HEADCORN MATTERS

HEADCORN PARISH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN: 2022-2038

ISSUED BY: HEADCORN PARISH COUNCIL
2024 – REGULATION 16 CONSULTATION

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1.1 This draft Neighbourhood Plan has been issued by Headcorn Parish Council and covers Headcorn Parish. HNP Policy Map 1 shows the boundary of Headcorn Parish, which is the designated neighbourhood plan area for Headcorn.

HNP Policy Map 1: Designated Neighbourhood Area for Headcorn Parish
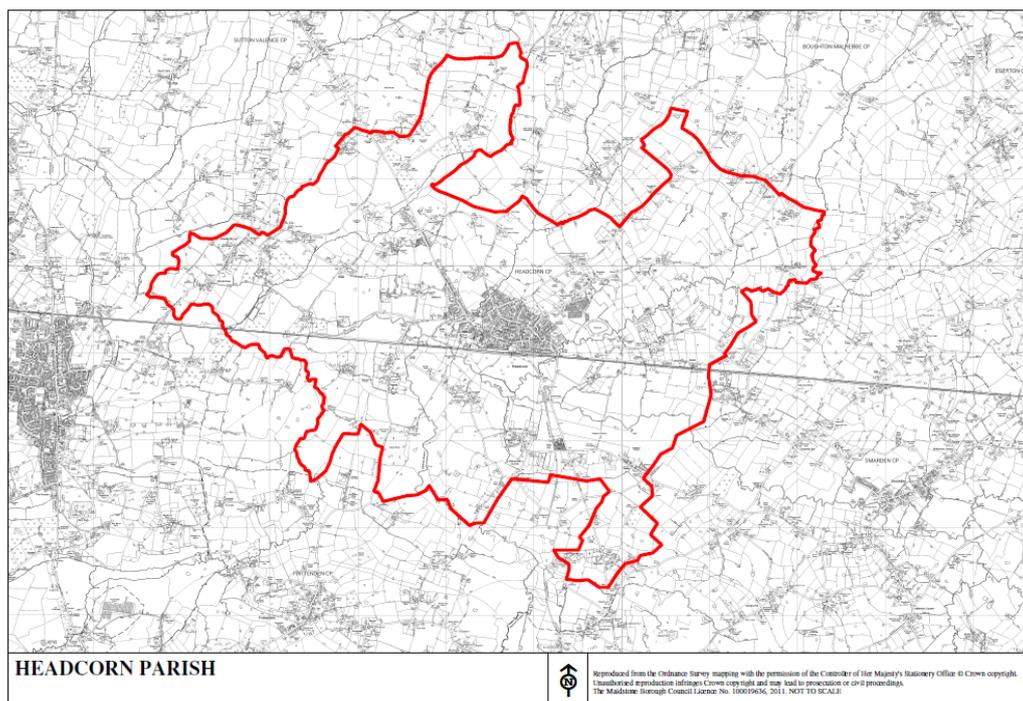
Source: Ordinance Survey

1.2 Headcorn is a thriving, rural parish in the Low Weald of Kent, which is centred on the village of Headcorn. It is located within Maidstone Borough, which is the relevant Local Planning Authority, but also borders the Boroughs of Ashford and Tunbridge Wells.

1.3 Headcorn village is designated as a Rural Service Centre in the Maidstone Borough Local Plan, which was adopted in 2017, as well as in the emerging Local Plan. Outside of the Maidstone town centre and urban area, Rural Service Centres are seen as the most sustainable settlements in Maidstone's settlement hierarchy.

1.4 Reflecting its high landscape value, the adopted and emerging Maidstone Borough Local Plans also designates the majority of Headcorn Parish, including the village of Headcorn itself, as part of the Low Weald Landscape of Local Value, see HNP Policy Map 2.

HNP Policy Map 2: Low Weald Landscape of Local Value
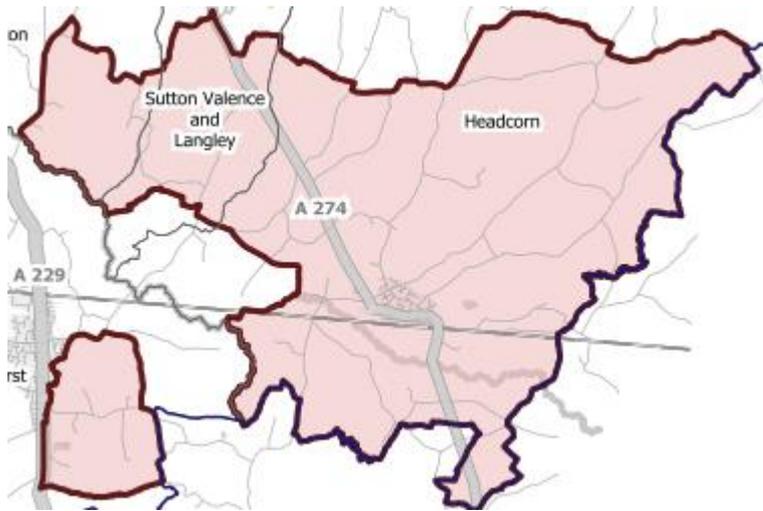
Source: Adopted Maidstone Local Plan (2017).

1.i   What is a Neighbourhood Plan?

1.5 A Neighbourhood Plan is a plan prepared by a Parish Council or neighbourhood forum for a designated neighbourhood area. They are designed to allow local people to shape how development within their communities takes place. There is no set format for what a Neighbourhood Plan should look like or what sort of policies it should include, and since they were introduced Neighbourhood Plan policies have taken many different forms. However, an important element of a Neighbourhood Plan is that it should shape and direct development that is outside the strategic policies contained in the Local Plan adopted by the Local Planning Authority for the area. As part of this Neighbourhood Plans can, but do not have to, also allocate sites for development.

1.6 Once adopted, a Neighbourhood Plan is used to determine planning applications in the area covered by the plan and becomes part of the Development Plan for the area, with the same legal status as the Local Plan produced by the Local Planning Authority. Although it is not compulsory to introduce a Neighbourhood Plan, it provides a potentially powerful tool for local communities to ensure they get the right type of development.

1.7 Neighbourhood Plans are therefore an important part of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and were introduced as part of the Localism Act (2011). In law a Neighbourhood Plan is described as a neighbourhood development plan in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004).

1.i.a   Process for adopting a Neighbourhood Plan

1.8 The process for developing and adopting a Neighbourhood Plan includes: a consultation and decision on the designation of the Neighbourhood Plan area; evidence gathering; a decision on the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment; two formal consultations (a Regulation 14 Consultation, followed by a Regulation 16 Consultation); an examination; and a referendum.

1.9 The reason for the examination is to determine whether or not a proposed Neighbourhood Plan meets the relevant legal criteria. For a Neighbourhood Plan to pass examination its policies have to be deliverable and need to meet certain basic conditions. In particular, a Neighbourhood Plan must:

- Have regard to national policies, including the NPPF itself, and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
- Ensure the Neighbourhood Plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development;
- Ensure the Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area of the authority; and
- Ensure the Neighbourhood Plan does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations.[1]

1.10 Assuming it passes its examination, a Neighbourhood Plan then also needs to pass a referendum of voters in the designated area. In other words, the proposed plan needs to receive over 50% of the votes cast.

1.11 Once a Neighbourhood Plan has successfully passed a referendum, then the Local Planning Authority (in this case Maidstone Borough Council) needs to decide formally whether the Plan should be Made. Once it is Made, a Neighbourhood Plan becomes part of the Development Plan for the area and is used to determine planning applications.

1.ii Why introduce a Neighbourhood Plan for Headcorn?

1.12 Neighbourhood Plans are designed to give communities a voice on what gets built in their area. The aim of the Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan is to ensure that development in both the village and the wider parish maximises the benefits to the existing community, as well as to businesses operating within Headcorn Parish. In particular the Plan aims to:

- influence the look and feel of new developments, to try and ensure that they integrate well with their surroundings;
- ensure that any new development is supported by the right type of infrastructure, which recognises the particular needs and constraints of those working and living in the Parish;
- ensure that there is an appropriate level of protection for the things that the local community values; and to
- influence where and what development takes place.

1.13 An additional benefit of introducing a Neighbourhood Plan is that, under current rules, areas that have an adopted Neighbourhood Plan are eligible for a higher share of the Community Infrastructure Levy (or CIL) associated with development in their area. This

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[1] See Appendix 2 for details of the Basic Conditions associated with Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan. The list of conditions set out in paragraph 1.9 are the key conditions that apply to all Neighbourhood Plans and are set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as applied to Neighbourhood Plans by section 38A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Additional conditions also apply where Neighbourhood Plans are used to grant planning permission, which is not the case for Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan. In addition to the basic conditions set out above, Neighbourhood Plans must also meet the prescribed conditions and comply with prescribed matters.

means that as well as potentially shaping the type of infrastructure associated with new development, the local community also gets more money to spend on the infrastructure it wants.

1.iii   What does Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan cover?

1.14 Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is designed to meet the needs and aspirations of local residents, as well as to support local businesses to ensure that Headcorn's economy will thrive. To ensure that it will achieve its aims, development of the Plan has been underpinned by a significant programme of evidence gathering, including most recently the Regulation 14 Consultation conducted between June 22nd and August 14th 2023, and a survey of residents conducted in early 2021.[2] This evidence gathering has been designed to identify the aspirations of local residents, as well as key constraints, in order to determine where policy intervention will be most effective. The resulting policies reflect this evidence.

1.15 Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan contains a Vision setting the overarching strategy for what the Plan is trying to achieve, namely that Headcorn will continue to thrive as a friendly, rural community, evolving gradually over time and supported by the right infrastructure. This Vision is supported by six policies in total. Four of the policies apply to all development, including housing, gypsy and traveller, commercial and community development. These are:

1. A Design policy for Headcorn, supported by Design Guidance, which sets the overall framework governing the look and feel of developments in Headcorn, and rules to ensure that new developments will be good neighbours;
2. A policy on siting, landscaping and protecting the natural and historic environment and setting, which sets the rules to determine how developments sit within the landscape;
3. A policy on connectivity and access, which is designed to ensure that developments are safe and well-connected, and recognise particular constraints in Headcorn; and
4. A policy on infrastructure provision, which sets the rules to ensure that specific types of infrastructure provision such as parking, broadband, water and sewerage, and promoting energy efficiency will meet the needs of local residents both now and in the future, as well as to set the priorities for infrastructure in Headcorn, reflecting local constraints.

1.16 In addition to these four overarching policies, there are two policies that cover specific types of development:

5. A policy on new dwellings, which covers both housing and gypsy and traveller pitches. This policy addresses issues such as where different types of development can be located and what the mix of provision should be in larger developments; and finally

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[2]   See Appendix 2 for details of both the history of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan and the evidence that has been gathered to support its making.

6. A policy on the economy, which covers the rules governing all business development, as well as specific rules designed to support the success of Headcorn High Street, and rules governing any future development of the Headcorn aerodrome and commercial energy generation.

1.17 The decision to apply the same rules on issues such as siting and connectivity to gypsy and traveller pitches as to other forms of dwellings reflects three factors: the desire to be fair, with the same rules applying to all parts of the community; the fact that caravans and other mobile or temporary dwellings make up a relatively high proportion of dwellings in Headcorn, meaning their impact on the built environment in Headcorn can be significant; and the fact that the same policy considerations apply, meaning the chosen approach avoids needless repetition.[3]

1.18 The period covered by Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan runs from 2022 to 2038. This period ensures it has the same end point as Maidstone's emerging Local Plan (covering 2021 to 2038), which was submitted for examination in March 2022.

1.iii.a What isn't covered by Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan

1.19 One of the themes that emerged in the 2021 Residents' Survey was a desire for the Neighbourhood Plan to allocate sites explicitly for development. Headcorn Parish Council considered this as a policy option and discussed the issue with Maidstone Borough Council in October 2021. Maidstone Borough Council pointed out that it was in the process of revising its Local Plan, and that as part of this process it would look at allocating additional sites for development in Headcorn that would meet any identified housing need for Headcorn. Maidstone Borough Council expressed concern that if Headcorn Parish Council were also to allocate sites through the Neighbourhood Plan process, then this could lead to potential conflicts between the two plans. In addition, the allocations for Headcorn within the adopted 2017 Maidstone Local Plan already address the identified housing need of 423 homes for the Parish, and combined with windfall development, mean that there is already planning consent for more than 500 homes in Headcorn, which significantly exceeds that identified need.

1.20 For this reason Headcorn Parish Council made a decision not to allocate sites as part of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan. Instead it will seek to influence development indirectly, by sharing its evidence on local preferences with Maidstone Borough Council. It will also use the policies within the Neighbourhood Plan to: shape the look and feel of individual developments; determine what infrastructure is needed to support them; ensure that the approach to connectivity and access recognise local priorities; and help influence where any windfall development might take place.

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[3] The 2021 Census showed that caravans and other mobile or temporary dwellings made up 3.0% of Headcorn's housing stock, compared to 0.4% for England as a whole.

1.iv   Next steps

1.21 Headcorn Parish Council was advised by Maidstone Borough Council on 10th May 2023 that a formal Strategic Environmental Assessment was not needed in the case of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan.[4]

1.22 Headcorn Parish Council is therefore issuing this draft Neighbourhood Plan as the basis of Headcorn's Regulation 16 Consultation, which is the next stage in the process. Headcorn Parish Council is keen to hear views from residents, local businesses and developers, as well as the Statutory Consultees, on both the overall shape of the plan and the specific policy proposals, to help ensure that the plan will meet the needs of both residents and local businesses.

1.23 Box 1.1 sets out the draft timetable for adoption of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan.

Box 1.1   Timeline for Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan: Next Steps

1. March/April 2024: Maidstone Borough Council to assess if Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan meets the basic conditions and add the draft to their website for comments (6 week period over April/May 2024).

2. June/July 2024: Examination

3. August/September 2024: Referendum

4. September/October 2024: Maidstone Borough Council decides whether Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan should be made

5. October/November 2024: Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is adopted for use in planning decisions

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1.v   Acknowledgements

1.24 Headcorn Parish Council would like to thank everyone who helped in the production of the Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan. In particular, we would like to thank all the members of the Headcorn Matters Team, both past and present, with particular thanks to Dave Andrews, Caroline Carmichael, Rebecca Driver, Chris Haynes, Hilary Hosford, Michael Jefferys, James Ker, Lyn Selby and Tim Thomas.

1.25 We would also like to thank all the volunteers who helped with the residents and business surveys, and all the parishioners and business people who responded to the surveys and consultations, attended open meetings or just provided comments and

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[4]   This advice is based on the emerging policies in Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, and on their discussions with the statutory consultees.

feedback. We would like to thank Jane Armstrong for her help publicising our consultations and surveys.

1.26 We would like to thank the officers and members of Maidstone Borough Council and Kent County Council, who helped inform the drafting of the Plan. We would also like to thank all the people and organisations, whose input helped inform work on Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, including Riki Therivel of Levett-Therivel; Brian Whitely of Planning Aid; Kevin Harris; Irene Seijo and the team at Design South East; and Sanderson Associates (Consulting Engineers) Ltd.

1.27 Finally we would like to thank Dr Rebecca Driver at Analytically Driven Ltd for her help drafting this Plan, as well as her 2014 Sustainability Analysis.

2.   SETTING THE SCENE – HEADCORN PARISH

2.1 Geographically, Headcorn is located in the south east of Maidstone Borough, on the borders with Ashford and Tunbridge Wells boroughs. The village of Headcorn is over 10km from all the major population centres in Kent, see HNP Policy Map 3. Therefore, in geographic terms, Headcorn is relatively far from all the major employment centres - almost 50% of workers in England travel at most 5km to work and almost 70% travel at most 10km to work, but Headcorn is 15.9km from Maidstone, the nearest population and employment centre.[5]

HNP Policy Map 3: Headcorn's position relative to local urban centres
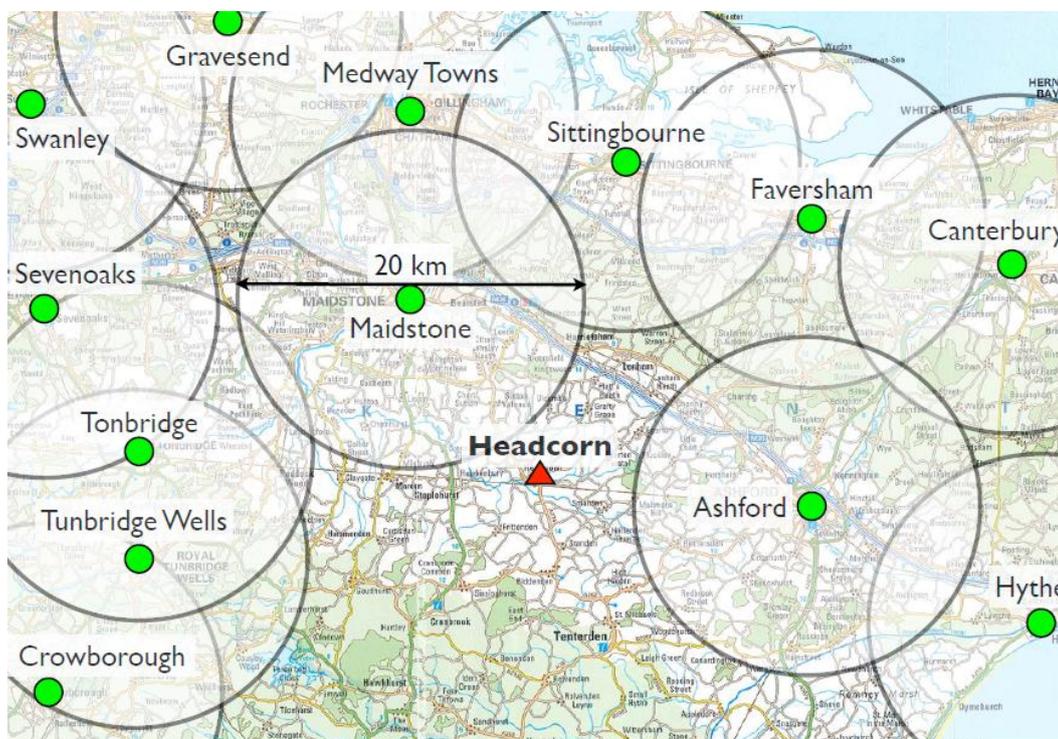
Note: Each of the employment and population centres surrounding Headcorn (defined as having a population of at least 10,000) is marked with a green dot and the surrounding rings mark the 10km radius that would be within a normal commuting range for the majority of workers. As it can be seen, Headcorn is relatively far away from all the key surrounding employment centres. Headcorn is a 15.9km drive from the closest employment centre, Maidstone. Calculations based on the 2021 Census results for all workers in England travelling to a fixed workplace show roughly 44% of commuters lived within 5km of their workplace and around 65% lived within 10km of their workplace. For Maidstone Borough as a whole, 27.3% and 58.9% of workers travelling to work lived within 5km and 10km of their workplace respectively. In the case of Headcorn Parish only 16.5% of workers travelling to work in 2021 lived within 5km of their workplace, and only 31.5% of workers lived within 10km of their workplace.

2.2 The emphasis in Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is on maximising local opportunities and supporting the needs of local people and businesses. This is in part informed by Headcorn's location, which means that commuting times, distances and costs are all significantly above the national average. For example, Headcorn is at least a 30-minute drive from the nearest population centre of at least 10,000 people, which is significantly

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[5]   The 2021 Census recorded that in total for England 43.7% of workers with a fixed workplace travel at most 5km to work, with 65.4% travelling at most 10km. Therefore, compared to the experiences of the vast majority of workers, 15.9km (the distance between Maidstone and Headcorn) would not be considered close to work.

higher than average commuting times in England.[6] Although Headcorn does benefits from a direct rail link to London, there is no direct rail link from Headcorn to Maidstone, which is the closest population centre. However, there is an irregular bus service between Maidstone and Tenterden that stops in Headcorn. Again though, compared to average commuting times in England of 24.5 minutes, travel times from Headcorn by public transport to any of the main employment centres are mostly significantly above average.[7] For example, journeys to London by train from Headcorn take between 55 minutes to reach London Bridge Station and roughly an hour and ten minutes to reach Charing Cross station. It also takes around 40 minutes to reach the centre of Maidstone by bus from Headcorn. This may explain why the 2021 Census showed that a higher proportion of commuters in Headcorn drove a car of van to work (77.5%) compared to Maidstone as a whole (72.7%).

2.3 Despite, or possibly because of, its relative distance from local centres, Headcorn benefits from a range of good services, including: a popular primary school; a doctor's surgery; three dentists; a Village Hall; a library; a variety of shops, restaurants, pubs and cafes; and several churches.

2.4 However, Headcorn lacks easy access to a secondary school. The closest government funded secondary school is Lenham School, which is 11.1km from the centre of Headcorn. The second closest, Cranbrook School, is not only 11.6 km from the centre of Headcorn, but also has an 8.5km catchment area meaning pupils from Headcorn do not qualify. To put this in context, this means pupils in Headcorn aged 11 to 18 need to travel longer distances than the majority of working adults. They also have to travel far further than is typical for the vast majority of pupils - for England as a whole, 90% of pupils travel at most 6.6 km to school, and even in rural areas 90% of pupils travel less than 9.4 km.[8]

2.i   Headcorn's landscape and setting

2.5 Headcorn is a rural parish covering 2125 hectares in the scenic Low Weald of Kent. The Low Weald is recognised as a National Character Area by Natural England. Its geology consists largely of Wealden Clay (see HNP Policy Map 4). There are also deposits of three safeguarded land-won minerals that are found in Headcorn Parish, including on land immediately surrounding Headcorn village. The rules governing the management and protection of these deposits are set out in the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan (KMWLP).[9]

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[6]   England does not have a definition of 'remote', but Headcorn would qualify as remote under the definition of remote used by the Scottish government and both the travel times and distances between Headcorn and major population centres are significantly above average commuting times and distances. See the discussion of the implications of this for sustainability in Driver (2014).

[7]   Manning and Petrongolo (2017), based on Labour Force Survey data for 1993-2007.

[8]   Burgess et al (2006).

[9]   See   https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/service-specific-policies/housing,-regeneration-and-planning-policies/planning-policies/minerals-and-waste-planning-policy/kent-minerals-and-waste-local-plan-kmwlp for details of the mineral safeguarding policies applying to Headcorn Parish. Reference to the need to abide by the relevant KMWLP policies has not been included within the policies of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, because mineral extraction policies are excluded development for Neighbourhood Plans, meaning there is a legislative requirement for Neighbourhood Plans to avoid policies covering mineral extraction and safeguarding. Nonetheless the relevant policies within KMWLP should inform decisions with respect to planning applications in Headcorn.

2.6 The Low Weald is a unique landscape area, characterized by small, pretty villages and a countryside consisting of numerous farms, with small fields and ancient hedgerows, in addition to small woodland, or copse areas. Headcorn is very much part of this rural landscape, with most of the roads within the village maintaining a sense of being country lanes and benefiting from the presence of ancient trees and hedgerows.

HNP Policy Map 4: Map of Geology of Kent
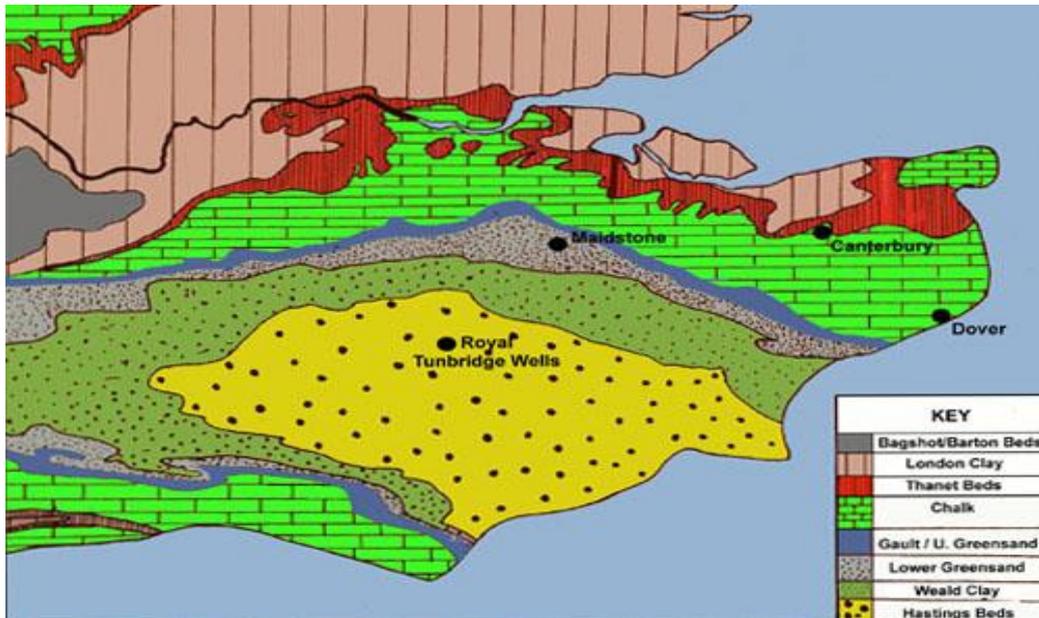
2.7 Agriculture, incorporating both farming and fishing, remains an important part of Headcorn's economy. In keeping with Kent's reputation as the garden of England, agricultural activity within the Parish is extremely varied.

2.8 The village of Headcorn itself is surrounded on three sides by streams and rivers, including the River Beult, which runs to the south and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Flood risk is the main reason why Headcorn village has developed in the direction it has and why it has retained a relatively compact shape. Overall, at the time of the 2011 Census, the built-up area of the village covered 79 hectares.

Figure 1: Examples of Headcorn's rural setting

Note: Clockwise from the top: view from Headcorn railway bridge; view of the fields close to the village; cattle rearing; sheep grazing; view of an oast house across the fields; an apple crop ready for picking; and preparing the fields for the year ahead.

2.ii   The history of Headcorn

2.9 Headcorn is believed to have originated in the days of the Kingdom of Kent as a den or clearing, to which pigs were driven from the northern parts of the County to feed on acorns and beech mast in the Wealden Forest. The earliest written records are references in charters of King Wihtred and King Offa, respectively, to Wick Farm, in 724; and Little Southernden, in 785.

2.10 The early development of Headcorn was linked to the church, rather than a feudal overlord. Although Headcorn does not appear in the Domesday Book of 1086, the Domesday Monachorum, the ecclesiastical survey made at about the same time, records the existence of a Church at Hedekaruna. Records show that Henry of Ospringe was appointed the first Rector of Headcorn in 1222. In 1239 the King gave the den of Headcorn, with the rectorial endowments, to the Maison Dieu at Ospringe. In 1516, following the dissolution of the monasteries, St John's College, Cambridge was given the Maison Dieu properties.

Figure 2: The Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul

2.11 Although there are few archaeological discoveries from Headcorn dating earlier than the medieval period, such discoveries are not unknown. Several prehistoric artefacts, in the form of stone or bronze axes and axe heads, and iron age coins, have been found in the parish. In addition, a mid to late bronze age vessel in a pit was discovered at Ulcombe Road in 2018 together with late iron age and Roman features, and a late iron age / Roman farmstead may have been found at Little New House Farm. Many of these discoveries, together with a wider review of the heritage and potential of Headcorn village, can be found in a historic town survey prepared by Kent County Council. All these sites, as well as others now lost, will have left an archaeological heritage that could be revealed either by research or during development. This archaeological heritage is also part of the wider heritage of the Neighbourhood Plan area.

2.ii.a The history of the built environment

2.12 Headcorn's long history means that the village benefits from a significant architectural heritage. In 2022 the Kent County Council Historic Environment Record listed 207 sites of architectural or historic interest in Headcorn Parish. Listed buildings include the Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul (Grade I), situated at the western end of the High Street; Headcorn Manor (II*); the Cloth Hall (II*); and Shakespeare House (II). In the survey of residents in 2013 to inform Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, views of St Peter and St Paul's church, together with the neighbouring Parsonage Meadow, were consistently identified by residents as buildings, places or views that it was important to protect. The centre of Headcorn village is a Conservation Area and has kept much of its old charm, even though most of the shops and businesses have changed hands and use over the years.

Figure 3: Examples of Headcorn's historic architecture

Note: Clockwise from top left: houses on Headcorn High Street; and Headcorn manor; view of Headcorn Parish Church, St Peter and St Paul, and Church Walk; and Church Walk.

2.13 In addition to heritage assets in Headcorn village itself, there are many other heritage assets in the Parish that are listed in the Historic Environment Record. These include at least five medieval moated sites, including the important site of Moatenden Priory. Moated sites are a site type of particular interest for the local community and worthy of conservation. These sites are characteristic of the Low Weald and many of the issues of setting and conservation identified in the Neighbourhood Plan apply to them. There are also approximately 70 historic farmsteads (identified as present on the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map 1897-1900) that are also key heritage assets, reflecting Headcorn's rural history.

2.14 The 2021 Census recorded 2029 dwellings in Headcorn Parish, an increase of 29.6% compared to 2011. There were 1849 households living in Headcorn Parish at the time of the 2021 Census, an increase of 26.7% compared to 2011. Of the occupied housing stock

in Headcorn in 2021, the largest segment (38.7%) is made up of detached dwellings. Semi-detached dwellings accounted for 31.5% of the housing stock and terraced housing 15.5%. Flats and maisonettes accounted for a further 9.4% of the occupied housing stock. Caravans or other mobile or temporary structures accounted for 3.0% of the housing stock in Headcorn Parish in 2021, compared to 1.2% in Maidstone and 0.4% in England as a whole.

2.15 Data for the split between housing in the village compared the countryside in the Parish of Headcorn are not yet available for the 2021 Census. However, at the time of the 2011 Census just over 75% of Headcorn's household spaces were in the village of Headcorn itself, which was home to 1119 households. The built up area of Headcorn village was 79 hectares, meaning that there are 15.3 household spaces per hectare within the village.

2.16 On average the housing stock in Headcorn is larger than the housing stock in the rest of Maidstone Borough. In 2021 70.7% of households in Headcorn were living in dwellings with at least three bedrooms, compared to 63.7% for Maidstone as a whole. Only 5.8% of households in Headcorn were living in a property with at most one bedroom, compared to 9.7% for Maidstone Borough as a whole.

2.17 At the time of the 2021 Census, the Parish of Headcorn was home to 4,277 people, or 2.4% of the total population of Maidstone Borough. In total there were 1,849 households living in Headcorn, giving an average of 2.31 people per household.

2.18 Headcorn's population is older on average than the population of Maidstone as a whole, with 24.5% of the population in 2021 aged 65 or over (compared to 19.1% for Maidstone as a whole) and only 22.1% aged 19 or under (compared to 23.1% for Maidstone as a whole).[10] This means that Headcorn can expect to see fewer emerging households than the Maidstone average, as well as accounting for a higher proportion of the properties that become vacant due to the death of the homeowner. Combined this means that proportionally over the plan period Headcorn's contribution to Maidstone's assessed housing need will be significantly lower than other parts of the Borough.

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[10]   In 2011, 28.4% of households in Headcorn were made up of individuals who are all aged 65 or over, compared to 20.9% for Maidstone as a whole. These data are not yet available for the 2021 Census.

HNP Policy Map 5: Evolution of Headcorn's housing stock before 2015

Note: Image taken from a presentation by the Headcorn Matters Team to Headcorn residents in June 2014. Source: Kevin Harris

2.19 As HNP Policy Map 5 shows, Headcorn's housing stock has largely evolved slowly over time, with occasional bursts in response to economic stimulus, such as the introduction of the railway in 1842 and the electrification of the rail links to London in the 1960s. The vast majority of this housing sits within a ten minute walk of the centre of Headcorn High Street. Since 2015 there has been another significant burst of housebuilding in Headcorn, reflecting the change in policy associated with the adoption of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan in October 2017, which included delivery of 423 new houses on six allocated sites. In practice, over 500 new houses have been given planning permission in Headcorn since 2015, an increase in the size of the village of over 40%.

3. VISION FOR HEADCORN'S NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

3.1 Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is underpinned by a positive Vision for Headcorn's future, supported by five high-level policy objectives, which should be used to guide development in the Parish. The Vision and the associated policy objectives flow from the evidence that has been gathered to support Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan. Importantly, the Vision for Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is supported by the vast majority of residents in Headcorn.[11]

Vision for Headcorn

Our vision is for Headcorn to continue to thrive as a friendly, rural community with a strong local economy. We believe that Headcorn should evolve gradually over time in a way that, through appropriate choices of the scale and design of individual developments, preserves and enhances the distinctive character, landscape and setting of the village, while meeting the needs of local residents and businesses. This will be achieved by:

1. Maintaining a sense of being a country village, with a strong local community.

2. Supporting a vibrant local economy, based around the High Street, agriculture, leisure, tourism and small business enterprise.

