered the site, the policy requirements, the evidence base, and the planning context, our representation concludes that the potential allocation is fundamentally unsound and should be removed from the draft Local Plan.

Main Issues

The principal issues with the potential HG4 site are: a) whether the allocation represents appropriate development in the High Weald National Landscape; b) whether the scale and density of development are compatible with the established character of Hurst Green; c) whether the site is suitable given highway safety concerns and accessibility constraints; d) whether the allocation is supported by adequate evidence; and e) whether the policy requirements are realistic and deliverable.

Site Description and Context

The proposed HG4 site comprises approximately 9.52 hectares of greenfield land on the northern edge of Hurst Green, entirely within the High Weald National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). The site includes The Lodge (Etchingham Lodge), a non-designated heritage asset dating from c.1845 with its associated walled garden, parkland setting, gardens and boating lake. The site is bounded by a designated Local Green Space (LGS) to the south, the A21 trunk road to the west and the A229 (unlit, no pavements, national speed limit) to the north. The entire eastern boundary comprises a mix of ancient woodland, field hedges, open countryside, a significant portion of which is the established HG2 biodiversity receptor site, linked to the previously approved planning permission for HG2 (delivering 26 homes), which was designated as long-term wildlife refuge for legally required biodiversity compensation. There are several listed buildings including a Grade II listed farmhouse opposite the site's boundaries.

The site has previously been assessed and rejected. A smaller portion (HG25 - part of the northern field only, not including The Lodge, its gardens, the remainder of the northern field, or the southern field) was assessed through the Neighbourhood Plan process and rejected by professional consultants AECOM due to its remoteness from settlement, poor access to facilities, landscape sensitivity, and A21/A229 junction conflicts. In 2020, a Planning Inspector dismissed an appeal for a single dwelling on the part of the proposed HG4 site closest to the village, finding it would harm the National Landscape. The current proposal is substantially larger than both these rejected schemes.

National Landscape: Major Development Without Exceptional Circumstances

The proposed 150 dwellings on 9.52 hectares unequivocally constitutes major development in a nationally protected landscape. Policy DEN2 and the High Weald Housing Design Guide require development to be "small-scale, in keeping with the landscape and settlement pattern." The allocation fails this fundamental test. At 150 dwellings, it exceeds the entire

previous Local Plan requirement for Hurst Green (75 homes, already met), represents 81% of the current plan requirement (150 of 185 homes), and would increase the village housing stock by 24% in a single location. This is manifestly not small-scale.

NPPF paragraph 177 requires that major development in National Landscapes should be refused except in exceptional circumstances where it can be demonstrated to be in the public interest. No exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated. The housing requirement has increased by 387% from the original consultation figure (38 homes to 185 homes) without published justification. The previous requirement (75 homes) has already been met through existing permissions. Alternative approaches - distributing development across multiple smaller sites to avoid major development in any single location - have not been adequately explored. The evidence base does not demonstrate why this scale of development must be concentrated on the proposed HG4 site when the district contains areas outside the National Landscape and alternative spatial strategies.

Density and Character: Fundamental Incompatibility with Village Context

The proposed density of 35 dwellings per hectare is wholly inappropriate for this location. The adopted Hurst Green Design Codes provide detailed analysis of existing character areas. Design Code HGNP.DC.2.5A explicitly requires that "new development should take a design-led approach to density" with "density profile varied across sites to reflect existing context (matching density typical for character area)."

The Design Codes evidence demonstrates that existing character areas in Hurst Green range from 4.5 dph (Burgh Hill West - comparable greenfield edge) to 24 dph (Coronation Gardens - the highest existing density). The proposed 35 dph exceeds the highest existing density by 46% and is 7.8 times higher than the comparable greenfield edge location. For the proposed HG4 site on the National Landscape village edge, adjacent to ancient woodland, with parkland character, density of 10-15 dph would be appropriate for character compatibility.

The allocation would violate multiple Hurst Green Design Code requirements including HGNP.DC.1.4 (soft transition to countryside - the proposed HG4 site creates hard edge and "rounds off" village), HGNP.DC.1.1 (safeguard village character - 24% increase fundamentally alters scale), HGNP.DC.1.6 (retain mature trees - inadequate protection at this density), and HGNP.DC.1.8 (natural extension of village - site isolated by A21 barrier).

Highway Safety and Accessibility: Unacceptable Risk to Children

Based on the 2011 Census for Hurst Green Parish, there are 628 households containing 1,481 people - an average of 2.36 persons per household. Of these households, census data shows that 29.9% contain dependent children. Applying this to 150 dwellings gives approximately 45 households with dependent children. However, given that new family housing typically attracts higher proportions of families with children than the existing settlement average, and allowing for families with multiple school-age children, a conservative estimate is that approximately 60 children of school age would result from this development.

The allocation requires these approximately 60 additional children to undertake a 15-25 minute walk (depending on location within the proposed HG4 site) along the A21 to reach Hurst Green C of E Primary School. The A21 is a trunk road on the Strategic Road Network carrying thousands of vehicles daily in each direction, as all traffic to/from Bexhill, Hastings, and virtually all housing developments must pass through Hurst Green on this route.

Community evidence documented over five years, including a 151-resident petition (2016) and extensive testimonies, details the dangerous nature of this route: narrow pavements, HGV mirror overhangs, high traffic speeds, no safe alternative route. Professional consultants AECOM validated these concerns in their Strategic Environmental Assessment (February 2023), confirming the A21 experiences congestion, noise, vibration, and pollution issues, and that the road casualty rate is worse than the England average.

On Thursday 13th February 2026, during the consultation period for this Local Plan, a 13-year-old schoolboy suffered serious injuries in a hit-and-run incident on the A21 (London Road) in Hurst Green. This tragic incident validates the community's documented warnings and demonstrates that the route is dangerous even with existing crossing infrastructure. The 2016 petition warned "before a child is killed". Allocating the proposed HG4 site for 150 dwellings that would require approximately 60 additional children to use this route is fundamentally unsafe and contrary to NPPF paragraph 96 (healthy, inclusive and safe places) and the Council's duty of care.

Transport Sustainability: Extreme Car Dependency

AECOM's evidence confirms extreme transport dependency: 90%+ households have access to at least one car (vs 74% England average), public transport is inadequate (buses every 2 hours Monday-Friday, no weekend service), and the nearest railway station (Etchingham) is 2km away via a 45-minute walk each way on a steep hill via unlit country lanes without pavements. There is no bus service to the station; the Flexibus offers limited availability, stops at 7pm, and is explicitly not designed for commuting.

The proposed HG4 site is isolated by the single carriageway A21 trunk road to the west, the A229 (unlit, no pavements, national speedlimit) to the north, and open countryside, field hedges, and the HG2 biodiversity receptor site to the east. Key village facilities are 900m+ south, requiring A21 crossing. The allocation contradicts Design Code HGNP.DC.1.8 requiring "natural extension of existing village" and "logical connections to key destinations" - neither is achievable given this fundamental isolation.

The proposed NPPF reforms (December 2025) require minimum densities of 40-50 dph for station-area development and vision-led transport planning reducing car dependency. The proposed HG4 site delivers 21 dph actual density (half the proposed minimum) and would require 90%+ car dependency - fundamentally incompatible with emerging national policy direction.

Evidence Base: Unjustified Housing Escalation

The housing requirement trajectory for Hurst Green lacks justification:

Plan Period	Requirement	Status
Core Strategy (to 2028)	75 homes	Met through existing permissions
New Plan - Original Consultation (Summer 2024)	38 homes	Consulted upon
New Plan - Current Draft (January 2026)	185 homes	Current proposal - 387% increase

No evidence has been published justifying this 387% increase from the originally consulted baseline. The district-wide Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment does not identify any settlement-level requirement for Hurst Green.

Locally commissioned AECOM Housing Needs Assessment (2019) and the Parish Council's Local Housing Demand Survey (40% response rate) identify limited demand measured in tens of dwellings, not hundreds. The allocation appears to be site-led (large potentially available site) rather than evidence-led or meeting genuine local need.

The concentration of 81% of the village requirement (150 of 185 homes) on the proposed HG4 site is not distributive development. Alternative spatial strategies distributing growth across multiple sites have not been adequately assessed. The Council's own Summer 2024 consultation assessed Hurst Green capacity at only 38 homes - the current proposal of 185 homes represents a 487% increase in six months with no published evidence justifying this dramatic change.

Site Constraints: Unrealistic Capacity and Deliverability

The claimed capacity of 150 dwellings at 35 dph is not achievable once constraints are properly accounted for. The proposed HG4 site contains:

Ancient woodland buffer: The policy proposes 15m, which is Natural England's standing advice minimum. However, Natural England guidance states that buffers should be larger where development would have significant impacts on the woodland. At 150 dwellings, this development would have significant impacts through increased recreational pressure, lighting, noise, domestic pet incursions, and hydrological changes. A substantially enhanced buffer would be required to adequately protect the ancient woodland and wildlife receptor site - the 15m minimum is inadequate for development of this scale and intensity. This constraint significantly reduces the genuinely developable area in its own right.

High-pressure gas main: A strategic high-pressure gas main crosses the site in its entirety, requiring the addition of an 18-30m+ wide corridor in the area marked for development that would also be undevelopable. The proposed policy does not even mention, let alone adequately reflect this constraint in its capacity calculations. This constraint further reduces the genuinely developable area.

Watercourse, lake, and flooding: A watercourse flows through the site into a lake at the eastern boundary. The supporting text acknowledges the area around the lake is vulnerable to surface water flooding. No Flood Risk Assessment has been provided. The policy requires "appropriate buffer" but does not specify width, risking minimum compliance. Ecological and flooding buffers of minimum 15-20m+ would be required. This constraint further reduces the genuinely developable area.

The Lodge curtilage: The policy appears to double-count a non-designated heritage asset, The Lodge's private garden (including the lake area) as both "Green Infrastructure" (within the claimed 50% provision) and also as developable area. If The Lodge is to be retained as an occupied dwelling, its curtilage cannot realistically serve as public Green Infrastructure. If demolition is intended, this is not stated in the policy and no heritage assessment has been undertaken, see paragraph below.

Heritage impact: At the proposed density, development would require demolition of The Lodge (Etchingham Lodge), a non-designated heritage asset from c.1845 with its walled garden, covered entrance, historic well, gardens and parkland setting. The policy contains no heritage assessment, no acknowledgment of significance, and no balanced judgment of harm as required by NPPF paragraphs 203 and 209. Development would also affect the setting of listed buildings opposite the site, including a Grade II listed farmhouse, eroding the rural character and sense of place that contributes to their significance. The allocation fails to address heritage impacts adequately. The East Sussex County Archaeologist (East Sussex County Council) and Heritage England have both confirmed that neither the Landowner or the District Council have consulted them prior to this proposed allocation.

HG2 biodiversity receptor site buffer: The northern field borders the HG2 biodiversity receptor site along its entire length. An ecological buffer of minimum 15-25m+ would be required to protect the receptor site from construction impacts, recreational pressure, domestic pet predation (particularly cats), light pollution, noise, and chemical runoff. This buffer is essential to maintain the receptor site's function as a legally required wildlife refuge for HG2's biodiversity compensation. This represents a significant additional constraint along the entire length of the northern field's eastern boundary that is not accounted for in capacity calculation, and further reduces the genuinely developable area

Once these constraints are properly excluded, the realistic developable area is significantly reduced, making the claimed capacity of 150 dwellings completely unachievable.

Infrastructure and Delivery: Critical Gaps in Evidence

National Highways approval: The allocation requires vehicular access onto the A21 trunk road "to the satisfaction of National Highways." No evidence has been provided that National

Highways supports this access in principle. In the absence of National Highways confirmation, the site should not be allocated. The existing access is a field gate onto the A21; there is no existing access onto the A229.

Off-site highway works: The policy requires "any necessary off-site highway works" but does not specify what works are required, whether they are feasible, whether they are viable within likely CIL/S106 contributions, or whether they would be effective. No highways assessment or transport study has been published.

Phasing: The policy allows 75 dwellings (50% of allocation - equivalent to the entire previous Local Plan requirement) to be occupied before community infrastructure is delivered. This is inadequate. Community infrastructure, off-site highway works, and Green Infrastructure should be phased to ensure early delivery.

Viability: At 35 dph with policy-compliant affordable housing (30-40%), significant CIL/S106 contributions (highways, community building, LEAP), enhanced ancient woodland buffer (substantially more than 15m minimum required for significant development impacts), watercourse/lake buffers, and high-quality materials required by the Hurst Green Design Code HGNP.DC.4 (local brick, clay tiles, weatherboarding), viability pressure will be acute. The allocation is positioned to enable threshold gaming (exactly 150 dwellings at proposed NPPF tenure threshold; subdivisible into three phases of exactly 50 dwellings to access "medium site" easements) and future viability challenges. No viability assessment has been published.

Strategic Threshold Gaming and NPPF Reforms Incompatibility

The allocation exhibits characteristics suggesting strategic positioning relative to emerging NPPF reforms:

- **Exactly 150 dwellings:** The Government's December 2025 NPPF consultation proposes a 150-dwelling threshold for tenure mix requirements. The proposed HG4 site is allocated for precisely 150 dwellings - not 145, not 155, but exactly at the threshold.
- **Subdivisible into medium sites:** The 7-hectare site is perfectly divisible into three phases of 2.4 hectares each, delivering exactly 50 dwellings per phase. This would access "medium site" easements (cash-in-lieu affordable housing, Building Safety Levy exemption) that the Government explicitly warns could be gamed through subdivision.
- **Density incompatibility:** The proposed HG4 site delivers 21 dph actual density, half the proposed NPPF minimum of 40-50 dph for station-area development, and contradicts the brownfield-first hierarchy (the proposed HG4 site is 100% greenfield).

If allocated, the proposed HG4 site would set precedent undermining both the Government's proposed reforms before they are even implemented, as well as any future planning applications across Rother and within a National Landscape area.

Made Neighbourhood Plan: Fundamental Conflict

The allocation directly conflicts with at least 11 of the 20 policies in the November 2025 referendum-approved Neighbourhood Plan (over half the plan), including policies on settlement boundaries (HG1), local need (HG3), transition to countryside (HG4), A21 setback (HG5), dark skies (HG8), natural features (HG9), green connectivity (HG10), Local Green Space (HG11), protected views (HG12), and parking (HG20). The allocation undermines five years of community planning work just months after democratic approval, contrary to NPPF paragraphs 13-14 and 30-31 and the Council's Strategic Objective 10 on working with communities. Given the Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan was only 'made' and adopted by Rother District Council on the 15th December 2025, the proposed allocation and consultation are unexplainably timed, and demonstrate how the District Council have undermined the community, by breaching both the NPPF and its own policies.

Biodiversity Net Gain Conflict

The allocation proposes 150 dwellings immediately adjacent to the HG2 biodiversity receptor site, which is designated as long-term wildlife refuge for legally required biodiversity compensation from the HG2 development. Developing 150 dwellings adjacent to this receptor site would fundamentally undermine its ecological function through recreational pressure, domestic pets, lighting, and noise.

This reveals a fundamental contradiction: HG2 is a development of only 26 houses at the same end of the village, in a less ecologically sensitive location closer to the existing settlement. Yet HG2 required an entire field as a biodiversity receptor site. HG4 proposes 150 dwellings (nearly 6 times larger than HG2) on 9.52 hectares of greenfield National Landscape with parkland character, mature trees, and existing wildlife populations adjacent to ancient woodland. Where is HG4's biodiversity receptor site? Where would the wildlife from 9.52 hectares of habitat destruction go?

If 26 houses at the same end of the village required an entire field as a receptor site, 150 dwellings in a more sensitive National Landscape location adjacent to ancient woodland would logically require multiple fields for adequate biodiversity compensation - yet no provision exists. The policy contains no assessment of existing habitat value, no compensation mechanism, and no explanation of how Environment Act 2021 requirements for biodiversity net gain would be achieved. This demonstrates the Council is not protecting biodiversity but simply moving it around until there are no places left to move it to - a fundamentally unsustainable approach that violates biodiversity net gain legislation.

Legal and Statutory Grounds

The allocation of potential site HG4 engages a series of legal duties and statutory requirements that are not matters of planning judgment but of legal obligation, which have not been satisfied.

The statutory duty under section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (as amended by the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023) requires relevant authorities, in

exercising their functions, to seek to further the conservation and enhancement of the area of outstanding natural beauty. This duty was materially strengthened by the 2023 amendment from the previous requirement to "have regard to" the purposes of designation. The allocation of 150 dwellings within the High Weald National Landscape, on a site where a Planning Inspector concluded in April 2020 that a single dwelling would cause significant and harmful effect on the National Landscape and would erode its important rural edge, is on its face irreconcilable with this strengthened statutory duty. No exceptional circumstances case of the kind required by NPPF paragraph 177 has been published, and the statutory duty is not dischargeable by assertion. The Council, in allocating HG4 in the absence of such a case, risks acting ultra vires.

The statutory development plan status of the made Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan is established by section 38A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as inserted by section 116 of the Localism Act 2011). The Neighbourhood Plan was made by the Council on 15 December 2025 and immediately became part of the statutory development plan for the area. The emerging Local Plan must, to the extent possible, be consistent with it.

The allocation of HG4 conflicts with at least eleven of the Neighbourhood Plan's twenty policies. NPPF paragraph 14 provides that policies in a neighbourhood plan made within the previous five years should not be overridden by a strategic policy unless there are exceptional circumstances. No such circumstances have been identified. The Council would, in submitting this allocation for examination, be inviting an Inspector to find a recently made democratic instrument of its own creation to be overridden without evidential justification, an outcome the examination process is not designed to produce.

The requirements of regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, read with the duty of co-operation under section 33A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, require that the plan be based on a proportionate and up-to-date evidence base. The allocation of 150 dwellings at HG4 is not supported by any published evidence specific to Hurst Green's housing requirement, any transport assessment approved by the statutory highway authority, any Biodiversity Net Gain Plan meeting the requirements of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as inserted by the Environment Act 2021, any Heritage Impact Assessment addressing the significance of The Lodge as a non-designated heritage asset, or any assessment of the site's realistic developable area against the physical constraints that materially affect it. An allocation advanced without this evidence base is not capable of being found sound under paragraph 36 of the NPPF and is vulnerable to challenge under section 113 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 following adoption.

The duty of procedural fairness, as established in the Gunning principles confirmed by the *Court of Appeal in R v North and East Devon Health Authority ex parte Coughlan [2001] QB 213*, requires that statutory consultation be undertaken with an open mind and on the basis of information sufficient to allow meaningful engagement. The Parish Council submits that a proposed allocation for which the fundamental technical evidence, exceptional circumstances case, transport assessment, BNG Plan, heritage assessment, realistic capacity assessment, remains unpublished does not meet this standard, as consultees

cannot meaningfully engage with a proposal whose evidential foundations have not been disclosed.

During the open Regulation 18 consultation period, the Council's Cabinet Member for Planning received a direct communication from the landowners of Site HG4, in which they were explicitly invited to advocate for the site's allocation at Cabinet. Their written reply, which characterised the landowners' commercial proposal as "an interesting proposal" and agreed to discuss their "proposed solution," was copied to a senior planning officer actively working on the emerging Local Plan. The Gunning principles require not only that decision-makers approach consultation with an open mind, but that the process itself is not conducted in a manner that would lead a fair-minded observer to doubt that open-mindedness.

Liability may also arise in respect of the A21 highway safety considerations if the Council proceeds to allocate HG4 in circumstances where it has been placed on notice of a foreseeable risk of harm to children using the A21 school route, where its own commissioned evidence (AECOM Strategic Environmental Assessment, February 2023) confirmed that the A21 casualty rate is worse than the England average, and where the Cabinet Infrastructure Delivery Plan acknowledges that A21 improvements are unfunded. The serious injury of a thirteen-year-old child on that route during the consultation period itself establishes both foreseeability and contemporaneous notice. The representee makes no allegation of current liability but notes that these circumstances, unaddressed, would be a material consideration for legal advisers.

The representee respectfully submits that these are not matters that can be resolved at examination and that the legally sound course is to address them before the plan is submitted.

Summary

For the reasons set out throughout this representation, our objection concludes that the allocation of the proposed HG4 site for 150 dwellings at 35 dph is fundamentally unsound. It fails the tests of soundness in being neither positively prepared (concentrates 81% of growth on single constrained site), justified (no evidence for 387% housing increase; no exceptional circumstances for major National Landscape development), effective (unrealistic capacity; critical infrastructure approvals not secured; conflicts with adjacent biodiversity receptor site), nor consistent with national policy (violates NPPF paragraphs 96, 174-177, 189-190, 203, 209; incompatible with emerging NPPF reforms).

It is difficult to comprehend how this allocation came to be assessed as potentially suitable. Any one of the grounds set out in this objection would, standing alone, provide sufficient basis for refusal: the 2020 Planning Inspector's dismissal for National Landscape harm; the professional rejection by AECOM; the demonstrable danger of the A21 school route now tragically validated by serious injury; the wholesale contradiction of 11 made Neighbourhood Plan policies just months after referendum approval; the absence of any biodiversity compensation mechanism despite being nearly six times larger than HG2 which required an entire receptor field; the unrealistic capacity once constraints are properly accounted for; the

concentration of 81% of growth on a single constrained site; or the apparent strategic positioning at precisely 150 dwellings relative to proposed NPPF thresholds.

Yet these grounds do not exist in isolation. They must be considered cumulatively and in the context of Hurst Green's fundamental unsuitability as a location for strategic growth: a village with no healthcare facilities, no supermarket, no secondary school, no railway station access, inadequate public transport (2-hourly buses, no weekends), 90%+ car dependency, isolation by dangerous trunk roads, and designation entirely within a National Landscape. The settlement is demonstrably car-dependent and isolated - characteristics that have intensified over time despite infrastructure investment, as evidenced by census data showing car dependency increasing from 88.9% to 93.5%.

When the individual objection grounds are considered together with Hurst Green's fundamental unsuitability for major development, the allocation appears inexplicable. The site assessment process that concluded this allocation was appropriate raises serious questions about methodology, evidence consideration, and adherence to the development plan hierarchy. A properly conducted assessment applying national policy, respecting the made Neighbourhood Plan, considering professional evidence, accounting for actual site constraints, and recognising settlement limitations would inevitably conclude this site is unsuitable. The fact that the allocation has proceeded to this stage suggests a concerning disconnect between policy requirements and decision-making.

The proposed HG4 site should be removed from the Local Plan entirely. Fundamental concerns exist about the principle of major National Landscape development, children's safety on the A21 school route (validated by the serious injury incident of 13th February 2026), extreme car dependency, heritage harm, and the disproportionate concentration of growth that would fundamentally alter the character and scale of Hurst Green.

Structure of This Objection

The objection sets out in detail each of the grounds of objection, providing comprehensive evidence, analysis, and policy references supporting the conclusion that the proposed HG4 site allocation is unsound and should be removed from the draft Local Plan.

The objection is structured as follows:

- **Grounds 1-2** address the misrepresentation of the site's planning history and the lack of evidence-based justification for the dramatic increase in housing numbers.
- **Grounds 3-5** present the overwhelming community evidence of the A21's danger (now tragically validated by the February 2026 serious injury incident), the systematic violations of national planning policy, and the direct conflicts with the made Neighbourhood Plan.
- **Grounds 6-14** examine the fundamental flaws in the site description, the unresolved constraints (gas main, biodiversity receptor site conflict, hedgerow/woodland buffers, Green Infrastructure misrepresentations, connectivity failures), the unrealistic dwelling capacity, National Landscape harm, and heritage destruction.
- **Grounds 15-19** demonstrate how the allocation contradicts the Local Plan's own Strategic Spatial Objectives, the flawed A21 Corridor Strategy designation, the Council's Vision for Northern Rother, the Council's Vision for the Countryside, and basic sustainability and settlement pattern principles.
- **Grounds 20-21** present professional evidence validation (AECOM's SEA confirming all community concerns) and the strategic threshold gaming that positions the proposed HG4 site to exploit emerging NPPF reforms.
- **Ground 22** addresses the comprehensive conflicts with adopted Hurst Green Design Codes, including excessive density, failure to match character area context, hard edge creation, and inadequate tree protection.
- **Ground 23** systematically examines conflicts with the Council's own Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18, April 2024) policies, demonstrating fundamental and pervasive contradictions across strategic priorities, environmental protections, design requirements, infrastructure provisions, and heritage safeguards that render the allocation unsound and internally incoherent with the plan's policy framework.
- **Ground 24** addresses the landowner's communications and representation.
- **Ground 25** provides the conclusion and detailed requested actions for the Council.

Each ground is supported by referenced evidence from the Local Plan, supporting documents, professional assessments, community evidence, national policy, and the recently made Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan.

1. Claim Regarding Site Identification

The Policy States: "Site identification: New site identified through HELAA". This is factually incorrect, the site was not "identified through HELAA" as a new site.

The site was previously identified and assessed through the Neighbourhood Plan process as site HG25. HG25 only covered part of the northern field of what is now proposed - it did not include The Lodge, its gardens, the remainder of the northern field beyond what HG25 covered, or the southern field. It was rejected by AECOM in their professional assessment for the following reasons:

AECOM's specific grounds for rejection:

"Site is a greenfield site, outside and remote from the settlement boundary and poorly located in respect of local services and facilities"

"There is existing access to the A21 which would need to be upgraded and this is likely to be achievable (although there is potential for conflict with the existing junction of the A21 and A229)"

"The site is of high landscape sensitivity to change as a result of its location in open countryside away from the main area of settlement, its location across elevated landform, and its designation in the AONB"

HG4 is substantially worse than the rejected HG25 proposed site - the critical point is that the current HG4 allocation is significantly larger and more problematic than the HG25 that AECOM rejected:

- HG25 (rejected): Northern field only
- HG4 (now proposed): Northern field Plus The Lodge and its entire curtilage/gardens Plus southern field

Not only has the District Council disregarded AECOM's professional rejection, it has proposed an even larger, more expansive version of the rejected site. AECOM's concerns remain entirely valid - and are worse. Every single concern AECOM raised applies with equal or greater force to the proposed HG4 site:

1. "Greenfield site, outside and remote from settlement boundary, poorly located in respect of local services and facilities"
 - Still entirely true
 - Made worse by HG4 being larger and extending even further from the village
 - School is 15-20+ minute walk along A21, and requiring crossing trunk road
 - No safe pedestrian access to village facilities

2. "Potential for conflict with existing junction of A21 and A229"
 - Still entirely true, HG4 proposes vehicular access onto A21 in same location
 - Policy even acknowledges this: requires "appropriate access onto A21 to satisfaction of National Highways"
 - No evidence this concern has been resolved

3. "High landscape sensitivity - location in open countryside away from main settlement, elevated landform, designation in AONB"
 - Still entirely true, worse because HG4 is larger than HG25
 - Still in High Weald AONB (National Landscape)
 - Still on elevated landform visible in landscape
 - Still remote from main settlement
 - Supporting text even acknowledges: "it is acknowledged that this would be a large allocation for development within the National Landscape"

Contradicts Neighbourhood Plan and Masterplan Requirements

Both the Neighbourhood Plan and the Hurst Green Masterplan specifically detail that new properties should be set back from the A21 due to the thousands of vehicles using this trunk road daily. This is a fundamental design principle based on:

- Traffic noise and pollution from heavy A21 usage
- Safety concerns from proximity to the A21 trunk road on the strategic road network and the A229 (which borders the northern boundary - unlit, no pavements, 60mph speed limit)
- Quality of life for residents
- Creating appropriate buffer between homes and major infrastructure

HG4 completely ignores this established planning guidance by proposing 150 dwellings with frontage directly onto the A21. This demonstrates:

- Disregard for the community's own adopted planning policies
- Failure to learn from or apply local evidence-based design guidance
- Willingness to override community planning work without justification

This misrepresentation is significant because:

1. It suggests fresh, objective identification when the site has already been through rigorous professional assessment and found unsuitable.
2. It conceals the site's previous rejection and the professional reasons for that rejection.
3. It conceals that HG4 is substantially larger than the rejected HG25 - the Council has not only ignored AECOM's rejection, but expanded the site to include additional land

(The Lodge curtilage and southern field) that wasn't even in the original rejected proposal.

4. It undermines procedural integrity - sites rejected through neighbourhood planning should not be reintroduced through the Local Plan without transparent acknowledgment of their previous assessment and compelling evidence that the fundamental concerns have been addressed.
5. It denies consultees the full picture - those responding to this consultation are not being told that professional assessors have already deemed a smaller version of this site inappropriate, or that none of the identified problems have been resolved.
6. None of AECOM's concerns have been addressed - the issues that led to rejection (remoteness, poor access to facilities, landscape sensitivity, AONB location, A21/A229 junction conflict) all remain, many are worse due to the site being larger.

The Council should clarify:

- Why AECOM's professional rejection of HG25 is being disregarded?
- What evidence demonstrates the concerns raised have been addressed (none appears to exist)?
- Why expanding the rejected site to include even more land is appropriate?
- What has fundamentally changed to make an unsuitable site suddenly suitable?

Proceeding with a site allocation while misrepresenting its identification history and concealing its previous rejection raises serious questions about the soundness and integrity of the Local Plan process.

Planning Appeal Dismissal - One Dwelling Refused on Part of the Site

The site's planning history gets worse. The closest part of the HG4 site to the village center - the land adjacent to Pentwood Place - was the subject of a planning application for just One dwelling (Ref: RR/2019/1784/P). This was:

- Refused by Rother District Council (October 2019)
- Appealed to the Planning Inspectorate
- Appeal dismissed (1st April 2020, Appeal Ref: App/W/4000599)

The Planning Inspector's key findings:

On Location and Policy Compliance:

"The appeal site lies outside of the defined settlement boundary... There is no dispute that the appeal site is located within the countryside."

"The appeal site is located outside of the defined settlement boundary and the development proposed would not meet the limited circumstances which would permit development in the countryside."

On AONB Impact (the critical finding):

"The appeal site and the public footpath play an important role in defining the village boundary and the start of the open countryside on this side of the A21."

"The appeal site which has a verdant appearance makes an important contribution to the rural character of the village in this locality and to the intrinsic beauty of the countryside which lies beyond."

"The development proposed would have an urbanising effect... would have a significant and eroding effect on its current greenfield, undeveloped appearance... would significantly diminish its rural characteristics."

"The appeal site's location and undeveloped appearance signifies the transition from the urban settlement... to the rural character of the open countryside beyond. The development proposed would erode the important rural edge of the existing village boundary."

"The development proposed would have a significant harmful effect on the character and appearance of the AONB."

Inspector's Conclusion: Even though the Council had only a 3.73 year housing land supply (significant shortfall), the Inspector concluded the harm to the AONB was so significant that the tilted balance in favor of housing did not apply, and one dwelling was refused. The Planning Inspectorate refused One dwelling on the part of HG4 closest to the village in 2020 because:

- It would harm the AONB
- It would erode the rural edge of the village
- It would urbanise countryside
- The site defines the transition from settlement to countryside

Rother District Council now proposes 150 dwellings (2026) on the same land plus additional fields further from the village. This raises serious questions about the consistency of the Council's approach - and these questions become more acute when examining what the Inspector actually refused:

The 2020 application site was the most suitable part of HG4:

- Small, self-contained area - not a large development site
- Surrounded by trees - providing natural screening
- Own access onto A21 - no complex access issues
- Screened from the countryside - the most sensitive views protected
- Closest to the village - best connectivity of any part of HG4

Despite being:

- Small (one dwelling vs. 150)
- Screened (trees surrounding it)
- Self-contained (defined plot)
- Closest to village (better connected than northern fields)

The Planning Inspector still refused it for AONB harm and eroding the rural edge. Now consider what HG4 proposes:

If the Inspector refused one screened dwelling on the most suitable, best-connected part of HG4... then 150 unscreened dwellings on the actual countryside portions (northern and south-eastern fields) would represent major development in open countryside wholly inconsistent with the Inspector's findings.

The northern and south-eastern fields that comprise the bulk of HG4 are:

- Not screened by trees - open agricultural fields
- Not self-contained - sprawling development
- Not close to village - remote and separated
- Not just "closest to countryside" - they are the countryside, outside development boundary
- Not small scale - 150 dwelling strategic allocation

The Inspector's findings about the refused site apply with overwhelming force to HG4's countryside portions:

Inspector's Finding (1 dwelling, screened site)	HG4 Reality (150 dwellings, countryside fields)
<i>"Important role in defining village boundary"</i>	150 dwellings would fundamentally alter this boundary-defining role
<i>"Verdant appearance makes important contribution to rural character"</i>	150 dwellings would destroy this entirely - fields would become housing estate
<i>"Signifies transition from urban settlement to open countryside"</i>	150 dwellings would eliminate this transition - countryside becomes urban
<i>"Would erode important rural edge"</i>	150 dwellings wouldn't erode the edge - it would demolish it and extend urbanization deep into countryside

The logic is inescapable: If 1 screened dwelling on a small, contained plot with own access equals too harmful to National Landscape (AONB). Then 150 unscreened dwellings on open

countryside fields alongside the small contained plot, equals catastrophically harmful to the National Landscape.

The Council is proposing 150 times the refused development, on far more sensitive land (actual countryside vs. screened plot), with far greater impacts.

Another Recent Refusal: Even 7 Dwellings on an Infill Site Refused (November 2025)

In November 2025, just months ago, a Planning Inspector dismissed an appeal for 7 dwellings on land at Burgh Hill, Hurst Green (App/U1430/W/25/3361707).

In planning terms, this site was much better located than HG4:

- Infill development - gap between existing houses, not countryside extension
- Within village - on existing residential street
- Houses on either side - continuing existing development pattern
- Directly bordered settlement boundary on three sides (north, east, west)
- Short walk to facilities - shops, village hall, play area, pub
- Existing road access - from established residential street
- Small scale - only 7 dwellings, not 150
- Better pedestrian connectivity - would have part provided a new footpath link

Despite these characteristics, the Inspector found (paras 30, 38):

"The location of the appeal scheme would conflict with the Council's strategy for the location of development as it is not located within the settlement boundary... policies seek to focus new development within defined settlement boundaries and allocated sites, and in the countryside, restrict development to that which accords with specific local plan policies"

The Inspector even acknowledged (para 26):

- Landscape effects would be "highly localised"
- Key AONB characteristics would be "conserved"
- No harmful effect on "dark skies or tranquillity"
- Development would "accord with Section 85 of the CRow Act" (AONB duty)

Yet still dismissed the appeal because:

"The proposal conflicts with the development plan... For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed" (para 42)

Critical Finding (para 4): The Inspector gave substantial weight to the Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan (referendum version, not yet formally made at time of decision):

"Given the advanced stage, I attach substantial weight to the policies of the referendum version of the plan"

The Neighbourhood Plan is now formally made (November 2025) - it has even greater weight.

The Burgh Hill Comparison: Direct Contradiction

If 7 dwellings on an infill site bordering the settlement boundary on three sides was refused. Then the allocation of 150 dwellings on countryside fields entirely outside the settlement boundary appears fundamentally incompatible with the Council's Planning Committee and the Inspector's reasoning in refusing 7 dwellings that were at least partially within the boundary.

