

Agenda Item No: 9

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 29 June 2023

Report Title: Adoption of Charing Neighbourhood Plan

Report Author: Claire Marchant – Team Leader (Plan Making and Infrastructure)
Job Title:

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Linda Harman
Portfolio Holder for: Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing Delivery and Communication



Summary:

The Charing Neighbourhood Plan was submitted in May 2022 for an independent examination which began in September 2022 and the Council received the Examiner's report in December 2022.

The Examiner's report recommended that the Charing Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum subject to a number of modifications.

On the 14 March 2023 the Neighbourhood plan was subject to a local referendum, which was held in the parish. A total of 77% voted in favour of the plan, 23% of voters voted against it. The electorate for the Neighbourhood Plan area is 2540, the Council issued 620 ballot papers which equates to a turnout of 24%.

Following the successful referendum it is now the Local Planning Authority's responsibility to formally 'make' (i.e. adopt) the Plan, which will grant the Plan Development Plan status for decision making purposes.

Formally 'making' the Neighbourhood Plan must be agreed by Full Council. This report recommends that the Cabinet ask Full Council to 'make' it.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: Charing; Upper Weald

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- I. **recommend that Full Council 'make' the Charing Neighbourhood Plan 2011 – 2030 (incorporating the modifications recommended by the Examiner) in accordance with Section 38A(4) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.**

Policy Overview: The adoption of the Charing Neighbourhood Plan will mean that it becomes part of the Development Plan and its policies shall have the same weight in decision-making as the policies contained within the Borough Council's own Ashford Local Plan 2030.

Financial Implications: 25% of any Community Infrastructure Levy monies received from development in the Neighbourhood Plan area must be top sliced and paid to the Parish Council, rather than 15% for those parishes without a Neighbourhood Plan. The Council does not currently operate a CIL regime however.

Legal Implications: None identified with regard to the making of the Plan, other than those set out in this report. The making of the Plan was required within 8 weeks of the referendum, and is thus overdue; it was unavoidably delayed by the Borough pre-election and post-election periods immediately after the referendum. Therefore the decision is now somewhat urgent and should not be delayed.

*Text agreed by
Principal Solicitor –
Strategic
Development on 16
June 2023*

Any legal challenge to the making of the Plan must be made within 6 weeks after the Plan is formally made by Full Council. The Examiner found that (as modified by him) the Neighbourhood Plan would be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan, which in this case refers primarily to the Ashford Local Plan 2030. Legal rules exist to resolve any conflicts that may arise in the future between the policies of the Neighbourhood Plan and other policies in the development plan, such as the ALP 2030.

Equalities Impact Assessment: See Attached

Data Protection Impact Assessment: None

Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement): None

Sustainability Implications: The Examiner found that policies within the Neighbourhood Plan will contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

Other Material Implications: None

Exempt from Publication: NO

**Background
Papers:**

**Charing Neighbourhood Plan 2011 – 2030 (Appendix 1)
Examiner's Report dated 20 December 2022 (Appendix 2)**

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Report Title: Adoption of the Charing Neighbourhood Plan

Introduction and Background

1. Neighbourhood planning was introduced through the Localism Act 2011, and enables local communities to shape development and growth in their area through the production of a neighbourhood development plan, a neighbourhood development order, or a community right to build order.
2. A neighbourhood plan covers a geographic area and can be taken forward by town and parish councils or 'neighbourhood forums'. A neighbourhood plan, if adopted, becomes part of the statutory development plan for that area and will be used in determining planning applications.
3. The Charing Neighbourhood Plan will be the sixth Neighbourhood Plan to be adopted in the borough. It will apply to the whole of Charing Parish.
4. Work commenced on the production of the Neighbourhood Plan in 2016, and the process has involved significant consultation with the local community. Throughout the process, officers from the Plan Making team have supported the Charing Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to ensure that the eventual Plan not only met the aspirations of local residents, but also fulfilled the tests of compliance with national and local planning policy.
5. In accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 ('the SEA Regulations'), as part of the Plan preparation process officers from the Plan Making team screened the Charing Neighbourhood Plan against the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA). A Screening Report was originally issued by the borough council in January 2019, and was subsequently updated in October 2020.
6. The updated October 2020 Screening Report concluded that a HRA is required for the Plan, as the Plan area lies within the catchment of the Stodmarsh Lakes Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar Site and the Stodmarsh Site of Special Scientific Interest, which has been identified as being under threat from eutrophication. In order to address the threat, Natural England presently require that all new residential development within the Stour catchment is phosphorous and nitrogen neutral.
7. In 2021, AECOM was appointed by Locality (on behalf of Charing Parish Council) to prepare a HRA Report (dated October 2021). The report accompanied the submission draft of the Plan. Section 5 of the report contains a screening assessment to assess whether policies in the Plan will have Likely Significant Effects on the European Designated sites. The HRA Report indicates that policies seeking to deliver housing could lead to Likely Significant Effects to water quality at the Stodmarsh Lakes. Section 6 of the HRA Report contains an Appropriate Assessment. The Appropriate Assessment considers the effects of new residential development concluding that in the absence of mitigation there is a risk of increased pollution to the Stodmarsh Lakes during

and post-construction. A supplementary note to the HRA Report was prepared by AECOM on 15 June 2022 which contains updated nutrient neutrality calculations following a change to Natural England's methodology for calculating nutrient loads.

8. Both the original HRA and supplementary note conclude that the Neighbourhood Plan should contain a policy requiring proposals for new residential development and other development including overnight accommodation within the Plan area to demonstrate that they can achieve nutrient neutrality. In response to AECOM's recommendation Charing Parish Council drafted criteria to address this issue within the wording of Policy C2 'Infrastructure, services, and facilities'. The approach was supported by the Examiner who recommended some modifications to the policy wording and the insertion of a new sub-section within Section 11 'Housing' titled 'Addressing nutrient neutrality' (see 'Proposed modification numbers' PM2 and PM33 of the Examiners Report attached at Appendix 2).
9. Following two formal stages of public and stakeholder consultation on the draft Plan, the Independent Examiner appointed by the Council formally considered whether the Plan met the necessary 'basic conditions' tests set down in legislation. The examination followed the written representation procedure throughout autumn/winter 2022. In December 2022, the Council received the examiner's report which concluded that, subject to a number of modifications, the Plan was sound and did meet the 'basic conditions' tests. The independent Examiner found that the SEA Environmental Report and HRA Report, together with the Plan itself, are compatible with EU obligations under retained EU law.
10. In his conclusions the examiner advised that the Plan should progress to the final stage of the Neighbourhood Plan process – a local referendum.
11. The local referendum on the Plan, as amended in accordance with the examiner's modifications (see Appendix 1), was held in Charing parish on 14 March 2023. Of the 620 people who voted (a turnout of 24%), 77% supported the Plan and 23% voted against it.

Proposal

12. As more than 50% of those who voted in the local referendum were in favour of the Plan, the Local Planning Authority must 'make' (adopt) the Plan.

Implications and Risk Assessment

13. The 'making' of the Neighbourhood Plan will confer full Development Plan status on its policies. This means that for decision-making purposes, applications should be determined in accordance with its policies unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Neighbourhood Plan should therefore play a central role in guiding the Local Planning Authority in assessing planning applications in the parish, alongside the policies in the Ashford Local Plan 2030 and any other relevant plan policies.

Equalities Impact Assessment

14. Members are referred to the attached Assessment. Although the Neighbourhood Plan has been drafted and modified by others, it is necessary to consider EIA if the Council is to adopt its policies.
15. It is concluded that the policies contained within the Neighbourhood Plan do not prejudice any protected groups. The Plan provides a framework for development that will support all sections of the local community.

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

16. As set out in the background section of this report, significant consultation has taken place on the Plan, in accordance with the relevant statutory requirements, which has helped to shape the Plan.

Other Options Considered

17. The Council must 'make' (adopt) the plan unless it considers that the making of the plan would breach, or would otherwise be incompatible with, any retained EU obligation or any human rights. In my opinion, there is no such incompatibility and therefore, the Council should progress to formally 'make' the Plan.

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

18. The Council are required to 'make' the Plan, following the supportive referendum result, unless the making of the plan would breach, or would otherwise be incompatible with, any EU obligation or any human rights, and there are no such reasons.

Next Steps in Process

19. If the Cabinet agree the recommendation, then it will be for the Full Council to approve and formally 'make' the Neighbourhood Plan so that it becomes a part of the Development Plan for the borough, alongside the Local Plan 2030 and other Development Plan documents.
20. In addition, following the Full Council's decision, the relevant regulations require the Borough Council to publish this decision on the council's website and also a statement setting out the reasons for making that decision. This should also be sent to the Parish Council and other relevant parties, and made available locally within the parish. The adopted version of the Neighbourhood Plan, and the Examiner's report, will also be made available on the Borough Council's website.

Conclusion

21. The Parish Council as a whole and the members of the Neighbourhood Planning Group in particular, deserve much credit for undertaking and persevering with the Parish Neighbourhood Plan through to its conclusion. The referendum result shows support for the Plan by the local community and demonstrates the efforts to engage the community throughout the process.

22. It is recommended that Cabinet endorse the Neighbourhood Plan and request that Full Council formally 'make' the Plan to form part of the Development plan for the borough.

Portfolio Holder's Views

23. I am very supportive of local communities taking an active role in the future evolution of their environment. These plans then inform future decisions being taken by the Local Planning Authority to develop a comprehensively beneficial place for all. The work and commitment required by communities to produce a neighbourhood plan is significant and the team in Charing is to be commended for undertaking this exercise.

Contact and Email

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Equality Impact Assessment

1. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a document that summarises how the council has had due regard to the public sector equality duty (Equality Act 2010) in its decision-making. Although there is no legal duty to produce an EIA, the Council must have **due regard** to the equality duty and an EIA is recognised as the best method of fulfilling that duty. It can assist the Council in making a judgment as to whether a policy or other decision will have unintended negative consequences for certain people and help maximise the positive impacts of policy change. An EIA can lead to one of four consequences:

- (a) No major change – the policy or other decision is robust with no potential for discrimination or adverse impact. Opportunities to promote equality have been taken;
- (b) Adjust the policy or decision to remove barriers or better promote equality as identified in the EIA;
- (c) Continue the policy – if the EIA identifies potential for adverse impact, set out compelling justification for continuing;
- (d) Stop and remove the policy where actual or potential unlawful discrimination is identified.

Public sector equality duty

2. The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on the council, when exercising public functions, to have due regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (ie tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups).

3. These are known as the three aims of the general equality duty.

Protected characteristics

4. The Equality Act 2010 sets out nine protected characteristics for the purpose of the equality duty:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership*
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

*For marriage and civil partnership, only the first aim of the duty applies in relation to employment.

Due regard

5. Having 'due regard' is about using good equality information and analysis at the right time as part of decision-making procedures.
6. To 'have due regard' means that in making decisions and in its other day-to-day activities the council must consciously consider the need to do the things set out in the general equality duty: eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. This can involve:
- removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
 - taking steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics when these are different from the needs of other people.
 - encouraging people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where it is disproportionately low.
7. How much regard is 'due' will depend on the circumstances. The greater the

potential impact, the higher the regard required by the duty. Examples of functions and decisions likely to engage the duty include: policy decisions, budget decisions, public appointments, service provision, statutory discretion, decisions on individuals, employing staff and procurement of goods and services.

8. In terms of timing:

- Having 'due regard' should be considered at the inception of any decision or proposed policy or service development or change.
- Due regard should be considered throughout development of a decision. Notes shall be taken and kept on file as to how due regard has been had to the equality duty in research, meetings, project teams, consultations etc.
- The completion of the EIA is a way of effectively summarising this and it should inform final decision-making.

Armed Forces Community

9. As part of the council's commitment to the Armed Forces Community made through the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant the council's Cabinet agreed in November 2017 that potential impacts on the Armed Forces Community should be considered as part of the Equality Impact Assessment process.

10. Accordingly, due regard should also be had throughout the decision making process to potential impacts on the groups covered by the Armed Forces Covenant:

- Current serving members of the Armed Forces (both Regular and Reserve)
- Former serving members of the Armed Forces (both Regular and Reserve)
- The families of current and former Armed Forces personnel.

Case law principles

11. A number of principles have been established by the courts in relation to the equality duty and due regard:

- Decision-makers in public authorities must be aware of their duty to have 'due regard' to the equality duty and so EIA's must be attached to any relevant committee reports.
- Due regard is fulfilled before and at the time a particular policy is under consideration as well as at the time a decision is taken. Due regard involves a conscious approach and state of mind.
- A public authority cannot satisfy the duty by justifying a decision after it has been taken.
- The duty must be exercised in substance, with rigour and with an open mind in such a way that it influences the final decision.
- The duty is a non-delegable one. The duty will always remain the responsibility of the public authority.
- The duty is a continuing one so that it needs to be considered not only when a policy, for example, is being developed and agreed but also when it is implemented.
- It is good practice for those exercising public functions to keep an accurate record showing that they have actually considered the general duty and pondered relevant questions. Proper record keeping encourages transparency and will discipline those carrying out the relevant function to undertake the duty conscientiously.
- A public authority will need to consider whether it has sufficient information to assess the effects of the policy, or the way a function is being carried out, on the aims set out in the general equality duty.
- A public authority cannot avoid complying with the duty by claiming that it does not have enough resources to do so.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has produced helpful guidance on "Meeting the Equality Duty in Policy and Decision-Making" (October 2014). It is available on the following link and report authors should read and follow this when developing or reporting on proposals for policy or

service development or change and other decisions likely to engage the equality duty. [Equality Duty in decision-making](#)

Lead officer:	Claire Marchant
Decision maker:	Cabinet & Council
Decision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy, project, service, contract • Review, change, new, stop 	To 'make' the Charing Neighbourhood Plan 2011 – 2030 (incorporating the modifications recommended by the Examiner) in accordance with Section 38A(4) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
Date of decision: The date when the final decision is made. The EIA must be complete before this point and inform the final decision.	29 June 2023 & 20 July 2023 respectively
Summary of the proposed decision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims and objectives • Key actions • Expected outcomes • Who will be affected and how? • How many people will be affected? 	<p>The adopted plan will form part of the Council's development plan, and need to be taken into account in making decisions on planning applications within Charing Parish.</p> <p>The adoption of the Plan impacts upon planning decisions within the parish of Charing. There is a potential impact upon residents, landowners and businesses in the parish of Charing.</p>
Information and research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline the information and research that has informed the decision. • Include sources and key findings. 	The production of the Neighbourhood Plan has been through its statutory process, being produced by the Charing Parish Council. Following a successful referendum the Local Planning Authority is required to 'make' (adopt) the Plan.
Consultation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What specific consultation has occurred on this decision? • What were the results of the consultation? • Did the consultation analysis reveal any difference in views across the protected characteristics? • What conclusions can be drawn from the analysis on how the decision will affect people with different protected characteristics? 	<p>The Parish Council has carried out consultation in accordance with the statutory requirements. Consultation has taken place with the local community, businesses, landowners and other statutory stakeholders.</p> <p>The Council has also carried out a consultation on the plan with all of the above. Responses received to the consultation, raised specific issues about the Plan's proposals and were taken into account during Independent Examination of the Neighbourhood Plan. The consultation analysis did not reveal any difference in views across the protected characteristics</p>

Assess the relevance of the decision to people with different protected characteristics and assess the impact of the decision on people with different protected characteristics.

When assessing relevance and impact, make it clear who the assessment applies to within the protected characteristic category. For example, a decision may have high relevance for young people but low relevance for older people; it may have a positive impact on women but a neutral impact on men.

Protected characteristic	Relevance to Decision High/Medium/Low/None	Impact of Decision Positive (Major/Minor) Negative (Major/Minor) Neutral
<u>AGE</u> Elderly	None	Neutral
Middle age	None	Neutral
Young adult	None	Neutral
Children	None	Neutral
<u>DISABILITY</u> Physical	None	Neutral
Mental	None	Neutral
Sensory	None	Neutral
<u>GENDER RE- ASSIGNMENT</u>	None	Neutral
<u>MARRIAGE/CIVIL PARTNERSHIP</u>	None	Neutral
<u>PREGNANCY/MATERNITY</u>	None	Neutral
<u>RACE</u>	None	Neutral
<u>RELIGION OR BELIEF</u>	None	Neutral
<u>SEX</u> Men	None	Neutral
Women	None	Neutral
<u>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</u>	None	Neutral
<u>ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY</u> Regular/Reserve personnel	None	Neutral
Former service personnel	None	Neutral

Service families	None	Neutral
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<p>Mitigating negative impact:</p> <p>Where any negative impact has been identified, outline the measures taken to mitigate against it.</p>	N/A
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<p>Is the decision relevant to the aims of the equality duty?</p> <p>Guidance on the aims can be found in the EHRC's Essential Guide, alongside fuller PSED Technical Guidance.</p>	
Aim	Yes / No / N/A
1) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation	N/A
2) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	N/A
3) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	N/A

<p>Conclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how due regard has been had to the equality duty, from start to finish. There should be no unlawful discrimination arising from the decision (see guidance above). Advise on whether the proposal meets the aims of the equality duty or whether adjustments have been made or need to be made or whether any residual impacts are justified. How will monitoring of the policy, procedure or decision and its implementation be undertaken and reported? 	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan has been drafted by others, but the Council has considered the Equalities Act when providing comments and advice to the Parish Council regarding the Plan.</p> <p>The policies in the Plan are not specifically relevant to any of the protected characteristics.</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to bring forward sustainable development that will benefit the parish as a whole.</p> <p>It is concluded that the policies contained within the Neighbourhood Plan do not prejudice any existing groups.</p> <p>The Plan provides a framework for development that will support and apply to all sections of the local community. The monitoring of development outcomes will form part of the Council's wider development monitoring activities. The Annual Monitoring report will be vehicle by which any specific outcomes can be noted, as well as the annual Infrastructure Funding Statement which reports on the delivery of infrastructure that has been secured through Section 106 Agreements</p>
EIA completion date:	16 June 2023

CHARING NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

2011 – 2030

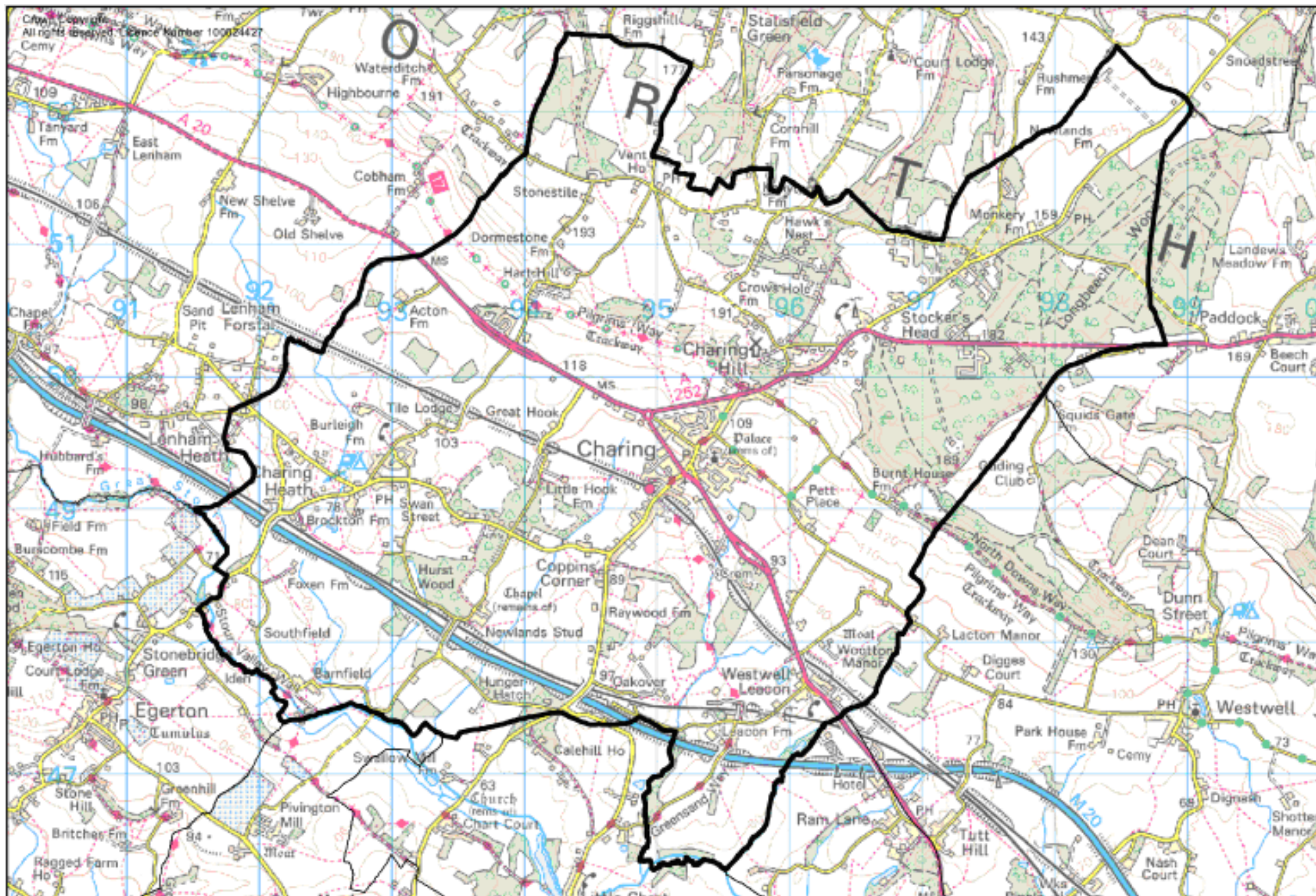
CHARING – THE FUTURE VIEW



**NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (April 2022), AS DEFINED BY
THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING (GENERAL) REGULATIONS, 2012
Referendum version**

version 16

Figure 1: Charing parish boundary



(Scale: blue grid is one-kilometre squares.)

FOREWORD

Neighbourhood Development Plans come out of the Government's determination to ensure that local communities are closely involved in the decisions which affect them. The Charing Neighbourhood Development Plan has been developed to establish vision and objectives for the parish and help deliver the local community's aspirations and needs for the period up to 2030. Unlike the Charing Parish Plan, 2008, on which it builds, our Neighbourhood Development Plan is a statutory document that will be incorporated into the Borough planning frameworks, and must be used by Ashford Borough Council (ABC) to determine planning applications.

Our Plan has been developed from the combined efforts of parishioners, volunteers, the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee (NPSC), and the Charing Parish Council (CPC), to ensure local opinion was at the centre of the Plan. A wide range of processes were used in formulating this Plan in order to influence the well-being, sustainability, and long-term preservation of our rural community. Every effort, therefore, has been made to ensure that the policies contained in this document reflect the consensus view of parishioners.

The Neighbourhood Plan has many benefits for the residents, including:

- Protection from uncontrolled large-scale or poorly placed development
- Spreading wherever possible development across smaller sites
- Minimising incursion into open countryside
- Protecting the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Protecting heritage assets and the village character
- Providing suitable housing for residents to downsize
- Providing suitable housing for younger people/first-time buyers
- Promoting existing businesses and creating new business
- Improving infrastructure, facilities, and amenities needed for growing population
- Promoting tourism and preserving vibrant local retailers
- Accessing appropriate funding to meet the needs of a 50% growth in population

This Plan will be subject to a referendum which will be arranged by Ashford Borough Council. It will also be found on the Charing Parish Council website together with all associated documents. A hard copy may be borrowed from the Parish Clerk for those without Internet access.

I and the CPC would like to thank all the Steering Committee Members who have worked tirelessly over the plan period especially: John Duncalfe; John Gilliver; Simon Lake; Jill Leyland; Sue Lowen; Karen Saunders; Alan Witt; of course others who joined and left the committee during the journey; volunteers; the administrator; and the experts (see project 113) who have worked tirelessly to enable this Plan to be made. In addition, we thank Groundwork UK and Village SOS (see projects 101 and 102) for grants which enabled this Plan to be completed. We also thank those businesses in the area that contributed finance and gifts to promote Neighbourhood Plan activities.

The Covid pandemic has significantly delayed the preparation of this Plan.

To help the reader, a list of acronyms used may be found in **Appendix A**.

Dr Hugh Billot

Chair, Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee

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2 Introduction

Charing parish is in the middle of Kent in the borough of Ashford. It consists of the village of Charing itself, the settlements of Charing Heath and Westwell Leacon, and the surrounding countryside. Part of the parish is in the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), including the scarp slope, and much of the rest is in its setting. Charing and the two settlements are historic villages. The existence of Charing itself is documented from the 8th century, and archaeology has shown evidence of both pre-Roman and Roman remains and roads. There are numerous historic buildings.

The Channel Tunnel Rail Link/HS1, the M20, the main railway line from Ashford to London Victoria, and the A20 all run through the Parish. The A20 connects Charing to both Maidstone and Ashford, while the A252 runs from its intersection with the A20 at Charing roundabout to Canterbury.

This plan has been based on extensive research and on extensive consultation with residents.

Charing village has grown in every decade since the Second World War. In general, expansion has been steady with one or two new developments each decade. But all this is about to change. While this Neighbourhood Plan was in preparation, Ashford, pushed by heavier government demand for new housing, substantially increased its planned housing allocations in Charing village.