3. Ensuring the village is supported by a robust infrastructure, designed to meet the needs of local residents and businesses.

4. Ensuring that there is a robust policy framework governing development in the countryside around Headcorn that will support both local needs and the benefits residents receive from being surrounded by beautiful countryside.

5. Ensuring that development in the Parish is managed in a way that is sustainable; promotes small scale development; is well designed; is capable of meeting the needs of local residents in different age groups and family units; and is in keeping with its setting.

3.i Creating a Vision for Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan

3.2 Identifying a Vision is an important part of any Neighbourhood Plan, as it is used to drive the policies within the Neighbourhood Plan, both individually and collectively. The key to getting this right is good evidence, taking a rigorous approach to identify what needs preserving and what big changes are needed. Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan has been informed by a large evidence base including analysis of sustainability and infrastructure issues, surveys of residents in 2013, 2015 and 2021, surveys of businesses, estate agents,

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[11] In the 2021 Residents' Survey, 83% fully supported the Vision, with another 15% ticking maybe. In total, only 3% of those surveyed did not support this as a Vision for Headcorn.

and traffic movements, as well as a survey of the parents, teachers, pupils and governors at Headcorn Primary School. Drawing these together, there are a number of key findings.

3.3 The first is a very positive one - Headcorn Parish is a great place to live. When residents were asked to rate living in Headcorn on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 5 was very good) 74% of residents rated Headcorn as either good or very good as a place to live in the 2021 Residents' Survey. While this represents a deterioration compared to the 2013 Residents' Survey, where over 85% of residents rated Headcorn as either good or very good, it still represents a positive view of Headcorn. The two things that residents value most about life in Headcorn are the fact that it is surrounded by beautiful countryside and the High Street.[12]

Figure 4: Headcorn as a community

Note: The May Fair celebrations at Days Green and the Remembrance Day parade in Headcorn, 2014.

3.4 Headcorn Parish is also a good place to do business. Indeed, one of the reasons that Headcorn is successful as a village is that it also enjoys a thriving business community. When Headcorn Parish Council undertook a survey of the local business community in 2013, there were 143 businesses in Headcorn Parish and around one in three residents of working age also worked in the Parish.[13] When asked about how Headcorn compares as a place to do business, the business community was very positive, with the majority of business owners and managers rating Headcorn as either good or very good as a place to do business.[14]

3.5 It is this positive view of the Parish that was one of the main motivating factors behind the decision by Headcorn Parish Council to introduce a Neighbourhood Plan. It is important that development in Headcorn maintains and enhances the benefits of Headcorn as a place

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[12] These were both picked by over 75% of residents in the 2013 Residents' Survey.

[13] The evidence on one in three people working in the Parish is based on the 2013 Residents' Survey for Headcorn Parish. It is not possible to get a breakdown of the number of residents working in Headcorn Parish from the Census and working patterns were distorted in 2021 due to COVID. However, in the 2011 Census 10.9% of those in work in Headcorn Parish worked mainly at or from home and 16.3% of commuters in the Maidstone 017 Middle Layer Super Output Area (which include Headcorn Parish) lived and worked in the same area. Assuming the proportion of commuters living and working in Headcorn Parish is the same as the proportion in the Maidstone 017 Middle Layer Super Output Area as a whole, this would mean that 27.2% of Headcorn residents in employment worked in the Parish.

[14] Based on the 2013 Survey of Businesses in the Parish. In total 53% of businesses rated Headcorn as either good or very good and 33% rated Headcorn as average, with only 14% of businesses rating Headcorn as either bad or very bad.

to live and do business and that it will meet the needs of the whole community going forward. To do this, one of the key aims of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is to recognize the challenges that expansion will bring and to plan strategically how to address these. So, looking to the future, what are the key messages that come out of Headcorn's evidence?

3.6 Based on the 2013 Residents' Survey, twenty years from now, residents would most like Headcorn to be described as: friendly, rural, peaceful, traditional and prosperous (in that order). When asked about the opportunities associated with expansion, the need for housing, even affordable housing, did not feature. Out of 22 options, the top five from the perspective of residents were: ensure good medical facilities; protection for the countryside; boost local jobs and businesses; ensure good public transport links; and create a strong village identity. However, none of these options was picked by more than 45% of residents.

3.7 In contrast, there was a much greater consensus about the issues that expansion could cause. Of the 22 options they were given, 67% picked "lose the sense of being a village". The next four biggest issues (in order of preference), each picked by over 30% of residents, were: development more suitable for a town than a village; overstretched sewerage system; increase in crime; and reduction in the amount of green space.

3.8 This worry about losing the sense of being a village is also reflected in another key finding to emerge from all the survey evidence, including the most recent survey in 2021, which is the very strong preference for individual housing developments to be small scale. When asked how big individual housing developments should be, in the 2021 survey almost 80% of residents picked at most a maximum of 25 houses. In 2013 almost 90% of residents picked at most a maximum of 30 houses.[15] It is also supported by the views of local estate agents, who were surveyed as part of the evidence gathering undertaken in 2013 and who all felt that it became harder to sell properties in Headcorn in housing developments of more than 30 houses. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this concern was borne out in practice, as it took a long time for developers to sell the properties in the larger housing developments that were built in the village after 2015. This preference for smaller developments is in keeping with Headcorn's historic experience, as the largest development in Headcorn, dating from the 1970s, was around 80 houses. It is much harder to integrate a large housing estate into the fabric of the village.

3.9 Combining this evidence, the vision for Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan has at its heart the importance of maintaining a friendly, rural community, which will thrive because the approach to development will ensure that it can be easily absorbed within the local community, will enhance the character of the village and surrounding countryside and will help support the local economy.

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[15]   Note the scale for individual developments suggested in the two surveys differed. Reflecting development patterns at the time of the survey, in 2013 residents were given a choice of: at most 10 houses; 20 houses; 30 houses; 40 houses; 50 houses; and any size. In contrast, given recent large developments had changed how the village had evolved, in the 2021 Residents' Survey, residents were given the choice developments of: at most 10 houses; 25 houses; 75 houses; 100 houses; 150 houses; 200 houses; or any size. Despite these differences in the choices offered, the results were almost identical in terms of a very strong preference for small scale developments.

3.i.a   Creating policy objectives to support the Vision

3.10 The Vision for Headcorn is underpinned by five high-level Policy Objectives, which provide a framework to inform the suite of policies in the Neighbourhood Plan. Each of the Policy Objectives covers a key aspect of development.

3.11 The first Objective is probably the most important, which is that Headcorn wants to retain the sense of being a country village and to develop in a way that supports community engagement. In practice, when residents were asked what it meant to be a village, key aspects were that: the village should retain a compact shape; the Primary School should remain at the heart of the village and have the sufficient capacity to accept children from the Parish; individual developments should be small scale; roads should feel like narrow country lanes rather than wide city streets; there should be a single, vibrant retail centre (the High Street), with no shops in new developments; and that there should be lots of green spaces, big and small.

3.12 The second Objective reflects the importance of the local economy for Headcorn, highlighted by the fact that roughly one in three residents in employment are based in Headcorn for work. Headcorn enjoys high levels of business ownership, with 22.0% of economically active residents in the parish being self-employed, compared to 14.0% for England as a whole. The choice of the sectors to place at the heart of economic development reflects the preferences of businesses, as well as the value that residents place on the High Street – 75% of residents picked the High Street as something they valued most about living in Headcorn, a score beaten only by being surrounded by beautiful countryside.

3.13 The third Objective reflects the reality that infrastructure plays an important role in sustainable development. Although some parts of Headcorn's infrastructure are strong, both businesses and residents feel that certain key aspects of Headcorn's infrastructure are not currently fit for purpose and that development could lead to further deterioration. This means that the policy framework within Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan needs to address this issue proactively.

3.14 The fourth Objective reflects the importance of the countryside for the enjoyment that residents receive from living in Headcorn and the need to find a balance between that enjoyment and the needs of residents and businesses operating in the Parish, including the 23% of households living in the countryside surrounding the village.

Figure 5: A typical countryside scene in Headcorn Parish

Note: Preparing the fields for the year ahead against a backdrop of ancient hedgerows and a typical cluster of dwellings and outbuildings. Agriculture is an important part of Headcorn's economy.

3.15 The final Objective covers the overarching approach to all development in Headcorn (including housing and commercial development). Aspects that are important here are that: it is small scale – almost 80% of residents want individual developments to be at most 25 houses; well designed; in keeping with its setting; is sustainable; and will meet the needs of existing residents and businesses.

4. DESIGN POLICY FOR HEADCORN

4.1 As set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. Therefore, all Plans should set out a clear design vision and expectations, so that applicants have as much certainty as possible about what is likely to be acceptable. Neighbourhood planning groups can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development.

4.2 Headcorn's Design Policy is set out below. It should be read alongside the Headcorn Design Guidance, which aims to highlight specific aspects of design that are unique or important to Headcorn and provide policy justification. Individual elements of Headcorn's design policy framework are reinforced in subsequent policies.

4.3 The aims of the design policies in Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan are:

- to create well-designed buildings, which will stand the test of time and be desirable both now and in the future;
- to preserve and enhance Headcorn's distinctive heritage and character; and
- to create development that is in keeping with Headcorn's position as a rural village; contributing to a high-quality built environment; providing sensitive landscaping; and reflecting its setting within the Parish.

4.4 As Figure 6 illustrates, development can have a very positive impact on the built and man-made environment, enhancing its setting while still taking cues from the local vernacular. The aim of this Design Policy, together with the accompanying Design Guidance, as well as Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan as a whole, is to ensure that new development will have a similarly positive impact throughout the Parish.

Figure 6: Foremans - the changing face of Headcorn

Note: Foremans, seen from the High Street in the 1980s and now

HNP Policy 1: Design policy for Headcorn

This policy covers all development in Headcorn, including housing, gypsy and traveller, commercial and community development and should be read in conjunction with the Headcorn Design Guidance. New development in Headcorn Parish, in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan, will be permitted where it:

A) Is designed to a high quality, which responds to the heritage and distinctive character of Headcorn and its rural environment and reflects the local context by way of:

- design;
- use of local building materials;
- scale, spacing, layout and orientation, and the sensitive choice of the way in which new buildings and structures relate to the road;
- the creation of varied and visually interesting schemes;
- height (which is typically no more than two and a half storeys); and
- the retention, and where feasible reinforcement, of the traditional boundary treatment of the area.

B) Is sympathetic to the setting of any heritage asset, and adheres to Conservation Area guidance where appropriate.

C) Safeguards the privacy and daylight of adjoining residents and will not result in unacceptable levels of light, noise, air, ground or water pollution.

D) Promotes high quality exterior spaces, appropriate to its rural setting.

E) Ensures that any new roads visually resemble traditional village streets and country lanes in keeping with the existing street scape, for example through:

- the appropriate choice of scale, width, layout and materials;
- ensuring that any street furniture, signage or electric vehicle charging facilities will be in keeping with Headcorn's rural location and will avoid creating a cluttered street scape; and
- the use and retention of mature native trees and hedgerows lining the road.

F) Deals with practicalities effectively and incorporates them into the scheme in a way that minimises their visual impact and avoids creating a cluttered streetscape. For example, by:

- ensuring that the spacing and screening of parking is designed to minimise its visual impact and to avoid creating the feel of an urban environment;
- providing adequate storage, such as refuse and recycling storage; and
- ensuring that the way that buildings are connected to utilities is effective, minimises its visual impact and supports future proofing.

5. HEADCORN DESIGN GUIDANCE

5.1 Achieving high quality places and buildings is a fundamental aim of any plan-making process, and the key to delivering successful outcomes is good design. Design also plays an important role in ensuring that development can support and enhance a sense of place, by taking cues from the surrounding area and building on what has been successful.

5.2 This Design Guidance for Headcorn aims to work with the policies within Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, by providing guidance on the type of features that help define Headcorn's sense of place. It also provides examples that help illustrate where development in Headcorn has been either successful or less successful, in order to promote the types of positive design choices that will underpin successful development in the future.

5.3 While the focus of design decisions will vary, depending on what is being proposed, the Design Guidance for Headcorn has been created to inform all development in Headcorn, including housing, gypsy and traveller, commercial and community development. The guidance covers different aspects of design, including the design of the scheme as a whole, the structures that sit within it, the type of street scape that it will produce, and the practical considerations that should be addressed in order to produce successful schemes. It should be read in conjunction with the Headcorn Design Policy HNP1 and is organised to reflect the structure of that policy.

5.i Local context – characteristics of developments in Headcorn

5.4 Headcorn is a historic village situated in the Low Weald of Kent and the wealth of historic buildings of different ages in the centre of the village reflects Headcorn's growth over the centuries. This history helps define Headcorn's unique character with its core of historic buildings, many listed, in the conservation area in the centre of the village (see HNP Policy Map 10) and around the Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul. There is widespread support for retaining the 'sense of a village' and maintaining the traditional character of the village in any new developments.

5.5 The rich history of the built environment in Headcorn village is also reflected in the wider countryside, with many examples of old farmhouses, some dating back to the 15th century, throughout the Parish. In addition to the traditional farmhouses, there are a number of workers' cottages throughout the Parish, many dating to the Victorian period. More recently building in the countryside has tended to focus on barn and oast house conversions, and there are a number of successful examples of these within the Parish. Buildings in the countryside, including farm buildings, tend to be clustered in small groups and this is reinforced by the existence of several small hamlets within the Parish, including Bletchenden and Hawkenbury.

5.6 The character of Headcorn Parish owes much to the variety of architectural forms and styles developed over hundreds of years. There are examples of timber framed hall houses from the 14th century, to tile hung and brick built properties with Georgian style windows

from the 18th century onwards. Bricks and tiles made from the local clay are much in evidence. Key features of Headcorn's style include:

- A varied roof scape, with a distinct local feel, created by the use of: steeply pitched roofs; hipped and half hipped roofs; different roof heights and building orientations within developments; and the extensive use of Kent peg tiles.
- Most buildings of two storeys, albeit with varying ridge heights, but the use of dormer windows in some properties to create 2.5 storeys;
- A mix of building styles, including: oak framed buildings; brick or tile hung elevations (some use of contrasting grey bricks for decoration) and mathematical tiles in different designs; weather boarding in white paint or black stain; Bethersden marble facades with brick detailing; and many buildings with brick chimney stacks.
- Well-proportioned windows, including examples of: Georgian sash windows; Victorian sash windows; bow windows; and cottage style casement windows.
- Roads, even in the village, which feel like country lanes; and small lanes and pedestrian footpaths connecting up different parts of the village. There is no clear pattern for how buildings relate to the road and there are successful examples of both houses that are set back from the road and houses that sit directly on the road, even within the context of the main road through Headcorn (the A274). Many of the successful examples of houses being set back involve the use of native hedges or other distinctive boundaries treatments, such as traditional picket fencing or low brick walls, combined with the creation of cottage gardens, which help preserve the rural feel.

5.7 This diversity of building styles and use of materials (many derived from the local area) contributes greatly to the character of Headcorn. It is important that this diversity and use of local materials is retained when new development is planned. Headcorn residents strongly support the use of different sizes and styles of property to ensure this diversity, as well as to aid integration into the village.

5.8 Future building should respect the distinctive height, scale, spacing, layout, orientation and materials of the area. Development should also be sensitive to location within the village. For instance, the High Street is the densest part of the village with terraces or closely packed housing. However, even on the High Street there are several substantial properties with large gardens.

5.9 Innovative design should reflect design cues from its context within the Parish. In recent years there have been a couple of developments in the village which have taken account of Headcorn's character, using sensitive and appropriate building materials and styles and as a result have been more successful visually than many other new builds. These include the development of the former Foremans site in the heart of the village, which maintained the density appropriate to the centre of the village and took cues from its former agricultural use; and the Chantry scheme off Grigg Lane, which uses steeply pitched roofs, different heights of houses, styles and orientation, as well as having good parking management and limited use of hard landscaping to create a visually successful development.

Figure 7: Examples of developments that capture the village feel

Note: Clockwise from the top left: Church walk is part of the old part of the village, with houses of different shapes, styles and sizes creating a varied and traditional street scape; Tallow Court is a successful modern development, which benefits from good landscaping and a variety of designs; Foremans Walk in the heart of the village is a good example of the use of sympathetic design to help create a new development that complements the High Street following the replacement of the old grain silos; and The Chantry development picks up visual cues from traditional village developments such as Church Walk and uses landscaping and the positioning of the buildings to visually soften the development.

5.i.a Design

5.10 There are many different aspects to design that collectively and individually help contribute to a sense of place: the types of materials that are used; the scale, spacing, layout and orientation of buildings; the uniformity or variety of buildings; the height of buildings; and choices around the public realm. Each of these aspects is dealt with below. However, equally important to a sense of place are the elements of design that are linked to the shape and feel of the buildings themselves.

5.11 There is significant variety in the historic buildings that make up the core of Headcorn village, as well as the surrounding countryside. However, there are also certain elements to building design that are common to buildings in Headcorn from different periods. It is these commonalities that help provide Headcorn's sense of place, and it is important that new developments look to incorporate them, in order to help ensure that new developments fit well within the landscape.

Figure 8: Examples of the different treatment of upper and lower storeys

Note: Clockwise from the top left: a jetty or overhang visible at Chequers on the High Street; a jetty or overhang visible at the George and Dragon on the High Street; use of white weather boarding on the upper storey on the Smarden Road; use of hanging tiles on the upper storey of a house on Church Walk; an example of a bay window with a continuous roof over the door at a house on Ulcombe Road; and bay windows on the shops on the High Street.

5.12 One typical element seen in the design of buildings from different periods in Headcorn is differences in the external treatment of the ground floor compared to the upper storey. The form that these differences take varies, meaning it is the use of a different approach to the upper and lower storeys that is the key design element, rather than a specific treatment. Examples of the type of differences between upper and lower storeys typically found in Headcorn are:

- a jetty or overhanging upper storey. This treatment is typically found in some of the oldest buildings in the Parish. However, there are also more recent buildings, such as the George and Dragon pub on Headcorn High Street, that replicate this use of overhang;
- the use of bay windows on the ground floor, sometimes with the use of a continuous roof over the bay and door. Although, it is less common, this type of treatment is found, for example, in some of the old commercial properties on the High Street; and
- the use of different cladding for the upper and lower storeys, typically involving bricks on the lower storey and either timber cladding, or decorative tiles on the upper storey.

5.13 Another important design feature is one of scale. Although Headcorn's Conservation Area, for example, benefits from several substantial properties, particularly those dating from the medieval period, no individual property dominates the space or looms over its neighbours. This is achieved in part by the fact that buildings throughout Headcorn tend to be wider than they are taller and are at most two and a half storeys high. This means that while individual buildings may be substantial and give the impression of solidity, they also succeed in being relatively modest at the same time – essentially they are large farmhouse in scale, rather than stately home. This means that scale, particularly in relation to surrounding buildings, and ensuring that new additions do not overwhelm existing structures, should be an important element of any new development. Similarly the proportions of buildings, which are wider than they are high, as well as the associated height limits of no more than two and a half storeys are important contributors to Headcorn's sense of place.

Figure 9: A good example from Headcorn High Street

Note: Although substantial, Chequers (on the left hand side of the picture) does not dominate its neighbours on the High Street. Its proportions help achieve this, including the fact that the body of the building is much wider than it is tall. In addition, the very substantial roof structure is typical of buildings in Headcorn from different periods.

5.14 Another feature that is very much in evidence in historic buildings in Headcorn, and contributes to its sense of place, is the roof structures and particularly the fact that the roofs are often both steeply pitched and quite substantial in relation to the rest of the building. They also typically involve Kent pegged tiles. However, the choice of roof design itself is very varied, embracing hipped roofs, gable ends, dormers, crosswings and cat slide roofs, amongst others. This means that in order for developments to be in keeping with Headcorn's sense of place, they should look to priorities size, roofing material and variety, rather than a specific shape.

5.i.b Use of local building materials

5.15 Headcorn has a rich built environment that benefits from the use local materials and styles. In many cases building materials are used in combination, in order to create visual interest, for example, through the use of decorative patterns, or the different treatment of the upper and lower storeys.

5.16 Many of the oldest buildings in the Parish are timber framed, with important examples of this using both natural and black stained timbers. As these largely predate the Tudor period, the use of timber framing is relatively simple, and lacks the close studding and decorative framing that became popular elsewhere in the 16th and early 17th centuries.

5.17 Red brick made from local clay is another popular building material very much in evidence in historic buildings in Headcorn. These are typically laid using a Flemish bond. As well as the use of plain brick, there are also numerous examples of the use of the burnt grey ends of bricks, in combination with red bricks, to create patterns. There are also examples where bricks have been laid in herringbone patterns as an infill for timber framing. However, even in cases where simple red bricks have been used, these are rarely entirely uniform, creating a textured effect. While there are examples where the external brickwork has been painted, this is less common.

5.18 As well as bricks, there are also several examples of buildings that are built entirely, or partly of the local stone, which is Bethersden marble.

5.19 Red tiles, again made from local clay, are a popular choice of cladding material for the front of building and these can often be highly decorative, or combined in a way to create texture and patterns. Another popular choice of cladding material for buildings is timber. In domestic architecture this is often painted white.

5.20 Similar styles and use of materials are in evidence in the countryside surrounding Headcorn village, as well as in the village itself. This includes examples of historic agricultural buildings. For example, the local oast houses are typically brick built, and there are also numerous historic examples of brick built barns and stables, including many involving detailed patterns. There are also a large number of timber clad barns that are clad in either natural or black stained timber.

Figure 10: Examples of the type of local building materials typically used in walls in Headcorn

5.21 The variety of materials in evidence in and on the walls of historic buildings in Headcorn means there is no one dominant material that needs to be used, in order to help retain the sense of place. However, there are some rules that can be followed, such as the use of red brick, ideally from local clay, and the way in which materials are used to create visual interest and a textured finish. The sense of place will be helped by other design choices, such as the way in which the historic buildings often clearly differentiate between storeys, as well as the choice of roofing material, which is predominantly Kent peg tile.

5.22 Although there are some examples of the use of slate in newer buildings, the vast majority of buildings throughout both the village and Headcorn Parish use Kent peg tiles (often handmade) as their roofing material. This is true both of domestic and agricultural buildings. The tiles in evidence on historic buildings are typically a darker shade and are rarely entirely uniform, and the result is that roof structures typically have a slightly speckled effect.

Figure 11: Kent peg tiles are the dominant local roofing material

5.23 The continued use of Kent peg tiles as the dominant roofing material will be important for ensuring that Headcorn retains its sense of place, and ways should be found to recreate the slightly speckled effect on older buildings to ensure that newer additions feel as if they were meant to be there.

5.24 Downpipes and guttering on historic buildings are typically in black. Again this should be replicated, where these features will be visible.

5.i.c Scale, spacing, layout and orientation

5.25 Headcorn is a village that is made up of small scale developments, and has evolved gradually over time. Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan aims to support and promote a continuation of this gradual evolution, based around small scale developments.

5.26 In addition to the fact that most developments in Headcorn are small scale, key features of the layout of developments in the village include:

- a significant amount of green space, either of a private or public nature;
- developments that rarely encompass straight lines – even where buildings are close together, which can be observed in parts of the village centre, they are often at slightly different angles and orientations;
- roads and pathways are rarely straight;
- the use of pedestrian only routes;
- a range of different boundary treatments; and
- a mix of buildings that are different sizes and scales and could rarely be described as box-like.

5.27 All these features can be observed in HNP Policy Map 6, which covers an aerial view of the area between Moat Road and Church Walk. This is one of the older parts of the village, and is made up of buildings largely dating from between the Medieval and Victorian periods. It includes a range of different types of properties, including: terraced housing on Church Walk and Gooseneck Lane; semi-detached properties on Moat Road; a range of detached properties throughout; and several commercial properties. The boundary treatments vary, ranging from hedges and picket fences enclosing front gardens, to properties that open directly, or almost directly, onto the public highway.

HNP Policy Map 6: Land between Moat Road and Church Walk – historic Headcorn

Source: Google Earth. April 2020 © 2021 Maxar Technologies.

5.28 It is this type of varied built environment that Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is trying to promote and there are clear examples within the village of how this can be achieved successfully in a way that helps reinforce Headcorn's sense of place. One example of this is the Chantry development off Grigg Lane, which dates to around 2006. An aerial view of the Chantry development is shown in HNP Policy Map 7.

5.29 Visual examination of the Chantry development demonstrates why it is successful:

- The buildings have a range of different orientations and styles and cater for a range of different family groups and sizes;
- It includes a range of different types of property, from terraced housing to detached and semi-detached properties;
- The shape of the properties is varied, and very few could be described as box-like;
- The roof scape, which is varied and in Kent peg tiles clearly reflects the roof scape in older parts of the village;
- There are two areas of significant green space around local ponds, which are visually pleasing and benefit local wildlife, as well as small patches of greenery dotted around the front and sides of some of the properties, that help promote a green feel to the development;
- The road is curvy, rather than straight;
- Parking options are tucked out of sight, shielded by twists in the road the changing direction of individual properties; and

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- The scheme includes an additional pedestrian access point through to Oak Lane

HNP Policy Map 7: The Chantry – a good example of scheme layout

Source: Google Earth. April 2020 © 2021 Maxar Technologies.

5.30 Further along Grigg Lane is another new development, the Hardwicks, which was built around 2013. The Hardwicks is an example of the type of development that Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is seeking to avoid. The reasons for this can be seen from an examination of an aerial view of the scheme, which is shown in HNP Policy Map 8. In particular:

- The development is made up of straight lines, both in terms of the road itself, and how the buildings relate to both the road and to each other;
- The buildings are fairly boxy in appearance, with limited visual interest created through the use of varied shapes or orientations;
- There is very limited green space, particularly in the public parts of the development;
- The roof scape is predominantly slate, which is contrary to Headcorn's sense of place;
- No attempt has been made to hide or shield parking, undermining how the properties relate to the road; and
- There is very high ratio of paved area in the scheme, which means it completely lacks any sense of being part of a rural landscape.

HNP Policy Map 8: The Hardwicks – a bad example of scheme layout

Source: Google Earth. April 2020 © 2021 Maxar Technologies.

5.31 Looking beyond the village itself, development in the countryside surrounding Headcorn village is characterised by small clusters of agricultural and domestic buildings, with significant gaps between individual developments, which allows views over the surrounding countryside. An example of this development pattern can be seen in HNP Policy Map 9, which shows the countryside north of Headcorn village and is typical of rural development in Headcorn. What this shows is that while the majority of the scattered rural developments are very green in nature, there are some developments that are made up almost entirely of hard standing, which is contrary to the rural nature of Headcorn Parish and should be avoided.

5.32 Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is seeking to ensure that where development takes place in the countryside surrounding Headcorn Parish, it will aim to replicate existing development patterns, involving small scale developments involving clusters of buildings, with significant gaps between; limited use of hard standing; and boundary treatments that allow views over the countryside and are in keeping with their rural location.

HNP Policy Map 9: The countryside North of Headcorn village

Countryside North of Headcorn village - April 2020

Source: Google Earth. April 2020 © 2021 Maxar Technologies.

5.i.d Creation of varied and visually interesting schemes

5.33 A key contributor to Headcorn's sense of place is variety. Therefore, however impressive an individual building may be, the introduction of a large number of identikit buildings, particularly in straight rows, would be directly contrary to Headcorn's sense of place. It is important therefore that all developments, but particularly larger developments, should be able to demonstrate how they will create varied and visually interesting schemes.

5.34 A great example exemplifying how variety and visual interest form one of the key elements that make up Headcorn's sense of place is the High Street. Not only is there significant variety in the buildings themselves, including in the choice of building materials and cladding, but, as shown in Figure 12, the roof line illustrates that each building differs in its orientation, form and height. Even though individually each roof line may be straight, collectively they combine to create something that is both more organic and more dynamic in nature. It is this sense of variety and organic development that Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is seeking to replicate in new developments.

Figure 12: The roof line on the High Street

5.35 Headcorn's High Street achieved this dynamic, organic and even slightly chaotic visual appeal because it was developed over time. New developments involving more than one building will need to work harder to do so. However, there are clear examples from recent developments that suggest it is possible to do so successfully. Two of these are the Chantry and The Willows.

5.36 As can be seen in Figure 13, the roof line at the Chantry would be very much at home on Headcorn High Street, involving different angles and shapes. The buildings within the development are all orientated at different angles, around curving roads. As illustrated by the terraced housing pictured, in some cases even the floorplans of individual buildings do not use right angles. Each building has a different shape and feel, with significant differences in the choices of cladding and design that draw inspiration from the dominant building materials and shapes and form observed in historic buildings throughout Headcorn Parish. The development makes sensitive use of planting, both to give the development a significantly green feel, even in the depth of winter, and to help screen practical elements of the development such as parking. It also replicates the variety of boundary treatments that are found in the properties in Headcorn's historic core, with examples of properties opening almost directly onto the path, to properties with enclosed front gardens.

5.37 The Willows development is much smaller than The Chantry, but is successful both because it makes use of similar design choices, but also contains design elements that are particularly suited to small developments on the rural edge of Headcorn village. For example, each of the buildings within the Willows development is orientated slightly differently, which is reinforced by the fact that the access road is gently curving. Each of the buildings displays different choices in terms of cladding, roof shape, and even roofing materials, but in each case they clearly draw inspiration from the building materials and styles seen elsewhere in the Parish. Practical elements like parking have been well thought out and designed to avoid creating a cluttered street scape with significant parking in front of individual dwellings. For example, there is a cut out areas within the green space at the front of the development to house parking. Like the Chantry, the Willows development is very green, but in the case of the Willows, this is reinforced by the retention of mature

trees and hedging at the entrance to the development. The retention of significant grassed area running down to the stream and the use of split chestnut fencing along the bank of the stream, almost gives the impression of a small village green.

Figure 13: Two good examples – The Chantry and The Willows

5.38 At the other end of the scale, the Hardwicks development next to the Doctor's Surgery is a development that is very much out of keeping with Headcorn's sense of place. Although the development uses three different cladding options, as well as slight variations in the shape of the roofs and the treatment of the front elevation, these are repeated in a regular pattern. In addition, with the exception of the side elevations, the windows are all of an identical size and shape, and are all positioned in the same way, meaning each building seems almost identical. The result is that the overall impression is one of straight lines and sameness, with buildings that look as if they would be more suited to an urban,

rather than a rural environment. This sense that the Hardwicks development is out of place is reinforced by the choice of high fences; large expanses of hard standing, with the road visually merging into the pavements; and very limited greenery or green spaces. In addition the choice of slate as the dominant roofing material, with red tiles along the ridge of the hip, is also out of keeping the rest of Headcorn, where red clay Kent peg tiles dominate, with the occasional use of slate, rather than the other way round. These types of design choices should be avoided in future developments.

Figure 14: A poor example – the Hardwicks

5.39 Although many of the examples of successful recent additions to Headcorn's built environment have built on the traditions of historical architectural styles, there are also some examples of successful additions that are unashamedly modern in style. One such example is a house located to the west of the A274, tucked behind more traditional housing stock. The use of a wedge shape makes it more dynamic that a simple box and ensures that the house follows the contours of the land. It also adds visual interest to what is otherwise a flat roof. The decision to use different materials to clad the upper and lower sections is in keeping with one of the key elements underpinning Headcorn's sense of place. In addition, the choice of natural wooden cladding on the upper layer echoes traditional cladding choices within the Parish and, combined with the decision to lay the cladding in vertically rather than horizontally, helps the building blend with the surrounding planting.

Figure 15: A successful modern addition to the housing stock

5.i.e   Height

5.40 The height of buildings is another important aspect of design that helps provide a sense of place. In the case of Headcorn, with the exception of the Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul, all the buildings in Headcorn are very much on a domestic scale. The vast majority of buildings in Headcorn are typically no more than two and a half storeys high, and the Design Policy for Headcorn (HNP 1) seeks to ensure that this remains the case.

5.41 The reason for this is vividly illustrated by the aerial photo of Headcorn from the 1970s, which is shown in Figure 16. With the exception of the church, all the buildings are of a very similar scale, and this is part of what creates the village feel. An aerial photo of the village taken today would produce an almost identical view.

5.42 As well as a lack of buildings of more than two and a half storeys high, another feature of the older part of the village is that there are often slight variations in the height

of buildings that are next to each other, which helps create varied and visually interesting streetscapes. This is the type of typical Headcorn characteristic that the Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan is looking to encourage.

Figure 16: Aerial photograph of Headcorn from the 1970s

5.i.f *Boundary treatments*

5.43 Hedges are the dominant boundary treatment in use in Headcorn village, often with grass verges in front, even in the heart of the village on the High Street. Another typical boundary treatment very much in evidence is picket fences. Other examples of boundary treatments include low walls, fences or railings. With the exception of some hedges, however, a key element of all these boundary treatments is that they are low. Even in the case of the higher hedges within the village, these do not form an impermeable barrier.