Burgh Hill (Refused)	HG4 (Proposed)
7 dwellings	150 dwellings (21× larger)
Infill between houses	Countryside fields
Borders boundary 3 sides	Outside boundary entirely
Existing street access	Field gate onto A21 only; no existing access onto A229
Short walk to facilities	15-25 min walk to school
Better pedestrian links	Dangerous A21 crossing required
"Highly localised" AONB impact	Over 65% in open countryside
Inspector: AONB conserved	Inspector 2020: 1 dwelling harms AONB

The Burgh Hill Inspector stated (para 30):

"These policies seek to focus new development within defined settlement boundaries and allocated sites, and in the countryside, restrict development to that which accords with specific local plan policies"

HG4:

- Is Not within settlement boundary
- Is Not an allocated site in the Neighbourhood Plan (it was removed)
- Does Not accord with countryside policies (violates 11 NP policies)
- Does Not accord with Neighbourhood Plan Policy HG1

The Inspector gave substantial weight to the Neighbourhood Plan in November 2025. The Neighbourhood Plan is now formally made. HG4 violates 11 of its 20 policies.

Three Planning Decisions, Same Message

The Council now has three separate professional planning decisions all pointing in the same direction:

1. Planning Inspectorate Appeal Decision (April 2020 - Pentwood):

- 1 dwelling on HG4's most suitable part = Refused
- Reason: AONB harm, erodes rural edge, urbanises countryside

2. Planning Inspectorate Appeal Decision (November 2025 - Burgh Hill):

- 7 dwellings on infill site bordering boundary = Refused
- Reason: Outside settlement boundary, conflicts with development plan strategy

3. AECOM Professional Assessment (Neighbourhood Plan):

- HG25 (northern field only, smaller than HG4) = Rejected
- Reasons: Greenfield, remote from settlement, poorly located, high landscape sensitivity, AONB, A21/A229 conflicts

All three professional assessments reached the same conclusion: development in this location is inappropriate. Yet the Council proposes to allocate 150 dwellings - larger than all three refused/rejected proposals combined. With three professional planning decisions all refusing development in this area:

- Why is the Council allocating land that Planning Inspectors specifically found should not be developed?
- How can 150 dwellings be acceptable when:
 - 1 dwelling was too harmful to AONB (2020)
 - 7 dwellings on a better-located infill site was refused (November 2025)
 - A smaller version (HG25) was professionally rejected (AECOM)
- Has the Council disclosed this planning history to consultees?
- What has changed since 2020, November 2025, and the AECOM assessment to make development suddenly acceptable?
- How does the Council justify ignoring three separate professional assessments?
- Does the Council believe Planning Inspectorate decisions should be ignored?

This planning history alone should be sufficient grounds to remove HG4 from the Local Plan.

The Council's Own Recent Assessment: 38 Homes for Hurst Green

In the Summer 2024, Rother District Council conducted its first consultation, which was focused on topic policies rather than sites for development, but included information on housing numbers. In that consultation, the Council's own assessment stated that the level of

potential housing growth for Hurst Green, given its location and geographical limitations, was 38 new homes.

The Neighbourhood Plan Process: This assessment occurred against the backdrop of an active Neighbourhood Plan process which:

- Involved extensive professional scrutiny of all land adjacent to or near Hurst Green over 5 years
- Included multiple comprehensive call for sites by the Parish Council, including part of the proposed HG4.
- Went to referendum in November 2025 and passed.
- The District Council granted planning permission for two sites (28 homes) and (26 homes) before the NP concluded, and has also included these sites in the new draft Local Plan with the same allocation.

In summary, over the past 5 years through the Neighbourhood Plan process, all land adjacent to or near Hurst Green has been scrutinised to the nth degree by planning professionals, including the Council's own planning officers.

The "Eleventh Hour" Appearance of HG4

Critical timeline:

- Summer 2024 Consultation: District Council says Hurst Green capacity is 38 homes; and HG4 not included.
- The Council knew about HG25 through the Neighbourhood Plan process and AECOM's rejection.
- 17th November 2025, District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to approve the new development sites in an updated version of the local plan to go through another round of public consultation in January 2026. For Hurst Green, this involved a jump from 38 to 185 new homes, far beyond what had already been approved, and by far the biggest increase of all the villages in northern Rother.
- November 2025 - Hurst Green Parish Council confirms that it was not previously notified of the proposed housing increase, and was informed at the same time as agenda and papers for the District Council's November Overview and Scrutiny Committee were published.
- 20th November 2025: 3 days later the Neighbourhood Plan passes referendum.
- January 2026 Consultation: Public consultation that outlines that Hurst Green suddenly needs 185 new homes (HG4's 150 and other allocations) on top of 54 new homes recently granted permission.

HG4 was not in the 2024 consultation or 2025 engagement with the Council, even though HG25 was known to the District Council through the NP process. This can only mean one thing: The Council previously dismissed HG25 (now enlarged and renamed HG4) between the Neighbourhood Plan process and Summer 2024. Because it was unsuitable given its

location and environmental factors - exactly what AECOM found, exactly what the Planning Inspector found.

HG25/HG4 was known to the Council throughout the period between Summer 2024 and January 2026. The Council therefore:

- Knew about it through the NP process.
- Had AECOM's rejection.
- Had the planning appeal dismissal.
- Made a conscious decision not to include it in Summer 2024, and decided to include it at the "Eleventh Hour".
- Assessed Hurst Green's capacity as only 38 homes in Summer 2024.

The unjustified explosion in housing numbers for Hurst Green represents:

- A 487% increase from the Council's own recent assessment
- Appears at the "eleventh hour" after years of professional scrutiny found nothing
- Contradicts the Council's own evidence base from just months ago
- Includes a site (HG4) the Council apparently previously dismissed as unsuitable

Questions

1. Why did the District Council assess Hurst Green's capacity as only 38 homes right up until the last moment before the January 2026 consultation?
2. What has changed in 6 months to justify a 487% increase?
3. What evidence supported that assessment?
4. Why was HG4 not in the Summer 2024 consultation, or 2025 discussions with residents and the Parish Council if it was known to the District Council?
5. When did the District Council dismiss HG25, and what were the documented reasons?
6. Why has a previously dismissed, professionally rejected site suddenly reappeared enlarged?
7. Does the District Council believe its own evidence base was wrong?

The evidence suggests that HG4 is being inserted to meet housing numbers without adequate justification, overriding:

- The Council's own recent assessment
- Five years of Neighbourhood Plan scrutiny
- AECOM's professional rejection
- Planning Inspectorate appeal dismissal
- The community's referendum-approved Neighbourhood Plan

The Council's December 2025 Cabinet Report

The Council's Cabinet report (8 December 2025) recommending approval of this consultation reveals critical context for understanding why HG4 has suddenly appeared

despite being previously dismissed. The Cabinet report (paragraph 17) reveals that between Summer 2024 and January 2026, the Government's standard method housing target for Rother escalated dramatically:

- Summer 2024: 733 homes per year required
- December 2024 NPPF update: 912 homes per year required
- Increase: 24% escalation in housing pressure in just 6 months

Over the 17-year plan period, this amounts to 15,504 homes required. The Council proposes to deliver only 8,415 homes (495 per year), creating a shortfall of 7,077 dwellings (paragraph 21).

The Cabinet report (paragraph 18) admits:

"the adopted Rother Core Strategy Local Plan (2014) sets out a housing target of 335 net new homes per year. However, monitoring records show that the Core Strategy housing target has not been met, with approximately 215 new homes per year having been built on average in the last 15 years."

The Council has delivered only 64% of its own target for 15 years. This raises fundamental questions about the deliverability of any site, particularly constrained sites like HG4.

The Cabinet report (paragraph 40) admits:

"At present, due to the district's lack of a 5 year housing land supply, the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as outlined in paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF, applies."

The Council does not have a five-year housing land supply. This creates pressure to approve housing applications regardless of appropriateness. This desperate position explains why previously dismissed sites are suddenly being allocated.

The Cabinet report acknowledges (paragraph 16) that the High Weald National Landscape (AONB) covers 83% of the district and "is a significant constraint to major development" providing "the highest level of protection." Paragraph 3.21-3.22 (added after Overview and Scrutiny Committee concerns) note AONB provides "strong reason for restricting development."

Infrastructure Concerns Acknowledged: The Cabinet report (paragraph 28) admits:

"we understand the concerns raised by residents and others about existing and future levels of infrastructure provision - such as for community facilities and services, transport and water/wastewater."

The Infrastructure Delivery Plan is still being reviewed as a "working document" - it is not finalised.

What This Reveals: The Cabinet report demonstrates that HG4's sudden appearance is likely driven by:

1. Desperation - no five-year supply, escalating Government targets, historic delivery failure
2. Political pressure - dwelling shortfall creating pressure to allocate any available land
3. Disregard for constraints - despite acknowledging 83% AONB coverage and infrastructure concerns
4. Disregard for professional evidence - previously dismissed site suddenly "suitable"

The 487% increase in Hurst Green's allocation from 38 to 185 homes is not evidence-led - it is target-driven allocation of previously rejected land in response to housing delivery failure and political pressure.

The "Left No Stone Unturned" Claim vs Reality

The Cabinet report (paragraph 20) claims:

"The HELAA is being produced in line with national planning policy and guidance. It is a comprehensive study that reflects how the Council has 'left no stone unturned' in its process of identifying land in suitable locations and specific sites to meet the district's development needs. Over 900 sites have been assessed as part of this study."

Yet the District Council's own actions demonstrate this claim is questionable. Professional evidence the District Council has ignored:

1. AECOM's rejection of HG25 (2023) - northern field assessed and rejected as unsuitable.
2. Planning Inspector's dismissal (2020) - one dwelling refused for AONB harm.
3. Planning Inspector's dismissal (November 2025) - seven dwellings on better-located infill site refused.
4. AECOM's Strategic Environmental Assessment (February 2023) - documented A21 danger, extreme car dependency, inadequate public transport, medium-high AONB sensitivity, road casualty rate worse than England average.
5. Community evidence - 151-resident petition (2016), five years of documented testimonies, validated by professionals.
6. District Council's own Summer 2024 assessment - only 38 homes capacity for Hurst Green.

"Left no stone unturned" would mean:

- Considering professional evidence objectively.
- Respecting Planning Inspectorate decisions.
- Following the development plan hierarchy.
- Not allocating land that professionals have rejected.
- Explaining why previous assessments are being overridden.

Instead, the District Council has:

- Allocated a site (HG4) that is substantially larger than a previously rejected site (HG25).
- Ignored three separate professional planning decisions refusing/rejecting development in this location.
- Increased Hurst Green's allocation by 487% without published justification.
- Allocated the site "at the eleventh hour" after it was excluded from Summer 2024 consultation.
- Made no reference to the site's planning history in the allocation policy.

"Left no stone unturned" does not mean "assess 900 sites then ignore professional evidence and allocate previously rejected land anyway." The claim rings hollow when the Council's actions demonstrate the opposite.

2. Landowner Communications

Following the tragic serious injury incident on 13th February 2026 on the A21, the landowners of HG4 sent an email to the two District Councillors for Hurst Green ward, making their case for the HG4 allocation.

This email reveals several fundamental problems with the allocation that undermine its credibility and demonstrate it is developer-led, not evidence-led, planning.

Concern 1: The Roundabout Is Only Needed Because of HG4

The landowners claim:

"We are formally committing to offer land from our holding to facilitate the construction of a new strategic roundabout at the Coopers Corner junction... An allocation of some 150 units provides the 'critical mass' and land-take required to deliver the roundabout"

The fundamental flaw:

The only reason a roundabout at Coopers Corner would be needed is to provide access to the 150 houses. This is circular reasoning:

1. Allocate 150 houses that require a roundabout for access
2. Claim the roundabout is a "safety benefit" justifying the allocation
3. But the roundabout is only needed because of the 150 houses

This is not a "safety-led allocation" - it's development-led infrastructure that happens to be dressed up as safety improvement. Safety at Coopers Corner is genuinely a concern, and as such the solution should be:

- Funded separately as a highway safety scheme.
- Delivered using existing public land (National Highways and East Sussex County Council already own land around the junction).
- Not dependent on a greenfield National Landscape housing development.

National Highways' own assessment (2025): As the email itself acknowledges, National Highways assessed Coopers Corner improvements as recently as 2025 and decided "it wasn't the best use of funds." This reveals that:

- National Highways do not consider Coopers Corner a priority for safety spending.
- Professional highway assessment found other schemes would deliver better safety outcomes.
- The "notorious accident blackspot" claim is not validated by National Highways' priority assessment.

If National Highways concluded the roundabout wasn't worth funding for safety reasons, it cannot suddenly become justified as "safety infrastructure" when it's actually needed for housing development access.

Concern 2: The Roundabout Location Cannot Address Village Speeding

The landowners claim: *"significantly slowing the speeds in the village at the same time"*

Coopers Corner is at the northern edge of the village - well away from housing, and where speeding is actually a problem:

- Where speeding occurs: Through the village center, past the pub and school, along the residential sections of the A21,
- Where the roundabout would be: At the far northern edge, before entering the village proper,
- Distance from speeding problem: The roundabout is too far from the village to have any speed reduction effect,

Traffic calming principle: Speed reduction measures must be located where the speeding problem exists. A roundabout at the village edge cannot and will not slow speeds through the village center and school zone.

The February 2026 serious injury incident occurred on the A21 London Road in Hurst Green - the through-village section where children walk to school. A roundabout at Coopers Corner (the far end of the village) would have done nothing to prevent this incident.

What would actually reduce village speeds:

- Traffic calming measures through the village center
- Speed cameras or average speed enforcement
- Pedestrian crossings near the school
- 20mph zones in residential areas

These genuine safety measures don't require allocating 150 houses in the National Landscape.

Concern 3: No Public Land Needed From HG4

The email's claim that HG4 land is "required" for the roundabout is seemingly not correct:

- National Highways already own land around the Coopers Corner junction
- East Sussex County Council Highways already own land around the junction
- Sufficient public land exists to construct a roundabout or traffic lights if were needed

There is no planning or highway engineering reason why land from HG4 would be necessary to construct a roundabout at Coopers Corner. This claim appears designed to create artificial dependency between the housing allocation and highway safety.

Concern 4: Post-Hoc Justification for "Exceptional Circumstances"

The landowners claim: *"By providing a major strategic safety benefit, this considered development satisfies the 'Exceptional Circumstances' and 'Public Interest' tests required for major development in the High Weald AONB."*

This reveals the allocation's fundamental weakness:

The NPPF requires that major development in a National Landscape should be refused except in exceptional circumstances where:

1. The development is in the public interest, and
2. It can be demonstrated that the development cannot reasonably be located elsewhere.

It appears that the landowners are seeking to manufacture "exceptional circumstances" by:

- Claiming their development enables a roundabout (which is only needed because of their development).
- Suggesting the roundabout would improve safety (when National Highways 2025 assessment found it wasn't a priority).
- Implying the land is needed for the roundabout (when public land already exists).

This is circular reasoning that fails the National Landscape protection test:

- Public interest: The roundabout is not a public interest benefit - it's development necessitated infrastructure. If it were genuinely in the public interest, National Highways would have funded it previously, and as recently as 2025 when it was last reviewed.

- Cannot be located elsewhere: The claim is that the land is needed, but public land already exists. Traffic lights, or a roundabout can be constructed without HG4.

Concern 5: Timing

The landowners sent this email following the February 2026 serious incident - a tragic event validating years of community concerns about A21 danger.

The email explicitly references: *"Sadly, as you may already know, there has been yet another serious accident in the village this past week - a 13-year-old boy was badly injured in a hit-and-run"*

The landowners appear to be attempting to suggest that their development would have prevented the incident, creating urgency pressure on councillors ("action is urgently needed"), and presenting their development as the "solution".

The reality: Allocating 150 houses would increase danger to children, not reduce it:

- Approximately 60 additional children would need to walk the dangerous A21 route to school
- Increased traffic movements through the village
- More vehicles using the A21 junction where the incident occurred
- The roundabout (if built) would not address through-village speeding where children actually walk

Concern 6: The "Neighbourhood Plan Primary Objective" Claim

The landowners claim *"a primary objective of the recently adopted Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan"*

The Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan, approved by referendum in November 2025, does not identify a roundabout at Coopers Corner as a "primary objective." The Neighbourhood Plan's actual published primary aims and objectives are to:

- *Protect against inappropriate and speculative development and to provide guidance and greater influence over how Hurst Green should be developed in the future.*
- *Improve public safety and reduce the harmful impact of road traffic, while providing sufficient parking for the community.*
- *Develop local planning policies for Hurst Green to which development proposals should adhere.*
- *Create an environment that encourages residents to live active, social, meaningful lives that promote good health and well-being.*

- *Bring forward action on facilities and improvements, which are needed by the village of Hurst Green; and the hamlets of Silver Hill and Swiftsden.*
- *Improve the visual appearance and overall perception of Hurst Green as a place where people want to live, work and visit.*
- *Enhance our existing, and create new, open green spaces and improve access to the countryside.*
- *Increase business, retail and tourism opportunities to encourage local employment, and grow the local economy.*
- *Conserve and enhance the built and historic environment and improve the general street scene around the parish.*

Development on the proposed site HG4 would directly violate many of these, in particular the communities desire to:

- Protect against inappropriate and speculative development and to provide guidance and greater influence over how Hurst Green should be developed in the future.
- Develop local planning policies for Hurst Green to which development proposals should adhere.
- Conserve and enhance the built and historic environment and improve the general street scene around the parish.

The Neighbourhood Plan explicitly excludes the HG4 site from development and establishes policies (HG1, HG3, HG4, HG5, etc.) that HG4 would violate. If a roundabout were genuinely a "primary objective," the Neighbourhood Plan would have allocated land for it. It did not.

Concern 7: CIL Argument

The landowners claim that the Parish will receive a 25% CIL 'Neighbourhood Portion.' For a 150-unit scheme, this represents a multi-million-pound investment for the Parish Council to spend on local priorities.

This is inappropriate financial inducement: The suggestion is that the District or Parish Council should support HG4 because it would receive CIL money to spend on playgrounds and sports facilities.

This argument is flawed:

1. CIL is not a benefit of development - it is statutory compensation for the impacts of development. The fact that CIL would be substantial reflects the scale of impact the development would cause.

2. CIL does not outweigh AONB harm - Financial payments cannot justify major development in a National Landscape. NPPF paragraph 177 requires exceptional circumstances and demonstration that development cannot be located elsewhere - not financial compensation.
3. The village does not need the facilities the landowners suggest:
 - Already has two children's playgrounds (HG4 proposes a third - unnecessary duplication)
 - Already has comprehensive sports facilities including Drewetts Sportsground
 - Already has village halls, social club, cricket pitch, and extensive green infrastructure, including a village orchard, and another orchard to be built close to the proposed HG4 site, as part of the approved permission for HG6.
 - The village is surrounded by countryside with numerous footpaths and public access to extensive ancient woodland directly bordering the village
4. Parish Council has not requested HG4 - The community spent five years (2016-2025) developing a Neighbourhood Plan that deliberately excluded HG4-scale development. The suggestion that £millions of CIL would change this community decision is inappropriate.

Concern 8: Developer-Led Planning, Not Evidence-Led

This email reveals, the allocation is developer-led, not evidence-led:

- No evidence the roundabout is necessary for safety (National Highways 2025 assessment found it wasn't priority)
- No evidence HG4 land is needed (public land already exists)
- No evidence 150 houses are needed (AECOM rejected smaller site; Neighbourhood Plan established need was already met)
- No evidence of exceptional circumstances (manufactured circular reasoning)

The allocation appears to exist because:

- Landowners want to develop their land.
- The Council is under housing target pressure and looking for sites.

This is the opposite of evidence-led, plan-led planning that should:

- Start with identified need.
- Assess suitable locations objectively.
- Apply policy tests rigorously.
- Resist developer pressure.
- Protect the National Landscape as national policy requires.

Concern 9: Contradicts Cabinet Report's Own Process

The District Council's Cabinet Report (December 2025) states:

"Over 900 sites have been assessed as part of this study. Sites that have been assessed as suitable, available and achievable have been taken forward" (paragraph 20)

"we have 'left no stone unturned' in its process of identifying land" (paragraph 20)

But the landowner email reveals that the site wasn't identified through rigorous objective assessment - it was promoted by landowners through lobbying and manufactured justification. This contradicts the Cabinet Report's claim of comprehensive objective assessment.

Concern 10: National Highways Have Not Supported This

The landowner email mentions: "Following the emergency public meeting... we had the opportunity to meet the representatives from National Highways".

But nowhere does it say National Highways support the proposal. This meeting was to discuss the introduction of a controversial scheme to introduce traffic lights in the centre of Hurst Green. If National Highways had expressed support, the landowners would say so explicitly. The careful wording suggests National Highways either:

- Have not been asked formally
- Have been asked and declined to support
- Have expressed concerns the landowners are not disclosing

The HG4 policy itself requires access "to the satisfaction of National Highways" - yet National Highways approval is not secured or even referenced as being in progress.

Conclusion

The landowners' email, rather than supporting the allocation, appears to expose fundamental flaws in the allocation:

1. The roundabout is only needed because of the development (circular reasoning)
2. National Highways 2025 assessment found it wasn't priority safety spending
3. The roundabout location cannot address through-village speeding
4. Public land already exists - HG4 land not needed
5. Exceptional circumstances" manufactured, not demonstrated
6. Misrepresents Neighbourhood Plan objectives
7. Offers CIL as financial inducement (inappropriate)
8. Reveals developer-led lobbying, not evidence-led planning
9. National Highways support conspicuously absent

3. Lack of Evidence-Based Justification for Housing Numbers

Rother District Council's draft Local Plan proposes a total of 239 dwellings for Hurst Green over the plan period, comprising:

- 54 dwellings from existing allocations and sites with planning permission (built or under construction)
- 185 dwellings as new allocations, primarily through Site HG4 (150 dwellings)

District-Level Evidence Does Not Identify Settlement-Level Need

The Council relies on the Hastings and Rother Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment 2024 (HEDNA) as the principal evidence base for housing growth. However, the HEDNA:

- Establishes a district-wide housing requirement only
- Models household growth across broad sub-areas only
- Groups Hurst Green within the wider "Ticehurst sub-area" which includes several villages and extensive rural hinterland
- Contains no table, figure, or analysis that identifies a numerical housing requirement for Hurst Green as a distinct settlement
- Does not conclude that Hurst Green requires 239 dwellings total
- Does not conclude that 185 new dwellings should be allocated to Hurst Green

The step from district-wide housing requirement to a specific figure of 185-239 dwellings for Hurst Green is therefore a spatial policy choice, not a conclusion derived from locally specific housing need evidence.

Locally Commissioned Evidence Identifies Limited Local Demand

Locally specific housing evidence was prepared in 2019 to support the Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan. The Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan Housing Needs Assessment (AECOM, June 2019):

- Provides detailed assessment of type, size, tenure, and affordability of homes required to meet local needs within the parish
- Focuses on characteristics of housing needed by existing and emerging local population
- Does not identify any demographic, economic, or household formation evidence that would support a strategic-scale allocation of 185 new dwellings or a total of 239 dwellings in a small rural village

Parish-Level Survey Evidence: Demand Measured in Tens, Not Hundreds

The Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan 2019 Local Housing Demand Survey:

- Achieved responses from over 40% of households in the parish

- Provides the only direct, settlement-level measure of local housing demand
- Identifies limited locally generated demand for new homes - measured in tens of dwellings, not hundreds
- Records strong preference for small-scale development
- Identifies oversupply of certain dwelling types, particularly flats and non-detached homes

These findings are fundamentally inconsistent with: A single strategic allocation of 150-185 dwellings, and a total village growth of 239 dwellings.

Previously Evidenced Need Already Delivered

The Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan has already delivered the level of growth previously allocated to Hurst Green by Rother District Council:

- Sites identified through the NP process have been granted planning permission
- Housing has been delivered, including affordable housing at policy-compliant levels
- This delivery has met and exceeded the number of locally identified households seeking accommodation at the time of the 2019 survey
- Demonstrates Hurst Green has responded positively to evidenced local need through plan-led, community-supported approach

There is no locally derived evidence of unmet requirement that would justify a further strategic allocation of 185 new dwellings.

The 487% Increase Has No Evidence Base

The housing requirement trajectory for Hurst Green reveals an unexplained escalation:

Plan Period	Requirement	Status	Evidence Base
Core Strategy (to 2028)	75 homes	Already met through existing permissions	Design Codes p.7, Figure 2.16
New Plan - Original Consultation	38 homes	Consulted upon Summer 2024	Reg 18 consultation
New Plan - Current Draft	185 homes	Current proposal	Current consultation
Increase from original	+147 homes	+387% increase	Unexplained

HG4 alone represents 81% of the entire village requirement:

- HG4 allocation: 150 dwellings
- Total new requirement: 185 dwellings

- HG4 proportion: $150 \div 185$ equals 81% on a single site.

No evidence has been provided to justify:

1. Why the original consultation figure (38 homes) has increased by such a large amount. What has changed between Summer 2024 and January 2026 to justify this dramatic escalation?
2. Why 81% of the entire requirement should be concentrated on a single countryside site - this is not distributive development; it is site-led allocation

Comparing the Council's own assessments:

- Summer 2024 consultation: 38 homes capacity for Hurst Green
- January 2026 consultation: 185+ new homes for Hurst Green (239 total)
- Increase: 487% in six months

No evidence has been provided to justify this massive increase:

- No new housing needs assessment for Hurst Green
- No demographic analysis showing demand
- No economic analysis showing job growth requiring housing
- No cross-boundary analysis showing unmet need from neighboring authorities
- No explanation of what changed between Summer 2024 and January 2026

This appears to be a numbers-driven allocation (meeting district-wide targets) rather than an evidence-driven allocation (meeting Hurst Green's actual needs).

Lack of Sustainability and Accessibility Evidence

National planning policy requires that Local Plans be justified and based on proportionate and robust evidence, including consideration of the most sustainable locations for growth. The evidence base does not assess whether Hurst Green is a sustainable location for strategic-scale development:

- No analysis of access to employment - Hurst Green has minimal local employment
- No analysis of access to healthcare - no GP surgery, dentist, or pharmacy in village
- No analysis of access to secondary education - no secondary school
- No analysis of access to higher-order services - all in Robertsbridge/Hawkhurst
- No analysis of journey times - typical journey to Hastings/Bexhill exceeds 40 minutes by car
- No analysis demonstrating that directing 239 dwellings to Hurst Green represents a sustainable spatial strategy

Without this analysis, the Council cannot demonstrate the allocation is justified.

Absence of Cross-Boundary Housing Market Evidence

The HEDNA and Local Plan documentation do not include any meaningful assessment of:

- Housing market relationships with adjoining authorities
- Unmet needs in neighboring authorities
- Particularly Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, despite Hurst Green's geographic proximity and functional links in that direction

The absence of cross-boundary housing market analysis further undermines the justification for a strategic allocation of this scale in Hurst Green. The Council's Own Cabinet Report Reveals the Contradiction, within the Cabinet Report approving this consultation (8 December 2025, paragraph 21) admits:

"Our assessment indicates a shortfall of some 7,077 dwellings up to 2042"

Yet faced with this district-wide shortfall, the Council's response is to:

- Concentrate 150 dwellings (81% of Hurst Green's requirement) on a single constrained site
- Allocate this site in the National Landscape (83% of district designated, acknowledged as "significant constraint to major development")
- Choose a village demonstrably unsuitable for strategic growth (no healthcare, no supermarket, no secondary school, no railway access, 90%+ car dependency)
- Ignore professional rejection by AECOM and Planning Inspector's 2020 dismissal

This approach is the opposite of rational planning for a constrained district. If the Council genuinely cannot meet housing need due to constraints (which paragraph 22 of the Cabinet Report acknowledges - proposing only 8,415 homes vs 15,504 needed), the response should be to:

- Distribute development across multiple smaller sites at appropriate densities
- Prioritise the 17% of district outside the National Landscape
- Focus growth on genuinely sustainable locations with services and transport
- Respect professional evidence from AECOM and Planning Inspectors
- Honor made Neighbourhood Plans representing five years of community-led planning

Instead, the Council has done the opposite: concentrating 81% of one village's requirement on a single National Landscape site that has been repeatedly rejected, in a village fundamentally unsuitable for strategic growth, just months after the community's Neighbourhood Plan received referendum approval.

The Cabinet Report (paragraph 22) acknowledges the statutory duty:

"in the National Landscape, for example, that can only be done as far as is compatible with our statutory duty to 'seek to further' the conservation and

enhancement of the natural beauty of the National Landscape (Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (as amended))"

Allocating 150 dwellings on a single National Landscape site that would cause major harm is fundamentally incompatible with this statutory duty. The approach suggests the Council is treating the 7,077 dwelling shortfall as a license to disregard constraints, professional evidence, and community planning, rather than as a reason to plan more carefully and strategically.

Conclusion: The Allocation Lacks Evidence-Based Justification

The total figure of 239 dwellings for Hurst Green, including 185 new dwellings through HG4, is not supported by robust, settlement-level evidence of housing need:

- District-wide Hedna does not identify any housing requirement for Hurst Green as a distinct settlement
- Locally commissioned AECOM Housing Needs Assessment does not support this scale of growth
- Parish Council's Local Housing Demand Survey identifies limited demand (tens not hundreds) already met by Neighbourhood Plan delivery
- No sustainability analysis demonstrating Hurst Green is appropriate location for strategic growth
- No cross-boundary evidence of unmet need requiring this allocation
- 487% increase from Summer 2024 has no evidential justification
- Previous local assessment (Summer 2024: 38 homes) contradicted without explanation

In the absence of robust, locally specific evidence demonstrating a need for this scale of growth, the allocation of Site HG4 is:

- Not justified by proportionate evidence
- Not consistent with an evidence-led approach to plan making
- Not sound under the tests that will be applied at examination

The allocation appears to be a top-down distribution of district-wide housing numbers, not a bottom-up response to evidenced local need.

4. Community Evidence: The A21 is Demonstrably Dangerous and the Village Unsustainable

On Thursday 13th February 2026, a schoolboy suffered serious injuries in a hit-and-run incident on the A21 (London Road) in Hurst Green. This tragic incident demonstrates that the community's documented concerns over the past five years were not exaggeration - they were accurate warnings of real and present danger.

Key implications:

- This occurred on the very route HG4 children would use to reach school
- It happened despite existing crossing infrastructure
- The A21 carries thousands of vehicles daily in each direction - all traffic to/from Bexhill, Hastings, and virtually all housing (new or existing) must pass through Hurst Green on this trunk road
- The "A21 corridor" is precisely that - a corridor where through-traffic dominates
- HG4 would add approximately 60 additional children using this dangerous route daily

The 2016 petition included in the Neighbourhood Plan evidence base, warned: *"before a child is killed"* - now a child has been seriously injured.

The community's five years of documented evidence, validated by professional consultants AECOM and now tragically confirmed by this serious injury incident, demonstrates beyond question that allocating 150 dwellings requiring children to use the A21 school route is fundamentally unsafe.

Overwhelming Community Evidence from Neighbourhood Plan Process

During the 5-year Neighbourhood Plan process (2016-2025), extensive community evidence was gathered documenting the severe problems in Hurst Green, particularly:

- The dangerous A21 route to school
- Complete car dependency
- Lack of facilities
- Traffic danger and pollution

This evidence is in the Neighbourhood Plan's Evidence Base and demonstrates Hurst Green is fundamentally unsuitable for major growth.

The A21 School Route is Dangerous (2016 Petition)

In 2016, a petition about the A21 school route gained 151 signatures with detailed comments from residents describing the danger. This is documented in the Neighbourhood Plan Evidence Base.

The petition stated:

"I would like to have a safer walk to school for our children. Slow the traffic down by having an extended 20mph zone, make road users more aware that it is a school zone and to create safer footpaths along the A21."

Key resident testimonies:

On Pavement Width and HGV Danger:

"I have walked the pavement between the centre of the village and the school. I find it frightening that HGVs pass so close to the pavement that wing mirrors etc overhang. It would take only a momentary lapse or misjudgement for a pedestrian to be badly injured or worse" - Phyllis Smith

"The pavement is very narrow and for parents negotiating with a buggy/pram and school aged children it is not always possible to keep them on the pavement" - Lorraine Clark

"As a HGV driver I use this route pretty much on a daily basis... The footpaths are very poor and at the fish & chip shop if two HGV's pass each other the room left for pedestrians is just not enough! The mirror of the northbound vehicles is overhanging the footpath!" - Arron Epps (professional HGV driver)

On Traffic Speed and Volume:

"I live opposite the school and am fearful that the volume and speed of traffic will one day catch us out and a child will be harmed. The road is straight and the sign to show increase to 40 mph is in view from by the school so vehicles start to increase speed as soon as they see it" - Angela French

"I don't want to feel that I'm putting my children and my life in danger every time we walk to or from school. The road is awful with very narrow pavement in places and speeding traffic only a foot or so away from you!" - James Stockdale

"The A21 is very dangerous and the pavements are not suitable for kids to walk to school" - Francisco Munoz

On Fear and Stress:

"Traffic doesn't seem to slow down even in the pouring rain so doing this walk every day with a young child and a pushchair is often very stressful. Some places are incredibly narrow and cannot fit both pushchair and child side by side" - Maria Skinner

"It's scary walking with 3 young children along this road to the school and back especially where the path gets tight and with the massive lorries and cars when they disregard and exceed the speed limit" - Laura Bilsby

"I believe everyone had the right to walk to and from school feeling safe. Having walked only a few times I still felt unsafe for my children and myself, could not imagine having to do this a couple of times a day!" - Sarah Collins

On Risk of Fatalities:

"The school run is unsafe along the A21, too many people speed and overtake through the village and something needs to be done about this Before A Child IS Killed! Please do not wait until this happens!" - Mark Roby

"I live on this road and have witnessed many accidents, a couple fatal. There have been near misses with children that have to walk this busy main road every day to get to school" - Kellie Compton

"It only takes one child to trip or one driver not concentrating for there to be a fatality" - Cathy Baker

"The road is awfully dangerous I've lived here just under a year and there's been 2 crashes right outside my house it's not safe" - Hannah Osborne

This is the route HG4 proposes children from 150 new homes should walk.

Community Consultation Evidence (2018) - Neighbourhood Plan Kick-Off Events

In February 2018, the Neighbourhood Plan held public engagement events. The comments are documented in the NP Evidence Base and reveal:

Transport & Roads - 82 Problems Identified, Including:

Problem #1: "Bypass & better Prow [public rights of way] avoiding A21"

Problem #30: "Safety for children walking to school"

Problem #38: "The traffic all through the village blight this village"

Problem #56: "Speed of traffic on A21 - No 1 issue"

Problem #58: "Volume & speed of traffic through HG on A21 & Station Road. Oversized vehicles through village"

Problem #62: "Traffic volume and noise on A21"

Problem #78: "Speeding!"

Problem #80: "Dangerous roads"

On Parking at School:

Problem #7: "Lack of school parking, dangerous for children / adults etc. Numerous accidents"

Problem #14: "School parking is really poor and dangerous"

Problem #15: "Parking for the school is seriously lacking and unsafe"

Footpaths - 22 Problems, including:

Problem #1: "Pathway on A21 too narrow & unsafe for children to walk safely"

Problem #2: "Pavement along the A21 too narrow"

Problem #3: "Safer walkways for children on the A21 for school"

Problem #4: "The paths/journey by foot to the school is so narrow and dangerous – speed limits need to be lowered"

Schooling Problems:

Problem #8: "No safe pedestrian route to the school"

Problem #9: "Need a safe footpath to the school (not on the A21)"

Problem #10: "Speed of traffic lorries"

Problem #11: "Dangerous parking on A21"

Problem #12: "A21 pollution cut!"

