

Examination of the Horsham District Local Plan 2023-2040

Further Statement in Respect of

Matter 4: Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

Submitted on behalf of:

Wates Developments Limited

November 2024

Document Management

Project	Version	Date	Author	Checked/ Approved by	Reason for Revision
24001	Matter 4	21/11/2024	JF	KM	

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Matter Statement has been prepared on behalf of Wates Developments Limited (Wates) in response to Matter 4: Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment, specifically in response to Strategic Policy 14: Countryside Protection; Strategic Policy 15: Settlement Coalescence; and Strategic Policy 18: Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity
- 1.2 Wates has land interests in the District across 5 no. sites as set out below, and has submitted representations at earlier stages of Plan preparation at the Regulation 18 and 19 consultations:
- Land west of Worthing Road, Tower Hill, Horsham (Southwater Parish)
 - Land west of Centenary Road, Southwater (Shingley Parish)
 - Land east of Marringdean Road, Billingshurst
 - Land west of Shoreham Road, Small Dole (Henfield Parish)
 - Land north of Melton Drive, Storrington
- 1.3 Two of the above sites are allocated for residential development in the Submission Plan these are:
- Land west of Shoreham Road, Small Dole (Strategic Policy: HA16 (SMD1))
 - Land north of Melton Drive, Storrington (Strategic Policy: HA18 (STO1))

2 Issue 2: Whether the approach to the natural environment, biodiversity, landscape, coalescence, countryside, green and blue infrastructure and local green space is justified, effective, consistent with national policy and positively prepared?

Strategic Policy 14: Countryside Protection

Q2 Is Strategic Policy 14: Countryside Protection sound?

a) Should this policy make reference to its geographical application on the Policies Map?

- 2.1 As set out in Wates comments on this policy at the Regulation 19 consultation stage, Policy 14 in its current form is in effect a blanket policy that seeks to prevent all development that is not essential to its countryside location. It seeks to protect the countryside for its own sake and would restrict market housing outside settlement boundaries even though there might be a pressing need to provide additional homes in sustainable locations i.e. on the edge of sustainable settlements on housing land supply grounds.
- 2.2 The approach of this policy is similar to that of the original version of the NPPF of 2012 and the Planning Policy Guidance Notes issued before then. These sought 'to protect the countryside for its own sake'. This approach is not consistent with national policy and is contrary to paragraph 60 of the NPPF (September 2023). This confirms that the Government's objective is to significantly boost the supply of homes. To support this, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed. This is especially the case where a local planning authority is not able to demonstrate a sufficient housing land supply and additional land in sustainable locations in the countryside is required for development. As such this policy not considered to be sound and should be made more flexible. This could be achieved by including the uses cited in criterion 1a) to c) and also allow for other forms of development where there is an identified need for them and they are in a sustainable location i.e. on the edge of existing settlements. This could be achieved by replacing the word "protected" with "recognised".
- 2.3 Regarding question a) above and for the purposes of clarification and certainty it would be advisable if this designation was shown on the Proposals Map. This would be beneficial in the context of smaller settlements which in some instances are not defined by a built up area boundary.

