

Hastings Planning Strategy Examination

**Matter 7 – Sites for Housing and other matters including
Recreation, Leisure and Culture**

Statement by Rother District Council

January 2013

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Introduction

1. This statement presents Rother District Council's evidence in relation to Matter 7: 'Sites for Housing and other matters including Recreation, Leisure and Culture'. The statement is structured to address the specific issues for examination as identified by questions raised by the Inspector.

7.1 Should the Local Plan identify land at Breadsell Lane for Housing? What are the constraints to its development, how could they be reduced or overcome? How many dwellings could be accommodated there?

2. The Breadsell Lane development was identified in the respective Councils Core Strategies at the "Preferred Options" stages, with the majority of the land with development potential being identified within Hastings Borough. The only viable point of access to the site is through frontage land to the A2100 within Rother District.
3. Development of this frontage land in Rother in isolation from land in Hastings was rejected by the Rother District Local Plan Inspector in 2005 on accessibility and environmental grounds. An extract from the Inspector's Report is attached as Appendix 1.
4. As highlighted in the Report, there is a current policy (Policy DS6) in the Rother District Local Plan (2006) which protects 'strategic countryside gaps', including the gap between Battle and Hastings/St Leonards, within which Breadsell is located. Maintaining effective separation between settlements is considered of strategic importance, and countryside gaps which are considered vulnerable to development pressures are therefore protected.
5. It is noted that the continued protection of the Strategic Gaps was supported through the development of the Council's Core Strategy, and the existing policy protection is carried forward through Policy HF1 of the Rother [Proposed Submission Core Strategy](#), It has been strongly supported by the local Parish Councils of Battle and Crowhurst.

6. The prospect of a strategic allocation was put forward by Hastings Borough Council in their Preferred Options stage consultation in May 2008 (1000 houses and up to 10,000 square metres of employment floorspace). The District Council's response was:

'Accept the major development location at Breadsell Lane and its implications for land in Rother District subject to further assessment (in liaison with this Council) of its potential to constitute a sustainable urban extension through provision of associated jobs and local facilities, as well as transport infrastructure, and safeguarding of an effective Strategic Gap between Battle and Hastings.'

7. The position is summed up at paragraphs 6.43-6.46 of the District Council's 'Consultation on Strategy Directions' document:

6.43 *Hastings Borough Council has proposed a major allocation of land just within the Borough boundary, which runs to the south of Battle Road, for some 1,000 houses and associated business space.*

6.44 *Land fronting the road is within Rother District and forms part of the Strategic Gap between Hastings and Battle, and is prominent open ground rising westwards. Land to the rear slopes south-eastwards towards from the ridge towards the Marline valley.*

6.45 *Land at Breadsell Farm was considered in 2005 by the Local Plan Inspector, who did not support its development as it is poorly related to services and facilities in Hastings, as well as being attractive open land within the strategic gap to Battle.*

6.46 *However, to implement Hastings' preferred location for future major development which lies to the rear of this area would necessitate access through it. Such a scale of housing as well as significant employment land as is envisaged, should ensure local services to help address the remoteness issue. Close control over the extent, land use nature and treatment of any development close to the Battle Road within Rother District may mitigate the environmental objections. However, such an intrusion would only be justified as an integral part of a larger scheme.*

8. Natural England strongly objected to the proposal at Breadsell at the 'preferred options' stage, particularly in relation to the adverse impact on the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). As a result of the objection, Hastings Borough Council carried out both design and impact studies in liaison with Natural England to determine the feasibility and scope for mitigation of any development in the area ([Appendix A of Hastings' Explanation of housing evidence \(August 2012\)](#)).

9. In March 2010, the Borough Council considered its strategic options relating to housing distribution. It looked at how to proceed with identifying greenfield housing potential at Breadsell, given the serious question marks over deliverability in relation to the Natural England objections. Hastings Borough Council's decision effectively dropped Breadsell from their Core Strategy.
10. As Rother District Council's original support for the proposal was based on the site coming forward as a sustainable urban extension, without the respective land being brought forward within Hastings, the District Council has not included it as a strategic, or broad, location for development in its Proposed Submission Core Strategy.
11. To date, it has been Natural England's view that no further evidence has been submitted by the site promoters in response to their 'in principle' objection and, as such, their objection still stands. Natural England has been explicit with respect to the nature of evidence needed to robustly consider the site for allocation, and as no appropriate evidence has been provided, there are clear issues within regards to the site being developable, and therefore contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (paragraph 47).
12. Without the appropriate evidence, any allocation of this site would also be contrary to paragraphs 113, 116, 118 and 120 of the NPPF, particularly in terms paragraph 118 which states that:

'proposed development on land within or outside of a Site of Special Scientific Interest likely to have an adverse effect on a Site of Special Scientific Interest (either individually or in combination with other developments) should not normally be permitted. Where an adverse effect on the site's notified special interest features is likely, an exception should only be made where the benefits of the development, at this site, clearly outweighs both the impacts that is likely to have on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest'

13. The NPPF is clear that sites which are likely to have an adverse impact on a SSSI should not normally be permitted. There has been insufficient evidence submitted to overcome Natural England's objection and as such, it has not been demonstrated that development at Breadsell outweighs any likely negative impacts on the adjacent SSSI.
14. The Inspector should be aware that there are outstanding objections relating to the omission of land in Rother from the Proposed Submission Core Strategy. However, there was no discussion at the Examination regarding the merits of the Breadsell site.
15. Furthermore, even in the context of Rother finding additional housing needs to achieve its South East Plan housing target (see Matter 1 Statement), the Council's position remains that there is not a sound basis for including land adjacent to Breadsell Farm as a broad (or strategic) location of development in the light of unresolved environmental and access constraints, while a smaller development (without the range of facilities discussed above) would not constitute sustainable development.