Over 600 new houses are now likely to be built during the Plan period of 2011 to 2030, with nearly 500 new houses during the 2020s. This is nearly 50% higher than an independent assessment suggested was appropriate for Charing. It is a higher rate of growth than in Ashford as a whole, and Ashford itself is expecting a far higher rate of growth than the country as a whole.

It is worth pointing out that while housing growth in Kent and South East England has been and continues at very high levels, this Plan has embraced the need for more housing, subject of course to the appropriate need, mix, and location. Further, it has contributed to housing growth by allocating sites, but only to ensure there are suitable new infrastructure, amenities, and facilities to ensure that residents do not experience a welfare deficit.

The implications of this housing growth have informed the preparation of this Neighbourhood Development Plan, and have largely driven its proposals.

The Local Plan has stretched the thinking behind this Plan – and, as such, its strategic objectives, plans, policies, and initiatives – socially, economically, and environmentally – fit with the broad thrust of the Local Plan, and are all designed to ensure Charing grows to benefit all of its residents.

These benefits will come from the sound objectives and policies incorporated in the Plan and, in particular, the creation of a new community centre, integrated business units, a health and well-being centre, and a new car park, at Parsons Mead, just a few minutes' walk from the village centre. In addition, this Plan also proposes the creation of a Greenway between Charing itself and Charing Heath, with consequent environmental, health, and well-being benefits.

This Plan cannot solve all the problems Charing will face during the coming decade, but it is believed that it will go a long way towards offsetting or compensating for the negative implications, and leave Charing in a good position by the end of the Plan period.

The Plan has experienced major delays, due to both the Covid pandemic, and water quality levels at the Stodmarsh Nature Reserve outside Canterbury which required a Habitats Regulations Assessment in order to amend policies.

3 The Parish

3.1 Location

Charing is a rural parish in the Borough of Ashford (see map on page 2). It includes the principal settlement of **Charing**, together with the village of **Charing Heath** and the small hamlet of **Westwell Leacon**. Approximately half of the parish lies in the “Kent Downs” Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The village of Charing enjoys an enviable location at the foot of the distinctive chalk escarpment of the Downs, resulting in attractive views framing many of the streets of the village.

Charing with Charing Heath became a civil parish in 1894.

While most of the parish is in Charing ward, Charing Heath – and some of its surrounding area – forms part of another ward.

3.2 Connectivity

Charing has good road connectivity, with the resulting traffic, a railway station and an extensive footpath network. Details are given in section 8.

3.3 Demographics

A study (project 147) was undertaken of relevant demographics. Specific help was found in *Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)*, *Rural Evidence Project October 2013*, and *Rural community profile for Charing (Parish)* [see reference 10] as well as a number of government databases.

At the 2011 census, Charing parish had a population of 2,765 (including 410 in Charing Heath and approximately 82 [based on 2.4 people per house] in Westwell Leacon). The gender breakdown was 47.4% male and 52.6% female.

58.8% were working age adults;
26.9% were people over 65 years of age, and
14.3% were children under 16 years of age.

Charing has a disproportionately higher number of residents over 65 compared to the average of 16.3% for England, although this is not very out of line with other villages.

Population growth over the census period 2001 to 2011 was 2.7%, or 77 people.

In 2011 the parish contained 1,228 households and had 1,298 dwellings including park homes, caravans, and temporary accommodation. Detached houses were the most numerous type of property at 44.0% of all properties. 74.5% of properties were owner-occupied, while 15.6% were social rental properties. In 2011 the average number of cars per household was 1.53.

House prices in 2011 were considerably more expensive, other than flats, than for England as a whole, and also more expensive than in Ashford. The parish comprises 2,489 hectares of land, and population density is 1.11 persons per hectare.

There were 1,323 economically active residents according to the 2011 census, and 130 people working from home.

There is a large GP surgery, but no local optician or NHS dentist.

In 2011, 14.6% of the population aged between 16 and 64 had a limiting long-term illness; 14.8% were attendance-allowance claimants; and 5.5% were claiming disability-living allowances (Census 2011).

3.4 The historic village of Charing

There is evidence of *occupation* in the area before and during Roman times but the earliest *recorded* history refers to the 8th century. During the Middle Ages the manor of Charing belonged to the Archbishops of Canterbury, who built a residence (the Palace – see section 10.4) used as a staging post on the Archbishops’ journeys, and occasionally as a venue for a royal visit. Charing has over 100 listed buildings dating from the late Middle Ages onwards, with Picture 1 and Picture 2 exemplifying some of those listed (see project 142).

Picture 1: Sherbourne House in the High Street



Picture 2: The Old House in Station Road



The village grew only slowly between the 16th and 19th centuries, remaining primarily agricultural, although the communications revolution of the 19th century, and the arrival of the railway, inevitably opened it up. Its location in Kent meant it inevitably played a major role in both world wars.

In contrast to the slow growth of preceding centuries, Charing grew substantially after the Second World War, with developments in every decade (see project 162). These started with the *Downs Way estate* in the 1940s/1950s, and went on to include *The Moat estate*, *Woodbrook*, and *Haffenden Meadow*, to mention just the largest developments. The trend has continued in the 21st century with the interconnecting estates of *Charing Green* and *Poppyfields*, comprising nearly 100 houses built south of the A20 between Pluckley Road and the roundabout at the western perimeter. This trend will accelerate significantly over the next ten years (see section 11). Despite population growth, the number of shops in the High Street has continued to decline.

3.5 Charing Heath

Charing Heath, formerly an area of scattered farms around a heath, developed into a settlement with a new church. It is situated two kilometres to the west of Charing village on the sandy soils of the Greensand Ridge. There are a number of *farmhouses* dating from the 15th century. The *church*, the *vicarage*, and the *church school* (which closed in the 1960s) were built in the 1860s. The *Memorial Hall*, which was updated and refurbished in 2000, is home to a wide range of activities. It has a playing field and playground. The *Red Lion public house* in the centre of the village was originally a farmhouse. It has been licensed since 1709. Charing Heath is adversely affected by ongoing noise pollution from rail and roads (see project 148).

3.6 Westwell Leacon

Westwell Leacon is a small hamlet two kilometres south-east of Charing village, and was incorporated into the parish in the 1950s. There are many old dwellings at the Leacon (an area of common land in the centre of the hamlet) including *Leacon Farm*, *Walnut Tree House*, and *Forge Cottage*. *Yew Tree House* dates back to the reign of Queen Anne. The hamlet was badly affected by the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, with loss of footpath connections and general construction disturbances (see project 148).

3.7 Landscape

Charing parish has a very interesting and important landscape, including an area of outstanding natural beauty, a conservation area, and some important public green spaces. The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is renowned for its dramatic views and landform, its biodiversity-rich habitats, its woodlands and water, and its history and tranquillity. The rest of the parish, apart from being in the setting of the Kent Downs AONB, enjoys a gently rolling pastoral landscape, with the whole of the parish shaped also by the tradition of mixed farming and its history and cultural heritage. For more details see section 10.

Picture 3: View of the Kent Downs AONB, north-east from the church tower



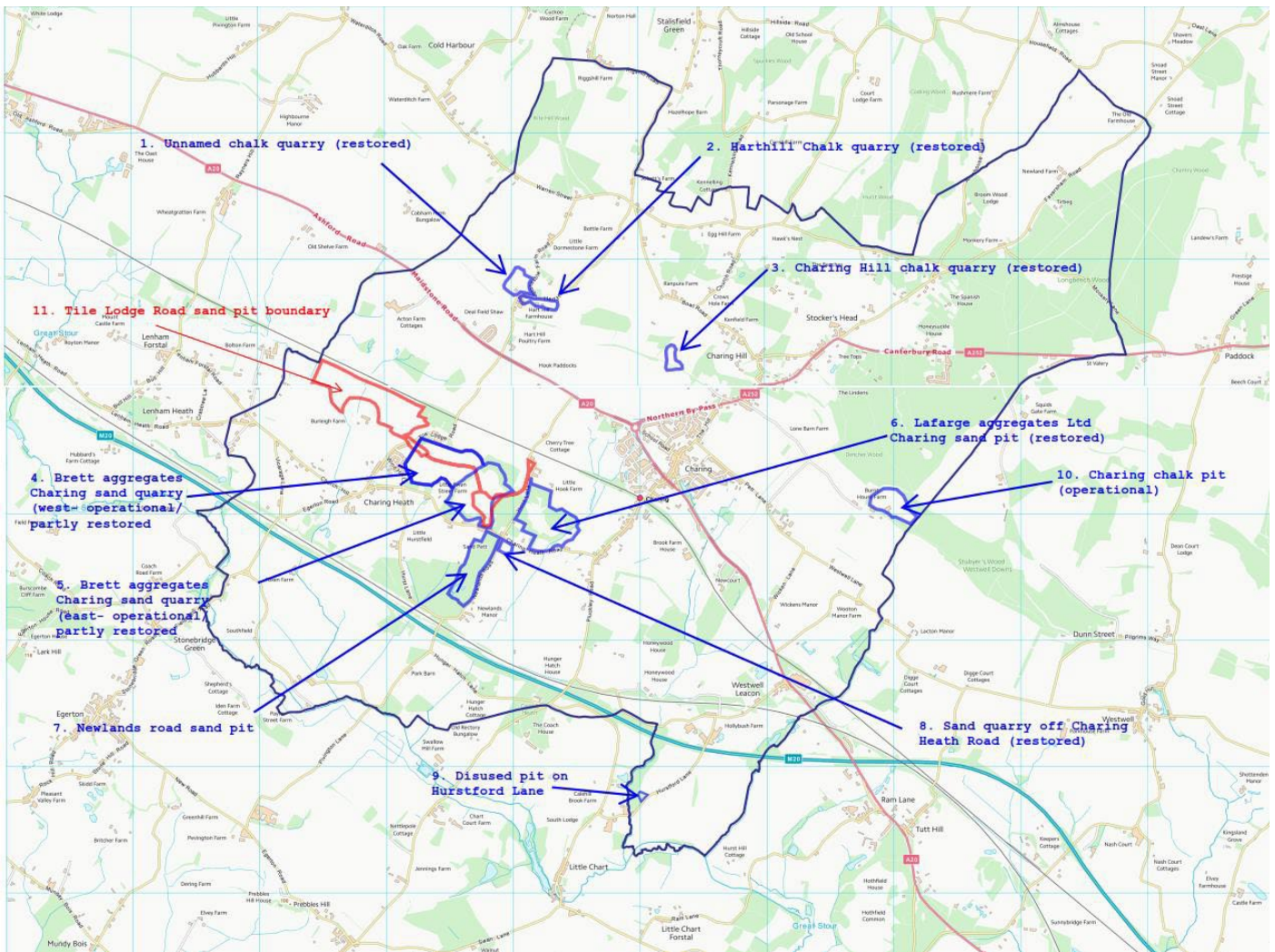
3.8 Quarrying and minerals in Charing

Sand and chalk are the two minerals that have been, and still are, quarried in Charing parish (see project 151). Part of the parish lies on the chalk of the Kent Downs, while the Folkestone Sand Beds, a major source of soft (building) sand, runs under Charing Heath and much of the south of the parish. The importance of the supply of sand means that areas of the parish are in Mineral Safeguarding Areas.

KCC is responsible for both minerals and waste safeguarding in Kent, ensuring that mineral resources are not needlessly sterilised by other forms of development. Current quarrying operations in the area are subject to modern restoration planning conditions.

Sand is currently being quarried at Burleigh (Tile Lodge Road) Quarry, on the outskirts of Charing Heath. KCC has no plans for more quarries in Charing in its current plan.

Figure 2: Quarry sites, past and present



Three old chalk quarries (sites 1, 2, and 3 above) no longer function, but Beacon Hill Quarry (site 10) is still operational albeit intermittently when there is seasonal demand for chalk.

Past sand quarries have had a major impact on landscape. Until recently, they were left as steep-sided wooded pits with no or limited landscaping and unavailable for public access. This applies to sites 6, 7, 8, and 9 on the map. The large Charing Quarry – consisting of two bowls, west and east, sites 4 and 5 respectively – is different: the quarry is now worked out (although it still includes a conveyor bringing sand from the new Burleigh Quarry and a loading bay) and is being restored to form a pleasant landscape. Improving public access will be a major feature of the restoration with a number of additional footpaths created. Ultimately, it should be a major recreational asset to the parish, as well as providing sites favourable to wildlife.

3.9 Groundwater protection zones

South East Water operates five boreholes in Charing, drilled into the Folkestone Beds aquifer and located at a key point in the supply network between Maidstone and Ashford. It is vital that developments do not have an adverse impact on the existing yield or quality of water-supply sources.

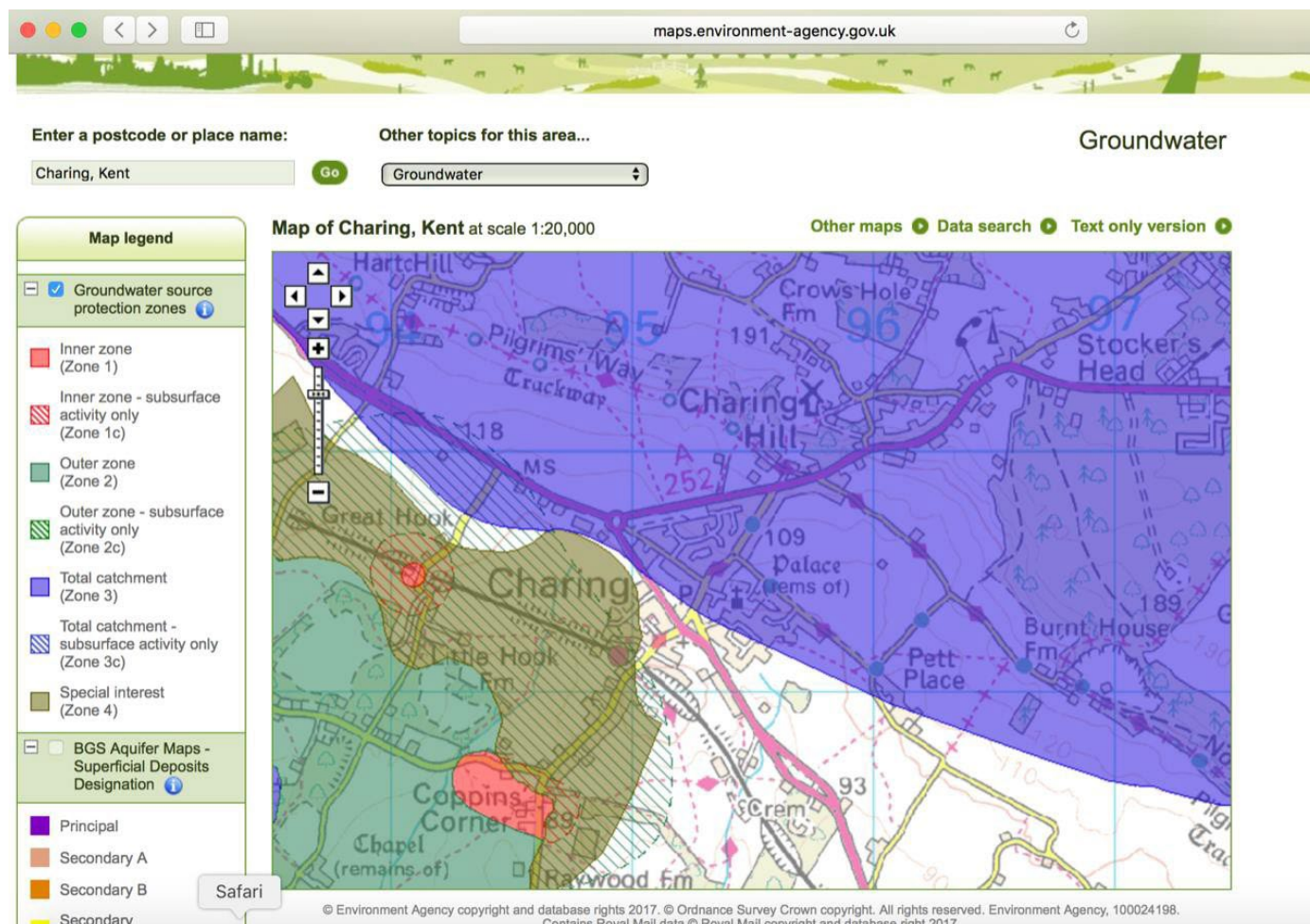
Much of S55, the land immediately to the west of Poppyfields, is an area of groundwater emergence with a number of springs. The water is gathered in S55 meadows, flows into West Brook, and eventually joins the upper Stour River. During its passage, there is a stretch where it passes over or abuts sand. It loses almost a quarter of its flow into the aquifer not far from boreholes which supply drinking water. Water from Charing is widely distributed for drinking, not just in Charing.

Source Protection Zones are defined by the Environment Agency to protect groundwater supplies of drinking water. Much of site S55 is identified as an SPZ 4 (special interest), being an

area of rainfall catchment as well as benefiting from surface water springs. There is also an SPZ 2C, indicating groundwater underneath the Gault Clay;

see projects 131 and 157 and reference 9. Refer also to sections 5.42, 5.43 and 5.44 of the Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Figure 3: Charing groundwater protection zones



(screenshot from Environment Agency website)

3.10 Sites of special scientific interest, wildlife sites, & nature reserves

Charing is rich in these areas which include:

Site of special scientific interest

- Charing Beech Hangers, a. k. a. Dencher Wood

Roadside nature reserves

- A20 Hart Hill/Charing Heath Crossroads (AS02)
- Charing roundabout (AS11)
- Stalisfield Road (south) [includes part of Charing] (SW14)

Local wildlife sites

- Charing Hill Chalk Pit (AS39)
- Longbeech Wood, Charing (AS40)
- Hurst Wood, Charing Heath (AS68)
- Hart Hill Meadows and Shaw, Charing (AS70)
- Alder Wood and Fen, Charing (AS72)
- Lenham Heath and Chilston Park [includes small part

- of Charing Heath] (MA66)
- Valley west of Tong Green [includes small part of north Charing] (SW15)

3.11 Heritage and character assessment

The AECOM Heritage and Character Assessment, May 2017, provided useful insight into the landscape of the village and parish (see project 118 and 120 and references 5 and 6).

It concluded that “any new development along the edge of the settlement would only be considered appropriate where adverse visual impacts on the setting of the village and the AONB are mitigated through appropriate design responses”.

4 Preparing the Plan

4.1 Purpose

In April 2012, the Localism Act 2011 amended the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, introducing new rights and powers to allow local communities to shape new development in their community by preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan, which can establish general planning policies for the development and use of land in the neighbourhood. This document is a Neighbourhood Development Plan as defined by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

4.2 Submitting body

The Neighbourhood Development Plan (the Plan) is submitted by CPC, which is a qualifying body as defined by the Localism Act 2011.

4.3 Neighbourhood area

The Plan applies to the Parish of Charing in Ashford Borough, Kent, as shown in Figure 1, in accordance with part 2 of the Regulations.

Ashford Borough Council (ABC), the local planning authority, published the application from the CPC and advertised a consultation period beginning on 18th March 2016 and ending on 29th April 2016. The application was approved by the Cabinet of ABC on 31st May 2016, and the Parish designated as the Neighbourhood Area (NA). [See section 2.2 of the Basic Conditions Statement.]

CPC confirms that this Plan:

1. relates only to the Parish of Charing and to no other Neighbourhood Areas; and
2. is the only Neighbourhood Development Plan in the designated area. No other Neighbourhood Development Plan exists nor is in development for part or all of the designated area.

4.4 The Neighbourhood Plan

Steering Committee

At an early stage after the launch, a Steering Committee was established. Its terms of reference (project 104) stated its objectives as:

- To prepare a neighbourhood plan for the parish of Charing.
- To promote or improve the social, economic, and environmental well-being of the parish.

The terms of reference also dealt with: purpose; membership; officers; meetings; finances; and changes to the constitution.

The committee has met throughout the planning process, as needed, to deal with issues of importance.

4.5 The context

The Charing Neighbourhood Development Plan must:

1. have appropriate regard to national planning policy;
2. contribute to sustainable development;
3. be compatible with EU obligations and human rights requirements;
4. protect the character of the parish; and
5. be in general conformity with strategic policies in the Development Plan for the local area, and as a result the following strategic policies within the Ashford Local Plan need to be adhered to (see also section 2.6 of the Basic Conditions Statement):

SP1: Strategic Objectives

SP2: Strategic Approach to Housing Delivery

SP3: Strategic Approach to Economic Development

SP4: Delivery of Retail and Leisure Needs

SP6: Promoting High Quality Design

SP7: Separation of Settlements

S55 (ex S28): Charing – Northdown Service Station¹,
Maidstone Road

S55 (ex S29): Charing – Land south of the
Arthur Baker Playing Fields

S55: Charing – Land adjacent to Poppyfields

HOU1: Affordable housing

HOU2: Local needs/specialist housing

HOU3a: Residential windfall development
within settlements

HOU5: Residential windfall development
in the countryside

HOU6: Self and Custom Built Development

HOU7: Replacement dwellings in the countryside

HOU8: Residential Extensions

HOU9: Standalone annexes

HOU10: Development of residential gardens

HOU11: Houses in Multiple Occupation

HOU12: Residential space standards internal

HOU14: Accessibility standards

HOU15: Private external open space

HOU16: Traveller Accommodation

HOU17: Safeguarding existing Traveller sites

HOU18: Providing a range and mix of
dwelling types and sizes

EMP1: New employment uses

EMP2: Loss or redevelopment of Employment Sites and
Premises

EMP3: Extensions to employment premises in the rural
area

EMP4: Conversions of rural buildings to non-residential
uses

EMP5: New employment premises in the countryside

EMP6: Promotion of Fibre to the Premises (FTTP)

EMP10: Local and Village Centres

EMP11: Tourism

TRA3a: Parking Standards for Residential Development

TRA3b: Parking Standards for Non Residential
Development

TRA4: Promoting the local bus network

TRA5: Planning for Pedestrians

TRA6: Provision for Cycling

TRA7: The Road Network and Development

TRA8: Travel Plans, Assessments and Statements

TRA9: Planning for HGV movements

ENV1: Biodiversity

ENV3a: Landscape Character and Design

ENV3b: Landscape Character and Design in the AONBs

ENV4: Light pollution and promoting dark skies

ENV5: Protecting important rural features

ENV6: Flood Risk

ENV7: Water Efficiency

ENV8: Water Quality, Supply and Treatment

ENV9: Sustainable Drainage

ENV10: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy

ENV11: Sustainable Design and Construction -
Non-residential

ENV12: Air Quality

ENV13: Conservation and Enhancement of Heritage
Assets

ENV14: Conservation Areas

ENV15: Archaeology

COM1: Meeting the Community's Needs

COM2: Recreation, Sport, Play and Open Spaces

COM3: Allotments

COM4: Cemetery Provision

IMP1: Infrastructure Provision

IMP2: Deferred Contributions

IMP4: Governance of
public community space and facilities

In addition, there are a number of policies in the Ashford Local Plan which need to be read in conjunction with the policies in this Plan. These are listed in **Appendix C**.

¹ "Northdown Service Station" is now "Charing Motors"

5 Community Engagement

Considerable effort throughout the Plan process has been devoted to engaging parishioners, and this has enabled the development of ideas and plans for the future based on the expectations and requirements of parishioners.

5.1 Sense of community

The parish has a strong sense of community which is borne out by the number of societies in action and major village events.

There is a Farmers' Market every Thursday in the church barn, and coffee mornings are held every Wednesday in the Methodist Church and once a month in Charing Heath and Lenham Heath Memorial Hall. The Church produces a monthly magazine, and the Parish Council a periodic newsletter. Facebook groups – notably Charing Chatter, Charing Heath, and Lenham Heath – and Charing Parish Council keep people informed, as well as Nextdoor.

A Neighbourhood Watch scheme operates. There are a number of organisations that meet regularly throughout the year and which run fundraising events to ensure the ongoing success of village Christmas lights, summer fete, and village picnic. Other societies include a senior citizens' club, gardening, history, archaeology, knit and natter, the country ways quilters, and the guild of players. Cubs, scouts, beavers, and brownies are involved in the scout hut.

There is much emphasis on sport with an excellent Sports Club in the village. Sports include bowls, cricket, football, badminton, and tennis. There are walking and gardening groups organised via the GP surgery aimed at improving residents' health.

During the late spring and summer of 2020, the parish created a "stone snake" whereby residents, notably children, painted stones and added them to a line to form a "snake" named Charlie. The Parish Council is having the "snake" installed as a permanent memorial to the Covid pandemic and its impact on the parish.

5.2 Community engagement

It was determined that parishioners needed to be kept informed every step of the way, and have every opportunity of inputting their thoughts, opinions, and views at each stage of the process.

The Neighbourhood Plan was launched at four meetings in the parish in September 2016, held at the parish hall on the morning and evening of Thursday 22nd; on the morning of Saturday 24th; and at the Memorial Hall at Charing Heath on the evening of Monday 26th.