5.44 There are also examples of many historic buildings that open directly, or almost directly, onto the highway, without the need to cross any barriers in order to reach the building. This is particularly true for commercial buildings along the High Street, but there are also examples of this in domestic buildings.

5.45 These boundary treatments are a key part of Headcorn's sense of place. They allow people to appreciate and enjoy the local architecture, and help maintain an open feeling within the village, which helps foster a sense of community by ensuring people are not fenced off behind impermeable barriers. It is important that boundary treatments for new developments reinforce these local patterns.

5.46 In the countryside surrounding Headcorn village, hedges are by far the most prevalent boundary treatment, often with grass verges in front. Entry onto rural properties is typically through five barred gates, or equivalent, reflecting the need for farm and other vehicles to access properties.

5.47 Again, reinforcing these typical boundary treatments for developments within the countryside surrounding the village will be important. Retaining hedgerows will help wildlife, and importantly will also foster a sense of openness, allowing people to see, or catch glimpses of, the countryside and architecture behind the hedge.

Figure 17: Examples of typical boundary treatments in Headcorn

5.48 One example of less successful boundary treatments that should be avoided where possible is the use of chain linked fences. Even though these allow clear views into properties, and so help foster a sense of openness, they can jar compared more typical boundary treatments, by suggesting a more urban or suburban feel.

5.49 Another example of boundary treatments that should be avoided is the use of tall, close boarded fences. These are directly contrary to the sense of openness that characterises Headcorn, which is what this Neighbourhood Plan is looking to reinforce. Tall fences block views and create a sense of the occupants being fenced off from the rest of

the community. They are also a barrier to wildlife. Furthermore, the use of high fences is out of character with Headcorn's rural location, often being used in ways that would be more in keeping with a suburban environment.

Figure 18: Examples of boundary treatments that are out of keeping

5.50 It is important that inappropriate boundary treatments are avoided, both in the village itself and the surrounding countryside, to ensure that Headcorn retains its sense of place, namely that of a rural location, rather than an urban or suburban setting.

5.ii Heritage and Conservation Area

5.51 Headcorn is a Parish that it is filled with historic buildings, both within the village itself and in the surrounding countryside. A key role for Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is to ensure that any development will protect and enhance this heritage. This applies throughout the Parish, not just within the Conservation in the heart of the village. So how does a development succeed where its very existence will have an impact on a heritage asset?

5.52 One of the features that defines Headcorn's sense of place is variety. This is exemplified in its historic core, particularly in the area covered by the Conservation Area. Each building is orientated slightly differently and has made different choices in terms of shape and form. Taken together, for example, the buildings on the High Street form an organic, dynamic, and even slightly chaotic, attractive whole.

5.53 It is possible to learn from this history, in order to inform future development, because whether it is a result of accident or design, there are certain design choices that have helped ensure that these relatively disparate buildings work well together. In particular, developments that are close to any historic building in Headcorn should reflect the lessons from Headcorn's historic core, namely:

- No single building should dominate. Headcorn has some relatively substantial properties, including buildings from the medieval period like Headcorn Manor, or Chequers on the High Street. However, these properties do not dominate or loom over the properties next to them. While they are bigger, their scale is in keeping with what is around them.
- The use and combination of local materials is key. For example, bricks and tiles made from local clay are very much in evidence on schemes spanning different centuries, allowing buildings to relate to each other, even if stylistically they differ.

- The ratio of the roof to the rest of the building, differences in detail between upper and lower storey, and picking up historical roof structures, such as the cat slide roof, can also help buildings relate well to each other.
- Finally, simple square boxes are unlikely to work. Headcorn's sense of place is defined by the variety of texture, shape, roofline and orientation found in individual buildings and how they sit next to each other.

5.54 There are successful examples of new additions to the village, such as Tallow Court, where design choices have been explicitly based on historic styles, ensuring that buildings look as if they have always been part of the village. However, success does not have to be about simply producing a pastiche of previous architectural styles, but instead it is about making use of cues that ensures any new additions will relate well to existing buildings.

5.55 An example of where this has worked well is the new primary school building on Kings Road, which sits next to the Headcorn Library and Old School building, which date back to the 1800s. As can be seen, these are very different buildings and the choice of windows, for example, marks the new school building as being proudly modern. However, the two buildings work well together, because despite its modern appearance the new school building has made use of key design cues that help the two relate to each other, including: the steeply pitched red clay tile roof; the form of the eaves; the proportions of the building; the fact that the new does not dominate the old; and the use of variegated red brick as a decorative feature on the gable end. In addition, the new school building also makes use of white weather boarding to clad the main part of the gable end, which picks up on design cues from elsewhere in the village. These buildings may be very distinct, but these types of detail help ensure that they are good bedfellows. It is this type of successful integration of old and new that Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is seeking to support.

Figure 19: The old and the new – Headcorn Primary School and Library

5.56 The new school building is a good example of how the sensitive choice of form and materials can help the old and new sit well together and illustrates its importance even outside Headcorn's Conservation Area. The rules matter everywhere, which means that this guidance covers all development that will impact historic buildings in Headcorn.

5.57 However, there is clearly an even greater need for any new development to work well with its historic neighbours in Headcorn's Conservation Area, because of the sheer number of historic buildings that any new development will potentially have an impact on. Headcorn's existing Conservation Area and Article 4 land is shown in HNP Policy Map 10.

5.58 As well as the policies and guidance associated with Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, development in the Conservation area is therefore also subject to the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for Headcorn produced by Maidstone Borough Council. In October 2021, Maidstone produced a new draft Appraisal and Management Plan for Headcorn's Conservation Area. This included a proposal to extend the area within Headcorn's Conservation Area and to align the borders of Article 4 directions land (which enjoys even stronger protections) with the new Conservation Area boundary, as shown in HNP Policy Map 11. Headcorn Parish Council supports this proposal.

HNP Policy Map 10: Headcorn's Conservation Area and Article 4 Directions

Listing status

- ■ Grade 1
- ■ Grade II*
- ■ Grade II
- ■ Non designated heritage asset
- ▢ Article 4 Areas
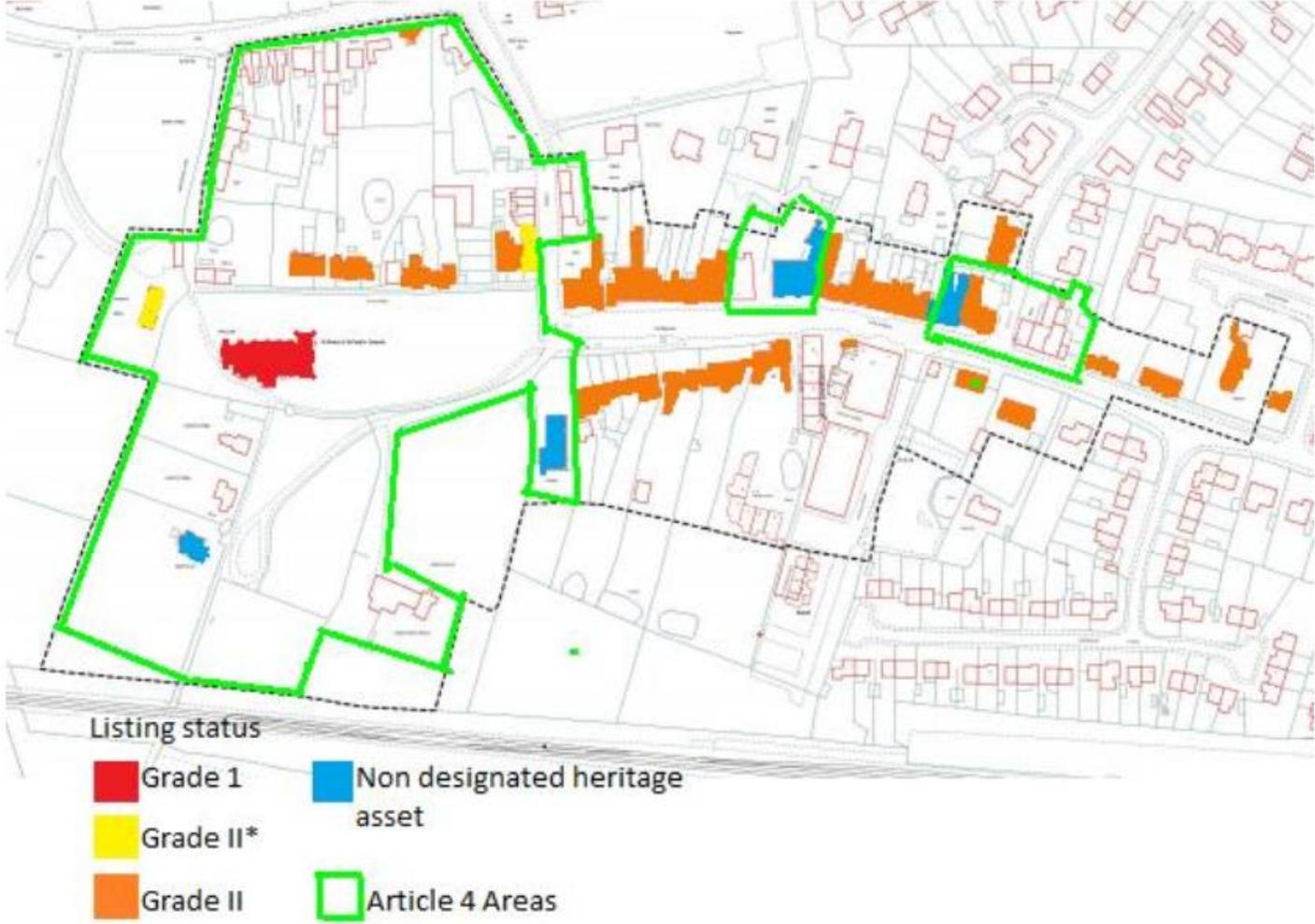
Note: A Conservation Area is designed to manage change in areas with a high proportion of heritage assets, in order to sustain and where possible enhance their significance. Land covered by Article 4 Directions confers even greater protection, by withdrawing permitted development rights granted by that Order.

Source: Maidstone Borough Council (2021).

HNP Policy Map 11: Proposed new Headcorn Conservation Area and Article 4 Directions Land

Suggested additions to
Conservation Area
(shown dotted)
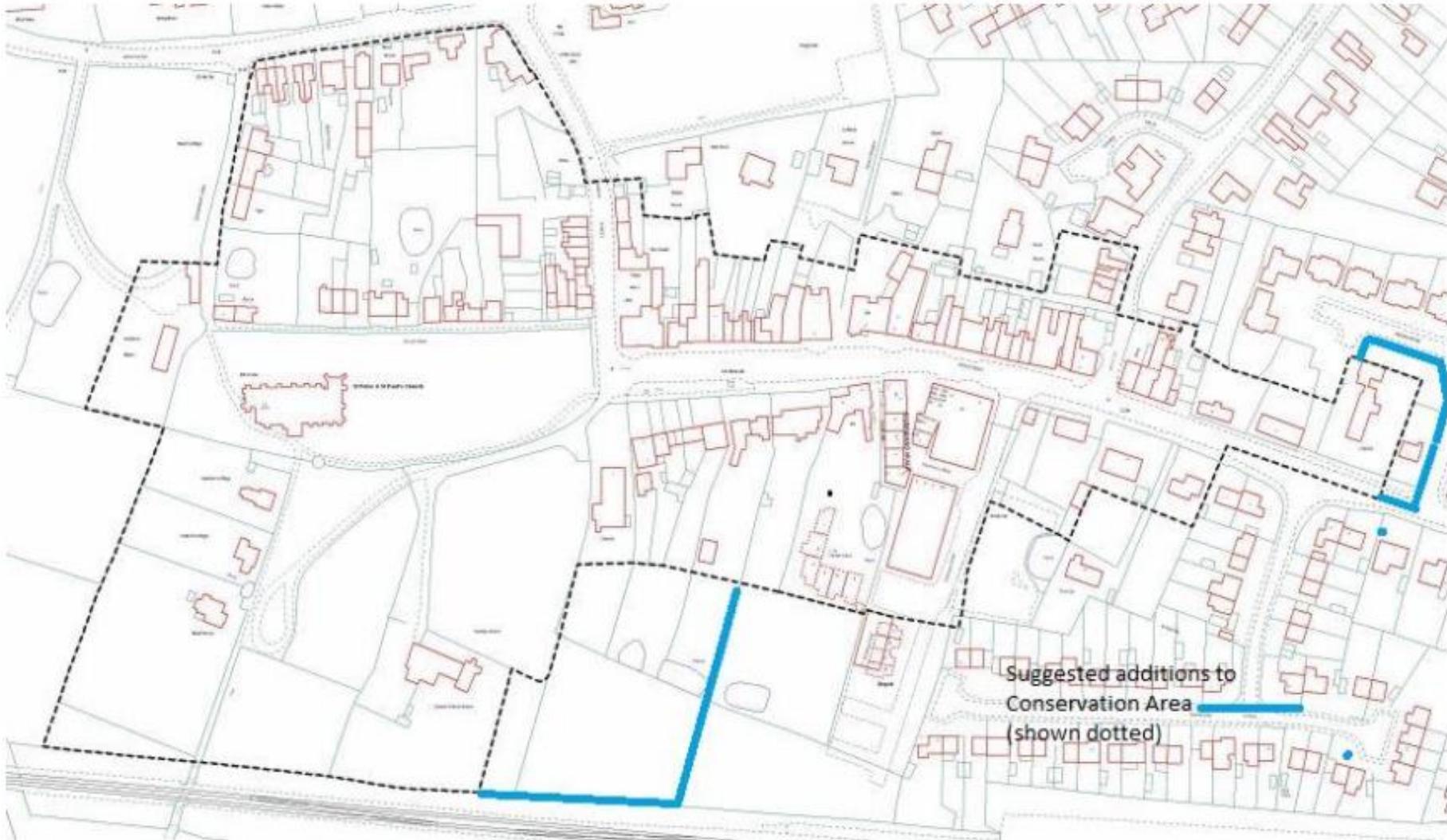
Source: Maidstone Borough Council (2021).

5.iii   Being good neighbours

5.59 Successful development is not just about how it looks, it is also important that any new development should be a good neighbour, by being sensitive to the needs of those who are already there. In particular, new developments need to safeguard the privacy and daylight of adjoining residents and must not result in unacceptable levels of light, noise, air, ground, or water pollution.

5.60 Furthermore, this is not just about "human" neighbours. All forms of pollution can have a very negative impact on wildlife and biodiversity. For example, light pollution can have a significantly negative impact on insect and bird life. Any ground and water pollution would risk having a significantly negative impact on the local streams and rivers, including the River Beult, which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

5.61 Given Headcorn's rural location, this makes it important the risk of all types pollution is kept to an absolute minimum. This includes, for example, limiting the use of external lighting, particularly in the countryside and edge of village locations, to help preserve the local fauna. Therefore proposals on external lighting need to demonstrate that proposed lighting is necessary.

5.iv   Exterior Spaces

5.62 Headcorn is very much a rural village. Trees, hedges, rivers, ponds and green spaces help define its sense of place. Successful new developments in Headcorn, particularly new housing developments, are typically very green. They make good use of existing natural features, such as established trees, and think carefully about how both residents and wildlife will be able to enjoy the spaces on offer.

Figure 20: Tallow Court provides opportunities for both residents and wildlife to enjoy

5.63 A good example of what Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is trying to achieve is Tallow Court to the south of the High Street, which was built around 2007-8. The pond in front of the development was already in existence and the developers chose to sensitively incorporate it within the scheme. The result is both perfect for wildlife and provides opportunities for residents to enjoy a tranquil green space. The planting around the pond creates both visual interest and shelter for wildlife, and in front of the development itself there is a small, more formal planting area, which both complements the development and

includes bench seating to allow residents to sit and enjoy the space. Thought has also been given to the safety of both residents and the local wildlife, through the sensitive use of picket fencing and iron railings to create distinct zones, without creating impermeable barriers for wildlife. While the space involved is not enormous, it successfully blends different needs to create a harmonious and visually pleasing external space.

5.64 It is important that new developments seek to achieve similar success in their public green spaces. The experience from some recent developments suggests that developers can struggle to achieve an appropriate balance in this regard. One example of what not to do, which is discussed elsewhere in this guidance, is the Hardwicks development, which has large areas of hard standing and almost no greenery in either the private or public areas of the development, both of which are completely contrary to what Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is trying to achieve.

Figure 21: The Hazelpits development – an example of poorly thought out green space

5.65 Another example is the Hazelpits development off the Ulcombe Road. Although the Hazelpits development has a large area of green space between the development itself and the core of the village, it is not well designed for residents to enjoy, involving several large pits in the ground, some with culverts in. This means that will not make an effective play area, particularly as in times of flooding the area could be potentially dangerous and there is no fencing to protect people. In addition, there is limited visual interest, no significant biodiversity in terms of the flora and nowhere to sit. This means its main purpose is simply to act as a water catchment area, but anecdotal evidence from residents suggests that it has not been effective in achieving this goal. Future developments should avoid making these mistakes, and seek to make more effective use of green spaces.

5.66 As well as the public green spaces, it is also important that new developments also have effective private exterior spaces. Here thought needs to be given to the likely occupants. For example, houses aimed at families will need spaces for children to play, as well as outdoor spaces for eating and entertaining.

5.v   Street scape – maintaining Headcorn's sense of place

5.67 The aim of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is to ensure that any new roads visually resemble traditional village streets and country lanes, in keeping with the existing street scape. This will be achieved through:
- the appropriate choice of scale, width, layout and materials;
- ensuring that any street furniture, or signage will be in keeping with Headcorn's rural location and will avoid creating a cluttered street scape; and
- the use and retention of mature native trees and hedgerows lining the road.

5.68 Each element of this part of Headcorn's design policy plays a role in achieving the overarching aim, of creating roads that visually resemble traditional village roads and country lanes.

5.v.a Scale, width, layout and materials

5.69 Creating successful developments is not just about the scale, layout and orientation of the buildings themselves, it is also about the roads and access within schemes. A key design aim of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is to ensure that any new roads visually resemble traditional village streets and country lanes and this as an important design imperative to help Headcorn retain its village feel. However, as well as having an attractive visual impact in keeping with their rural setting, roads and access points also need to be safe and effective for users, and the aim is to achieve both.

5.70 In terms of the scale and width of roads, the aim should be to ensure that they are of a similar scale and width to the country lanes surrounding Headcorn village. Long, wide avenues may be very impressive in an urban or suburban setting, but they do not fit with Headcorn's rural landscape. Instead the aim should be to minimise hard standing. As discussed elsewhere in this guidance, the large areas of hard standing that are found in the Hardwick's development, for example, are unsuitable for use in a village like Headcorn and should be avoided.

5.71 The country lanes and village streets that make up the historic core of Headcorn are rarely straight and the design of roads within new developments should replicate these winding curves. This helps allow for opportunities for visual delight, as new aspects of developments are revealed, as well as opportunities for screening things like parking.

5.72 Narrow roads and curves can also help with traffic management, by discouraging speeding. Other aspects of road design can also help with this. An example of this type of clever design approach is the choice to add two parking spaces on the approach to Headcorn High Street, just before the junction to Forge Lane. These parking spaces not only help to support the customers of the businesses opposite, they also help to slow the

traffic as it enters the High Street, without impeding the sight lines for traffic exiting Forge Lane.

Figure 22: An example from the High Street of using parking spaces to slow traffic

Parking spaces directly on road

Parking spaces in cut outs in the pavement

Note: Satellite photo from Google Earth. Two parking spaces have been positioned directly on the road on the side of traffic heading west onto the High Street, just before the junction of Forge Lane. These provide parking spaces for the customers of the businesses opposite, but importantly also act to slow traffic entering the High Street. In contrast, on the east bound lane for traffic exiting the High Street, parking has been provided in bays cut into the pavements, in order not to impede the view of traffic exiting Forge Lane.

5.73 As well as winding curves and minimal hard standing, another design trick that has been used in some of the older parts of the village is to split the main and service entrances of the property, by allowing small access roads for things like parking to the rear. Church Walk, Gooseneck Lane, and even parts of Headcorn High Street all use this approach.

Figure 23: Access to the rear of properties on Headcorn High Street from Forge Lane

5.74 In terms of the choice of materials, the most prevalent material for road surfaces throughout the Parish is Tarmac. However, part of Headcorn High Street and some of the newer developments such as parts of the Chantry have also successfully used bricks laid in a herringbone pattern to create an attractive area of the public realm, at the same time as reminding people of the need to drive slowly.

5.75 However, although bricks can be used successfully, success is not guaranteed, meaning thought needs to be given to a variety of design choices. For example, the Hardwicks scheme also used brick laid in a herringbone pattern, but in contrast to the Chantry and the High Street is much less visually successful. There are various reasons for this:

- The most obvious one is width, as the road is much wider than developments like the Chantry or surrounding country lanes.
- Another factor is the prevalence of straight lines, rather than curves.
- However, another factor is that all of the hard standing within the Hardwick scheme has been treated in the same way. The road, pavements, pathways, on-street parking spots and even the driveways with off-road parking are all treated in the same way, with nothing to break the monotony.
- There is also very limited green space of planting to soften the impact.

5.76 Therefore the dominant visual impression that emerges from the Hardwicks is the sheer expanse of hard standing, with nothing to soften it. In contrast both the High Street and The Chantry development make use of alternative materials for the road and

pathways, and only some sections of the roads themselves make use of brick. The contrasting textures and colours help break up the hard surfacing and in doing so help avoid either any one material, or the hard surfacing as a whole, from visually dominating the space.

5.v.b Street furniture and signage

5.77 Headcorn Parish Council has placed significant emphasis on ensuring that Headcorn has an attractive and uncluttered street scape. One of the aims of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is to ensure that new additions to the landscape, as well as potential redevelopment of existing areas, will continue this tradition.

Figure 24: A successful example of integrating street furniture into a scheme from the Foremans Centre on Headcorn High Street

Note: The choice of black for the bollards to mark the start of a pedestrian zone at the Foremans Centre helps them to disappear. The placement of the bollards, which is slightly set back from the pavement of Headcorn High Street, helps keep the High Street uncluttered. The regular placement of the bollards, together with attractive rounded tops designed to reduce risk of accident, help reinforce a sense that the scheme has been well designed. The addition of an old pump and bench seating, also painted black, helps reinforce a sense of a tranquil place to sit and shop. This is reinforced by the choice to add a circle of small pavers around a centrally located tree to provide and emphasize an attractive visual focal point. The positioning of the Automated External Defibrillator (AED) next to the bench seating, provides a potentially lifesaving addition to the street furniture. The AED's green and white colouring manages to highlight its existence, but its small scale and discreet placement next to the bench ensures that it is not overly visually intrusive.

5.78 The aim is to ensure that the choice of street furniture and signage will achieve its practical goals, while remaining attractive. Important design choices include the colour, size, shape and placement. For example:

- Street furniture in dark colours can help ensure that it will not be visually intrusive.
- Ensuring that signage takes design cues from the colours of surrounding structures can help soften it, while still allowing it to create a visual impact.
- It is important to ensure that street furniture and signage does not block or dominate lines of sight, access or passageways, either as a result of its placement or its size.
- Ensuring that the choice of shape and design helps maintain a rural village feel is also important.

Figure 25: Good examples of signage for commercial purposes

Note: Clockwise from top left: The choice of faded colour on the adverts on the side of the building on the corner of the High Street and Forge Lane, and the fact that they are smaller than the windows on that elevation, help the adverts to blend with the white painted wall; signage for the shops on the corner of Foreman's Walk, just off the High Street, is small scale and attractive, blending with other decorative features, such as the colour of the window frames; signage on the A274 for businesses operating at Great Tong Farm is easily visible in both directions, while being attractive and small scale, and is sympathetically sited in a way that allows for the surrounding hedges and trees to be maintained; a hanging sign for Headcorn Tiles on Moat Road is attractive and small scale.

5.79 In the case of signage, it is important that it is not just commercial signage that is appropriate for its rural setting. Signposts and street signs should also retail a rural feel.

Figure 26: Examples of signposts and street signs with a rural feel

5.v.c Trees and hedges

5.80 Trees and hedges are an important part of Headcorn's rural landscape, and are found lining the roads throughout the Parish. Even where historic man-made barriers do exist, such as the stone wall on the bridge across the River Beult on Water Lane, the barriers are low, allowing views across the countryside, and trees and hedges are still very much in evidence. Retaining, and where appropriate enhancing, the trees and hedging on the road network throughout the Parish is an important aim of this Neighbourhood Plan.

Figure 27: Examples of country lanes and roads in Headcorn Parish

Note: Clockwise from top left: exiting the village via the Smarden Road; the corner of Moat Road and Water Lane on the way out of the village; the bridge over the River Beult on Water Lane; and Black Mill Lane.

5.81 However, it is not just the rural areas of the Parish where trees and hedging help define Headcorn's sense of place. Even in the historic heart of the village, such as the High Street or Church Walk, trees and hedging are very much in evidence. The result is that

there is a significant blurring between village and countryside, which helps make clear that Headcorn village is very much part of a rural landscape, rather than an urban or suburban one.

5.82 Therefore there are good design reasons for seeking to ensure that trees and hedging are incorporated and used as part of the boundary treatment for schemes, and are retained on existing roads and boundaries. Mature trees in particular can also help screen buildings, and combined with hedging help soften the edges of the public realm. TV design shows often talk about bringing the outside in. Retaining and using trees and hedging is the village equivalent, by bringing the countryside in.

Figure 28: Maintaining links with the countryside – examples of rural village roads

Note: Clockwise from top left: Even the addition of traffic lights at the turn off to Moat Road from the A274 does not disguise the close links between the village and the surrounding countryside; looking down Church Walk towards the High Street, the retention of trees and hedges helps provide a leafy feel; the entrance to the Weavers off Grigg Lane where the retention of mature trees and use of hedging helps soften and screen buildings and is reminiscent of the surrounding countryside; even on the High Street at the heart of the village, mature trees, hedges and grass verges are very much in evidence.

5.vi   The practicalities

5.83 It is often the little things that can make or break a development, both in terms of its liveability, and in terms of its visual impact. Both these factors are important and need to be given careful thought. This means the practicalities associated with new development need to be well thought out, in order for developments to be successful, and Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan seeks to encourage a thoughtful approach to solving practicalities, including issues such as:

- Parking. For example, ensuring both that there is adequate parking and that it does not create a cluttered street scape;

- Storage. For example: bicycles, refuse and recycling bins, and gardening and other tools;
- Connecting buildings to utilities. For example: telephone lines; gas and electricity meters; satellite dishes; and sewerage provision; and
- Future proofing. For example: solar panels and electric vehicle recharging.

5.84 For schemes to work they need to give the residents and users of buildings what they need, at the same time as ensuring that they will work for those who only see developments from the outside, for example while walking or driving around the Parish. In many cases achieving these two goals will be aligned.

Figure 29: Forge Lane – an example of solving several practical issues at once

5.85 In practice, successfully solving the practicalities will often involve thinking through how to address them as a whole, rather than on a piece by piece basis. For example, this scheme on Forge Lane successfully solves several practical issues together. It has a separate parking area at the front, which is laid out in a way that still allows both for a sizeable front garden and enables both visitors and residents to access the property without having to dodge round vehicles. As part of the parking area there is a shed that is camouflaged in a way that will minimise its visual impact, and provides a practical solution for storing bicycles and tools. The shed also has the benefit that it can be used to screen the refuse and recycling bins from the house itself, but because the shed is at the opposite end of the parking area to the street, this also minimises the visual impact of the bins for anyone on the street.

5.vi.a Parking

5.86 Headcorn is relatively far from all the main local centres, meaning residents tend to be dependent on cars for transport. Furthermore, there is often a lack of safe on-street

parking available, particularly on narrow country lanes. Therefore effective parking provision is important for the success of any development in Headcorn, and this success will be determined by two main factors: the adequacy of parking provision itself; and how it is designed. Policy HNP4A of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan covers parking standards, while Policy HNP1F deals with the issue of design. This section aims to support the provisions in HNP1F, by providing guidance on the type of parking design that will help maintain the village feel.

5.87 The aim of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan's approach to the design of parking provision is to ensure that it is spaced and screened in a way that minimises its visual impact. Key to that aim is to avoid parking schemes that will lead to the creation of large areas of hard standing, particularly where that will comprise part of the street scape associated with the development. Such an approach would be contrary to Headcorn's sense of place, which owes much to the country lanes and green spaces that are a key part of the village's fabric. Ways of achieving successful parking schemes that are found in Headcorn include:

- tucking parking around the side or back of properties to ensure that it does not dominate the approach to buildings. This can include the use of walled courtyards to house parking for several properties, or archways or gates that allow vehicles to be stored to the rear of properties;
- mixing the orientation of parking within a scheme, to avoid creating long lines of cars; and
- using public green space and planting to help soften the impact of parking provision.

5.88 In general, developers should seek to avoid creating schemes where users' vehicles are all parked directly in front of each property at right angles to the road, as this creates a cluttered street scape and emphasizes the amount of hard standing on show. Where this type of approach to parking is unavoidable, then developers should use design tricks such as fencing the parking in a way that will create a pathway immediately in front of the property, in order to soften the approach and improve the visual appeal of the boundary treatment for the properties.

5.89 Other practical design features to consider that will help determine how successful parking provision will be from the point of view of users include:

- how wide spaces are. Cramming too many spaces into a car park, as has been done at Headcorn Doctor's Surgery for example, make it extremely difficult for users to get in and out of their vehicles and should be avoided.
- the angle of the parking. Car parks where spaces are at 45 degrees (rather than 90 degrees) to the road can be easier to access, particularly where the approach road itself is narrow. This makes it a good choice for creating effective parking solutions, and therefore should be considered by developers.
- how safe the parking provision is. For example, ensuring that parking courtyards are overlooked by adjacent properties will help deter theft.
- how the parking layout is able to accommodate the needs of cyclists, motorcyclists and the mobility impaired.

5.90 One final issue that needs to be considered in relation to parking is electric vehicle recharging. From a design perspective, this presents a variety of challenges. For example, recharging cabling creates potential trip hazards. Large numbers of electric vehicle recharging points by the side of the kerb, potentially create a cluttered street scape. Handling the need for recharging by putting recharging points at the front of each dwelling would result in large numbers of vehicles parked directly in front of each property, which is undesirable from a design perspective. Developers will therefore need to demonstrate how they will support the shift towards electric vehicles, while still ensuring that any parking is spaced and screened in a way that minimises its visual impact.

Figure 30: Examples of good parking design options

Note: Clockwise from the top left: tucking parking to the side and significant use of evergreen planting and hedges, helps soften the parking in the Chantry development; a driveway, with gates to the rear provides options for storing vehicles out of sight at the rear of the property for this house on the High Street; the use of fencing, planted borders in front of the property and different paving materials for parking and walkways helps soften the impact and create a strong boundary treatment, even though the parking is immediately in front of this property, which is part of the Hazelpits development; a walled carpark, created using local stone and softened by plantings, helps avoid the creation of significant on street parking within the new Hazelpits development; siting parking spaces within a greenspace, and retaining old trees, rather than having all the parking in front of the properties, helps soften the parking in this scheme in Forge Meadows; and the archway through to the rear of this property on the High Street creates options for storing vehicles.

5.vi.b Bins and storage provision

5.91 A key element to the success of any scheme, both in terms of its liveability and visual impact, is storage provision. Providing adequate storage within both domestic and commercial buildings is key for their usability. However, it is important to ensure that external storage solutions are effective, including for things such as refuse and recycling bins. From the point of view of creating visually effective schemes, thought therefore needs to be given to how to provide adequate storage, while ensuring that its design and placement will be both practical for users, while not marring the visual impact of schemes.

5.92 For example, storing refuse and recycling bins along the front fence line of a property, ready to be put out on bin collection days, will be unattractive without any visual screening. Large numbers of unsightly refuse and recycling bins will ruin the street scape for passers-by, at the same time as meaning anyone looking out of the front windows will have their view marred by the sight of the bins. Potential solutions to this include tucking bins in between natural screening, such as hedging, to minimise their visual impact, or creating storage structures to the side of buildings that will keep them out of sight when not in use.

Figure 31: Handling practicalities – the bins

5.vi.c Connecting to utilities

5.93 Similar considerations apply to the choice how buildings are connected to utilities. For example, telegraph poles supporting large numbers of telephone wires and electricity cables can be unsightly, as can the placement of satellite dishes on the front or side of buildings where they can be easily seen from the street.