APPENDIX 1

to implement Policy BX4, which merits priority, I consider that it would be unrealistic within the available time to formulate further proposals for other areas as part of the Local Plan. Such considerations should therefore be deferred to future plan preparation processes.

Recommendation

14.19 **I recommend that the Local Plan is not modified in respect of this objection:**

Section 14 Omission Sites

HOUSING OMISSION SITES

Objections

293/3552	Mr & Mrs A. Miskin (Section 14) (Land at Breadsell Farm, Hastings)
103/1575	Mr R Vidler (Policy HG1) (Land off Rock Lane, Hastings)
103/1576	Mr R Vidler (Inset Map 4) (Liddham Farm, Batchelors Bump)
103/3657	Mr R Vidler (Inset Map 4) (Liddham Farm, Batchelors Bump)
43/1207	Mrs J Hare (Inset Map 37) (Land at 56 Westfield Lane)
115/1786	Mr M Wells (Inset Map 37) (Land to rear of 66-78 Westfield Lane)
210/3211	L Cook (Policy DS3) (Land at Chowns Hill, Hastings)

Introduction

14.20 In that part of my report dealing with Section 4 of the Plan and the issue of housing supply, I conclude that the Local Plan generally makes adequate provision for new housing and that, with some minor exceptions and subject to adjustments to the criteria for site release, no additional housing allocations are required. That general conclusion applies to the following site allocations which have been suggested by Objectors and I do not recommend that they be included in the Local Plan. However, in case that recommendation should not be accepted by the Council, I comment briefly on each site and the relevant issues.

Housing Omission Site	Land at Breadsell Farm, Hastings Road, Hastings
293/3552 Mr & Mrs A. Miskin	
Location of site (Greenfield or previously-developed land)	<i>Greenfield agricultural land. Approximately 6-7ha.</i>
Location and accessibility to jobs, shops and services by modes other than the car and the potential for improving such accessibility	<i>South east corner adjoins Hastings development boundary but the development would nevertheless be highly car-dependent with only infrequent bus services for an urban area and a lack of adequate shops, primary schools or other facilities within walking distance. Cycle access also poor due to hilly terrain.</i>
Capacity of existing and potential infrastructure to absorb further development	<i>Not assessed.</i>
The ability to build communities to support physical and social infrastructure and to provide sufficient demand to sustain appropriate local services and facilities	<i>The Objector suggests the provision of a local play facility and community centre on site but access to other facilities would remain poor.</i>
The physical and environmental constraints on development	<i>Development would significantly erode the vulnerable Policy DS5 strategic gap between Hastings and Battle and blur the separate identities of the towns. Adjacent to High Weald AONB. Development on this prominent site on a ridge-top beside a main road would be widely seen and visually intrusive. Ancient woodland adjoins south east corner.</i>
Conclusion	<i>The site is not needed, it has poor accessibility by means other than the car and it is in a visually intrusive location in open countryside in an important strategic gap between settlements</i>

Supplementary Reasoning

14.21 The development of this site for housing would also conflict with Policy S24 of the Structure Plan which states in reference to Hastings that ‘No further outward expansion of the town beyond existing commitments will be allowed except for that permissible for early economic development in Policy E10.’

Recommendation

14.22 **I recommend that the Plan is not modified in respect of this site.**

Housing Omission Site 103/1575 Mr R Vidler	Land off Rock Lane, near Hastings
Location of site (Greenfield or previously-developed land)	<i>Greenfield. About 10.5ha</i>
Location and accessibility to jobs, shops and services by modes other than the car and the potential for improving such accessibility	<i>On edge of urban area but accessibility by non-car modes not assessed</i>
Capacity of existing and potential infrastructure to absorb further development	<i>Not assessed.</i>
The ability to build communities to support physical and social infrastructure and to provide sufficient demand to sustain appropriate local services and facilities	<i>The proposal is one for ‘low-cost’ housing but this is not defined. A large scheme of exclusively affordable housing would not create a mixed and balanced community and would require considerable supporting infrastructure. There is a lack of evidence as to how this would be funded whilst also making the housing available at a cost affordable to those unable to compete in the market.</i>
The physical and environmental constraints on development	<i>Sloping land within the designated High Weald AONB and prominent in views from the surrounding area, but particularly from the west from where the development would appear intrusive in the landscape.</i>
Conclusion	<i>The site is not needed and development would be intrusive in the AONB</i>

Supplementary Reasoning

14.23 The development of this site for housing would conflict with Policy S24 of the Structure Plan which states in reference to Hastings that ‘No further outward expansion of the town beyond existing commitments will be allowed except for that permissible for early economic development in Policy E10.’

14.24 Objection 103/1575 which seeks the allocation of this site for low cost housing development was submitted at the Initial Deposit Local Plan stage in relation to Policy H14 which exceptionally provided for residential development outside development boundaries to meet the needs of local people unable to compete in the housing market (‘affordable’ housing). Policy H14 was replaced at the Revised Deposit Stage by Policy HG2. I address objections to Policy HG2 in that part of this report which deals with Section 4 of the Local Plan.

14.25 Policy HG2 reflects national Government policy to make exceptional provision for affordable housing on sites outside development boundaries where general market housing would not normally be acceptable. At the time of writing, national policy does not support the allocation of specific sites for this purpose. Whilst such a measure has in the past been floated in consultation proposals, they have not been adopted by the Government.

14.26 Having regard to the large extent of the site, its capacity at the densities recommended by PPG3 ‘Housing’ could be as much as 315-525 dwellings. That would be a large development in the context of this Local Plan. In Section 4 I conclude that there is no need for such additional housing allocations. Moreover, whereas a development