Seven key surveys were carried out:

- A Community survey (parish-wide; 24 questions)
- B Poppyfields survey
- C Facilities survey
- D Survey of traders in and around the High Street
- E Business growth and decline survey 2017 (83 businesses)
- F Village confines
- G New community facility at Parsons Mead

Responses were categorised into six important themes, namely:

- Improving the village character.
- Landscape, views, and green spaces.
- Community facilities.
- Traffic, transport, and parking.
- Housing, including alternative sites, and the village confines.
- Sustaining successful businesses in the High Street, and capability to bring new business to Charing.

A wide range of projects were undertaken by task groups to collect data relevant to the issues established at the launch and workshops. The results of the projects are to be found in bound evidence books located in the Charing Parish Council archives, and may also be accessed on the parish council website:

<https://www.charingkent.org/neighbourhood-plan/neighbourhood-plan-documents> – click any of the 8 links below "Evidence Books". A full list of projects undertaken is listed in **Appendix B**.

A Community Engagement Consultant, who gave expert advice, was appointed at the beginning. The NPSC also took advice from Village SOS, and had a number of useful meetings with the local officer, especially in terms of learning what works well. During the middle-to-end stages of the Plan, advice was taken from planning consultants. In addition, an administrator was appointed to record all meetings and relevant information, and assist with organising events and especially with communications. Section 2 of the Consultation Statement details who was consulted during the process, when, and the outcome.

It was determined that parishioners needed to be kept informed every step of the way, and have every opportunity of inputting their thoughts, opinions, and views at each stage of the process. Our community engagement process and events have included:

The Plan was launched with a series of four open, heavily advertised, meetings (three in Charing and one in Charing Heath) to gather initial ideas. These were followed by a number of workshops, including one on Vision and Objectives, and a survey delivered to every home in the parish. As the Plan was developed, further workshops and a number of specific surveys were carried out. On three occasions, including the Regulation 14 consultation, major exhibitions, again heavily advertised, were held to update residents on progress and to gather their opinions on the emerging policies. Residents were also updated regularly in the Parish Council newsletter. Full details can be found in the Consultation Statement, in the reports on exhibitions and workshops detailed in projects 105, 119, 136, and 137, and in the reports on surveys detailed in projects 106, 121, 127, 128, 134, and 159.

Picture 4: "Vision & objectives" workshop (preparation)



5.2.1 Task groups

A number of formal and informal task groups have been used during the process. These included the following group functions:

- Preparing the community questionnaire, and a number of smaller and more specific questionnaires.
- Establishing village confines for Charing.
- Assessing the growth in housing year by year over the last twenty years.
- Keeping track of housing built and planned for the plan period.
- Heritage and village character assessing.
- Analysing workshop outcomes.
- Assessing impact of exhibitions.

5.2.2 Volunteers

Volunteers were sought at all public events, by advertising in articles in the parish magazine, by word of mouth, and through personal contacts. Over fifty volunteers have been involved at different stages. Maintaining engagement and full participation has not always been easy, and the type of activity has often been the determinant of continued involvement. The administrator kept a record of all volunteers and the type of project/event work they would prefer to engage in (project 108).

We were fortunate to have some keen photographers, and they have taken many photographs, a selection of which have been incorporated into this Plan (see project 109). A photographic library has been created on a Charing Parish Council laptop.

6 Vision and Objectives

This Neighbourhood Development Plan has many benefits for the residents of the parish of Charing, by incorporating their genuine needs into sound policies, as well as some important recommendations for CPC and ABC, including:

- Protecting **Charing village, Charing Heath, and Westwell Leacon** from *uncontrolled, large scale, or poorly placed* development.
- Spreading new development, wherever possible, across *smaller* sites, to avoid village character damage resulting from *large-scale* estates.
- Minimising incursion into open countryside, and avoiding adverse impact on the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and heritage assets.
- Ensuring that new development is sympathetic to, and improves the look and feel of, the village and the two settlements, and that the recommendations of the Parish Design Statement, 2002 are preserved.
- Providing new houses to enable *younger people/first-time buyers/renters* to secure a place to live, and existing residents to downsize and remain in the parish.
- Promoting the prospects of existing business, and creating opportunities for new business, through highlighting *locations* suitable for business development.
- Identifying the potential to improve: infrastructure, especially *parking; road and pedestrian safety; community meeting space; health facilities; local environment; and* travel and transport.
- Promoting tourism, and, especially, preserving a vibrant High Street.
- Giving the village the potential to access S106 and/or Community Infrastructure Levy funding to improve village and parish facilities.

Our vision for the parish of Charing at the end of the Plan period is that both new and existing residents will be enjoying the same or greater benefits of living in the village and parish as current residents do, and that the area will be an even more attractive community in which to live and work.

6.1 Plan objectives

The “Vision and Objectives” activity, combined with the views obtained from the community questionnaire and exhibitions, enabled the establishment of these key objectives (with sections):

1. To minimise the impact of new developments on the surrounding countryside, landscape, and ecosystems. (10.7)
2. To ensure the beautiful views inwards and outwards are not compromised, and the public open spaces are protected. (10.8)
3. To improve and increase Charing village parking, including provision of charging facilities to encourage the use of electric vehicles. (8.4)
4. To establish a multipurpose community centre with attractions for all. (13)
5. To provide existing and future residents with the opportunity to live in a decent home. (11)
6. To enhance the prospects of local business, and take actions to create additional employment. (9)
7. To reduce harm to the environment by seeking to minimise pollution. (14.5)
8. To ensure the village character and spirit are maintained, and, where possible, enhanced. (10.1)
9. To support actions likely to re-establish a pub/restaurant/hotel in the village heart. (7.1)
10. To support the enhancement of, and improvement in, the level of health care provision. (7.7)
11. To promote retail activity to the parish, especially Charing High Street. (9.3)
12. To take actions to ensure road traffic congestion does not get worse, and that road networks in the parish are safe for both vehicle users and pedestrians. (8.2)
13. To establish a formal cycle- & footpath between Charing and Charing Heath. (14.1)
14. To support full restoration of the Archbishop’s Palace. (10.4)
15. To support all initiatives which preserve heritage in the parish. (10.2 & 10.3)
16. To promote sustainable tourism. (6, 7.6)

6.2 Neighbourhood Development Plan policies

The following sections contain the policies to deliver the objectives of the plan listed in section 6.1. To aid identification the policies have been coded as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Policy classification and coding

code	policy area	n° of policies
C	Community well-being	8
T	Traffic and transport	5
EC	Employment creation and business development	2
E	Environment and countryside	6
H	Housing	17
D	Housing design	3

7 Community Well-Being Policies

Charing is defined as a second-tier settlement in the Ashford Local Plan to 2030, and currently has, in general, good facilities to promote resident well-being. Charing village has a library; two churches; a large general practice and pharmacy (although Charing residents only account for about a quarter of the total patient count); a reasonable range of shops including a post office; a parish hall; a sports pavilion and playing fields; considerable recreation space including two playgrounds; and a wide range of clubs and societies. Charing village lost (we hope temporarily) its only pub (the building is an asset of community value), but has a micro-pub. The village does not have a community centre with parking, and this is becoming increasingly important as the population grows. Charing Heath has a church, a pub, a community hall, and a sports field and playground. There are two pubs elsewhere in the parish.

With estimates indicating population growth for the village at around 50% in the Plan period (and around 40% in the current decade), it is essential that this Plan ensures there is no resident welfare deficit, and hence an increase in community facilities will be essential.

The spring 2017 community questionnaire emphasised the importance of parish facilities, with the medical practice, pharmacy, and library in the top three, as well as suggesting what needs improving – where the top three were activities for the young, village parking, and restaurants.

A further analysis was undertaken using a Survey Monkey questionnaire in September 2018 (project 128), which confirmed the importance of improved facilities for the future, including: more parking; a new community centre; improved facilities for teenagers; more recreational facilities; and a footpath/cycleway connecting Charing to Charing Heath.

It is important that facilities are not lost, but, more importantly, that they are enhanced to meet the needs of population growth.

All major developments should contribute to the extra facilities and infrastructure needed to support the development. Accordingly, all developments shall make provision to meet the additional requirements for infrastructure arising from the development, either through Section 106 agreements, or Community Infrastructure Levy contributions, or both.

Infrastructure and community facilities, needed to address the growing needs of residents and to meet population growth, are detailed in sections 13 & 14 of this Plan.

7.1 The Oak public house, an Asset of Community Value

The loss of the only remaining pub in Charing village has had a negative impact on the well-being of residents. A social meeting place, restaurant, hotel accommodation, venue for events, receptions, and wakes, and, in addition, a visitor attraction were lost. The owners have refused offers from a community group, from individuals, and from owners of small pub chains. Their 2019 application to convert the main part of the building to four flats was refused in March 2020.

The Oak was first nominated as an Asset of Community Value on 5th May 2016 and the nomination was approved by ABC on 23rd May 2016. The status was extended for a further five years in July 2021 (ABC reference number PR86-013; relevant documents may be found at <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/ugynksrr/decision-pr86-013.pdf>). The micro-pub, while welcome, is small, and does not serve food or have rooms to rent, and the limited hours of bar opening at the Sports Pavilion do not offset the profound loss of the pub/restaurant/B&B.

ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE (Statement of fact)

Where a community facility plays a significant role in contributing to the enjoyment of life in the parish and the sustainability of the community, Charing Parish Council will support the seeking of designation as an Asset of Community Value.

7.2 Community facilities (sports, social, and recreational)

Charing has a number of buildings, including the parish hall, the church barn, and the sports pavilion (Charing Heath has the Memorial Hall), devoted to a range of recreational, sport, and social activities. With the exception of the sports pavilion and the Memorial Hall in Charing Heath, there is no associated parking. None of the current facilities are of adequate size to meet the growing needs of the community.

At the Arthur Baker playing fields (Picture 5), there is a recently constructed sports pavilion, which has a limited-hours bar and social space, changing rooms, and a kitchen for production of refreshments. The playing fields comprise two football pitches, a cricket square, a modest skate park (Picture 12), and two tennis courts which have floodlights, a bowling green, and an extensive children's playground (Picture 6). There is also a newly constructed scout hut.

There is an additional playground at Piquets Meadow. The parish hall has badminton facilities, and holds fitness classes such as Zumba dancing as well as other indoor activities. Charing Heath has a playground and sports field. Westwell Leacon has a field with swings in it.

Charing Parish Council has ensured that playground facilities have been upgraded as and when necessary, and are kept in safe working order.

However, to meet expected population growth of over 50% and to address major shortcomings with existing facilities, this plan is proposing a completely new community facility, health and wellbeing centre, new business units, and a new car park at Parsons Mead (see section 13 for full details).

Picture 5: Arthur Baker playing fields



Picture 6: Children's playground at Arthur Baker playing fields



Policy C1: New community centre at Parsons Mead, and improved sports facilities

Development proposals for a new Community Centre developed on Parsons Mead will be supported in principle, with integrated business units, health and well-being centre, and new parking - for use by users, shoppers to Charing High Street, and tourists. Further details regarding this project are set out at section 13 in the Plan.

Development proposals which provide additional sports, recreation, social, and educational facilities which meet the wider community needs will be supported in principle.

7.3 Infrastructure and utilities

Charing village is situated on a spring line, and is also divided by the A20. It has an important conservation area, and lies in the setting of the Kent Downs AONB. The latest successful large-scale development,

Poppyfields, has preserved the recommendations of the Parish Design Statement (now enshrined into policies in this Plan) with character housing, large open spaces, and ample provision for parking, coupled with the provision of high-speed broadband and fibre.

With Poppyfields and the proposed site S55 both being on an Environment Agency Source Protection Zone, an area where drinking water is collected for Charing village and the wider area, the sewage, storm drains, and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) infrastructure need to be very effective.

The drainage lessons learnt by Poppyfields are important for any new large development in Charing. The process of adoption of the Poppyfields storm and foul drains took longer than expected and occurred only after extensive consultation and negotiation between the developer, expert parties, and the residents. It required various alterations to the drains and, in addition, some extensive works to comply with SuDS standards and guidelines. The Poppyfields' Residents Group produced an information document (project 150, which has now been updated and replaced by project 160), explaining the potential pitfalls of adoption, and suggesting ways that drainage issues can be avoided during any future build process.

Any new Charing development must obtain drainage adoption by a sewerage undertaker. The consequences of non-adoption are that the responsibility of maintenance would ultimately fall on the residents of any new development, and any problems and costs would fall on its residents' management company.

More development in the village and surrounding villages has markedly increased traffic volumes, including HGVs, especially on Station Road and Pluckley Road. Road surfaces have deteriorated and pavement walking has become increasingly hazardous in places.

With a predicted growth in housing exceeding 50% during the Plan period it is vital that infrastructure, services, and facilities are adequate to meet growing demands, and that financial contributions are made to key planned projects. Policy C2 addresses this.

Policy C2: Infrastructure, services, and facilities

Proposals for new development in the Plan area will be required to make adequate provision for new infrastructure, services, and facilities that may be necessary to address the environmental, transportation and social impacts directly arising from such new development.

Such provision may include off-site improvements and enhancements that will be secured, where appropriate, by financial contributions linked to the grant of planning permissions.

Contributions may be sought by the Borough Council, Kent County Council and service providers, for capacity improvements and enhancements to infrastructure, services and facilities, which include education, health care, community facilities such as recreational and sports facilities, public open spaces, footpaths and cycleways, allotments and burial spaces, utilities including sewerage, surface water drainage and water supply, and any necessary highway improvements.

The Parish Council may seek contributions towards the provision of a new community centre, including a range of community services and facilities and associated car parking, at Parsons Mead, Charing, and also towards the provision of a new all-weather footpath and cycleway between Charing and Charing Heath.

Proposals for new residential development and other development including overnight accommodation within the Plan area will only be supported if they demonstrate nutrient neutrality regarding the Stodmarsh SAC/SPA/Ramsar designated site, both in relation to nitrogen and phosphorous. All such proposals must take account of the guidance on this issue published by Natural England and the Borough Council.

This policy C2 adds definition to the Local Plan strategic policy IMP1 - Infrastructure Provision and major protection to the Stodmarsh Lakes.

Additionally, an exploratory note is taken from the Habitats Regulations Assessment, to help developers' thoughts and actions and shown in Table 2 below:

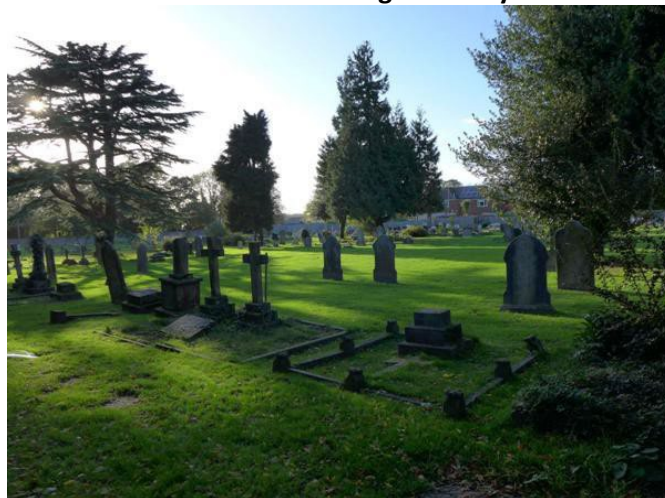
Table 2: Potential mitigation measures developers can take to protect Stodmarsh Lakes

- i. Secure agreement with the wastewater treatment provider that they will maintain an increase in nitrogen/phosphorus removal at the WwTW though this will be unlikely to be successful until after the WINEP study is completed and the measures required to achieve favourable conservation status with regards to treatment works have been agreed.
- ii. Secure agreement with the wastewater treatment provider or others to provide and maintain an increase in nitrogen/phosphorus offsetting from catchment management measures (this may include mini-farm interceptor wetlands). This must take account of the restoration duties and must not hinder the ability to achieve the conservation objectives.
- iii. Provide measures that will remove nitrogen/phosphorus draining from the development site or discharged by the WwTW (such as wetland or reedbed).
- iv. Increase the size of the SANGs and Open Space provision for the development on agricultural land that removes more nitrogen/phosphorus loss from this source.
- v. Establish changes to agricultural land in the wider landholding in perpetuity that removes more nitrogen/phosphorus loss from this source.
- vi. Acquire, or support others in acquiring, agricultural land elsewhere within the river catchment area containing the development site (or the waste water treatment discharge if different), changing the land use in perpetuity (e. g. to woodland, heathland, saltmarsh, wetland, or conservation grassland) to remove more nitrogen/phosphorus loss from this source, and/or, if conditions are suitable, provide measures that will remove nitrogen/phosphorus on drainage pathways from land higher up the catchment (e. g. interception wetland).

7.1 New burial ground

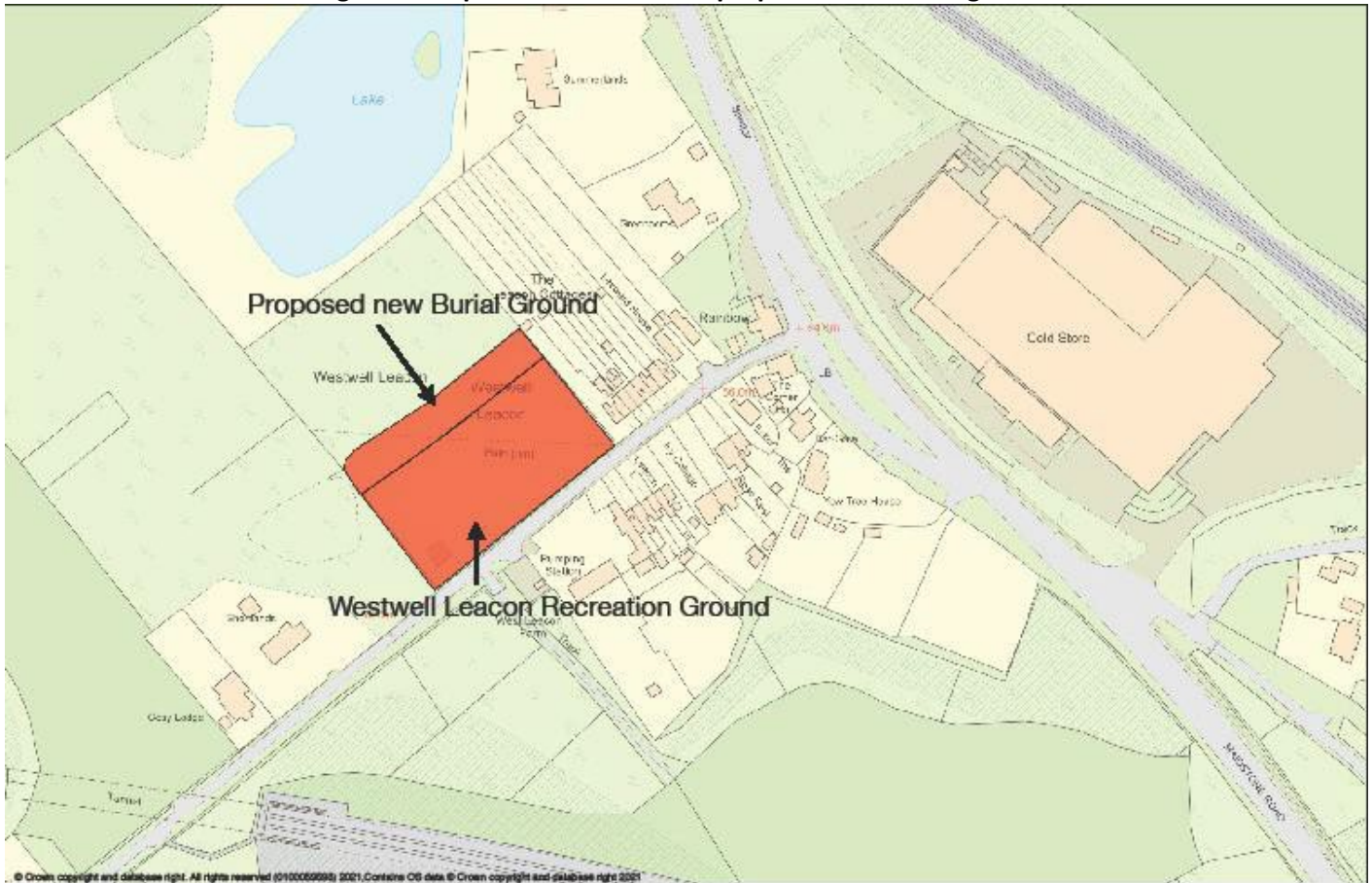
The burial ground or cemetery (Picture 7) has a theoretical capacity of 706 spaces as depicted on very old maps, but much of this has now been used. With both a growing and an ageing population, the average number of burials is likely to increase from 8 per year on average, as assessed over the period 2010 to 2017, to, possibly, around 11-12 per year. A section of the previously unused land has recently been designated for the burial of ashes. With those factors, and a trend towards larger "American" caskets, which take up 1.5 times the space of a traditional casket, it is estimated that only around 110 spaces still remain. Thus the cemetery is likely to be full towards the end of the Plan period (see project 133).

Picture 7: Charing cemetery



In addition, there is some demand for a natural burial ground. It is thought that land already owned by the Parish Council at Westwell Leacon could provide, subject to further investigation, a suitable site (see Figure 4). Such a burial ground could prolong the life of the current cemetery as some families would prefer a natural burial.

Figure 4: Map to show location of proposed new burial ground



Policy C3: New burial ground

Proposals for a natural burial ground, on land identified on the map in Figure 4 at Westwell Leacon, will be supported in principle, subject to satisfactory site investigations. Where justified, contributions towards the cost of providing a new burial ground will be sought from new development proposals.

The Local Plan, through strategic policy COM4, supports cemetery expansion or creation.

7.2 Communications infrastructure

The communications infrastructure has improved significantly over the last few years, and now most of the parish has access to high-speed broadband (see project 152). The provision of good telecommunications is particularly important in rural areas, and for the support of rural enterprise and homeworking. While Policy EMP6 in the Local Plan is duly noted, there are a considerable number

of people who work from home in the parish. Currently fibre-optic connections are the most robust and future-proof method of delivering high-performance connectivity, and this should be the aim for all new developments, to suit home-working or be attractive to new businesses setting up in the parish. Developers introducing fibre connections should, wherever possible, give the resident a choice of service provider.

Policy C4: Communications infrastructure

- a. Proposals that seek the expansion of electronic/digital communication networks and high-speed broadband, along with improvements to connectivity, will be supported.
- b. All residential developments, however small, should endeavour to enable fibre to the premises.

7.3 Survival of the High Street/shopping

Most parishioners value the High Street businesses. However, during a SWOT analysis at a workshop (see project 137), concerns were expressed about their long-term survival, and issues raised threatening the High Street included: lack of parking; no pub/community hub; poor broadband; lack of customers; conversion of shops to residential; potential introduction of a chain store; and ease of shopping in nearby towns.

Retail facilities in Charing village have been steadily in decline in recent years, due mainly to loss of footfall, brought about by changing shopping habits, with Internet shopping now a regular occurrence. It is rare not to see delivery vans from the major supermarkets on a daily basis. Despite this, there is a reasonable range of stores, including: a butcher; two general stores; a post office which acts as a bank for the village/parish; and a jewellery/clothing/gift shop. In addition, there is a micro-pub, an estate agency, a barber's shop, an osteopath's practice, and two hairdressers. Not far away are a farm shop and ironmongers.

A questionnaire was sent to all businesses in and around the High Street in December 2016 (see project 121), and three major issues reported were:

- Shortage of customers
- Inadequate parking
- Lack of broader range of businesses

Some traders have publicly stated that if people can't park close by, they are likely to drive to Lenham or Ashford to do their shopping. The car parking survey did reveal less than 100% occupancy at the time of the study, but random observations at other times confirm the car parks are full, and not just at major events such as weddings and funerals. The car parking surveys did also reveal significant illegal parking in and around the High Street. Picture 8 and Picture 9 are typical of any day in the village showing cars parked (legally) bumper to bumper, in front of shops.

Picture 8: Parking in the High Street



Picture 9: Parking in the High Street



This Plan recommends actions to safeguard shops, while the project to build a new community centre incorporating a visitor centre should help to boost tourism increasing footfall in retail units in and around the High Street (see sections 13 & 14 and project 130). The map at Figure 26 (page 91) shows the location of shops, other amenities, and car parking in and around Charing High Street (along with their relationship to the proposed new community centre).

Local Plan policy EMP10 is very much welcomed; the Plan policy C5 provides additional local clarity.

Policy C5: Shopping

- Proposals for additional retail services in and around the High Street will be supported.
- Proposals to increase footfall within retail units through appropriate forms of tourism development will be supported.

7.4 Health and health care

Charing has the benefit of a large GP practice (Picture 10), serving not just Charing but surrounding villages and the outskirts of Ashford. It has close to 11,000 registered patients (December 2021), and the equivalent of 7.5 full-time doctors (see also projects 123 and 124). This provides a doctor:patient ratio of 1:1,467. While this is a better ratio than many GP surgeries, the population served is older than average (see section 3.3) and the recent completion of a block of accommodation for older people in Charing will accentuate this.

The practice also employs 4 advanced Clinical Practitioners, a Paramedic Practitioner, First Contact Physiotherapists, and Clinical Pharmacists. The surgery has its own pharmacy. It offers a broad range of services including minor surgery, ultrasounds and echocardiograms, and several specialist clinics. It is focused on overall well-being, supporting also gardening and walking groups, and offering various classes from its own staff or outside specialists, such as mindfulness and relaxation, and respiratory rehabilitation.