5.94 Furthermore, in the case of connecting to utilities, the visual impact will not just be confined to how they connect to individual buildings. How utilities provision is handled for schemes as a whole can also have a big visual impact, and thought should be given to how to screen any necessary supporting infrastructure such as cabinets, in order to minimise their visual impact and avoid creating a cluttered street scape. Screening should be achieved through the use of natural planting and the choice of placement within the scheme, rather than the use of tall fences, which would simply replace one unattractive feature with another.

Figure 32: A bad and good example of integrating and visually screening utility infrastructure and equipment – the Hardwicks and Ulcombe Road
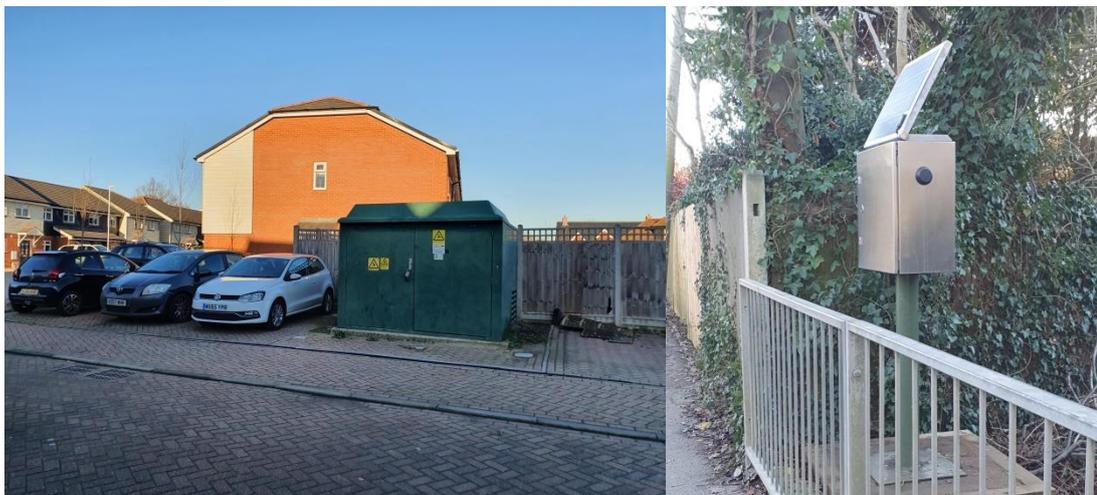
5.95 Similarly, while it is extremely important to future proof developments, to ensure that they contribute to the fight against climate change, it is also important that the way this is done is supported by effective design choices. There is no reason why developments cannot be both good for the planet and visually appealing. This means thought needs to be given to how to provide and screen electric vehicle recharging, in order to minimise its impact on the local street scape.

5.96 Similar thought needs to be given to the use of solar panels. It can be hard to adapt existing buildings to add solar panels, without giving the impression that they have been simply plonked on top, with no thought as to how this will affect the roof scape. New developments, however, have no such excuse and could easily integrate solar panels within roofs to create something that is visually attractive, rather than an unsightly after thought.

Figure 33: Integrating solar panels within roofs is visually more attractive than post construction bolt on options

6. SITING, LANDSCAPING AND PROTECTING THE NATURAL AND HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT AND SETTING

6.1 It is not just design that determines impact. A key factor influencing the impact of any development will be choices about siting and landscaping. Policy HNP2 is designed to ensure that choices on siting and landscaping will be made in a way that will help protect the natural and historic environment and setting in Headcorn, as well as to address specific challenges such as the risk of flooding.

6.i Historic setting

6.2 Headcorn Parish is situated in the Low Weald of Kent and contains a wealth of historic buildings of different ages reflecting Headcorn's growth over the centuries. These historic buildings, many listed, help define Headcorn's unique character. In the village itself, Headcorn's conservation area covers in the centre of the village (see HNP Policy Map 10), including the Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul.

6.3 However, the rich history of the built environment in Headcorn village is also reflected in the wider countryside, with many examples of old farmhouses, some dating back to the 15th century, throughout the Parish. In addition to the traditional farmhouses, there are a number of workers' cottages throughout the Parish, many dating to the Victorian period. There are also many examples of historic agricultural buildings, including barns and oast houses, some of which have been successfully converted into dwellings.

6.4 It is important that any development in Headcorn respects the setting of any listed buildings, or other buildings that contribute towards the character of the countryside, or exemplify the development of the Low Weald. In addition, any historic features within the site should be protected and sensitively incorporated to sustain the historic environment, including the contribution of these features to local character and identity.

6.ii Views

6.5 It is not just historic assets that need to be protected, certain 'views' within the Parish also need protection to help preserve Headcorn's sense of place. The views most valued by residents in the Neighbourhood Plan survey were those of the Church of St Peter and St Paul and the surrounding area including Parsonage Meadow and the views along the High Street within the historic core of the village. These views contribute important positive features to the Headcorn Conservation Area, as well as contributing to the significance of the Parish Church and numerous other designated heritage assets, including the listed buildings that line the High Street.

6.6 There are also several key views out of the village, notably from the passenger bridge over the railway line, which gives an unimpeded vista of the water meadows of the Low Weald; from the footpath from the Church towards the railway line; and to the north and

north west from the Summer Hill, Black Mill, and Hazelpits Bank towards the Greensand Ridge. These key views are highlighted in HNP Policy Map 12.[16]

6.7 However, there is also at least one part of the approach to Headcorn's High Street, where views could be enhanced, and opportunities to do this should be taken where possible.

6.8 In addition, it is also important to preserve the way in which Headcorn sits within the landscape and in particular the views of the Low Weald from the Greensand Ridge. At present Headcorn village sits below the Summer Hill, Black Mill, Hazel Pits Bank and is not visible from the Greensand Ridge and it will be important to ensure that future development of Headcorn does not intrude in a way that would destroy the appreciation of the Low Weald from the Greensand Ridge, including the Greensand Way.[17]

Figure 34: A view of Headcorn's rural setting from the Greensand Way

Note: Headcorn's rural setting is typical of the Low Weald of Kent. Even Headcorn village is heavily camouflaged, remaining hidden in the landscape and it will be important that future development in the parish does not alter this. Photo taken at grid ref 835496, north of Parsonage Farm and Charlton Court, looking south towards Headcorn village.

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[16]   See also descriptions in Section 8 in Maidstone Borough Council (2021).

[17]   The Greensand Way is a long distance path of 108 miles in the South East running from Haslemere in Surrey to Hamstreet in Kent.

HNP Policy Map 12: Key views in and around Headcorn village

Important views that should be protected

Important views that could be improved and protected
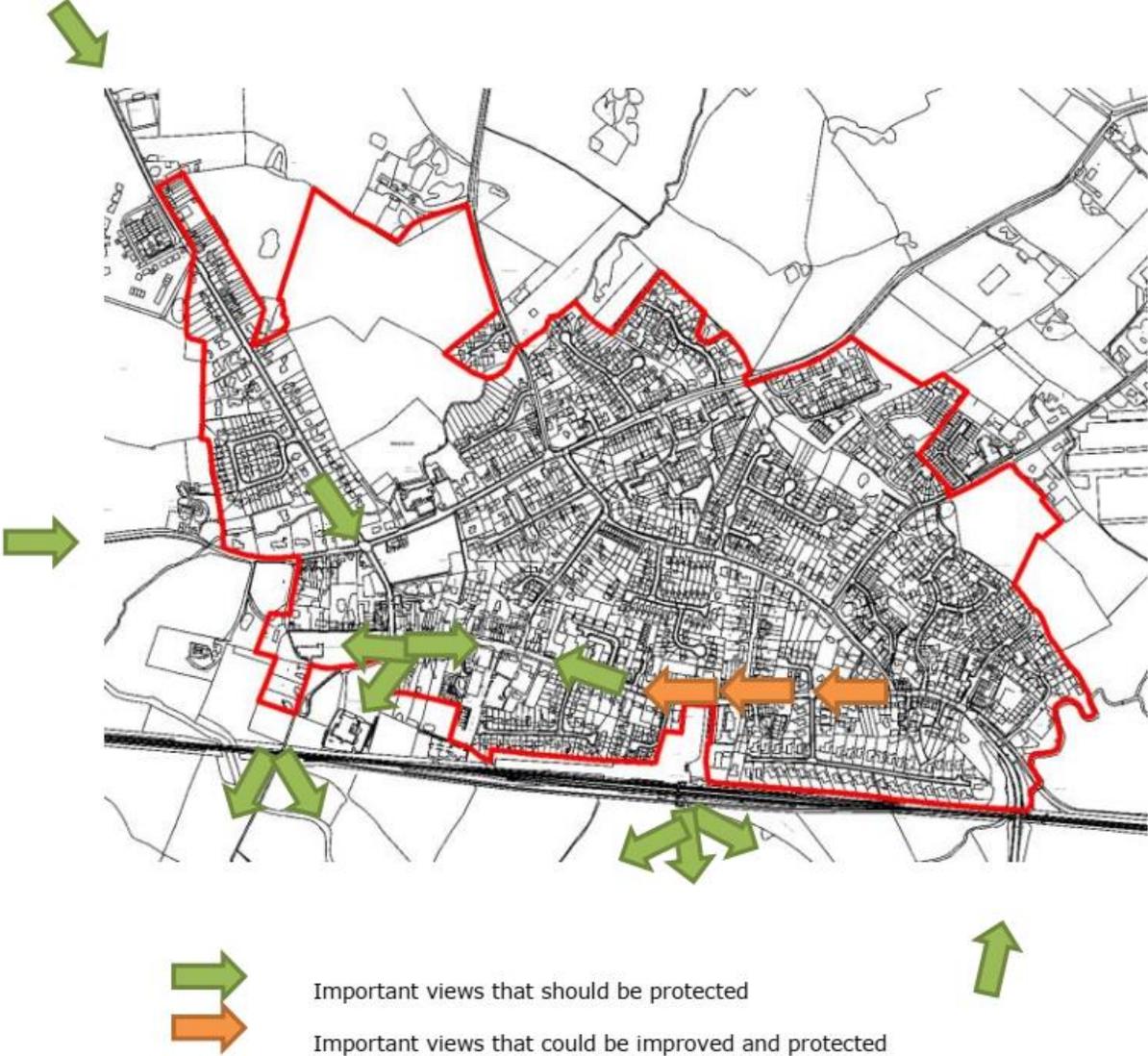
6.iii   Green spaces

6.9 Headcorn village is compact, with a density of buildings within the built-up-area of around 15 dwellings per hectare, roughly the same density as seen in other villages in Kent. However, this compact shape does not mean that Headcorn lacks green spaces. The centre of the village in particular benefits from two important green spaces, which are highly valued by residents, namely:

- Parsonage Meadow, which is adjacent to the parish church of St Peter and St Paul and new village hall and used for travelling fairs and smaller events. Parsonage Meadow was purchased from St John's College by Headcorn Parish Council in the 1970s; and
- Days Green at the entrance to the village abutting the A274 from Maidstone, which is the focus of major village events, such as the May Fair. Days Green was gifted to the village by the local Day family for leisure and enjoyment in 1951.

6.10 Two other spaces have also been acquired for village use:

- Hoggs Bridge Green was donated in 1974; and
- Spires Ash in Grigg Lane was bought by Headcorn Parish Council in 1994.

6.11 In addition, the village centre also benefits from the green space associated with the churchyard of St Peter and St Paul.

6.12 The other large open space, which is available for community use at certain times, is the playing fields to the north of Headcorn Primary School. The community also benefits both from a variety of additional open green spaces, including:

- green spaces within developments, such as Knights Way, Forge Meadows and the pond at Sharp's Field; and
- a number of green spaces on the edge of the village that are available for recreational purposes, including the allotments, the football club, the cricket club and the bowls club.

6.13 The abundance of green spaces scattered throughout the village, combined with the presence of numerous mature trees and hedgerows, contribute to Headcorn's sense of place and the impression that Headcorn is a green village that fits in well with its Low Weald setting.

6.14 However, consultations with residents to support Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, including the Residents' Survey, have revealed a shortage of sports and leisure facilities and facilities for young people, as well as demand for more informal space for dog walkers. Therefore, it is important to not only protect existing open space, but also to enhance its provision in future.

6.15 One of the aims of this Plan is to focus development on appropriate sites. To do this it is important that the green, historic and recreational spaces in and around the village should be protected. This includes protecting any Open Space allocations within Maidstone Borough Council's Local Plan. Communal green spaces within housing developments are

also an important part of the look and feel of the village and therefore in general these can only be developed where the result is of material benefit to surrounding residents or the Parish as a whole. In the case of recreational spaces, such as sports clubs, these are slightly different, because they are often in private hands. However, it is important that these recreational spaces are also preserved. So in general, while some development may, for example, be necessary to help upgrade facilities, the development of recreational spaces will only be allowed where the result is that the facilities provided are at least as good as the existing facilities.

HNP Policy Map 13: Important green spaces and wildlife corridors in Headcorn village

Headcorn Village - September 2021

	Parish Council and church run Green Spaces		Principal recreational spaces

Wildlife corridors and stepping stones, including green spaces, waterways, ponds and ancient and species-rich hedgerows

Note: Source of satellite image: Google Earth © 2021 Maxar Technologies

6.iv Environment, habitats and landscaping

6.16 Headcorn's setting in the Low Weald of Kent means that it is a rural landscape characterized by small fields, ancient hedgerows, orchards, small wooded areas of native trees (particularly oak and ash) and natural water sources including rivers, ponds and natural soaks in keeping with the local geology and in particular the clay soil. Much of Headcorn's landscape has remained unchanged for centuries, with evidence from Tithe Maps, for example, showing that the current field boundaries in and around both the village and the rest of the Parish date back to at least the early 1800s (see HNP Policy Map 14). This history means that many of the hedges in the Parish benefit from a rich variety of local flora, including species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, elder and hornbeam. This landscape not only defines Headcorn's rural setting, it also provides an ideal habitat for many different species of wildlife. In addition, the retention of many hedgerows and established native trees within the village has meant there are natural access routes for wildlife into the village itself, much to the enjoyment of many residents.

6.17 The definitions of the different types of key habitats within Headcorn Parish are set out in Section 6.iv.a. A key aim of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is to protect this environment, particularly given the enjoyment that residents get from being surrounded by beautiful countryside, as well as the benefits that this landscape provides to the local economy, both through tourism and agriculture.

6.18 Policy HNP2 therefore contains a variety of measures to ensure that development within the Parish is sensitive to the local environment, working with it and retaining key habitats where possible. This includes addressing one of the concerns that has been raised to the Parish Council, which is that developers often clear trees and hedgerows before putting a site forward for development, losing key habitats in the process. Landowners may need to address problems on their land, such as when a tree has become unsafe. However, such activity should not be undertaken purely to allow them to avoid having to agree appropriate environmental protections and landscaping with Maidstone Borough Council's Planning Department. Headcorn Parish Council is keen to discourage this where possible and to ensure that where there is a need to fell trees or clear hedgerows that these are restored by the sensitive reintroduction of native species, if a site subsequently comes forward for development.

6.19 However, in line with UK Government policy, Headcorn Parish Council is also keen to ensure that future development will be undertaken in a way that will support biodiversity net gain. The approach taken by developers should be focused on supporting a proliferation of flora and fauna that is native to the Low Weald of Kent, in order to ensure that the net gain is not achieved primarily through the introduction of non-native species, which may out-compete local species, or be of limited value to local wildlife. Focusing on local species is likely to be most beneficial. For example, an oak tree can support hundreds of different insect species, while a horse chestnut, which is a more recent addition to the English landscape, supports only a handful. The choice of how best to deliver biodiversity net gain should be informed by ecological surveys. In addition, it is important that wherever possible the biodiversity net gains should be achieved within the development site itself.

However, where this is not possible, then any offsite solutions should be located within Headcorn Parish, and ideally managed in a way that local residents will be able to enjoy.

6.20 In considering how to support local wildlife, developers should also look at design options that might help wildlife such as swift boxes, hedgehog holes and bat boxes. Developers should also consider whether a more ambitious approach would be more effective in some circumstances. For example, a larger pond might support more wildlife than smaller options. In general developers are encouraged to take an ambitious approach to encouraging and supporting local wildlife.

HNP Policy Map 14: Tithe map of Headcorn from early 1800s

Note: Tithe map dating from before the railway was built in 1842.
Source: Ordinance survey

6.iv.a Definitions of Key habitats

6.21 When considering any new building, how best to protect the habitats that are defined in this Section, must be considered:

Wildlife Corridors

6.22 Boundary features are important biological characteristics of the local landscape, and many can be described as "Wildlife Corridors"; for example lines of trees and shrubs, grassland, other semi-natural habitats. These are usually linear habitats and often occur on agricultural land and alongside roads and railway lines. Wildlife corridors are often said to act as a means of dispersal for many species by linking isolated habitats such as woodland and grassland, allowing the movement of species through otherwise open or built up terrain. They are also important in the dispersal of plants, acting as a linear habitat for the

dispersal of seeds, and attracting insects for pollination. They contain a large part of the countryside's biodiversity, but are also considered important for agriculture, cultural and archaeological reasons. This is in keeping with planning guidance, which recognises the need for wildlife corridors in maintaining viable populations of flora and fauna that would otherwise suffer as a result of fragmentation and isolation. Very often these corridors link into and between ponds and their associated copses.

Ancient, and/or Species-rich Hedgerows

6.23 Hedgerows form a distinctive and highly attractive part of the Low Weald landscape around Headcorn and as such penetrate into the built-up area. In keeping with its Low Weald setting, agricultural activity in Headcorn is exemplified by a large number of small fields and associated ancient hedgerows. Many of these hedgerows can be traced back to medieval times. The Tithe Map above (HNP Policy Map 14) dates from the early/mid 1800s shows the hedgerows near to the village centre, many of which still exist today. They are species-rich and are considered to be important for biodiversity conservation locally.

6.24 Ancient hedgerows are defined as those that were in existence before the Enclosure Acts (1720-1840) in Britain, and these tend to support the greatest diversity of plants and animals. However, they are not the only species-rich hedgerows, which are defined as those containing five or more native woody species on average over a 30 metre length.

Roadside Verges

6.25 Many of the roadside verges in the country lanes that come into the built-up area of Headcorn represent small areas of semi-natural habitat, and are an important collective biodiversity resource. Road verges can often support species-rich, long-established neutral grassland vegetation as well as being backed by ancient or species-rich hedgerows. They provide food and shelter for a wide range of wildlife, from birds, small mammals, to invertebrates such as butterflies and moths. Where possible, these must be maintained and integrate with wildlife corridors.

Tree Preservation

6.26 It is important that development recognises the need to preserve older trees, especially the oak as these are also very important wildlife refuges. Design of new development should ensure that roads and properties do not damage these important trees by ensuring that sufficient distance is left between new buildings and existing trees.

Woodland

6.27 Woodland cover in Headcorn Parish is limited, however the Weald ancient woodlands where they are do occur are important local resources that should be retained and positively managed. Ideally plans should aim to help link these important habitats, and make sure they have an appropriate buffer from development that would otherwise disturb or damage woodland wildlife.

Unimproved meadows

6.28 Where semi-improved or unimproved lowland meadows still exist these should be protected and enhanced, as an increasingly rare biodiversity resource in the low weald.

Streams and ditches

6.29 Streams and ditches are important corridors for wildlife, and are characteristic of the Low Weald landscape.

6.30 The River Sherway retains many plant species characteristic of Clay Rivers such as arrow head, water plantain and yellow flag iris, and is an important local wildlife site. There are also numerous other small streams and ditches in and around Headcorn and these add to the range of plants and other wildlife found locally.

Figure 35: Examples of key aspects of Headcorn's environment

Note: Clockwise from the top left: Hazel Pits ancient hedgerow/wildlife corridor; Hedgerow in field between Lenham Road and Grigg Lane; Pond in field between Grigg Lane and Lenham Road; and River Beult (SSSI).

River Beult Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

6.31 The River Beult SSSI was notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended, Section 17 of the Water Resources Act 1991, Section 4 of the Water Industry Act 1991 and Section 13 of the Land Drainage Act 1991 in 1994.

6.32 The River Beult flows for most of its length over Wealden clay which influences its ecology. It is one of the few clay rivers in England which retains a characteristic flora and

fauna. Most clay rivers in England are mainly found in central England, but have usually been canalised for land drainage purposes.

6.33 The Beult flows through an agricultural catchment with sheep and cattle pasture, orchards and arable land. River flows are dependent on surface run-off and weirs are placed in spring to maintain levels. In common with many lowland rivers, the Beult has suffered some enrichment with phosphate and nitrate from sewage effluent and agricultural run-off. The SSSI runs from Smarden to the Medway confluence, but excludes the upper river which is ditch-like with an impoverished fauna and flora.

6.34 The river supports a number of nationally important plants and invertebrates. In addition, the bare clay banks provide important nesting sites for the kingfisher amongst other birds.

Ponds

6.35 In addition, Headcorn Parish contains a large number of ponds often associated with copses of willow and other tree types. These are also very important wildlife havens, in particular for the Great Crested Newt, a European protected species. The ponds also help prevent local flooding as they act as local water sumps during wet winters when the water table on the clay is very close to the surface.

6.iv.b Flood risk

6.36 As well as protecting the environment from development, it is also important to protect development (both existing and new) from the environment. This is particularly true of a key risk within Headcorn, namely flooding.

6.37 The village of Headcorn is surrounded by three rivers, including the River Beult, which is an SSSI. These rivers bring benefits to the Parish, for example through the variety of flora and fauna they support, meaning that it is important to protect them. However, they also bring with them significant risk of flooding, something which is exacerbated by the speed at which the River Beult and its tributaries can flood.

6.38 In addition, the local geology and particularly the clay soil means that the Parish also suffers from significant problems with surface water flooding. Combined these problems can contribute to making roads and fields within the Parish impassable after heavy rain, including the A274 to the south and Ulcombe Road within the village.

Figure 36: Examples of flood events in Headcorn village and surrounding countryside from 2021
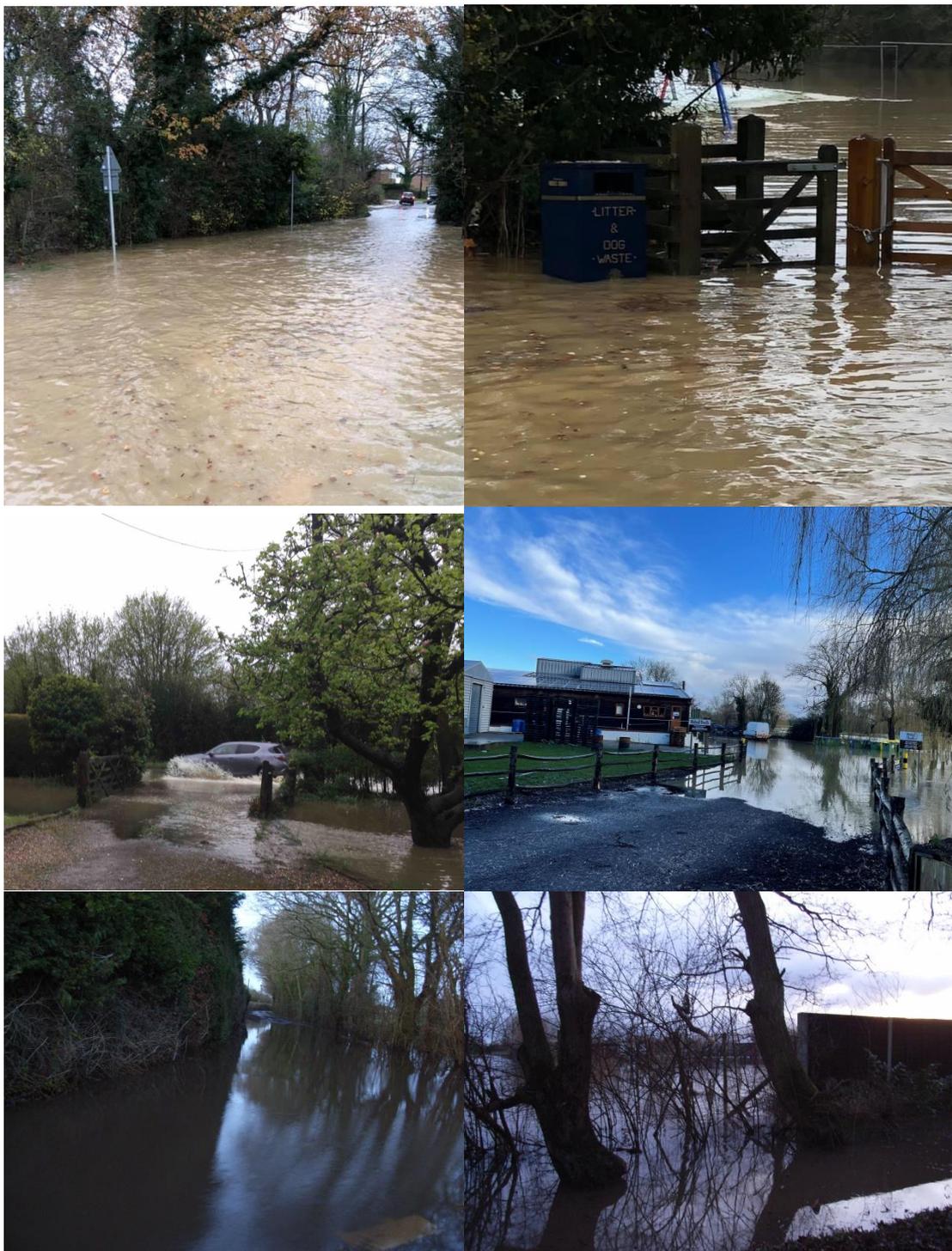
Notes: Clockwise from the top left: Down from Uptons on Ulcombe Road; Hoggs Bridge Gate across to Hoggs Green; Naked Foods site on the Smarden Road; fields between Love Lane and Smarden Road; entrance to Love Lane; and Moat Road.

6.39 When properties are flooded they take significant amounts of both time and money to repair. In addition, flooding is not only a problem for those directly at risk. It can also cause problems for the wider community, for example through higher insurance premiums. Therefore it is very important that any development in the Parish takes place outside

identified flood zones and avoids either exacerbating or creating additional fluvial or surface water flooding. As flood maps are only updated infrequently, a process that often involves homeowners reporting problems (at potential harm to their property value), the assessment of flood risk should not only take into account the latest flood maps, but also local knowledge of flood events. Assessing the risk of flooding is hard and there are significant downsides to getting this risk assessment wrong. Therefore local knowledge of flood events can helpfully supplement flood maps as evidence of flood risk. It is, however, important to recognise that the absence of any recent flood event cannot be used as evidence that flood maps are out of date - they are designed to capture the risk of events that only occur infrequently and therefore a recent lack of flooding does not undermine that longer term modelling approach.

6.40 Minimising the risk of flooding is not just about ensuring that new development does not occur in areas that are known to be at risk of flooding. It is also important that development is only allowed where it will not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere. Maidstone Borough Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) from 2020 examined the potential for the cumulative impact of development to increase flood risk for third parties. This Cumulative Impacts Assessment showed that the assessed level of risk in and around Headcorn village and for most of the Parish was either High or Medium (see HNP Policy Map 15). The risk of exacerbating flood risk in Headcorn is also apparent from Headcorn's Surface Water Management Plan, published in 2017:

> *"The topography of Headcorn is relatively low lying and is underlain by the Weald Clay, contributing to surface water flooding in the village. The report also noted that there are few surface water drainage systems, with runoff discharging to the foul network or into soakaways, which are unlikely to be effective. Flooding coincided with high river levels in the River Beult, which may indicate an inability of the surface water drainage systems to discharge runoff during fluvial flood events. No flood alleviation options were found to be cost effective, however it was proposed to install a rain gauge to ensure more accurate and timely flood warnings."*[18]

6.41 Furthermore, the experience of recent developments in Headcorn suggests that current practices for managing surface water run-off have not been effective at preventing flooding. It is therefore very important that any new developments learn from these experiences and adapt their approach to address weaknesses. When development is allowed, it should be landscaped and managed in a way that will minimise flood risks, for example by minimising the amount of hard standing and having clearly defined responsibilities for the maintenance of features such as ditches and culverts.

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[18] See JBA Consulting (2020), Maidstone Borough Council's (2020) Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.

HNP Policy Map 15: Map of Cumulative Impacts Assessment of potential for development to increase flood risk for third parties in Headcorn
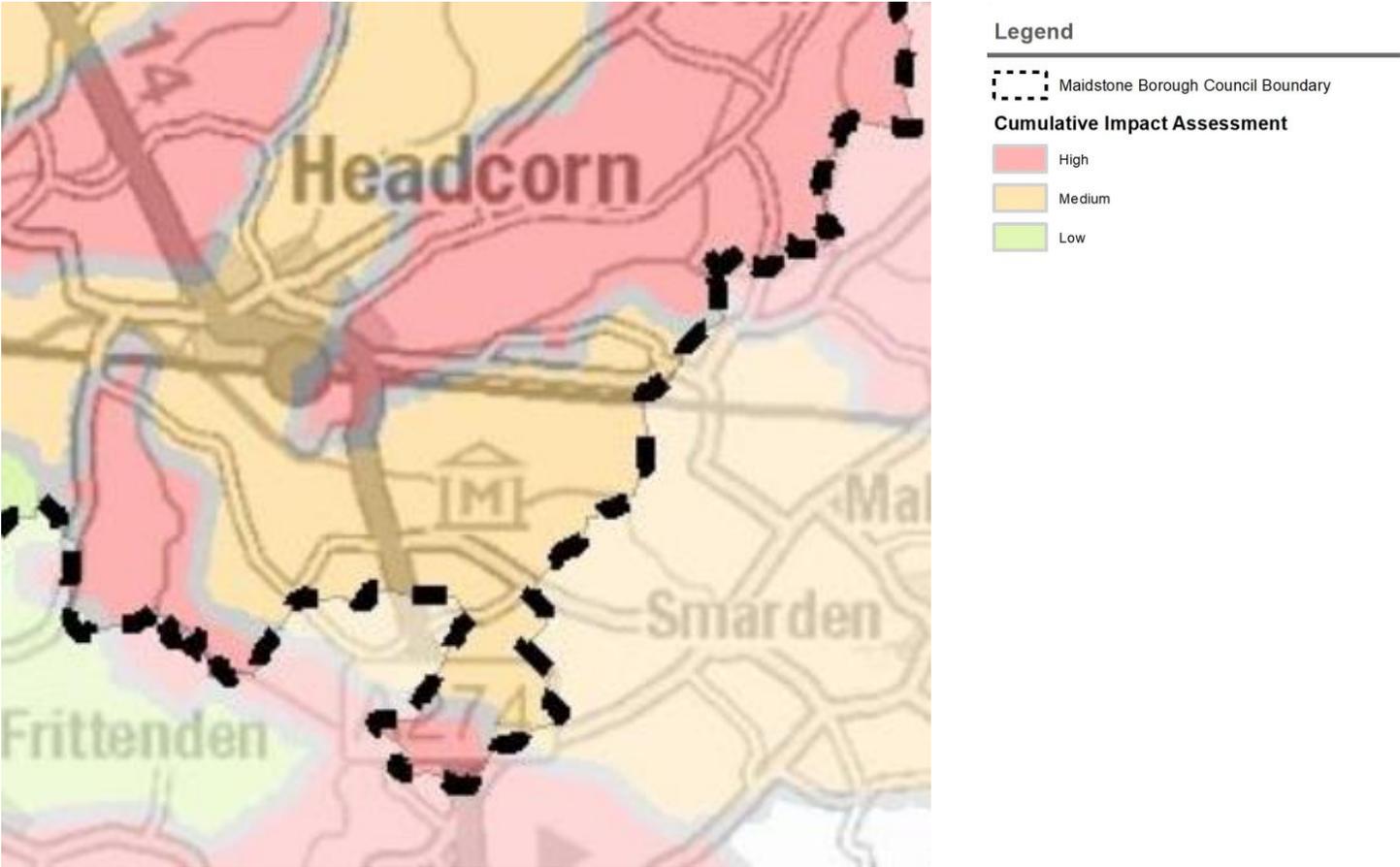
Source: Excerpt from Figure 13-2, Maidstone Borough Council, Level 1 SFRA update and Level 2 SFRA (2020), JBA Consulting.

6.v   Development in the countryside

6.42 In line with the National Planning Policy Framework, in general development in the countryside in Headcorn should not be allowed, except under strict conditions. This is particularly true in more isolated parts of the Parish. However, where it does take place, it is important that it reflects existing development patterns, in order to ensure that Headcorn retains its sense of place.

Figure 37: Examples of typical rural developments in Headcorn Parish

Note: Development in the countryside of Headcorn Parish typically involves small clusters of buildings, used for either agricultural or domestic purposes, with fields on either side giving views out to the countryside. These photos show some typical examples of the grouping of buildings and historic architecture in Headcorn countryside. Clockwise from the top left the examples come from: Ulcombe Road; Plumtree Road; the view across the fields towards Grigg Lane; and view from the Smarden Road towards Love Lane.

