

**By email**

Our Ref: JB/11378  
Your Ref: 16/504798/FUL

31 October 2016

Dear Councillors

**PLANNING COMMITTEE: LAND AT FORGE LANE, BREDHURST**

I am writing in relation to the proposal for 6 detached dwellings at the above site, which is to be considered at Planning Committee this Thursday, 3 November. The recommendation for refusal appears to be primarily on the grounds of harm to the countryside and conflict with policy ENV28 in light of the Council's claimed five-year supply.

As the committee report recognises, the proposal has positive aspects and is acceptable in terms of amenity, heritage, design, highways and ecology. As is recognised in the positive feedback received from some local residents, the scheme has been designed to be in keeping with the village and to cause little impact to the street scene. Overall, we consider that there is very little actual harm to counter these significant benefits.

Whilst we appreciate the site is technically countryside, the reality is that it is in a sustainable location (as Officers agree – committee report para 8.19), being in the centre of the village and almost completely surrounded by development. The village pub, school, garage and village hall are all within 150 metres of the site.

The committee report also confirms that the site is inward-looking, self-contained and well screened from all public vantage points, describing it as “severed from open countryside by existing development”. Whilst we take the point that the “invisibility” argument could be repeated elsewhere, each case must be treated on its own merits and this is a hidden site at the heart of a village, not a green field in open countryside. We do not consider that approving this scheme would set a difficult precedent.

Indeed, part of the site falls within the village boundary. The developer could have chosen to put housing in this part of the site, fully in line with policy, but considers that this scheme which allows

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the re-use of the barn as a community facility, has greater overall community benefit and makes a more positive contribution to the village.

The NPPF presumption in favour of sustainable development still applies, regardless of the Council's housing land supply position. The Ham Lane appeal Inspector noted that he would have allowed that scheme for 82 houses even if a five year supply could be proven despite its conflict with ENV28, and indeed the planning committee allowed the scheme at Grafty Green Garden Centre recognising that the overall benefits of the scheme outweighed the harm.

The question, as summarised in paragraph 8.23 of the committee report, is whether the scheme is a sustainable one. Our view is that the scheme does successfully balance the actual impacts on rural character (taking into account its central location and the fact that it can hardly be seen from outside the site) with the fact that the development is otherwise acceptable. It clearly is sustainable development in the context of the NPPF.

We note the appeal decision referred to in the report. Whilst this relates to a neighbouring site, that site was further from village facilities and, importantly, that decision pre-dated the NPPF and its presumption in favour of sustainable development.

In case it is helpful, I enclose an appeal decision relating to another Maidstone countryside site from July 2016. You will see at paragraph 12, the Inspector disagrees that Maidstone can demonstrate a five year supply, and at paragraph 21 states that "the absence of harm in terms of character and appearance would accord with the environmental dimension" of sustainable development as defined in the NPPF. Even if you disagree with the first point, the second is highly relevant to the current application.

In conclusion, it seems to be accepted by many people that this is a well-designed, limited impact scheme which will benefit Bredhurst. We hope that you can lend your support to the proposals on Thursday.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Buckwell', written in a cursive style.

Jonathan Buckwell  
Director

C.c. Graham Parkinson, Maidstone Borough Council