Expected population growth from new developments, not just in Charing, and an ageing

population, is likely to place additional demands on the practice although the surgery does have plans to address this.

This Plan recognises that there will be significant challenges for the Charing surgery and pharmacy to meet ongoing population growth in its catchment area. As a result, and with the support of the current GP Practice, a small health and well-being centre is planned in the proposed new community centre (see section 13) which could ease some pressures on the existing GP Practice by providing space for non-clinical services.

Picture 10: Charing surgery and pharmacy



Policy C6: Health and health care

Development proposals that expand the Charing Surgery and Practice to meet patient needs will be supported, subject to the proposals making satisfactory provision for vehicular and pedestrian access, car parking for patients and staff, and having no adverse impacts upon local amenities. Where justified, qualifying developments within the Plan area should provide S106 contributions towards this purpose in accordance with Policy C2 in this Plan.

7.5 Education

Charing Primary School (see Picture 11) was converted to an academy (part of Aquila) in March 2017. The school has 115 pupils (November 2021) in the age range 4 to 11 (see also project 122).

The school can accommodate 140 children. The governors have commissioned a feasibility study to develop a plan for the school. The local authority has identified Charing as a school with potential for expansion to at least 1 form entry resulting in a capacity for 210 children. This could be achieved with only limited expansion of buildings, and is fully supported by the governors and the school leadership team. However, there would need to be considerable infrastructure development to make this happen, including the retention of the 'old school site', additional special needs space, intervention areas, expanded office space, and a library. Local Plan strategic policy

COM1 makes clear the need to ensure education provision, and this Plan adds to that policy.

It is also important to note the importance of early-years learning facilities and Special Educational Needs schools, as well as secondary schools which serve children in the parish but lie outside the parish boundary.

Picture 11: Charing primary school



Policy C7: Education

Where justified, development proposals will be required to provide for necessary education infrastructure and facilities in accordance with Kent County Council plans and Policy C2 in this Plan.

7.6 Recreation – skate park

The small existing skate park, although well used, is considered to be of poor quality by users. With the expected growth in population, especially of younger residents, a new skate park would be of significant benefit, and S106 funds have been promised for this. There is a shortage of facilities for older children, which needs to be remedied in the near future.

Picture 12: Skate park at Arthur Baker playing fields



Policy C8: New skate park and other recreational facilities for older children

Proposals to build a new skate park on the Arthur Baker playing fields will be supported. Other proposals at appropriate sites for new recreational facilities that are suitable for older children, will also be supported.

7.7 Community well-being

Local Plan housing requirements, together with strong windfall development, are predicted to increase the number of dwellings by around 50% during the Plan period (around 40% between 2020 and 2030), and to increase the population broadly

proportionately. In order to avoid a welfare deficit for residents, developers will need to make a considerable contribution to new community facilities, and policy C2 has been developed to ensure that happens, and should be considered alongside Local Plan policies COM1 and IMP2.

8 Traffic and Transport Policies

Introduction

Since prehistoric times, major transport routes have passed in or near Charing, and this is still the case today. The M20 and the High Speed (Channel Tunnel link and HS1) railway pass through the south of the parish. Charing village lies at the junction of the A20, running parallel to the M20 with Maidstone to the north-west and Ashford in the south-east, and the A252, running towards Canterbury. A busy road (Station Road leading to Pluckley Road) runs towards Pluckley and the Weald. Charing village has a railway station on the Ashford to London Victoria line, and is on the Maidstone to Ashford bus route.

Its position on major transport links has been and is a strong influence on the development and character of the village and is a key reason why it is a magnet for new housing development. While this brings advantages to Charing by providing connectivity and making Charing the site of facilities such as the major GP surgery, a library, and a range of shops in the High Street, the roads also bring the disadvantages of traffic and congestion as well as danger to pedestrians.

Traffic issues are of growing importance to residents, as evidenced through a SWOT analysis developed at the workshops (see project 137). The main concerns were:

- Shortage of parking in Charing village (and illegal parking).
- Inappropriate road widths for HGVs, especially Pluckley/Station Road and the High Street.
- A20/Station Road crossing is dangerous.
- Speed of traffic, especially on A20, A252, and Station/Pluckley Road.
- Increased housing and population are likely to make the above concerns worse.

Indeed, issues concerning parking, growth in vehicle movements, and vehicle and pedestrian safety, have been raised at every event held during the Plan process.

Currently, Charing is reasonably well-served by public transport. However, the bus service, operated by Stagecoach, is only once an hour for most of the day, with an early end in the evening. One weekday bus service stops at Charing Heath and doubles up as a school bus.

The train service is also only one per hour for part of the day. There is no step-free access to the Up platform. (See projects 125 and 126.)

The volume of passenger rail travel in Charing was increasing prior to the pandemic. Figures from the Office of Rail and Road show an increase of passenger numbers from 66,616 in the period 2014/15, to 89,554 in the period 2019/20.

Wealden Wheels, a not-for-profit membership community transport company, supported financially by six Parish Councils and with ad-hoc capital grants from ABC and KCC, makes a significant positive impact on the rural community. It currently operates 4 vehicles and engages in events such as trips for societies, youth clubs, scouts, care homes, shopping trips, and hospital visits.

8.1 Traffic congestion and speed

Vehicle traffic by residents has increased with population growth. The 2011 census showed over 1,980 cars in the parish, an average of 1.5 per dwelling (up from an earlier figure of 1.4).

With around 650 additional dwellings built or planned between 2011 and 2030 (see project 153), this suggests 2030 could see nearly 1,000 additional cars, bringing the total number of cars owned by Charing residents to a figure not far short of 3,000, a growth of around 50%. This situation, along with growth in neighbouring areas, will add to traffic congestion and parking problems, as well as increasing air pollution.

2011 census information also showed that 907 people – 71% of those in employment – travelled to work by car, generating significant vehicle movements every working day.

The A252 had a high injury accident record but has recently been the subject of major works by KCC Highways to improve this and slow speeds. 2020 also saw the introduction of a 30mph limit in Charing Heath and a 40mph limit along Charing Heath Road.

The A20 bisects the village. Traffic growth resulting from rapid population growth in Ashford, Maidstone and surrounding villages, speeding, accidents and noise are major concerns. The A20 is a relief road for the M20 and gets substantial traffic when there are incidents on the motorway or when the M20 is used as a holding area for lorries as a result of disruption to cross-channel traffic.

The crossroads of the A20 with Station Road and the High Street is a particular concern with the number of injury

accidents in recent years being sufficient to oblige Kent County Council Highways and Transportation to undertake an improvement plan in 2022 under Department for Transport rules. A survey by Kent County Council Highways and Transportation in September 2021 showed 97,000 vehicles using the crossroads in the survey week.

While flows into and out of the High Street were small, 40% of all traffic turned into or out of Station Road, the majority coming from or turning to the Maidstone direction. 5% of this traffic – 6% on weekdays – was HGVs or other large vehicles, a high proportion for what is supposedly a minor unclassified road. Between Maidstone and the A28 most roads are unsuitable for HGVs with the result that many are channelled down Station Road (see Picture 13). The narrow and bendy nature of Station Road (see Picture 14) creates a significant problem with wide vehicles having at times to mount the narrow pavements in order to pass.

Indeed, traffic along Pluckley and Station Roads has grown substantially during the last decade. Surveys taken in 2012, 2017, and 2021 show growth of 12% from 2017 and 29% from 2012. (See references 1, 2, 3, and 4, and projects 117 and 162.)

Picture 13 Shows that HGVs are directed south from the A20 into Station Road



Picture 14: Entrance into Station Road from A20



Traffic speeds are also a concern on a number of minor roads. A 2021 survey showed over 80% of vehicles exceeding the 30mph limit on Pluckley Road with 85th percentile speeds of over 40mph. The Hill in Charing, along with Egerton Road and Church Hill in Charing Heath, are also roads where speeds are notably higher than the limit, with a significant number of vehicles exceeding the speed at which the police would in theory take enforcement action. Finally there are concerns over speed along Faversham Road, a natural, but narrow and in places bendy, cut through from the A252 to the A251, a large part of it being subject only to the national speed limit. (see Project 162).

Informal surveys in 2020 also highlighted an issue of traffic using the village centre as a rat run, for example traffic coming from the Canterbury direction driving down the High Street and Old Ashford Road rather than staying on the A252 and then turning onto the A20 at the roundabout.

Crashmap data shows that, in the parish as a whole, there were 3 fatal and around 25 serious injury vehicle accidents, as well as numerous minor injury accidents, reported to the police between 2011 and 2020 (see project 154). Most serious injury accidents occur along the A20 and the A252. In addition, there are frequent reports from residents of non-injury accidents.

Few requirements to contribute to improvements in road safety have been planned for the current large developments. So future large developments should contain plans for appropriate contributions towards safer infrastructure.

While there are issues with the A20, and traffic is growing as a result of developments elsewhere as well as in Charing, it remains the most logical choice

for the placement of larger new developments from the point of view of traffic management and avoiding congestion. Additional access points will add to the need to control speeding. (It is noted that Maidstone Borough Council required new

developments in the village of Harrietsham, which lies on the A20 to the north, to contribute to a number of road safety improvements including a reduction in the speed limit to 30mph.

Policy T1: Traffic congestion and speed

- a. Development proposals that accord with the policies in the Plan, and result in improvements to the free flow of traffic, will be supported.
- b. Major developments will be supported in principle, subject to an acceptable impact upon the road network, which should include appropriate highway mitigation measures where necessary, and must not adversely affect pedestrian safety.
- c. Where justified, developments may be required to contribute to related road safety improvements.

8.2 Pedestrian safety

The A20 cuts the village in two. The village centre, shops, library, primary school, cemetery, church, and sports ground are on the north side; the current parish hall, as well as the proposed community centre (see section 13), GP surgery, railway station, and Methodist Church, as well as most of the newer and proposed housing developments, are on the south side. Consequently, pedestrians frequently need to cross the A20. While the pedestrian lights just east of the A20/Station Road crossroads provide a safe crossing route, they are less convenient for residents of Poppyfields and Charing Green, as well as the proposed developments to the west. Further, many pedestrians using the traffic lights may find they also need to cross Station Road, which has its own traffic issues, and where sight lines are limited due to its bends. Additional housing will add to these issues.

Pavements in Charing centre are narrow, so that for two pedestrians to pass, one often has to step into the road. Wheelchair users often struggle.

The pavements on Station Road are dangerously narrow, forcing pedestrians into the road to pass one another. As already explained, traffic, including HGVs, has increased substantially along this road, and there is a pinch point where two wide vehicles cannot pass without one mounting the already-

narrow pavement. The railway bridge, at the point where Station Road becomes Pluckley Road, is a further danger spot where the narrowness of the pavements obliges pedestrians to step into the road to pass. Beyond the railway bridge, a continuous pavement only exists on the west side.

Picture 15: Lights-controlled pedestrian crossing east of A20 crossroads



With the current population, the number of pedestrians walking along Pluckley and Station Roads is limited. An application for up to 245 houses on the west side of Pluckley Road was refused by Ashford Borough Council in 2017 with one of the reasons cited being the absence of a safe pedestrian route to the village centre and the possibility of an increase in pavement overrunning by the additional traffic.

Policy T2: Pedestrian safety

- a. Development proposals shall demonstrate how safe and accessible pedestrian access and movement routes will be delivered, and how they will connect to the wider movement network. This includes ensuring that residents can walk safely with children, prams, and buggies, to shops, school, bus stops, railway station, surgery, and other village facilities, and that wheelchair users can also travel safely except where the width of existing pavements in the village centre already precludes this.
- b. Proposed developments that will increase pedestrian movements across the A20 should deliver pedestrian-crossing improvements where necessary.
- c. Proposals to make the centre of Charing more attractive to pedestrians, without inhibiting visitors to the village or reducing parking, will be supported.
- d. Major developments of more than 10 houses, with direct access onto Pluckley Road and Charing Heath Road, will only be supported if it can be demonstrated that a safe pedestrian route of acceptable length to the village centre exists or can be created.

8.3 Residential car parking

Ashford's Local Plan sets out car parking spaces for residential development in suburban and rural areas of one space for a one-bed dwelling, two spaces for a two- or three-bed dwelling, and three spaces for a four-bed or larger dwelling. Visitor parking of 0.2 spaces per dwelling is to be provided. The Parking Standards guide also requires an additional allowance of 0.5 spaces where there is tandem parking. This is therefore the default requirement for Charing. There is nevertheless an additional need to avoid adding to parking stress in the village centre. In addition, where developments

provide direct access to the A20 or to the A252, it is clearly desirable that there is no risk of excess parking taking place on those A category roads. In these cases, additional visitor parking is appropriate. This is particularly important for smaller developments where there is less opportunity for excessive visitor parking connected to one dwelling to be compensated by less parking at others.

Electric charging points should be provided for at least 50% of new parking spaces and a minimum of one per dwelling, plus provision for visitors wherever two or more dwellings are involved.

Policy T3: Residential car parking spaces

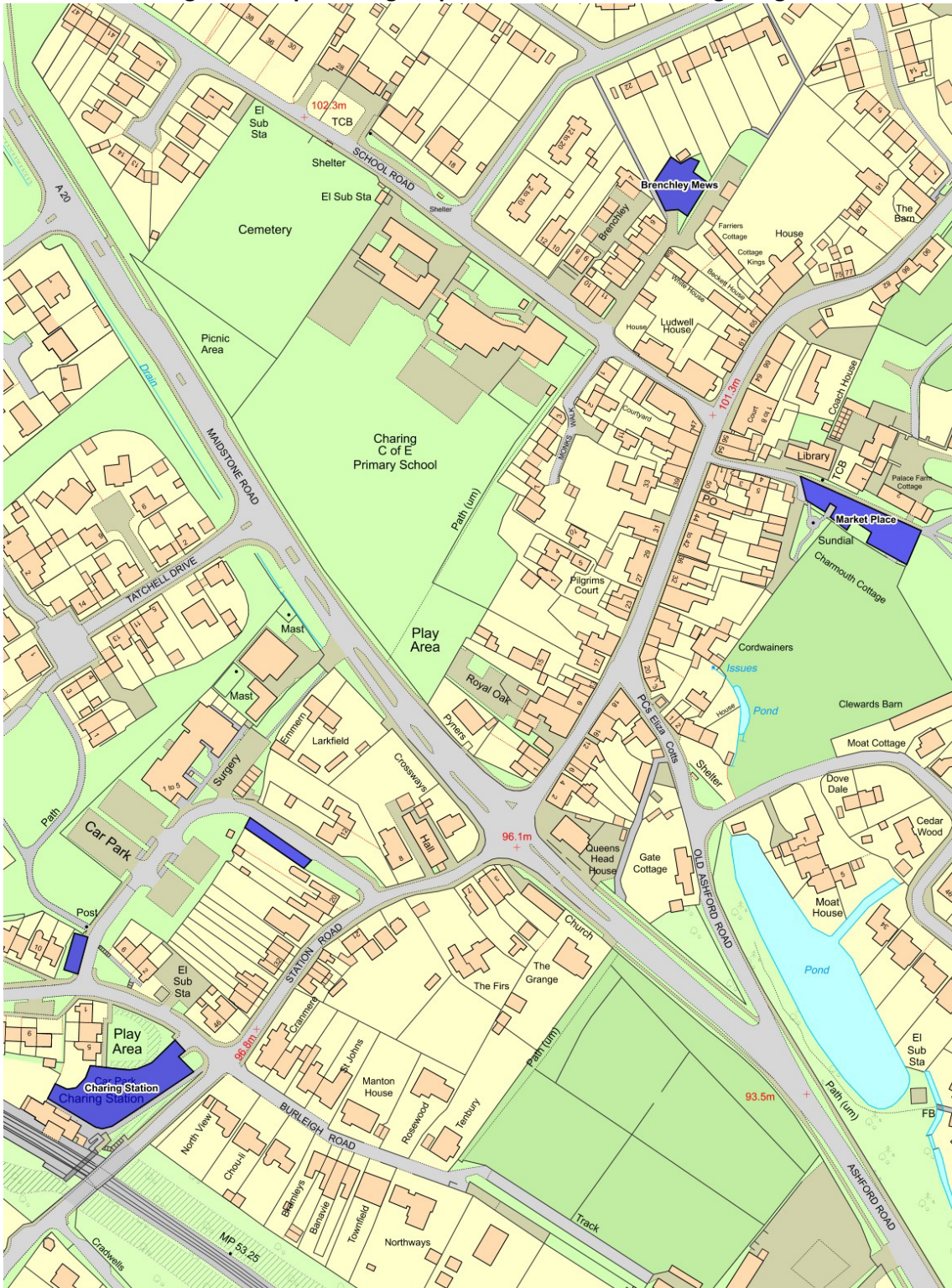
- a. Visitor parking for developments on the High Street and roads which only exit onto it, developments on School Road and roads which only exit onto it, developments on Station Road, and developments exiting onto either the A20 or A252, shall provide 0.3 visitor spaces per dwelling, rounded up to the next highest whole number, plus two additional visitor spaces per development, in order to accommodate visiting cars in locations where parking is already at capacity.
- b. All other large developments shall provide 0.2 visitor spaces per dwelling, rounded up to the next highest whole number.
- c. Adequate provision shall be made for electric vehicle charging points in all new developments.

8.4 Charing village parking

Parking is a major issue in Charing village. There are five formal car parks: Surgery Close (also known as Station Road car park); Hitherfield; Market Place; and Brenchley Mews, which are free to use, and the train station car park which can be used for a fee. The overall capacity of these car parks is 96. The GP surgery has its own car park.

In addition to the formal car parks, there is 'legal' street parking in the High Street, School Road, Downs Way, Hitherfield, and Old Ashford Road. Some of this parking is used by residents who lack sufficient, or any, parking on their properties. The full capacity of this street parking is estimated at 119 car spaces giving a total capacity of 215.

Figure 5: Map showing car parks in and around Charing Village



Note: Hitherfield car park is closest to the Charing Station car park, and Station Road car park is directly off Station Road.

In order to obtain an objective position, a number of detailed car parking surveys were undertaken (see project 116). To gain an understanding of where cars that park in Charing come from, a number of points of origin studies (project 140) were undertaken. This latter covered the main car parks, including the surgery, the High Street, and School Road.

Key findings from these surveys are:

- Overall weekday occupancy was 50% for off-street and 66% for on-street parking, but there were substantial differences between different areas.
- Weekday occupancy in the High Street and Market Place was 86% and 77% respectively, with Market Place rising to 85% on Saturday.
- Random checks showed that legal street parking in the village centre reaches 100% capacity on occasion leading to illegal or dangerous parking. Market Place, Surgery Close, and Hitherfield are also full at times, while queuing can occur for the GP surgery car park.

- Of 1,696 vehicles counted during the parking surveys, 38 were parked illegally or obstructively. Such parking can cause traffic problems, particularly at the junction of High Street and School Road, where the 10X bus can struggle to get through.
- Brenchley Mews car park and the Station car park were under-occupied. Inadequate signage may account for the former. The Station car park is the only paid parking and there is a clear problem of commuters using Hitherfield or the Surgery Close car park instead of the station.
- School Road is “overparked” at school pick-up times.
- Parking in Old Ashford Road by the junction with The Moat does obscure visibility for vehicles leaving The Moat, and can cause hazardous driving conditions.
- People regularly visit Charing for many reasons. The origin study found only around a fifth of parking was by Charing village residents. Others came from:
 - Ashford: 12%;
 - villages within 5 kilometres: 33%;
 - villages between 5 and 10 kilometres: 25%;
 - locations 10-15 kilometres away: 3%; and
 - locations over 15 km from Charing: 7%.

Table 3: Parking survey - numbers & occupancy, by weekday/Saturday and off/on street

area/zone	off-street	Capacity	Weekday		Saturday	
			av. n ^o . cars	av. occ.	av. n ^o cars	av. occ.
A4	Surgery Close	14	12	82%	5	32%
A3	Hitherfield parking	7	5	68%	5	64%
A1	Station car park	35	7	21%	2	6%
B1	Market Place	26	20	77%	22	85%
C1	Brenchley Mews	14	4	30%	1	9%
	total off-street:	96	48	50%	35	36%
	on-street					
A2	Hitherfield	12	7	60%	6	50%
B2a-e	High St (A20 to Kings Head)	32	27	86%	26	82%
B2f-g, 3a-b, 4a	High St north and Old Ashford Road	39	19	49%	18	46%
C2-4	School Road & Downs Way	36	25	68%	21	59%
	total on-street:	119	78	66%	71	60%
	grand totals:	215	126	59%	106	49%

Policy T4: Charing village parking

- a. Development proposals for additional public car parking in Charing village centre, or close to, will be supported.
- b. Contributions may be sought from new developments within the Plan area, in accordance with Policy C2 in the Plan, towards the provision of additional public car parking, including at the proposed new Community Centre at Parsons Mead, Charing, where justified.

8.5 Cycle routes, footpaths, and bridleways

With poor connectivity with public transport and a narrow bendy road link, without pavements, between Charing and Charing Heath, this Plan recommends action to improve safe connectivity.

Ashford Local Plan, Policy TRA6, states that the Borough Council will seek to improve conditions for **cyclists** through the following measures:

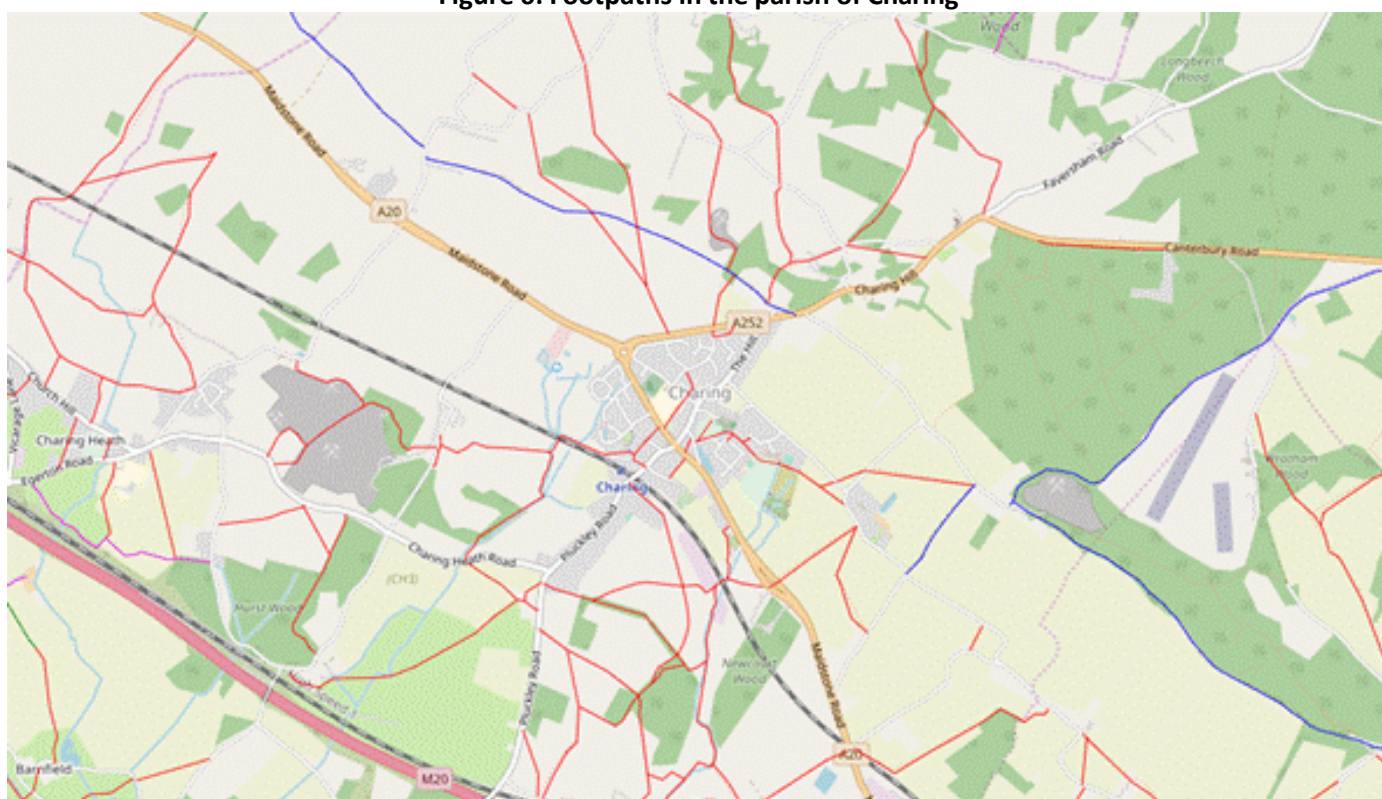
- Promoting and developing a Borough-wide network of cycle routes.
- Developments should, where opportunities arise, include safe, convenient, and attractively designed cycle routes, including, where possible, connection to the Borough-wide cycle network.

Despite being a rural area, **bridleways** are limited in the parish. Some are short stretches that do not connect with other bridleways.