6.43 Developments in the countryside around Headcorn village are typified by small clusters of houses and agricultural buildings, with significant gaps between clusters. This development pattern ensures that the countryside in Headcorn Parish retains a rural, rather than suburban, feel, and maximises the benefits of views across the countryside. The siting and landscaping of any development in the countryside should therefore seek to replicate this pattern.

6.44 It is particularly important that development does not take place in isolated parts of the Parish where there are currently no buildings. Avoiding development in isolated areas will help ensure the separation of individual developments. It will also create benefits for local wildlife, as light pollution is known to have a detrimental effect on many species. While there is no generally agreed definition of isolated, in order to help inform decision making, for the purposes of this Neighbourhood Plan it is defined as locations that are not within 200m of at least two established dwellings.

HNP Policy 2: Siting, landscaping and protecting the natural and historic environment and setting

This policy covers all development in Headcorn Parish, including housing, gypsy and traveller pitches, commercial and community development. New development in Headcorn Parish, in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan, will be permitted where it:

1. respects the setting of any listed buildings, or other buildings that contribute towards the character of the countryside, or exemplify the development of the Low Weald, and protects and sensitively incorporates historic features within the site to sustain the historic environment, including the contribution of these features to local character and identity;

2. will not have a detrimental impact on the distinctive views within the village and of the surrounding countryside (particularly those identified in HNP Policy Map 12, or contributing to the character or appearance of the Headcorn Conservation Area or the significance of other heritage assets) that can be seen from public vantage points within and adjacent to the built up area of the village. This includes the distinctive views to and from the nearby Greensand Ridge;

3. retains and, where relevant, enhances existing public green spaces (including spaces within existing developments) and recreational spaces (for example, sports clubs) within the Parish. In general, the loss of public green spaces within existing developments will not be permitted, unless it can be demonstrated that the development would be of material benefit to the surrounding residents, or the Parish as a whole; and a proposal involving moving a recreational space will only be permitted where the result is that the new facilities provided will be at least as good as the existing facilities, and where the accessibility of the new location from the Village is at least as good as from the existing facility;

4. respects the natural contours of the site and protects and sensitively incorporates natural features such as trees, hedges and ponds within the site, to make best use of the site to accommodate development, helping to preserve and enhance the natural environment in Headcorn, by providing a habitat for wildlife, and to sustain the contribution of these features to local character and identity;

5. maintains and enhances existing wildlife corridors and stepping stones, and avoids the use of impermeable barriers. Roadside verges and hedges, which are important wildlife refuges, should be maintained where possible when development takes place. Developments within and adjacent to the village itself should preserve and enhance the wildlife corridors that link with the central village and the surrounding countryside, to allow the free flow of wildlife into the parks and gardens of the village;

6. will deliver biodiversity net gain, in line with national and local targets, that is focused on supporting native flora and fauna. Ideally this net gain should be within the site itself. However, where this is not possible, any offsite solutions should be

located within Headcorn Parish, and ideally managed in a way that local residents will be able to enjoy.

7. is sensitively landscaped, making good use of native plants, including trees such as oak, hawthorn, hornbeam and ash as well as fruit trees, to protect and enhance the green nature of the built environment and rural landscape in Headcorn, and ensures that any loss of hedgerows and established trees from a site in the previous five years (or where it will be unavoidable to remove parts of existing hedgerows or established trees as part of the development) will be balanced by the provision of similar species within the development that will help maintain and enhance wildlife corridors within and around the site. In general, mature trees and hedgerows should only be removed as an exception and existing ancient hedgerows must be preserved as part of any new development. See HNP Policy Map 13 for a map of the ancient hedgerows and key wildlife corridors that have been identified in the immediate vicinity of Headcorn village;

8. makes appropriate use of landscape buffers between new and existing developments where they will help create and enhance wildlife corridors;

9. limits the amount of hard standing and hard landscaping associated with developments;

10. will not cause damage to local streams and rivers;

11. is not within the Flood Zone 3b, as identified by the maps provided by the Environmental Agency (or whichever body is officially responsible for providing flood information), and avoids Flood Zones 2, 3a and areas where Headcorn Parish Council is aware of recent flood events (including surface water flooding) affecting the site, unless it can be shown that the development passes the requirements set out in the sequential and exception tests for assessing flood risk and can demonstrate that the development will remain safe throughout its lifespan and will not increase flood risk elsewhere;

12. is able to deal with flooding and surface water run-off from the site in a way that will not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere (including on adjacent land), through the use of best practice techniques that are designed to address the challenges provided by the local geology and topography, as well as learn from the experiences of other developments in Headcorn; and

13. has adequate drainage provision with clearly identified responsibilities for maintenance, for example of ditches and culverts.

Outside the strategic allocations set out in the adopted Local Plan, where the proposed development is located in the countryside surrounding Headcorn Parish, then it must also:

14. reflect the established development pattern within the surrounding countryside of the Parish, which involves small clusters of dwellings and agricultural buildings,

with significant gaps in between that provide views out to the countryside;

15. avoid locations situated in more isolated parts of the Parish, unless the proposal involves the conversion of an established building, in order to preserve the unspoilt rural character of undeveloped parts of the countryside and retain separation between developments. In particular, development should be avoided where it is in a location that is not within 200m of at least two established dwellings.

7.   CONNECTIVITY AND ACCESS

7.1 Connectivity and access are an important part of the success of development schemes. They determine:

- how the development will sit within its environment;
- how residents interact with the village (for example are they encouraged to walk, or is using a car a necessity); and
- how easy it is for all residents to access both the countryside surrounding the village and the High Street at the village core.

7.2 Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan aims to ensure that new development throughout the Parish will be undertaken in a way that will foster good connectivity and access; will not create or exacerbate problems, for example for road safety; will reflect desired development patterns by, for example, avoiding the creation of ribbon development or rat runs; and will be undertaken in a way that is sensitive to the local environment and helps preserve key features such as wildlife corridors.

7.3 At present Headcorn is well served by a series of roads and pathways that radiate out from the village core, see HNP Policy Map 16. These help foster both the commercial viability of the village High Street, as well as a sense of community connection, by encouraging people to walk around the village. Therefore, connecting new housing to the rest of the village by maintaining and enhancing this system of paths, roads and alleyways, enabling access on foot and by bike, will be essential. It is also important that any new pathways will remain operational in all weathers. For example, grass footpaths are likely to be unsuitable for key links from developments into the village, given the fact that Headcorn sits on Wealden clay, which means grass footpath rapidly become extremely muddy in wet weather.

Figure 38: Good examples of footpaths linking developments to the main link roads in Headcorn village

Note: From left to right: Path linking Forge Meadows and Kings Road; and path linking the Chantry and Oak Lane.

HNP Policy Map 16: Connectivity within Headcorn Village
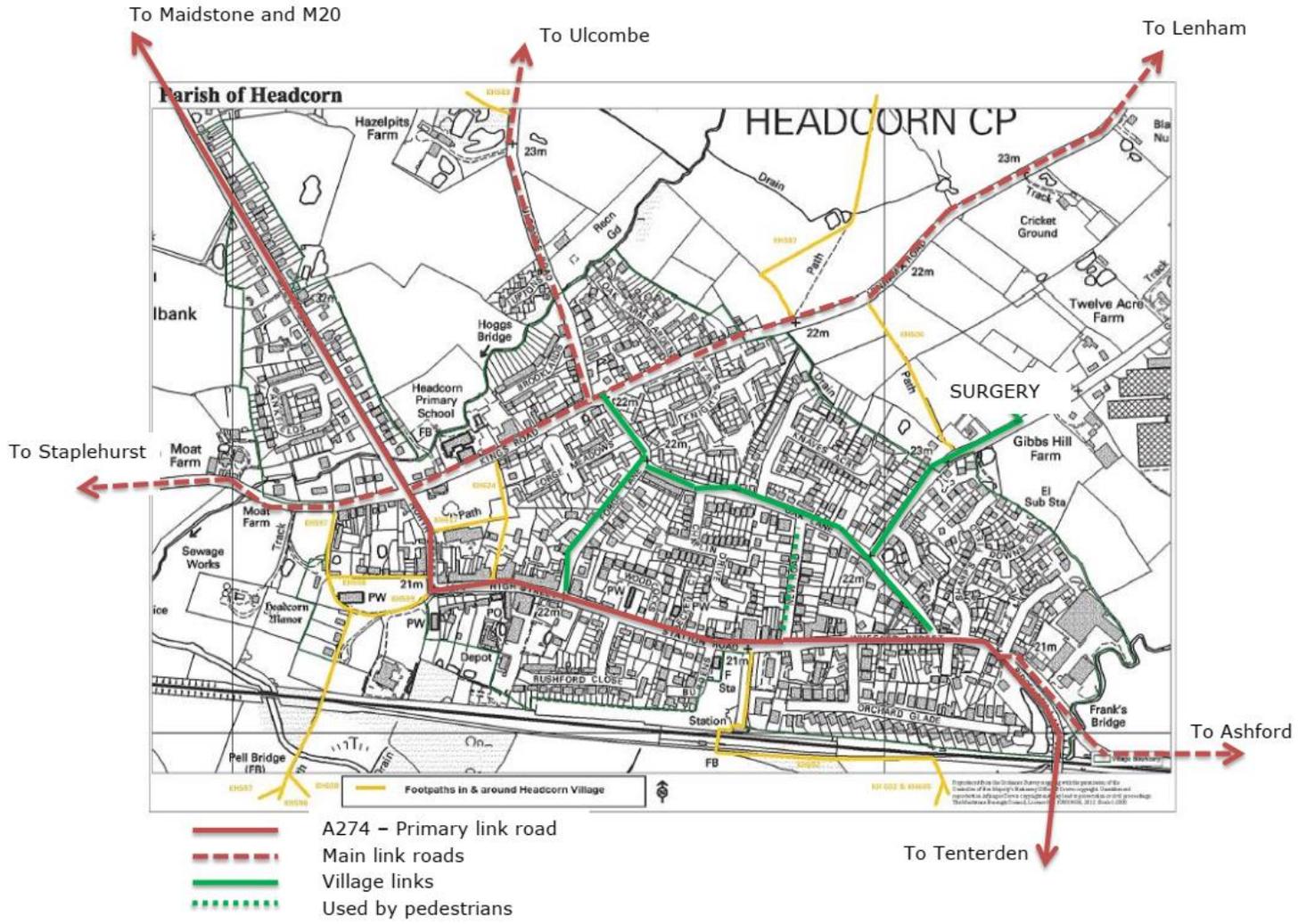
Note: The road marked with a dotted green line is New Road. This is a private road, but is used by pedestrians to access the railway station.

HNP Policy Map 17: Traffic pinch points within Headcorn Village
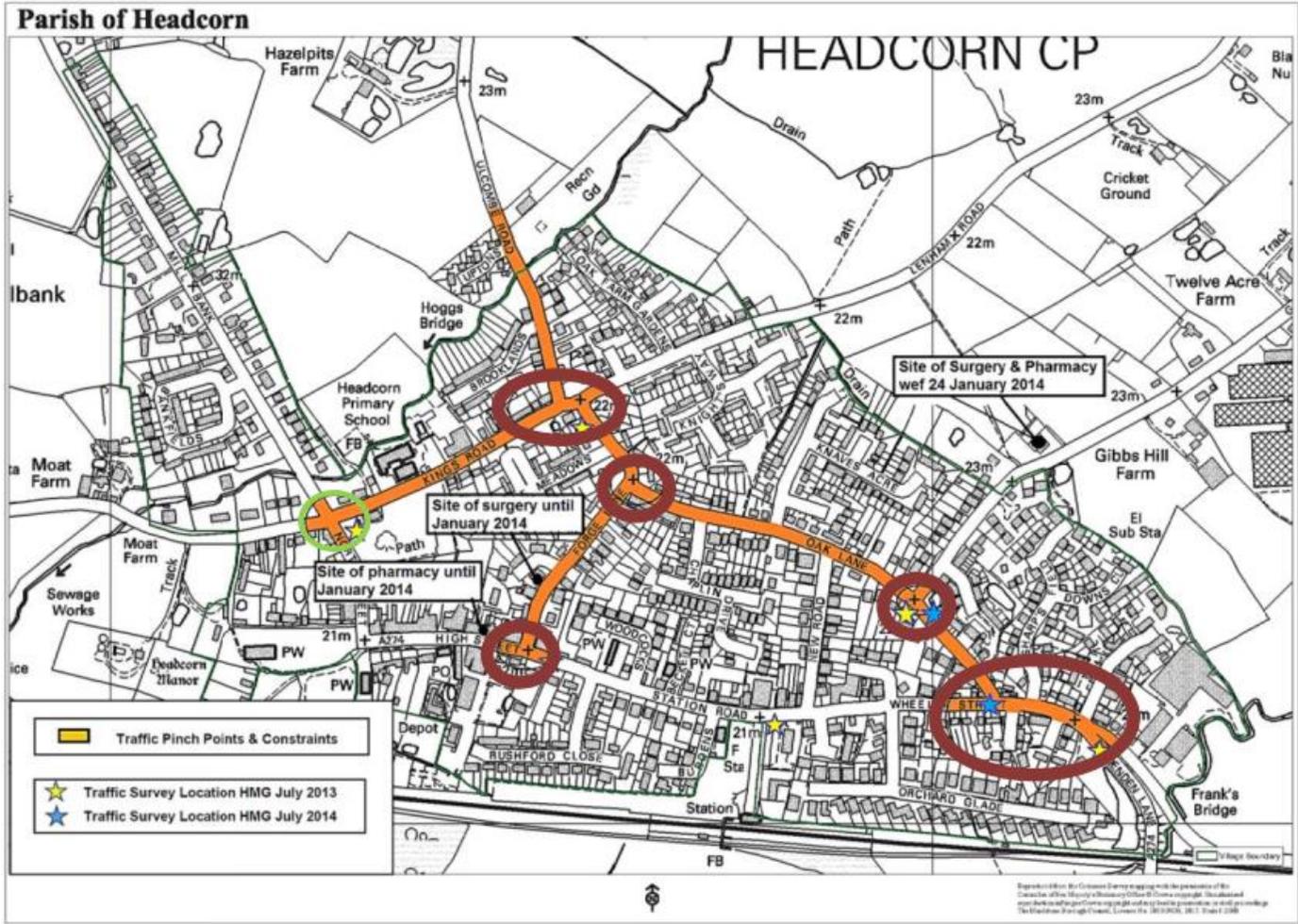
Note: Based on the results of Headcorn's traffic surveys. The green circle indicates where traffic lights have been introduced between the A274 and Moat Road and Kings Road, which anecdotally has helped improve safety at that junction.

7.4 In addition, Headcorn's system of roads and pathways also allows good access to the countryside from the village, with a network of footpaths connecting to the lush water meadows of the River Beult to the south and the attractive agricultural land in other directions. This easy access to the surrounding countryside is highly rated by residents and needs to be retained and enhanced through new developments. These public rights of way (PRoW) are an important feature of Headcorn's landscape and this network should be preserved and enhanced.[19] Initiatives to help achieve this include Kent County Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). Developments should avoid creating any adverse impact on the PRoW network, including the enjoyment that residents gain from their use. Preventing harm should inform landscaping considerations.

7.5 However, while access by foot or by cycle will play an important role in the success of a development, how vehicular access is organised will also have an important impact on the development's success. For example, the creation of "rat-runs" can be harmful both for traffic flows in the village as a whole and for the residents of the development itself and should be avoided. In addition there are certain key pinch-points within the village that could be exacerbated depending on how access was organised. For example, there is a bridge at the start of the Ulcombe Road that only allows a single lane of traffic. Thought therefore also needs to be given to ensure that there will be solutions in place that will be able to alleviate any pressures from new development on key parts of the existing road network.

7.6 As well as fostering connectivity, how access is organised within developments (both to the development as a whole and to individual houses within the development) have an important impact on how a development will sit within its village or countryside setting. For example:

- residents are keen that sites should have a single point of access onto the existing road network, to reinforce the development of clusters of houses rather than ribbon development;[20] and
- depending on how access is organised there is a risk that where several new developments interconnect they end up creating a large, urban style estate by default, which is contrary both to the existing character of the village and to what residents want, meaning developments need to be self-contained. However, it is worth recognising that concerns about the creation of large developments by stealth primarily reflect concerns about vehicle access arrangements. Links between developments that created footpaths and cycle paths would be permitted, if they helped improve accessibility by foot or cycle to either the High Street or the countryside.

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[19] PRoW are defined as "A way over which the public have a right to pass and repass, including Public Footpaths, Public Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open to All Traffic".

[20] Two out of three residents picked option B when asked to choose between "A: All the houses in a new development should have their own point of access onto the existing road system, so that they line the existing roads or B: New developments should have a single point of access onto the existing road system, allowing the development of clusters of houses". Headcorn Residents' Survey 2013.

HNP Policy 3: Connectivity and access

This policy covers all development in Headcorn Parish, including housing, gypsy and traveller pitches, commercial and community development. New development in Headcorn Parish, in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan, will be permitted where it:

1. creates safe and well connected developments, promoting and enhancing links both to Headcorn High Street and to the countryside that can be easily accessed by foot and cycle;

2. where needed takes advantage of opportunities to enhance road safety, for example by enhancing existing junctions that will be key for access to the development (including any junctions with the primary or main link roads within the Parish) in a way that is appropriate for Headcorn's rural setting;

3. has direct access from the site to an existing highway or driveway, without the need to cross additional field boundaries;

4. makes best use of pre-existing site access (for example to facilitate the retention of hedgerows) unless reasons such as road safety require alternative access routes onto the existing road network to be provided;

5. creates a self-contained development, to avoid creating large estates by default;

6. is accessed in a way that avoids creating harmful rat runs;

7. is accessed in a way that avoids creating the appearance of ribbon development along the existing road network (for example with direct vehicular access to all the houses in the development to an existing road);

8. avoids choosing access routes that will exacerbate existing key pinch points for traffic flows within the village;

9. will not cause or exacerbate traffic problems, for example by blocking lines of sight at junctions; contributing to on-street parking; creating vehicular access that will be difficult to use, for example, because of poor lines of sight; or creating safety concerns for other road users (including pedestrians and cyclists); and

10. will be supported by an effective traffic management plan during the construction period, including a pre-conditions survey for any major development, which will respect the needs of existing residents and will avoid exacerbating key pinch points for traffic flows within the village, or the primary and main link roads within the Parish.

8. INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION

8.1 Infrastructure always plays an important role in development, and the history of Headcorn is no different. The strength of its infrastructure (including the railway station, primary school, library, vibrant High Street and doctor's surgery) are the main reasons why Maidstone Borough Council has designated Headcorn as a Rural Service Centre (RSC). However, while some areas of infrastructure are valued by local residents and businesses, others, such as the sewage and storm drainage system, are seen as bad by the majority of residents, and businesses regard them as a constraint on future expansion. Therefore it is likely that some aspects of Headcorn's infrastructure, such as the sewage and storm drainage system could act as a constraint on development in the absence of substantial investment.

8.2 The choices reflected in Policy HNP4 on Infrastructure Provision have been informed by the results of the 2021 Residents' Survey, which rated different aspects of infrastructure within Headcorn, the Regulation 14 Consultation, as well as previous evidence gathered.

Figure 39: How are services and infrastructure rated in Headcorn?
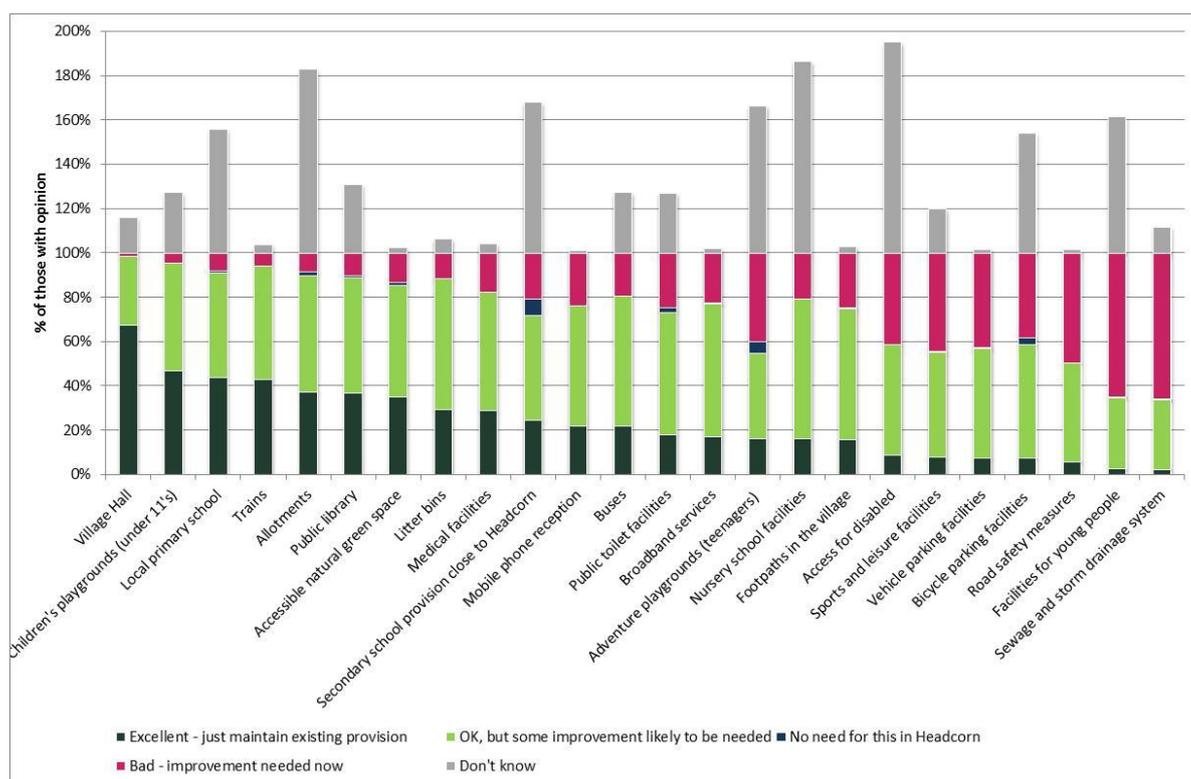
Note: Based on 2021 Residents' Survey. The question wording was "One of the key reasons for introducing a Neighbourhood Plan is that it will enable the community to have more influence over the priorities for local infrastructure spending. To help identify what those priorities should be, thinking about how the village is likely to develop over the next 20 years, how do you rate the provision of the following in Headcorn? [TICK ONE FOR EACH TYPE OF INFRASTRUCTURE]". Residents were given 5 options to assess each service: Excellent – just maintain the existing provision; OK, but some improvement likely to be needed; Bad – improvement needed now; No need for this in Headcorn; and don't know. The percentages shown are a percentage of those who expressed an opinion (in other words excluding those ticking "Don't know". Options are ranked relative to the share of residents seeing provision as excellent.

8.3 The aim of this Neighbourhood Plan is to ensure that Headcorn's infrastructure is robust and will support the needs of residents and businesses in the Parish, both now and in the future. It therefore sets standards for four key aspects of infrastructure, which will help ensure this, namely: parking; broadband provision; water and sewerage management; and energy efficiency. With the exception of broadband provision, these standards apply to all types of development within Headcorn.

8.4 As well as setting standards for key parts of the supporting infrastructure for development in Headcorn, Part E of Headcorn's policy on Infrastructure Provision also sets the priorities for infrastructure spending in Headcorn, in order to ensure that it will best meet local needs.

8.i   Parking

8.5 Parking has been a concern for residents in Headcorn for some time. In a comparison of 24 different types of infrastructure supporting Headcorn in the 2021 Residents' Survey, both vehicle parking and bicycle parking ranked in the bottom five, with around 40% of residents identifying these as "bad, improvement needed now".[21] Although both types of parking scored poorly in the survey, there was much more uncertainty associated with scoring the provision of bicycle parking, meaning the bulk of residents were more aware of poor vehicle parking than poor bicycle parking.[22]

8.6 The results from the 2021 Residents' Survey represent a slight improvement compared to the results from the 2013 Residents' Survey, where around half of residents who expressed an opinion felt that both vehicle and bicycle parking facilities were bad.[23] This potentially reflects the impact of the global pandemic, with fewer people travelling to work in February-March 2021. In the case of vehicle parking, discussions with residents and businesses in meetings at the end of 2013 revealed that the biggest problem for parking is commuter parking on residential roads, followed by the cost of parking, although the availability of parking is an issue for some.

8.7 The issue of commuter parking is not one of the availability of parking spaces in the station car park. For example, the traffic survey conducted in July 2013 revealed that the station car park was only three quarters full. The issue appears to be one of cost causing commuters to park in residential roads in Headcorn to avoid paying for car parking. In November 2021, charges for parking in the station car park range from £6.70 for a day, £29.30 for a week to £1,120.80 for an annual car parking ticket. To put this in context, the weekly cost of parking in the station would be 13.5% of the gross weekly income of those

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[21] Percentage calculations are of those expressing an opinion, so exclude those who ticked "Don't know" or didn't answer.

[22] Compared to those expressing an opinion, an additional 55% of respondents ticked "Don't know" for bicycle parking, but less than 2% ticked "Don't know" for vehicle parking.

[23] The pattern for those ticking "Don't know" in the 2013 Survey was also similar, with almost two thirds as many respondents ticking "Don't know" for bicycle parking as expressed an opinion, but with almost all respondents expressing an opinion on vehicle parking.

at the bottom 10% of the income distribution; and 5.3% of the weekly income of those on median earnings.[24]

8.8 Solving the issue of commuter parking on residential roads will require measures such as additional parking restrictions or improving enforcement, both of which are favoured by residents.

Table 1: Weekly cost of travel by public transport from Headcorn

	Cost (£)	% of median gross weekly earnings	% of gross weekly earnings for those at bottom 10th percentile
Weekly season ticket by train from Headcorn to London	£137.60	25.0%	63.2%
Weekly parking permit at Headcorn station	£29.30	5.3%	13.5%
Weekly bus fare from Headcorn to Maidstone	£31.00	5.6%	14.2%

Note: Median gross earnings (in other words earnings before tax) in 2021 for all workers (full and part time) resident in Maidstone Borough were £549.50 per week and earnings of those on the bottom 10th percentile were £217.80 per week. Data based on the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings published by the ONS.

8.9 However, in planning terms, it is also important to ensure that new developments are supported by adequate parking facilities, to avoid exacerbating problems elsewhere. In the case of residential dwellings, Headcorn's rural location makes vehicle parking particularly important, because the cost of travel by public transport, Headcorn's distance from most local centres, and the irregular nature of most local bus services means that most local households rely on cars for transport.

8.10 However, given this reliance on cars for transport, it will also be important to ensure that new developments help support a switch to electric vehicles, in order to help support the UK Government's climate change goals and reduce emissions. The way that this is done needs to be sensitive to its potential impact on Headcorn's street scape, in order to ensure that the village retains its rural charm.

8.11 Considerations about its impact on Headcorn's street scape also influence considerations on parking standards. Most households of more than one adult in Headcorn are likely to need more than one car. In addition, while garages are popular, they are much more likely to be used for general storage rather than parking cars. Therefore developments need to consider the likely requirements for outdoor parking, with the choice to provide parking in garages being an addition to the required provision. It is also important to consider the need for visitor parking.

8.12 To achieve its aims, therefore, the approach taken by Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is to ensure that:

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[24] Data for earnings are for total gross earnings in 2021, in other words earnings before tax is deducted, based on Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) data for all workers living in Maidstone Borough.

- all new developments are supported by adequate outdoor parking facilities, to reduce the need for on-road parking in residential areas;
- all new developments demonstrate how they will facilitate the adoption of electric vehicles, without creating a cluttered street scape; and
- developments will not result of the loss of parking facilities that support the High Street (which is central to Headcorn's economy), or key local services such as the railway station or Doctors' surgery.

8.ii   Provision of broadband

8.13 Even before the start of the global COVID pandemic, broadband provision had increasingly become a prerequisite for any economy to flourish. This is particularly true for areas like Headcorn, where distance from major urban centres means that residents are much more likely to need to work locally. Indeed in 2011, 18.9% of those in work in Headcorn worked mainly at or from home, compared to 10.3% for England as a whole. The Kent County Council Community Broadband scheme has a roll-out programme for the delivery of standard (up to 17mbps) and superfast broadband infrastructure (24mbps+). The programme for the built up area of Headcorn village covered the period of October 2014 to the end of 2015.

8.14 In the 2021 Residents' Survey, broadband provision ranked relatively well, with only around a quarter of those expressing an opinion ranking broadband as "Bad, improvement needed now". This represents a significant improvement compared to the 2013 Residents' Survey, when around half of respondents expressing an opinion ranked broadband as "Bad, improvement needed now".

8.15 It is important that effective broadband provision is maintained in the Parish, not just in existing properties, but also in new ones. BT has an obligation to provide a landline to every household in the UK. In addition, developers are expected to want to facilitate high speed broadband provision to make their developments marketable. However, there have been instances where developers have not contacted BT early enough in the process for fibre and ducting to be laid, or where they have relied on a national agreement with a cable provider that is not active in the area, leaving new housing developments with little or no connections. Therefore, this policy seeks to ensure that all housing developments are connected to superfast broadband.

8.16 The policy covers housing in developments of more than one or two dwellings, because these are the developments where occupiers are most dependent on the developer to have installed the right infrastructure from the start. The aim is to ensure that this infrastructure is installed in a way that will future proof developments, by making sure that even if the most up-to-date form of broadband connection is not yet available within Headcorn, the relevant infrastructure is provided to facilitate such connections once it reaches the parish.

8.17 While it is expected that community and commercial development will also want to comply with the same high standards, to ensure the longevity of the development, it is acknowledged that this needs to be a commercial decision based on the intended usage.

Therefore no specific condition is proposed for this type of development, but developers will need to demonstrate why they have decided not to install the relevant high-performance broadband option, because it will help determine whether the proposal would make good use of the land to be used for the development.

8.18 Similarly for micro village developments and individual countryside developments, it is assumed that individuals will want to install the best possible option, but it is left to them to judge what is necessary.

8.iii   Water and sewerage management

8.19 Of all the parts of Headcorn's infrastructure reviewed by residents in the 2021 Residents' Survey, the sewerage and storm drainage system was seen as the worst, with over 65% of residents rating it as "bad, improvement needed now".[25] This represents a deterioration of around 10 percentage points since the 2013 Residents' Survey. This deterioration occurred despite the fact that Southern Water, which is the company responsible for sewerage in Headcorn, has recently upgraded the sewerage system at Moat Road, meaning that sewage no longer flows onto Moat Road at times of heavy rain.

8.20 The views of residents are consistent with the findings of the assessment of Headcorn's foul drainage assessment conducted by Sanderson (Consulting Engineers) Ltd, which was commissioned by Headcorn Parish Council in 2015. The study was a modelling exercise based on information provided by Southern Water. Results from the study identified that the current system has significant problems, including:

- 15 sewage pipes that already have insufficient capacity, including 9 locations, totalling some 432m linear run, on the main distribution network;
- 14 sewage pipes that suffer from back-fall (where sewage is trying to flow uphill);
- 74 sewage pipes (around 60% of the sewerage network in the village) where the pipes are not self-cleaning due to inadequate velocity; and
- 6 sections of sewage pipes that suffer from all three problems.

8.21 These problems were in evidence throughout the village and included several sections of major pipework that were important for the functioning of the entire sewerage system in the village – in other words, problems were not simply confined to small, localised areas. The results also highlighted that Southern Water's records were far from complete, with at least some data missing for 45% of the manholes in the village, suggesting further problems might emerge when more accurate records are available. For example, at the time of the survey, the problem section of sewerage in Moat Road could not be modelled, because Southern Water's records suggested that sewage flowed in both directions, something that is unheard of in engineering terms.

8.22 Ensuring that Headcorn's sewerage system will be able to cope with any proposed development is therefore a key aim of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan. The system must be able to cope not just in normal periods, but also in periods of heavy rain. This is

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[25] Percentage calculations are of those expressing an opinion, so exclude those who ticked "Don't know" or didn't answer.

because many older properties in the village are legitimately allowed to discharge surface water into the sewerage system (and are charged for doing so). Beyond the obvious implications for human health, the ability of sewerage systems in Headcorn to cope is also important to avoid potentially undermining the ecosystems associated with Headcorn's streams, rivers and ponds, including the River Beult, which is an SSSI. Sewerage providers should be able to calculate whether the network is able to cope with the usage associated with peak demand (heavy rain), because they will know not only what normal flows are, but also how many properties are paying to discharge surface water into the sewerage system.