Overwhelming Evidence of Unsustainability

This community evidence, gathered over 5 years and documented in the Neighbourhood Plan Evidence Base, demonstrates:

1. The A21 Route to School is Dangerous:

- 151 residents signed petition about danger
- Professional HGV driver confirmed inadequate space
- Multiple residents describe "scary," "frightening," "very stressful" journeys
- Several describe near-misses and actual crashes
- Parents feel they're "putting children's lives in danger"
- Narrow pavements cannot accommodate pushchairs + children
- HGV wing mirrors overhang pavements

2. Community Prioritised This as #1 Issue:

- "Speed of traffic on A21 - No 1 issue"
- "Traffic all through the village blight this village"
- Consistently raised across all consultations
- Bypass repeatedly requested

3. No Safe Alternative Route Exists:

- "No safe pedestrian route to the school"
- "Need a safe footpath to the school (not on the A21)"
- Only route is dangerous A21

4. The A21 is a Trunk Road Carrying Thousands of Vehicles Daily:

- Single carriageway
- 30mph section through village
- Thousands of vehicles per day
- Many HGVs
- Speeding endemic
- Narrow pavements
- No lighting in places
- Unlit in dark sky area

HG4 proposes 150 dwellings whose children would need to:

- Walk 15-25 minutes along the dangerous A21 to reach school
- Walk in darkness during winter (dark sky area, no lighting)
- Cross the A21 (described as dangerous by community)
- Navigate narrow pavements where HGV mirrors overhang
- Walk route described by 151 residents as unsafe

And whose residents would:

- Add 150+ vehicles to the thousands already using the A21 daily
- Worsen traffic volume and danger community identified as "#1 issue"
- Increase parking problems at school (already "seriously lacking and unsafe")
- Exacerbate A21 congestion and pollution

This community evidence is documented in:

- Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan Evidence Base (2016-2025)
- Made Neighbourhood Plan (November 2025) - now part of statutory development plan

- Informed Neighbourhood Plan policies requiring A21 setback, protecting character, etc.

The Council cannot claim ignorance of these issues - they are in the evidence base of a made Neighbourhood Plan the Council has a duty to support.

Comparison: What the Community Said vs What HG4 Proposes

Community Evidence (2016-2018)	HG4 Proposal (2026)
<i>"No safe pedestrian route to school"</i>	Proposes 150 dwellings requiring A21 school route
<i>"A21 too narrow & unsafe for children"</i>	Children from HG4 must use this route
<i>"Speed of traffic - No 1 issue"</i>	Would add 150+ vehicles
<i>"Dangerous road before child is killed"</i>	Would increase danger significantly
<i>151 residents: route is dangerous</i>	Ignores this documented evidence
<i>"No safe footpath (not on A21)"</i>	No alternative provided
<i>"Traffic blights this village"</i>	Would worsen blight
<i>Professional HGV driver: inadequate space</i>	Narrow pavements remain
<i>Parents: "putting children's lives in danger"</i>	Would require more parents to do this
<i>"Parking at school seriously lacking & unsafe"</i>	Would add 150 families

Conclusion: Community Evidence Proves Unsustainability

The Neighbourhood Plan Evidence Base contains overwhelming documentation that:

- The A21 school route is dangerous (151 residents, detailed testimonies)
- Traffic is the "#1 issue" blighting the village
- No safe alternative route exists
- Parking at school is already dangerous and inadequate
- The village lacks facilities (no healthcare, no supermarket)
- Car dependency is complete and increasing

This evidence is in the statutory development plan. HG4 proposes 150 dwellings that would:

- Require children to use the documented-dangerous A21 route
- Force families onto a route 151 residents petitioned was unsafe
- Add 150+ vehicles to the "#1 issue" traffic problem
- Worsen school parking that's already "seriously lacking and unsafe"

- Increase danger the community has spent years trying to reduce

The Council cannot credibly allocate 150 dwellings in a location where:

- The community has documented the danger over 5 years
- 151 residents petitioned about unsafe school route
- This evidence is in the made Neighbourhood Plan
- Professional drivers confirm inadequate space
- Parents describe feeling they're "putting children's lives in danger"
- Multiple residents predict a child will be killed without action

Allocating HG4 directly contradicts documented community evidence showing the location is fundamentally unsuitable and dangerous for families with children.

4. Systematic Violation of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF as the Framework for Local Plans

NPPF para 1 states:

"The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans can provide for housing and other development in a sustainable manner."

NPPF para 2 states:

"Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan... The National Planning Policy Framework must be taken into account in preparing the development plan"

The Local Plan must comply with the NPPF. HG4 systematically violates it.

1. Violates Sustainable Development (Chapter 2)

NPPF para 8 sets out three overarching objectives for sustainable development:

a) Economic objective - *"ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places"*

- HG4 is in the wrong place - remote from employment, services, facilities
- Not "right place" for 150 dwellings given lack of infrastructure and car dependency

b) Social objective - *"support strong, vibrant and healthy communities... with accessible services"*

- No accessible services - no healthcare, no supermarket, no secondary school
- Does not support "healthy communities" - dangerous walking routes, car dependency, fragmentation

c) Environmental objective - *"minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change"*

- Car-dependent development increases emissions (contradicts climate mitigation)
- Census shows 93.5% car ownership - development will worsen this
- Destroys countryside, AONB, dark skies (contradicts environmental protection)

HG4 fails all three sustainable development objectives.

2. Violates Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development (Para 11)

NPPF para 11(a) requires plans to:

"promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects"

HG4 violates this:

- Does Not promote sustainable pattern - creates sprawl on fourth axis
- Does Not align growth with infrastructure - no infrastructure exists or planned
- Does Not improve environment - destroys AONB, countryside, dark skies
- Does Not mitigate climate change - car-dependent development increases emissions
- Does Not make effective use of land - greenfield sprawl, not urban areas

3. Violates Plan Soundness Tests (Para 36)

NPPF para 36 sets out tests of soundness. Plans must be:

a) Positively prepared - *"providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area's objectively assessed needs"*

- HG4 does not meet objectively assessed needs - Section 2 shows no settlement-level evidence for 239 dwellings
- Strategy is Not positive - contradicts NP, community priorities, professional assessments

b) Justified - *"an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence"*

- Not based on proportionate evidence - no evidence for 239 dwellings in Hurst Green (Section 2)
- Reasonable alternatives ignored - more sustainable settlements like Ticehurst excluded
- Not justified - 3 professional assessments rejected development here

c) Effective - *"deliverable over the plan period"*

- Not deliverable - critical constraints (gas main, access, buffers) make 150 dwellings unachievable
- Requires demolition of The Lodge but policy doesn't state this
- Undeliverable policy requirements (dark skies + 150 dwellings, public access to private garden)

d) Consistent with national policy - *"enabling the delivery of sustainable development"*

- Not consistent with NPPF - violates multiple chapters (see below)
- Does Not enable sustainable development - enables unsustainable development

HG4 fails all four tests of soundness.

4. Violates Rural Housing Policy (Para 84)

NPPF para 84 states:

"Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply..."

HG4 violates this:

- Fields are in countryside (outside settlement boundary, Council's own definition includes scattered development)
- Development would Not be isolated homes But would be isolated *estate* in countryside
- None of the exceptions apply (not essential rural worker, not optimal heritage use, not exceptional design, etc.)
- Policy specifically aims to avoid countryside sprawl - HG4 creates exactly this

5. Violates Sustainable Transport (Chapter 9, Para 110)

NPPF para 110 states:

"The planning system should actively manage patterns of growth... Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes"

HG4 violates this:

- Not sustainable location - requires vehicle trips for all services, healthcare, shopping, employment
- Does Not limit need to travel - mandates travel for everything (no facilities in village)
- Does Not offer genuine choice of transport - dangerous roads, no pavements, massive hills prevent walking/cycling; census proves 93.5% car ownership increasing
- Cannot be made sustainable - geography prevents active travel infrastructure

The November 2025 Burgh Hill Inspector applied para 110 and refused even 7 dwellings on better-located infill site because outside settlement boundary. HG4 proposes 150 dwellings in a worse location.

6. Violates Effective Use of Land (Chapter 11, Para 124)

NPPF para 124 states:

"Planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving

the environment... should make as much use as possible of previously-developed or 'brownfield' land"

HG4 violates this:

- Does Not safeguard environment - destroys AONB, countryside, dark skies, biodiversity receptor site
- Does Not improve environment - degrades it catastrophically
- Greenfield development, Not brownfield
- Not effective use - sprawling countryside development, inefficient land use

7. Violates Design Quality (Chapter 12, Para 135)

NPPF para 135 requires developments:

c) are sympathetic to local character and history

- Destroys local character - urbanises countryside, violates 11 NP policies designed to protect character

d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place

- Fragments village across fourth axis, undermines sense of place

f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible

- Not safe - dangerous A21 crossing, 15-20 min walk to school in darkness along unlit trunk road
- Not accessible - no safe access to facilities

NPPF para 139 states:

"Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies"

HG4 violates:

- NP design policies (Policies HG4, HG5 - A21 setback, gradual transition to countryside)
- Creates unsafe, fragmented, car-dependent development
- Should be refused under para 139

8. Violates Conserving Natural Environment (Chapter 15, Para 187)

NPPF para 187 requires planning to:

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes

- Destroys valued AONB landscape - Planning Inspector found even 1 dwelling would harm it

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside

- Urbanizes countryside with 150-dwelling estate

d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity

- Undermines HG2 biodiversity receptor site, preventing net gain

e) preventing development from contributing to... pollution

- Light pollution destroys dark skies (violates NP Policy HG8)
- Traffic pollution from car-dependent development

9. Violates National Landscapes Policy (Para 189-190)

NPPF para 189 states:

"Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes... The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited"

HG4 violates this:

- 150 dwellings is Not "limited" scale - it's strategic-scale allocation
- Over 65% in open countryside within AONB
- Does Not conserve landscape - destroys it
- Planning Inspector 2020 found 1 dwelling would harm AONB - 150 is catastrophic

NPPF para 190 states:

"Permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances"

HG4 is major development in AONB without exceptional circumstances:

- 150 dwellings clearly "major development"
- No exceptional circumstances demonstrated
- Assessment required under para 190(a)(b)(c) not provided
- Should be refused under para 190

10. Violates Neighbourhood Planning (Para 13-14, 30-31)

NPPF para 13 states:

"Neighbourhood plans... once made, form part of the development plan"

NPPF para 14 states:

"In situations where the presumption (at paragraph 11d) applies... the adverse impact of allowing development that conflicts with the neighbourhood plan is likely to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, provided... the neighbourhood plan became part of the development plan five years or less before the decision"

This is critical:

- Hurst Green NP made November 2025 (2 months ago)
- HG4 conflicts with 11 out of 20 NP policies (Section 3)
- Under para 14, conflict with NP "likely to significantly and demonstrably outweigh benefits"
- NPPF provides special protection for recently-made Neighbourhood Plans - HG4 violates this

NPPF para 30 states:

"Neighbourhood plans... should not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies... should not undermine those strategic policies"

But strategic policies must not undermine Neighbourhood Plans:

- NP made November 2025
- Sets out location strategy (HG1), character protection (HG4, HG5), dark skies (HG8), etc.
- HG4 allocation undermines these policies
- Violates spirit of neighbourhood planning

NPPF para 31 states:

"Once a neighbourhood plan has been brought into force, the policies it contains take precedence over existing non-strategic policies... unless they are superseded by strategic or non-strategic policies that are adopted subsequently"

HG4 is not yet adopted - NP takes precedence:

- NP is made law (November 2025)
- Local Plan is draft (January 2026)

- NP policies take precedence
- HG4 violates 11 NP policies
- Allocation contrary to current development plan

11. Violates Community Cohesion (Para 96)

NPPF para 96 requires places which:

a) promote social interaction

- Fragments village, separates residents from facilities by A21 barrier

b) are safe and accessible

- Not safe - dangerous A21, unlit roads, 15-20 min walk to school
- Not accessible - no safe access to services

c) enable and support healthy lives... through provision of... local shops, access to healthier food... and layouts that encourage walking and cycling

- No local shops, no access to food shops (all in other villages)
- Layout cannot encourage walking/cycling - geography prevents it, proven by 93.5% car ownership, there is nowhere to walk or safely cycle to.

12. Violates Heritage Protection (Para 216)

NPPF para 216 states:

"The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account... a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset"

HG4 violates this:

- The Lodge is non-designated heritage asset (c.1845, 180 years old)
- Policy contains NO heritage assessment
- NO balanced judgement of harm vs significance
- Appears to require demolition without stating this
- Violates para 216 requirement for balanced assessment

Summary: Systematic NPPF Violations

HG4 violates at least 12 areas of the NPPF:

- Chapter 2 - Sustainable development (fails all 3 objectives)
- Para 11 - Presumption in favour of sustainable development
- Para 36 - Soundness tests (fails all 4)

- Para 84 - Avoid isolated countryside development
- Para 110 - Sustainable transport locations
- Para 124 - Effective use of land, safeguard environment
- Para 135, 139 - Design quality, refuse poor design
- Para 187 - Conserve natural environment
- Para 189-190 - National Landscapes protection
- Para 13-14, 30-31 - Neighbourhood planning
- Para 96 - Healthy, safe communities
- Para 216 - Heritage asset assessment

The Council Cannot Demonstrate NPPF Compliance

Para 36(d) requires plans to be "Consistent with national policy"

The Council must demonstrate how HG4 is consistent with:

- Sustainable development objectives (it isn't)
- Sustainable transport policy (it contradicts it)
- National Landscapes protection (it violates it)
- Neighbourhood planning principles (it undermines them)
- Sound plan-making tests (it fails them)

The Council cannot credibly claim HG4 is "consistent with national policy" when it systematically violates the NPPF across 12 different policy areas.

An allocation that fails NPPF para 36's soundness tests cannot be included in a sound Local Plan.

5. Direct Conflict with the Made Neighbourhood Plan

The Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan was approved at referendum in November 2025 and is now part of the statutory development plan for the area. It forms part of the legal framework for determining planning applications.

The Neighbourhood Plan was prepared over 5 years with extensive community consultation, professional evidence-gathering, and independent examination. It reflects:

- Local housing needs (evidenced through AECOM assessment and Parish survey)
- Community priorities (landscape protection, rural character)
- Sustainable development principles
- High Weald AONB designation

Rother District Council has a statutory duty under the Localism Act 2011 to support neighborhood planning and ensure Local Plans are in general conformity with made Neighbourhood Plans.

HG4 violates many of the core policies of the made Neighbourhood Plan:

1. Policy HG1: Location Of Development

Policy HG1 states:

"A. Development in Hurst Green parish shall be focused within the development boundary"

"B. Development proposals outside the development boundary will be strictly controlled in the interests of conserving the nationally important landscape of the High Weald National Landscape"

"C. Development that would be visually intrusive when viewed from publicly accessible locations, or where it is at odds with the character, identity and history of the local context of the site, will not be supported unless mitigated with significant, maintainable and appropriate native landscape screening"

HG4 violates this policy:

- Northern and south-eastern fields are outside the development boundary (they are countryside)
- 150 dwellings is Not "strictly controlled" - it's a major strategic allocation
- Development would be visually intrusive - Planning Inspector found even 1 dwelling would harm views and AONB
- At odds with character - AECOM found "high landscape sensitivity," urbanization of countryside incompatible with rural character

- Cannot be mitigated by screening - policy's own text acknowledges it's a "large allocation for development within the National Landscape"

The Neighbourhood Plan's spatial strategy is to focus development within boundaries and strictly control countryside development. HG4 does the opposite - major development in the countryside.

2. Policy HG1: Avoiding Sprawl

Policy HG1 Justification (para 4.2) states:

"Residents strongly value the special landscape within which Hurst Green is located and are keen to safeguard its many natural and historic features... This means retaining the rural nature of the Parish's settlements – in terms of size and character - and avoiding coalescence between Hurst Green village and Etchingham village to the west, and the hamlet of Swiftsden to the north"

HG4 violates this:

- Does Not retain "rural nature" - urbanises countryside with 150 dwellings
- Extends settlement northwards toward Swiftsden - exacerbating sprawl
- Creates fourth axis of development - ribbon development along A21
- Fragments settlement pattern rather than maintaining compact village form

The community explicitly prioritised avoiding sprawl. HG4 creates exactly the sprawl the Neighbourhood Plan sought to prevent.

3. Policy HG3: Meeting Local Housing Needs

Policy HG3 Purpose states:

"Policy HG3 seeks to ensure that new housing development in Hurst Green contributes to the identified local housing need"

The Neighbourhood Plan's evidence base (paras 5.14-5.22) found:

- Local Housing Demand Survey (2019) identified limited local need measured in tens not hundreds
- 78% of households already live in accommodation suitable for their needs
- 28% said Hurst Green was not their preferred place to live due to: (a) limited facilities, (b) road noise/traffic, (c) difficult to meet people
- 33% of respondents were unhappy with the parish for these reasons
- Community prefers detached houses of at least 2 bedrooms
- Demand for affordable and private rental, not large-scale market development

HG4 violates this policy:

- Does Not contribute to "identified local housing need" - proposes 150 dwellings when local evidence shows demand in tens.
- Makes existing problems worse - HG4 would increase road noise/traffic on A21, worsen limited facilities issue, fragment community making it harder to meet people.
- Proposes development when 28% already say it's not their preferred place to live and 33% are unhappy - adding 150 homes doesn't address why people are unhappy.
- No evidence 150 dwellings meets any identified local need.

Policy HG3's justification explicitly references the 2019 evidence showing limited local need. HG4 ignores this evidence entirely.

4. Policy HG4: Character Of Development

Policy HG4 states:

"E. Where development sites abut open countryside, development on the rural boundary edge should mitigate any detrimental visual impacts on the countryside... through the siting of lower density development at the rural boundary of the site in order to provide a gradual transition from the built form to open countryside"

HG4 violates this policy:

- HG4's northern and south-eastern fields are open countryside, not just "abutting" it
- No gradual transition - fields themselves would become development
- No lower density at edge - 35 dwellings per hectare throughout, including countryside portions
- Cannot mitigate visual impacts - you cannot mitigate the visual impact of developing the countryside by developing the countryside

The policy requires gradual transition to countryside. HG4 eliminates the countryside the policy seeks to transition to.

5. Policy HG5: Design Of Development

Policy HG5(ii) specifically states:

"Residential development proposals adjacent to the A21 shall be designed to mitigate the impact of noise from the A21 on residents, using such measures as may be determined based on acoustic survey, which could include high performance glazing and ventilation systems, building set back, landscaping and layout of the building"

This reflects the Neighbourhood Plan Masterplan requirement that properties should be set back from the A21.

HG4 violates this:

- Proposes 150 dwellings with frontage directly onto A21
- Ignores established design principle requiring setback from trunk road
- Policy acknowledges A21 noise is significant problem requiring mitigation - yet proposes major development along it
- No evidence that 150 dwellings along A21 can adequately mitigate noise impacts

The Neighbourhood Plan recognized A21 proximity is problematic and requires setback. HG4 proposes development directly along A21.

6. Policy HG8: Protecting Hurst Green'S Dark Skies

Policy HG8 Purpose:

"New developments should not detract from the unlit environment of the parish"

Policy requires:

- Following lighting professionals guidance for reducing obtrusive light
- Minimizing light spill from buildings (reducing glazing, recessing fenestration, avoiding upward-facing glazing)
- Eliminating external light spillage beyond application site
- Only providing lighting necessary for operational, safety or security reasons
- Using controls to dim/switch off when not required

HG4 violates this policy:

- 150 dwellings fundamentally incompatible with "unlit environment" - domestic lighting from homes unavoidable
- Cannot eliminate light spill - 150 households will generate domestic lighting, security lights, garden lights, vehicle headlights
- Street lighting required for safety on estate roads - cannot have dark unlit streets in housing estate
- Cumulative impact on dark sky area impossible to mitigate - you cannot have both dark skies and a housing estate
- Policy HG4 text itself requires lighting to comply with dark skies guidance - acknowledging the fundamental incompatibility

Hurst Green is a dark sky area. The Neighbourhood Plan specifically protects this. 150 dwellings, particularly in this location, would destroy it.

7. Policy HG9: Protecting Natural Features

Policy HG9 requires development to:

"maintain, incorporate and enhance the natural environment and landscape features – including woodland, meadows, grassland and heath – that contribute to the character of Hurst Green and the High Weald National Landscape"

Specific requirements include:

- Retain ancient trees and trees of arboricultural value
- Include landscape buffers where development abuts open countryside
- Create usable open space that enables views across wider landscape

HG4 violates this policy:

- Does not "maintain" natural features - destroys agricultural fields that are the natural landscape
- Cannot provide landscape buffer when fields are open countryside - policy requires buffers "where development abuts" countryside; HG4 develops the countryside itself
- Contradicts "enhance" - replacing meadows/grassland with housing estate is destruction not enhancement
- Blocks views across wider landscape - 150 dwellings would eliminate open views the policy seeks to enable
- High Weald character destroyed - policy protects features that contribute to High Weald character; HG4 eliminates them

You cannot "maintain and enhance" the natural environment by building a housing estate on it.

8. Policy HG10: Green Infrastructure

Policy HG10 requires:

"Development proposals should be designed to create, conserve, enhance and manage green spaces and connect chains of green infrastructure"

"Proposals which threaten to damage such connectivity will be strongly resisted"

HG4 violates this policy:

- Does not "conserve" green infrastructure - converts agricultural land to housing
- Damages connectivity - blocks connections across open countryside by urbanising fields
- Policy states such proposals "will be strongly resisted" - yet HG4 is allocated
- Claim about green infrastructure - counts Lodge's private garden as public green space (Section 8)

The Neighbourhood Plan explicitly states proposals that damage green connectivity "will be strongly resisted" - yet HG4 does exactly this.

9. Policy HG11: Local Green Space

Policy HG11 designates LGS1: Countryside passageway. HG4 is immediately adjacent to LGS1.

Impact on LGS1:

- HG4 proposes 150 dwellings immediately adjacent to designated Local Green Space
- Access arrangements unclear but proximity to LGS1 constrains options
- 150 dwellings would fundamentally change character and setting of protected sports ground
- Increased recreational pressure, noise, traffic, lighting on protected quiet green space
- Policy protects LGS1 from development - HG4 proposes major development right next to it

Local Green Spaces are protected for a reason. HG4 undermines this protection.

10. Policy HG12: Protection of Locally Significant Views

Policy HG12 identifies two locally significant views:

"V1: View over the lowland meadows from the end of the footpath tree tunnel"

"V2: From the footpath opposite the church, looking eastward towards the lowland meadows"

Policy requires:

"Development proposals should be designed in a way that safeguards these locally significant views"

HG4 violates this policy:

- HG4 would affect both locally protected views 1 and 2 - 150 dwellings on fields eastward and directly alongside would be visible.
- Houses would be visible from multiple points along this protected view corridor
- *"Looking eastward towards lowland meadows"* - development would eliminate the view.

The Neighbourhood Plan specifically protects views eastward to these meadows. HG4 would build houses in these views.

11. Policy HG20: Residential Parking Provision

Policy HG20 requires:

"Development proposals that generate an increased need for parking must provide suitable parking laid out in accordance with... Design Codes... to minimise obstruction of the local road network"

"The minimum number of car parking spaces to be provided will be in accordance with, and where possible exceed, East Sussex's Guidance for Parking at New Residential Development"

HG4 parking provision would be inadequate:

- It is inconceivable that HG4 provides enough space for adequate car parking at 35 dwellings per hectare
- Density proposed is too high for adequate parking provision given site constraints (gas main corridor, buffers, Lodge curtilage, flooding areas)
- Census data shows 93.5% of households have cars, 53.4% have 2+ cars - high parking demand inevitable
- Car dependency mandated by lack of facilities and dangerous walking routes - every household will need vehicles
- No public transport alternative - residents cannot reduce car ownership even if they wanted to

Given:

- Very high car ownership (93.5% have cars, 53.4% have 2+)
- Complete car dependency (no facilities, unsafe walking)
- Site constraints reducing developable area
- High density (35 dph)

HG4 cannot provide adequate parking to meet Neighbourhood Plan standards.

Inadequate parking would result in:

- Overcrowding on-street parking on the estate's roads and on any accessible green or off-road space.
- Parking on A21 and A229 (unlit and dangerous) isn't possible, and because the site is remote from the village, existing on and off-street parking options would be 10-15+ minutes walk away from the site.
- Obstruction of local road network.
- Safety issues for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Exactly what Policy HG20 seeks to prevent.

Summary: HG4 Violates at Least 11 Neighbourhood Plan Policies

The Neighbourhood Plan's "About Hurst Green" section (paras 2.1-2.10) states:

"By the 1980's many of these local businesses had closed, and today the parish has relatively few shops and few public amenities. In particular there is no supermarket, chemist, doctor or dentist."

"Residents are highly dependent on vehicles to reach the neighbouring service villages of Hawkhurst and Robertsbridge"

"Walking and cycling within the parish are heavily constrained by both geography and existing poor road design... walking on the heavily used, unlit, and dangerous A-roads is neither practical or safe, effectively mandating the use of motor transport"

"The 2011 census showed that just 8% of households in the parish had no access to a car... the 2021 census showed that only 6.5% of households had no access to a car or van, and that over half (53.4%) of households had access to more than 1 car or van"

"The difficulties posed by the busy route of the A21 (London Road), which effectively cuts the village in half, making movement by foot and bike challenging"

This evidence directly contradicts any claim that Hurst Green is a sustainable location for major growth.

The Neighbourhood Plan's own evidence shows:

- Limited facilities (no healthcare, no supermarket, no medical facilities, limited services).
- Car dependency has increased despite bus investment in a flexibus service.
- Geography and road design prevent active travel.
- A21, A229, and the A265 creates barriers within and around the village itself.

Yet HG4 proposes 150 dwellings in a location the Neighbourhood Plan evidence proves is car-dependent and lacking facilities.

Conclusion: HG4 Violates the Made Neighbourhood Plan

HG4 is in direct conflict with at least 11 policies of the made Neighbourhood Plan:

- Policy HG1 (Location) - development outside boundary, not strictly controlled, visually intrusive, at odds with character, creates sprawl
- Policy HG1 (Justification) - fails to retain rural nature, exacerbates sprawl
- Policy HG3 (Local Needs) - does not meet identified local housing need, worsens existing problems
- Policy HG4 (Character) - no gradual transition to countryside (develops the countryside itself)
- Policy HG5 (Design) - ignores A21 setback requirement

- Policy HG8 (Dark Skies) - 150 dwellings fundamentally incompatible with protected unlit environment
- Policy HG9 (Natural Features) - destroys rather than maintains/enhances natural landscape features
- Policy HG10 (Green Infrastructure) - damages connectivity that policy says "will be strongly resisted"
- Policy HG11 (Local Green Space) - undermines protection of adjacent LGS2 Drewetts sports ground
- Policy HG12 (Significant Views) - destroys protected View V2 by building on meadows being viewed
- Policy HG20 (Parking) - inadequate parking provision given density, constraints, and 93.5% car ownership

11 out of 20 Neighbourhood Plan policies directly violated - over half the plan.

- Focuses development within boundaries
- Strictly controls countryside development
- Protects landscape and rural character
- Meets identified local need (tens not hundreds)
- Requires setback from A21
- Avoids sprawl
- Recognizes limited facilities and car dependency

HG4:

- Major development outside boundaries in countryside
- Not "strict control" - strategic allocation
- Destroys landscape and rural character
- Proposes 150 dwellings with no local need evidence
- Directly along A21 without required setback
- Creates sprawl on fourth axis
- Ignores facilities gap and worsens car dependency

Strategic Objective 10: Balance with Neighbourhood Planning

The Local Plan's own Strategic Spatial Objective 10 states:

"Balance strategic planning with the opportunities for local delivery through neighbourhood planning"

HG4 does not "balance" - it overrides and contradicts:

- 5 years of Neighbourhood Plan preparation
- Extensive community consultation
- Professional evidence gathering
- Independent examination
- Referendum approval (November 2025)

- Made plan status (part of statutory development plan)

This is not "balancing" strategic and neighborhood planning - it's the District Council undermining and contradicting a made Neighbourhood Plan immediately after the community approved it.

Legal and Policy Implications

National Planning Policy Framework (para 13) states:

"Neighbourhood plans... once made, form part of the development plan... Plans and decisions should be prepared and made in a way that is not in conflict with neighbourhood plans"

Planning Practice Guidance confirms:

"If a policy in a neighbourhood plan conflicts with a policy in a Local Plan or other development plan, the most recent policy takes precedence"

Since the Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan was made in November 2025 and contains specific policies on:

- Location of development (within boundaries, strict countryside control)
- Meeting local housing needs (based on evidence of limited demand)
- Character protection (setback from A21, gradual transition to countryside)

And HG4 directly contradicts these policies, there is a fundamental conflict in the development plan that undermines its legal coherence.

In summary, HG4 Violates the Made Neighbourhood Plan, being in direct conflict with many policies of the made Neighbourhood Plan ,including:

- Policy HG1 - development outside boundary, not strictly controlled, visually intrusive, at odds with character, creates sprawl
- Policy HG1 (Justification) - fails to retain rural nature, exacerbates sprawl
- Policy HG3 - does not meet identified local housing need, worsens existing problems
- Policy HG4 - no gradual transition to countryside (develops the countryside itself)
- Policy HG5 - ignores A21 setback requirement

The allocation also contradicts:

- Neighbourhood Plan's evidence base (limited local need, car dependency, lack of facilities)
- Community priorities (landscape protection, avoiding sprawl, rural character)
- Strategic Objective 10 (balance with Neighbourhood Planning)

- NPPF para 13 (plans should not conflict with made Neighbourhood Plans)

Allocating HG4 just months after the community approved the Neighbourhood Plan undermines:

- 5 years of community-led planning work
- The statutory development plan framework
- The principle of localism
- Trust in the planning system

The District Council cannot credibly claim to support Neighbourhood Planning while proposing an allocation that fundamentally contradicts a made Neighbourhood Plan approved by the community just months earlier.

6. Misleading Site Description and Boundary

The site allocation HG4 is presented in a manner that significantly misrepresents what is actually available and deliverable for housing development. The site actually comprises:

1. The Lodge - An occupied, non-designated heritage asset, that is residential property and its curtilage, lake, its walled and formal gardens, along with various other cottages and gardens, and agricultural barns required for maintaining the estate.
2. Northern field - An isolated open field located to the north, in the countryside, separated from the settlement of Hurst Green by distance, and The Lodge and its gardens.
3. South-eastern field - A second isolated open field, separated from the northern portion by The Lodge property and its gardens, further isolated from the highway and the village by:
 - A designated Local Green Space
 - An existing residential garden

The site has an existing farm gate onto the A21 with limited visibility sprays, any meaningful access would require either:

- Creation of a roundabout at Coopers Corner (at the northern edge of the site)
- Demolition of The Lodge (an existing occupied dwelling), or
- Development through designated Local Green Space and/or existing residential curtilage

Neither option represents sustainable or acceptable planning. The suggestion that this constitutes a viable housing site is fundamentally flawed. The fundamental problem: The site allocation conflates the curtilage of an existing occupied dwelling with two separate, isolated agricultural fields. This creates a grossly misleading impression of a coherent, deliverable development site.

7. High Pressure Gas Main - Critical Infrastructure Constraint

A large high-pressure gas transmission main operated by SGN, part of the UK's critical national infrastructure runs east-to-west through one of the proposed field portions of the site.

SGN enforce a strict development exclusion zone around their high pressure gas mains, and already have a statutory easement/wayleave protection around their high-pressure main. Consultation with SGN does not appear to have occurred, SGN published guidance makes clear that around high pressure pipes they require:

- Minimum no-build zone: 6-9 meters either side of the pipeline, which would equate to an approximately 12-18 metre wide sterile corridor around the pipe.
- Consultation zone requiring risk assessment of up to 30 meters from pipeline centerline, with a potentially 60 meter wide restricted zone.

This represents a substantial physical constraint removing a significant portion of the land from any realistic development potential. When combined with:

- Required setbacks from hedgerows and woodland (minimum 10 meters from field edges)
- The gas main exclusion corridor (18-30 meters wide)
- The lack of direct access
- The separation by The Lodge and Local Green Space

The actually developable area is severely compromised and may not be viable for meaningful housing numbers.

This infrastructure constraint appears to have gone unnoticed by the District Council (despite the SGN's infrastructure markers permanently installed at the site's boundaries), supporting this representation's suggestion of the site's eleventh hour appearance, and is certainly inadequately considered in the site's assessment and the District Council's justification for its allocation.

8. Contradicts Adjacent Biodiversity Net Gain Receptor Site (HG2)

The Biodiversity Receptor Field

The entire eastern boundary of the northern field is directly adjacent to a field that serves as a designated biodiversity receptor site for HG2 (another allocated development site that has planning permission), and already allocated as Policy HGSA3: Site HG6: The field opposite The Lodge, London Road in the Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan.

Background:

- HG2 (HG6 in Neighbourhood Plan) received planning permission subject to strict biodiversity requirements.
- A field adjacent to the proposed HG4 site was specifically required to be designated by the developers of HG2 as a green receptor site for displaced wildlife from their site.
- This field provides biodiversity net gain compensation for the ecological loss from HG2 development.
- Strict conditions require this field to be maintained for wildlife for an extended period.
- These requirements were fundamental to HG2 receiving planning permission.

The District Council now proposes to allocate HG4 - a 150-dwelling development - directly adjacent to this biodiversity receptor site. This is completely contradictory because:

1. Undermines HG2's biodiversity compensation - A receptor site requires tranquility, lack of disturbance, appropriate buffers, and continuity of habitat. Building 150 homes immediately adjacent will:
 - Generate constant noise, light, and human disturbance
 - Increase domestic pet predation (cats hunting birds/small mammals)
 - Create edge effects that degrade habitat quality
 - Introduce invasive garden plants and species
 - Fundamentally undermine the site's function as wildlife refuge
2. Violates the planning conditions for HG2 - If the receptor field's ecological function is compromised by adjacent development, HG2's planning permission conditions cannot be satisfied. This raises questions about whether HG2's permission remains valid if the Council itself undermines the required mitigation.
3. Demonstrates lack of strategic planning coherence - The Council granted permission for HG2 based on long-term biodiversity compensation, then immediately proposes development that would negate that compensation. This suggests:
 - No genuine commitment to biodiversity net gain principles
 - Lack of joined-up thinking between allocated sites

- Treating ecological requirements as box-ticking rather than meaningful obligations
4. Sets dangerous precedent - If biodiversity receptor sites can be immediately surrounded by development, they become meaningless. Future developers will rightly question whether the Council will honor long-term ecological commitments.
 5. May violate biodiversity net gain legislation - The Environment Act 2021 requires developments to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain for at least 30 years. HG4 would directly undermine the biodiversity gains supposedly secured from HG2.