Charing has a substantial network of **footpaths**, but some become too muddy to use in the winter. In particular, there is no all-weather walking route between Charing and Charing Heath: see separate section on the proposed Charing/Charing Heath Greenway (see section 14.1).

There is a comprehensive network of 82 public footpaths and other rights of way with an estimated combined length of 52.6 kilometres within the Plan area, including the *North Downs Way* National Trail, the *Pilgrims' Way*, and *National Cycle Network Route 17* (see project 146):

Figure 6: Footpaths in the parish of Charing



Policy T5: Rights of way, bridleways, and cycleways

- a. Development proposals will be expected to take opportunities to connect with and enhance public rights of way, bridleways, and cycleways whenever possible, encouraging journeys on foot, cycle, or horseback.
- b. New developments should seek to connect with footpaths and cycleways and should contribute to their improvement and extension where appropriate.

9 Employment Creation and Business Development

9.1 Employment data

The AECOM Housing Needs Assessment, September 2017 reported that Charing has the third largest rural business proportion in the borough, after Tenterden and Wye. The parish accounted for 8% of all employment in the borough. See project 103.

There were 1,323 economically active residents according to the 2011 census. This included:

- 625 full-time employees,
- 252 part-time employees, and
- 357 self-employed.

According to the 2011 census, 130 people worked from home, and the long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will probably increase this number. There were 704 economically inactive residents; those included the retired, students, and home-makers.

Since 2013, employment in the Plan area has been in decline (see Table 4), and no initiatives have been taken to boost the economy with new business premises. However, job creation and business development is a core strategy of this plan.

Table 4: Number of businesses in Charing parish at start of 2018

location	n° of		businesses closed in last 5 years	jobs lost due to company closure/downsizing
	businesses	employees		
village centre	19	67	6	38
Charing settlement	21	160	1	14
rural Charing	29	279	3	10
Charing Heath	4	53	0	3
TOTALS:	73	559	10	65

The parish of Charing had, at the start of 2018, 73 businesses confirmed in a survey (project 112). It is recognised that there may well be other businesses operated via personal service company employees, but it was not possible to identify them. Taking Charing village as a whole, some 40 businesses are to be found, 55% of total businesses in the parish.

The parish business economy is primarily made up of small businesses. 85% employ 10 or fewer employees (see Table 5, source project 112).

Table 5: Number of businesses by size in Charing parish

size of business by n° of employees	village centre	Charing settlement	Charing rural	Charing Heath	Totals
1	6	9	8	1	24
2-5	10	4	11	2	27
6-10	2	3	6	0	11
1-25	1	3	3	0	7
26-50	0	2	0	1	3
51-100	0	0	0	0	0
101-150	0	0	1	0	1
Totals:	19	21	29	4	73

source: project 112

More of a concern was that only five new businesses were set up in the parish in the five years, and they had created just 26 new jobs. This is disappointing, as the economy and job creation in the UK grew during this period; this plan will allocate sites for new business development.

The community-wide questionnaire strongly supported growth of businesses, and the top five types were:

1. Small, independent retail businesses
2. Hospitality (pubs/restaurants/hotel)
3. Farming and agricultural support services
4. Traditional crafts such as thatching and blacksmiths
5. Shared office space for people currently working from home

One interesting finding from the community questionnaire was that 72 people expressed an interest in managed office facilities of one sort or another.

9.2 Locations for new business

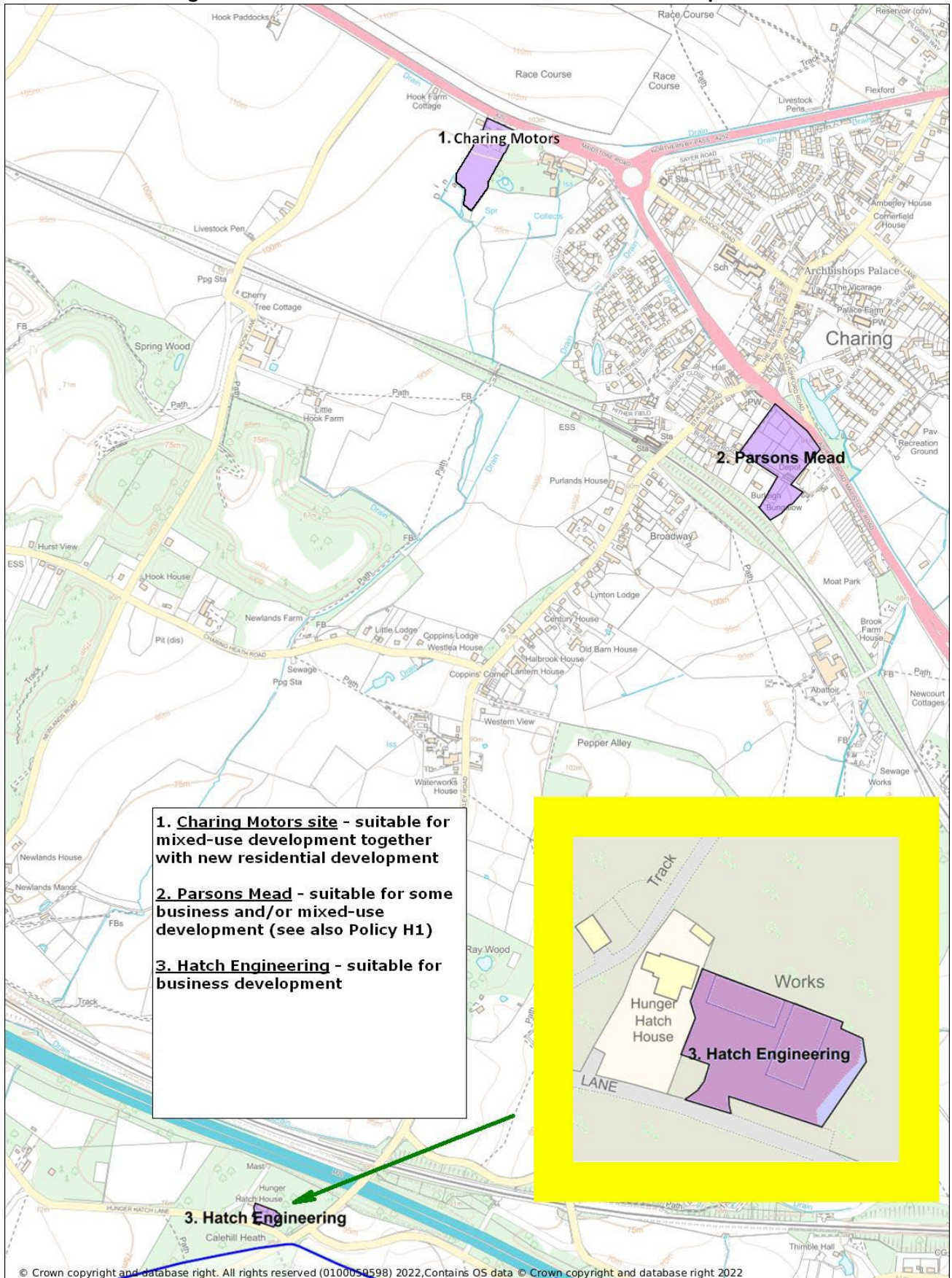
New business locations should be within easy walking distance of the train station and bus stops, and should have ample capacity for car parking. The plan allocates three sites for business development as shown in Figure 7 and detailed in policy EC1.

At **Parsons Mead** there will be six business units and a shared space area, with an opportunity of creating 20-25 new jobs to offset severe job losses in the village over the last five years. **Charing Motors (formerly Northdowns Garage)** was a

business location and planning has been approved for some business units.
Hatch Engineering is a manufacturing company to

the south of the village. The owners are willing to allow industrial development on the adjacent land.
 No other suitable sites were found.

Figure 7: Sites suitable for new business or mixed-use developments



The expected type of business activity at these three sites is shown in Table 6:

Table 6: Expected business activity at allocated sites

class	activity	Parsons Mead	Charing Motors	Hatch Engineering
Ea	Display or retail		Yes	
Eb	Sale of food, consumption on premises	Yes		
E(c) (i)	Financial services	Yes		
E(c) (ii)	Professional services			
E(c) (iii)	Other commercial services			
E(d)	Indoor recreation	Yes		
E(e)	Health services			
E(g)(i)	Administrative functions	Yes	Yes	
E(g)(iii)	Industrial process			Yes
F1(a)	Education	Yes		
F2(b)	Community hall			

Policy EC1: Business and mixed-use developments

The following sites (as shown in Figure 7) are proposed for new business or mixed-use developments:

- a. Parsons Mead, Charing (as part of the Parsons Mead community centre scheme – see also Policy H1 and Section 13)
- b. Charing Motors site (as part of the Ashford Local Plan Policy S28 allocation for new residential development)
- c. Hatch Engineering site.

Table 6 sets out the class E uses that would be considered suitable at each of the above sites.

Development proposals for each of these sites will need to demonstrate the suitability of building design and layout for the proposed use(s), taking account of all other relevant policies in the Plan, the provision of satisfactory vehicular access and servicing arrangements, the provision of suitable access for pedestrians and cyclists, and adequate on-site car parking for staff and visitors. All proposals must ensure that there are no adverse impacts upon residential amenities and the natural environment in the vicinity of the site.

9.3 Innovative commercial development & retention of existing business zones

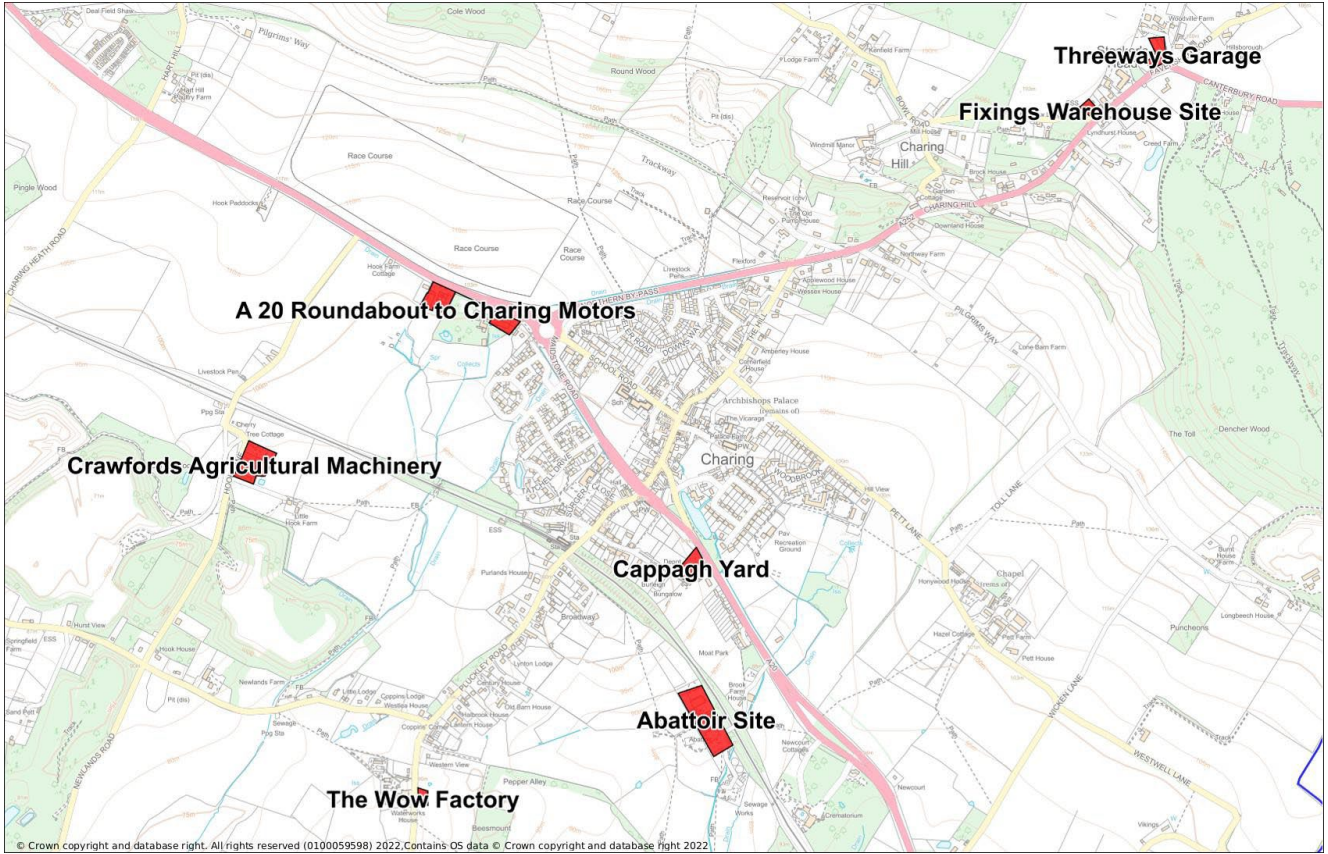
Innovation may be required to create employment opportunities which could include mixed development. In order to protect existing employment, and create more job opportunities for residents and newcomers, it is vital that the current business zones are not converted to residential areas. The plan seeks to introduce initiatives to stem job losses, and increase employment.

Policy EC2 aims to preserve the current commercial areas. Land next to the farm shop owned by Cappagh is currently let out for a three-year period to a utility support business. The **land fronting the A20 from the roundabout to the Charing Motors** repair workshop comprises mixed business use including the vehicle repair shop, an accountancy firm, and a

restaurant. Occasionally pop-up shops trade there. These businesses provide significant employment.

Threeways Garage also provides employment, and the **Fixings Warehouse** is an important facility used by local people and those from farther afield. The **Abattoir** owned by Kent Halal Meat Limited is not currently operational. **RW Crawford** is an important agricultural machinery supplier in the south-east of England. The **WOW Factory** site on Pluckley Road was developed to secure the return of a company that moved away from Charing due to a shortage of business space. These are all successful businesses.

Figure 8: Map showing locations of existing businesses



Policy EC2: Loss or redevelopment of existing employment sites and premises

The following sites should be maintained for such use:

- a. Land owned by Cappagh (adjacent to the A20 in Charing village).
- b. The land fronting the A20 from the roundabout to the Charing Motors repair workshop.
- c. Threeways Garage site (at the top of Charing Hill).
- d. The Fixings Warehouse site (at the top of Charing Hill).
- e. The Abattoir site.
- f. RW Crawford Agricultural Machinery.
- g. The WOW Factory.

Proposals for the loss or redevelopment of the above employment sites will not be supported, unless any of the following criteria apply:

- a) the site is no longer appropriate for continued employment use in terms of its serious adverse impact upon neighbouring occupiers or the environment;
- b) the site or premises is vacated by the relocation of the existing business to another appropriate site within or close to the Plan area and which ensures the retention of local employment opportunities;
- c) it has been demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Parish Council and the Borough Council that the site or premises has remained unlet or unsold for continued employment use, despite genuine and sustained marketing of the site or premises on reasonable terms over a period of not less than three years.

9.4 New community centre with integrated business units

A significant part of the NP is the construction, at Parsons Mead, of a new community centre (see section 13), which will include a modern complementary health centre and café/tearoom (there is not currently one in Charing), as well as flexible office space and a car park. Demand for such office space has been confirmed with Locate in Kent as well as the results from the community questionnaire.

It is likely that this new community facility could create a number of permanent jobs, plus shared space to accommodate the needs of homeworkers who may need either meeting space or improved working space for periods during the week. Rental income from the business units is expected to cover the community centre running costs.

Section 13 describes this Parsons Mead community hall development.

All Internet users wish to see improvements in broadband speeds and reliability.

10 Countryside and Environment

10.1 Key characteristics found in Charing

Natural England defines key characteristics as “those combination of elements which help to give an area its distinctive sense of place” that would result in significant consequences for the current character if they were changed or lost. The key landscape characteristics of Charing, as identified by AECOM in its Heritage and Character Assessment (see reference 5), are:

- Steep, wooded, chalk ridge escarpment north of the village of Charing, which allows panoramic, long-distance views across the landscape to the south.
- Extensive network of well-defined and well-maintained public rights of way that provide good access to the countryside.
- Rural landscape comprising mixed farmland with fields defined by hedgerows and interspersed with blocks of woodland, including ancient woodland.
- Extensive areas of ancient woodland north of the scarp that create a strong sense of enclosure.
- Sense of enclosure provided by trees and woodland around and within Charing.
- Historic layout of the centre of Charing largely intact.
- Settlement outside the village thinly dispersed across rural landscape.
- Large number of surviving heritage assets, both designated and non-designated, that contribute to the distinctive character of Charing.
- Strong diversity to local vernacular, with a mixture of architectural styles, details, and construction materials and methods evident.
- Landmark of the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul within Charing and the surrounding landscape.
- Good quality and variety of local green spaces within the village.
- Historic and cultural associations with the city of Canterbury such as the Pilgrim’s Way national walking trail and the Archbishop’s Palace.
- Motorway, road, and rail traffic reduce tranquillity in the landscapes from the scarp and the land running south from the scarp.

These features, with the exception of the last, figure strongly in residents’ appreciation of living in the parish. In the community survey, respondents rated the beautiful countryside and green spaces in Charing parish as features that make Charing special. Likewise, these features, together with wonderful views and the Kent Downs AONB, were picked out at a workshop as strengths on a SWOT on

maintaining and improving village character and landscape and green spaces (see project 137).

The character and charm of Charing village itself comes largely from the combination of a village centre packed with historic buildings and climbing up the scarp slope of the Kentish Downs, views into and out of the village and the various green spaces. The parish is partly within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the rest of it is largely within its setting. Historic buildings also feature both in Charing Heath and Westwell Leacon and are scattered throughout the more rural areas of the parish.

Picture 16: Charing village centre and surrounding countryside



10.2 Heritage

Archaeology shows that there were both Iron Age and Roman settlements, while the historical record also confirms that Charing was a notable settlement in Anglo-Saxon times. However, with the exception of the Archbishop’s Palace and the church (see below), the earliest surviving buildings date from around AD 1400 with about 40 houses built in the 16th century or earlier. Many have been altered substantially over the years. To these were added a number of fine buildings in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.

The parish has over 100 listed buildings (see project 142), and 3 sites are scheduled ancient monuments. Many are found in the centre of Charing village, but others are found in Charing Heath, Westwell Leacon, and scattered throughout the rural areas of the parish.

Picture 17: Historic houses in Charing High Street



In addition to the Archbishop's Palace (see separate section below), the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in the centre of Charing village, and Pett Place, a grand house on the outskirts of the village, are both listed Grade I. Several houses are listed Grade II. These include such houses as the Old House in Station Road (see Picture 2 in section 3), Peirce House and Sherbourne House in the High Street, and houses such as Wickens in the rural area. There was probably a church on the site of the present one in the 8th century but the earliest material in the current building is probably from the late 12th or early 13th century, when the main body of the church was originally built. Some additions and alterations were made in the later Middle Ages and the 16th century. Much of the church survived an accidental fire in 1590 but the roof was destroyed and had to be rebuilt.

Picture 18: Church of St. Peter and St. Paul



10.3 Non-listed heritage assets

In addition to listed buildings, there are a wealth of heritage assets in the parish that help shape its distinctiveness, and which need to be preserved.

The following are considered by CPC and the NP Steering Committee as worthy of conservation, as they contribute to the character and heritage of the area:

- 1 Charing Railway Station, opened in 1884 and still active.
- 2 The Old Pumping Station, Pluckley Road, now converted to apartments and named Harrison Court.
- 3 Charing Methodist Church, built in the nineteenth century with a schoolroom added in 1905.
- 4 The old building at Charing Church of England Primary School, which opened in 1873 to replace an earlier school in the High Street. It is a good representation of Victorian village architecture.
- 5 Memorial Porch, at the parish hall (designated War Memorial) was built c1920 to commemorate the fallen of WW1.
- 6 Queens Head House, a 1920s building in mock-Tudor style, was originally a public house, and is now commercial offices.
- 7 Cemetery Lych Gate, School Road, built in the nineteenth century.
- 8 The moat which partially surrounds the 15th century Moat House; the moat was known to exist in the late 16th century but may be earlier.
- 9 Roman finds in the area between Pett and Wickens extending to Wooton Lane. Preliminary excavation and geophysical surveys reveal remains of a military characteristic and villa dating c.200 to 400 AD.
- 10 The area 200 metres wide centred on a line drawn from Charing Church towards Pluckley Church running along the western side of Beesmount of Roman characteristic; locates at its northern end close by Maidstone to Ashford, and includes the site of a medieval windmill.
- 11 The area from Newlands Manor House north-east to Coppins Corner shows extensive mediæval water works. A possible Roman road extends from Pepper Alley across the Pluckley Road and south of Charing Heath Road.
- 12 The area from the A20 along the East Brook, past Brook House south of the railway, to Pepper Alley, has a mediæval water mill, dam, and leat, and a kiln of uncertain age.
- 13 The church barn, an old building which was brought to Charing from High Halden and re-assembled in 1958.
- 14 Dormeston Farm complex, which is typical of mediæval settlements strung out along the top of the North Downs.
- 15 Ridge and Furrow near Wickens Manor is characteristic of mediæval arable.
- 16 Second World War pillboxes guarding the railway bridge on Pluckley Road.
- 17 Three milestones, probably 19th century, are located: on Faversham Road near Monkery Farm; on the A20 near

Hook Lane; and by Acton Farm.

18 The Old Deer Park near Newlands Manor, although recorded from 1639, may date back to the 12th century. 19 Mediæval moat at Wootton Manor; lies north of the A20 towards the eastern boundary of the parish, and may date from the 14th century. It is recorded in Dr Natasha Coveney's 2014 thesis on English moats.

20 Iron Age village on west side of Hurst Lane in Hurst Wood.

21 Burleigh Chantry Chapel complex, including chapel ruins by Burleigh Farm (other than the remains of the Chapel which is already listed).