8.23 Where relevant, proposals to connect to the existing drainage network 'upstream' of known flooding hotspots should provide improvements to reduce flood risk off-site.

8.24 The use of holding tanks for sewerage that then pump into the main sewerage network is discouraged, because it potentially creates scheduling problems, including problems associated with discharging sewerage into the network in periods of heavy rain. Furthermore, Headcorn's experience suggests that holding tanks are not reliable; they create the need for regular pumping activities; and they require land to be allocated to sewage storage that could be used for other purposes.

8.25 In addition to setting policy to ensure that sewerage and waste water will be adequately disposed of, Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan also recognises that climate change will potentially create challenges around water usage. To address this, developments should look to promote the efficient use of water.

8.26 However, as with the sewerage network, it is also important that the water supply network is able to cope with any increase in demand. Recent experience in Headcorn suggests that this is currently not the case. In 2022, half of the Village (on the Kings Oak / Weavers side) had no water supply, which lasted for 2-3 days and no water station was provided.[26] In 2023 again there was no water supply for half of the Village every evening for 2-3 nights in a row. A water station was provided at the Aerodrome, but this is located outside of the Village and is not a central location for any of the affected residents.[27] These two events could reflect one-off problems with the network. However, there is a risk that they are an indication that the significant increase in the size of the Village in recent years, combined with development elsewhere and the impacts of climate change, means that the water supply can no longer cope. It is therefore important to ensure that the water supply network has sufficient capacity to support development.

8.27 In all cases, any solutions to issues around sewerage or water usage should not undermine the utility and comfort of intended users. This is to ensure that any developments will stand the test of time and will be usable both now and in the future.

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[26]   This resulted in compensation to the value of £2,500.

[27]   Despite complaints, all that was received was an apology.

8.iv   Promoting energy efficiency

8.28 There is a growing acceptance of the need to promote energy efficiency, in order to reduce emissions and help deal with climate change. Although it was not covered in the 2021 Residents' Survey, the issue of promoting energy efficiency was raised by several respondents in the comments. In addition, discussions with residents in 2014 and 2015 revealed that many felt that the introduction of environmentally friendly measures in new homes and commercial developments was an attractive option.

8.29 In recognition of this, Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan seeks to ensure that energy usage for all types of development in Headcorn will be lower than for standard properties of the type proposed. This is balanced by a requirement designed to ensure that the solutions employed do not undermine the utility and comfort of intended users, in order to support the longevity of developments. This reflects the recognition that the process of building and producing materials itself has an impact on the environment. Therefore it is important to make sure that developments will stand the test of time and will be usable both now and in the future.

8.30 Opportunities should also be sought to consider how to minimise the environmental impact of development. For example, it may be more energy efficient to adapt an existing structure than to demolish it and rebuild.

8.v   Priorities for infrastructure spending

8.31 Policy ID1 in the adopted 2017 Maidstone Local Plan lists the priorities for infrastructure spending within the Borough. However, the policy recognises that site specific considerations might require relative priorities to shift.

8.32 As set out in the Vision underpinning Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, a key objective of the Plan is to ensure that Headcorn is supported by robust infrastructure that is designed to meet the needs of local residents and businesses. To achieve this, it is important that the infrastructure built to support development in Headcorn reflects Headcorn's specific needs. Policy HNP4(E) therefore reweights the Borough-wide infrastructure priorities to reflect the specific needs identified through the Headcorn Residents' Surveys, discussions with businesses and evidence gathered by Headcorn Parish Council through discussions with residents.[28] The policy is designed to ensure that in cases where there are competing demands for developer contributions towards the delivery of infrastructure for new development proposals, the demands will be effectively prioritised in a way that will best meet Headcorn's needs.

8.v.a Priorities for public realm improvements, such as road safety

8.33 In addition to identifying where any infrastructure spending will be best used, the 2021 Residents' survey also investigated for specific types of infrastructure provision, including road safety measures. Road safety and traffic management is a concern that has

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[28] Results from the 2021 Residents' survey rating different types of infrastructure provision are shown in Figure 39 above. These are very similar to priorities identified in earlier surveys, as well as discussions with businesses, particularly in relation to the need to improve sewage and storm drainage system.

often been raised by residents in Headcorn. The 2021 Residents' Survey identified a range of measures with majority support. In descending order of popularity these were:

- No loss of strategic parking facilities;
- Introducing a pedestrian crossing by the station;
- Creating a 20 mile per hour zone on the Kings Road and Ulcombe Road, close to the Primary School;
- Adding physical markings on the surface of the A274 to show the speed limit;
- Adding speed calming measures on all the principal side roads into the village;
- Introducing traffic calming measures such as a traffic island on the northern edge of the village on the A274;
- Improving parking in the centre of the village; and
- Adding bollards on Oak Lane to reduce its width and reduce traffic speed.

Figure 40: The use of road markings to reinforce speed limits

Note: An example of the use of road markings to reinforce the speed limit from Broad Oak village in Sussex. These reminders appear at regular intervals throughout the village to slow vehicles on a long, straight stretch of the A265. More elaborate examples can include the use of a different coloured road surface (typically red) to create an even stronger reminder.

8.34 Measures that did not enjoy majority support included: creating cycle lanes, either in new developments or the centre of the village; making all roads within the village boundary 20 mile per hour zones; making all roads within the village boundary except the A274 20 mile per hour zones; improving cycle parking in the centre of the village; and making Oak Lane and Forge Lane one way.

8.v.b Priorities for open spaces

8.35 Headcorn's 2021 Residents' Survey also investigated preferences for the provision of different types of open spaces. Facilities for young people, including the provision of adventure play grounds for teenagers all scored poorly in residents' assessment of existing infrastructure in Headcorn. This suggests that facilities for teenagers need to prioritised.

8.36 In addition, there is also concern over the availability of sports and leisure facilities in the Parish, which is why Policy HNP2 in this Neighbourhood Plan looks to protect and enhance these. Headcorn Parish Council has also identified the need for more allotments, based on discussions with residents.

HNP Policy Map 18: Map of accessible natural green space (ANGSt) in Maidstone Borough
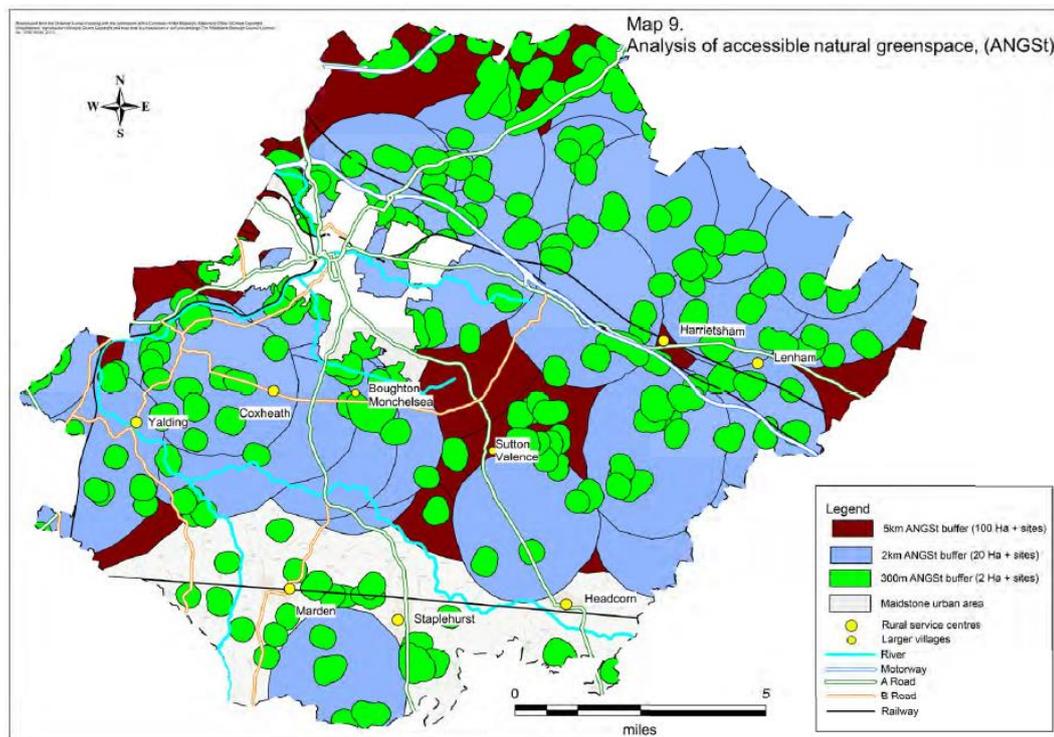
Note: Map 9 from Maidstone's draft Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy. Headcorn does not have any green spaces meeting the ANGSt definitions.

Source: Maidstone Borough Council (2013)

8.37 In contrast, the provision of children's playground spaces for under 11s scored very highly in the 2021 Residents' Survey, with almost 50% thinking provision was excellent, with no need for additional provision, and less than 5% rating provision as bad. This suggests limited need for children's playgrounds for the under 11s, except in very large developments.

8.38 In addition, although Headcorn benefits from green spaces scattered around the village, Headcorn fails to meet Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt), which has been adopted by Maidstone Borough Council. This standard recommends that people live within 300m of a two hectare natural green space, within 2km of a 20 hectare natural green space and within 5km of a 100 hectare natural green space. As can be seen from HNP Policy Map 18, Headcorn does not meet any of these standards.

8.39 Whilst accessible green space was not flagged as a particular concern the 2021 Residents' Survey, many residents have indicated that they would value more accessible natural green space in which they could walk their dogs, for example. In addition, over 85% of residents responding to the survey supported the introduction of either establishing a large area of natural green space within easy reach of the village centre, or of creating a wildlife sanctuary with access to the River Beult.

HNP Policy 4: Infrastructure provision

A. Parking

This policy covers all development in Headcorn, including housing, gypsy and traveller pitches, commercial and community development. New development in Headcorn Parish, in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan, will be permitted providing it:

1. will be supported by adequate outside parking provision at each property. In the case of residential development this will include parking for at least one car per dwelling and a minimum of two cars for any dwelling of more than one bedroom, together with on-street parking provision of at least 0.2 spaces per dwelling;

2. can demonstrate how it will support greater adoption of electric vehicles through the provision of appropriate charging facilities;

3. will not result in the loss of parking facilities in the village that support either the High Street, or key services such as the railway station or Doctors' surgery; and

4. provides adequate cycle parking provision.

B. Provision of broadband in Headcorn

This policy covers all housing developments (except for micro developments of at most two housing units). New development, in accordance with the Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan, will be permitted providing there is a Planning Condition that specifies that:

1. The necessary infrastructure will be provided to ensure that all new dwellings in the development will be served by a superfast broadband connection (or the appropriate future standard for high-performance broadband delivery) installed on an open access basis; and

2. The broadband provision is provided in a way that will enable future repair, replacement or upgrading, for example through direct access from the nearest British Telecom exchange.

Where it can be demonstrated that it is not possible to provide the relevant high-performance broadband at the time of construction (for example where it is not yet available in Headcorn), then the Planning Condition should state that:

3. the infrastructure should be installed to allow households to use the best available alternative on an open access basis, until it is possible to upgrade; and

4. the necessary facilitating infrastructure should also be installed to ensure that it will be easy to connect to the relevant high-performance broadband in future, once a connection is possible.

There will be no standard planning condition for high-performance broadband provision in

community and commercial development as part of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan. However, developers of community and commercial buildings will need to detail what broadband provision will be available (if any) and (if applicable) demonstrate why the expected use of the building means that it is not appropriate to install the relevant high-performance broadband option, to allow planners to judge whether this is acceptable.

C. Water and sewerage management

This policy covers all development in Headcorn, including housing, gypsy and traveller pitches, commercial and community development. New development in Headcorn Parish, in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan, will be permitted providing:

1. it employs best practice options for promoting efficient use of water, for example through rainwater harvesting;

2. where relevant, it can be shown that the water supply can cope with any increase in demand, including at times of high demand;

3. the disposal of any sewerage and waste water will follow the best practice guidelines provided by the relevant environmental body, and will not create risks for the ecosystems associated with Headcorn's streams, rivers and ponds;

4. the solutions employed will not undermine the utility and comfort of the intended users; and

5. where relevant, it can be shown that:

    i.   the sewerage system within Headcorn village, including the pumping station, will have the capacity to cope with both the existing demands on the system and the increase in sewage that will arise as a result of the development, including during periods of heavy rain;

    ii.   the Headcorn Waste Water Treatment Works, operated by the foul water drainage supply company for Headcorn, will be able to treat the projected sewage outflow and waste water from such development fully in accordance with its environmental permit; and

    iii. where the use of sewage holding tanks is necessary, it can be shown that: they have been incorporated into the design of the development in a way that accords with the relevant Headcorn Design Policies and Design Guidance; and their use has been subject to an effective risk assessment, including of the capacity of the system to cope in the event of power cuts, in order to demonstrate that they will not create problems. In general, the use of sewage holding tanks within new developments is discouraged.

D. Promoting energy efficiency

This policy covers all development in Headcorn, including housing, gypsy and traveller pitches, commercial and community development. New development in Headcorn Parish, in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan, will be permitted providing:

1. It can demonstrate how it will contribute to energy generation and a relative reduction in energy usage, so that the energy needs associated with the development will be lower than for standard properties of the type proposed; and

2. The solutions employed will not undermine the utility and comfort of the intended users.

E. Priorities for infrastructure spending in Headcorn

Recognising the specific needs for and constraints on infrastructure in Headcorn Parish, in line with the flexibility envisaged in Maidstone's Local Plan, where there are competing demands for developer contributions towards the delivery of infrastructure, secured through section 106 legal agreements or through Headcorn Parish Council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) revenues, the demands should be prioritised in the manner listed below, which ranks infrastructure types in order of importance for Headcorn.

I.   Infrastructure priorities for residential development will be:

1. Utilities (particularly sewerage provision, storm drainage, water supply and broadband)
2. Education (particularly nursery school provision and continued support for the development of Headcorn Primary School in line with needs)
3. Public realm (particularly road safety priorities, parking (including parking for bicycles), disabled access, flood defences and connectivity)
4. Emergency Services (including police)
5. Social Services and care services
6. Health
7. Transport
8. Open Space, both for wildlife and community enjoyment, including green pathways, ponds and woods – the priorities for amenity spaces will be allotments and sports facilities
9. Affordable Housing (particularly shared equity)
10. Buildings supporting community activity (especially libraries and the Village Hall to ensure existing provision in Headcorn remains strong)

II.   Infrastructure priorities for commercial and community development will be:

1. Utilities (particularly sewerage provision, storm drainage, water supply and broadband)
2. Public realm (particularly road safety priorities, parking (including parking for bicycles), disabled access, flood defences and connectivity)
3. Education (particularly nursery school provision and continued support for the

development of Headcorn Primary School in line with needs)

4. Emergency Services (including police)
5. Open Space (both for wildlife and community enjoyment)
6. Transport

9. DWELLINGS – HOUSING AND GYPSY AND TRAVELLER PROVISION

9.1 The Vision underpinning Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, together with Policies HNP1 to HNP4, provide the overarching framework governing all development in Headcorn. However, developments involving dwellings – places where people live – create additional opportunities and challenges, if they are to be managed in a way that will maximise their benefits and minimise any problems associated with them.

9.2 Policy HNP5 therefore covers the specific planning considerations associated with introducing new dwellings, be they houses occupied by the settled community, or pitches associated with gypsy and traveller sites. The reason for treating different types of dwellings the same way is three fold:

- It is fairer;
- It reduces unnecessary duplication, given that the considerations determining the success of different types of dwelling are likely to be the same; and
- It recognises that gypsy and traveller developments represent a much higher proportion of dwellings within Headcorn Parish than is typical elsewhere, meaning it is important that the planning framework takes account of their potential impact on the built (or man-made) environment in the Parish.[29]

9.3 In setting a policy covering the provision of new dwellings, Headcorn Parish Council is looking to provide an overarching framework governing new dwellings, and in particular to put in place rules that will promote small scale development. It has decided not to allocate specific sites. The reason for this decision is that Maidstone Borough Council is currently reviewing its Local Plan, and will look to allocate sites in Headcorn as part of that process. Therefore allocating sites through the Neighbourhood Plan would risk creating a clash with Maidstone's Local Plan process, as well as duplicating effort. This is particularly true as, in the 2017 Maidstone Local Plan, a large number of the allocated strategic sites were small sites, including sites of fewer than ten houses. This means the Borough is likely to consider the full range of potential sites to form part of its strategic allocations, not just large ones.

9.i Density

9.4 The density of developments has an important impact on an area's sense of place. Headcorn village is compact, with a density of buildings within the built-up-area of around 15 dwellings per hectare, roughly the same density as seen in other villages in Kent.[30] Therefore, in order to retain Headcorn's sense of place, any new development should ideally replicate this type of density, which is why 15 dwellings per hectare has been set as the minimum density for all housing developments except for micro developments (developments of at most two dwellings).

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[29]   Caravans or other mobile or temporary structures accounted for 3.0% of the housing stock in Headcorn Parish in 2021, compared to 1.2% in Maidstone and 0.4% in England as a whole.

[30]   At the time of the 2011 Census, the built up area of Headcorn village consisted of 79 hectares, with an average of 15.3 household spaces per hectare within the village.

9.5 The reason for setting higher densities would be to minimise land use – the higher the density, the less land is needed to provide the same number of houses. However, this clearly comes at a price – it restricts the amount of green space available for both residents and wildlife to enjoy and changes the feel of the built environment either by using smaller and smaller plots, or by building higher and higher. This change will be most dramatic in the case of villages, because the scale of development that takes place can be large relative to the existing village. For example, Maidstone's 2017 adopted Local Plan specified strategic housing sites accounting for 423 new homes in Headcorn village over the plan period of 2011 to 2031. This is equivalent to a 35% increase in the number of dwellings in the village itself compared to 2011 and will have a material impact on the look and feel of the village as a whole. If this housing is delivered at 30 houses per hectare (or double the existing densities in the village), on its own it will increase housing density within the village from an average of 15.3 to 17.6 dwellings per hectare, a 15% increase. If the density of these new developments is higher still, then it will have an even greater material impact on Headcorn's sense of place.

HNP Policy Map 19: Built up area of Headcorn village
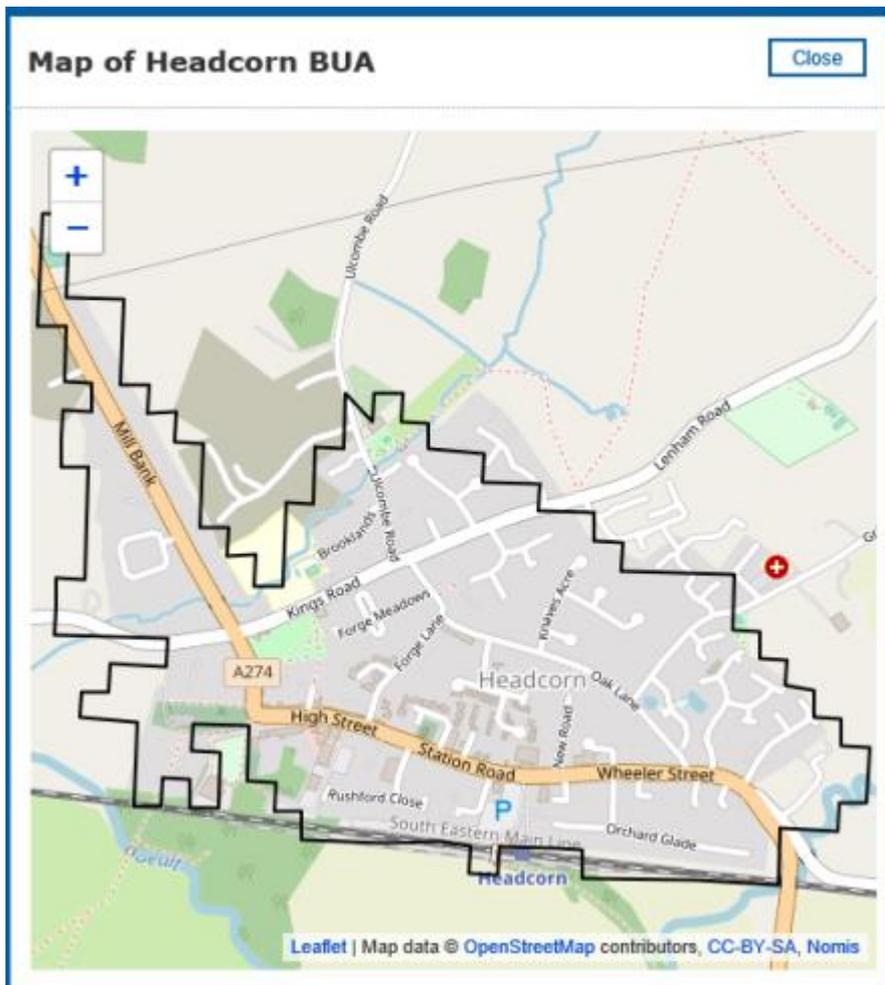
Source: Office of National Statistics, Nomis database. The 2011 Census dataset for population density (QS102EW) measures the built-up area of Headcorn village shown above as 79 hectares. At the time of the 2011 Census this area held 1,211 household spaces (a density of 15.3 household spaces per hectare) and was home to 2,505 residents (a density of 31.7 people per hectare).

9.6 Residents in Headcorn are very keen that it retains the sense of being a village, and that development should be more suitable for a village than a town. To achieve this Policy HNP5 therefore looks to ensure that any new development will be supported by appropriate garden spaces, and sets a maximum density of development of 30 houses per hectare. The only exceptions will be where it can be demonstrated that innovative solutions will support higher densities, in a way that will not undermine the landscape quality reflected in developments within Headcorn Parish.

9.ii   Additional siting considerations for new dwellings

9.7 Headcorn is a relatively compact village, with the majority of dwellings being situated within a ten minute walk of the village centre, which helps support a strong sense of community. Policy HNP2 sets the overarching framework associated the landscaping and siting of developments in Headcorn. However, survey evidence suggests that residents are very keen for Headcorn to retain its sense of being a country village, and that they see Headcorn retaining its distinctive compact shape as being a key component in achieving this. To ensure that this happens, it is therefore important that any development involving new homes reinforces this compact development pattern, particularly if it involves more than one or two dwellings.

9.8 Therefore, outside any strategic allocations associated with Maidstone's Local Plan, new development in Headcorn should be within or immediately abut the existing village boundary, as defined in the most recently adopted Maidstone Local Plan. The village boundary in the 2017 adopted Maidstone Local Plan is shown in HNP Policy Map 20.

9.9 This development pattern is a priority, so there will be relatively few exceptions. Outside strategic allocations, the only exceptions to the need for new developments to abut the existing village envelope (as defined in the adopted Local Plan) will be:

- micro developments of one or two dwellings;
- cases that are allowed under permitted development rules; and
- community self-build projects of at most 9 dwellings for schemes that involve individuals with strong links to Headcorn Parish coming together to organise the design and construction of their new homes directly.

9.10 For the purposes of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, a community self-build scheme is defined as a scheme where a group of individuals with strong links to Headcorn Parish come together to organize the design and construction of their new home directly, either by building the house themselves, or working with subcontractors. Unless the scheme is within or immediately abuts the existing village envelope, the maximum size of a Headcorn community self-build scheme will be nine dwellings. The reason for including community self-build projects in the list of exceptions for developments that can take place away from the village is that these are minor developments that would directly benefit Headcorn residents, but where residents may struggle to obtain affordable sites.

HNP Policy Map 20: Headcorn Village Boundary
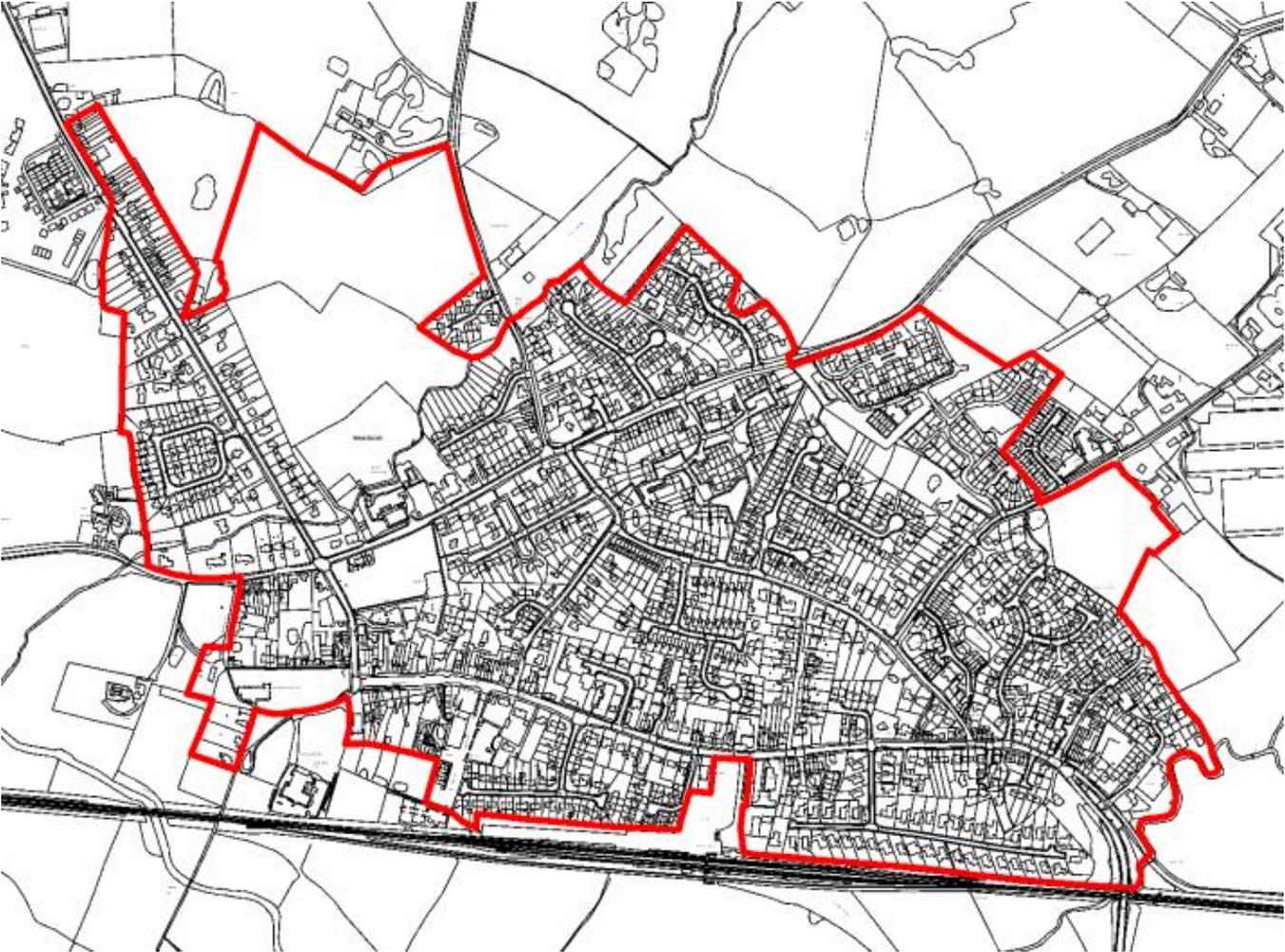
Note: Village boundary in the adopted 2017 Maidstone Local Plan.

9.ii.a Development in the countryside

9.11 The National Planning Policy Framework sets stringent rules for any development in the countryside, and in general such development is not allowed. Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan follows this policy approach. The countryside surrounding Headcorn village is a valued asset, and contributes in an important way to Headcorn's sense of place.

9.12 However, there may be cases where exceptions will be acceptable. In those cases, it is important that development is managed in a way that will not undermine the character of the Low Weald, particularly as the majority of Headcorn Parish sits within the Low Weald Landscape of Local Value.

9.13 One factor that concerns the Parish Council and residents is the potential for unconstrained development in the countryside surrounding Headcorn Parish to result in the suburbanisation of the countryside. Part of Headcorn's sense of place is the character of the countryside, which involves small clusters of dwellings and agricultural buildings, with large gaps in between allowing views over the Low Weald countryside. Some recent developments, however, including developments that have occurred without prior planning permission, have resulted in splitting fields and introducing multiple dwellings, producing what is relatively high density development for a rural location and a relatively suburban ribbon-like development.

9.14 The impact of this type of development can be seen from Figure 41, which charts the evolution of three fields in the eastern part of the land between the Smarden Road and Love Lane in Headcorn between the period 1940 and September 2021. This land is over 1.3km from the edge of Headcorn village, and almost 2km from the village centre. It remained untouched between 1940 and 2008, with no man-made structures being added into the three fields that made up this parcel of land. Between 2008 and 2011 a single large barn was added in the south eastern corner of the parcel of land, but otherwise the field boundaries remained the same. However, between 2011 and 2021 significant development took place:

- the three fields were broken up into around 40 separate parcels of land, often enclosed behind high fences that block the open nature of Headcorn's countryside and make it harder for wildlife;
- a large number of man-made structures were added; and
- a significant amount of hard standing was introduced.

Figure 41: Land between the Smarden Road and Love Lane – 1940, 2008, 2011 and 2021

Land between Smarden Road and Love Lane - December 1940

Land between Smarden Road and Love Lane - December 2008

Land between Smarden Road and Love Lane - March 2011

Land between Smarden Road and Love Lane - September 2021

Source: Google Earth. 1940 Map: 2021 Kent County Council; 2008 Map: © 2021 Getmapping plc; 2011 Map: © 2021 Maxar Technologies; and 2021 Map: September 2021 © 2021 Maxar Technologies.

9.15 Only one of the developments that took place after 2011 in these three fields between the Smarden Road and Love Lane had planning permission prior to its introduction. Headcorn Parish Council is keen to prevent this type of high density, uncontrolled development from happening in future.

9.16 To achieve this it is looking to set rules that will limit the amount of development that can take place within historic field boundaries. Therefore, outside development covered by strategic allocations, permitted development rules and community self-build schemes, any permission for new dwellings in the countryside should be limited to ensure there will be at most two houses or gypsy and traveller pitches within any field boundary (where the field boundary is the one in existence in 1948).

9.iii Mix of dwellings

9.17 Reflecting the preferences of residents, one of the five high-level policy objectives underpinning the Vision for Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is that development in the Parish is managed in a way that is capable of meeting the needs of local residents in different age groups and family units.

9.18 This desire for developments to provide accommodation that will support different family groups and units is reinforced by the responses to individual questions. Over 60% of the residents who responded to the 2021 Headcorn Residents' Survey saw sheltered accommodation for those in need of extra care or support (either to buy or to rent) as a high or medium priority. In addition, affordability was the main reason cited for why emerging households had not left home, with the majority of emerging households wanting either one or two bedrooms. However, only 29.3% of households were living in properties with at most two bedrooms in Headcorn at the time of the 2021 Census, significantly lower than the proportion for Maidstone Borough as a whole, where properties of at most two bedrooms accounted for 36.3% of household accommodation. This may explain why they may be struggling to find affordable accommodation to meet their needs.

9.19 In addition, variety is a key element underpinning Headcorn's sense of place. It is noticeable that the more successful of the larger developments in Headcorn typically include a variety of different styles, orientations and designs.

9.20 For these reasons, Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan seeks to ensure that all major developments are mixed developments, both in terms of design and the type of households they cater for. This will be beneficial, as it will help to both preserve and enhance the character of Headcorn village, and also to promote healthy communities, by encouraging a mix of different family sizes and age groups.

9.21 By virtue of their size, major developments have a bigger negative impact if they fail to incorporate more variety, both in terms of design and also in terms of the type of household they cater for. A major development is defined in the 2023 National Planning Policy Framework as any development where 10 or more homes will be provided, or the site has an area of 0.5 hectares or more. Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan therefore uses this threshold to determine at what point developers should be required to address this

need for diversity. However, where possible developers of smaller sites are also encouraged to incorporate similar thinking into their proposals.

9.iii.a Affordable housing and homes for emerging households

9.22 One factor contributing to the mix of homes that should be provided in major developments are the rules around the provision of "affordable housing". In planning terms affordable housing is not simply a home that someone can afford. Instead affordable housing only covers specific types of housing. In particular, the 2023 National Planning Policy Framework defines affordable housing as housing for sale or rent for those whose needs are not met by the market (including housing that provides a subsidised route to home ownership and/or is for essential local workers) and which complies with one or more of the following definitions:

- Affordable housing for rent;
- Starter Homes;
- Discounted market sales housing; and
- Other affordable routes to home ownership.[31]

9.23 Policy SP20 in Maidstone's 2017 adopted Local Plan sets out that in rural service centres such as Headcorn affordable housing should make up 40% of the housing provision in developments of 11 or more residential units. In addition, it sets an indicative target for tenure of 70% of this provision being made up of affordable rented housing, social rented housing or a mixture of the two, but the actual tenure split will be determined following consultation and taking into account the evidence available at the time.