Proposed Policy Requirements

HG4's own policy requires:

"Include provision for the retention and future management of a buffer zone of semi-natural habitat, at least 15 metres wide... on the eastern boundary"

But this is inadequate when the adjacent field is supposed to function as an active biodiversity receptor. A 15m buffer won't prevent:

- Light pollution affecting nocturnal species
- Noise disturbance from 150 households
- Pet predation ranging well beyond property boundaries
- Recreational pressure and informal access
- Edge effects penetrating the receptor habitat

As the northern field of HG4 borders the HG2 biodiversity receptor site along almost its entire length. To protect the receptor site's ecological function, an appropriate buffer would be required between the development and the receptor site boundary. This buffer would need to:

- Protect the receptor site from construction impacts (noise, dust, vibration, contamination)
- Prevent recreational pressure and informal public access
- Mitigate domestic pet incursions (particularly cats, which are significant predators of small mammals and birds)
- Buffer light spillage from dwellings, street lighting, and vehicle movements
- Prevent garden waste disposal, invasive species spread, and chemical runoff
- Maintain habitat quality and tranquility essential for the receptor site's function

A significant ecological buffer would be required along the length of the northern field bordering the receptor site. This represents a significant additional constraint not accounted for in the site capacity calculations. Combined with:

- The 15m ancient woodland buffer (acknowledged as inadequate)
- The gas main corridor

- The Lodge curtilage
- Watercourse and lake buffers
- Surface water flooding areas

The genuinely developable area of the northern field is dramatically reduced from what the site boundary suggests.

This allocation reveals a fundamental contradiction in the Council's approach to biodiversity: HG2 is a development of only 26 houses at the same end of the village, in a less ecologically sensitive location closer to the existing settlement. Yet HG2 required an entire field to be designated as a biodiversity receptor site to compensate for its habitat destruction.

HG4 proposes 150 dwellings on 9.52 hectares of:

- Greenfield land that has never been developed
- High Weald National Landscape with medium-high landscape sensitivity
- Land with parkland character and mature trees
- Land adjacent to ancient woodland (irreplaceable habitat)
- Land that currently supports existing wildlife populations

The proposed HG4 policy contains no provision for biodiversity compensation. No receptor site is allocated. No assessment has been published of:

- What wildlife currently inhabits these 9.52 hectares of greenfield
- Where this displaced wildlife would go
- What receptor sites would be required under biodiversity net gain legislation
- How 10% net gain (Environment Act 2021 requirement) would be achieved

If HG2 (smaller, less sensitive) required an entire field as receptor site, HG4 (larger, more sensitive, in National Landscape, adjacent to ancient woodland) would logically require multiple fields for adequate biodiversity compensation. But no such provision exists. Where would the wildlife go?

This exposes the fundamental flaw in the Council's approach: we are not protecting biodiversity - we are simply moving it around until we run out of places to move it to. Each development displaces wildlife to a receptor site, then the next development is allocated adjacent to that receptor site, undermining its function. This is not sustainable ecological management; it is a shell game that ultimately results in net biodiversity loss regardless of legal requirements.

The allocation of HG4 without any identified biodiversity compensation mechanism demonstrates:

1. The policy is not deliverable - biodiversity net gain cannot be achieved without receptor site provision
2. The Environment Act 2021 10% net gain requirement cannot be satisfied

3. The Council has not undertaken the ecological assessment required to understand habitat value
4. Adjacent allocation to HG2's receptor site suggests the Council views receptor sites as expendable
5. The cumulative impact of multiple developments displacing and re-displacing wildlife is unsustainable

Questions

On HG4's missing biodiversity compensation:

- Where is HG4's biodiversity receptor site?
- Where would the wildlife currently inhabiting 9.52 hectares of greenfield habitat go?
- If HG2 (only 26 houses at the same end of the village, less sensitive location) required an entire field as receptor site, how many fields would HG4 (150 dwellings - nearly 6 times larger - on National Landscape greenfield adjacent to ancient woodland) require?
- How would the Environment Act 2021 requirement for 10% biodiversity net gain for 30 years be achieved?
- What ecological assessment has been undertaken of the existing habitat value of the site?
- Why does the policy contain no provision for biodiversity compensation when HG2's receptor site demonstrates such provision is essential?

On HG2 receptor site conflict:

- How can HG4 be allocated when it would undermine HG2's legally required biodiversity compensation?
- Has the Council consulted with HG2's developer about this conflict?
- Has Natural England been consulted about proposing development adjacent to a designated receptor site?
- What assessment has been done of the impact on the receptor field's ecological function?
- If the receptor field can no longer fulfill its purpose, does HG2's planning permission remain valid?

The fundamental question: Are we protecting biodiversity, or simply moving it around until we run out of places to move it to? This allocation appears to demonstrate either gross incompetence in strategic planning or willful disregard for ecological commitments made to secure previous planning permissions.

9. Hedgerow and Woodland Buffers

The proposed HG4 site is bounded by hedgerows and woodland that would require appropriate buffers:

- Minimum 10 meter setbacks from the other field edges to protect existing hedgerows and tree root protection zones
- This further reduces the developable area from all sides

When these, the gas main corridor and ecological buffers are combined, the remaining developable land is drastically reduced from what the site boundary suggests.

10. Misleading Green Infrastructure Claims - The Lake and Watercourse

The draft policy states that the site should:

"Include significant areas of Green Infrastructure (with public access provided where appropriate) across some 50% of the site area, notably including the central area containing an existing watercourse and lake."

The supporting text goes further, suggesting:

"The area around the lake within the site... should form part of the site's Green Infrastructure, with the potential to deliver a landscaped belt of public open space."

The reality is the lake and watercourse area are part of The Lodge's private residential garden, in immediate proximity to the occupied dwelling house.

This is fundamentally misleading for several reasons:

1. Not deliverable as public open space - Given the lake's position within the curtilage and in close proximity to The Lodge (an occupied dwelling), it is wholly unrealistic to suggest this would ever be given over to public access
2. Inflates Green Infrastructure provision - By counting The Lodge's private garden as "Green Infrastructure" contributing to the site's 50% requirement (4.7ha), the policy creates a false impression of what public amenity space the development would actually deliver
3. Distorts site calculations - The 9.52ha site area appears to include:
 - The Lodge and its entire private curtilage/garden (including the lake)
 - Two separate agricultural fields

This makes the site appear larger and more viable than it actually is

4. Undeliverable without demolition - For the lake area to genuinely function as public Green Infrastructure, The Lodge would need to be demolished - which contradicts the policy's apparent assumption that it would be retained

The Green Infrastructure calculations are fundamentally flawed. If 4.7ha of the 9.52ha site is meant to be Green Infrastructure, but a significant portion of that is actually The Lodge's private garden:

- What is the actual public Green Infrastructure being delivered?
- What is the actual developable area once you exclude:
 - The Lodge curtilage (which cannot realistically be public open space)

- The gas main corridor (18-30m wide)
- Hedgerow/woodland buffers (10m+ from boundaries)
- Ancient woodland buffer (15m required by policy)
- Surface water flooding areas around the watercourse/lake

The numbers simply do not add up to a deliverable development of 150 dwellings.

11. Misleading Connectivity Claims

The site description suggests proximity to facilities and the A229. This is fundamentally inaccurate:

- The site is not located near the school.
- The claim of being "connected to the A229" is meaningless - aside from a handful of rural properties, there is nothing to connect to on the A229 at this location.
- No services, facilities, shops, employment, or community infrastructure exist at this point.
- The site is isolated in the countryside, separated from any actual settlement.

Deceptive Footpath and Connectivity Claims

Claim in proposed policy:

"Include an eastern boundary pedestrian connection to the footpath east of the site: public right of way 'Hurst Green 33'"

Supporting text suggests:

"The site layout should also create a pedestrian connection to public right of way 'Hurst Green 33', footpath to the south and east of the site, to connect residents to the surrounding countryside."

The reality is the over fields footpath 33 does not provide access to "surrounding countryside" or create genuine connectivity. The over fields footpath only connects to:

- The village itself (not wider countryside), OR
- The A229 with no footpaths, no pavement, and no connecting footpath network

This is fundamentally misleading. Creating a connection to a footpath that dead-ends at a major A-road with no safe onward routes does not constitute "connecting residents to the surrounding countryside" or meaningful pedestrian infrastructure.

In addition, the definitive map for footpath 33 shows that the footpath doesn't appear to join up to the proposed site at all, and would require a user to trespass across a private field and through private woodland in order to access it.

A229 "Connectivity" Claim

The policy requires:

"Include appropriate pedestrian and cycle infrastructure inside and outside the site... to enable improved pedestrian and cycle connections north-southwards to the A229"

This is essentially meaningless. Aside from a handful of scattered rural properties, there is nothing to connect to on the A229 at this location:

- No services or facilities
- No shops or employment
- No community infrastructure
- No settlement

The nearest business is a Caravan and Motor Home Business, which also includes Merriments Cafe, on the A229. The proposed site boundaries are significantly short of this rurally located business, and would require an individual to walk along the narrow single carriageway (A229), as there are no footpaths or traversable verges to reach this business from the proposed site.

Claiming this represents "improved connectivity" is deceptive - it simply provides access to an A-road in the countryside.

The A229 Pedestrian Infrastructure Reality

The policy claims the development should create pedestrian connections to the A229, but:

1. No existing pedestrian infrastructure - The A229 has no pavements or footways in this area
2. HG4 providing on-site pavements is irrelevant - Even if the development creates pavements within the site leading to the A229, they would terminate at a road with no onward pedestrian route along a busy A road.
3. No room for pavements on A229 - There is no space to extend pavements along the A229 beyond the site.
4. Nowhere to walk to anyway - Even if pavements could somehow be provided, there are no destinations.

This renders the entire "pedestrian connectivity to A229" requirement completely meaningless.

It's the equivalent of building a bridge to nowhere - creating pedestrian infrastructure that leads to... a road you can't safely walk along to reach... nothing.

This policy requirement appears designed to create the illusion of pedestrian or cycling connectivity where none exists or can exist.

Walking Distance to Village Centre

The supporting text claims development would be "within walking distance of the village centre."

This requires critical examination:

- The site's northern extent is furthest from the village.
- Access would be onto the A21 - a trunk road, or the A229, even further away from the village.
- The policy acknowledges current bus stops are "300m to the south" - indicating significant distance.
- Pedestrian crossing of the A21 would be required.
- No safe, attractive pedestrian route currently exists.

For residents in the northern portion of a 150-dwelling development, claiming "walking distance" to the village is highly questionable, particularly for less mobile residents, families with young children, or in poor weather.

The School Distance Reality

The school is located on the main road at the furthest point from this proposed site.

Families living in HG4 would need to:

- Walk 15-25 minutes along the A21 depending on which part of the site they live in
- Walk along narrow pavements beside a busy trunk road with thousands of cars and lorries passing every day
- Walk through unlit paths - these pavements have no lighting
- Walk through the entire village and out the other side
- Cross the A21 at some point (the school is on the opposite side of this trunk road)

During winter months, this walk would be in darkness - Hurst Green is a dark sky area, meaning there is none, to very limited street lighting along these pavements to the school. Parents and children would be walking in the dark, along narrow pavements, beside a busy trunk road with heavy traffic.

This is not a safe or realistic school route for young children. The idea that families would walk this route daily, particularly:

- With primary-age children
- In darkness during winter
- Along narrow pavements with no lighting
- Beside heavy trunk road traffic (cars and lorries)

- For 15-25 minutes each way

...is completely implausible and potentially dangerous.

The reality is that most families with school-age children would drive, utilising the new school drop off car parking facility that is being built to accommodate this exact requirement, as part of the planning permission for the existing approved housing site opposite the school (Policy HGSA2: Site HG22/43: Land opposite Hurst Green School, London Road), further contributing to:

- School-run traffic congestion.
- Air quality problems around the school.
- Parking issues.
- Increased vehicle movements on already busy A21.
- Complete contradiction of sustainable development objectives.
- Undermining the dark sky area with additional vehicle headlights and movements.
- Creating additional congestion at the new school drop off car parking facility and on the A21 as parents drop off and collect their children.

Actual Proximity to Facilities

The proposed development's claimed proximity to community facilities does not withstand scrutiny. The only facility within any reasonable distance is the local church, which is closed to the public for the majority of the week and therefore cannot be counted as a meaningful community resource.

All other key facilities are located significantly further away, with residents dependent on the A21 trunk road as the sole pedestrian route:

- Primary school – approximately 15–25 minutes walk
- Village Hall – approximately 10–15 minutes walk
- Village green – approximately 15–20 minutes walk
- Play parks – approximately 10–20 minutes walk (both located in other parts of the village)
- Sports facilities – approximately 10–15 minutes walk
- Village centre shops and services – approximately 10–15 minutes walk

These distances are indicative and will vary depending on the point of departure within the site. For residents with mobility impairments, elderly residents, or those with young children, journey times would be longer.

Critically, the A21 route presents serious accessibility barriers beyond mere distance. The footways along this stretch are narrow throughout and have been rendered wholly impassable in multiple locations by street furniture and signage placed within the footpath itself. This renders the existing route entirely unsuitable for mobility scooter users and presents significant difficulties for pushchairs, wheelchairs, and others with limited mobility.

Any claim that the development enjoys walkable access to the village centre is therefore fundamentally misleading. When assessed against the reality of safe, practical, and inclusive accessibility, particularly for the families with young children and older residents that planning policy seeks to serve - this is a car-dependent development in all but name, and should be assessed as such.

12. Unrealistic Dwelling Capacity

The policy allocates the site for 150 dwellings at 35 dwellings per hectare, based on:

- Total site area: 9.52ha
- "Indicative size of area for built development": 4.8ha

This is unachievable once the following are properly excluded from developable area:

1. The Lodge and its entire curtilage (including the lake area claimed as "Green Infrastructure")
2. High-pressure gas main corridor - minimum 18m wide, potentially 30m+
3. Ancient woodland buffer zone (required by the policy itself, acknowledged as inadequate for significant development impacts)
4. HG2 biodiversity receptor site buffer - ecological buffer along almost the entire length of the northern field to protect the receptor site's function as legally required wildlife refuge
5. Hedgerow and mature tree buffers from boundaries
6. Surface water flooding areas around watercourse and lake
7. Adequate access roads and turning areas

The actual developable area will be substantially less than 4.8ha. The claim of 150 dwellings is not simply not credible and appears to be based on counting The Lodge's private garden as both "Green Infrastructure" And as part of the site's overall developable capacity, while ignoring the cumulative impact of multiple buffer requirements.

If 4.7ha is genuinely Green Infrastructure (50% of site), this leaves only 4.82ha. But this apparently includes The Lodge's existing dwelling and curtilage. The policy suggests 4.8ha for built development - but this is impossible if it includes an existing occupied dwelling's garden that's simultaneously being counted as public Green Infrastructure.

The site capacity appears to be fundamentally over-estimated by the District Council.

Excessive Density Compounds Unrealistic Capacity

The proposed 35 dwellings per hectare is excessive for this AONB edge location.

Hurst Green Design Codes analysis (Figure 2.16, page 31) shows existing character area densities:

Character Area	Density (dph)	Character Type
Burgh Hill West	4.5	Low density, comparable greenfield edge
Station Road South	12.3	Ribbon development

Character Area	Density (dph)	Character Type
Great Oak	21.6	Mid-density suburban
Coronation Gardens	24	Highest existing density
HG4 proposed	35	46% higher than any existing

For a greenfield National Landscape edge site adjacent to ancient woodland and the HG2 biodiversity receptor site:

- Appropriate density: 10-15 dph (matching comparable character areas)
- This would yield: 22-40 dwellings (based on realistic developable area of ~2.2-2.7 hectares after proper constraints including HG2 receptor buffer)
- Not 150 dwellings at 35 dph

In summary, the capacity claim of 150 dwellings is unrealistic because:

1. It ignores site constraints (Lodge curtilage, gas main, ancient woodland buffer, HG2 receptor buffer, flooding)
2. It applies excessive density incompatible with context
3. It double-counts The Lodge's garden as both Green Infrastructure and developable area

13. High Weald National Landscape Impacts Understated

The site lies entirely within the High Weald National Landscape (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), where national policy (NPPF paragraph 177) states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty, and major development should be refused except in exceptional circumstances.

AONB Policy Requires "Small-Scale" Development

Policy DEN2 states:

"Development within the High Weald AONB should be small-scale, in keeping with the landscape and settlement pattern; major development will be inappropriate except in exceptional circumstances."

The High Weald Housing Design Guide emphasises:

"Development must be small-scale, in keeping with the landscape and settlement pattern"

150 dwellings cannot be considered "small-scale" by any reasonable interpretation:

- Exceeds the entire previous Local Plan requirement for Hurst Green (75 homes)
- Represents 81% of the current plan requirement for the village (150 of 185 homes)
- Is four times the original consultation figure (38 homes)
- Would be the single largest development in Hurst Green's modern history
- Represents a 24% increase in village housing stock in one location
- At 9.52 hectares, is larger than some entire character areas within the village

This is manifestly "major development" that requires exceptional circumstances under NPPF paragraph 177.

No exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated (see Ground 2 - the housing requirement increase from 38 to 185 homes is unexplained and unjustified).

The Council's Own Cabinet Report Confirms the National Landscape Constraint

The Cabinet Report approving this consultation (8 December 2025, paragraph 16) explicitly acknowledges:

"The presence of the High Weald National Landscape, which covers some 83% of the district, is a significant constraint to major development as it is not a location for unrestricted housing growth and is given the highest level of protection in relation to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty both by the NPPF and legislation."

This admission is devastating to the allocation's credibility:

1. 83% of the district is designated National Landscape - the Council acknowledges this coverage makes it a "significant constraint to major development"
2. Highest level of protection - the Council explicitly recognizes NPPF and legislative protection requirements
3. Not a location for unrestricted housing growth - the Council acknowledges National Landscape is fundamentally constrained

Yet faced with these acknowledged constraints, the Council's response is to:

- Allocate 150 dwellings (manifestly "major development") in the National Landscape
- Concentrate 81% of one village's requirement on a single National Landscape site
- Proceed despite the Cabinet Report acknowledging 83% coverage and "significant constraint"
- Ignore the logical alternative: distribute development across multiple smaller sites, prioritizing the 17% of district outside the National Landscape

The Cabinet Report (paragraph 22) reinforces the statutory duty:

"in the National Landscape, for example, that can only be done as far as is compatible with our statutory duty to 'seek to further' the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the National Landscape (Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (as amended))"

The allocation of 150 dwellings fundamentally fails this test. "Small-scale" development might be compatible with the statutory duty. Major development of 150 dwellings causing substantial landscape harm, light pollution, and urbanization of open countryside is manifestly incompatible.

The Council cannot simultaneously acknowledge that the National Landscape covers 83% of the district and represents a "significant constraint to major development," then allocate major development within it and claim compatibility with the statutory duty to "seek to further" conservation and enhancement.

The Policy's Approach

The supporting text acknowledges:

"It is acknowledged that this would be a large allocation for development within the National Landscape"

Yet the policy proceeds regardless, relying on:

- Screening from existing hedgerows and trees

- Requirement for landscape sensitivity assessment
- Dark skies lighting design

Dark Skies - Policy Contradiction

The policy requires lighting to be designed "in accordance with Policy LAN3 and in reference to the High Weald National Landscape Unit's Technical Advice Note on Dark Skies."

This requirement reveals the problem: Hurst Green is a dark sky area with minimal light pollution. The policy acknowledges this must be protected.

But 150 dwellings will inevitably generate:

- Domestic lighting from homes (windows, security lights, garden lights)
- Street lighting (required for safety on estate roads)
- Vehicle headlights from increased traffic movements
- Light spill from the development into the surrounding countryside
- Cumulative light pollution incompatible with dark sky objectives

The policy's own requirement to protect dark skies is fundamentally incompatible with allocating 150 dwellings in this location. You cannot have both a dark sky area and a major housing estate - the development would inevitably compromise the dark sky character that makes the National Landscape special.

A development of 150 dwellings within a National Landscape is self-evidently major development requiring the exceptional circumstances test under NPPF para 177.

The draft policy fails to demonstrate:

- What the exceptional circumstances are
- Why this site specifically is necessary when alternatives outside the National Landscape exist
- What the overwhelming public benefit would be
- Why this scale of development is appropriate in this sensitive landscape

Despite claims of screening:

- The site's northern fields are in open countryside within the National Landscape
- Over 65% of the developable parts of HG4 (if not more) are located in what would be described as open countryside
- Development would extend the settlement northwards into undeveloped landscape
- The parkland character referenced in the supporting text would be destroyed
- 150 dwellings plus associated infrastructure represents substantial urbanisation
- Vehicle movements, lighting, and activity would fundamentally change the rural character

The policy's suggestion that existing hedgerows and additional planting would adequately mitigate a 150-dwelling development - with over 65% in open countryside - in the National Landscape is not credible.

This directly contradicts the Planning Inspector's 2020 findings that even one dwelling would:

"erode the important rural edge of the existing village boundary, which makes an important contribution to the intrinsic scenic beauty of the surrounding landscape"

If one dwelling would "erode the important rural edge," 150 dwellings with 65%+ in open countryside would obliterate it entirely.

14. Likely Destruction of Non-Designated Heritage Asset - The Lodge

The Historic Property at the Heart of HG4

The Lodge (formerly Etchingham Lodge) is a large historic house dating from approximately 1845, still occupied and in its original form with its historic gardens intact.

Historic features include:

- The main house (c.1845) - substantial Victorian property
- Walled garden
- Historic well in the kitchen
- Covered walkway with grand entrance to the street - apparently built to shelter a famous visitor (probably mid-1850s)
- Historic parkland setting with mature trees referenced in the policy's own supporting text
- Adjacent to numerous other listed properties in the area

The covered entrance remained glass-covered until just a few years ago, demonstrating the property's continuous historic character.

The Property is Not Listed - But Should Be Considered

Extraordinarily, The Lodge is not yet a listed building, despite its clear historic and architectural significance. However:

- It is unquestionably a non-designated heritage asset under NPPF terminology
- The property dates from the 1840s-1850s and retains its historic character
- It has significant architectural features (walled garden, covered entrance, well)
- It exists within its historic parkland setting
- It is surrounded by numerous listed properties
- Historic photographs show it has been a notable local landmark for over 150 years

NPPF Requirements for Non-Designated Heritage Assets

NPPF Paragraph 203 states:

"The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset."

NPPF Paragraph 209 states that local planning authorities should identify non-designated heritage assets and consider their significance when developing policies.

The Policy Ignores Heritage Impact Entirely. Indeed, HG4's policy text contains no mention of:

- The Lodge's historic significance
- Assessment of heritage impact
- Requirement for heritage impact assessment
- Any consideration of the harm to this non-designated heritage asset

The supporting text mentions the site has "parkland character containing mature trees" but completely fails to acknowledge that this is because it's the historic setting of a 180-year-old house with designed landscape.

The Development Would Likely Require Demolition

To achieve 150 dwellings at 35 dwellings per hectare on 4.8ha of "built development area," The Lodge would almost certainly need to be demolished:

1. Access requirement - The policy requires vehicular access onto the A21. The only practical access route goes through The Lodge's curtilage.
2. Site layout - Fitting 150 dwellings requires the entire site including The Lodge's footprint and gardens.
3. Counted in site area - The policy counts The Lodge's 9.52ha total site area including the house and gardens, suggesting they're part of the development area.
4. Green Infrastructure double-counting - The policy counts The Lodge's gardens (including walled garden and lake) as "Green Infrastructure," implying they won't remain private property attached to the existing house.

The policy appears to assume The Lodge's demolition while concealing this fact from consultees.

Demolition of The Lodge would result in:

1. Complete loss of a non-designated heritage asset - contrary to NPPF paragraph 203's requirement for balanced judgment
2. Loss of 180 years of continuous occupation - the house is still lived in, maintaining its original residential use
3. Destruction of historic designed landscape - walled garden, parkland setting, lake, mature tree planting all part of the historic design
4. Loss of architectural features - covered entrance, well, historic fabric

5. Harm to setting of surrounding listed properties - The Lodge exists within a context of listed buildings
6. Loss of local historical identity - historic photographs show this has been a notable landmark since the 1840s

Policy Silence

The complete absence of any heritage assessment or acknowledgment in the policy is a serious failure.

The Council has a duty under NPPF paragraphs 203 and 209 to:

- Identify non-designated heritage assets
- Assess the significance of heritage assets
- Require balanced judgment about harm or loss
- Consider heritage significance when developing policies

HG4 does none of this. The policy:

- Doesn't acknowledge The Lodge's heritage significance
- Doesn't assess the impact of its likely demolition
- Doesn't require any heritage impact assessment
- Doesn't balance heritage harm against housing need

Questions Requiring Answers

1. **Has the Council assessed The Lodge as a non-designated heritage asset?**
2. **Has any heritage impact assessment been undertaken?**
3. **Does the Council intend that The Lodge be demolished?** If so, why is this not stated in the policy?
4. **Has Historic England been consulted?**
5. **Have the owners of surrounding listed properties been notified of potential harm to setting?**
6. **What public benefit could possibly outweigh the total loss of a 180-year-old occupied historic house and designed landscape?**

The allocation of HG4 without any heritage assessment or acknowledgment of The Lodge's significance is contrary to NPPF requirements and represents another fundamental failure in the site's assessment.

15. Conflicts with the Local Plan's Own Strategic Spatial Objectives

The draft Local Plan sets out Strategic Spatial Objectives that are meant to underpin all policies and site allocations. HG4 directly contradicts multiple core objectives of the very plan it appears in.

Objective 1: Climate Change Mitigation and Net Zero

"Mitigate and adapt to climate change, including by delivering net zero carbon ambitions... and promoting the multifunctional benefits of green blue infrastructure"

HG4 Contradicts This:

- Car-dependent location maximises vehicle emissions - 15-20 min unlit walk to school along busy trunk road ensures every family drives
- Sprawl pattern increases travel distances and vehicle dependency
- Scattered across fourth axis rather than compact walkable development
- Undermines net zero ambitions by creating development pattern that mandates fossil fuel use
- Green infrastructure claims are questionable - counts private garden and required buffers as "benefits"

If the Council is serious about net zero, HG4 should not be allocated.

Objective 2: Nature Conservation, Biodiversity Net Gain, and High Weald Character

"Maximise opportunities for nature conservation, recovery and biodiversity net gain and preserve the historic landscape character of the High Weald National Landscape"

HG4 Contradicts This:

- Undermines HG2's biodiversity receptor site - proposes 150 dwellings immediately adjacent to field legally required as wildlife refuge, destroying its ecological function
- 65%+ in open countryside within High Weald National Landscape
- Destroys historic landscape character - Planning Inspector found even one dwelling would "erode the important rural edge" and harm AONB
- AECOM identified "high landscape sensitivity" - nothing has changed
- No credible biodiversity net gain when development undermines adjacent designated receptor site

This allocation actively harms nature conservation and biodiversity - the opposite of "maximising opportunities."

Objective 3: Protect Heritage and Setting

"Protect and enhance the significance of Rother's built and natural heritage, including its setting"

HG4 Contradicts This:

- Requires demolition of The Lodge - 180-year-old non-designated heritage asset (Etchingham Lodge, c.1845)
- No heritage assessment conducted or required by policy
- Destroys designed historic landscape - walled garden, parkland setting, mature trees, historic features
- Harms setting of surrounding listed properties
- Complete loss rather than enhancement - contrary to objective's explicit requirement

The allocation destroys heritage without even acknowledging it exists.

Objective 7: Focus Growth in Sustainable Locations

"Focus growth in sustainable locations across the district, or places that can be made sustainable, through the timely delivery of strategic and other supporting infrastructure"

HG4 Contradicts This:

- Remote from settlement - AECOM found it "outside and remote from the settlement boundary and poorly located in respect of local services and facilities"
- Cannot be made sustainable - no amount of infrastructure makes a 15-20 min unlit walk along a trunk road in a dark sky area a safe school route
- Requires duplicate infrastructure (third playground, community buildings) because so disconnected from village facilities
- Infrastructure cannot solve isolation - A229 has no pavements and no room for them; footpath 33 leads nowhere

This is the opposite of sustainable location - it's textbook unsustainable sprawl.

Objective 8: Sustainable Transport and Active Travel

"Enhance the sustainability and connectivity of local communities through sustainable transport measures, including to support active travel"

HG4 Contradicts This:

- No safe active travel route - 15-20 min walk in darkness along narrow pavements beside trunk road with heavy traffic
- A229 pedestrian connection meaningless - no pavements exist or can be provided, nowhere to walk to

- Footpath 33 leads nowhere - terminates at A-road with no onward routes
- Violates Neighbourhood Plan/Masterplan requirement to set back from A21 due to traffic volumes
- Every family will drive - contradicts "support active travel" objective

The allocation mandates car dependency and makes active travel dangerous.

Objective 9: Safe, Healthy Communities and Wellbeing

"Support and achieve safe, healthy, vibrant and mixed communities where the physical and mental health and well-being of residents is a high priority"

HG4 Contradicts This:

- Unsafe pedestrian routes - children walking in darkness along busy trunk road is dangerous
- Fragments community - creates third/fourth separate area in 1,000-person village, undermining "vibrant" community
- Air quality impacts - increased traffic on A21, school-run congestion
- Social isolation - separated from village facilities by trunk road and distance
- Mental wellbeing - disconnection from community facilities and services

Prioritising residents' safety and wellbeing would mean rejecting this allocation.

Objective 10: Balance Strategic Planning with Neighbourhood Planning

"Balance strategic planning with the opportunities for local delivery through neighbourhood planning"

HG4 Contradicts This:

- Disregards 5 years of Neighbourhood Plan work - comprehensive professional scrutiny found nothing here suitable
- Overrides AECOM's rejection of HG25 without justification
- Contradicts Council's own Summer 2024 assessment (38 homes capacity)
- Ignores referendum-approved Neighbourhood Plan (passed November 2025)
- Undermines Neighbourhood Plan/Masterplan requirement to set back from A21
- Inserted "eleventh hour" after community's plan approved

This doesn't "balance" - it overrides and disregards local delivery.

Objective 11: Optimal Use of Land and Brownfield Priority

"Deliver sustainable development by making the optimal use of land, including by prioritising the use of brownfield land"

HG4 Contradicts this:

- Greenfield site - AECOM specifically noted "greenfield site, outside and remote from settlement"
- Not optimal use - over 65% in open countryside unsuitable for development
- Site calculations - counts occupied dwelling's garden as development area
- Gas main corridor renders significant area undevelopable
- Multiple constraints (flooding, buffers, heritage) mean actual developable area far less than claimed

This is inefficient use of constrained greenfield land, not "optimal use."

Summary: HG4 Fails the Plan's Own Objectives

HG4 directly contradicts at least 8 of the 11 Strategic Spatial Objectives:

- Climate change mitigation (car-dependent)
- Nature conservation and AONB protection (harms both)
- Heritage protection (destroys heritage asset)
- Sustainable locations (textbook unsustainable)
- Sustainable transport/active travel (mandates car use)
- Safe, healthy communities (unsafe, fragmented)
- Balance with Neighbourhood Planning (overrides it)
- Optimal land use (inefficient greenfield)

How can a site allocation be included in a Local Plan when it fundamentally contradicts the plan's own core objectives?

This demonstrates the allocation is not based on planning principles or the plan's strategy - it appears to be included purely to meet housing numbers, regardless of suitability, sustainability, or consistency with the plan's own stated aims.

16. The Flawed A21 Corridor Strategy - Hurst Green is Not a Sustainable Location

The Council's Stated Approach

The Local Plan states (paragraphs 5.9-5.11) that the development strategy includes an "A21 corridor growth" option:

"Development along the A21 road corridor, focussed within and around existing settlements, where there is a reasonable level of local services... existing opportunities for sustainable travel (including improvements to bus services, cycling and walking infrastructure)."

The Council claims (para 5.11):

"Overall, it is considered that the option will bring forward some larger sites in sustainable locations and provide for opportunities for enhanced cycle and walking routes within villages"

Three settlements are identified for this strategy: Robertsbridge/Salehurst, Hurst Green, and Flimwell.

The Reality: Hurst Green is Completely Isolated

Hurst Green does not meet the Council's own criteria for this strategy. The village is geographically isolated with no safe or realistic connectivity to other settlements or facilities.

The "A21 corridor" is precisely that - a corridor:

The A21 is a trunk road on the Strategic Road Network that carries thousands of vehicles daily in each direction. All traffic traveling to or from Bexhill, Hastings, and virtually all housing developments (new or existing) in this area must pass through Hurst Green on the A21. This is not a "corridor for sustainable development" - it is a through-route dominated by vehicular traffic where the village happens to be located.

The serious injury incident on 13th February 2026 (13-year-old schoolboy hit in a hit-and-run on the A21 in Hurst Green) demonstrates the danger of this trunk road even with existing crossing infrastructure. Adding 150 dwellings would significantly increase pedestrian movements across this dangerous route.

There are only 3 routes in and out of Hurst Green parish:

1. The A21 (towards Robertsbridge/Salehurst) - Most Dangerous Road in South East:

- No pavements or footways
- Single-lane A-road, part of Strategic Road Network

- Carries thousands of vehicles each way daily
- Most dangerous road in the South East for casualties
- No lighting anywhere along the route
- Massive long hill up to the village
- Distance to Robertsbridge: 5-10 minutes by car at 40-50mph
- Walking would take approximately 20 minutes - along an unlit, dangerous trunk road with no pavements
- Cycling and walking is utterly impractical and dangerous

The Council's Own Cabinet Report Confirms the A21 Will Remain Dangerous:

The Cabinet Report approving this consultation (8 December 2025) addresses Overview and Scrutiny Committee concerns about potential A21 bypasses at Flimwell and Hurst Green. Officers' response (page 6 of Cabinet Report):

"the potential bypasses are currently unfunded and there is a lack of evidence they will come forward at any point"

This admission is devastating: The Council acknowledges there is no prospect of A21 improvements, yet proceeds to allocate 150 dwellings requiring approximately 60 children to use this demonstrably dangerous route. The Council knows the A21 will remain a dangerous trunk road carrying thousands of vehicles daily, with no pavements, no lighting, and no safe pedestrian infrastructure - yet allocates development that fundamentally depends on safe pedestrian access along it.

This is not speculative concern about future infrastructure - it is the Council's own explicit admission that the A21 danger is permanent and allocation of HG4 means knowingly exposing children to documented danger validated by the February 2026 serious injury incident.

2. The A265 (towards Etchingham):

- No pavements or footways
- Massive hill down from village, and consequently back up again
- No lighting
- Walking to Etchingham: approximately 20 minutes along unlit road with no safe pedestrian infrastructure, would be 40+ from the proposed site.
- Etchingham itself is a small settlement with minimal facilities

3. The A229 (towards Hawkhurst in Kent):

- No pavements or footways
- 60mph A-road
- Huge hills
- No lighting
- Walking to Hawkhurst: 30-40+ minutes along a single-lane busy A-road

- Utterly dangerous and impractical

Alternative Routes:

- Muddy footpaths across fields to other settlements exist
- These would require 1+ hour walks across countryside
- Not viable for regular access to services, employment, healthcare, or shopping

Hurst Green Has No Key Facilities

The village lacks:

- Healthcare facilities (GP surgery, dentist, pharmacy)
- Supermarket or food shops
- Secondary school
- Employment centers
- Most services required for daily living

All of these are located in Hawkhurst or Robertsbridge - requiring travel along the dangerous, unlit, unpaved A-roads described above.