Strategic Policy 15: Settlement Coalescence

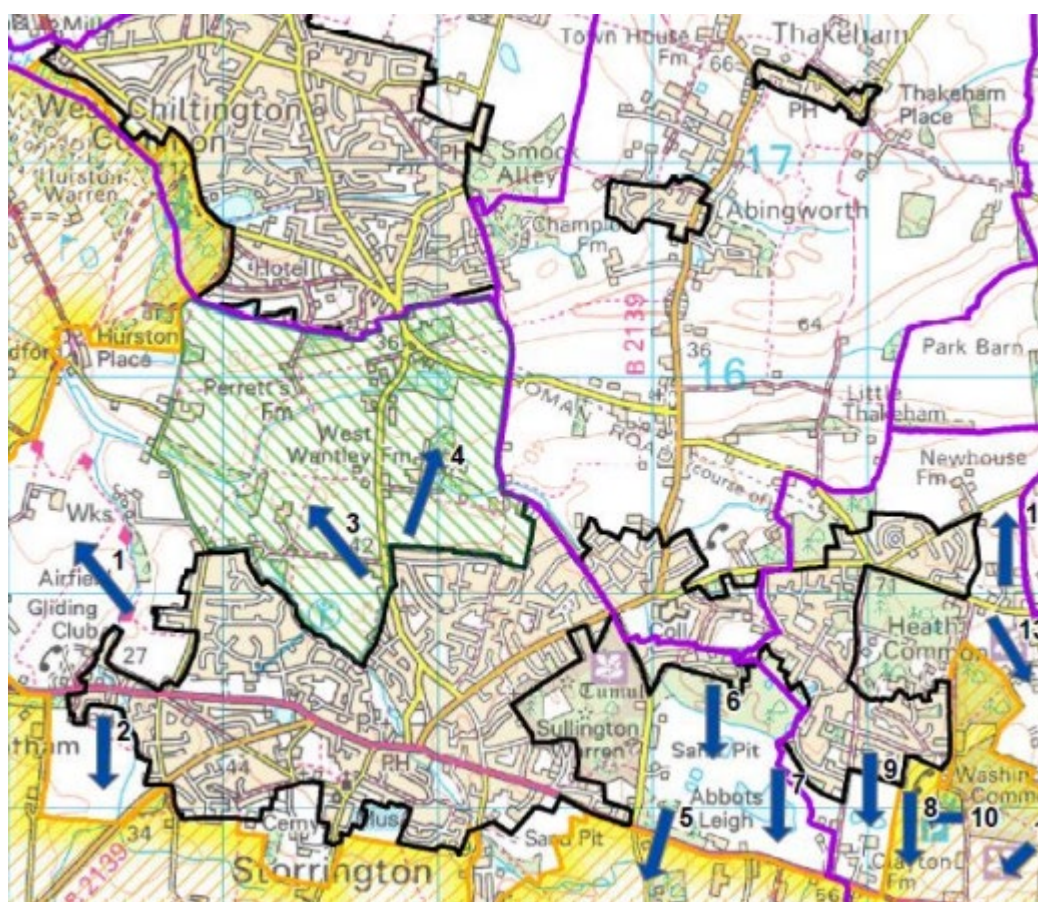
Q3 Is Strategic Policy 15: Settlement Coalescence sound?

a) Does this policy apply to the whole District or just specific locations within it? Does it have a geographical application which should be identified on the submission Policies Map?

- 2.4 The current wording of this policy suggests that it applies to the whole district. Given the large number of settlements in the district and their varying type and size (as set out in Table 3: Settlement Hierarchy that forms part of Strategic Policy 2: Settlement Hierarchy) plus their

varying proximity to each other and the wide range of landform and topography between them. For clarification purposes there could be merit in identifying those parts of the district at most risk of unacceptable coalescence by showing these on the Proposals Map. This would result in greater clarification and certainty.

- 2.5 Careful consideration will however need to be given to the identification of these areas and how they are shown on the Proposals Map. Straight line distances between settlements are often a good starting point in defining areas that are more susceptible to coalescence i.e. distances of 200m or less but other factors will need to be taken into consideration such as topography and landscape features which will influence the extent of inter-visibility between settlements which will contribute to the sense of coalescence or not.
- 2.6 An example of this is the Green Gap between Storrington and West Chiltington Common that is the subject of Policy 9 of the 'made' Storrington, Sullington and Washington Neighbourhood Plan (SSWNP). This is shown in the plan below:



Source – Policy Map Inset 6 of the SSWNP

- 2.7 The minimum straight line distance between the nearest built form in Storrington and West Chiltington Common is 1.07km, but the travelling distance on Fryern Road (the most commonly used route between the settlements) is approximately 1.15km. Views from the northern edge of Storrington towards West Chiltington Common (and vice versa) are not possible because of topography and intervening landscape features. There is currently no inter-visibility between

the settlement edges and also no potential for intra visibility. In the context of the distances between other settlement in the locality these are considerably less than 1.07km. For example the gap between West Chiltington Common and West Chiltington village (to the north) is about 370m and the straight line distance between West Chiltington Common and Abingworth (to the east) is approximately 550m. The distance between Nutbourne and West Chiltington Common (to the north west) is about 200m at the narrowest point. None of these areas identified as Green Gaps in the emerging West Chiltington Neighbourhood Plan.

c) Is there any conflict between this policy and others in the Plan which allocate sites for development?

- 2.8 Yes. The proposed Strategic Policy HA18 (STO1) allocation on land to the north of Melton Drive and south of Northlands Lane, Storrington is currently in the Green Gap designated by Policy 9 of the made SSWNP. Notwithstanding this, Policy HA18 (STO1) demonstrates that housing development in this gap is considered acceptable as there would still be a significant distance of approx. 930m straight line (and 965m travelling distance) between the new development and the southern edge of West Chiltington Common.
- 2.9 In addition to the draft HA18 (STO1) allocation it is noted that Policy 2vi. of the SSWNP allocates Land to the north of Downsview Avenue. (which is adjacent to eastern edge of the STO1 allocation) is allocated for up to 60 dwellings. This neighbourhood plan allocation is also in the same Green Gap. A reserved matters application (DC/23/0290) for up to 62 dwellings on this site. was approved by Planning Committee (South) on 17 September 2024 subject to the completion of a S106 Agreement and Conditions. The principle of development in this Green Gap is therefore clearly acceptable.
- 2.10 It is noted that the policy text to Criterion 1a) of Strategic Policy 15: Settlement Coalescence states:
“a) There is no significant reduction in the openness and ‘break’ between settlements.”
- 2.11 Wates questions the use of the word ‘openness’ which is more of a Green Belt term, which implies that it is necessary to keep land open in order to provide a clear break between settlements which could be used to restrict development that doesn’t impact on the sense of separation between settlements. A better approach would be to reword criterion c) so that it states that:
“There would be no significant impact on the clear sense of leaving one settlement, travelling through an intermediate landscape, and arriving somewhere else.
- 2.12 This wording accords with the criteria devised by the Inspector for the Eastleigh Local Plan Inquiry in 1998 which sets out the methodology that is frequently used for assessing the effectiveness of gaps between settlements strategic gaps. This methodology and criteria were subsequently quoted in a report prepared by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (*Strategic Gaps and Green Wedge Policies in Structure Plans, Main Report, ODPM 2003*). These criteria have been applied to the assessment of gaps at numerous hearings and appeals and have always been accepted as being thorough and robust.
- 2.13 Should the Policies Map identify areas of the plan area that are at risk of unacceptable coalescence it should use the Eastleigh criteria.

Strategic Policy 17: Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity

Q5 Is Strategic Policy 17: Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity sound?

c) Are the requirements for off-site biodiversity net gain justified?

- 2.14 No. Criterion 6 of Strategic Policy 17 requires BNG net gain to be achieved through the delivery of appropriate on-site BNG, or; where this is not practicable, through off-site net gain within the District and especially areas, considered suitable/identified in the District's Green Infrastructure Strategy or the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, or as agreed by the Council.
- 2.15 Whilst the above sequential approach to BNG provision is desirable it is not consistent with Government advice on this matter. Off-site provision does not have to be in an area of strategic significance. Government advice confirms that Biodiversity gains may be delivered anywhere in England. Whilst there might be some flexibility in the words "*or as agreed by the Council*" it is uncertain as to whether this includes delivery anywhere in England. This uncertainty makes the policy inconsistent with national policy and unsound.
- 2.16 To remedy this situation, Strategic Policy 17 should include additional criterion stating that 'Where it is agreed on-site provision or delivery within the District of BNG is not possible, off-site provision outside of the Plan Area will be permitted'.