22 The Newlands Manor complex other than the Chapel and the Manor House which are already listed.

23 Brockton Manor Moat, dating back to at least the 13th century.

24 Armada Beacon site above Beacon Hill quarry.

25 Sandpett is an important, but unlisted, mediæval house.

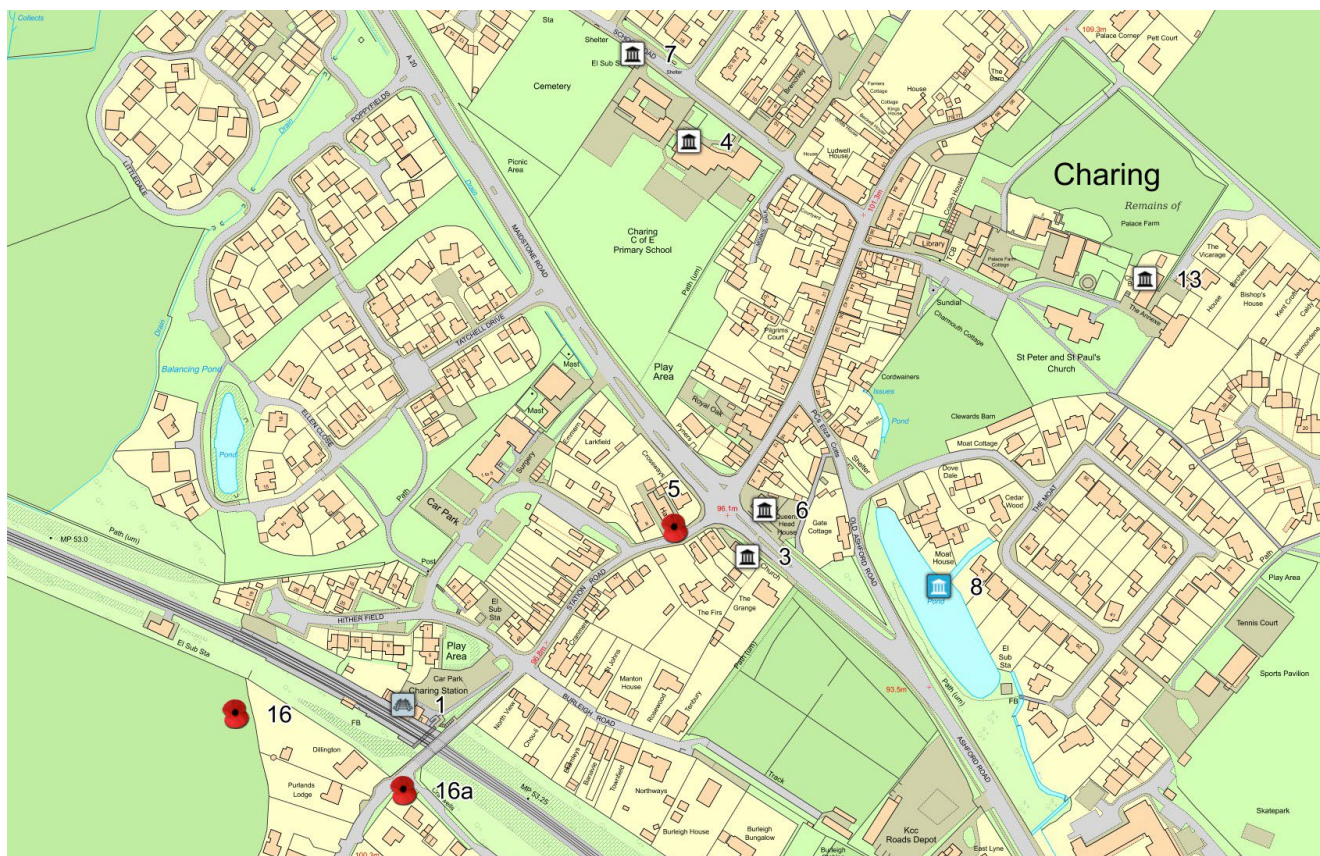
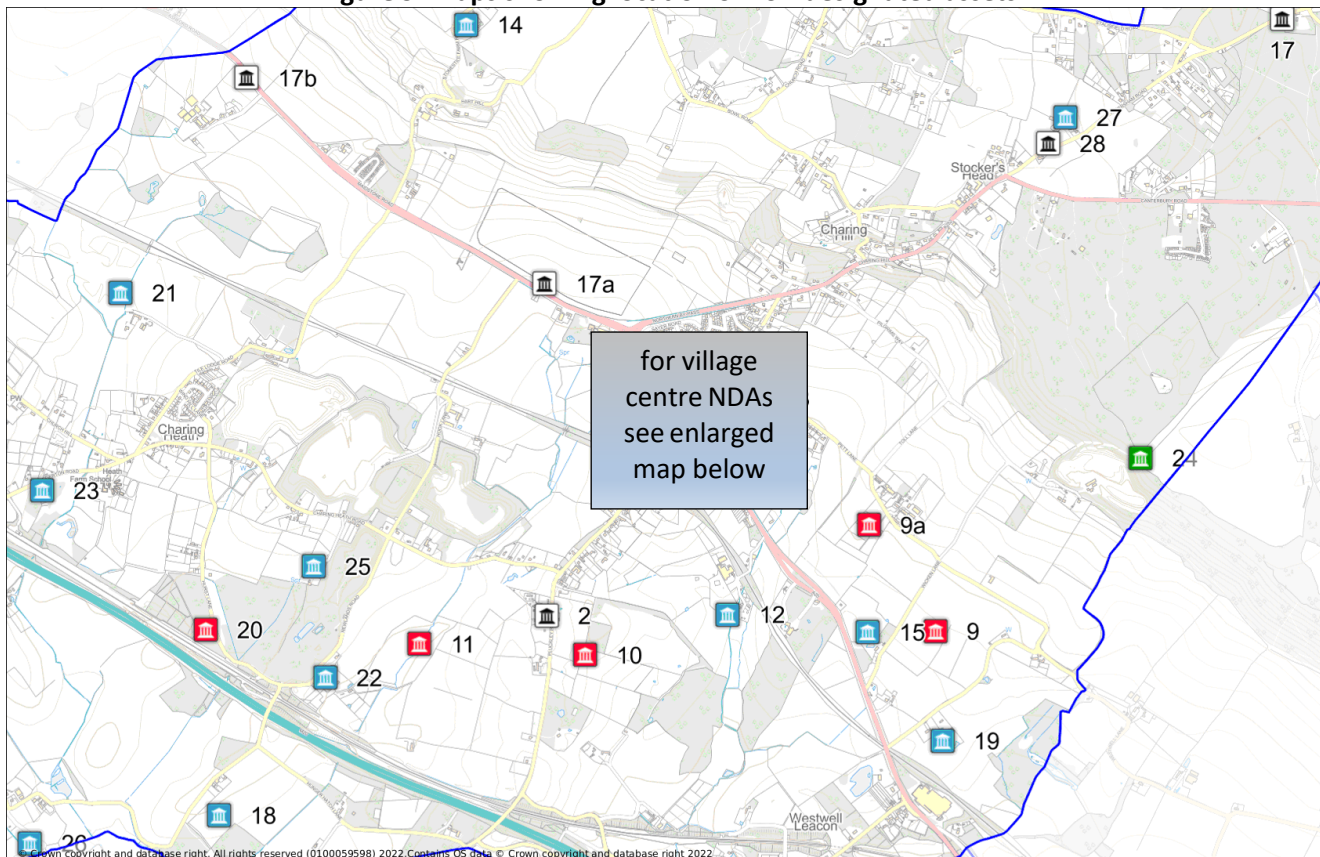
26 Tramhatch Moat and associated older buildings, which date from around the 15th century, with the exception of the House which is already listed.

27 Impkins Farm and Barn. The farmhouse dates from the 17th century but includes some timbers which appear to be of mediæval origin. The barn is thought to be mediæval.

28 Impkins Cottage. A cottage dating from at least the early 18th century and possibly earlier; it may have been a toll cottage. It is relatively unusual for such a modest building to survive today.

The locations of these assets are shown on the following maps.

Figure 9: Maps showing location of non-designated assets



Key for Charing non-designated assets maps:

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| | Iron Age or Roman structures | | Mediæval buildings or landscape features |
| | 16 th - and 17 th -century structures | | 18 th -, 19 th -, and early 20 th -century structures |
| | Railway station (19 th century) | | War Memorial, and Second World War pillboxes |

Policy E1: Historic environment

a. Proposals will be supported that conserve or enhance for their historic significance and their importance to local distinctiveness, character, and sense of place any:

- i listed buildings and their settings,
- ii scheduled ancient monuments and their settings,
- iii future conservation areas, or
- iv non-designated heritage assets listed in this Plan and their settings.

This refers to assets and settings both above and below ground.

b. Proposals for development that affect non-designated historic assets will be considered taking account of any harm or loss, and the significance of the assets and their setting.

Details of the listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments in the Plan area are set out in supporting document marked RPR 142. Details of the non-designated heritage assets in the Plan area are set out in section 10.3 of the Plan.

10.4 The Archbishop's Palace

A particularly important heritage site is the Archbishop's Palace in the centre of Charing village. This was one of a number of "Palaces" owned by the Archbishops of Canterbury and used on their travels. Many of the current palace buildings date back to the early fourteenth century with later additions and rebuilding, notably under Archbishop John Morton, in the late fifteenth century. The Palace was visited by Kings Edward I and II, King Henry VII, and King Henry VIII and his wife Catherine of Aragon, on their travels.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archbishop%27s_Palace,_Charing - cite note-3

The Palace was acquired by the Crown in 1545 and was subsequently leased to, and then owned by, local farming gentry, notably the Honywoods and the Whelers. The present owner's family acquired the complex in the 1950s. In 1952 the Palace was designated a scheduled monument and four of its buildings listed Grade I.

Two of the buildings fronting the Market Square have been restored in recent years as private dwellings by the Spitalfields Trust (ST), a British

Building Preservation Trust. However the remainder of the complex is in disrepair and features very prominently on Historic England's "Heritage at Risk" list.

There is strong support among residents for restoration of the complex with responses to the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire also showing majority support for some form of community hub/access in the complex.

Picture 19: The Archbishop's Palace



Policy E2: The Archbishop's Palace

- a. Proposals for ongoing restoration will be supported.
- b. If shown to be possible as part of a sustainable and deliverable solution for the site as a whole, proposals that enhance public access (including community uses) will be encouraged.

10.5 Public green spaces

The parish has ten public green spaces (see project 114). These are:

- Picnic area A20 (next to school field and cemetery).
- Piquets Meadow A20 (east of school field) which includes a playground. To the north of this is an area of grassland owned by KCC.
- Clewards Meadow (off Market Place).
- Sundial Garden (off Market Place).
- Charing Cemetery (School Road).
- Arthur Baker playing fields.
- Alderbed Meadow.
- Sayer Road (managed by Ashford Borough Council).
- Westwell Leacon recreation ground.
- Charing Heath recreation ground.

Figure 10: The location of local green spaces in Charing village

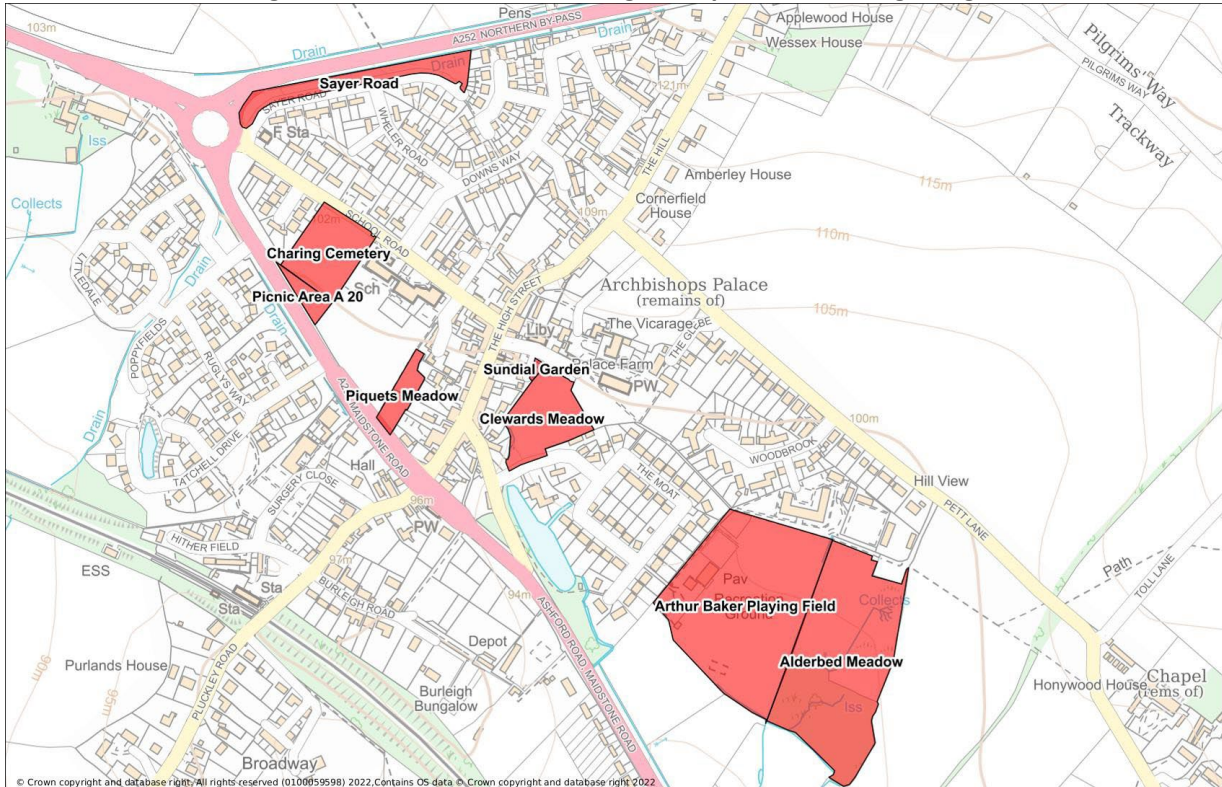


Figure 11: The location of the local green space in Charing Heath

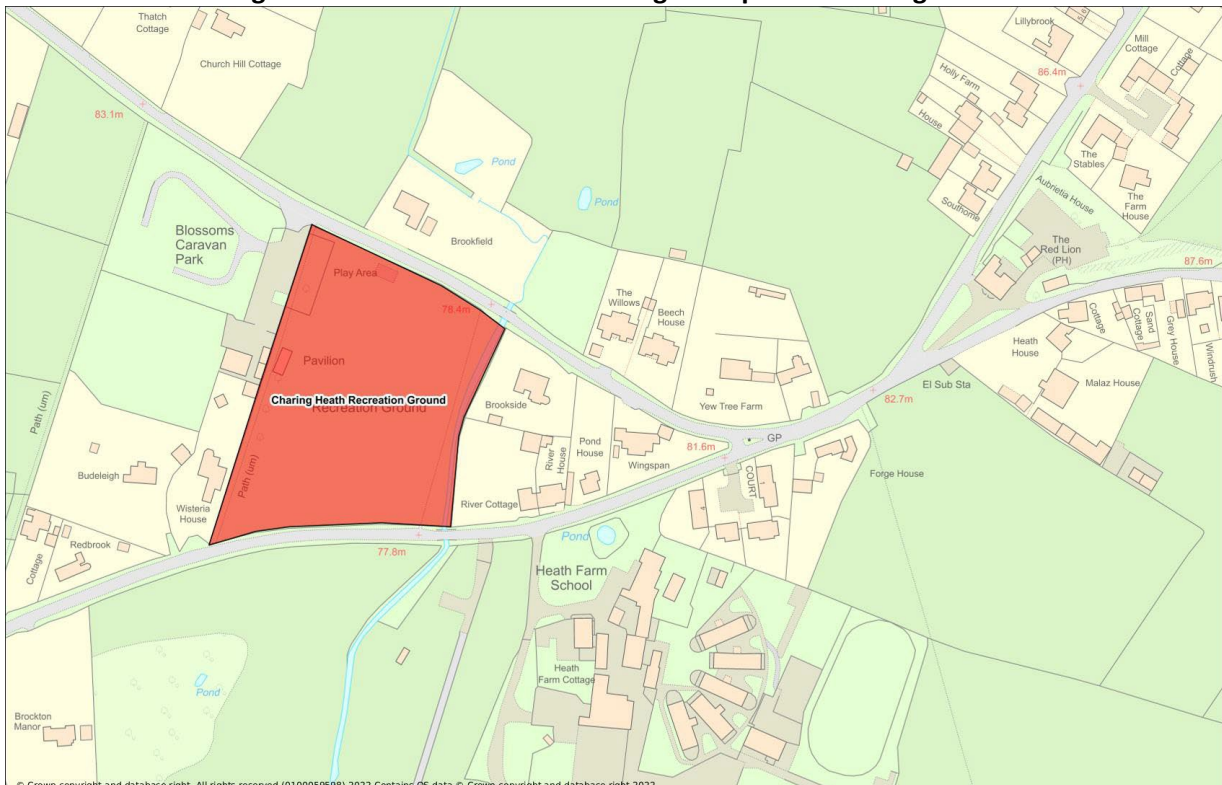


Figure 12: The location of the local green space in Westwell Leacon



Clewards Meadow (see Picture 20) is at the centre of the village and is the main public green space. It is a registered village green (number VG229) [see project 155]. A small strip to the immediate north of it owned by Ashford Borough Council is also a designated village green. It is used formally for fetes and picnics and other fundraising events. Informally, visitors and residents use it for recreation including walking, dog walking, playing games, or just sitting and enjoying the peace and tranquility of the space. It is particularly valued for its exceptional idyllic panorama of the church, Archbishop's Palace, roofscape of varied vernacular styles seen from the rear of the buildings in the High Street, and mature shady trees.

Picture 20: Clewards Meadow



The Sundial Garden just off Clewards Meadow is a peaceful spot for people to sit and enjoy the surroundings. It also has the human sundial where a

person may stand on the central strip in whatever place is dictated by the time of year, and their shadow will indicate the time. There is a commemorative paving stone for Corporal Frederick Coppins VC in the garden.

The Arthur Baker playing fields is the principal recreation ground in Charing Village (see section 7.2).

The Charing Alderbed Meadow (Picture 21) is a landscape of wet grassland and woodland immediately to the east of the Arthur Baker playing fields. It consists of 2.5 acres (1 ha) of woodland and 4 acres (1.6 ha) of grassland, both wet in character due to the presence of small streams that rise from the spring line at the base of the North Downs. It is designated as a Local Wildlife Site. Residents frequently enjoy walking through this tranquil and attractive area.

Picture 21: The Alderbed



The picnic area and adjacent layby off the A20 is regularly used by vehicles (domestic and industrial) passing through Charing who wish or need to take a break, and enjoy that and refreshments at picnic tables provided by the Parish Council.

The Sayer Road green is a small area used for recreation, mainly by residents of the Downs Way Estate.

The recreation grounds in Charing Heath provide space for formal or informal sports and recreation as well as a playground in Charing Heath and children's swings in Westwell Leacon.

These spaces meet the requirements of paragraph 101 in the (2021) NPPF Guidelines of: being reasonably close to the community; demonstrating special local significance in terms of beauty, recreational value, tranquillity, and richness of wildlife; and being local in character rather than extensive tracts of land. They are a feature of the parish, and allow the countryside to come into the developed areas, affording open views and providing habitats for a variety of wildlife.

Policy E3: Local green spaces

a. Designation of local green spaces in the parish

The following are designated Local Green Spaces and are shown in Figure 10 to Figure 12:

- Picnic area A20 (next to school field)
- Piquets Meadow A20 (east of school field) (which includes a playground)
- Clewards Meadow (off Market Place)
- Sundial Garden (off Market Place)
- Charing Cemetery (School Road)
- Arthur Baker playing fields
- Alderbed Meadow
- Sayer Road (managed by Ashford Borough Council)
- Westwell Leacon recreation ground
- Charing Heath recreation ground

b. Local green space development

Proposals for development in such locations will only be allowed in very special circumstances, and, where such development takes place, the following must apply:

The loss of green space resulting from the proposed development must be replaced by equivalent or better provision in a suitable location; *or*

The development proposed is for alternative sport and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.

The former Charing Quarry on the edge of Charing Heath, being attractively restored and with a number of footpaths, is likely to qualify as a local green space in future years, once it no longer also houses the loading bay for sand excavated from Burleigh Quarry and the conveyor belt which transports the sand.

There are a number of other important green spaces in Charing village which are not public open spaces. They include the green areas in Charing Green and Poppyfields housing developments to the south of the A20, which are managed by each development's residents' association, and the primary school playing fields.

10.6 Development in the Kent Downs AONB

The provisions of the NPPF, which requires great weight to be given to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of AONBs, of the Ashford Local Plan, through policy ENV3b, and the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan, address this matter comprehensively.

In formulating policies which protect the landscape and natural habitat, this Neighbourhood Plan has taken account of the Kent Downs AONB, due to its distinctive landscapes and its impact on the parish landscape. Developments in, or in the setting of, an AONB must take account of the landscape character areas, and policies – in this case, The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan, 2014-2019.

10.7 Landscape Strategy and ecological impacts

As this Plan notes throughout, the landscape and countryside throughout the parish are very important and enhance its character.

Previous landscape studies by ABC, which have defined 44 Landscape Character Areas outside of the AONBs and the Ashford and Tenterden Urban Areas, are set out in detail in the Landscape Character SPD (2011), and such assessment has assisted policymaking in this Plan.

In addition, the Charing Neighbourhood Plan Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Report and determination, prepared by ABC, December 2020, draws attention to water quality, as the parish lies in the Stour catchment area where Natural England have concerns of environmental degradation, and that further development in Charing would likely lead to adverse effects on the Stodmarsh Lakes, east of Canterbury. This matter will be addressed later in this section, including reference to mitigation strategies.

While development is taking place and will continue through the Plan period, it is important that it does not become an eyesore and can blend in to the character of the area. Developers and planners will be expected to ensure there is a buffer of trees, hedgerows, and/or other vegetation to reduce visual, audible, and other impacts of traffic (carbon sequestration, air quality, wildlife resource, and the reduction of air and particulate pollution, nitrogen oxides, ground level ozone, and other vehicle emissions). These buffer zones will also act as habitat corridors.

The Environment Act (2021) will require new developments to meet at least a 10% net gain, and this is taken into account in Policy E4.

Policy E4: Landscape strategy, and safeguarding and enhancing biodiversity

a. Development proposals should include a proportionate landscape strategy, which will incorporate hard and soft landscaping, tree and hedgerow surveys, and measures to protect trees and hedgerows, and demonstrate consideration of both near and distant views of the development from key public vantage points where appropriate.

b. Each such development should put forward proposals to enhance the biodiversity and green infrastructure of the parish wherever possible, for example through retaining and enhancing wildlife areas and green spaces and the connections between them.

c. Proposals should safeguard features of nature conservation interest, and should include measures to retain, conserve, and enhance habitats and networks of ecological interest, including ancient woodland, water features, and ditches, dykes, and hedgerows, as corridors and stepping stones for wildlife.

d. Development proposals which minimise impacts on, and provide net gains in, biodiversity, will be supported in principle.

10.8 Views

A number of existing views are greatly valued by members of the parish, and such views are what attract many residents to settle in Charing. Many ramblers and walkers visit Charing to walk the footpaths and the Pilgrim's Way, where they enjoy the views, as do many residents who walk daily.

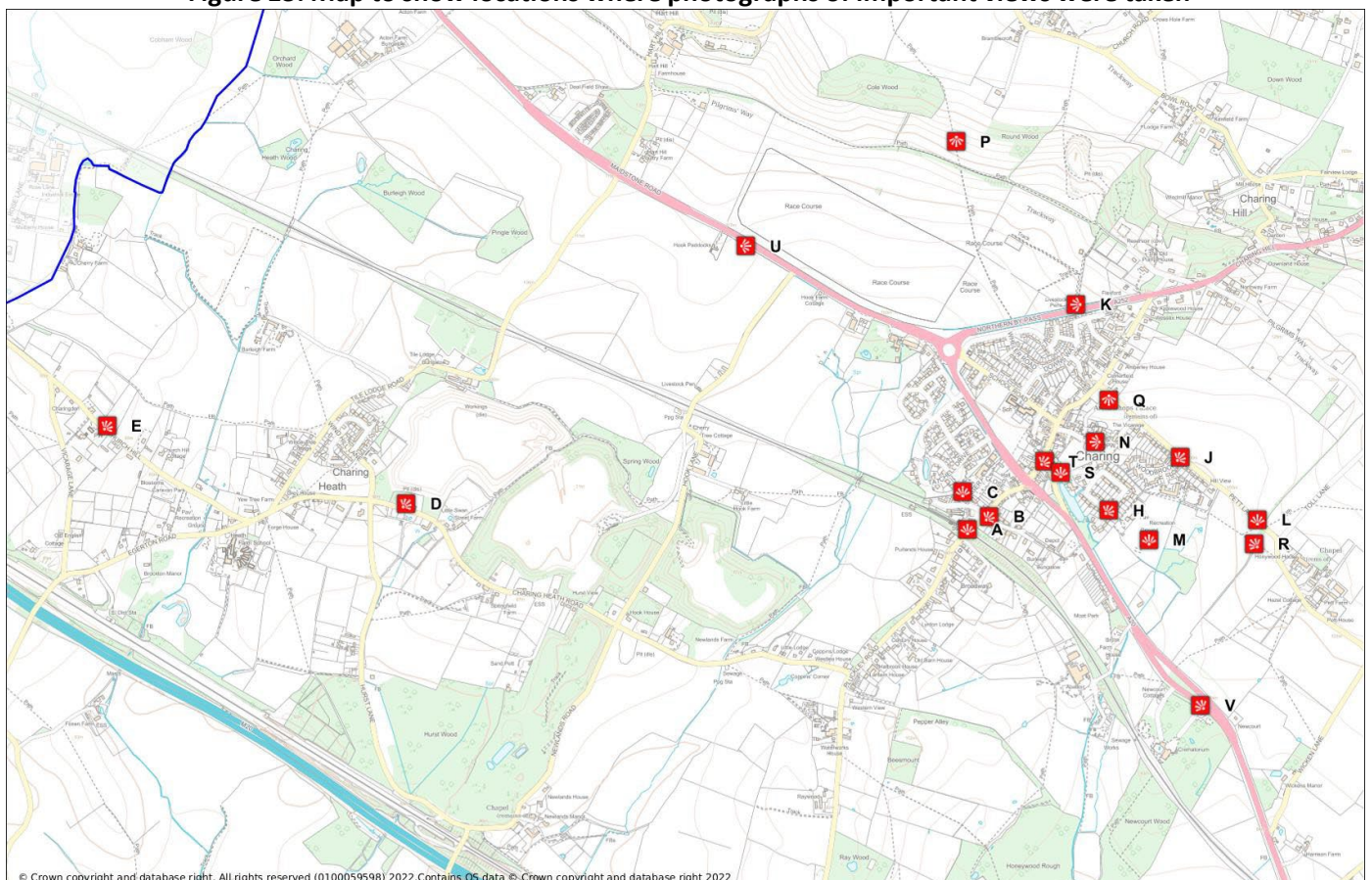
The Kent Downs AONB is the most significant landscape valued by the residents, as it comprises a dramatic and diverse landscape. The upland nature of the scarp makes it a prominent feature in the wider landscape, particularly in views towards it from the south. Long-distance panoramas are offered across open countryside, particularly from the scarp, primarily in a southerly direction. The AONB was designated in part because of these views

beyond it into its setting, and these have remained critical to its value and to public enjoyment. The *setting* of the AONB does not have a geographical border; in most cases, it comprises land *outside* the AONB which is visible *from* it, and *from which it can be seen*.

The AECOM Heritage and Character Assessment report identified elements which are particularly sensitive to change in relation to the value and setting of heritage assets, and the village's rural characteristics, including views from the North Downs ridge towards Charing and vice versa.

The importance and preservation of locally-cherished views, such as those to and from the Downs, and of the High Street and the church and its surroundings, was an important feature in the Parish Design Statement.

Figure 13: Map to show locations where photographs of important views were taken



(the view symbols on the map show the direction in which the photograph was taken)

Policy E5: Views

Developments will not be supported that significantly detract from the following views into, out of, and within the village as identified on Figure 13, by failing to respect their distinctive characteristics.