The "Sustainable Travel Corridor" Designation Lacks Evidence Base

The Council's claim that Hurst Green offers "existing opportunities for sustainable travel" is demonstrably questionable:

1. No cycling infrastructure - cycling 20-40 minutes along unlit 60mph A-roads is not "sustainable travel," it's suicidal
2. No walking infrastructure - no pavements exist or can be provided on the A21, A265, or A229 beyond the village
3. No enhanced bus services - no evidence provided that bus services will or can be enhanced to make car-free living viable
4. Massive hills on all routes - even if pavements existed, the topography makes walking/cycling to other settlements extremely challenging
5. Dark sky area - no lighting exists or can be provided without undermining AONB dark sky designation
6. Strategic Road Network - the A21 is a trunk road managed by National Highways; prospects for pedestrian/cycle infrastructure are nil

The "sustainable travel corridor" concept is pure fantasy when applied to Hurst Green.

Contradiction with Council's Own Strategy Criteria

The Council's strategy (para 5.10) explicitly states development should be:

"focussed development only within and on the edges of those larger settlements which already have a level of services and facilities and offer existing opportunities for sustainable travel"

Hurst Green fails both criteria:

- Does Not have a level of services (no healthcare, no supermarket, no secondary school)
- Does Not offer existing opportunities for sustainable travel (no safe walking/cycling to anywhere)

By the Council's own stated criteria, Hurst Green should Not be included in the A21 corridor strategy.

Ticehurst's Exclusion

The Council's list of A21 corridor settlements is: Robertsbridge/Salehurst, Hurst Green, and Flimwell. Conspicuously absent: Ticehurst. This is particularly interesting because:

- Ticehurst is also along the A21 corridor
- Ticehurst is larger than Hurst Green
- Ticehurst has better facilities than Hurst Green

Sustainability Appraisal Appears Flawed

The Council states (para 5.11):

"The Council has assessed this option through the SA process. Based on this, the Council is proposing to take this option forward for the Development Strategy."

If the Sustainability Appraisal concluded that Hurst Green offers "sustainable locations" and "opportunities for enhanced cycle and walking routes," then the SA is fundamentally flawed.

The SA appears to have:

- Failed to assess actual on-the-ground conditions
- Ignored the reality of dangerous, unlit, unpaved roads
- Assumed "sustainable travel corridors" can be created where they cannot
- Not considered the village's isolation and lack of facilities
- Not compared Hurst Green objectively with excluded settlements like Ticehurst

An SA that concludes Hurst Green is a "sustainable location" for major growth has failed in its basic function.

Conclusion: Hurst Green Does Not Fit the Strategy

The Council's own A21 corridor strategy requires:

1. Settlements with reasonable level of services
2. Existing opportunities for sustainable travel
3. Enhanced cycling and walking routes
4. Sustainable locations

Hurst Green fails every single criterion.

The reality is:

- Isolated village with only 3 routes out, all dangerous A-roads
- No pavements, no lighting, massive hills on all routes
- No healthcare, no supermarket, no secondary school
- 20-40 minute walks along trunk roads to reach any facilities
- No possibility of safe cycling or walking to other settlements
- Complete car dependency for all services, healthcare, shopping, employment

Including Hurst Green in the "A21 corridor growth" strategy is not evidence-based planning - it appears to be retrofitting a strategy to justify site allocations that don't meet the strategy's own criteria.

HG4 should be removed from the Local Plan, and Hurst Green should be removed from the A21 corridor growth strategy unless and until the Council can demonstrate it actually meets the stated criteria.

The Cabinet Report's Extraordinary Claim: Hurst Green is a "More Sustainable Settlement"

The Council's December 2025 Cabinet report (paragraph 24) recommending approval of this consultation states:

"Growth is also proposed across the other four sub-areas and there are some major development sites within the National Landscape, focused on our more sustainable settlements including Battle, Robertsbridge, Hurst Green and Ticehurst"

The Council explicitly categorises Hurst Green as a "more sustainable settlement" suitable for "major development sites."

This claim is extraordinary given the evidence presented in this objection:

Hurst Green's actual characteristics:

- No healthcare facilities whatsoever
- No supermarket
- No secondary school
- No railway station access (45-minute walk each way to Etchingham on steep unlit lanes)
- No bus service to station
- Public transport: 2-hourly buses Monday-Friday only, no weekend service
- 90%+ households have access to at least one car (vs 74% England average)
- Car dependency has increased from 88.9% to 93.5% despite bus investment
- Only 3 routes out of the village: all dangerous, unlit, unpaved A-roads requiring 20-40 minute walks to reach any facilities
- A21 school route validated as dangerous by serious injury to 13-year-old on 13th February 2026
- Isolated by A21 trunk road to west, A229 (no pavements, 60mph) to north
- AECOM confirmed: extreme car dependency, inadequate public transport, road casualty rate worse than England average

If Hurst Green is "more sustainable," what would an unsustainable settlement look like?

This categorisation demonstrates either:

1. Fundamental disconnect from reality - desktop assessment without visiting or understanding actual conditions
2. Deliberate mischaracterisation - labeling an unsustainable settlement as "sustainable" to justify predetermined allocations
3. Flawed assessment methodology - if Hurst Green scores as "sustainable," the assessment framework is broken

The fact that the Council's Cabinet report to elected members characterises Hurst Green as a "more sustainable settlement" undermines confidence in the entire site assessment process. If this level of disconnect exists between policy claims and ground truth, what else in the assessment is fundamentally flawed?

17. Contradiction with the Council's Vision for Northern Rother

The Council's Stated Vision

The draft Local Plan sets out a "Vision for Northern Rother" which includes:

"Northern Rother's rural settlements and communities will continue to thrive, through sensitive residential development and growth in villages to create sustainable forms of development with a strong emphasis on protecting the landscape character and scenic beauty of the High Weald National Landscape."

"Connectivity between rural settlements and the Hastings-London rail line will be enhanced through promoting and improving sustainable and active transport infrastructure including walking, wheeling and cycling, enabling communities to lead healthy and active lifestyles."

"There are opportunities for sensitive development in the sub-area during the timeframe of the Local Plan, where sustainable and related to an existing settlement, including those alongside the A21."

"Longer term (beyond the timeframe of the new Local Plan), the delivery of significant improvements to create a sustainable transport corridor could open up opportunities for future development along the A21 corridor, which could be addressed in a plan review."

HG4 Contradicts Every Aspect of This Vision

1. Not "Sensitive Development"

The vision requires "sensitive residential development" with "strong emphasis on protecting landscape character and scenic beauty of the High Weald National Landscape."

HG4 is the opposite:

- 150 dwellings in the AONB - not "sensitive"
- Over 65% in open countryside - destroys landscape character
- Planning Inspector found even 1 dwelling would harm AONB
- Destroys The Lodge - 180-year-old heritage asset in parkland setting
- Extends settlement into countryside - erodes rural edge
- No landscape sensitivity demonstrated - policy acknowledges it's a "large allocation" but provides no justification

This is wholesale urbanisation of the countryside, not "sensitive development."

2. Not "Sustainable Forms of Development"

HG4 is textbook unsustainable:

- Car-dependent for all services, healthcare, shopping, employment
- 15-25 minute walk to school (depending on location within site) along dangerous unlit trunk road
- No safe walking/cycling to any facilities
- Contradicts climate change and net zero objectives
- Creates urban sprawl across fourth axis
- Fragments community rather than creating cohesion

3. Does Not "Protect Landscape Character and Scenic Beauty"

HG4 actively destroys it:

- AECOM identified "high landscape sensitivity to change"
- Planning Inspector found development would "erode the important rural edge" and harm AONB
- 65%+ in open countryside within National Landscape
- Dark sky area incompatible with 150 dwellings
- Policy's own text acknowledges landscape harm but proceeds anyway

4. "Connectivity Enhanced Through Active Transport" - Not Supported by Evidence

The vision claims connectivity will be *"enhanced through promoting and improving sustainable and active transport infrastructure including walking, wheeling and cycling."*

This is demonstrably impossible in Hurst Green:

The Evidence:

- Geography constrains active travel - massive hills on all routes out of village
- Poor road design prevents improvements - A21, A265, A229 are narrow single-lane A-roads with no room for cycle infrastructure
- No pavements to neighboring villages - none exist, none can be provided
- Unlit dangerous A-roads - walking on heavily used trunk roads is "neither practical nor safe"
- Motor transport effectively mandated - census data proves this

Census Data Proves Car Dependency:

- 2011: Only 8% of households had no car access (national average: 26%)
- 2021: Only 6.5% of households had no car access
- 2021: Over half (53.4%) of households had 2+ cars
- Car ownership has Increased despite bus investment - demonstrating no amount of policy can overcome geographic reality

The idea that "walking and cycling will increase" is nonsense given:

- Unbelievably dangerous and unlit roads
- Massive hills in all directions
- No pavements to service villages (Etchingham, Robertsbridge, Hawkhurst)
- Complete lack of safe infrastructure

Residents are highly dependent on vehicles - this is proven fact, not speculation.

5. Not "Related to an Existing Settlement"

The vision states development should be "where sustainable and related to an existing settlement."

HG4 fails both criteria:

- Not sustainable (as demonstrated throughout this objection)
- Not related to existing settlement:
 - Outside settlement boundary
 - Separated from village by A21 trunk road
 - AECOM found it "outside and remote from the settlement boundary"
 - Planning Inspector found it defines "transition from urban settlement to rural character of open countryside"
 - Creates separate satellite development, not extension of existing settlement

6. Acknowledges Sustainable Transport Corridor is "Longer Term" - Yet Allocates Now

The vision explicitly states:

"Longer term (beyond the timeframe of the new Local Plan), the delivery of significant improvements to create a sustainable transport corridor could open up opportunities for future development along the A21 corridor, which could be addressed in a plan review."

This is critical language:

- "Longer term" = beyond this plan period
- "Could" = uncertain, aspirational
- "Plan review" = future decision point

The Council acknowledges that sustainable transport improvements that might justify A21 corridor development are:

- Not deliverable within this plan period
- Uncertain ("could")
- Should be addressed in future plan review

Yet HG4 allocates 150 dwellings Now, before any sustainable transport corridor exists or is even certain to be delivered.

This directly contradicts the Council's own vision, which explicitly defers A21 corridor development until after sustainable transport improvements are delivered.

The Vision Undermines the Allocation

The Council's own Vision for Northern Rother demonstrates that HG4:

1. Is not "sensitive development" - it's large-scale countryside urbanization
2. Is not "sustainable" - it's car-dependent sprawl
3. Does not "protect landscape character" - it destroys it
4. Cannot achieve "enhanced active transport connectivity" - geographic and infrastructure reality prevents it
5. Is not "related to existing settlement" - it's remote and separated
6. Is premature - allocated before sustainable transport corridor that "could" justify it in "longer term"

The vision also reveals the fundamental flaw in the strategy: The Council acknowledges sustainable transport improvements are needed before A21 corridor development, but allocates sites anyway, hoping improvements will somehow materialize.

This is backwards planning: The vision should drive allocations, not be contradicted by them.

Census Data Proves the Vision is Fantasy

The 2011-2021 census data for Hurst Green parish proves:

- Car dependency has increased (92% to 93.5% of households have cars)
- Multi-car ownership has increased (to 53.4% with 2+ cars)
- This occurred despite bus service investment
- No amount of policy aspiration can overcome geographic reality

If the Council's vision of "enhanced active transport" were realistic, we would expect:

- Decreasing car ownership
- Increasing walking/cycling modal share
- Success from bus investment

We see the exact opposite. Car dependency is increasing because it's geographically mandated.

Allocating 150 dwellings based on a vision that census data proves is failing is not evidence-based planning.

Conclusion: HG4 Contradicts the Vision

Every single element of the Council's Vision for Northern Rother is contradicted by HG4:

Vision Requirement	HG4 Reality
Sensitive development	150 dwellings in AONB
Sustainable forms	Car-dependent sprawl
Protect landscape	Destroys landscape
Enhanced active transport	Impossible given geography
Related to settlement	Remote and separated
Longer term corridor development	Allocated prematurely

The Council cannot credibly claim HG4 delivers its vision when it contradicts every stated objective.

The allocation should be removed and only reconsidered if and when the "longer term" sustainable transport corridor the vision describes is actually delivered - which the Council itself acknowledges is uncertain and beyond this plan period.

18. Contradiction with the Council's Vision for the Countryside

The Council's Stated Vision for the Countryside

The draft Local Plan sets out a "Vision for the Countryside":

"New development will be strictly limited to that which supports local agricultural, economic, tourism, community or housing needs (especially for affordable housing) and maintains or improves the rural character."

"The countryside and coast will have improved access and recreational and leisure facilities, compatible with the rural character of the area."

Explanatory Text (para 6.96):

"The term countryside is used here for those areas outside of defined development boundaries and includes not only farmland and woodland but also scattered development outside the main confines of villages."

Para 6.98:

"The vision for the countryside seeks to balance the many diverse pressures and competing demands on the countryside, whilst ensuring the maintenance of its farming capacity and of its attractive landscape character, to create a living, working countryside."

HG4 is Countryside Development

The site comprises:

- The Lodge and its garden - within or adjacent to development boundary
- Northern field - agricultural field in the countryside, outside development boundary
- South-eastern field - agricultural field in the countryside, outside development boundary

The two main parts of HG4 are just fields in the countryside, clearly outside the development boundary.

By the Council's own definition (para 6.96), these fields are "countryside" - they are farmland outside defined development boundaries.

Furthermore, the Council's definition explicitly includes:

"The term countryside is used here for those areas outside of defined development boundaries and includes not only farmland and woodland but also scattered development outside the main confines of villages"

This is critical because:

The scattered houses around HG4 (The Lodge, Pentwood Place, and other properties along the A21 corridor north of the village) would be deemed "countryside" by the Council's own definition - they are "scattered development outside the main confines of villages."

Therefore:

- The agricultural fields of HG4 equals countryside (farmland outside boundary)
- The scattered existing houses around HG4 equals countryside (scattered development outside main village confines)
- The entire HG4 area is countryside by the Council's own definition

This means HG4 is not "development on the edge of a village extending into countryside" - it is "development in the countryside itself."

The distinction matters because:

- Countryside development must be "strictly limited" per the Vision

- Countryside development must "maintain rural character"
- Scattered development is recognized as part of countryside character
- Proposing 150 dwellings in area defined as countryside directly violates the Countryside Vision

HG4 Directly Contradicts the Countryside Vision

1. Not "Strictly Limited" Development

The vision states countryside development will be "strictly limited" to that which supports:

- Local agricultural needs
- Economic needs
- Tourism needs
- Community needs
- Housing needs (especially affordable)

HG4 is a strategic allocation of 150 dwellings - this is not "strictly limited" development.

Does HG4 support these countryside needs?

- Agricultural needs - Removes productive farmland from agricultural use; opposite of supporting agriculture
- Economic needs - No evidence of local economic need in Hurst Green requiring 150 homes (Section 2 demonstrates lack of evidence)
- Tourism needs - Not a tourism development
- Community needs - Village already has comprehensive community facilities (Section 15); no evidence of community need for 150 homes
- Housing needs (especially affordable) - No settlement-level evidence of housing need for 150 dwellings (Section 2); Parish survey showed demand in tens not hundreds, already met

HG4 does not meet any of the criteria the vision sets for countryside development.

2. Does Not "Maintain or Improve Rural Character"

The vision requires development to "maintain or improve the rural character."

HG4 would destroy rural character:

- 150 dwellings on agricultural fields in open countryside
- Wholesale urbanisation of countryside landscape
- AECOM identified "high landscape sensitivity to change"

- Planning Inspector found even 1 dwelling would "erode the important rural edge" and harm AONB
- Over 65% of developable area in open countryside (Section 10)
- Would eliminate transition from settlement to countryside the Inspector identified
- Parkland character destroyed - policy acknowledges site has "parkland character" but proposes to develop it
- Lighting pollution in dark sky area incompatible with rural character

This is the opposite of maintaining rural character - it's eliminating it.

3. Not "Compatible with Rural Character"

150 dwellings, associated infrastructure, street lighting, traffic, and urbanization are fundamentally incompatible with rural character.

The vision acknowledges countryside should have "improved access and recreational facilities" but only if "compatible with rural character."

A strategic housing estate is not "improved recreational access" - it's urbanisation.

4. Contradicts "Maintenance of Farming Capacity"

Para 6.98 emphasises "ensuring the maintenance of its farming capacity."

HG4 removes farmland from current and future agricultural use:

- Northern and south-eastern fields are currently agricultural
- 150 dwellings would permanently remove this land from farming
- Directly contradicts vision to maintain farming capacity

5. Contradicts "Attractive Landscape Character"

Para 6.98 requires "ensuring maintenance of its attractive landscape character."

The landscape character will be destroyed:

- Agricultural fields replaced by housing estate
- Countryside views replaced by urban development
- Open landscape replaced by built form
- AONB character and scenic beauty harmed (as Planning Inspector found)

The Vision Defines What Countryside Development Should Be

The vision makes clear that countryside (areas outside development boundaries) should have:

- Strictly limited development only

- Development that supports rural needs, not urban expansion
- Development that maintains rural and landscape character
- Compatible uses, not incompatible urbanisation
- Protection of farming capacity

HG4 exhibits none of these characteristics:

Vision Requirement	HG4 Reality
Strictly limited	150 dwelling strategic allocation
Supports rural needs	No evidence of need (Section 2)
Maintains rural character	Destroys it entirely
Compatible with countryside	Housing estate incompatible
Protects farming capacity	Removes farmland permanently
Maintains landscape character	Eliminates landscape character

The Council Cannot Allocate Countryside Sites While Claiming to Protect the Countryside

The fundamental contradiction:

- Vision: Countryside development "strictly limited," must "maintain rural character," protect "farming capacity" and "landscape character"
- HG4: Large-scale housing estate on farmland in countryside, destroying rural and landscape character

The Council cannot credibly claim to protect the countryside while allocating major housing estates in it.

The vision states the countryside is "a defining characteristic of Rother" - yet HG4 would urbanise countryside to meet housing numbers.

Conclusion: HG4 Violates the Countryside Vision

HG4 is countryside development (fields outside development boundary) that:

- Is Not "strictly limited" - it's a strategic allocation of 150 dwellings
- Does Not support any identified local countryside need
- Does Not maintain rural character - destroys it
- Is Not compatible with rural character - urbanization incompatible with countryside
- Does Not maintain farming capacity - removes farmland permanently
- Does Not maintain landscape character - eliminates it

By the Council's own definition and vision for the countryside, HG4 should not be allocated.

The allocation demonstrates the Council is prioritising meeting housing numbers over its stated vision to protect the countryside - undermining the plan's credibility and strategic coherence.

19. Sustainability and Settlement Pattern

The Cabinet Report's Claim of Sustainability

The Cabinet Report approving this consultation (8 December 2025, paragraph 24) claims:

"Growth is also proposed across the other four sub-areas and there are some major development sites within the National Landscape, focused on our more sustainable settlements including Battle, Robertsbridge, Hurst Green and Ticehurst"

This description of Hurst Green as a "more sustainable settlement" is demonstrably questionable and contradicts the Council's own evidence:

Hurst Green lacks basic services and facilities:

- No healthcare facilities (no GP surgery, dentist, or pharmacy)
- No supermarket or food shops
- No secondary school
- No railway station or realistic access to one (Etchingham 2km away via 45-minute walk up/down steep hill on unlit lanes without pavements)
- Inadequate public transport (buses every 2 hours Monday-Friday only, no weekend service)
- No employment centers

AECOM's Strategic Environmental Assessment (February 2023) confirms extreme car dependency:

- 90%+ households have access to at least one car (vs 74% England average)
- Public transport is grossly inadequate
- Census data proves car dependency has increased from 88.9% (2011) to 93.5% (2021) despite bus service investment
- The village is isolated by dangerous trunk roads with no pavements or lighting

The Cabinet Report's spatial strategy (paragraph 29) states:

"the spatial strategy seeks to allocate growth in and around our most sustainable towns and villages, where communities will have access to a wide range of services and facilities and sustainable transport options"

Hurst Green manifestly fails these criteria. It is not a "more sustainable settlement" - it is among the least sustainable locations in the district for strategic growth. The Cabinet Report's categorization appears to be post-hoc justification for a site-led allocation rather than evidence-based assessment of sustainability.

The Cabinet Report even acknowledges (paragraph 22) that the 7,077 dwelling shortfall requires careful management:

"in the National Landscape, for example, that can only be done as far as is compatible with our statutory duty to 'seek to further' the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty"

Yet the response to acknowledged shortfall and statutory duty is to allocate 150 dwellings in a "more sustainable settlement" that demonstrably isn't sustainable, in a National Landscape that shouldn't accommodate major development, on a site requiring 90%+ car dependency in contradiction of both sustainability and National Landscape objectives.

Unsustainable Development Pattern

The site allocation would result in:

- Isolated development in the countryside, disconnected from existing settlement
- Unsustainable car dependency due to lack of genuine pedestrian/cycle connectivity
- Harm to rural character through sporadic development pattern
- Coalescence risk or inappropriate countryside sprawl

This is contrary to:

- NPPF requirements for sustainable development patterns
- Rother's own strategic objectives for focused, connected development
- Climate change mitigation through reducing car dependency

Disproportionate Impact on Settlement Scale

Hurst Green Parish baseline (2011 Census):

- 1,481 people in 628 dwellings

Development trajectory and cumulative impact:

Period	Homes	% Increase	Cumulative Total	Impact on Village
Baseline (2011)	628	-	628	-
Approved permissions (to 2028)	+75	+12%	703	Manageable
HG4 alone	+150	+24%	853	Major transformation

Period	Homes	% Increase	Cumulative Total	Impact on Village
Full new plan requirement	+185	+29%	888	Fundamental change

HG4 alone represents:

- 24% increase in village housing stock in a single location
- Double the entire previous Local Plan allocation (75 homes)
- Four times the original consultation figure (38 homes)
- 81% of the entire new plan requirement (150 of 185 homes)

This scale of growth in a single location:

- Is manifestly not "small-scale" as required for AONB development
- Will fundamentally alter the character and scale of Hurst Green
- Represents transformative change, not organic growth
- Contradicts the community's Neighbourhood Plan objective to control development and protect village character

Village Fragmentation and Community Cohesion

Hurst Green is a village of approximately 1,000 people. Extending the settlement northwards with 150 dwellings would create a fifth distinctly separate area, fundamentally fragmenting what should be a cohesive village community.

Existing village structure:

- Main village center with village green
- Recent development (HG2) adjacent to the school to the south

The Village Does Not Need More Community Infrastructure

Existing community facilities in Hurst Green:

- Church
- Village hall
- Community social club
- Pub
- Village green
- 2 children's playgrounds
- Cricket pitch
- Sports ground
- School with playing fields
- Nursery

For a village of ~1,000 people, this is already comprehensive community provision.

HG4 proposes adding:

- Another Leap (Local Equipped Area for Play) - a third children's play area
- "Community buildings" - when the village already has village hall, a social club, and other facilities
- More green infrastructure - despite the extensive provision detailed below

The Village Does Not Need More Green Infrastructure

The policy's claim that the village requires 4.7ha of "Green Infrastructure" is not supported by an assessment of existing provision.

Hurst Green is in the middle of the countryside and already has exceptional green infrastructure provision:

Existing green infrastructure:

- Numerous public footpaths throughout and around the village
- Two community orchards
- Allotments
- Village park
- Cricket pitch
- 2 playgrounds
- Sports ground
- Public 'nature reserve' at Stage Field in Silver Hill
- Massive open access ancient woodland immediately adjacent to the village
- The village is surrounded by countryside - residents have direct access to the High Weald landscape

The surrounding countryside is the green infrastructure. The claim that residents require 4.7ha of "Green Infrastructure" when the village is surrounded by accessible countryside, ancient woodland, nature reserves, and numerous footpaths appears to misunderstand the nature and purpose of green infrastructure provision in rural AONB settings.

The reality: The 4.7ha "Green Infrastructure" in HG4 is actually:

- The Lodge's private garden (counting as "public" green space when it isn't)
- Land required for ecological buffers (gas main, ancient woodland buffer, hedgerows)
- Surface water flooding areas that can't be built on anyway

It's not genuine additional green infrastructure for the community - it's unusable or inaccessible land being counted to inflate the site's apparent benefits.

Why This Makes No Sense

For a village of ~1,000 people that already has comprehensive community and green infrastructure, there is absolutely no need or justification for three separate residential areas, each with their own duplicate facilities:

1. Undermines community cohesion - Residents of HG4 would be physically separated from the village center and existing facilities by the A21. They would naturally gravitate to their own on-site facilities rather than integrating with the existing community and using the village halls, social club, pub, village green, and other existing facilities.
2. Wasteful duplication of resources - Building a third play area when two already exist, and "community buildings" when the village already has village halls (with 2 halls), a social club, church facilities, and pub is completely unnecessary for a village of this size.
3. "Green Infrastructure" claim - Counting 4.7ha as "Green Infrastructure" when: (a) much of it is The Lodge's private garden; (b) the village already has two community orchards, allotments, park, nature reserve, and extensive ancient woodland adjacent; (c) the village is surrounded by accessible AONB countryside; (d) numerous footpaths already provide countryside access. The claim that residents require additional "Green Infrastructure" is not supported by assessment of existing provision.
4. Creates further car dependency within the village - Residents wanting to access the actual village facilities (village halls, social club, pub, existing playgrounds, sports facilities, village green) would need to drive or face crossing the A21.
5. Defeats the purpose of village living - Villages work as communities because they're compact and centered around shared facilities. Creating satellite developments with duplicate facilities destroys this model.
6. Contrary to sustainable development principles - NPPF promotes cohesive communities and efficient use of land and infrastructure. Fragmenting a 1,000-person village with comprehensive existing facilities into three separate areas with duplicate provision achieves neither.

The Policy's Own Requirements Reveal the Problem

The fact that HG4's policy requires:

- No more than 50% occupancy until community buildings and Leap are provided on-site
- Suggests even the Council recognizes residents won't/can't use existing village facilities

This admission confirms HG4 would create an isolated, separate community rather than extending the existing village.

What Sustainable Development Would Look Like

If Hurst Green genuinely needs 150 additional dwellings (which is questionable for a village of 1,000), sustainable planning would:

- Locate them contiguous to and integrated with existing settlement
- Enable residents to walk safely to existing facilities and village center
- Strengthen the existing community rather than fragmenting it
- Avoid creating duplicate infrastructure

HG4 achieves none of these objectives. It represents sprawl, not sustainable growth.

HG4 Represents Urban Sprawl

The development of HG4 would constitute urban sprawl - the extension of development into the countryside in an unplanned, fragmented manner. Hurst Green is already a village sprawling across three axes because land in the center of the village is not available for development due to:

- Being part of the rolling High Weald National Landscape
- Being in single estate ownership

This has resulted in an already separated, fragmented settlement pattern rather than a compact, cohesive village. HG4 would make this worse by:

1. Adding a fifth axis of development - extending northwards along the A21 into open countryside
2. Increasing separation - the furthest homes in HG4 would be even more distant from the village center and other residential areas
3. Exacerbating sprawl - rather than consolidating the village, HG4 extends it further into the countryside
4. Creating ribbon development - strung out along the A21 trunk road rather than focused around a village core

This is the antithesis of sustainable development. National policy (NPPF paragraph 105) seeks to:

"limit the need to travel and offer a genuine choice of transport modes"

HG4 does the opposite:

- Maximises travel distances within the village
- Offers no genuine transport choice (must drive)

- Spreads development across the landscape
- Fragments rather than consolidates the community

Sprawl vs. Sustainable Growth:

Sustainable Growth	HG4 (Sprawl)
Compact, focused development	Scattered across multiple axes
Integrated with existing settlement	Separated by trunk road
Walkable to facilities	15-20 min walk in darkness along busy road
Strengthens village core	Fragments into separate areas
Limits car dependency	Mandates car use
Efficient use of infrastructure	Requires duplicate facilities

The allocation of HG4 represents classic urban sprawl into the countryside - exactly what national and local planning policies seek to prevent.

20. AECOM Professional Evidence Validates Community Concerns and Contradicts HG4 Allocation

The February 2023 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan, conducted by professional planning consultants AECOM, provides independent expert validation of community concerns and explicitly contradicts the HG4 allocation.

AECOM Confirms A21 Route Dangers

Air Quality Theme:

"The A21 passes through the neighbourhood area and often experiences significant congestion. Residents note that there are noticeable noise, vibration and pollution issues experienced whilst walking through the village."

This is professional confirmation that the A21 dangers documented in the 151-resident petition are real and recognised by internally, central government appointed, expert assessors.

AECOM Confirms Extreme Transport Dependency

AECOM's transport assessment:

"With reference to local public transport networks, the neighbourhood area is not connected to the rail network, with the nearest railway station accessible in the neighbouring settlement of Etchingham (located approximately 2km to the south west of Hurst Green village). Although there are bus routes which pass through Hurst Green and Silver Hill and connect to neighbouring towns of Hawkhurst and Hastings, services are relatively infrequent (roughly one service every two hours during Monday-Friday, with no weekend services). In the context of the above, there is a high dependency on private vehicles, with over 90% of households in the neighbourhood area having access to at least one car or van (based on Census data)."

The Etchingham Station Access Reality:

AECOM states the station is "approximately 2km" away, but this drastically understates the actual accessibility problem:

Physical access barriers:

- 45-minute walk each way (Google Maps routing) - not the 25 minutes implied by 2km distance
- Steep hill from Hurst Green down to Etchingham station - making cycling/walking non-viable for most residents, particularly with luggage, in bad weather, or for those with mobility limitations

- Unlit country lanes without pavements for the majority of the route
- Dangerous road conditions - narrow, winding rural roads with no pedestrian infrastructure
- No bus service connecting Hurst Green to Etchingham station at any time of day
- Flexibus only option - unreliable demand-responsive service that stops at 7pm and is explicitly not designed for commuting

The critical point: Service frequency is irrelevant because the station is physically inaccessible without a car.

This means residents must:

- Drive to station (park-and-ride) - negating sustainability benefit of rail, OR
- Drive directly to destination - bypassing rail entirely

Etchingham station does not provide sustainable transport connectivity to Hurst Green. It provides a car-dependent park-and-ride facility that requires:

- Car ownership to access
- Parking at station (capacity constraints)
- 90-minute round-trip drive time just to access train service
- Additional driving for any station access before 7am or after 7pm (no Flexibus)

This is not sustainable transport - it is car dependency with an optional train connection.

AECOM's detailed statistics:

- 91.7% of households have access to at least one car/van (vs 81% Rother, 81.4% South East, 74% England)
- 57.1% of households have access to two or more cars/vans (vs 37% Rother, 39.7% South East, 32% England)
- Most popular travel to work method: driving car/van 48.4% (vs 37.7% Rother, 41.3% South East, 37% England)
- Train/bus/walk/cycle to work: 10.6% (vs 12.4% Rother, 17.4% South East, 17% England)

This professional evidence confirms:

- Public transport is grossly inadequate (every 2 hours, no weekends)
- 90%+ car ownership is a necessity, not a choice
- Hurst Green has significantly higher car dependency than regional or national averages
- Active and sustainable transport is not viable

HG4 proposes adding 150 dwellings to this car-dependent location - adding approximately 330+ additional cars to a village with demonstrably inadequate public transport and dangerous pedestrian routes.

AECOM Confirms AONB Medium-High Sensitivity

Landscape assessment:

"Although there are detracting influences (predominantly relating to the settlements and roads) which somewhat lessen the landscape value and quality, the sensitivity of the parish scale landscape character is judged to be medium to high."

"The proposed site allocations through all three options have the potential to adversely impact the special character and qualities of this nationally protected landscape in the absence of sensitive design."

For site HG06 (London Road, adjacent to HG4):

"MEDIUM to HIGH sensitivity but is well located in relation to the village and would be a natural extension to the existing pattern of development. Potential for new development areas to offer effective visual mitigation and landscape opportunities."

Key point: Even HG06, which AECOM assessed as "well located in relation to the village," has medium-high landscape sensitivity. HG4 is further from the village, more remote, and larger - yet the Council proposes 150 dwellings.

At 150 dwellings on 7 hectares, HG4 cannot constitute "sensitive design" that would avoid adverse impacts on the nationally protected High Weald AONB.

AECOM Confirms Road Safety Dangers

Health and Wellbeing assessment:

"The rate of killed and seriously injured on roads is worse than the England average."

This independent professional assessment validates community concerns about road danger. HG4 proposes placing 150 dwellings in a location where:

- Road casualty rates exceed national averages
- Children must cross a trunk road to reach school
- Pavements are narrow with HGV overhangs
- Parents have documented "putting children's lives in danger"

AECOM Documents Community Evidence in Official Record

The AECOM SEA formally records and validates the community evidence:

- 2016 petition (151 residents) about A21 dangers
- 2018 consultation identifying A21 speed/traffic as "#1 issue"
- Dangerous school route concerns
- Narrow pavements with HGV overhangs
- Multiple near-misses
- Parents' testimonies about danger to children

AECOM did not dismiss these as exaggeration or nimbyism - they documented them as factual evidence in their professional assessment.

The Critical Contradiction

AECOM's SEA (2023) professional findings:

- A21 is demonstrably dangerous (congestion, noise, vibration, pollution)
- Public transport is inadequate (2-hourly, no weekends)
- 90%+ households require cars (high dependency vs. all comparators)
- AONB has medium-high sensitivity to development
- Road casualty rates worse than England average
- Community safety concerns are valid and documented

Rother's HG4 allocation (2026):

- Proposes 150 dwellings requiring A21 school route
- Ignores transport inadequacy identified by AECOM
- Ignores car dependency statistics documented by AECOM
- Proposes major development in medium-high sensitivity AONB
- Disregards road safety evidence validated by AECOM
- Makes no reference to AECOM's findings

The Council has commissioned professional evidence, received professional validation of community concerns, and then ignored both in allocating HG4.

Questions This Raises

1. Why is AECOM's SEA professional findings being disregarded?
2. What has changed between 2023 and 2026 that makes AECOM's evidence no longer valid?
 - A21 is still dangerous
 - Bus service is still 2-hourly with no weekend service
 - Car dependency is still 90%+

- AONB sensitivity has not reduced
 - Road safety record has not improved
3. How can the Council justify allocating 150 dwellings when their own commissioned professional evidence demonstrates the location is unsuitable?
 4. Does the Council disagree with AECOM's professional assessment?
 - If yes: on what evidence basis?
 - If no: why is HG4 being allocated despite contradicting it?
 5. Has the Council undertaken any professional assessment that supersedes or contradicts AECOM's findings?
 - If yes: why has this not been published?
 - If no: on what basis is AECOM's evidence being set aside?

AECOM Evidence Should be Determinative

AECOM is a professional planning and environmental consultancy commissioned by Rother District Council to conduct the SEA for the Neighbourhood Plan. Their evidence is:

- Independent - conducted by professional experts
- Comprehensive - based on site visits, data analysis, stakeholder engagement
- Recent - February 2023 (less than 3 years old)
- Relevant - specifically assesses Hurst Green's characteristics
- Validated - went through statutory SEA process
- Factual - based on measurable data (transport frequency, car ownership statistics, landscape assessment)

This is exactly the type of robust, professional, evidence-based assessment that should inform Local Plan allocations. Yet HG4 contradicts it entirely.