9.24 Affordable housing provision is one route to meet the needs of emerging households in Headcorn, which makes it important that the tenure mix of affordable housing in Headcorn will serve the needs of the local population. The evidence from the 2021 Headcorn Residents' Survey suggests a strong preference amongst emerging households for a property to buy, see Figure 42. In total 58% of emerging households picked options to buy as the only type of accommodation they wanted, with a further 32% being willing to consider options to either buy or rent.

9.25 Demand for housing meeting the definitions of either affordable housing to rent or to buy amongst emerging households was relatively low. However, reflecting the overall preference for a property to buy, where these types of accommodation represented the sole preference of emerging households, 11% picked share equity (affordable housing to buy) and 5% picked social rented housing (affordable housing to rent). In other words, demand for affordable housing to buy was double the demand for affordable housing to rent where it was the only option considered. However, some emerging households would be willing to look at a range of different options. Analysis of the share of emerging households that would consider either affordable housing to rent or to buy or both amongst the options they would consider shows that demand was split evenly between the two types of affordable housing.

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[31]   See Appendix 1 and the NPPF for more details.

Figure 42: Tenure preferences amongst emerging households in Headcorn
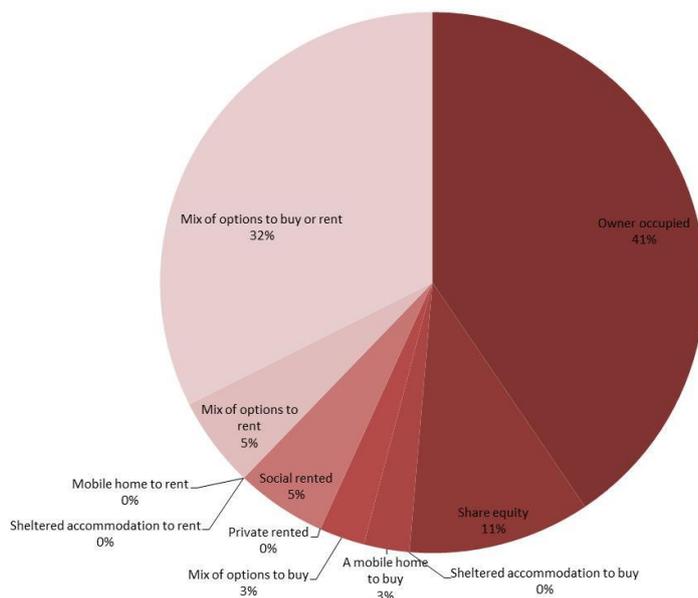
Note: Results from 2021 Headcorn's Residents' Survey. Tenure preferences for emerging households wanting to stay in Headcorn.

9.26 There is also a strong preference for smaller houses amongst emerging households in Headcorn.

Figure 43: Preferred size of property amongst emerging households in Headcorn, 2021 Residents' Survey
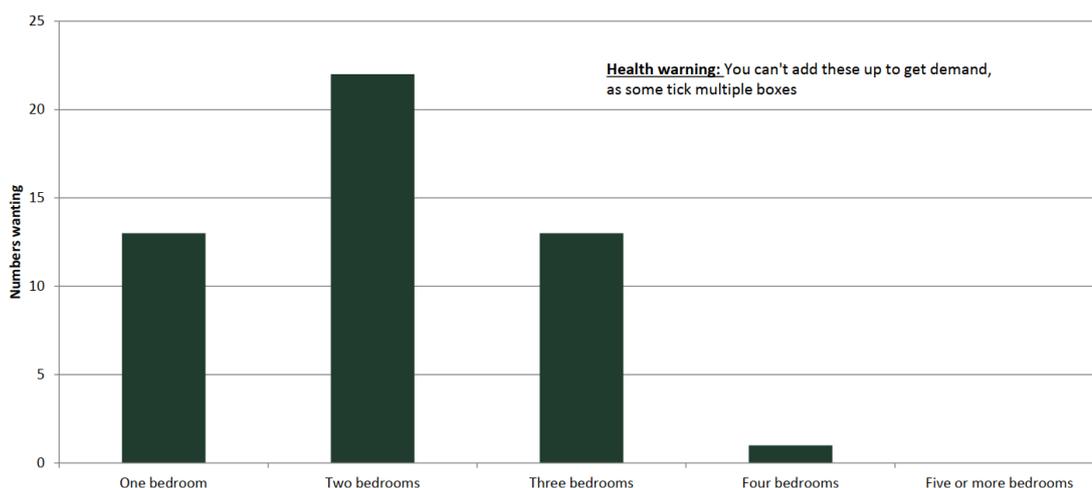
Note: Results from 2021 Headcorn's Residents' Survey. Size preferences for emerging households wanting to stay in Headcorn.

9.27 It is important that housing provision in Headcorn reflects these demand patterns, in order to ensure that it will best meet the needs of emerging households in Headcorn. Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan therefore seeks to ensure that, where there is a

requirement for affordable housing to be provided as part of a development in Headcorn, at least half of the provision of affordable housing will be affordable housing to buy. The full range of options that meet the definition of affordable housing to buy is set out in the 2023 National Planning Policy Framework (see also the definitions in Appendix 1 of this Plan). Under Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan where possible the affordable housing options to buy should focus on options to help first time buyers, such as starter homes.

9.28 Headcorn Parish Council notes that its choice of the tenure mix for affordable housing also reflects sustainability considerations, particularly the social and economic aspects of sustainability. Headcorn Parish Council considers that the sustainability analysis conducted to inform its early Neighbourhood Plan work remains valid.[32] This analysis concluded that time, cost and distance would all act as barriers, creating problems for occupants of affordable housing in Headcorn.[33] This would be particularly true for new residents who had no previous link to the village and would be a considerable distance from support networks, such as family and friends, as well as key public sector infrastructure, such as benefit offices or hospitals.

9.29 Headcorn Parish Council considers that delivery of a high target level of affordable housing to rent, as required under Maidstone's Local Plan, combined with the high housing numbers envisaged, has the potential to create social deprivation in areas like Headcorn.[34] In practice, these concerns are reinforced by the results of Headcorn's 2023 Regulation 14 consultation, in which a significant number of respondents flagged antisocial behaviour by residents of the new affordable housing to rent. Headcorn Parish Council notes that, in discussions, affordable housing providers operating in Headcorn often suggest that they struggle to fill affordable housing to rent in the village due to limited demand.[35]

9.30 Sustainability considerations therefore reinforce Headcorn Parish Council's decision to prioritise the needs and preferences of emerging households in Headcorn in deciding on the desired tenure split for affordable housing.

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[32] For full details, see the analysis in Driver (2014).

[33] As Policy Map HNP3 demonstrates, Headcorn is a considerable distance from all urban settlements. Table 1 of this Neighbourhood Plan highlights the significant cost of travel from Headcorn for those looking to work elsewhere. There is also a significant time cost associated with travel from Headcorn to key employment centres. Travel to all the local population and employment centres have journeys of at least 30 minutes in rush hour, well over the national average of 24.5 minutes. As the analysis in Manning and Petrongolo (2011) demonstrates distance, time and cost are key disincentives for those looking for work. Similarly, the closest secondary school to Headcorn is 11.4km away and, for those without access to their own transport, journey times by public transport to all the closest schools are over 45 minutes and require at least one change. This is likely to limit parental involvement in schooling, as well as children's ability to take part in after school activities, to the detriment of the education of affected children.

[34] This problem is exacerbated by the scale of development under Maidstone's 2017 Local Plan, which has resulted in around 170 new social houses being built within Headcorn– an increase of 143% in social housing within the Parish compared to the 2011 Census.

[35] For those without a personal reason for living in Headcorn, being located in a relatively remote area like Headcorn risks creating far more problems than it solves. It is noticeable that when canvassed in 2014, 72% of families in the Hardwicks development of 25 social housing units said that they would like to move out if they could. This may also reflect other issues, such as problems with noise because of how the development is laid out. However, it supports the idea that affordable housing to rent in Headcorn is unpopular with tenants, particularly amongst those with no connection to the Parish – less than half of the families housed in the Hardwicks had a local connection, because most local residents who expressed an interest did not qualify.

9.iv Size of development

9.31 Headcorn's residents have a very strong preference for small scale developments, see Figure 44. The 2021 Residents' Survey showed that almost 80% of residents would prefer individual developments to be at most 25 houses. Similar results were obtained in the 2013 Residents' Survey. This preference for small scale development reflects historic development patterns within the Parish, and therefore Headcorn's sense of place.

Figure 44: Preferred development size
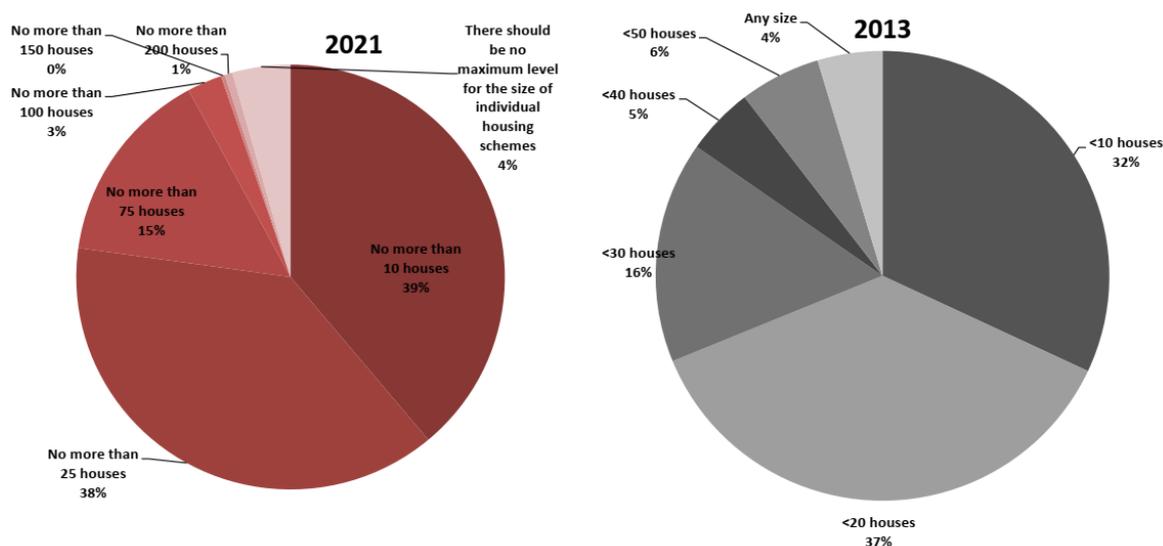
Note: Results from the 2021 and 2013 Residents' Surveys to the Question: How big should individual housing development schemes in Headcorn village be? [Tick One].

9.32 However, as well as shaping development in the way that Headcorn residents would like, there are sensible planning and social reasons for looking to support small scale development:

- Small scale development will enable proper integration of new residents to take place, maintaining social cohesion and avoiding the "them and us" situation of a large-scale housing development. It will also be more sustainable, because it means that development is more likely to match the evolution of the local jobs market, reducing the need for new residents to commute long distances and therefore making it easier to absorb any expansion in the village.
- A key part of the Vision for Headcorn in this Plan is to keep a sense of being a "village", which was a strong theme to emerge from consultations with residents. To maintain this "village feel" it is essential to retain the pattern of gradual organic growth that has occurred in Headcorn over the past centuries and more recent decades. The housing stock in Headcorn has evolved slowly over time, through a series of small developments, at different sites, and this variety is a key part of Headcorn's sense of place.
- Another important theme of the Neighbourhood Plan is the desire for new developments to be varied, making use of appropriate materials to reflect the diversity and interest of the many listed buildings in the High Street and throughout the Parish.

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This is best achieved by different architects and designers being responsible for a series of small scale developments, not a single, monolithic estate built by one developer.

- Having development evolve as a series of small scale developments will make it easier for the housing stock to adjust to changing circumstances, as it is difficult to anticipate accurately what housing needs will be in 10 to 15 years.
- Small scale developments are also a better match to the pattern of demand in Headcorn. Discussions with local estate agents in 2013 revealed that they struggled to sell houses in developments of over 30 houses. Anecdotally it was also hard for developers to sell the houses in the larger developments that were given planning permission in the recent past, including those in strategic housing allocations within Maidstone's Local Plan. This possibly reflects the fact that people looking to live in a rural village location are more likely to want small scale developments, in order to better enjoy the village experience.
- It is also harder to account properly for the cumulative impact of development and to plan for the sustainability implications and the infrastructure needed to support larger developments, where they take place outside the planning policy development process associated with introducing a Local Plan.
- Finally, as well as being both more sustainable and what residents want, it is also clear that there are no concerns over the viability of small developments in Headcorn. Historically, the vast majority of housing developments in Headcorn were small scale. For example, of the 39 schemes that were given planning permission between 2006-7 and 2014-15 only one development was for more than 25 dwellings, and that was a development of 44 houses on a brownfield site. This clearly indicates that there is no reason to be concerned that developments of 25 dwellings or less cannot be successful within Headcorn.

9.33 For these reasons, except for developments which are strategic site allocations within an adopted Maidstone Local Plan, Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan seeks to ensure that new developments will be at most 25 dwellings. In exceptional cases there may be an argument for allowing a development that is larger than 25 dwellings. However, in these circumstances, such a development must demonstrate that it brings significant benefits to existing residents in the form of infrastructure improvements within the Parish. Such benefits could, for example, include the provision of significant community or recreational spaces, or addressing known infrastructure needs, such as improving the water supply, sewerage provision or road safety.

9.34 The other factor determining the size of development in Headcorn is where it is located. In general, outside strategic allocations within the adopted Local Plan, or on a site immediately abutting the village boundary (as set out in the adopted Local Plan), development in the countryside surrounding Headcorn village will not normally be permitted. Therefore, unless a development immediately abuts an existing development that is within the village boundary (as set out in the adopted Local Plan) it would not typically be allowed. Where exceptions are allowed they will be confined to: micro developments of one or two dwellings; developments that occur under permitted development rights; and community self-build projects of at most nine dwellings for

schemes that involve individuals with strong links to Headcorn Parish. The reason for limiting community self-build schemes in the countryside to at most nine dwellings is to ensure that no major developments are permitted in the countryside surrounding Headcorn village.

HNP Policy 5: New dwellings

I.   This policy covers all dwellings, in other words places where people live, including housing and gypsy and traveller development in Headcorn. New development in Headcorn Parish, in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan, will be permitted providing it:

  I.1.   creates garden spaces that will:

     i.   be appropriate for the size and type of the dwellings;
     ii.   work well for the intended inhabitants both now and in the future;
     iii.   help create an attractive overall environment within the development; and
     iv.   where the new dwelling is located within the countryside, involve limited loss of agricultural land;

  I.2.   will be at a minimum density of 15 dwellings per hectare (except for micro developments where lower densities may be permitted) and does not exceed a density of 30 dwellings per hectare, unless it can be demonstrated that innovative solutions will support higher densities without undermining landscape quality in keeping with developments within Headcorn Parish. Precise density should be determined by site characteristics and allow for pedestrian/cycle routes, landscape buffers, open space and protection of important features such as ponds, hedgerows and trees; and

  I.3.   immediately abuts an existing development that is part of the village boundary (as set out in the adopted Local Plan), or demonstrates that the reason it cannot abut an existing development within the village boundary is due to physical constraints, such as flood risk or recreational areas used by the community. This will help ensure that the village retains its distinctive compact shape. Outside strategic allocations within the adopted Local Plan, the only exceptions allowed to this will be:

     i.   micro developments (of one or two dwellings) that meet the conditions for rural dwellings set out in the National Planning Policy Framework[36] and the adopted Development Plan for Headcorn. Outside development covered by strategic allocations, permitted development rules and community self-build schemes, any permission for new dwellings in the countryside should be limited to ensure there will be at most two houses or gypsy and traveller pitches within any field boundary (where the field boundary is the one in existence in 1948);
     ii.   developments allowed under permitted development rules; or
     iii.   community self-build projects of at most 9 dwellings for schemes that involve individuals with strong links to Headcorn Parish coming together to organise the design and construction of their new homes directly (either building the homes themselves, or working through subcontractors) and

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[36]   See Paragraph 84 of the NPPF published in December 2023.

where it can be shown that it was not possible to secure suitable land abutting the village boundary (as set out in the adopted Local Plan).

II.   In the case of developments in Headcorn of ten or more dwellings, new development in Headcorn Parish, in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan, will be permitted providing:

II.1.   it includes buildings that are in a variety of different styles, orientations and design;

II.2.   the development includes some smaller properties, particularly properties to buy, that will better meet the needs of emerging households;

II.3.   it provides communal open and recreational space within the development (this may be for allotments, sports pitches, children, amenity space, etc). The provision of a commuted sum to contribute to these facilities elsewhere will not normally be acceptable, unless the developer helps procure a suitable alternative site within the Parish. Headcorn Parish Council will take responsibility for the maintenance of these areas if required;

II.4.   it incorporates a proportion of housing specifically designed to meet the needs of the elderly and those with disabilities. This could be in the form of sheltered accommodation, or adapted housing, which through its design will facilitate people's ability to remain independent for as long as possible;

II.5.   where there is a requirement to provide affordable housing (as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework), the provision of affordable housing should favour affordable housing for purchase, as opposed to affordable housing for rent. At least half of the affordable housing units provided should be for purchase, particularly for first time buyers, through schemes such as: First Homes, starter homes, discounted market sales housing, shared equity, or a similar scheme that aims to promote home ownership. Developers will be expected to work with Headcorn Parish Council to try and ensure these homes are allocated to those with a local connection; and

II.6.   it creates a mixed development that caters for all age groups and abilities, in order to promote the type of healthy community envisaged in the National Planning Policy Framework, unless there is a compelling reason (such as the economic viability of providing sheltered housing).

III.   Outside the strategic allocations set out in the adopted Local Plan, Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan seeks to promote small scale development, in keeping with Headcorn's rural setting and historic development patterns. Therefore, unless it is part of the adopted Development Plan for Headcorn, any development should normally be a maximum of 25 dwellings. Any exceptions to this must demonstrate that it brings significant benefit to existing residents in the form of infrastructure improvements within the Parish. Such benefits could, for example, include the

provision of significant community or recreational spaces, or addressing known infrastructure needs, such as improving sewerage provision or road safety. In addition, any such development should also otherwise accord with the policies set out in the adopted Development Plan for Headcorn, and particularly the policies within Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan.

IV. Major developments (of 10 or more dwellings) will not normally be permitted in the countryside surrounding Headcorn village unless the site is immediately adjacent to the village boundary (as set out in the adopted Local Plan), or is a strategic allocation set out in the adopted Development Plan for Headcorn.

10. THE ECONOMY

10.1 Having a strong local economy is important for the economic wellbeing of local residents and will help promote sustainability, by reducing the need for residents to travel elsewhere to either work or shop. This is particularly true in areas such as Headcorn, which are geographically far from local centres, see HNP Policy Map 3.

10.2 Ensuring that Headcorn is supported by a vibrant economy is therefore a key goal of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan. However, it is also important that business development is managed in a way that not only maximises its potential, but also minimises any harm, in order to balance both the opportunities and potential externalities (i.e. where the impact of any development will not be fully captured by the cost of the development itself).[37] Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan Policy HNP6 aims to achieve this in four ways by setting:

- the overarching rules governing any form of business development within the Parish, in order to ensure that businesses will be good neighbours and are in keeping with their rural setting;
- the rules for retail development in a way that seeks to promote and protect a key asset for the Parish, namely Headcorn High Street;
- the rules for development at Headcorn Aerodrome, which is associated with some specific opportunities and challenges; and
- the rules for commercial energy generation, in order to ensure that such projects properly take into account their impact on the landscape.

10.i Supporting business development in Headcorn

10.3 Headcorn is supported by a diverse economy, predominantly centred around small businesses, with no one employer dominating opportunities within the Parish. Excluding farm agriculture, businesses in Headcorn supported around 1,150 jobs in 2020. In terms of geographic spread, around 40% of the jobs in the Parish were centred on the village itself, with the retail and health sectors being the two largest sources of jobs in the village, each accounting for around 17% of jobs in the village. Outside the immediate village, manufacturing provided the largest source of employment, accounting for 21.4% of roles outside the village and 14.8% of roles for the Parish as a whole. Around 65% of roles in the Parish were full time, and part time roles were split evenly between the village and the wider Parish, meaning there was a higher proportion of part time roles in the village than elsewhere.[38]

10.4 Policy HNP6 covers development by all businesses operating in Headcorn Parish, whatever their sector or business use class. The aim of the policy is to ensure that new

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[37] Pollution is a typical example of externalities, as unless a polluter can be made to pay the full costs associated with any pollution, including the impact of pollution on others, their assessment of costs versus benefits will be skewed.

[38] Estimates for employment are taken from the ONS's Business Register and Employment Survey for 2020. The geographic units used are: the Maidstone super output area lower layer Maidstone: 017A for Headcorn Parish excluding the village; and the Maidstone super output area lower layer Maidstone: 017B for Headcorn village.

business development in Headcorn is an asset to the Parish. To achieve this, it aims to ensure that business development:

- is appropriate for a rural setting;
- respects the needs of any neighbours, for example by minimising negatives such as noise and light pollution;
- does not undermine Headcorn's sense of place, in other words that it reflects the scale and height and form of surrounding buildings, as well as the character of the local area, and is supported by signage and shop frontages that are appropriate for their setting; and
- makes effective use of existing buildings wherever possible.

10.ii Promoting the role of Headcorn High Street

10.5 The Vision underpinning Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan places significant emphasis on the role of the High Street in supporting a vibrant local economy.

10.6 Headcorn High Street is central to life in the Parish. It supports a significant proportion of the businesses operating within the Parish and represents an important source of employment opportunities for residents. Furthermore, the existence of a vibrant and attractive High Street is not just important for businesses on the High Street itself, but can also help support businesses elsewhere in sectors such as tourism, for example.

Figure 45: Remembrance Day parade on Headcorn High Street

10.7 As well as being important for the economic success of the Parish, Headcorn High Street is also visually attractive and many of the buildings along it are historically significant. The centre of Headcorn Village is designated a Conservation Area and a number of buildings within the Conservation Area are themselves listed. In addition part of

Headcorn's Conservation Area, including parts of the High Street, are also covered by an Article 4 Direction.

10.8 Having a good range of shops and businesses is an important part of encouraging customers to shop in the High Street. In general Headcorn Parish Council considers that it is important to ensure that the retail options in the Parish are concentrated on the High Street itself to ensure it continues to flourish. A key role for Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is therefore to try and ensure that the policy framework will help support the continued success of the High Street. To achieve this, the policy framework within the Neighbourhood Plan aims to ensure that: new retail developments will help support the rural economy; development will not take place that would be of a sufficient scale to undermine the viability and vitality of the High Street; and that the conversion of the ground floor of retail and business premises on the High Street to domestic use will not take place.

10.9 Under the Neighbourhood Plan no new retail units, or retail warehouse developments will be allowed in the Parish, if they would be of a sufficient scale that they could risk undermining the vitality and viability of the High Street. Therefore, away from the High Street itself new retail and retail warehouse development will only be permitted where the nature of the business is appropriate for Headcorn's rural location. An example of the type of business that would be allowed is a nursery or farm shop, while an out-of-village retail-park, for example, would not be appropriate for Headcorn's location.

10.10 In order to ensure the High Street continues to thrive, it is also important that there is a good range of business units available for use. The General Development Orders confer certain rights on building owners. For example, subject to certain conditions, change of use can take place without the need for planning permission. However, the exceptions to this are buildings located in Conservation Areas or individually listed as being of architectural or historic importance.

10.11 The policy on promoting the High Street in Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan includes a presumption against permitting change of use for ground floor retail and business units on the High Street into dwellings. This approach is supported by residents. However to provide some flexibility, the policy will only apply to the ground floors of buildings in the Conservation Area and will not to apply to the upper parts of buildings otherwise in retail use.

10.12 Given the importance of the High Street for Headcorn, it is not just this policy that is designed to help support it. For example, Policy HNP3 covering connectivity and access also tries to support the role of the High Street by ensuring that new developments will promote and enhance links to the High Street that can be accessed by foot and cycle. In addition, the vast majority of housing in Headcorn is within 800m of the centre of the High Street, or roughly a 10 minute walk, and Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan aims to support the compact shape of Headcorn village through its policy on new dwellings (Policy HNP5).

10.iii Headcorn Aerodrome

10.13 Headcorn Aerodrome is also known as Lashenden Airfield. The Aerodrome is based at Shenley Farm, and was first used by one aircraft in the 1920s, before serving as an advanced landing ground for Canadians and then Americans in World War II. Today, as a private civil airfield and parachute centre, it also houses an Air Warfare Museum, the Air Cadets of 500 Squadron and a helicopter company, together with 10 other aviation and tourism related businesses. The aerodrome currently consists of around 5500m² of built space, together with the associated airfield runways.

Figure 46: Headcorn Aerodrome

10.14 The Aerodrome is an important part of the local economy and helps put Headcorn on the tourist map, both through flying and parachuting activities, as well as the annual Air Show. Headcorn Aerodrome is also an important heritage asset. However, its presence in the Parish does create some tensions, with around a third of residents worrying about aircraft noise. In addition, the absence of footpaths on the section of the A274 south of the village renders the aerodrome unsuitable for safe pedestrian access, resulting in a high dependency on motor vehicle access.

10.15 The Aerodrome has permission to operate as it currently is and this will not change. However, the Neighbourhood Plan is about planning for the future. Therefore, the question is if, for example, the owners of the Aerodrome wanted to expand the type of flying that was possible (by changing the runway to a solid surface to allow larger aeroplanes to land and take off) should this be permitted?

10.16 On balance, it is considered that the right policy mix is to support the Aerodrome as a tourist attraction operating under its existing rules, with the vast majority of residents supporting this approach. This would allow for the upgrading of facilities to support tourism activity, providing these will not significantly increase noise levels, but would involve

maintaining a grass (rather than hard surface) runway, to ensure it remains a home for smaller light aircraft. Where possible, Headcorn Parish Council would like to encourage the introduction of noise reduction measures associated with the use of the Aerodrome.

10.iv Commercial energy generation

10.17 There is a global need for sustainable energy and the UK government is committed to achieving green energy targets. In order to support the UK government's commitments to green energy targets, as set out in policy HNP4, new developments in Headcorn (including commercial developments) will be encouraged to invest in green energy generation options and energy efficiency to help boost Headcorn's contribution.

10.18 However, green energy generation does not necessarily need to be confined to supporting individual homes and businesses within the Parish. It can also be done on a commercial scale. Between 2010 and 2015, several proposals for large scale commercial green energy generation were proposed in the Headcorn region involving large solar energy farms. These generated considerable local opposition, and led to the formation of vocal protest groups. This concern was understandable given:

- large solar farms can be visually intrusive; and
- are likely to reduce, not increase, the number of local jobs available, both by reducing the amount of farmland under cultivation (and hence the number of agricultural jobs) and by undermining Headcorn's ability to generate tourist income. (Large solar farms are not the backdrop tourists usually look for when deciding on where to stay.)

Figure 47: View towards Headcorn church from Moat Road - the topography means that features such as pylons can be visually intrusive

10.19 Therefore, it is clear that commercial energy generation projects bring specific challenges, in terms of land use, because of the need to address their visual impact.

10.20 All business development in Headcorn (including any commercial energy projects) will be covered by the requirements in paragraphs 1-5 of Policy HNP6. However, reflecting the specific issues associated with commercial energy generation projects, Section C of that policy also sets specific rules governing the siting of commercial energy generation projects, including the siting of any necessary supporting infrastructure such as pylons, in order to minimise the visual impact of any projects of this nature.

HNP Policy 6: The Economy - supporting business development in Headcorn

This policy is the overarching policy covering all business activities in Headcorn Parish. Reflecting Headcorn's rural location, it is designed to support small and medium-sized enterprises in the Parish, including farms. Business development in Headcorn, in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan, will be permitted where it:

1. involves the conversion of an existing permanent building, or demonstrates that any existing structures on the site are inappropriate for conversion and that there will be significant benefit associated with allowing a new building;

2. respects the scale, height and form of existing surrounding buildings, together with the character of the surrounding area, to help it blend with the landscape and will have signage and shop frontage that is appropriate for its setting;

3. can be demonstrated that the development is in keeping with Headcorn's rural character;

4. safeguards the privacy and daylight of adjoining residents and will not result in unacceptable levels of light, noise, air, ground or water pollution; and

5. can be shown to otherwise comply with the policies within this Neighbourhood Plan covering issues such as design; connectivity and access; infrastructure; and siting, landscaping and protecting the natural and historic environment.

A. PROMOTING THE ROLE OF HEADCORN HIGH STREET

In addition to the overarching policy above, in relation to retail and retail warehouse units within Headcorn Parish and retail and business units located on Headcorn High Street, new development in Headcorn, in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan, will be permitted provided it:

A.1   will help support the rural economy (for example farm shops);

A.2   would not result in a change to residential use for the ground floor of a building within the village Conservation Area from any of the retail or business use classes; and

A.3   would not create a retail or retail warehouse development that would be of a sufficient scale that it could risk undermining the vitality and viability of the High Street, which is the established retail and business centre of the village.

B. HEADCORN AERODROME (AVIATION AND TOURISM)

In addition to the overarching policy above, in relation to Headcorn Aerodrome, planning permission for modest, proportional development at Headcorn Aerodrome will be allowed

for tourism and aviation related uses, providing any such development:

B.1   will not cause a significant increase in the noise associated with the operation of the airfield;

B.2   is in keeping with Headcorn's rural setting and its status as a heritage asset; and

B.3   is subject to the same strict regulations imposed on the current use of the airfield.

Depending on the proposed development, further conditions may be imposed to ensure that such continuing and further uses do not impact adversely on the neighbouring and surrounding residential settlements.

Planning permission will not be granted to upgrade the runway from grass to hard surface.

C. COMMERCIAL ENERGY GENERATION IN HEADCORN

In addition to the overarching policy above, in relation to all commercial green energy generation projects in Headcorn, new commercial green energy generation development in Headcorn Parish, in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan, will be permitted providing:

C.1   The development does not require the installation of new pylons to connect the project to the national grid, as these would be visually intrusive in the Low Weald landscape;

C.2   It will not undermine the distinctive views to and from the nearby Greensand Ridge; and

C.3   The screening and landscaping of the development will minimise its visual impact.

In addition, a planning condition should be included in any permission that will ensure that any land used for the development will be restored to its rural character once any development has reached the end of its life. Therefore adequate funding will need to be provided upfront to ensure that this is possible.

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

Affordable Housing	The National Planning Policy Framework defines ***Affordable housing*** as housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market (including housing that provides a subsidised route to home ownership and/or is for essential local workers) and which complies with one or more of the following definitions: • Affordable housing for rent; • Starter homes; • Discounted market sales housing; and • Other affordable routes to home ownership.
Affordable housing for rent	The NPPF defines ***affordable housing for rent*** as housing that meets all of the following conditions: (a) the rent is set in accordance with the Government's rent policy for Social Rent or Affordable Rent, or is at least 20% below local market rents (including service charges where applicable); (b) the landlord is a registered provider, except where it is included as part of a Build to Rent scheme (in which case the landlord need not be a registered provider); and (c) it includes provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision. For Build to Rent schemes affordable housing for rent is expected to be the normal form of affordable housing provision (and, in this context, is known as Affordable Private Rent).
Affordable housing to buy	The NPPF defines ***affordable housing to buy*** as housing that meets one or more of the following definitions: • Starter homes; • Discounted market sales housing; and • Other affordable routes to home ownership.
ANGSt	Accessible Natural Green Space
Article 4 Direction	A direction made under Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 which withdraws permitted development rights granted by that Order.
ASHE	Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. Data published by the Office for National Statistics.
CIL	Community Infrastructure Levy.
Community self-build scheme	For the purposes of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan a community self-build scheme is a scheme where a group of individuals with strong links to Headcorn Parish come together to organize the design and

construction of their new home directly, either by building the house themselves, or working with subcontractors. The maximum size of a Headcorn community self-build scheme will be nine dwellings.