- a. Views of the scarp ridge and southern slopes of the AONB to the west and north from: (i) Pluckley Road (ii) Station Road (iii) Charing Green (iv) Charing Heath Road (v) Charing Heath Memorial Hall (vi) Tile Lodge Road (vii) Hook Lane.
- b. Views of the scarp ridge and southern slopes of the AONB to the north and east from (i) The Moat (ii) Woodbrook (iii) The Hill at the entrance to the racecourse (iv) Pett Lane (v) Arthur Baker playing fields.
- c. Views of the AONB from the village centre.
- d. Views into Charing from the AONB, especially the Pilgrim's Way and to the western and eastern perimeters of the village.
- e. Views to and from the Archbishop's Palace and Charing Church.
- f. View towards the village from Clewards Meadow and the bottom of the High Street.
- g. Views to the centre of the village from west to east, and east to west approaches on the A20.

Views to and from the Archbishop's Palace and Charing Church [views (e) in policy E5]

(Figure 13 shows locations where pictures were taken from):

Views taken from the church tower have been addressed from location N under (c) in policy E5.

Picture 22: View of the Archbishop's Palace and church from location Q



Picture 23: View across Clewards Meadow to church & palace from Old Ashford Road (location S)



Views of the scarp ridge, and southern slopes of the Kent Downs AONB to the west and north

[views (a) in policy E5]:

Picture 24: View (a) (i) from Pluckley Road (from location A on Figure 13)



Picture 25: View (a) (ii) from the Station Road/Burleigh Road junction (from location B on Figure 13)



Picture 26: View (a) (iii) from Charing Green (from location C on Figure 13)



Picture 27: View (a) (iv) from Charing Heath Road from the eastern side of Swan Street & Little Swan Street Farm (location D on Figure 13)



Picture 28: View (a) (v) from Charing Heath Memorial Hall car park (location E on Figure 13)



[Similar views are obtained from Tile Lodge Road (F on the map and view (a) (vi) in Policy E5) and Hook Lane (G on the map and view (a) (vii) in Policy E5) so no further photographs were used to show the view.]

**Views of scarp ridge & southern slopes of the AONB to the north and east
[views (b) in policy E5] (Figure 13 shows locations where pictures were taken from):**

Picture 29: View (b) (i) from the Moat at entrance to the Arthur Baker playing fields (location H)



Picture 32: View (b) (iv) from Pett Lane near the pig field/Pett Place from location L



Picture 30: View (b) (ii) from Woodbrook at the junction with Pett Lane from location J



Picture 33: View (b) (v) from Arthur Baker playing fields from location M



Picture 31: View (b) (iii) from The Hill at the entrance to the racecourse from location K



Views of the AONB from Charing village centre (taken from the top of the church tower - location N on Figure 13 [view (c) in policy E5]) - see also Picture 16:

Picture 34: to north-west



Picture 36: to north-north-west



Picture 35: to east



Views into Charing from the AONB, especially the Pilgrim's Way and the western and eastern perimeters of the village (from location P on Figure 13 [view (d) in Policy E5]):

Picture 37: View of western end of village from the Pilgrim's Way overlooking the racecourse



Picture 38: View of the centre of the village taken from the Pilgrim's Way



Views (identified in policy E5; Figure 13 shows locations where pictures were taken from):

Picture 39: View of church & village from Pett Lane by the pig field from location R [view (e)]



Picture 42: Hook Lane taken from location U [view (g)]



Picture 40: Village from Clewards Meadow at entrance from Old Ashford Road (location S) [view (f)]



Picture 43: Charing east to west from western side of Crematorium (location V) [view (g)]



Picture 41: View of village from crossroads at bottom of High Street from location T [view (f)]



10.9 Climate change

Policy E6 has been designed to play its part in positively affecting climate change, and making

Charing a safer and healthier place to live.

Policy E6: Climate change

- a. New development should, wherever possible, include net additional native planting (including green walls, green roofs, and/or fruit and nut trees for local food provision); also retaining, enhancing and expanding green infrastructure and ensuring ecologically friendly maintenance.
- b. Development proposals will be supported in principle where the following matters are addressed as appropriate: siting/orientation for passive solar gain, thus reducing energy need; providing adequate space for waste recycling and composting; maximising thermal efficiency and environmental sustainability in building materials; providing, wherever possible, carbon reduction plans alongside development applications.
- c. New development will be supported provided it meets minimum energy efficiency standards guided by local and national policy.
- d. New development will be supported where it provides: demonstrable and strong support for cycling and walking infrastructure; guidance on the location and number of electric vehicle charging points (e-bikes as well as cars) to meet expected need; and, where feasible, connectivity to the existing footpath network, so that new residents may cycle or walk to local amenities, their place of work, and especially the proposed new community centre at Parsons Mead.
- e. Development will be supported which ensures appropriate flood defences and drought-resistant planting, and minimises urban heat islands and/or internal overheating, e. g. through planting and materials.

10.10 Habitats Regulations Assessment and Stodmarsh Lakes

AECOM was commissioned to undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) in 2021 to assess the potential effects of development allocated within this plan on European sites.

The assessment confirmed that there are no European Sites in the NP area and that the Plan was unlikely to have any significant effect on two European sites that lie within 10 km from the parish boundary: the Wye and Crundale Downs Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the Swale Special Protection Area (SPA)/Ramsar.

However, Charing parish lies within the hydrological catchment of the Stodmarsh SPA/Ramsar/SAC, which has been identified as being under threat from high levels of nitrates and phosphates leading to eutrophication. As a result, Natural England requires that all new residential development in hydrological

connectivity with these sites is phosphorus and nitrogen neutral. The HRA then produced advice to the NPSC/CPC by recommending policy adjustments required to protect European sites, and advice to assist ABC to discharge its duty under Regulations 105 and 106.

The screening process confirmed that none of the policies (other than H1 and H3) were likely to have significant effects so these were the only policies for which an Appropriate Assessment was carried out. (At the time of the Assessment, the site in Charing Heath next to the Red Lion (see Policy H4) was not included in the Plan, but the conclusions will be the same as for the other two sites.) While the NP allocates land for a relatively small amount of housing, the HRA said that “effects on the integrity of the Stodmarsh SAC/SPA/Ramsar sites from increased phosphorus levels are inherently in combination with all other growth within the hydrological catchment of this European site”.

However, for completeness, the potential impacts of draft NP housing development in isolation were also assessed.

All allocated sites in the NP are within the basin catchment of, and within close proximity of, the River Stour. First there is a general risk of pollution, during and post-construction, reaching the Stodmarsh SAC/SPS/Ramsar in the absence of mitigation. Preventing further surface water run-off and flood risk, within Charing parish, can be mitigated using high quality drainage design, which prevents surface water entering environmentally-sensitive areas, and standard construction pollution controls. The NP recognises this, and provides policy mitigation for the management of surface water/flooding/drainage as follows:

10.10.1 Mitigation measures taken in this plan

- Policy C2: New developments must ensure sustainable drainage systems to address surface water drainage.
- Policy C2: New development proposals must, in liaison with any sewerage service providers, ensure adequate foul sewerage infrastructure and capacity exists to serve the proposal.
- Policy C2: Developers will be required to provide details of the measures that will be taken to ensure that polluted run-off (including suspended sediment) does not leave the site and enter the River Stour and surrounding waterbodies, both during and after construction.
- Policy C2: Development will only be supported if it demonstrates nutrient neutrality regarding Stodmarsh SAC/SPA, both in relation to phosphorus and nitrogen.
- Policy H17: Where a site for development overlies a groundwater protection zone, an appropriate site investigation and risk assessment will be required to be undertaken, in consultation with the Environment Agency, prior to the grant of planning permission.
- Policy D1 (climate change): New buildings, infrastructure, and landscape should be resilient to climate change and other environmental threats in the long term. Policies and plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change impacts such as periods of

increased and reduced precipitation (i. e. surface water flood risk and water use/supply).

- Policy D1: Surfacing of large areas (parking areas, paths, etc., though not roads) with concrete or tarmac is prohibited. Brick or block paving should be encouraged in areas of light use; pea shingle on hoggin would be a viable alternative. In general, a permeable or semi-permeable surface would assist with minimising run-off and localised flooding.

In addition to mitigation features in the NP, the overarching ABC Local Plan addresses drainage and flooding mitigation in policies ENV6 and ENV9.

10.10.2 Nutrient Neutrality

This Plan's policies have been designed to address nutrient neutrality by taking away the uncertainty of pollution from new developments. Natural England has provided advice that a nutrient budget can be calculated for new developments, and a guidance document to aid calculations. Developers should refer to the HRA (Appendix A) carried out for this plan to see how calculations are made. This calculation can be used to show that development either avoids harm to protected sites from water quality issues, or will need to provide mitigation to avoid adverse effects with respect to nutrients.

The proposed 57 dwellings on land allocated under policies H1 and H3 would, without mitigation, lead (using the methodology approved by Natural England) to a small net increase in nitrogen of 173.09 kg/total nitrogen/year and an increase in phosphorus of 4.73 kg/total phosphorus/year when compared to 'no change' in existing land use. Protection is incorporated in policy C2. The 9 dwellings proposed in the additional Red Lion site (policy H4) would add a further 33.57 kg/TN/year and a further 0.87 kg/TP/year.

The Charing NP has amended its relevant policies to include all of the HRA recommendations, and, on that basis, the HRA confirmed "that no adverse effect would occur on the integrity of Stodmarsh SAC/SPA/Ramsar sites".

10.11 Housing

10.11.1 The Local Plan

There are important issues concerning the extent of housing growth in the parish. In order to explain this in context, this section is introduced by a short description of the impact of Ashford Borough Council's Local Plan.

While both Ashford's Local Plan and this Neighbourhood Plan were in preparation, revised household projections, and hence housing targets, were published by the government. This substantially increased the amount of housing required for the borough, and this in turn resulted in the allocations Ashford made in Charing

rising from 55 to 235 dwellings (excluding the 51 units in the Orbit housing for older people).

Ashford Borough Council has a tiered approach to allocating housing. Ashford itself is the prime target, followed by Tenterden. Charing, along with Wye and Hamstreet, is next in the hierarchy due to having more facilities than other villages.

In addition, the amount of windfall development (housing in addition to planned development) has been high in Charing in recent years, and looks likely to continue on a broadly similar scale.

Table 7: Allocations from Adopted Local Plan

Location	Proposed housing numbers	Comments
Charing Motors Service Station site S28	20	Full PP for three units; outline for up to 17.
Land south of the Arthur Baker playing fields, site S29 (also known as "Char 1")	35	Outline granted with plan indicating 40 dwellings. Current (April 2021) reserved matters application for 60 units to enable smaller dwellings.
Land South of the Swan	180 jointly	Outline granted for up to 135 dwellings. Current application for 131.
Adjoining land rest of site S55 ("Bromley land")		Assumed therefore around 45-50.
Total:	235	286 including the 51 age-related units

In addition to this plan, 51 age-restricted units were approved, and, at the time of writing, construction is almost complete.

10.11.2 Housing needs

Housing development in Charing always attracts great interest, more so since the current Local Plan allocates so much housing to Charing.

Four independent studies were examined. Three were by Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK), namely 'Older Persons Accommodation', March 2010 (see reference 7); 'Charing Housing Needs Survey', May 2014 (see reference 8); and an updated Housing Needs Assessment in January 2021 (reference 13).

The fourth was a comprehensive study by AECOM commissioned for the Neighbourhood Plan in 2017 (see project 103).

Finally, the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire

(as well as workshops and meetings) enabled parishioners' views (see projects 137 and 156) to become clear.

10.11.3 Views obtained from the community questionnaire

Concerns were expressed regularly during the consultation process about the urbanisation of the countryside, and the conversion of villages into dormitory towns, where character and tradition would be lost. Another issue is the high number of large high-priced executive homes being built, which reduces the scope for younger people to remain in the village and for older residents to downsize. There were grave concerns that already-stretched local facilities would not cope with a significant growth in population. These

issues have clearly conditioned our thinking. The Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire (see project 156 for full details) also contained a number of questions regarding the amount and type of new housing. It was clear that residents wanted far less new housing than the quantity planned, and also that they did not favour large estates. The type of house was also important. With concerns about the number of large “executive”-style houses that had been built so far this century, the need for smaller houses was a clear requirement.

Respondents were very clear on the type of new houses they wanted: most wanted homes at market prices, but there was strong feeling that there was a need for affordable homes, with emphasis placed on houses for elderly or disabled, shared-equity properties, and social housing (see Figure 17).

Respondents gave their preferences for new homes and included having: lots of different styles; developments for all different age groups and residents with differing physical abilities; new houses spread across lots of different sites; new developments having a single road onto an existing road; and affordable flats, bungalows, and houses.

10.11.4 Housing needs – independent study by consultancy AECOM

The AECOM Housing Needs Assessment, commissioned by the NPSC and CPC, was very detailed (see project 103 and reference 11). It noted that Charing accounts for 2.6% of Ashford’s housing stock.

AECOM examined four ways to assess the ideal number of houses that should be built in Charing over the Plan period. Three of these were based on the fact that Charing in 2011 accounted for 2.6% of Ashford borough’s housing stock, and applied this percentage to the housing projections in the Local Plan, the household projections for the borough from the Office for National Statistics, and a study which provided an assessment of Objectively Assessed Need for Ashford. The fourth was based on a projection of past housebuilding in the parish. The four ways gave a mean figure to meet housing needs, in the plan period 2011 to 2030, of **358** (with a range of 190 to 419). However, one of the four methods, that based on

past housebuilding trends for the parish, was out of line with the other three, and, if this were excluded, the mean would be **413** dwellings. Since around 70 houses had already been constructed during the plan period, the *additional* housing need was **288 or 343**.

10.11.5 Estimated number of new houses to be constructed in the Plan period

The NPSC has regularly assessed the amount of housing that could be built during the Plan period. These studies have been based on: numbers already constructed; Local Plan numbers, increases due to planning decisions; other proposed developments; and windfall developments (housebuilding that occurs in addition to that in any plan).

The latest estimate (see project 153 updated) of the number of new houses for the 2011 to 2030 Plan period is 652, 55% more than the maximum given by the AECOM study of housing needs. Population growth will be similar, possibly slightly higher.

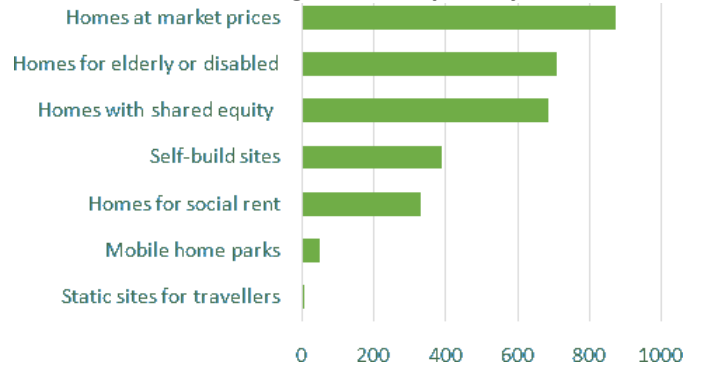
Of this total, around 540 will be built in the 2021- 2030 period, resulting in growth of around 40% in the parish, primarily in and around Charing village itself. The largest part of this growth – 286 houses or 53% – comes directly from Ashford’s Local Plan. The next largest amount, 188 or 35%, comes from windfall development, including a probable increase in the number of dwellings on one Local Plan site to enable that site to be mainly smaller dwellings (see section 13).

Finally, this Neighbourhood Plan makes three allocations, accounting for 66 houses or 12%. Two are specifically to enable other benefits – additional land coming into public ownership and a contribution to the proposed Greenway in Charing Heath (see below), and the proposed community facility at Parsons Mead (see below and section 13). The final allocation is to enable homes for first- time buyers in Charing Heath (see below). While it may seem at first sight strange to allocate more houses in this Plan, given the substantial amount of housing already in view, the benefits are deemed easily to outweigh any disadvantage.

Figure 14: What sort of housing are you likely to need when you next move home?



Figure 17: What types of homes should be given most priority?



(Respondents were instructed to tick 3 boxes.)

Figure 15: How many homes should be built in the parish over the next 14 years?

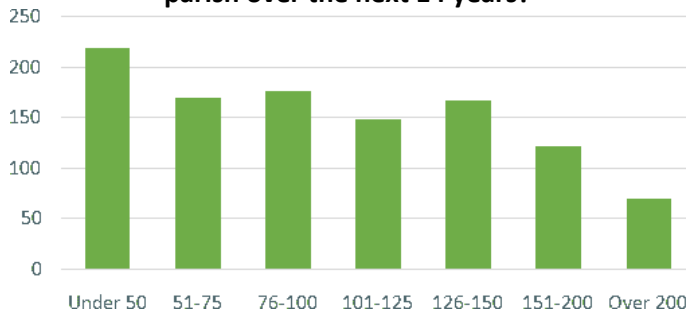
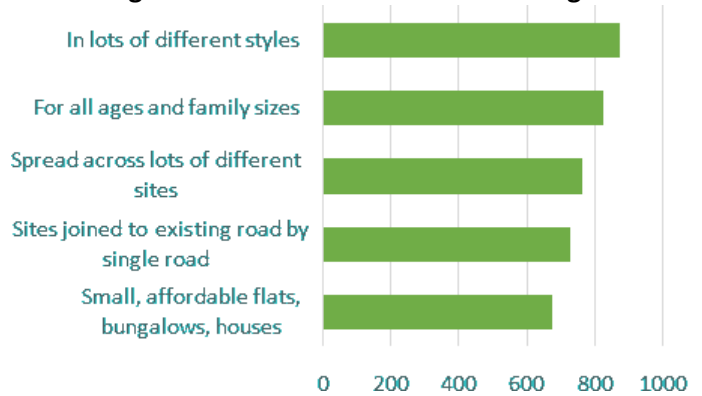


Figure 18: Preferences for new buildings



Each was an "either/or" question – for example, people were asked if they preferred to see homes built in lots of different styles or just one style.

Figure 16: How many homes should be built in any new housing development?

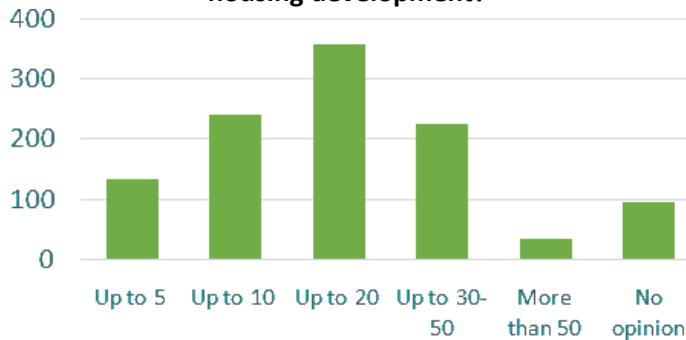


Table 8: Charing housing and population growth

The usual assumption of 2.4 people per dwelling has been used to estimate population growth, except where the size of dwellings suggests a smaller figure would be appropriate. Such cases are indicated in the notes.

	dwellings	population	Notes
2011 census	1,298	2,765	
additions to 31/3/2021	112	269	
current (31/3/2021) situation	1,410	3,034	
likely additions 2018 to 2030:			
Orbit age-restricted	51	70	single- & two-person units so assume 1.3 per dwelling
“Char 1” (site S29*)	35	84	
Charing Motors (site S28)	20	48	
land south of Swan (part site S55**)	131	314	
remainder of site S55	49	118	
total above	286	634	
Windfall			
additional on “Char 1” site	25	60	
Yew Tree Park	15	21	park homes, assume 1.5 per dwelling
windfall with extant PP Mar 2020	46	110.4	
PP granted 2020/2021	17	40.8	
estimated additional windfall to 2030	85	204	
Total above	188	436	
proposed allocations from NP***			
Parsons Mead	48	115	
Crofters, Charing Heath	9	14	one- & two-person starter homes; assume 1.6 per dwelling
Shepherd Neame site	9	22	
total above	66	151	
	540	1,221	
total additions from 31/03/2021			
total since 2011	652	1,487	
total at 2030	1,950	4,252	
<i>% growth from 31/03/2021</i>	38.3	40.1	
<i>% growth from 2011</i>	50.2	53.8	

Additional notes

*S29 is in Local Plan at around 35. However, due partly to Charing’s need for smaller homes, it is possible that plans will be changed to smaller houses and the number increased to up to 60. **This part of S55 was originally proposed for around 100 homes. Outline PP is for 135; latest plans are 131.

*** see text.

The table below summarises the considerable impact of expected housing growth on Charing Ward and Charing Heath separately. (While most of the parish is in Charing ward, Charing Heath – and some of its surrounding area – forms part of another ward). The parish as a whole seems likely to be around 50% larger in 2030 than at the start of the Plan period in 2011, and around 40% larger than in 2021 – a very substantial increase.

The bulk of the growth will be in and around Charing village itself with rather lesser growth in Charing Heath. While it is not possible to provide separate figures for the two villages that are separate from their more rural hinterlands, there will be only limited development in the more rural areas.

Table 9: Housing and population growth in Charing ward and Charing Heath

	2011	2021	2030	% growth	
				2011-2030	2021-2030
Nº of houses					
Charing ward	1,135	1,236	1,729	52.3	39.9
Charing Heath	163	174	221	35.6	27.0
total parish	1,298	1,410	1,950	50.2	38.32
Population					
Charing ward	2,355	2,597	3,710	57.5	42.8
Charing Heath	410	436	542	32.2	24.2
total parish	2,765	3,033	4,252	53.8	40.1

The Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan together account for six major sites, which are marked on Figure 19:

site A: Orbit age-restricted development (51 dwellings);

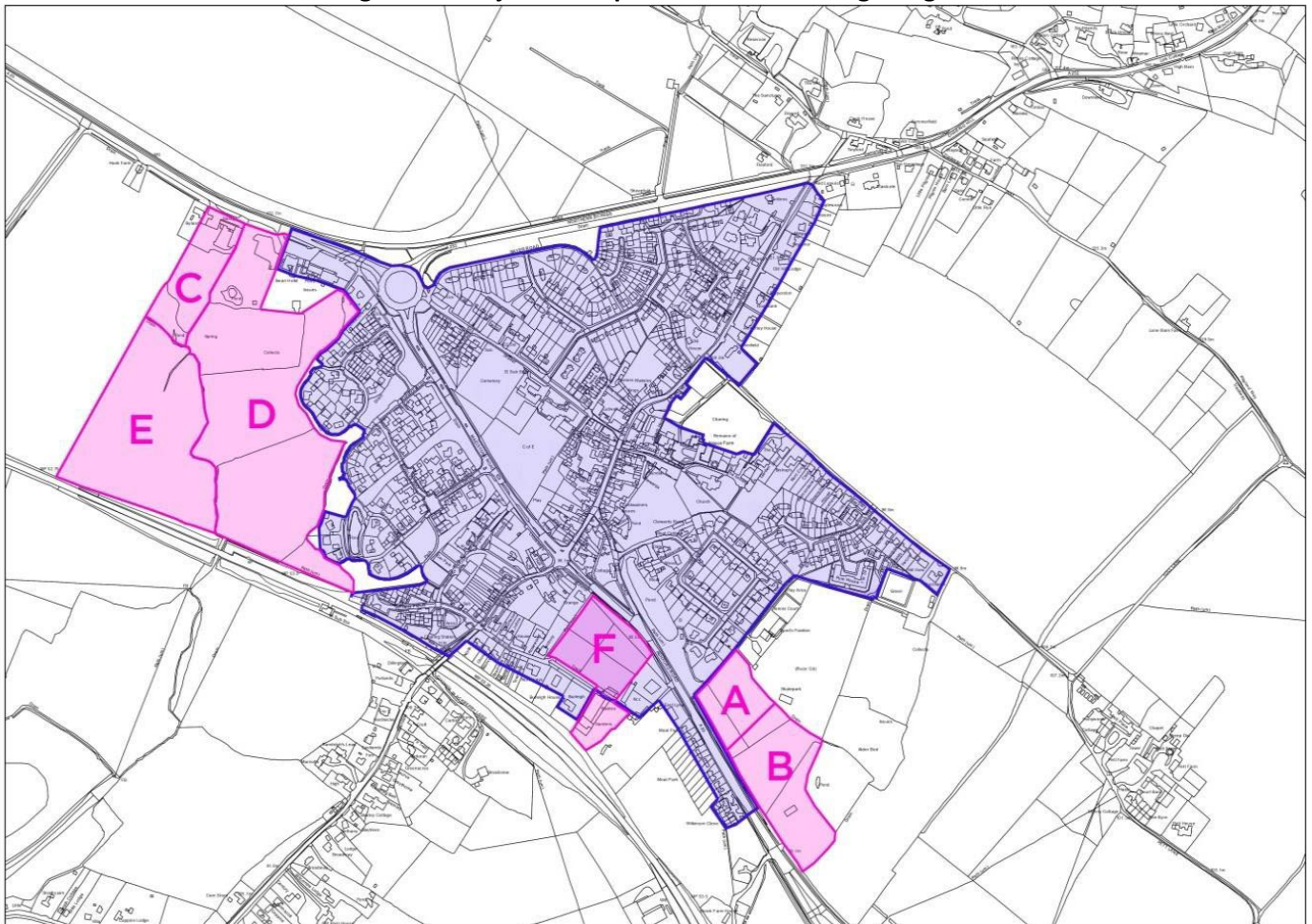
site B: land south of the Arthur Baker playing fields (Local Plan site S29, 35 dwellings);

site C: Charing Motors service station (Local Plan site S28, 20 dwellings);

sites D and E together, making land west of Poppyfields (Local Plan site S55, 180 dwellings); and

site F: Parsons Mead and land next to Burleigh Bungalow (allocated site for development of up to 48 dwellings, a new Community Centre, Business Units, and a new car park) [see section 13].