Conclusion on AECOM Evidence

The AECOM Strategic Environmental Assessment provides professional, independent validation that:

1. The A21 school route is demonstrably dangerous
2. Transport dependency is extreme (90%+ car ownership required)
3. Public transport is inadequate (2-hourly, no weekends)
4. The AONB has medium-high landscape sensitivity
5. Road safety is worse than England average
6. Community concerns are factually grounded

HG4 allocation is incompatible with area specific, local commissioned professional evidence (unlike the District Council's own material it has relied on).

The Council must either:

- Withdraw HG4 as inconsistent with evidence, OR
- Publish compelling professional evidence that supersedes AECOM's assessment and demonstrates the allocation is appropriate

In the absence of evidence contradicting AECOM's findings, HG4 should be removed from the Plan.

21. Strategic Threshold Gaming: HG4's Incompatibility with December 2025 NPPF Proposed Reforms

HG4 is allocated for precisely 150 dwellings - not 145, not 155, not 160, but exactly 150.

This precision is significant because the Government's December 2025 NPPF consultation proposes a 150-dwelling threshold for policy requirements.

Proposed Policy HO5: Meeting the needs of different groups (consultation p.43-44):

"We are proposing a 150-dwelling threshold above which authorities should set out requirements for a broader mix of tenures to be provided on larger sites"

Government consultation question 60:

"Do you agree with our proposals to ask authorities to set out requirements for a broader mix of tenures to be provided on sites of 150 homes or more?"

HG4's positioning at exactly this threshold suggests strategic gaming:

- If interpreted as "over 150" then HG4 avoids stricter tenure diversity requirements
- If interpreted as "150 or more" then developer positioned to negotiate minimum compliance
- Either way, 150 dwellings maximises market housing profitability by minimizing affordable housing diversity obligations

This precision is not coincidental - it indicates the site promoter is closely tracking NPPF reforms and positioning strategically.

Medium Site Subdivision Strategy

The December 2025 NPPF consultation proposes a new category of "medium development" with significant regulatory easements.

Proposed Definition (Draft Framework Glossary, Annex C p.117-122):

"Medium development: 10-49 homes (inclusive) on sites with an area of up to 2.5 hectares"

Proposed benefits for medium sites:

1. Commuted sums instead of on-site affordable housing (Policy HO8, Question 67)
2. Building Safety Levy exemption (threshold raised to 50 dwellings)
3. Simplified information requirements (Policy DM2)
4. Permission in Principle route available
5. Proportionate biodiversity net gain

HG4's Subdivision Potential

HG4 site area: approximately 7 hectares

Potential phasing to access "medium site" benefits:

Phase	Area	Dwellings	Classification	Benefits Accessed
Phase 1	2.4ha	50	Medium site	Cash-in-lieu affordable housing Building Safety Levy exemption Simplified requirements
Phase 2	2.4ha	50	Medium site	Cash-in-lieu affordable housing Building Safety Levy exemption Simplified requirements
Phase 3	2.2ha	50	Medium site	Cash-in-lieu affordable housing Building Safety Levy exemption Simplified requirements

Each phase:

- Stays under 2.5 hectares
- Delivers exactly 50 dwellings (within medium threshold)
- Accesses maximum regulatory easements
- Total = 3 × 50 equals 150 dwellings exactly

This is the precise pattern the Government warns against.

The Government's Explicit Warning

From consultation (Annex C, p.118):

"Some responses to the working paper raised concerns that introducing a new medium category of sites could result in misuse of category within the planning system, whereby larger sites may be divided into smaller parcels of land to benefit from the proposed easements, or by delivering at lower densities than the site may otherwise be suited for. We want to ensure that these reforms... are primarily supporting SME builders, and recognise that, if 'gaming' of the system were to occur, this would undermine confidence in the category."

Government questions 215-216:

"Do you foresee risks or operability issues anticipated with the proposed definition of medium development? If so, please explain your answer and provide views on potential mitigations."

HG4 exhibits exactly the pattern the Government is concerned about:

- Large site (7ha) subdividable into parcels under 2.5ha
- Each parcel = exactly 50 dwellings (just within medium threshold)
- Low density (21 dph) incompatible with site characteristics
- Total allocation = exactly 150 (3 × 50)
- Positioned to access easements designed for SME builders

HG4 should be cited to Government as evidence of the gaming risk they are trying to prevent.

Density Failure: Incompatible with Station-Area Requirements

Proposed Policy L3: Achieving Appropriate Densities (consultation p.70-72):

"This policy introduces new minimum density requirements for residential development near train stations... we are proposing a minimum density of 40 dwellings per hectare in the net developable area of the site around all train stations"

"For development around well-connected stations, we are proposing a minimum density requirement of 50 dwellings per hectare"

HG4's density: 50 dwellings on ~7 hectares equals 21.4 dwellings per hectare

Comparison to proposed minimums:

Requirement	Minimum dph	HG4 Actual	Shortfall
All stations	40 dph	21.4 dph	-46% below minimum

Requirement	Minimum dph	HG4 Actual	Shortfall
Well-connected stations	50 dph	21.4 dph	-57% below minimum

HG4 delivers half the minimum density the Government proposes for station-area development.

Etchingham Station Does Not Qualify as "Well-Connected"

Government's proposed definition (consultation p.71):

"Located within the top 60 Travel to Work Areas (partially or fully within England), by Gross Value Added, with a service frequency of four trains or trams per hour overall, or two trains per hour in any one direction"

Etchingham Station:

- 2km from HG4 site as the crow flies
- 45-minute walk each way via a steep hill on unlit country lanes without pavements
- Cycling/walking non-viable for most people due to steep gradient and dangerous road conditions
- No bus service between Hurst Green and Etchingham station at any time
- Flexibus only - unreliable, stops at 7pm, explicitly not designed for commuting
- Train frequency varies: ~2 trains/hour peak, ~1 train/hour off-peak
- Physical inaccessibility renders service frequency irrelevant
- Does not meet "well-connected" definition - even if train frequency were adequate, station is effectively inaccessible without a car

Proposed Policy S5: Principle of Development Outside Settlements (p.34-35):

"The policy also allows for suitable development (including housing and mixed-use) around railway stations offering high levels of connectivity... The objective of this policy is to support high density development in sustainable locations"

HG4 fails this policy:

- Not near a well-connected station
- 2km from station as crow flies, but 45+ minute walk via steep hill (not "physically well-related")
- Station physically inaccessible without car (steep gradient, unlit lanes, no pavements, no bus service)
- Delivering 21 dph (less than half proposed minimum of 40-50 dph)
- Outside settlement boundary
- Requiring 90%+ car dependency (AECOM confirmed)

- Station access requires car - negating any sustainability benefit of rail proximity

Under proposed Policy S5, development outside settlements around stations must:

- Be "of an appropriate scale"
- Not "prejudice long-term development proposals"
- Comply with "density requirements in chapter 12"

HG4 fails all of these criteria.

Brownfield-First Policy Breach

Proposed Policy S4: Principle of Development Within Settlements (p.33-34):

"This policy builds on the changes to the current Framework made in December 2024, which included... requiring that development on suitable brownfield land within settlements is approved unless there would be substantial harm... the first strand of the 'brownfield passport' working paper"

"Proposed policy S4 refines this to provide a more complete approach within settlements, so that development is supported in principle within settlements as a whole"

Consultation introduction (p.9):

"That is why the government moved... to consult on changes... including by... a strengthened brownfield-first approach to development"

HG4 is:

- 100% greenfield agricultural land
- In High Weald AONB (nationally protected landscape)
- Outside Hurst Green settlement boundary
- No brownfield element whatsoever

Government's clear hierarchy (Policies S4 and S5):

1. First: Brownfield within settlements → "approved unless substantial harm"
2. Second: Greenfield within settlements → subject to specified exceptions
3. Last: Development outside settlements → restricted to specific categories

HG4 jumps straight to category 3 (outside settlements, greenfield AONB) without evidence that categories 1 and 2 are exhausted.

HG4 Does Not Qualify Under Policy S5 Exceptions

Proposed Policy S5: Principle of Development Outside Settlements (p.34-35) restricts development outside settlements to specific categories.

HG4 does NOT qualify as:

- Agriculture/forestry/rural business
- Existing building reuse/extension
- Infrastructure provision
- Limited infill/rounding off
- Local community need (housing need is district-wide, not Hurst Green-specific)
- Well-connected station area (Etchingham 2km away, wrong service frequency)

HG4 fails criterion (ii):

- 1km+ from Hurst Green center
- Separated by dangerous A21 trunk road
- Poor pedestrian connectivity (AECOM: narrow pavements, high traffic, noise, vibration, pollution)
- 15-25 minute walk to school (depending on location within site) in darkness along unlit trunk road
- Not "well-related" to settlement

HG4 does not qualify for development outside settlements under proposed NPPF policies.

AONB Protection Failure

Proposed Policy N4: Protected Landscapes (p.100-101):

"This policy revises current Framework paragraphs 189 and 190 on development within protected landscapes... An additional provision emphasises the importance of mitigation measures which consider the special qualities of these landscapes where major development is permitted, and the use of compensation where significant harm cannot be mitigated"

Government rationale:

"The latter reflects changes which we think are needed following the amended legal duty in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 that relevant authorities should 'seek to further' the purposes of these areas in exercising their functions"

HG4's AONB impact:

AECOM's professional assessment (2023):

- "Sensitivity of the parish scale landscape character is judged to be medium to high"
- "Proposed site allocations... have the potential to adversely impact the special character and qualities of this nationally protected landscape in the absence of sensitive design"
- Site HG06 (adjacent to HG4): "MEDIUM to HIGH sensitivity"

At 150 dwellings on 7 hectares, HG4 cannot constitute "sensitive design."

Proposed Policy N4 requires where major development is permitted in AONB:

- Must consider "special qualities of these landscapes"
- Must provide mitigation measures
- Must compensate "where significant harm cannot be mitigated"

HG4 allocation provides:

- No landscape mitigation strategy
- No compensation measures
- No assessment of "special qualities" impact
- No consideration of enhanced statutory duty to "seek to further" AONB purposes

150 dwellings on 7 hectares of greenfield AONB = major development causing significant visual harm that cannot be adequately mitigated.

Transport Sustainability Failure

Proposed Policy TR3: Locating Development in Sustainable Locations (p.84):

"Development proposals that would generate a significant amount of movement should: a. provide good levels of connectivity to key services, facilities and employment by sustainable modes of transport, taking account of Connectivity Tool outputs"

HG4 generates significant movement:

- 150 dwellings at an low average of 2.5 people equals approximately 375 new residents
- 90%+ car ownership equals ~330 additional cars
- School run traffic: ~60 children crossing A21 daily
- No meaningful public transport (2-hourly buses, no weekends)
- Nearest station (Etchingham) physically inaccessible without a car:
 - 45-minute walk each way on steep hill via unlit country lanes without pavements
 - No bus service to station at any time
 - Flexibus unreliable, stops 7pm, not designed for commuting
 - Cycling/walking non-viable due to steep gradient and dangerous roads

AECOM's transport evidence confirms:

- Public transport "relatively infrequent (roughly one service every two hours Monday-Friday, with no weekend services)"
- "High dependency on private vehicles, with over 90% of households... having access to at least one car or van"
- Nearest railway station "approximately 2km to the south west"
- Most popular travel to work method: "driving car/van 48.4%" (vs 37% England)

Critical additional reality is that AECOM's "2km" distance to Etchingham station is misleading - it measures straight-line distance, not actual accessibility:

- 45-minute walk each way via steep hill down unlit country lanes without pavements
- No pedestrian infrastructure for most of route - narrow, winding, dangerous rural roads
- Steep gradient makes cycling non-viable for most residents, especially with luggage or in adverse weather
- No bus service connecting Hurst Green to Etchingham station
- Flexibus only - unreliable, stops at 7pm, explicitly not for commuting

Result: Residents must drive to access the train station - negating any sustainability benefit of rail proximity. Etchingham is a car-dependent park-and-ride facility, not a sustainable transport node. HG4 fails the sustainable transport test under proposed Policy TR3.

Vision-Led Transport Approach Breach

Proposed Policy TR1: Vision-Led Approach to Planning for Transport (p.83):

"This policy consolidates relevant plan-making provisions... It introduces new policy on early engagement in plan-making to promote a vision-led approach"

What is "vision-led" transport planning?

From Government's December 2024 NPPF reforms:

"Moving away from a 'predict and provide' approach to transport planning that can create unattractive environments dominated by cars"

HG4 represents the opposite:

"Predict and Provide" approach:

- Predict: 150 dwellings equals 330+ cars
- Provide: Widen A21? Create new access road? Install traffic lights?
- Result: Car-dominated environment, increased congestion, dangerous school route

Allocating HG4 is not vision-led transport planning - it is precisely the car-centric approach the Government is moving away from.

Children's Safety and Living Conditions

Proposed Policy P3: Living Conditions and Pollution (p.91-92):

"Building on current Framework paragraphs 198 and 199, this policy lays out the broad requirements for new development to be acceptable in terms of living conditions and pollution... It includes explicit reference to... noise exposure"

A21 conditions (AECOM confirmed):

- Significant congestion
- Noticeable noise and vibration
- Pollution issues while walking through village
- Road casualty rate worse than England average

HG4 requires approximately 60 children to walk this route daily to reach school = unacceptable living conditions.

Proposed Policy HC3: Community facilities serving new development (p.88):

"This policy... takes a more forward-leaning and comprehensive approach to be clear about the importance of all forms of community facilities and public services infrastructure being secured in instances where development could have a significant impact on the number of people needing those services"

HG4's impact:

- ~60 additional children requiring school access
- All must cross dangerous A21 with narrow footpaths, HGV overhangs, high traffic
- No safe pedestrian route provided
- Community has documented danger for 5+ years (151-resident petition, multiple testimonies)

Proposed NPPF policies require safe access to community facilities - HG4 fails this test.

Plan-Making Evidence Requirements

Proposed Policy PM8: Evidence for Plan-Making (p.22-23):

"The policy expects plan-makers to reuse or update existing evidence rather than produce wholly new evidence where possible... The aim of the policy is to ensure that the evidence base to support a plan is relevant, proportionate and sufficiently up to date"

Evidence base:

AECOM SEA (2023):

- Documented A21 dangers (congestion, noise, vibration, pollution)
- Confirmed inadequate public transport (2-hourly, no weekends)
- Assessed AONB sensitivity as medium-high
- Confirmed high car dependency (90%+ households)
- Validated road safety worse than England average
- Recorded community safety concerns

Rother's Local Plan (2024-2026):

- Proposes 150 dwellings on HG4
- Ignores AECOM's transport/safety/AONB evidence
- No explanation for departing from professional findings
- No updated evidence contradicting AECOM

This contradicts the proposed requirement to "reuse or update existing evidence" - the Council has existing evidence and is simply ignoring it.

Viability Gaming Positioning

The December 2025 NPPF consultation (Annex B, p.111-116) proposes standardizing viability assessment inputs to prevent gaming.

Key concerns raised:

Developer Returns (Questions 202-204):

- Current guidance: "15-20% of gross development value"
- Proposed: Greater specificity to prevent manipulation

HG4 strategy appears to be:

- Position at exactly 150 dwellings (tenure mix threshold)
- Option to subdivide into 3× 50-unit phases claiming medium site status
- Each phase claims 6% return on affordable element + standard return on market element
- Maximum profit extraction through strategic phasing

Benchmark Land Values (Questions 208-211):

"The government is aware of cases of extant planning consents for an alternative use potentially driving up land values, despite, for example, market demand lapsing"

HG4 context:

- Agricultural land (low existing use value)
- No extant consent
- AONB restrictions should suppress value
- But 150-dwelling allocation creates artificially inflated value
- Positioned to claim viability challenges later

Residual Land Value Cross-Check (Question 212):

"The government is aware of cases where viability assessments have reported very low or even negative residual land values, despite market data showing considerably higher prices were paid for those sites"

This is designed to catch exactly what HG4 appears positioned to do:

- Claim low viability at application stage
- Justify reduced affordable housing contributions
- Later subdivide and sell phases at market rates
- Extract maximum value while minimizing obligations

HG4's timing and positioning suggests preemptive gaming of proposed viability reforms.

Green Belt Precedent Risk

Proposed Policy GB8: Golden Rules (p.77-78) proposes lifting viability assessment restrictions for Green Belt sites in limited circumstances.

Government's concerns about "affordable housing floor":

"The government is also seeking views on a minimum threshold (or 'floor') below which applicants should not seek to negotiate on viability grounds... to avoid developments coming forward with no or very low levels of affordable housing"

HG4 precedent risk:

If HG4 (greenfield AONB, exactly 150 dwellings) is approved with:

- Below-policy affordable housing (via viability assessment), OR
- Phased delivery enabling cash-in-lieu substitution, OR
- Subdivision into medium sites avoiding obligations

Then it establishes precedent for Green Belt:

- "If Rother approved 150 dwellings on AONB greenfield with reduced obligations..."
- "...then we should approve [X] dwellings on Green Belt with similar concessions"

Government explicitly asks (Question 140, p.77):

"With regards to previously developed land, are there further changes to policy or guidance that could be made to help ensure site-specific viability assessments are used only for genuinely previously developed land, and not predominantly greenfield sites?"

HG4 is the problem this question addresses:

- 100% greenfield
- Positioned to claim viability challenges
- Exactly at policy thresholds
- Could subdivide to access easements

Approving HG4 undermines the Government's proposed Green Belt reform safeguards before they are even implemented.

Summary: The Pattern of Strategic Gaming

Government Reform	Proposed Safeguard	HG4's Strategic Response
150-dwelling tenure mix	Broader mix required above threshold	Exactly 150 - at threshold
Medium sites (2.5ha, 10-49 units)	Prevent subdivision gaming	7ha divisible into 3× 2.4ha phases
Station-area densities (40-50 dph)	Maximize sustainable locations	21 dph - half minimum
Brownfield-first hierarchy	Prioritize settlements	100% greenfield AONB
Vision-led transport	Reduce car dependency	90%+ car ownership required
AONB "seek to further" duty	Enhanced protection	150 dwellings = major harm
Evidence-based plan-making	Reuse existing evidence	Ignores AECOM findings
Viability reforms	Prevent land value inflation	Positioned to claim challenges
Medium site cash-in-lieu	Support SMEs, prevent abuse	Subdividable to access easements

What the Precision Reveals

HG4 is not:

- 145 dwellings (safely under threshold)
- 155 dwellings (clearly over threshold)
- 160 dwellings (maximizing site capacity)

HG4 is exactly 150 dwellings.

This precision indicates:

1. Site promoter is closely tracking NPPF reforms
2. Allocation is deliberately threshold-positioned
3. Strategy anticipates subdivision or phasing
4. Intent is maximum value extraction, minimum obligations

The Government's Own Risk Assessment

From consultation (Annex C, p.118):

"We recognise that, if 'gaming' of the system were to occur, this would undermine confidence in the category"

Questions 215-216:

"Do you foresee risks or operability issues?... please explain your answer and provide views on potential mitigations"

HG4 is the risk the Government is asking about.

Recommendation for Government Consultation Response

HG4 should be cited as evidence in responses to:

- Question 60 (150-dwelling threshold appropriateness)
- Question 67 (medium site cash-in-lieu risks)
- Questions 215-216 (medium category gaming risks)
- Question 140 (greenfield viability assessment abuse)
- Question 182 (impacts on groups with protected characteristics - children's safety on A21)

Rother's allocation of HG4 at exactly 150 dwellings on 7 subdividable hectares demonstrates the gaming risks the Government seeks to prevent.

Incompatibility Summary

HG4's exactly 150-dwelling allocation on 7 hectares of greenfield AONB outside settlement boundaries, divisible into three ~2.4ha phases, delivering half the proposed minimum density for station-area development, requiring children to cross a documented-dangerous A21, is not compatible with:

1. Proposed 150-dwelling tenure mix requirements
2. Proposed medium site definitions (exploitable via subdivision)
3. Proposed station-area density minimums (21 dph vs 40-50 dph required)
4. Proposed brownfield-first hierarchy
5. Proposed AONB "seek to further" duty
6. Proposed vision-led transport approach
7. Proposed viability assessment safeguards
8. Proposed evidence-based plan-making requirements
9. Proposed soundness tests (not "appropriate strategy")
10. Government's explicit warnings against threshold gaming

The allocation should be rejected as:

- Inconsistent with national planning policy direction
- Contrary to evidence-based plan-making
- Exemplifying the gaming behaviors the Government explicitly seeks to prevent
- Setting dangerous precedent that would undermine proposed reforms

If approved, HG4 becomes the precedent undermining the entire December 2025 NPPF reform package.

22. Fundamental Conflicts with Adopted Hurst Green Design Codes

The Hurst Green Design Codes were formally adopted following extensive community consultation and professional analysis. The Design Codes establish context-sensitive design principles based on detailed character area analysis. HG4's proposed 150 dwellings at 35 dwellings per hectare fundamentally conflicts with multiple Design Code requirements.

Density: Fundamental Incompatibility with Existing Character

Design Code HGNP.DC.2.5A (page 60) explicitly requires:

"New development should take a design-led approach to density... The density profile should be varied across the sites to reflect: existing context, (matching density typical for character area)..."

The Design Codes document (Figure 2.16, page 31) demonstrates existing character area densities:

Character Area	Density (dph)	Character Type
Burgh Hill West	4.5	Low density, generous plots
Station Road South	12.3	Ribbon development
Great Oak	21.6	Mid-density suburban
Coronation Gardens	24	Highest density area
HG4 proposed	35	46% higher than any existing area

HG4's proposed 35 dph:

- Exceeds the highest existing density in the village (24 dph) by 46%
- Is 7.8 times higher than comparable greenfield edge locations (Burgh Hill West: 4.5 dph)
- Makes no provision for density variation across the site
- Fails to match existing character area typologies
- Ignores the greenfield edge, AONB, and ancient woodland context

For a greenfield site on the village edge, adjacent to ancient woodland and within the AONB, densities of 7-15 dph would be appropriate (matching comparable character areas), yielding approximately 34-72 dwellings rather than 150.

Transition to Countryside: Hard Edge Failure

Design Code HGNP.DC.1.4 (page 51) requires:

"Avoid hard edges to development and create a 'soft' transition between the village and the surrounding landscape through green infrastructure"

"Development should not be designed to physically 'round off' the existing village, but should allow for the penetration of the surrounding landscape within the village"

HG4 explicitly creates:

- A hard northward extension that "rounds off" the village form
- At 35 dph with 4.8 hectares of built development, housing will dominate the site
- Prevents meaningful landscape penetration required by HGPN.DC.1.4

While the policy claims 50% Green Infrastructure, this includes:

- The constrained lake and watercourse (flooding risk)
- The 15m ancient woodland buffer
- The LEAP (400sqm)
- Road verges and functional landscaping

This leaves inadequate genuinely usable Green Infrastructure to create the "soft transition" required by the Design Codes and enable the landscape to "penetrate" into the development.

Village Character Protection Failure

Design Code HGPN.DC.1.1 (page 49) states:

"Developments should safeguard and enhance the character areas aspects and feel of Hurst Green"

The Design Codes supporting text (page 7) explicitly warns:

"A substantial increase in population and built up area could affect the 'sense of place' in Hurst Green by altering the scale of the settlement"

HG4's impact on settlement scale:

Period	Homes	% Increase	Cumulative Total
Baseline (2011)	628	-	628
Approved permissions (to 2028)	+75	+12%	703

Period	Homes	% Increase	Cumulative Total
HG4 alone	+150	+24%	853

150 dwellings in a single location:

- Represents a 24% increase in village housing stock
- Is double the entire previous Local Plan allocation (75 homes)
- Will fundamentally alter the scale and character of Hurst Green
- Directly contradicts Design Code HGNP.DC.1.1 and the stated aims of protecting village character

Permeability and Connections Failure

Design Code HGNP.DC.1.8 (page 54) requires:

"The proposed street networks should be a natural extension of the existing village where possible"

"Connectivity between strategic opportunity sites should be maintained"

"New development should make logical connections to key destinations within the wider area, including the Village Hub, the church, the school, Drewetts field sports ground and public transport"

HG4 is fundamentally isolated:

Destination	Distance	Accessibility Issue
School	1km south	A21 crossing required - unsafe for children
Village Hall	800m south	A21 crossing required - barrier to access
Church	700m south	A21 crossing required - barrier to access
Station Road shops	900m south	A21 crossing required - car-dependent
Drewetts Field	800m south	A21 crossing required - barrier to access

The site is isolated by:

- A21 trunk road to the west (creating fundamental barrier to village access)
- A229 to the north (unlit, no pavements, 60mph speed limit alongside site boundary)
- Open countryside, field hedges, and HG2 biodiversity receptor site to the east

The site cannot achieve "natural extension" of the village when separated by a trunk road and lacking integration with existing street patterns. At 150 dwellings, the development will be car-dependent, conflicting with Design Code HGNP.DC.1.8 sustainability objectives.

Mature Trees and Landscape Character

Design Code HGNP.DC.1.6 (page 53) states:

"Existing mature trees should be retained, maintained and enhanced in new development, with succession planting to ensure continuity of landscape character"

The Design Codes identify that the site has "parkland character with mature trees."

At 35 dph immediately adjacent to ancient woodland with only a 15m buffer:

- Pressure for tree removal will be inevitable (shading, leaf-fall complaints, root damage concerns)
- Root Protection Areas (RPAs) of mature trees typically extend 15m from trunk
- Trees within the buffer will have RPAs extending into developable area
- Residents will complain about shading, leaves, wildlife, subsidence fears
- At this density, tree retention conflicts with development maximization

High-quality tree retention and landscape character are achievable at 10-15 dph with an enhanced ancient woodland buffer, not at 35 dph with the inadequate 15m minimum.

Materials and Design Quality Pressure

Design Code HGNP.DC.4 (pages 63-67) requires:

"The materiality, detail and fenestration of new buildings should reflect the local vernacular"

"Building materials and finishes to be sustainable and of high quality. Materials to be ideally sourced locally"

The Design Codes palette specifies:

- Red and orange brick (preferably local bricks)
- Clay tile cladding (ideally hand-made)
- Sustainable weatherboarding
- Clay roof tiles (ideally hand-made)

These are premium materials. Combined with:

- 30-40% affordable housing requirements
- CIL/S106 contributions (highways, community building, LEAP)
- Ancient woodland buffer provision
- Watercourse/lake landscaping
- Extensive Green Infrastructure requirements
- High density reducing per-unit values

Viability pressure will inevitably drive towards:

- Standardised volume housebuilder products
- Cheaper materials (concrete tiles, UPVC, render)
- Reduced architectural quality
- Minimal landscape provision beyond policy minimums

High-quality design and materials are more viable at lower densities (10-15 dph) with fewer units (40-60 dwellings), allowing higher per-unit values.

Density-Driven Design Degradation

The Design Codes document (pages 24-31, 36-47) that Hurst Green has varied, characterful development:

Character Area	Density	Dominant Typology	Defining Features
Burgh Hill	4.5 dph	Detached houses	Rural lane, generous plots, hedgerows
Station Road	7-12 dph	Detached/semi-detached	Ribbon development, mature gardens
Great Oak	21.6 dph	Semi-detached	Suburban, verges, modest gardens
Coronation Gardens	24 dph	Terraces, bungalows	Higher density, post-war character

The imposition of 35 dph on a greenfield AONB edge site will inevitably result in:

- Terraced housing dominating (evidenced in Design Codes Figure 2.13, page 26)
- Minimal private garden space
- Hard-standing dominance (parking + density = tarmac-dominated streets)
- Loss of landscape character (trees and greenery squeezed out)

- Standardized layouts (density overrides context-sensitive design)

This is wholly inappropriate for:

- A gateway location on the A21 approaching the village
- An AONB setting requiring landscape-led design
- A site adjacent to ancient woodland
- A site with existing parkland character
- The edge of a High Weald village

Design-Led Alternative: Appropriate Capacity

Based on Design Codes analysis and comparable character areas, appropriate density: 10-15 dph maximum.

Justification:

Factor	Density Implication	Evidence
AONB edge location	Low-medium density required	Policy DEN2, NPPF para 177
Ancient woodland adjacency	Low density for adequate buffer	Natural England - enhanced buffer for significant impacts
Greenfield character area	Match existing context	Design Code HGNP.DC.2.5A
Parkland character	Retain landscape character	Design Code HGNP.DC.1.1
Village edge transition	Soft transition required	Design Code HGNP.DC.1.4
Gateway location (A21)	High-quality design required	Design Code HGNP.DC.1.5
Comparable character areas	Station Road: 12.3 dph	Figure 2.16, page 31

Revised capacity calculation:

Parameter	Appropriate Provision	Area (ha)
Total site area	As per allocation	9.52
Ancient woodland enhanced buffer	Substantially more than 15m minimum for development with significant impacts	-0.5-1.0

Parameter	Appropriate Provision	Area (ha)
HG2 biodiversity receptor site buffer	10-15m ecological buffer along length of northern field to protect receptor site function	-0.3-0.5
Lake and watercourse buffer	20m minimum	-1.5
Surface water flooding areas	As identified by FRA	-0.5
LEAP	400sqm	-0.04
Green Infrastructure	Usable (26%)	-2.5
SuDS provision	Swales, attenuation	-0.6
Roads and services	Access, internal roads	-0.8
Net developable area		2.2-2.7 ha

Appropriate capacity:

- At 10 dph: 22-27 dwellings
- At 12.5 dph: 27-34 dwellings (matches Station Road character)
- At 15 dph: 33-40 dwellings

Appropriate capacity: 22-40 dwellings maximum

Precedent Risk

Approving 150 dwellings at 35 dph in the AONB sets dangerous precedent:

- Other AONB sites will cite HG4 as comparable
- "Small-scale" requirement becomes meaningless if 150 = small-scale
- Design Code density requirements (matching character area) will be disregarded
- Ancient woodland buffer standards eroded
- This allocation, if approved, will undermine the entire Design Codes framework

Conclusion on Design Code Conflicts

HG4 at 150 dwellings and 35 dph comprehensively fails adopted Design Code requirements:

- HGNP.DC.2.5A - Density does not match character area context (35 vs 4.5-24 dph)
- HGNP.DC.1.1 - Fails to safeguard village character (24% increase in single location)
- HGNP.DC.1.4 - Creates hard edge, "rounds off" village, no landscape penetration

- HGNP.DC.1.6 - Inadequate tree protection at this density
- HGNP.DC.1.8 - Fundamentally isolated, not "natural extension"
- HGNP.DC.4 - Viability pressure will compromise materials quality

23. Comprehensive Conflicts with Draft Local Plan Policies (Regulation 18, April 2024)

The proposed allocation exhibits fundamental and systematic conflicts with the District Council's own Draft Local Plan policies consulted upon previously. Having examined the policy framework against the specifics of the HG4 allocation, the site fails to comply with strategic priorities, environmental protections, design requirements, infrastructure provisions, and heritage safeguards. These conflicts are not minor or capable of mitigation - they represent fundamental incompatibility between what the plan requires and what the allocation proposes.

Strategic Priority Failures

Vision and Twin Priorities ("Green to the Core" and "Live Well Locally"):

The Draft Local Plan states that "major development will be focused in places where sustainable development can be achieved" and requires all development to "contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions" while supporting "connected and compact neighbourhoods."

HG4 fails both strategic priorities comprehensively:

Green to the Core failure:

- Proposes major development (150 dwellings) entirely within the High Weald National Landscape, causing substantial landscape harm
- Borders ancient woodland without adequate buffer protection
- Contains non-designated heritage asset (The Lodge) with no heritage assessment
- Provides no credible mechanism for achieving 20% biodiversity net gain on-site
- Would increase car dependency rather than reduce it (93.5% car dependency census-evidenced)
- Contradicts climate change mitigation objectives through increased vehicular movements

Live Well Locally failure:

- Village lacks GP surgery, dentist, pharmacy, supermarket, secondary school, and railway station
- Public transport inadequate (2-hourly buses Monday-Friday only, no weekend service)
- Nearest railway station 2km away via 45-minute walk on unlit lanes without pavements
- All higher-order services require car travel on dangerous, unlit A-roads
- Not a "connected and compact" location - fundamentally isolated and car-dependent
- Requires approximately 60 children to walk 15-25 minutes along dangerous A21 to reach primary school

The allocation is fundamentally inconsistent with both strategic priorities, rendering the plan incoherent if HG4 is included.

Policy GTC9: High Weald National Landscape - Fundamental Breach

Policy GTC9 states:

"All development within or affecting the setting of the High Weald National Landscape (AONB) shall conserve and enhance its distinctive landscape character... Development within the High Weald National Landscape should be small-scale... Major development should not take place in the AONB save in exceptional circumstances as outlined at paragraph 183 of the NPPF."

Application to HG4: The allocation proposes 150 dwellings entirely within the National Landscape. This unequivocally constitutes major development by any reasonable interpretation:

- Exceeds the entire previous Local Plan requirement for Hurst Green (75 homes, already met)
- Represents 81% of the current plan requirement (150 of 185 homes)
- Would increase village housing stock by 24% in a single location
- At 9.52 hectares, would be the largest development in the village's modern history
- Involves loss of parkland character, mature trees, and historic setting

Policy GTC9 requires that major development "should not take place" except in exceptional circumstances. No exceptional circumstances are demonstrated. The allocation text acknowledges "this would be a large allocation for development within the National Landscape" but proceeds regardless without:

1. Demonstrating exceptional circumstances as required by NPPF paragraph 177
2. Proving the development is in the public interest
3. Establishing there are no suitable alternative sites outside the National Landscape
4. Demonstrating overwhelming public benefits that would outweigh the harm

Severity: Fundamental breach.

Evidence:

- Policy explicitly prohibits major development except in exceptional circumstances
- 150 dwellings is manifestly major development for this settlement
- Cabinet Report (December 2025, paragraph 16) acknowledges 83% of district is National Landscape representing "significant constraint to major development"
- 2020 Planning Inspector found even one dwelling would cause "significant harmful effect on the character and appearance of the AONB"
- If one dwelling caused significant harm, 150 dwellings in more extensive area would cause catastrophic harm

Conclusion: The allocation directly contradicts Policy GTC9. Without demonstrable exceptional circumstances and public interest justification required by national policy, the allocation fails this fundamental environmental protection policy.

Policy GTC8: Biodiversity Net Gain - Fundamental Breach

Policy GTC8 states:

"All qualifying development proposals must deliver at least a 20% measurable biodiversity net gain... Biodiversity net gain must be provided on-site wherever possible. Off-site provision will only be considered where... all reasonable opportunities to achieve measurable... on-site have been exhausted."

Application to HG4: The policy requires on-site-first delivery of 20% biodiversity net gain. The site's extensive constraints make this requirement unachievable:

Site constraints preventing on-site BNG:

- Ancient woodland adjacency requiring enhanced buffer (15m minimum inadequate for 150-dwelling development impacts)
- HG2 biodiversity receptor site borders northern field along its length (requiring 10-15m ecological buffer to protect receptor function)
- High-pressure gas main crosses site (18-30m undevelopable corridor)
- Watercourse and lake with surface water flooding vulnerability (requiring ecological and flooding buffers minimum 15-20m)
- The Lodge curtilage, walled garden, and parkland (if retained, not available for BNG; if demolished, heritage asset lost)
- Existing habitat value on 9.52 hectares of greenfield that would be destroyed

The critical comparison: HG2 (only 26 houses at the same end of the village, less sensitive location) required an entire field as biodiversity receptor site. HG4 proposes 150 dwellings (nearly 6 times larger) on 9.52 hectares of greenfield National Landscape with parkland character, mature trees, and existing wildlife populations adjacent to ancient woodland.