Custom-build housing	Custom-build housing, including self-build, is housing commissioned and built by individuals, or groups of individuals, for their own use, either by building the home on their own or by working with a builder, contractor or package company.
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government. *Now DLUHC*.
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Development Plan	Development Plans are defined in Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004). A development plan for an area will include the adopted local plan, any neighbourhood plan that has been made and published spatial development strategies, together with any regional strategic policies that remain in force. Neighbourhood plans that have been approved at referendum are part of the development plan for that area, unless the local planning authority decides that the neighbourhood plan should not be made.
Discounted market sales housing	Affordable housing defined as *Discounted market sales housing* in the NPPF is that sold at a discount of at least 20% below local market value. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Provisions should be in place to ensure housing remains at a discount for future eligible households.
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities. [Formerly the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)].
Dwelling	For the purposes of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, a *dwelling* is defined as either any building, or part of a building, that is suitable for occupation by a single household unit, or a gypsy and traveller pitch that is (or will be) occupied by one household. A building that consisted of two flats, for example, would count as two dwellings. Similarly, a building for shared occupation (where occupants, who are not part of the same family unit, share communal facilities, but have their own bedrooms) will be counted as having the same number of dwellings as there are bedrooms.
First Homes	First Homes are a government initiative (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/first-homes) and are a specific kind of discounted market sale housing and should be considered to meet the definition of 'affordable housing' for planning purposes. Specifically, First Homes are discounted market sale units which:

a) must be discounted by a minimum of 30% against the market value;

b) are sold to a person or persons meeting the First Homes eligibility criteria;

c) on their first sale, will have a restriction registered on the title at HM Land Registry to ensure this discount (as a percentage of current market value) and certain other restrictions are passed on at each subsequent title transfer; and,

d) after the discount has been applied, the first sale must be at a price no higher than £250,000 (or £420,000 in Greater London).

First Homes are the government's preferred discounted market tenure and should account for at least 25% of all affordable housing units delivered by developers through planning obligations.

Gypsies and travellers	For planning purposes, National Planning policy defines "gypsies and travellers" as: persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family's or dependants' educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily, but excluding members of an organised group of travelling showpeople or circus people travelling together as such.

In determining whether persons are "gypsies and travellers" for the purposes of planning policy, consideration should be given to the following issues amongst other relevant matters:

a) whether they previously led a nomadic habit of life
b) the reasons for ceasing their nomadic habit of life
c) whether there is an intention of living a nomadic habit of life in the future, and if so, how soon and in what circumstances. |
Gypsy and traveller pitch	For the purposes of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan a gypsy and traveller pitch is treated as a dwelling and is defined as a site (or part of a site) that is (or will be) occupied by one household, where the occupants meet the definition of gypsies and travellers provided above.
Isolated location	For the purposes of this Neighbourhood Plan an isolated location is defined as a location that is not within 200 metres of at least two established dwellings.
KCC	Kent County Council
KMWLP	Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan (https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/service-specific-policies/housing,-regeneration-and-planning-policies/planning-policies/minerals-and-

waste-planning-policy/kent-minerals-and-waste-local-plan-kmwlp).
Headcorn Parish includes sites containing safeguarded land-won minerals. The KMWLP contains the relevant policies that apply for decision-making for sites where these deposits are found.

Local Plan	A plan for the development of a local area drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community. In law, once it passes examination and is adopted, this is described as the development plan documents adopted under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004). A local plan can consist of either strategic or non-strategic policies, or a combination of the two.
Local Planning Authority	The public authority whose duty it is to carry out specific planning functions for a particular area. In the case of Headcorn, the Local Planning Authority is Maidstone Borough Council.
Low Weald Landscape of Local Value	The Low Weald Landscape of Local Value is defined in Policy SP17 of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan that was adopted in October 2017. It covers much of Headcorn Parish. The designation means the distinctive landscape and character of the Low Weald should be conserved and enhanced.
LPA	Local Planning Authority
Maidstone Borough Local Plan	The Local Plan for Maidstone Borough refers to the plan adopted by the Local Planning Authority, which is Maidstone Borough Council. The adopted Local Plan forms part of the Development Plan for Headcorn Parish. For the purposes of Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan, unless otherwise specified, the term Maidstone Borough Local Plan refers to whichever is the most recently adopted Local Plan for Maidstone.
Major development	For housing a major development is defined in the NPPF as a development where 10 or more homes will be provided, or the site has an area of 0.5 hectares or more. For non-residential development it means additional floorspace of 1,000m^2 or more, or a site of 1 hectare or more, or as otherwise provided in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.
MBC	Maidstone Borough Council
MHCLG	Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. ***Now DLUHC***.
Micro development	For the purposes of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, a ***Micro***

development is a development consisting of up to two dwellings.

Neighbourhood Plan	A plan prepared by a parish council or neighbourhood forum for a designated neighbourhood area. In law it is described as a neighbourhood development plan in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004). Once it is made, a Neighbourhood Plan form part of the Development Plan for the local area.
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
Other affordable routes to home ownership	Affordable housing defined in the NPPF as ***Other affordable routes to home ownership*** is housing provided for sale that provides a route to ownership for those who could not achieve home ownership through the market. It includes shared ownership, relevant equity loans, other low cost homes for sale (at a price equivalent to at least 20% below local market value) and rent to buy (which includes a period of intermediate rent). Where public grant funding is provided, there should be provisions for the homes to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for any receipts to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision, or refunded to Government or the relevant authority specified in the funding agreement.
PRoW	Public Right of Way: A way over which the public have a right to pass and repass, including Public Footpaths, Public Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open to All Traffic.
ROWIP	Rights of Way Improvement Plan. An initiative by Kent County Council to improve PRoW (https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/90491/Rights-of-Way-Improvement-Plan-2018-2028.pdf).
RSC	Rural Service Centre
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment. A procedure (set out in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004) which requires the formal environmental assessment of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.
Self-build and custom-build housing	Self-build and custom-build housing is defined in the NPPF as housing built by an individual, a group of individuals, or persons working with or for them, to be occupied by that individual. Such housing can be either market or affordable housing. A legal definition, for the purpose of applying the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 (as amended), is contained in section 1(A1) and (A2) of that Act.
SFRA	Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

Social rented housing	The 2012 NPPF defined Social rented housing as housing that is owned by local authorities and private registered providers (as defined in section 80 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008), for which guideline target rents are determined through the national rent regime. It may also be owned by other persons and provided under equivalent rental arrangements to the above, as agreed with the local authority or with the Homes and Communities Agency.
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest. Sites are designated by Natural England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
Starter homes	Affordable Housing defined as **Starter homes** in the NPPF is as specified in Sections 2 and 3 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and any secondary legislation made under these sections. The definition of a starter home should reflect the meaning set out in statute and any such secondary legislation at the time of plan-preparation or decision-making. Where secondary legislation has the effect of limiting a household's eligibility to purchase a starter home to those with a particular maximum level of household income, those restrictions should be used.
Stepping stones	Pockets of habitat that, while not necessarily connected, facilitate the movement of species across otherwise inhospitable landscapes.
Strategic Environmental Assessment	A procedure (set out in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004) which requires the formal environmental assessment of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.
Strategic Policies	Policies and site allocations within a Local Plan which address strategic priorities in line with the requirements of Section 19 (1B-E) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004).
Travelling showpeople	For planning purposes, National Planning policy defines "travelling showpeople" as: members of a group organised for the purposes of holding fairs, circuses or shows (whether or not travelling together as such). This includes such persons who on the grounds of their own or their family's or dependants' more localised pattern of trading, educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily, but excludes Gypsies and Travellers as defined above.
UK NEA	UK National Ecosystem Assessment
Wildlife corridor	Areas of habitat connecting wildlife populations.
Windfall development	Sites that are granted planning permission despite not being specifically identified in the development plan for the local area.

APPENDIX 2: THE MAKING OF HEADCORN'S NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

11.1 This Appendix sets out the history and background to Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan; the details of the basic conditions Headcorn's Plan will need to meet in order to pass examination; and the evidence that was gathered to underpin the policy choices within the Plan.

11.2 The process for introducing a Neighbourhood Plan is set out in the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (UK Statutory Instrument 2012 No. 637).[39]

A2.i   Background to Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan

11.3 The production of a Neighbourhood Plan for Headcorn has been a long time in the making.

11.4 Recognising that it could be a potentially powerful tool, Headcorn Parish Council made the decision in October 2012 to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for Headcorn to help shape any development that would be proposed. Headcorn Parish was designated as a Neighbourhood Area in April 2013. As part of the initial community engagement, the local community chose Headcorn Matters as the name for Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan project.

11.5 Following the designation of Headcorn as a Neighbourhood Plan area, significant work was undertaken with the help of volunteers from the wider community, in particular the Headcorn Matters team, in order to produce a draft Neighbourhood Plan. This work included a very significant programme of evidence gathering to support the choice of policies for the Neighbourhood Plan. Headcorn's approach to this was even used as a case study on how to gather evidence to support a Neighbourhood Plan.[40] In addition, policy choices were informed by Neighbourhood Plan policies that had passed examination elsewhere.

11.6 A draft Neighbourhood Plan for Headcorn was produced in 2015 and Headcorn Parish Council conducted its Regulation 14 Consultation in June 2015, and submitted a revised draft under Regulation 15 in October 2015. The approach of working with local residents and businesses to identify what was needed meant that Headcorn's draft Neighbourhood Plan enjoyed considerable local support. This was demonstrated in the 2015 Regulation 14 Consultation, where 93.9% of residents who responded to the Consultation supported the proposed Neighbourhood Plan.[41]

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[39]   https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/637/contents/made

[40]   Headcorn's approach to evidence gathering was used as a case study by Planning Aid to help those undertaking a Neighbourhood Plan to understand some of the issues involved, see http://www.ourneighbourhoodplanning.org.uk/case-studies/view/314.

[41]   As part of Headcorn's 2015 Regulation 14 Consultation, as well as being given an opportunity to provide general comments on the plan, residents were also asked six specific questions on the plan itself. Question 1 was "Do you support the Draft Neighbourhood Plan?, Yes/No". 93.9% responded yes, 5.2% no and 0.9% gave a qualified yes.

11.7 However, there were significant delays in the examination process, meaning that an examiner's report for Headcorn's draft Neighbourhood Plan was not issued until March 2017. During this delay Maidstone Borough Council made significant progress in producing a Local Plan for Maidstone: issuing the Regulation 19 Consultation draft in the spring of 2016; proceeding to examination in autumn 2016; and receiving an interim examiner's report on Maidstone's Local Plan in December 2016, with the final report issued in July 2017. This Local Plan proposed far more development in Headcorn than had been the case in the (2000) adopted Development Plan for the area. At the time when Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan was drafted, the existing Development Plan only allowed minor development in rural settlements such as Headcorn, and had not allocated any specific sites in the Parish. Recognising this policy background, as well as significant support amongst local residents for promoting small scale (rather than large) developments, encouraging small scale development was a key part of Headcorn's 2015 draft Neighbourhood Plan.

11.8 Differences in the approach to development in Headcorn in the 2015 draft Neighbourhood Plan and the 2016 draft Local Plan meant that Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan examiner decided that Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan did not meet the basic conditions. However, recognising the very considerable local support for Headcorn's draft Neighbourhood Plan, Maidstone Borough Council proposed that instead of accepting the examiner's recommendation, there should be a negotiation to try and find a way to allow the Plan to be deemed to have met the basic conditions and proceed to a referendum. Unfortunately this negotiation was not successful, leaving the draft Plan in limbo.

11.9 However, although the Plan itself was never formally adopted, the evidence gathered to support it successfully identified key issues for the local community and was used by Headcorn Parish Council to achieve change. In particular, the draft Plan identified two preconditions that were needed to support development: the need to ensure that Headcorn Primary School was able to expand in its existing location in the centre of the village; and the need for the sewerage system to be upgraded. Both these have been achieved:

- At the time work first started on Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, Headcorn's Primary School was oversubscribed and Kent County Council was looking at a range of options to meet the need for school places, including moving it to a location on the edge of the village and expanding provision in other villages. Using the evidence gathered, Headcorn Parish Council and the Neighbourhood Plan team successfully helped to persuade Kent County Council that the Primary School should instead be expanded to two form entry, and equally importantly that it should do so in its original location.

- Sewerage and storm water drainage was identified in the original residents' survey as a very significant problem for Headcorn. The most obvious manifestation of this was that sewage would emerge at low points in the network during heavy rain, primarily in the Moat Road area. In order to inform the debate and persuade others of the need for change, building on its survey work, Headcorn Parish Council commissioned a study of the sewerage network in Headcorn. This identified that the system had significant problems, including 15 sewage pipes that already had insufficient capacity, 14 sewage pipes that suffered from back-fall and 74 sewage pipes that were not self-cleaning due to inadequate flow.[42] Although not all these issues have been addressed, Southern Water was persuaded by Headcorn Parish Council of the need to upgrade the system at Moat Road, which means that sewage no longer emerges onto the road during heavy rain.

11.10 In November 2019 Headcorn Parish Council again decided to consider producing a Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish. It set up another steering group to make recommendations. This group concluded that, given its popularity and the huge volume of evidence underpinning it, the starting point for any new Neighbourhood Plan should be the previous Regulation 16 draft, but that work would be needed to ensure that it aligned to the Maidstone Borough Local Plan, which was adopted in October 2017, and that this work would require looking again at the validity of some of the policies. In addition, it was recommended that it would be advisable to undertake another survey of residents, in order to check that the evidence underpinning the previous Plan remained valid.

11.11 In light of these recommendations, in February 2020 Headcorn Parish Council made the decision to hire Analytically Driven Ltd to undertake the necessary survey work, as well as to help the Parish Council to produce a draft Neighbourhood Plan. However, the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 meant that work was paused.

11.12 The new Residents' Survey was finally issued to residents in February 2021, with a response deadline of March 14th 2021. In general the responses provided strong support for the core policies in the previous draft Plan. In particular, the Vision underpinning the previous draft Plan was overwhelmingly supported by those responding to the survey.[43] There was similarly very strong support for encouraging small scale development, with 77% of respondents wanting individual developments to be at most 25 houses.

11.13 The 2021 Residents' Survey, as well as engagement with Maidstone Borough Council, has informed the new draft Plan. In consultation with the steering group, the resulting Policy framework has been simplified and condensed.[44] At its core, however, is the Vision that underpinned the previous draft Plan, as this Vision was overwhelmingly supported by those responding to the survey.

11.14 A draft Neighbourhood Plan was shared with Maidstone Borough Council in March 2022 for comments, as well as with Kent County Council in July 2022. The Plan was

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[42] Sandersons (Consulting Engineers) Ltd (2015).

[43] 82% of participants in the 2021 Headcorn Residents' Survey supported the draft Vision, with an additional 15% ticking maybe. In total only 3% of residents opposed the draft Vision for Headcorn.

[44] The 2015 draft Neighbourhood Plan contained 34 Policies supporting the Vision for Headcorn.

reviewed in light of these comments, and a revised draft was issued in November 2022 for Maidstone Borough Council to use as the basis for consulting with statutory consultees for a formal decision on whether a Strategic Environmental Assessment is needed. On the basis of these consultations, Headcorn Parish Council was advised by Maidstone Borough Council on 10th May 2023 that a formal Strategic Environmental Assessment would not be needed in the case of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan.[45]

11.15 A revised draft Neighbourhood Plan was finalised in June 2023 and formed the basis of the first consultation needed to introduce a Neighbourhood Plan, namely the Regulation 14 consultation.[46] This consultation is also known as the pre-submission consultation, as it is the consultation that takes place before Headcorn Parish Council formally submits the Neighbourhood Plan to Maidstone Borough Council. Headcorn Parish Council is responsible for running and publicising the Regulation 14 consultation in a manner that is likely to bring it to the attention to anyone who lives, works or does business in the Parish. In addition, as part of the process the Parish Council must also consult: Maidstone Borough Council; Kent County Council; all the adjoining Borough and Parish Councils; as well as all the consultation bodies listed in Schedule 1, paragraph 1 of the Regulations. The consultation must run for at least 6 weeks.

11.16 The Regulation 14 Consultation for Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan ran from 22nd June 2023 until 14th August 2023, a seven and a half week period. Headcorn Parish Council received 262 responses to its Regulation 14 Consultation, including 14 from organisations. Headcorn Parish Council is very grateful to everyone who took the time to respond and has carefully considered all the responses.

11.17 Overall the majority of respondents to the Regulation 14 Consultation strongly supported the approach and policies within the Neighbourhood Plan. However, following careful consideration of the responses, Headcorn Parish Council has made a number of small changes to the Plan, including minor tweaks to some policies. The changes to policies were: HNP3 to add the need to consider the safety of other road users (clause 9); HNP4 to add a requirement for visitor and cycle parking (Part A), references to the water supply (Parts C, E.I and E.II) and transport to the list of priorities for commercial development (Part E.II); HNP5 to add a footnote citing the relevant NPPF paragraph (Part I), add reference to emerging household preferences for properties to buy (Part II), as well as starter homes (Part II) and to clarify that Part IV related to major developments in the countryside; and for HNP6 to recognise that the Aerodrome is also a heritage asset (Part B.2). Headcorn Parish Council does not consider that these changes necessitate a second Regulation 14 consultation, because they are relatively minor and simply reinforce the existing policy framework.

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[45] This advice is based on the emerging policies in Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, and on their discussions with the statutory consultees.

[46] The differences between the November 2022 draft and the June 2023 draft were: an updated timeline, to reflect the delays in obtaining the SEA consultation results; and the updating of some of the background data to reflect the publication of Census 2021 data for Headcorn (using data for Lower layer Super Output Areas E01024364: Maidstone 017A and E01024365: Maidstone 017B, which together make up Headcorn Parish).

A2.ii Next steps

11.18 Given the strength of support for the Neighbourhood Plan, Headcorn Parish Council is submitted the revised Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan to Maidstone Borough Council under Regulation 15, so that it can go forward to its Regulation 16 Consultation, which is the next step. To accompany the draft Plan, Headcorn Parish Council has prepared a Consultation Statement setting out: the people and bodies that were consulted; how they were consulted; what concerns were raised; how those concerns were considered and, where relevant, addressed in the proposed Neighbourhood Plan. The Parish Council has also prepared a Basic Conditions Statement setting out how the Plan meets the basic conditions that it must meet in order to pass an examination (see Section A2.ii.a for the Basic Conditions associated with Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan). The Parish Council will submit to Maidstone Borough Council: a map of the area covered by the Plan; the proposed Plan; the Consultation Statement; and the Basic Conditions Statement. Maidstone Borough Council will then publicise the Plan on their website and conduct the second formal consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan, which is the Regulation 16 consultation. This consultation will also last a minimum of 6 weeks.

11.19 Once the Regulation 16 Consultation has been concluded, the next stage of the process is for the Plan to be sent by Maidstone Borough Council to the examiner for assessment. The examiners role is to test whether the proposed Plan meets the basic conditions set out below. The examiner decides whether or not as part of the examination process it will be necessary for there to be a public hearing as part of the exam process. If there is a public hearing, the examiner decides who will be invited to speak and what questions they wish to be addressed. The examiner will then produce a report setting out their findings, and, in particular, whether or not they recommend that the Plan should go to referendum.

11.20 Maidstone Borough Council will then need to decide whether they are happy to accept the examiner's recommendations. If Maidstone Borough Council does not accept the examiner's recommendations, then it must notify anyone who submitted consultation responses, as well as any Consultation bodies, of their decision and the reason for it, and invite further representations, which must be submitted within 6 weeks. It can also refer the matter again to independent examination. Once the responses are in, Maidstone Borough Council will then have five weeks to make a final decision.

11.21 Assuming that the Plan is deemed to have passed its examination, the next step is for Maidstone Borough Council to organise a referendum on the Plan. Anyone who lives in the referendum area, and who is entitled to vote in local elections, is eligible to vote in the referendum. If the majority of those who vote in the referendum are in favour of the draft Neighbourhood Plan, then the Plan is deemed to have passed. Unless there is then a legal challenge, Maidstone Borough Council will need to make the Plan within 8 weeks of the referendum. At that point the Neighbourhood Plan will form part of the Development Plan for the local area, and will have equal status with the policies in the adopted Maidstone Local Plan in decisions on planning applications for Headcorn Parish.

A2.ii.a   The basic conditions for Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan

11.22 For any Neighbourhood Plan to be adopted its policies have to be deliverable and need to meet certain basic conditions. In particular, it must: have regard to national policies, including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) itself; ensure it contributes to the achievement of sustainable development; ensure it is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the local area; ensure it does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations; and meets the prescribed matters and prescribed conditions.

11.23 In the case of the NPPF published in December 2023, key policies include:

- The policies designed to achieve sustainable development set out in Section 2 of the NPPF, including the definition of sustainability set out in Paragraph 8, and the emphasis on the presumption in favour of sustainable development, including the implications of this for plan-making, as set out in Paragraph 11;
- The approach to plan-making set out in Section 3 of the NPPF, including the purpose and impact of Neighbourhood Plans as set out in Paragraphs 29-30, the potential need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) set out in Footnote 17 to Paragraph 32, and the background to the basic conditions for a Neighbourhood Plan set out in Paragraph 37;
- The requirements around affordable homes (as defined in the NPPF, which involves homes at below market prices) set out in Paragraphs 64-65;[47]
- The need for Local Planning Authorities to set out a housing requirement for designated Neighbourhood Areas, see Paragraphs 67-68;
- The importance of small and medium sized sites, including the implications for Neighbourhood Plans, as set out in Paragraphs 70-71;
- The policy on rural housing, including the need to avoid isolated homes, set out in Paragraphs 82-84;
- The policy on rural economic development set out in Paragraphs 88-89;
- The policy on retail and leisure development outside town centres set out in Paragraphs 94-95;
- The policies on promoting healthy and safe communities, including policies on promoting inclusivity and social interaction, and open spaces and recreation set out in Section 8;
- The policies on promoting sustainable transport set out in Section 9, including policies on parking standards in Paragraphs 111-112;
- The policy on supporting full fibre broadband connections in Paragraph 118;
- The policy on housing density set out in Paragraphs 128-129;
- The policies underpinning achieving well-designed places set out in Section 12, including the introduction of a national Design Code and National Model Design Code;
- The policies on meeting the challenge of climate change set out in Section 14, including policies on flood risk set out in Paragraphs 165-175;

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[47]   See Appendix 1 for the full definition of affordable homes as set out in the 2023 NPPF.

- The policies on conserving and enhancing the natural environment set out in Section 15; and
- The policies on conserving and enhancing the historic environment set out in Section 16.

11.24 In the case of Headcorn, the need to be in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for Headcorn means the strategic policies set out in the Maidstone Borough Local Plan that was adopted in 2017. For Headcorn, the most relevant strategic Local Plan policies are:

- SS1: Maidstone borough spatial strategy;
- SP5: Rural Service Centres;
- SP7: Headcorn Rural Service Centre;
- SP17: Countryside;
- SP18: Historic Environment;
- SP19: Housing Mix;
- SP20: Affordable Housing;
- SP21: Economic Development;
- SP22: Retention of employment sites;
- SP23: Sustainable transport;
- H1: Housing site allocations;
- OS1: Open space allocations;
- GT1: Gypsy and Traveller site allocations;
- EMP1: Employment site allocations;
- ID1: Infrastructure delivery; and
- The relevant strategic site allocations that are located in Headcorn Parish, namely H1(35), H1(36), H1(37), H1(38), H1(39), H1(40), GT1(5), GT1(6), and EMP1(1).

A2.iii Headcorn's Evidence Base

11.25 Development of the policies contained in Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan has been informed by a significant body of evidence. Some of this evidence has been gathered specifically to support this Neighbourhood Plan, including surveys of residents and businesses;[48] and specially commissioned reports covering sustainability and the operation of Headcorn's sewerage system. Details of this evidence are provided below.

11.26 In addition, the analysis supporting this Neighbourhood Plan makes use of a variety of data sources provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), including: the Census data for 2001, 2011 and 2021; the Business Register and Employment Survey; and the ONS mapping tool for rural-urban classifications. In most cases the data for Headcorn refer to Headcorn Parish, but where the data refer to either Headcorn Ward or Headcorn Village (i.e. the built-up area of Headcorn) that is made clear in the text. As well as national statistical sources, the analysis has also used the evidence collected by Maidstone Borough Council to inform its Local Plan.

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[48] Headcorn's approach to surveys was used as a case study produced by Planning Aid to help other Neighbourhood Planning groups think about how to gather evidence. See: http://www.ourneighbourhoodplanning.org.uk/case-studies/view/314.

A2.iii.a   2021 Residents' survey

11.27 This was a survey of all residents of Headcorn Parish aged 14 and over, although non-residents could also respond. It was designed to assess to what extent the views of residents had changed since the survey conducted in 2013; to gauge support for potential policy options; and to assess potential demand for housing amongst emerging households in Headcorn. The 2021 Residents' Survey was issued to residents in February 2021 (with a response deadline of March 14th 2021). Unlike the previous 2013 Residents' Survey, it was conducted entirely online in order to manage COVID risks and did not benefit from volunteers knocking on doors to encourage people to respond. Instead all publicity was done online and by word of mouth. Despite this, there were 447 responses, representing over 10% of the eligible population and over 20% of households, a response rate of 56% of the previous survey.

11.28 The questions included asking participants about: the vision for Headcorn; the appropriate size of individual developments; preferences on where to build; preferences for specific types of housing needed, including housing for gypsies and travellers; housing need from within the household and friends and family; views on local infrastructure; traffic issues; priorities for protecting the local environment; size and tenure of property occupied; demographic details; and length of time in the Parish.

11.29 In general the responses provided strong support for the core policies in the previous draft Plan and aligned well with the results of earlier surveys. In particular, the Vision underpinning the previous draft Plan was overwhelmingly supported by those responding to the survey.[49] There was similarly very strong support for encouraging small scale development, with 77% of respondents wanting individual developments to be at most 25 houses.

A2.iii.b   2015 Residents' Survey

11.30 As part of the Regulation 14 Consultation on Headcorn's earlier draft Neighbourhood Plan, which closed on July 31, 2015, Headcorn Parish Council also took the opportunity to undertake a short survey of residents to gauge support for specific proposals within the draft Plan. One of the questions asked was whether they supported the Plan overall, to which 93.9% responded yes.

A2.iii.c   2013 Residents' Survey

11.31 This was a survey of all residents of Headcorn Parish aged 14 and over, with volunteers canvassing the dwellings in the Parish to talk to residents and to give fliers to all households to alert residents that the survey was being conducted. The Parish Council also used other means to alert eligible participants, such as notices on the village green and on the village website. Participants were given the option of responding on-line or on paper and asked questions in a variety of multiple choice and free text forms. The survey achieved 797 responses and it is estimated that these responses represent 612

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[49]   82% of participants in the 2021 Headcorn Residents' Survey supported the draft Vision, with an additional 15% ticking maybe. In total only 3% of residents opposed the draft Vision for Headcorn.

households. Based on the data for the 2011 Census, the estimated response rate was over 28% of the eligible population and around 42% of households. Questions included asking participants about: their vision for Headcorn; what they value about living in the Parish; threats and opportunities of development; appropriate size of individual developments; support for overall development; preferences on where to build; preferences for specific types of housing needed, including housing for gypsies and travellers; housing need from within the household and friends and family; moving expectations; size and tenure of property occupied; views on local infrastructure; views on design and environmental issues; travel patterns; traffic issues; work patterns and local employment needs and preferences; demographic details; and length of time in the Parish.

A2.iii.d   Headcorn Survey of Businesses, 2013.

11.32 This was a survey of owners and managers of businesses based in Headcorn Parish. Participants were given the option of responding on-line or on paper and asked questions in a variety of multiple choice and free text forms. The survey achieved 55 usable responses, which is a 38.5% response rate, based on the estimate of 143 businesses operating in the Parish at the time of the survey, who all received notification that the survey was taking place and how to participate. Questions included asking participants about: their views on Headcorn as a location to do business; constraints on future expansion; number of employees in the business; number of employees living in Headcorn; the location of the majority of their customers; commuting patterns of the respondent; type of business; sectors that should be encouraged as part of the Neighbourhood Plan; and what would encourage businesses to locate in Headcorn.

A2.iii.e   Headcorn Estate Agents' Survey, 2013.

11.33 This was a survey of seven estate agents, who are the main estate agents selling and renting properties in the Parish. This survey was conducted face-to-face, based on a discussion guide. Participants were asked a series of questions to help explore the demand and supply conditions in Headcorn's property market.

A2.iii.f   Traffic surveys.

11.34 Two traffic surveys were undertaken: one in 2013 and one in 2014 (to gather evidence of the impact on traffic movements of the relocation of the doctors' surgery to the outskirts of the village). The surveys were conducted mid-week, during school term time in both the morning and evening, as well as key points during the day. See Jefferys (2015) for full details.

A2.iii.g   Survey of Headcorn Primary School, 2014.

11.35 A survey conducted by Headcorn Primary School of parents, pupils, teachers and governors to gather evidence on their preferences for the future development of the school and how to cope with the need for expansion.

A2.iii.h   Feedback sessions

11.36 As well as the formal surveys, residents and businesses were given opportunities to feedback informally during a series of meetings held during 2013 and 2014 and these responses have also informed Headcorn's evidence base, particularly the poster sessions held in June 2014, which allowed participants to use stickers to respond to a series of questions.

A2.iii.i   Position statements

11.37 As well as the surveys, Headcorn Parish Council also requested position statements from Headcorn Primary School and various clubs and societies in Headcorn (including the bowls club, cricket and tennis club, football club and badminton club), to help understand their needs. A position statement was also requested from the doctor's surgery, but this was not provided.

A2.iii.j   Analysing the overall sustainability of housing development in Headcorn

11.38 Headcorn Parish Council commissioned Analytically Driven Ltd to analyse how much housing development would be sustainable in Headcorn over the period 2011 to 2031. The assessment uses the definition of sustainability within the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework, which defined sustainability in economic, social and environmental terms. A key part of the analysis is assessing whether Headcorn is right location for housing to support growth and innovation (which is a crucial part of the NPPF's definition of economic sustainability). The results show that Headcorn is relatively far from key urban centres – the time, distance and cost of travel to the nearest urban centres will act as a significant barrier to those hoping to enter the labour market, for example, as well as important services such as hospital care. Not only will the distances involved make it harder for households to effectively engage in these labour markets, unless there are local jobs available in the Parish locating in Headcorn would result in commuting patterns that are significantly above average in terms of time, distance and cost. This makes Headcorn a less desirable location relative to other, better connected, options, particularly for workers on low incomes, as the cost of commuting would account for a significant proportion of their income, potentially leading them to be excluded from the labour market. See Driver (2014).

A2.iii.k   Sustainability appraisal of possible strategic development sites in Headcorn

11.39 Headcorn Parish Council also commissioned the internationally-renowned consultants Levett-Therivel to undertake an assessment of the sustainability of potential strategic development sites in Headcorn village. See Therivel (2015). The site assessment exercise undertook a sustainability appraisal of 20 potential strategic housing development locations in Headcorn Parish. These sites represent the sites submitted to Maidstone Borough Council as potential sites for housing development in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment consultations that Maidstone Borough Council undertook between

2012 and 2014. Sites south of the railway station were not considered because they are prone to flooding, are near the River Sherway / River Beult Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and are difficult to access.

A2.iii.l   Headcorn foul drainage assessment

11.40 The results from the 2013 Residents' Survey and the Survey of Businesses in Headcorn Parish, as well as observed overflow at the manhole in Moat Road and the results of the Water Cycle Study by Halcrow Group Limited (2010) for Maidstone Borough Council all highlighted significant problems with the sewerage system in Headcorn.

11.41 To identify how prevalent the problems were, where the problems were located and what impact any identified problems might have on the feasibility of further housing development in Headcorn, Headcorn Parish Council commissioned Sanderson (Consulting Engineers) Ltd to undertake an assessment of the sewerage system in Headcorn village. This followed explicit advice from the Head of Planning at Maidstone Borough Council that in order to be considered as a constraint, more specific information on the relevant issues was needed.

11.42 The study was a modelling exercise based on information provided by Southern Water, which is the company responsible for sewerage in Headcorn. Results from the study identified that the current system has significant problems, including:

- 15 sewage pipes that already have insufficient capacity, including 9 locations, totalling some 432m linear run, on the main distribution network;
- 14 sewage pipes that suffer from back-fall (where sewage is trying to flow uphill);
- 74 sewage pipes (around 60% of the sewerage network in the village) where the pipes are not self-cleaning due to inadequate velocity; and
- 6 sections of sewage pipes that suffer from all three problems.

11.43 These problems are in evidence throughout the village and include several sections of major pipework that are important for the functioning of the entire sewerage system in the village – in other words, problems are not simply confined to small, localised areas. The results also highlighted that Southern Water's records are far from complete, with at least some data missing for 45% of the manholes in the village, suggesting further problems might emerge when more accurate records are available. For example, the problem section of sewerage in Moat Road could not be modelled, because Southern Water's records suggested that sewage flowed in both directions, something that is unheard of in engineering terms. See Sanderson (Consulting Engineers) Ltd (2015) for full results.

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