Where is HG4's biodiversity receptor site? If 26 houses required an entire field for biodiversity compensation, 150 dwellings in a more sensitive National Landscape location would logically require multiple fields for adequate biodiversity compensation - yet no provision exists.

Conflict identified: The allocation provides:

- No published Biodiversity Net Gain Plan
- No on-site BNG strategy demonstrating how 20% could be achieved given constraints
- No off-site compensation mechanism
- No ecological assessment of existing habitat value

- No explanation of how Environment Act 2021 requirements would be satisfied

Severity: Fundamental breach.

Evidence:

- Policy requires 20% BNG on-site wherever possible
- Site constraints documented above make on-site provision unrealistic
- HG2 comparison demonstrates receptor site provision is essential
- No BNG mechanism provided with allocation
- Environment Act 2021 requires minimum 10% net gain for 30 years; Rother requires 20%

Conclusion: HG4 conflicts fundamentally with Policy GTC8. Without a credible, deliverable BNG plan demonstrating how 20% on-site gain would be achieved (or comprehensive off-site compensation secured and linked to Local Nature Recovery Strategy), the allocation cannot satisfy this mandatory environmental requirement.

Policies LWL3/LWL4: Walking, Cycling, and Public Transport - Fundamental Breach

Policies state:

"New development must facilitate active travel and public transport connections both within sites and to existing services; sites should be sited where a choice of transport modes is possible."

Application to HG4:

The allocation sits on the A21 trunk road with:

- No pavements beyond village limits
- No lighting (dark sky area designation)
- Thousands of vehicles daily on Strategic Road Network
- No realistic cycling infrastructure possible (unlit, dangerous 60mph A-roads)
- Inadequate public transport (2-hourly buses Monday-Friday only, no weekend service)
- Nearest railway station 2km away via unsafe 45-minute walk
- All key services requiring car travel on dangerous A-roads

The critical safety issue: On 13th February 2026, a 13-year-old schoolboy suffered serious injuries in a hit-and-run incident on the A21 (London Road) in Hurst Green - the very route approximately 60 children from HG4 would be required to use daily to reach Hurst Green C of E Primary School. This incident validates five years of community warnings documented through a 151-resident petition (2016) warning "before a child is killed."

Cabinet Report admission: The December 2025 Cabinet Report (page 6) acknowledges that "potential bypasses [at Hurst Green] are currently unfunded and there is a lack of evidence they will come forward at any point." The Council explicitly admits the A21 will remain a dangerous trunk road with no improvements - yet proceeds to allocate 150 dwellings requiring children to use this route.

Conflict identified: The allocation requires children and residents to use demonstrably dangerous routes where "active travel" is impossible and unsafe. The policies require development to facilitate walking, cycling, and public transport connections - HG4 provides none of these and exposes children to documented danger.

Severity: Fundamental breach (safety and policy failure).

Evidence:

- A21/A229 boundaries with no pavements, lighting, or safe infrastructure
- February 2026 serious injury incident validating community concerns
- AECOM Strategic Environmental Assessment (February 2023) confirms A21 congestion, noise, pollution, and casualty rate worse than England average
- 93.5% car dependency (2021 Census) - increased from 88.9% (2011) despite bus service investment
- Cabinet Report admission that A21 improvements will not happen

Conclusion: HG4 fundamentally conflicts with active travel policies and represents an unacceptable child safety risk. The allocation knowingly exposes approximately 60 children to a documented-dangerous route where the Council has admitted no improvements will be made. This is contrary to NPPF paragraph 96 (healthy, inclusive and safe places) and the Council's duty of care.

Policy DEV1: General Development Considerations - Fundamental Breach

Policy DEV1 states:

"Development proposals must accord with relevant policies of this Local Plan... must respect landscape character, protect biodiversity, avoid unacceptable harm to amenity and safety, and be supported by infrastructure provision and assessment (e.g., highways, flood risk, ecology)."

Application to HG4: The allocation lacks the fundamental assessments and approvals required by DEV1:

Missing assessments:

- National Highways approval for A21 access
- Flood Risk Assessment (watercourse and lake with acknowledged surface water flooding vulnerability)
- Biodiversity Net Gain Plan (20% requirement unaddressed)

- Ecological survey and ancient woodland impact assessment
- Heritage Impact Assessment for The Lodge and setting of listed buildings
- Viability assessment demonstrating affordable housing and infrastructure funding
- Transport Assessment including safe routes to school analysis
- Gas main corridor impact assessment (18-30m undevelopable corridor)

Missing evidence:

- No highways assessment published
- No evidence National Highways support access in principle
- No evidence required off-site highway works are feasible or funded
- No evidence community infrastructure (community building, LEAP) would be delivered
- No explanation of how HG2 biodiversity receptor site function would be protected

Conflict identified: Policy DEV1 requires development to be "supported by infrastructure provision and assessment." HG4 is allocated without the necessary evidence to demonstrate it can meet basic policy requirements. This is premature allocation contrary to evidence-based plan-making.

Severity: Fundamental breach.

Evidence:

- List of missing assessments above
- 2020 Planning Inspector found AONB harm for one dwelling
- AECOM rejected smaller HG25 due to constraints and impacts
- Policy requirements for assessments are mandatory, not discretionary

Conclusion: HG4 allocation appears premature and contrary to DEV1. The absence of mandatory assessments means it cannot be determined whether the site can satisfy basic development requirements. A properly prepared allocation would include all necessary evidence before being proposed for consultation.

Policies ENV1/ENV2: Flood Risk and Sustainable Drainage - Significant Breach

Policies state:

"Development must avoid increased flood risk, be supported by Flood Risk Assessments, and integrate sustainable drainage."

Application to HG4:

The site includes a watercourse flowing through to a lake at the eastern boundary. The supporting text acknowledges "the area around the lake within the site... is vulnerable to surface water flooding." Yet no Flood Risk Assessment has been provided with the allocation.

Conflict identified: The policies require FRA and SUDS evidence before allocation. The site's flooding vulnerability is acknowledged but not assessed. Without FRA, it cannot be determined:

- What areas are genuinely developable
- What buffer widths are required around watercourse and lake
- Whether the claimed capacity of 150 dwellings is achievable
- How surface water would be managed
- What impact development would have on downstream flood risk

Severity: Significant breach.

Evidence:

- Policy text acknowledging flooding vulnerability
- No FRA published with allocation
- Watercourse and lake are significant site features requiring substantial buffers

Conclusion: HG4 conflicts with ENV1/ENV2 until a site-specific Flood Risk Assessment and workable SUDS strategy are produced and demonstrate the development is feasible and safe.

Policies LAN1/LAN2: Landscape Character; Trees, Woodlands, and Hedgerows - Significant Breach

Policies state:

"Siting, layout and design must maintain and reinforce landscape character; priority to ancient woodlands, historic field boundaries, open landscape between settlements; protection for trees and woodlands."

Application to HG4: The proposed site borders ancient woodland on the eastern boundary (partial), contains mature parkland character with significant trees referenced in the policy's own supporting text, includes historic field boundaries and hedgerows, and contributes to the open rural edge of Hurst Green.

The 2020 Planning Inspector found:

"The development proposed would erode the important rural edge of the existing village boundary, which makes an important contribution to the intrinsic scenic beauty of the surrounding landscape."

If one dwelling would "erode the important rural edge," 150 dwellings across a substantially larger area would obliterate it entirely.

Conflict identified: The allocation would cause:

- Direct loss of parkland character and mature trees
- Erosion of rural edge that contributes to National Landscape scenic beauty
- Inadequate buffer to ancient woodland (15m proposed; substantially more required for 150-dwelling development impacts including recreational pressure, lighting, noise, domestic pets, and hydrological changes)
- Loss of historic field boundaries and hedgerows
- Urbanization of open countryside contributing to National Landscape character

Severity: Significant to Fundamental breach.

Evidence:

- Ancient woodland adjacency requiring enhanced buffer
- Parkland setting with mature trees (policy supporting text acknowledges this)
- 2020 Inspector findings on rural edge erosion
- Historic hedgerows and field patterns
- Policy requirement for priority protection of these features

Conclusion: HG4 fails to satisfy LAN1/LAN2 policies. The allocation would directly conflict with landscape character protection requirements and cause substantial harm to features the policies specifically prioritize for protection.

Policy HER1: Heritage Management - Significant Breach

Policy states:

"Development affecting designated and non-designated heritage assets must assess impacts, conserve where possible, and balance harm against public benefits following NPPF. Heritage impact assessments are required."

Application to HG4: The site contains The Lodge (Etchingham Lodge), a non-designated heritage asset dating from c.1845 with:

- Substantial Victorian property
- Walled garden
- Historic well in kitchen
- Covered entrance (built to shelter a famous visitor, mid-1850s)
- Historic parkland setting with mature trees and lake
- Continuous historic character maintained to present

The site is also located opposite a Grade II listed farmhouse and other listed buildings. Development would affect the setting of these designated heritage assets.

The allocation provides:

- No Heritage Impact Assessment for The Lodge

- No assessment of significance as required by NPPF paragraphs 203 and 209
- No acknowledgment that demolition appears necessary
- No balanced judgment of harm against public benefits
- No assessment of impact on setting of Grade II listed farmhouse opposite
- No consideration of how rural character contributes to heritage asset settings

The policy requires heritage assessment and balanced judgment - neither is provided with the allocation.

Severity: Significant breach.

Evidence:

- Non-designated heritage asset within site (The Lodge, c.1845)
- Adjacent Grade II listed farmhouse whose setting would be affected
- NPPF paragraphs 203 and 209 require assessment and balanced judgment
- No Heritage Impact Assessment published

Conclusion: HG4 conflicts with HER1. The absence of heritage assessment makes it impossible to determine whether heritage harm would be outweighed by public benefits as required by national policy. This is a fundamental evidential failure.

Policy LWL1: Compact Development (Density) - Significant Breach

Policy states:

"Proposals for new residential development must contribute to... deliver appropriate densities. Villages areas (villages with development boundaries): 25-45 dph... Development proposals must meet the minimum density in the ranges above, unless there are overriding reasons concerning townscape, landscape character, design, and environmental impact."

Application to HG4: The allocation claims 35 dph (150 dwellings) which superficially fits the 25-45 dph range for villages. However, this figure is based on a claimed "indicative developable area" of 4.8 hectares that does not properly account for site constraints.

Once constraints are properly excluded:

- Ancient woodland enhanced buffer: -0.5-1.0 ha
- HG2 biodiversity receptor site buffer (10-15m along northern field): -0.3-0.5 ha
- Lake and watercourse buffer (20m minimum): -1.5 ha
- Surface water flooding areas: -0.5 ha
- LEAP (400sqm): -0.04 ha
- Green Infrastructure (usable 26%): -2.5 ha
- SUDS provision: -0.6 ha
- Roads and services: -0.8 ha

Net developable area: 2.2-2.7 ha

Appropriate capacity:

- At 10 dph: 22-27 dwellings
- At 12.5 dph: 27-34 dwellings
- At 15 dph: 33-40 dwellings

Conflict identified: The policy allows density exceptions for "landscape character" and "environmental impact" - both of which argue strongly for lower density at HG4 given National Landscape location, ancient woodland adjacency, parkland character, and heritage asset presence.

The allocation artificially inflates the developable area to achieve 150 dwellings by treating more of the site as developable than policy-compliant design, landscape, ecological, and flooding buffers would permit. The realistic achievable capacity is 22-40 dwellings, not 150.

Severity: Significant breach.

Evidence:

- Policy allows density exceptions for landscape character and environmental impact
- Site constraints documented above drastically reduce developable area
- Realistic capacity calculation demonstrates 150 dwellings is unachievable with proper buffers
- Design Codes analysis confirms appropriate density for this location is 10-15 dph

Conclusion: HG4's claimed density and capacity are not credible against LWL1 when constraints are correctly applied. The allocation contorts density arithmetic to achieve a target figure that is fundamentally incompatible with the site's character, constraints, and National Landscape location.

Policies INF1 and Transport Infrastructure - Fundamental Breach

Policy states:

"Development must be supported by strategic infrastructure delivery, including highways improvements where required and funding/delivery secured. Access to trunk roads requires the approval of National Highways."

Application to HG4: The allocation states vehicular access onto the A21 will be required "to the satisfaction of National Highways" but provides:

- No evidence National Highways have been consulted
- No evidence National Highways support access in principle
- No technical approval or access design
- No assessment of junction capacity or safety

- No specification of "any necessary off-site highway works" required
- No evidence such works are feasible or viable within likely CIL/S106 contributions
- No evidence works would be effective in addressing A21 safety and capacity concerns

Conflict identified: The allocation is contingent on approvals and works that are not evidenced or secured. This is contrary to INF1 requirements that infrastructure delivery be demonstrated and secured.

The existing site access is a field gate onto the A21. There is no existing access onto the A229.

Severity: Fundamental breach.

Evidence:

- No published highways assessment
- No National Highways correspondence or approval
- A21 safety record (worse than England average per AECOM)
- February 2026 serious injury incident
- Community evidence of accidents and near-misses over five years
- Cabinet Report admission A21 bypasses "unfunded" with "no evidence they will come forward"

Conclusion: HG4 is not effective or deliverable in highway terms under INF1. The allocation should not proceed without confirmed National Highways approval and specified, funded, deliverable highway works.

Policies HOU1/HOU2: Housing Mix and Affordable Housing - Significant Breach

Policies state:

"New allocations should deliver a mix of dwelling sizes and tenures, contribute to local affordable housing needs, and be viable; viability/evidence must be demonstrated."

Application to HG4: No viability assessment has been published with the allocation. It is therefore unknown whether:

- Required affordable housing (30-40%) can be delivered
- Tenure mix objectives can be achieved
- Significant infrastructure costs (highways, community building, LEAP, BNG, enhanced buffers) can be funded
- High-quality materials required by Design Codes (local brick, clay tiles, weatherboarding) are viable
- The development is economically deliverable

The threshold gaming concern: The allocation is for exactly 150 dwellings - positioned precisely at the threshold proposed in the Government's December 2025 NPPF consultation for tenure mix requirements. The 7-hectare site is perfectly divisible into three phases of exactly 50 dwellings to access "medium site" easements (cash-in-lieu affordable housing, Building Safety Levy exemption) that the Government explicitly warns could be gamed through subdivision.

Conflict identified: The allocation concentrates 81% of the village requirement (150 of 185 dwellings) on a single site without demonstrating this is viable or would deliver balanced communities. The absence of viability evidence means the housing mix and affordable housing policies cannot be confirmed as deliverable.

Severity: Significant breach.

Evidence:

- No viability assessment published
- Exactly 150 dwellings suggests threshold gaming
- Site perfectly subdivisible into 3 × 50-dwelling phases
- Multiple significant cost burdens (infrastructure, BNG, buffers, high-quality materials)
- Concentration of 81% of requirement on one site is not "balanced"

Conclusion: HG4 is unjustified and not supported by the housing evidence required by HOU1/HOU2 policies. Without viability evidence, the allocation cannot be demonstrated as effective or deliverable.

Policies HWB1-HWB5: Health and Wellbeing; Community Facilities - Significant Breach

Policies state:

"New development should support health and wellbeing, provide or be located where there is access to community facilities including primary care, education, and open space; Infrastructure Delivery Plan must identify and fund necessary facilities."

Application to HG4: Hurst Green fundamentally lacks the health and community infrastructure required to support 150 additional dwellings:

Services absent:

- No GP surgery, dentist, or pharmacy in village
- No supermarket or food shops
- No secondary school (all children 11+ must travel out of village)
- No railway station (Etchingham 2km away via 45-minute dangerous walk)
- No employment centers

- All higher-order services in Robertsbridge or Hawkhurst (Kent) requiring car travel on dangerous A-roads

Health and wellbeing impacts: HG4 would add approximately 355 residents (150 dwellings × 2.36 persons per household from census) to a village of 1,481 people - a 24% population increase. These residents would have no local access to:

- Primary healthcare (nearest GP surgeries in Robertsbridge or Hawkhurst)
- Dental care
- Pharmacy services
- Mental health services
- Secondary education
- Employment opportunities

All of these require car travel on dangerous, unlit A-roads. For residents without cars, unable to drive, or with mobility issues, access to essential health services would be severely compromised.

Child safety and education: The allocation would require approximately 60 school-age children to walk 15-25 minutes along the A21 to reach Hurst Green C of E Primary School. On 13th February 2026, a 13-year-old schoolboy suffered serious injuries in a hit-and-run on this route, validating five years of community warnings about danger.

For secondary school, all children 11+ would require daily car travel or bus travel (2-hourly Monday-Friday only, no weekends) to Robertsbridge or further afield. This is not conducive to health, wellbeing, or sustainable living.

Infrastructure Delivery Plan failure: The policies require an Infrastructure Delivery Plan to "identify and fund necessary facilities." No evidence has been provided that:

- Required health infrastructure would be delivered
- Community facilities would be funded
- Education capacity is adequate
- Infrastructure timing is secured

Conflict identified: The allocation proposes major development (150 dwellings, ~355 residents) in a location that fundamentally lacks the health and community infrastructure the policies require. The policies mandate development should "support health and wellbeing" and have "access to community facilities" - HG4 provides neither.

Adding 355 residents to a village without healthcare facilities, with inadequate public transport, and requiring dangerous walking routes for children is contrary to health and wellbeing policy objectives.

Severity: Significant to Fundamental breach.

Evidence:

- Hurst Green service provision documented (no GP, dentist, pharmacy, supermarket, secondary school, station)
- Census data showing 2.36 persons per household
- AECOM confirmation of 90%+ car dependency
- February 2026 serious injury incident on school route
- No Infrastructure Delivery Plan evidence for required facilities
- Policies require health and community infrastructure access

Conclusion: HG4 conflicts with health and wellbeing policies. Allocating 150 dwellings in a location without basic health and community infrastructure, where access to such services requires dangerous car-dependent travel, is fundamentally incompatible with policies requiring development to support health and wellbeing and provide access to community facilities.

Neighbourhood Plan Conformity - Significant Breach

Draft Local Plan states:

"The Local Plan will support Neighbourhood Plans" and work with parish/town councils; neighbourhood plan policies should be supported and balanced against strategic needs.

Application to HG4: Hurst Green has made a Neighbourhood Plan approved by referendum in November 2025 - just a matter of months before this consultation. The Neighbourhood Plan represents five years of professional work (2016-2025), independent examination, and community support through referendum.

HG4 directly conflicts with at least 11 of the 20 Neighbourhood Plan policies:

- HG1 (settlement boundaries)
- HG3 (local need)
- HG4 (transition to countryside)
- HG5 (A21 setback)
- HG8 (dark skies)
- HG9 (natural features)
- HG10 (green connectivity)
- HG11 (Local Green Space)
- HG12 (protected views)
- HG20 (parking)
- Plus multiple Design Code policies

Conflict identified: Allocating HG4 just months after referendum approval of a Neighbourhood Plan that excludes such development fundamentally undermines the Draft Local Plan's stated commitment to supporting neighbourhood plans and working with communities.

Severity: Significant breach.

Evidence:

- Made Neighbourhood Plan (November 2025)
- Over half of NP policies (11 of 20) contradicted by HG4
- NPPF paragraphs 13-14 and 30-31 require neighbourhood plan conformity
- Draft Local Plan text emphasizes supporting neighbourhood plans

Conclusion: HG4 disregards the made Neighbourhood Plan's policy framework, all of its professional evidence, and community involvement, undermining the Draft Local Plan's stated approach to community-led planning and contradicting national policy requirements to support neighbourhood plans.

Cumulative Impact Assessment

The conflicts identified above are not isolated technical breaches - they represent fundamental incompatibility between HG4 and the Draft Local Plan's policy framework.

Cumulatively, the contradictions demonstrate:

1. Strategic incoherence: HG4 contradicts both "Green to the Core" and "Live Well Locally" priorities, undermining the plan's vision
2. Environmental protection failures: Fundamental breaches of National Landscape protection (GTC9), biodiversity net gain requirements (GTC8), landscape character protection (LAN1/LAN2), and ancient woodland safeguards
3. Infrastructure delivery failures: Critical gaps in highways approval (INF1), flood risk assessment (ENV1/ENV2), and viability evidence (HOU1/HOU2)
4. Heritage protection failures: Absence of required heritage assessment (HER1) for non-designated asset and listed building settings
5. Safety failures: Active travel policies (LWL3/LWL4) breached; children exposed to documented danger on A21 school route
6. Evidence failures: Fundamental assessment gaps contrary to DEV1 requirements for evidence-based allocation
7. Health and community failures: Development in location without healthcare facilities, community infrastructure, or safe access (HWP1-5); exposes residents to car-dependent isolation and children to documented danger
8. Community plan failures: Made Neighbourhood Plan undermined just months after referendum approval

Including HG4 in the Local Plan makes the plan unsound because it:

- Fails the "justified" test (conflicts with own policies; insufficient evidence)
- Fails the "effective" test (unresolved constraints; approvals not secured; infrastructure not deliverable)
- Fails the "consistent with national policy" test (NPPF paragraphs 96, 174-177, 203, 209 violated)

A coherent plan cannot simultaneously:

- Require small-scale development in the National Landscape (GTC9) while allocating 150 dwellings
- Require 20% on-site biodiversity net gain (GTC8) while providing no BNG mechanism
- Require sustainable transport access (LWL3/LWL4) while allocating in car-dependent, dangerous location
- Require evidence-based allocation (DEV1) while omitting mandatory assessments
- Commit to supporting neighbourhood plans while contradicting over half of a made plan's policies

Summary of the Serious Policy Contradictions

The ten most serious contradictions identified:

1. GTC9 (National Landscape): Major development without exceptional circumstances - fundamental breach of NPPF para 177
2. GTC8 (Biodiversity Net Gain): No mechanism to deliver required 20% on-site - fundamental breach of Environment Act expectations
3. LWL3/LWL4 (Active Travel): Unsafe, car-dependent location exposing children to danger - fundamental safety and policy breach
4. DEV1 (General Development): Missing mandatory assessments (highways, flood, heritage, ecology, viability) - premature allocation
5. INF1 (Infrastructure): National Highways approval not secured; highway works not specified or funded - deliverability failure
6. ENV1/ENV2 (Flood Risk): No Flood Risk Assessment for site with acknowledged flooding vulnerability - evidence gap
7. HER1 (Heritage): No Heritage Impact Assessment for The Lodge or listed building settings - NPPF paras 203, 209 breach
8. LAN1/LAN2 (Landscape): Loss of parkland, ancient woodland buffer inadequate, rural edge erosion - significant harm

9. LWL1 (Density): Unrealistic capacity (150 dwellings unachievable if buffers properly applied) - arithmetic manipulation
10. Neighbourhood Plan: Contradicts 11 of 20 policies in made plan - undermines community-led planning

Questions for the Council

Based on the systematic policy conflicts identified, the Council must explain:

1. GTC9: What are the exceptional circumstances case justifying major development (150 dwellings) in the National Landscape? Where is the demonstration of overwhelming public benefit required by NPPF paragraph 177?
2. GTC8: Where is the site-specific Biodiversity Net Gain Plan demonstrating deliverable 20% on-site gains? If off-site provision is proposed, how has it been demonstrated that "all reasonable opportunities to achieve... on-site have been exhausted"?
3. INF1: Has National Highways been formally consulted and provided approval for A21 vehicular access? Please publish correspondence and any technical approvals.
4. ENV1/ENV2: Where is the Flood Risk Assessment for the site? How will surface water flooding around the lake be managed?
5. HER1: Where is the Heritage Impact Assessment for The Lodge, its curtilage, and the impact on the setting of the Grade II listed farmhouse opposite?
6. DEV1: Why has the site been allocated without the mandatory assessments required by this policy? When will these be published?
7. LWL1: Please provide realistic developable area calculation applying required buffers (ancient woodland, HG2 receptor, gas main, watercourse/lake, flooding areas) and show resulting achievable dwelling numbers with methodology.
8. HOU1/HOU2: Where is the viability assessment demonstrating affordable housing, infrastructure, and Design Code high-quality materials are deliverable?
9. LWL3/LWL4: How can the allocation satisfy active travel policies given the A21 safety record and February 2026 serious injury incident? What child-safety risk assessment has been undertaken?
10. Neighbourhood Plan: How does allocating HG4 align with the made Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan and the Draft Local Plan's stated commitment to support neighbourhood plans?

Policy Compliance

The following table summarises HG4's compliance with Draft Local Plan policies:

Policy	Policy Area	HG4 Compliance Status	Severity of Conflict
Vision / Green to the Core	Strategic Priority	Conflicts	Fundamental
Vision / Live Well Locally	Strategic Priority	Conflicts	Fundamental
Development Strategy	Spatial Strategy	Conflicts	Significant to Fundamental
GTC9	High Weald National Landscape	Conflicts	Fundamental
GTC8	Biodiversity Net Gain (20%)	Conflicts	Fundamental
LWL3 / LWL4	Active Travel / Public Transport	Conflicts	Fundamental
DEV1	General Development Considerations	Conflicts	Fundamental
ENV1 / ENV2	Flood Risk & SUDS	Conflicts	Significant
LAN1 / LAN2	Landscape Character / Trees & Woodlands	Conflicts	Significant to Fundamental
HER1	Heritage Management	Conflicts	Significant
LWL1	Compact Development (Density)	Conflicts	Significant
INF1	Infrastructure Delivery	Conflicts	Fundamental
HOU1 / HOU2	Housing Mix & Affordable Housing	Conflicts	Significant

Policy	Policy Area	HG4 Compliance Status	Severity of Conflict
HWB1-HWB5	Health & Wellbeing / Community Facilities	Conflicts	Significant to Fundamental
Neighbourhood Plan Conformity	Community-led Planning	Conflicts	Significant

Summary:

- Total Policies Assessed: 15 policy areas covering strategic priorities, environmental protection, design, infrastructure, housing, health, and community planning
- Fundamental Breaches: 8 policies (GTC9, GTC8, LWL3/4, DEV1, INF1, Strategic Priorities)
- Significant Breaches: 7 policies (ENV1/2, LAN1/2, HER1, LWL1, HOU1/2, HWB1-5, NP Conformity)
- Compliant or Minor Concerns: No policies
- Overall Assessment: HG4 exhibits systematic non-compliance across the entire policy framework

Conclusion: The allocation conflicts with every assessed policy area. There are no policy areas where HG4 demonstrates clear compliance. This systematic failure indicates fundamental incompatibility between the allocation and the Draft Local Plan's policy framework.

Evidence Gaps

The following table identifies mandatory assessments and evidence that must exist to demonstrate policy compliance but are not published with the HG4 allocation:

Required Evidence	Policy Requirement	Status	Impact on Soundness
Biodiversity Net Gain Plan	GTC8 requires 20% BNG with on-site-first approach	No evidence of compliance and not published	Cannot demonstrate Environment Act compliance; deliverability uncertain
Ecological Assessment	DEV1, GTC8 require ecology assessment; ancient woodland impact assessment needed	No evidence of compliance and not published	Cannot assess habitat value, ancient woodland buffer adequacy, or BNG baseline

Required Evidence	Policy Requirement	Status	Impact on Soundness
Off-site BNG Strategy	GTC8 requires demonstration that on-site exhausted before off-site considered	No evidence of compliance and not published	No receptor site identified; HG2 comparison unanswered
Heritage Impact Assessment	HER1 requires HIA for non-designated heritage assets; NPPF paras 203, 209	No evidence of compliance and not published	Cannot assess significance of The Lodge or balance harm vs public benefit
Listed Building Setting Assessment	HER1 requires assessment of impact on Grade II farmhouse setting opposite	No evidence of compliance and not published	Harm to designated heritage asset setting not assessed
Flood Risk Assessment	ENV1/ENV2 require site-specific FRA for sites with flooding vulnerability	No evidence of compliance and not published	Cannot determine if site developable or what buffer widths required
SUDS Strategy	ENV1/ENV2 require sustainable drainage strategy	No evidence of compliance and not published	Surface water management unclear; downstream impacts unknown
National Highways Approval	INF1 requires approval for trunk road access; policy states "to satisfaction of National Highways"	No evidence of compliance and not published	Access deliverability uncertain; site may be undeliverable
Highways Technical Assessment	INF1, LWL3/4 require highways assessment including junction capacity, safety, off-site works	No evidence of compliance and not published	A21 capacity, safety impacts, required works all unknown

Required Evidence	Policy Requirement	Status	Impact on Soundness
Transport Assessment	LWL3/4 require assessment of sustainable transport provision and safe routes to school	No evidence of compliance and not published	Child safety on A21 not formally assessed despite Feb 2026 serious injury
Viability Assessment	HOU1/HOU2, INF1 require viability evidence for affordable housing, infrastructure funding	No evidence of compliance and not published	Cannot demonstrate 30-40% affordable housing deliverable with infrastructure costs
Infrastructure Delivery Plan	INF1, HWB1-5 require IDP showing infrastructure provision, funding, and timing	No evidence of compliance and not published	Community building, LEAP, highway works delivery all uncertain
Exceptional Circumstances Case	GTC9, NPPF para 177 require demonstration for major National Landscape development	No evidence of compliance and not published	Fundamental NPPF requirement not satisfied
Ancient Woodland Buffer Assessment	LAN1/2 require assessment of buffer adequacy for development scale and impacts	No evidence of compliance and not published	15m inadequate for 150-dwelling impacts not assessed
Gas Main Corridor Assessment	DEV1 requires assessment of high-pressure gas main impact on developable area	No evidence of compliance and not published	18-30m corridor constraint not accounted for in capacity
Developable Area Calculation	LWL1, DEV1 require realistic gross-to-net calculation applying all constraint buffers	No evidence of compliance and not published	Claimed 4.8ha developable area appears inflated; realistic 2.2-2.7ha

Required Evidence	Policy Requirement	Status	Impact on Soundness
Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan	DEV1 requires demonstration of how 4.7ha GI would be delivered as public amenity	No evidence of compliance and not published	Lodge curtilage double-counted; genuine public GI unclear
Dark Skies Assessment	GTC9 policy text requires dark skies compliance; cumulative lighting impact assessment needed	No evidence of compliance and not published	Impact of 150 dwellings on dark sky character not assessed
HG2 Receptor Site Compatibility	GTC8, DEV1 require assessment of impact on adjacent biodiversity receptor site	No evidence of compliance and not published	Effect on HG2 legally required receptor function not assessed
Response to 2020 Inspector Dismissal	DEV1 evidence-based approach requires explanation of how AONB harm now acceptable	No evidence of compliance and not published	Inspector found 1 dwelling caused significant harm; 150 dwellings not justified
Response to AECOM Rejection	DEV1 evidence-based approach requires explanation of how HG25 rejection addressed	No evidence of compliance and not published	Professional concerns (remoteness, landscape, A21) remain unresolved

Summary:

- Total Evidence Gaps: 21 mandatory assessments or evidence items missing
- Fundamental Gaps (preventing soundness assessment): 10 items (BNG Plan, HIA, FRA, National Highways, Highways Assessment, Viability, Exceptional Circumstances, 2020 Inspector Response, AECOM Response, Deliverable Area)
- Significant Gaps (undermining deliverability): 11 items (Ecology, SUDS, Transport, IDP, Ancient Woodland, Gas Main, GI Plan, Dark Skies, HG2 Impact, Listed Building Setting)

Conclusion: The allocation has been consulted upon without the fundamental evidence base required to demonstrate:

- Policy compliance (GTC8, GTC9, HER1, ENV1/2, INF1)
- Deliverability (highways approval, viability, infrastructure)
- Soundness (exceptional circumstances, response to professional rejections)
- Realistic capacity (constraint accounting, developable area)

This represents premature allocation contrary to evidence-based plan-making principles. The absence of mandatory assessments means it cannot be determined whether HG4 can satisfy basic policy requirements. A properly prepared allocation would include all necessary evidence before public consultation.

Conclusion on Draft Local Plan Policy Conflicts

The systematic examination of Draft Local Plan policies reveals that HG4 exhibits fundamental and pervasive conflicts across strategic, environmental, design, heritage, infrastructure, and community planning policies.

These are not minor technical breaches capable of mitigation - they represent fundamental incompatibility between the site's characteristics and constraints, and the policy framework's requirements.

The allocation cannot be considered sound because:

- It contradicts the plan's own strategic priorities and vision
- It breaches mandatory environmental protections without justification
- It lacks the evidence base required for allocation
- It undermines a made Neighbourhood Plan
- It exposes children to documented danger
- It fails to demonstrate deliverability

Including HG4 makes the Draft Local Plan internally inconsistent and incoherent. A plan cannot simultaneously establish protective policies and then allocate development that breaches those policies without robust justification and exceptional circumstances.

The allocation should be removed to ensure plan coherence and soundness.

Policy Compliance Scorecard

The following table summarizes compliance of the HG4 allocation against the Council's own Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18, April 2024) policies examined in this ground of objection:

Policy	Compliance Status	Breach Severity	Summary
Vision / Overall Priorities	Conflicts	Fundamental	Contradicts both "Green to the Core"

Policy	Compliance Status	Breach Severity	Summary
			and "Live Well Locally" strategic priorities
Development Strategy	Conflicts	Fundamental	Not directed to sustainable location; lacks infrastructure evidence
GTC9 - High Weald National Landscape	Conflicts	Fundamental	Major development without exceptional circumstances (NPPF para 177)
GTC8 - Biodiversity Net Gain	Conflicts	Fundamental	No mechanism to deliver required 20% on-site; no BNG Plan published
LWL3/LWL4 - Active Travel & Public Transport	Conflicts	Fundamental	Unsafe car-dependent location; exposes children to documented danger
DEV1 - General Development Considerations	Conflicts	Fundamental	Missing all mandatory assessments (highways, FRA, HIA, ecology, viability)
ENV1/ENV2 - Flood Risk & SUDS	Conflicts	Significant	No Flood Risk Assessment for site with acknowledged flooding vulnerability
LAN1/LAN2 - Landscape Character & Trees	Conflicts	Significant/Fundamental	Loss of parkland, inadequate ancient woodland buffer, rural edge erosion
HER1 - Heritage Management	Conflicts	Significant	No Heritage Impact Assessment for The

Policy	Compliance Status	Breach Severity	Summary
			Lodge or listed building settings
LWL1 - Compact Development (Density)	Conflicts	Significant	Unrealistic capacity calculation; 150 unachievable with proper buffers
INF1 - Infrastructure Delivery	Conflicts	Fundamental	National Highways approval not secured; highway works not funded
HOU1/HOU2 - Housing Mix & Affordable	Conflicts	Significant	No viability assessment; threshold gaming; 81% concentration
HWB1-HWB5 - Health & Wellbeing	Conflicts	Significant/Fundamental	No healthcare access; unsafe school routes; infrastructure not delivered
Neighbourhood Plan Support	Conflicts	Significant	Contradicts 11 of 20 policies in made NP just months after approval

Summary Analysis:

- Policies examined: 14 key policy areas
- Complies: No policies.
- Conflicts: 14 (100%)
- Fundamental breaches: 8 policies
- Significant breaches: 6 policies

This comprehensive policy failure demonstrates the allocation is fundamentally incompatible with the Draft Local Plan's own policy framework and cannot be considered sound.

Evidence Gaps

The following assessments and evidence are required by Draft Local Plan policies but are missing from the HG4 allocation. These omissions render the allocation premature and contrary to evidence-based plan-making requirements:

1. Biodiversity Net Gain Plan

- Required by: Policy GTC8
- Content needed: Metric calculation demonstrating deliverable 20% measurable biodiversity net gain on-site; if off-site provision required, demonstration that "all reasonable opportunities to achieve... on-site have been exhausted"
- Status: Not published

2. Native Habitat Receptor / Off-Site Compensation Strategy

- Required by: Policy GTC8 and Environment Act 2021
- Content needed: Identification of receptor site(s) for wildlife displaced from 9.52 hectares; explanation of why smaller HG2 development (26 houses) required entire field as receptor yet HG4 (150 dwellings) has no provision; coherence with Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Status: Not identified or secured

3. Ecological Appraisal and Ancient Woodland Impact Assessment

- Required by: Policies GTC8, LAN1/LAN2, DEV1
- Content needed: Survey of existing habitat value on 9.52 ha greenfield; ancient woodland buffer requirements for 150-dwelling development (15m minimum inadequate for recreational pressure, lighting, noise, pets, hydrology impacts); assessment of HG2 biodiversity receptor site function maintenance
- Status: Not published

4. Heritage Impact Assessment

- Required by: Policy HER1 and NPPF paragraphs 203, 209
- Content needed: Assessment of significance of The Lodge (non-designated heritage asset c.1845) including walled garden, parkland, lake, historic well, covered entrance; impact assessment on setting of Grade II listed farmhouse opposite; balanced judgment of harm against public benefits; justification for demolition or substantial alteration
- Status: Not published

5. Flood Risk Assessment and SUDS Strategy

- Required by: Policies ENV1/ENV2 and DEV1
- Content needed: Site-specific assessment addressing watercourse and lake with acknowledged surface water flooding vulnerability; buffer requirements around watercourse/lake (minimum 20m); developable area calculation after flood buffers applied; surface water management strategy; downstream flood risk impacts
- Status: Not published

6. National Highways Technical Response and Access Design

- Required by: Policy INF1
- Content needed: Formal consultation response from National Highways on proposed A21 vehicular access; technical approval or in-principle support; junction/access design proposals; safety assessment; capacity analysis; specification of "any necessary off-site highway works" required; funding mechanism and delivery timescales
- Status: Not secured or published

7. Transport Assessment Including Safe Routes to School

- Required by: Policies LWL3/LWL4, HWB1-HWB5, DEV1
- Content needed: Comprehensive transport assessment including: trip generation from 150 dwellings; modal split analysis; junction capacity assessments (A21/A229, A21/site access); safe routes to school analysis given February 2026 serious injury incident; child safety risk assessment; pedestrian/cycle infrastructure requirements; public transport enhancement proposals; mitigation costing
- Status: Not published

8. Viability Appraisal

- Required by: Policies HOU1/HOU2, DEV1
- Content needed: Viability assessment demonstrating: affordable housing delivery (30-40% policy requirement); funding for required infrastructure (highways works, community building, LEAP, enhanced ecological buffers, BNG measures); high-quality Design Code-compliant materials (local brick, clay tiles, weatherboarding); CIL/S106 contributions; development economics and deliverability
- Status: Not published

9. Exceptional Circumstances Justification for Major National Landscape Development

- Required by: Policy GTC9 and NPPF paragraph 177
- Content needed: Demonstration of exceptional circumstances; proof development is in the public interest; establishment that no suitable alternative sites exist outside National Landscape; demonstration of overwhelming public benefits outweighing harm; explanation of why 150 dwellings (manifestly major development) is necessary when policy requires "small-scale"
- Status: Not provided

10. Statement Addressing Previous Professional Rejections

- Required by: Evidence-based plan-making principles
- Content needed: Explanation of how Council addressed: (a) 2020 Planning Inspector's dismissal finding even 1 dwelling would cause "significant harmful effect on the character and appearance of the AONB" and would "erode the important rural

edge"; (b) AECOM's 2023 rejection of smaller HG25 through Neighbourhood Plan SEA due to remoteness, landscape sensitivity, A21 issues; (c) why HG4 (substantially larger than both rejected schemes) is now considered suitable when rejection reasons remain unresolved

- Status: Not provided

11. Infrastructure Delivery Plan Evidence

- Required by: Policies INF1, HWB1-HWB5
- Content needed: Identification of required community facilities (community building, LEAP playground, healthcare contribution); delivery mechanisms and timescales; funding arrangements; phasing with housing delivery; coordination with statutory providers (education, healthcare, utilities)
- Status: Infrastructure Delivery Plan acknowledged as "working document" in Cabinet Report; specific HG4 requirements not identified

12. Gas Main Corridor Impact Assessment

- Required by: Policy DEV1
- Content needed: High-pressure gas main runs through site; assessment of required undevelopable corridor width (18-30m); Health and Safety Executive consultation; impact on developable area and dwelling capacity; design implications
- Status: Acknowledged in policy text but not assessed

Summary: 12 fundamental evidence gaps have been identified. The allocation has been proposed without the mandatory assessments required by the Draft Local Plan's own policies. This represents premature allocation contrary to:

- Policy DEV1 (General Development Considerations requiring assessments)
- NPPF paragraph 35 (soundness test requiring evidence base)
- Evidence-based plan-making principles
- Natural justice (consultees cannot properly assess allocation without evidence)

The allocation should not proceed to Regulation 19 (submission) stage.

24. Landowner Communications & Representations

In February 2026, following the serious injury of a 13-year-old boy in a hit-and-run on the A21 in Hurst Green, the landowners of the proposed HG4 site sent a letter to District Ward Councillors.

The landowners' stated:

"We are formally committing to offer land from our holding to facilitate the construction of a new strategic roundabout at the Coopers Corner junction."

"Infrastructure-Led Growth: An allocation of some 150 units provides the 'critical mass' and land-take required to deliver the roundabout"

This reasoning is completely circular:

1. HG4 proposes 150 dwellings requiring vehicular access onto the A21
2. This access would require junction improvements, potentially including a roundabout at Coopers Corner (A21/A229)
3. The landowners claim 150 dwellings are needed to "provide the critical mass" to fund the roundabout
4. Therefore, they argue, 150 dwellings should be allocated to solve the problem that 150 dwellings would create

The roundabout is only necessary because of HG4's traffic generation. Without HG4's 150 dwellings, there is no need for a roundabout at this location funded by development.

National Highways Already Rejected the Roundabout as Poor Value

The landowners state:

"This proposal directly unlocks National Highways' A21 Safety Package by addressing one of the most notorious accident blackspots with a shovel ready solution"

This misrepresents National Highways' position.

As recently as 2025 and again in January 2026, National Highways assessed a roundabout at this location and concluded it was not the best use of funds for improving A21 safety. National Highways' professional engineers determined other interventions would be more effective.

If National Highways - the authority responsible for the A21 as part of the Strategic Road Network - concluded the roundabout was not cost-effective for safety, the landowners' claim that it represents a "shovel ready solution" is contradicted by the evidence.

The Roundabout Would Not Address Village Speeding

The landowners claim:

"significantly slowing the speeds in the village at the same time"

This claim has no basis. Coopers Corner (A21/A229 junction) is located at the northern edge of the village, well away from the village center and the speeding sections where residents have documented danger:

- The speeding problem is through the village center (30mph zone)
- Coopers Corner is outside the 30mph zone at the village edge
- A roundabout at this location would do nothing to address speeds through the village
- The village center is where the February 2026 serious injury occurred
- The village center is where the 151-resident petition documented five years of near-misses
- The village center is where children walk to school

A roundabout at Coopers Corner in relation to the development, serves one purpose only: enabling vehicular access from HG4 onto the A21/A229. It does not address the documented speeding and safety problems that residents have raised for five years.

Roundabout Does Not Require HG4 Land

The landowners claim land from HG4 is necessary for the roundabout. This is misleading.

The existing A21/A229 junction at Coopers Corner is surrounded by:

- Land already owned by National Highways (highway verges and embankments)
- Land owned by East Sussex County Council Highways
- Existing highway corridor with substantial width

If National Highways determined a roundabout was necessary (which they have not - they rejected it in 2025 and 2026), there is no evidence that it could not be constructed using existing public highway land without requiring any land from the HG4 site. The claim that HG4 land is necessary for a roundabout is a negotiating position designed to make the allocation appear essential, not a genuine constraint.

An accident

The letter states:

"Sadly, as you may already know, there has been yet another serious accident in the village this past week - a 13-year-old boy was badly injured in a hit-and-run. This reinforces what residents have been saying for a long time: action is urgently needed."

The landowners then state that HG4 should be allocated. However, the serious injury occurred:

- In the village center, not at Coopers Corner
- On the route children walk to school from the village
- In the location residents have documented as dangerous for five years
- In the 30mph zone through the village

HG4 would make this problem worse, not better:

- Adding 150 dwellings would require approximately 60 additional children to walk this dangerous route daily
- The roundabout at Coopers Corner (northern edge) would do nothing to protect children walking through the village center to school
- The development would increase traffic through the dangerous village center section where the injury occurred
- The proposal creates new danger (children crossing A21 to access HG4) while claiming to solve existing danger

The "Exceptional Circumstances" Claim is Unfounded

The landowners assert:

"AONB & Public Interest: By providing a major strategic safety benefit, this considered development satisfies the 'Exceptional Circumstances' and 'Public Interest' tests required for major development in the High Weald AONB."

This claim fails on multiple grounds:

1. The "safety benefit" is circular reasoning:

- The roundabout is only necessary because of HG4's traffic generation
- Providing infrastructure to mitigate your own development's impacts does not constitute "exceptional circumstances"
- This is routine development mitigation, not public benefit

2. National Highways rejected the roundabout:

- If the roundabout had genuine strategic safety benefit independent of HG4, National Highways would have funded it
- They assessed it in 2025 and concluded it was not cost-effective
- This demonstrates it does not represent compelling public benefit

3. The roundabout does not address the actual safety problem:

- Residents' documented concerns are about the village center (school route)
- Coopers Corner is at the village edge, away from documented danger

- The February 2026 injury occurred in the village center, not at Coopers Corner
- A roundabout that does not address the actual safety problem cannot satisfy public interest test

4. Alternative solutions exist:

- The actual safety problem (village center speeding, school route danger) could be addressed through traffic calming, speed cameras, pedestrian crossings, or other interventions
- These solutions do not require allocating 150 dwellings in the National Landscape
- If safety is genuinely the priority, less harmful solutions should be pursued

5. NPPF paragraph 177 requirements not met:

- No demonstration that the development is in the public interest
- No demonstration that no suitable alternative sites exist outside the National Landscape
- No demonstration of detrimental effect if not provided
- The "benefit" is entirely circular (solving problem created by the development)

CIL

The landowners state:

"Unprecedented Parish Investment: Following the recent success of the Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan Referendum in November 2025, the Parish will receive a 25% CIL 'Neighbourhood Portion.' For a 150-unit scheme, this represents a multi-million-pound investment for the Parish Council to spend on local priorities"

This is effectively a financial inducement to accept development the community has spent five years demonstrating is unsuitable.

The Neighbourhood Plan - approved by referendum in November 2025 - represents the community's considered view on appropriate development. The landowners are now suggesting the community should accept a development that violates over half the Neighbourhood Plan's policies (11 of 20) in exchange for CIL payments.

This fundamentally misunderstands the planning system:

- CIL is intended to mitigate development impacts, not to "buy" community acceptance of unsuitable development
- The community's democratic decision through the Neighbourhood Plan should not be overridden by financial inducement
- The "multi-million pound investment" claim inflates likely CIL receipts and ignores that much CIL would be spent addressing HG4's own impacts

More fundamentally:

- The community has clearly stated through the Neighbourhood Plan what development it considers appropriate
- That plan does not include a 150-dwelling development at HG4
- Offering money to override democratic community planning is inappropriate

The Letter Confirms HG4 is Developer-Led, Not Plan-Led

The landowners' letter inadvertently confirms that HG4 is a developer-led proposal being retrofitted into the Local Plan, rather than a plan-led allocation based on strategic planning principles:

Evidence of developer-led approach:

1. Timing: Letter sent during Regulation 18 consultation (February 2026) to influence Cabinet decision (March 2026)
2. Direct approaches to Ward Councillors and our Local MP
3. Negotiating position: "Offering" land for roundabout as quid pro quo for allocation
4. Commercial framing: Emphasis on "deliverability" and "critical mass"
5. Lack of planning merit: Arguments based on solving problems the development creates
6. Community override: Seeking to override made Neighbourhood Plan with financial inducements

This is precisely what plan-led development should prevent.

The planning system is intended to identify suitable locations for development based on strategic objectives, environmental constraints, infrastructure capacity, and community input. It is not intended to respond to landowner lobbying that creates artificial linkages between development and infrastructure to manufacture an appearance of necessity.

Conclusion: The Email Undermines HG4

The landowners' February 2026 letter and their own representation to this consultation, far from supporting HG4's allocation, actually undermines its credibility by revealing:

1. Circular reasoning: The development solves problems it creates
2. Misrepresentation: National Highways rejected the roundabout in 2025
3. Questionable claims: Roundabout would not address village speeding problems
4. Misleading assertions: HG4 land not proven necessary for roundabout
5. Unfounded "exceptional circumstances" claim: Circular benefit does not satisfy NPPF tests
6. Financial inducement: CIL to seek to override the Neighbourhood Plan
7. Developer-led approach: Confirms HG4 is opportunistic proposal, not plan-led allocation

The letter and the landowner's representation demonstrates that HG4 should be removed from the Local Plan.

If the only justification for allocating 150 dwellings in the National Landscape is circular reasoning (development funds infrastructure to mitigate development's own impacts), the allocation has no planning merit.

If National Highways - the professional authority responsible for the A21 - rejected the roundabout as poor value for safety in 2025, it cannot constitute "exceptional circumstances" for major National Landscape development in 2026.

If the actual safety problem (village center school route) would not be addressed by the roundabout, the public benefit claim collapses.

The letter, the landowner's representation, and the representations of those clearly involved with the proposed development, confirms what community evidence, professional assessments, and policy analysis have already demonstrated: HG4 is unsuitable and should be removed from the Local Plan.

25. Summary and Requested Action

Site HG4 should be removed from the Local Plan allocation for the following reasons:

1. **Claim about site identification and concealed planning history** - policy states site was "identified through HELAA" when: (a) it was previously assessed as HG25 and rejected by AECOM through Neighbourhood Plan; (b) HG4 is substantially Larger than rejected HG25; (c) the closest part to village was refused planning permission and appeal dismissed in 2020 for One dwelling due to AONB harm - now proposing 150; (d) HG4 was Not in Council's own Summer 2024 consultation which assessed Hurst Green capacity as only 38 homes; (e) HG4 appeared "eleventh hour" after 5 years of professional NP scrutiny; this reveals Council previously dismissed HG25 as unsuitable, none of the rejection reasons have been addressed, and the 487% increase in housing numbers is unjustified.
2. **Cabinet report revelations explain allocation through desperation not suitability** - December 2025 Cabinet report admits: (a) no five-year housing land supply creating presumption in favour of development; (b) housing targets escalated 24% between Summer 2024 (733/year) and December 2024 (912/year) creating 7,077 dwelling shortfall; (c) historic delivery failure delivering only 215 homes/year vs 335/year target for 15 years (64% delivery rate); (d) 83% of district is AONB acknowledged as "significant constraint to major development"; (e) infrastructure concerns acknowledged with Infrastructure Delivery Plan still "working document"; (f) Cabinet report extraordinarily claims Hurst Green is a "more sustainable settlement" (paragraph 24) despite no healthcare, no supermarket, 90%+ car dependency, 2-hourly buses only, dangerous isolated A-road access; (g) claims to have "left no stone unturned" (paragraph 20) while ignoring AECOM rejection, two Planning Inspector dismissals, and Council's own Summer 2024 assessment; revelations demonstrate HG4 is target-driven allocation of previously rejected land motivated by desperation and political pressure, not evidence-based assessment of suitability.
3. **Lack of evidence-based justification for housing numbers** - the 239 dwelling total (including 185 new allocations) is not supported by robust, settlement-level evidence; district-wide Hedna does not identify any requirement for Hurst Green; locally commissioned AECOM Housing Needs Assessment (2019) does not support this scale; Parish Council's Local Housing Demand Survey (40% response rate) identifies limited demand (tens not hundreds) already met by Neighbourhood Plan delivery; no sustainability analysis, no cross-boundary evidence, no explanation for 487% increase from Summer 2024; appears to be top-down distribution of numbers rather than evidence-led allocation.
4. **Overwhelming community evidence proves unsuitability** - Neighbourhood Plan Evidence Base documents 151-resident petition (2016) about dangerous A21 school route with detailed testimonies: "frightening," "scary," "putting children's lives in danger," HGV mirrors overhang pavements, cannot fit pushchair + child, "before a child is killed," multiple accidents/near-misses; 2018 public consultation: "Speed of

traffic on A21 - No 1 issue," "traffic blights this village," "no safe pedestrian route to school," "parking at school seriously lacking and unsafe"; A21 is trunk road carrying thousands of vehicles daily in each direction as all traffic to/from Bexhill, Hastings and virtually all housing must pass through Hurst Green; community spent 5 years documenting danger - this evidence is in made Neighbourhood Plan; on Thursday 13th February 2026, a 13-year-old schoolboy suffered serious injuries in a hit-and-run on the A21 in Hurst Green, validating the community's warnings; HG4 proposes 150 dwellings requiring approximately 60 additional children to walk this documented-dangerous route.

5. **Systematic violation of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** - violates at least 12 policy areas: fails all 3 sustainable development objectives (para 8); violates presumption in favour of sustainable development (para 11); fails all 4 soundness tests (para 36 - not positively prepared, not justified, not effective, not consistent with national policy); violates avoid isolated countryside development (para 84); violates sustainable transport locations (para 110 - Burgh Hill Inspector applied this in Nov 2025); violates effective land use and safeguard environment (para 124); violates design quality (para 135, 139); violates conserve natural environment (para 187); violates National Landscapes protection (paras 189-190 - should refuse major development); violates neighbourhood planning principles (paras 13-14, 30-31 - NP made Nov 2025 takes precedence); violates healthy communities (para 96); violates heritage assessment (para 216); Council cannot demonstrate NPPF compliance for allocation.
6. **Direct conflict with made Neighbourhood Plan** - violates at least 11 out of 20 policies (over half the plan) of the November 2025 referendum-approved Neighbourhood Plan: HG1 (outside boundary, not strictly controlled, creates sprawl), HG3 (doesn't meet local need), HG4 (no transition to countryside), HG5 (ignores A21 setback), HG8 (destroys dark skies), HG9 (destroys natural features), HG10 (damages green connectivity), HG11 (undermines Local Green Space), HG12 (destroys protected views), HG20 (inadequate parking); contradicts NP evidence showing limited facilities, 93.5% car dependency, geography prevents active travel; undermines 5 years of community planning just months after approval; violates Strategic Objective 10 and NPPF para 13.
7. **Contradicts Neighbourhood Plan and Masterplan** - directly violates established guidance requiring properties be set back from A21 due to heavy traffic; disregards community's adopted planning policies.
8. **Contradicts the Local Plan's own Strategic Spatial Objectives** - fails to meet at least 8 of the 11 core objectives including climate change mitigation (car-dependent sprawl), nature conservation (harms biodiversity receptor site), heritage protection (destroys The Lodge), sustainable locations (textbook unsustainable), active travel (dangerous routes), safe healthy communities (unsafe, fragmented), balance with Neighbourhood Planning (overrides it), and optimal land use (inefficient greenfield);

demonstrates allocation is included purely for housing numbers regardless of planning principles.

9. **Fails the Council's own A21 Corridor Strategy criteria** - Council's strategy requires settlements with "reasonable level of local services" and "existing opportunities for sustainable travel"; Hurst Green has no healthcare, no supermarket, no secondary school; only 3 routes out, all dangerous unlit unpaved A-roads (20-40 min walks to any facilities); no possibility of safe cycling/walking to other settlements; "sustainable travel corridor" designation is not supported by the evidence base; more sustainable settlements like Ticehurst excluded.
10. **Contradicts the Council's Vision for Northern Rother** - vision requires "sensitive development," "sustainable forms," "protecting landscape character," "enhanced active transport connectivity," and development "related to existing settlement"; HG4 is wholesale countryside urbanisation (not sensitive), car-dependent sprawl (not sustainable), destroys the High Weald National Landscape, cannot achieve active transport (census data shows car dependency increased to 93.5% despite bus investment, geography prevents walking/cycling improvements), and is remote from settlement; vision explicitly states sustainable transport corridor development is "longer term" beyond this plan - yet HG4 allocated prematurely.
11. **Contradicts the Council's Vision for the Countryside** - vision states countryside development will be "strictly limited" to that supporting local needs and must "maintain or improve rural character," protect "farming capacity" and "landscape character"; HG4 is 150-dwelling strategic allocation (not strictly limited) on farmland outside development boundary (countryside by Council's own definition); does not support any identified local need; destroys rather than maintains rural character; removes farmland permanently; eliminates landscape character; incompatible urbanisation of countryside contradicting plan's stated aim to protect countryside as "defining characteristic of Rother".
12. **Fundamentally misleading site description** - conflates The Lodge's occupied dwelling and curtilage with isolated agricultural fields
13. **Green Infrastructure calculations** - counts The Lodge's private garden (including lake) as public Green Infrastructure, creating entirely unrealistic expectations of what would be delivered and artificially inflating site viability.
14. **Direct contradiction with HG2 biodiversity receptor site and no biodiversity compensation provision** - proposes 150-dwelling development immediately adjacent to field designated as long-term wildlife refuge for HG2, fundamentally undermining HG2's legally required biodiversity compensation; HG2 (only 26 houses at same end of village, less sensitive location) required entire field as receptor site, yet HG4 (150 dwellings - nearly 6 times larger - on 9.52 hectares of greenfield National Landscape adjacent to ancient woodland) has no receptor site provision; policy contains no assessment of existing habitat value, no compensation

mechanism, no explanation of how Environment Act 2021 10% net gain requirement would be achieved; fundamental question unanswered: where would the wildlife from 9.52 hectares of habitat destruction go? demonstrates Council is not protecting biodiversity but moving it around until no places remain - fundamentally unsustainable approach violating biodiversity net gain legislation.

15. **Critical infrastructure constraint ignored** - high-pressure gas main renders significant portion undevelopable but appears inadequately reflected in capacity calculations.
16. **Unrealistic dwelling capacity** - claim of 150 dwellings not achievable once Lodge curtilage, gas main corridor, ancient woodland buffers, HG2 biodiversity receptor site buffer (10-15m along entire length of northern field), hedgerow buffers, and flooding areas properly excluded.
17. **No viable access** - would likely require demolition of The Lodge and/or development through its private garden (the very area claimed as "Green Infrastructure").
18. **Severe constraints understated** - combination of gas main corridor, ecological buffers, flooding, and access requirements dramatically reduce genuinely developable land.
19. **Connectivity claims** - footpath access misrepresented; A229 "connection" meaningless as nothing exists there to connect to And no pavements exist or can be provided on A229; site fundamentally isolated from village.
20. **Undeliverable policy requirements** - policy simultaneously requires retention of Lodge's garden features while expecting public access to them as Green Infrastructure.
21. **Unsustainable location and urban sprawl** - disconnected, car-dependent, contrary to climate objectives and NPPF sustainable development principles; school is 15-25 minute walk (depending on location within site) along unlit narrow pavements beside busy trunk road in dark sky area (dangerous in winter darkness); development constitutes urban sprawl, extending already fragmented village across fourth axis into countryside; creates ribbon development along trunk road rather than compact sustainable settlement.
22. **Village fragmentation and unsupported infrastructure claims** - creates an unnecessary fifth separate area of the village of only 1,000 people that already has comprehensive community facilities (village halls, social club, pub, church, 2 playgrounds, sports facilities) and extensive green infrastructure (2 orchards, allotments, park, nature reserve, ancient woodland, surrounded by AONB countryside); duplicate facilities undermine community cohesion rather than creating integrated sustainable growth; "Green Infrastructure" claims not supported by

assessment of existing provision in this National Landscape village with extensive countryside access.

- 23. Likely destruction of non-designated heritage asset without assessment** - development would most likely require demolition of The Lodge (Etchingham Lodge), a historic house from c.1845 with walled garden, covered entrance, historic well, and parkland setting; policy contains no heritage assessment, no acknowledgment of significance, no balanced judgment of harm as required by NPPF paragraphs 203 and 209; complete loss of 180-year-old occupied house and designed landscape is unacceptable and contrary to national policy.
- 24. Inadequate National Landscape justification** - major development in High Weald National Landscape without demonstrated exceptional circumstances or adequate assessment of landscape harm; over 65% of developable area in open countryside; 150 dwellings fundamentally incompatible with dark sky area protection despite policy's own requirement to protect dark skies.
- 25. AECOM professional evidence contradicts allocation** - Council's own commissioned Strategic Environmental Assessment (February 2023) provides independent expert validation of community concerns: A21 demonstrably dangerous (congestion, noise, vibration, pollution documented); public transport grossly inadequate (2-hourly, no weekends); extreme car dependency (90%+ households vs 74% England average); AONB medium-high landscape sensitivity; road casualty rate worse than England average; all community safety concerns validated and recorded in official professional assessment; Council has ignored its own commissioned professional evidence without explanation or superseding assessment.
- 26. Strategic threshold gaming incompatible with December 2025 NPPF proposed reforms** - HG4's exactly 150-dwelling allocation (not 145, not 155, but precisely 150) appears strategically positioned to game Government's proposed 150-dwelling tenure mix threshold; 7-hectare site perfectly divisible into three 2.4ha phases of exactly 50 dwellings each to access "medium site" easements (cash-in-lieu affordable housing, Building Safety Levy exemption, simplified requirements); delivers 21 dph (half the proposed 40-50 dph minimum for station-area development); 100% greenfield contradicting proposed brownfield-first hierarchy; incompatible with proposed vision-led transport (requires 90%+ car dependency); fails proposed AONB "seek to further" duty; positioned for viability gaming; Government's consultation explicitly warns against subdivision to access easements - HG4 exhibits exactly this pattern; if approved, sets precedent undermining entire December 2025 NPPF reform package.
- 27. Fundamental conflicts with adopted Hurst Green Design Codes** - HG4's 35 dph density is 46% higher than any existing character area in Hurst Green and 7.8 times higher than comparable greenfield edge locations (Burgh Hill West: 4.5 dph); violates Design Code HGNP.DC.2.5A requiring density to match character area context; violates HGNP.DC.1.4 requiring soft transition to countryside (HG4 creates hard edge

and "rounds off" village); violates HGNP.DC.1.1 by fundamentally altering village character (24% increase in housing stock in single location); violates HGNP.DC.1.8 as site is fundamentally isolated by A21 trunk road barrier; inadequate tree protection at this density (HGNP.DC.1.6); viability pressure will compromise materials quality (HGNP.DC.4); Design Codes analysis demonstrates appropriate capacity is 30-45 dwellings at 10-15 dph matching existing character areas, not 150 dwellings at excessive 35 dph.

The site is not suitable, available, or achievable for housing development as presented. The policy appears to be based on fundamental misunderstandings or misrepresentations of what the site comprises and what could realistically be delivered.

It is respectfully requested that Rother District Council:

1. Remove site HG4 from housing allocations entirely.
2. Explain how HG4 can be justified given the serious injury to a child on the A21 in Hurst Green on 13th February 2026 - this incident validates the community's documented warnings over five years and demonstrates that the A21 school route is dangerous even with existing crossing infrastructure; adding 150 dwellings requiring approximately 60 additional children to use this route is fundamentally unsafe.
3. Remove Hurst Green from the A21 Corridor Strategy unless and until the Council can demonstrate it meets the strategy's own criteria for "reasonable level of local services" and "existing opportunities for sustainable travel".
4. Explain how Hurst Green qualifies for the A21 Corridor Strategy when it has no healthcare facilities, no supermarket, no secondary school, and only 3 routes out (all dangerous, unlit, unpaved A-roads requiring 20-40 minute walks to reach any facilities); explain how the December 2025 Cabinet report can characterize Hurst Green as a "more sustainable settlement" (paragraph 24) suitable for "major development sites" given this evidence - does the Council genuinely believe a village with 90%+ car dependency, 2-hourly buses with no weekend service, no healthcare, and dangerous isolated A-road access qualifies as "more sustainable"? If so, what would an unsustainable settlement look like?
5. Explain the exclusion of Ticehurst from the A21 Corridor Strategy when it appears more sustainable than Hurst Green.
6. Publish the Sustainability Appraisal methodology that concluded Hurst Green offers "sustainable locations" and opportunities for "enhanced cycle and walking routes" - this appears fundamentally flawed.
7. Explain how HG4 can be allocated when it contradicts the Council's Vision for Northern Rother which requires "sensitive development," "sustainable forms," landscape protection, and enhanced active transport - when census data proves car

dependency has increased to 93.5% despite bus investment and geography prevents active travel improvements.

8. Explain why HG4 is allocated Now when the Vision explicitly states sustainable transport corridor development is "longer term" beyond this plan period and should be addressed in "plan review" - this is premature allocation before infrastructure exists.
9. Explain how HG4 can be allocated when it contradicts at least 8 of the Local Plan's 11 Strategic Spatial Objectives, including those on climate change mitigation, nature conservation, heritage protection, sustainable locations, active travel, community safety, neighbourhood planning balance, and optimal land use.
10. Produce and explain the relevant evidence that supports 487% increase in housing numbers from Summer 2024 consultation (38 homes assessed capacity) to January 2026 (185+ homes proposed) and provide evidence justifying this massive change.
11. Explain the December 2025 Cabinet report revelations and their implications - the report admits: (a) no five-year housing land supply creating presumption in favour of development; (b) housing targets escalated 24% between Summer 2024 (733/year) and December 2024 (912/year) creating 7,077 dwelling shortfall; (c) historic delivery failure (only 215/year delivered vs 335/year target for 15 years - 64% delivery rate); (d) 83% AONB coverage acknowledged as "significant constraint"; (e) infrastructure concerns acknowledged with IDP still "working document"; explain how these admissions of desperation, delivery failure, and constraint justify allocating a previously rejected, professionally assessed unsuitable site that contradicts the Council's own Summer 2024 evidence.
12. Explain why HG4 was not in Summer 2024 consultation despite the Council knowing about HG25 through the Neighbourhood Plan process, and when/why the Council dismissed HG25 as unsuitable.
13. Explain why AECOM's rejection of HG25 through the Neighbourhood Plan process is being disregarded, particularly given that HG4 is substantially larger than the rejected HG25.
14. Explain why the Planning Inspectorate's 2020 appeal dismissal for one dwelling on part of this site is being ignored and how 150 dwellings can possibly be acceptable when one dwelling was refused for AONB harm.
15. Undertake and publish a heritage impact assessment for The Lodge (Etchingham Lodge) as required by NPPF paragraphs 203 and 209, assessing its significance as a non-designated heritage asset and the harm from its apparent demolition.
16. Clarify whether the development requires demolition of The Lodge - if so, this must be stated explicitly in the policy and justified as public benefit outweighing heritage harm.

17. Consult Historic England on the heritage impacts of this allocation.
18. Provide evidence that AECOM's specific concerns (remoteness from settlement, poor access to facilities, landscape sensitivity, AONB designation, A21/A229 junction conflicts) have been resolved - because none appears to exist.
19. Explain why AECOM's February 2023 Strategic Environmental Assessment findings are being disregarded - specifically their professional documentation of: A21 congestion/noise/vibration/pollution; inadequate public transport (2-hourly, no weekends); extreme car dependency (90%+ vs 74% England); medium-high AONB sensitivity; road casualty rate worse than England average; validation of community safety concerns.
20. Publish any professional assessment that supersedes or contradicts AECOM's 2023 SEA findings - if the Council disagrees with AECOM's evidence, explain on what professional basis and provide the contradicting evidence.
21. Explain how HG4's exactly 150-dwelling allocation is not strategic threshold gaming given: (a) Government's December 2025 NPPF proposes 150-dwelling threshold for tenure mix requirements; (b) 7-hectare site is perfectly divisible into three 2.4ha phases of exactly 50 dwellings to access "medium site" easements; (c) Government's consultation explicitly warns against subdivision to access easements; (d) HG4 exhibits precisely this pattern.
22. Explain how HG4 is compatible with December 2025 NPPF proposed reforms including: brownfield-first hierarchy (HG4 is 100% greenfield); station-area density minimums of 40-50 dph (HG4 delivers 21 dph - half the minimum); vision-led transport approach (HG4 requires 90%+ car dependency); AONB "seek to further" duty (HG4 causes major harm); evidence-based plan-making (HG4 ignores AECOM evidence).
23. Confirm whether the site promoter/developer has been informed of the December 2025 NPPF consultation and whether it was the District Council in its conversations with the landowner who advised on the sizing of the 150-dwelling allocation (as reportably mentioned by a member of the RDC Planning Team at the Ticehurst public exhibition) as to position strategically the potential site relative to proposed thresholds.
24. Explain how approving HG4 would not set precedent undermining the Government's proposed NPPF reforms - particularly for Green Belt viability assessments, medium site easements, and prevention of gaming behaviors.
25. Explain where HG4's biodiversity compensation would be located - HG2 (only 26 houses at the same end of the village, less sensitive location) required an entire field as biodiversity receptor site; HG4 proposes 150 dwellings (nearly 6 times larger than

HG2) on 9.52 hectares of greenfield National Landscape with parkland character, mature trees, and existing wildlife populations adjacent to ancient woodland; where is HG4's receptor site? where would the wildlife from 9.52 hectares of habitat destruction go? if 26 houses required an entire field, 150 dwellings in a more sensitive location would logically require multiple fields for adequate biodiversity compensation - yet no provision exists; explain how Environment Act 2021 10% net gain requirement would be achieved; provide ecological assessment of existing habitat value; explain why the policy contains no biodiversity compensation mechanism when HG2 demonstrates such provision is essential.

26. Explain how HG4 can be allocated without undermining HG2's legally required biodiversity receptor site, and provide evidence of consultation with HG2 developer and Natural England; explain the Council's approach to cumulative biodiversity displacement - are we protecting biodiversity or simply moving it around until we run out of places to move it to?
27. Undertake rigorous reassessment with accurate site boundaries excluding The Lodge curtilage (if The Lodge is to be retained).
28. Properly account for the gas main constraint in any future assessment.
29. Ensure Green Infrastructure calculations reflect actual public amenity, not private gardens.
30. Ensure site descriptions accurately reflect physical reality, constraints, and genuine deliverability.
31. Disclose to all consultees the full planning history including HG25 rejection, planning refusal, appeal dismissal, and Summer 2024 assessment of only 38 homes capacity.
32. Explain how this allocation respects the community's referendum-approved Neighbourhood Plan after 5 years of professional scrutiny.
33. Explain how allocating a site that contradicts the plan's own Strategic Objectives can result in a "sound" Local Plan under the tests of soundness in NPPF paragraph 35.
34. Consider whether this allocation undermines the credibility of the entire Local Plan if such fundamental errors can occur.