Figure 19: Major development sites in Charing village



Note on Site A - Orbit development

Initially, this development was put forward as an Exception Site (so numbers would not count towards the Local Plan) for the establishment of ‘extra care housing’. However, this proposal became no longer viable on financial grounds, and the development of 46 flats and 5 bungalows is now purely an age-restricted development, although preference will be given to local people. The original intention was for the development to provide a mix of shared ownership (up to a 95% ownership share being available to the purchaser, thus enabling buyers to retain substantial equity) and social rented properties. However, at a late stage, Ashford Borough Council changed this to make the development all social rented. Thus a

need for open market older people’s accommodation remains.

10.11.6 Site assessments

As part of the Neighbourhood Plan process, Charing undertook a call for sites. One aim was to see whether the use of large estates could be reduced.

Call for sites

We were aware of the five sites above from the Local Plan as well as responses to previous calls for sites by ABC.

In March 2017, we asked landowners to contact CPC where they had minimum 0.2-hectare sites which they may consider for housing or business development over periods of 0-5 years,

5-10 years and 10 years plus (see project 149).

Seven sites were put forward in or around Charing village, and three in Charing Heath.

There was also a response for land close to Hatch Engineering for industrial use.

Sites assessments result

Of the sites assessed, those *not* considered suitable were too far from the village and facilities to be sustainable, or were in the AONB. Table 10 shows a summary of the results for those supported. The full details may be found in project 110.

Table 10: Summary of site assessment outcomes for approved sites

Site	Assessment outcome	Comment
land at Parsons Mead (CH37)	Suitable for development	Subject to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • safe access to A20 • protection of specified trees • needs to be design-sensitive to conservation area
land next to Burleigh Bungalow (was CH12 but now part of CH37)		Subject to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • achieving suitable access and reinforcement of south-east boundary
land next to Crofters, Charing Heath		
land at Church Hill, Charing Heath		Subject to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • re-routing the footpath • sensitive design addressing the adjoining listed buildings.
Hatch Engineering site	Suitable for <i>industrial</i> development	
land north-west of Swan Street	Suitable for development	

Subsequently, land at Church Hill has been granted full planning permission, and land north-west of Swan Street has been granted outline permission.

10.11.7 Addressing nutrient neutrality

All proposals for new residential development in the Plan area including those covered by the policies in this section of the Plan and those contained in the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030 for the Plan area will be required to take full account of the advice published by Natural England and the Borough Council on the measures necessary to demonstrate that the proposals satisfactorily mitigate any potential adverse effects on the designated Stodmarsh SAC/SPA/Ramsar sites.

All planning applications for new residential development in the Plan area will be assessed on the basis of such advice, and in due course in the context of the Stodmarsh Mitigation Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) prepared by the Borough Council. This matter is also addressed in detail at Section 10.10 in the Plan.

10.11.8 Housing allocations

Most of the Local Plan sites already have outline planning permission. The one exception is the second part of site S55 (S55/2 or “Bromley land”). It is important that this site provides both the type of housing stock needed, and a contribution to related additional facilities (see Policy H7).

Allocation of housing in sites in Charing

Policy H1 covers proposed developments on the two adjoining sites of Parsons Mead and Land Next to Burleigh Bungalow (mostly referred to as just Parsons Mead in this Plan). The sites are shown as site F in Figure 19. Parsons Mead is the larger, roughly rectangular, portion of the land and fronts the A20. KCC Highways has already indicated likely approval for a priority junction enabling access to the site. The Land next to Burleigh Bungalow is the smaller piece of land behind and would be accessed via Parsons Mead. The two landowners have agreed

to work together. We have worked closely with them to come up with a proposal for around 48 new houses plus a community facility. In exchange for planning permission for housing on the rest of the site the landowners will donate to the Parish Council an area not less than 0.3 hectares on the Parsons Mead section to house the new community facilities.

Section 13 describes the need for the community facility which, in addition to rooms for community use, would include office space, space for non-clinical medical activities easing the pressure on the GP surgery building, a café and welcome facility for tourists, and office space for the Parish Council and parish archives. This chapter looks at the planning need and justification for the project.

The NPPF (e. g. paragraph 16a) underlines that development must be sustainable. Among other points, this requires both support for economic growth, including in rural areas, and the provision of appropriate infrastructure and facilities. Ashford Borough Council's Local Plan echoes this, for example:

Policy SP1 e: *To ensure development is supported by the necessary social, community, physical and e-technology infrastructure, facilities, and services with any necessary improvements brought forward in a co-ordinated and timely manner;*

Policy SP1 h: *To provide a range of employment opportunities to respond to the needs of business, support the growing population, and attract inward investment;*

Policy SP2 paragraph 4: *Development in rural areas will be of a scale that is consistent with the relevant settlement's accessibility, infrastructure provision, level of services available, suitability of sites, and environmental sensitivity;*

and:

Policy SP3 e: *Promoting rural employment opportunities in sustainable locations in accordance with policies EMP3, EMP4, and EMP5;*

As regards promoting employment, while the Local Plan contains measures to boost employment generally in the borough, it does not include measures specific to Charing. It therefore falls to this Neighbourhood Plan to fill in the gap. Many people living in Charing will work in London or in centres such as Ashford town itself, Maidstone, or

Canterbury, but it is clearly not desirable that it becomes only a dormitory parish. Research for the Neighbourhood Plan found a clear need for office space – whether space for small companies or “co-working” space for individuals who currently work from home (whether full-time or as hybrid working) but do not have satisfactory facilities in their own dwellings (see section 9.1). A café and welcome facility for tourists will also help the local economy.

Meanwhile, the parish hall is ageing, expensive to run, does not have parking or modern facilities, and is already too small for larger community meetings. Other facilities in the parish are also too small for larger meetings (see section 13). With the growth in housing and population, better facilities for social and community activities are needed.

Finally, the GP surgery has a growing number of patients as a result of the growth in housing, not just in Charing but in the rest of its catchment area. While core medical activities will remain in the surgery building, space in the new community facility for some non-clinical activities would enhance parishioner welfare.

This projected grant of land in an area close to the village centre, and within easy walking distance of both the station and bus stops, is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the local community. The facilities will also be of wider benefit to the surrounding villages and rural area. It is therefore, the flagship project of this Neighbourhood Plan, and fundamental to its success. The existing parish hall served the community well for over a century; we have the opportunity to build a facility which should serve for a further century.

The building envisaged is ambitious, and will likely cost a sum approaching £2.0 million at 2021 prices, including fit-out costs and the car park. While the developer has to build this, and meet the costs of doing so, the Parish Council intends to make a significant financial contribution. To do this the Parish Council intends to take out a significant loan. It also hopes to sell the current parish hall. This latter has to be subject to referendum and also to a sensitive relocation, with wide consultation of parishioners and interested parties, of the War Memorial, currently the parish hall porch.

It was originally hoped that site S55 in the Local Plan would provide a substantial contribution via

S106 monies. The Local Plan, indeed, stated in the preamble to its policy for the site:

The scale of development proposed on this site is significant in a village context and it is therefore particularly important that the scheme makes an appropriate contribution to the facilities of the village so as to cater for the additional demand generated. The scale of such a contribution will be negotiated with the Borough Council (in consultation with the Parish Council).

However, despite requests from the Parish Council, the Borough Council considered, at the time the S106 agreement for the larger part of site S55 (“Land South of the Swan”) was negotiated, that the plans for the community centre were not sufficiently advanced for any contribution to be included. An S106 contribution will be requested from the smaller part of site S55.

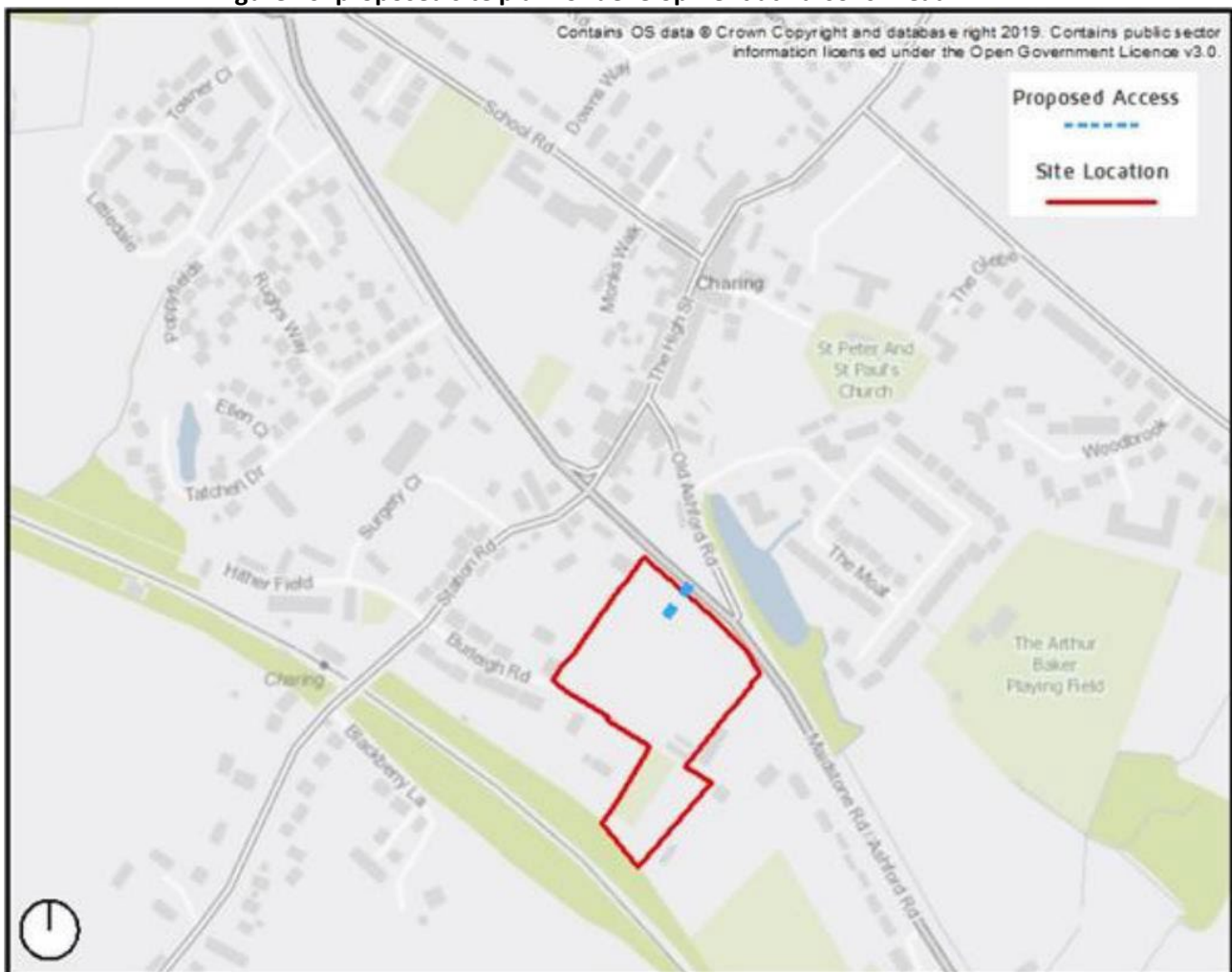
The parish council also believes that there is a strong case for Ashford Borough to contribute a

part of the money it received from the government under the “New Homes Bonus” scheme for local authorities, given the contribution Charing will be making to Ashford’s housing targets and to ensure the success of this major project. (We acknowledge that the scheme is currently under review.)

A business plan providing great detail on the new facilities project will be submitted at the time of the outline planning application, and the financial terms will also be the subject of legal agreements between the Parish Council, the current landowner, and the ultimate developer.

It is acknowledged that the cost to the developer of building the community centre, even with the parish council contribution, could be onerous. There may therefore be a need for the developer to seek relief from some of the other normal infrastructure requirements, given the importance of the proposed facility to the parish and the benefits it will bring. This will be assessed under the terms of Policy IMP2 of Ashford Borough’s local plan.

Figure 20: proposed site plan for development at Parsons Mead



Policy H1: Land at Parsons Mead

A key objective of the Neighbourhood Plan is to provide a new community facility at Parsons Mead. The primary uses for the facility shall include community use, commercial use, uses promoting health and wellbeing, and events space for a wide range of social, educational and recreational activities. Alternative compatible uses may also be appropriate.

The site is also allocated for new residential development, with an indicative capacity of 48 dwellings.

Proposals for the development of the Parsons Mead site shall:

- a) be planned and designed in such a way as to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Charing Conservation Area and its setting, in accordance with Policy ENV14 of the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030;
- b) retain and enhance the existing landscape features of the site, where possible;
- c) provide safe vehicular and pedestrian access to serve the proposed residential development and the proposed Community Centre;
- d) provide adequate car parking including electric vehicle charging points for the proposed residential development in accordance with the parking standards set out in policy TRA3(a) of the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030.
- e) provide adequate on-site car parking including electric vehicle charging points for the staff and users of the proposed Community Centre;
- f) include a full Viability Assessment as part of any planning application(s) for the development of the site;
- g) ensure that the amenities of neighbouring residential properties are safeguarded;
- h) protect the alignment of public footpath AW349 which crosses the site;
- i) include an Archaeological Assessment of the site, and if necessary, include a programme for archaeological mitigation;
- j) take account of all other relevant policies in this Plan and the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030, as they affect the specific development proposals.

Housing need and allocations in Charing Heath

This Plan allocates two sites in Charing Heath.

Charing Heath is a small settlement with limited facilities. It is therefore not suitable for major development. In Ashford's Local Plan, it is listed as a settlement in which limited infill within the confines is possible, but not outside them.

Until recently, the development which has

occurred in Charing Heath has tended to be larger, "executive" housing. Discussions with residents showed a need for a limited amount of smaller or more modest family houses, including bungalows, suitable for younger people including first-time buyers, for younger families, and for older people. This would help to rebalance the settlement's demographics. Therefore, some limited development is appropriate as described in policy H2.

Policy H2: Housing in Charing Heath

- Small-scale residential developments will be supported on appropriate sites within the confines of Charing Heath as defined in Figure 24.
- Proposals for such developments should take account of policy H13 in the Plan and its supporting text.

Land next to Crofters

The land next to Crofters is one allocated site. It is a flat rectangular area mainly surrounded by hedges. It is within the proposed confines. To the west is a dilapidated barn, and to the east Blossoms mobile home/caravan site. Access is

off a straight section of road. This land is proposed for First Homes (homes for first-time buyers discounted by a minimum of 30% against market value [see 11.8.5 including policy H5]) although it may include a small number of open-market houses as enabling development.

Figure 21: Land next to Crofters



Policy H3: Allocation of land next to Crofters

Development will be permitted for an indicative capacity of 9 dwellings on the Land next to Crofters, provided:

- At least 5 of the dwellings are First Homes, and the remainder predominantly one- to two-bedroom dwellings.
- An appropriate road access and sufficient residential parking are provided.
- Footpath AW14, which crosses the site, is preserved.
- The provisions of Policy HOU3A in Ashford's adopted Local Plan are met.

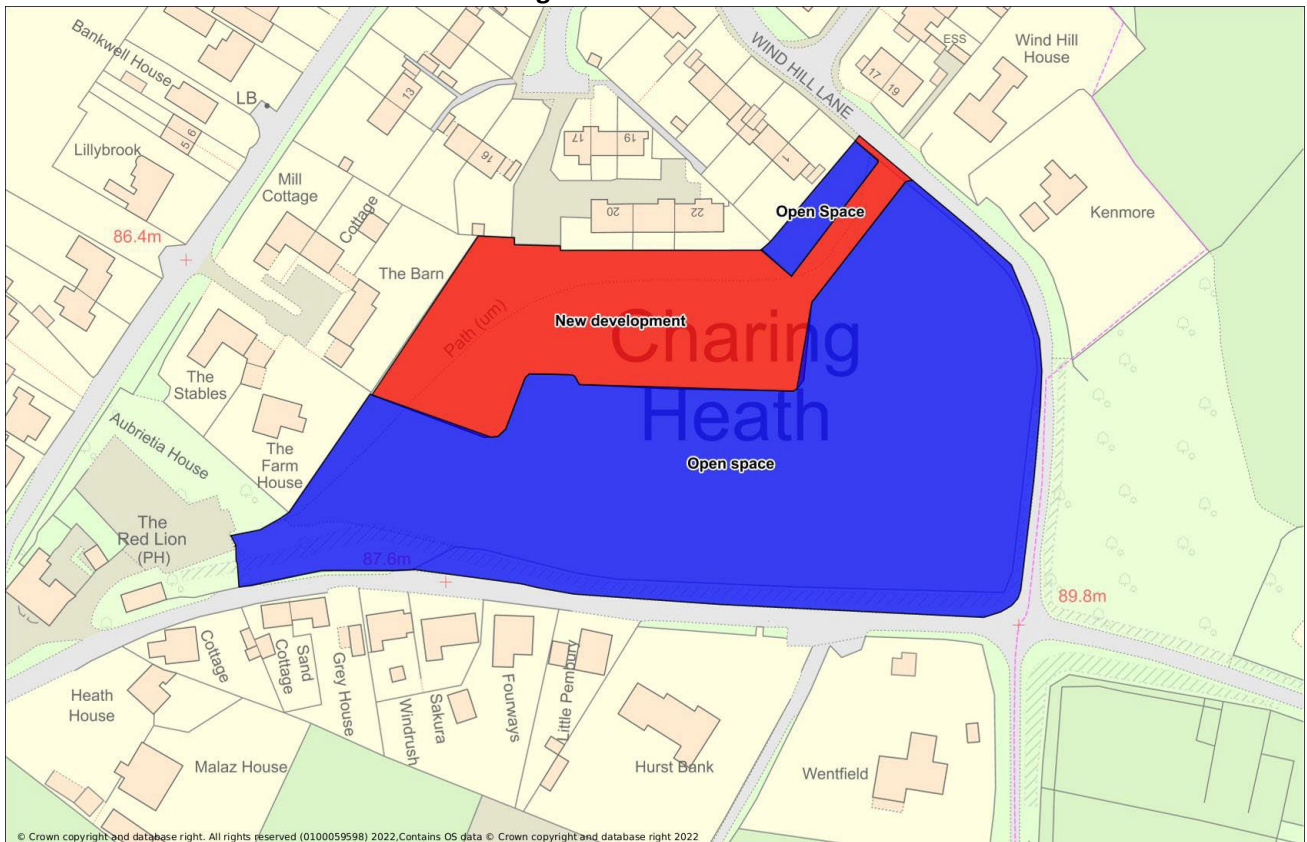
Land rear of Red Lion, and north of Charing Heath Road

At a late stage in the preparation of this Plan, a potential additional site was brought to the attention of the Parish Council and the NPSC. The site proposed lies just outside the previously-decided confines of Charing Heath (see Figure 24), so would not be permitted under Local Plan Policy HOU5. However, if the site *is* permitted, the owners have offered to give land to the Parish Council for public benefit, as well as constructing a

route which could be part of the Charing-Charing Heath Greenway (see section 14.1). It is appropriate, therefore, that an additional policy be added to the Plan to enable these advantages to be realised.

The site is on land which is owned by Shepherd Neame and is behind the Red Lion pub. A planning application (21/02055/AS) was submitted to Ashford Borough Council in November 2021. The proposed Plan is shown below.

Figure 22: Red Lion P.H.



The area is currently green space which, although privately owned, has been used informally by residents for dog walking and other recreation. If planning permission is granted for the proposed development – approximate area shown in red on the map – Shepherd Neame is willing to transfer the remainder of the land – in blue – to the Parish Council. This could therefore ensure that the remainder can be used in perpetuity for recreation or other public benefit. Shepherd Neame will also ensure that there is a route across the land to the Red Lion, which can be part of the proposed Charing/Charing Heath Greenway. This would take the final part of the Greenway away from Charing

Heath Road to a pleasanter and safer route. Finally Shepherd Neame is prepared to gift to the Parish Council a further stretch of land on which Charing Heath and Lenham Heath Memorial Hall stands.

Plans currently proposed are for the type of housing needed in Charing Heath: there are two bungalows, one 3-bedroom chalet, four terraced 3- bedroom houses, and two 2- bedroom houses. Planning Permission would be subject to satisfactory offset for nitrates and phosphates to offset the impact of these on the Stodmarsh lakes (see section 10.10.2).

Policy H4: Red Lion P.H

Proposals for the residential development of land to the rear of the Red Lion P.H. at Charing Heath, with an indicative capacity of nine dwellings, as shown coloured red on Figure 22, will be supported subject to:

- i) the houses include at least two bungalows, and a further bungalow or house with both living rooms and a bedroom and bathroom on the ground floor;
- ii) remaining houses are small in scale with either two or three bedrooms only;
- iii) The land coloured blue on Figure 22 is allocated for use as public open space for recreational purposes or for other public benefit, and includes the land occupied by the Charing Heath and Lenham Heath Memorial Hall.
- iv) the development shall provide a pedestrian and cycle route that connects the site to the proposed Charing/Charing Heath Greenway via Wind Hill Lane;
- v) other relevant provisions of this Plan, and, in particular, policy C2, are adhered to.

First Homes

First Homes 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 (see below);

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).

Policy H5: First Homes

All large-scale developments should meet the Government's guidance on the proportion of affordable housing, which should be specified as First Homes.

This plan specifically allocates a site (see Policy H3) in Charing Heath for the development of not less than 5 First Homes.

Size of new developments

The Local Plan effectively stipulates two large estates. S55 and S28, immediately to the west of Poppyfields, will together provide around 200 dwellings; the indicative size of the "Orbit" older people's accommodation, and the open market section of the land south of the Arthur Baker playing fields (S29), is around 90 (increased in

the latest application to around 110) dwellings in the LP. Larger estates were not favoured by residents as they are considered likely to damage the character of the village. This level of growth raises issues of sustainability, so, to avoid future damage to the character of the village, no further large-scale developments should be approved during the plan period unless they comply with Policy H6.

Policy H6: Larger new developments

Proposals for any larger-scale residential developments within the Plan area that are not presently identified by site allocations in this Plan or in the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030 will only be supported if the proposals demonstrate that:

- a) the development will not lead to any adverse impacts upon existing community and transportation infrastructure provision within the Plan area; and
- b) the development will not result in the loss of any land, that contributes positively to the character, form, heritage, or attractiveness of any part of the Plan area; **and**
- c) the development will not lead to adverse impacts upon any sites of nature conservation importance within the Plan area; and
- d) the development will not lead to any adverse impacts upon the designated heritage assets within the Plan area; and
 - e) the proposals satisfy the requirements of Policies HOU3a and HOU5 of the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030; and,
- f) Provides appropriate contributions to any necessary community and transportation infrastructure improvements within the Plan area, in accordance with Policy C2 in the Plan and Policies COM1 and IMP1 in the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030.

10.11.9 Rest of site S55

Site S55 is a site to the west of Poppyfields listed in the Local Plan for residential development for an indicative capacity of 180 dwellings (see Figure 19).

The main part of S55 “Land South of the Swan” has outline permission for up to 135 houses. Given the extent of development Charing is taking, it is desirable that S55, as a whole, does not exceed approximately 180 houses. Further, S55/2 will be an edge-of-village location, and is more visible from the AONB than Land South of the Swan. It is therefore appropriate that the development is not too dense, to allow sufficient landscaping.

Site S29 and Parsons Mead should both be predominately smaller houses. Current proposals for the “Land South of the Swan” part of S55 suggest that it will be 2-, 3-, or 4-bedroom houses. Between them, these sites should help to rebalance housing stock in Charing. However, none currently looks set to provide bungalows, which are a type of dwelling badly needed in Charing. Providing bungalows rather than two-storey dwellings will help to screen the development in views from the AONB. An alternative type of house could be a chalet style.

The site should make an appropriate contribution to the proposed community centre and the proposed Greenway. Since houses on it will be at the limit of or beyond an appropriate walking distance to the village centre, a contribution to village-centre car parking should also be made. Alternatively, a contribution to improving pedestrian crossings of the A20 would be appropriate.

The parish needs allotments. The only current allotment site will be subsumed by the Parsons Mead project, so a replacement is needed. In addition, there will inevitably be some demand for these from new residents. This site would be an appropriate place for them if no other site can be found. It will need a water supply. No financial contribution would be needed, since finance is adequately provided through S106 agreements on other sites. (A “man-shed” – that is an informal shed-style building where people can carry out repairs and DIY activities, and also get training in these skills – has been suggested by some residents, and, if space permits, adjacent to allotments would be a suitable place.)

The new site should be designed so that informal green open space on it links to that on the rest of site S55.

Policy H7: Local Plan residential site allocation S55 – land to the west of Poppyfields, Charing

Residential development of the second phase of Local Plan site allocation S55 (S55/2) as shown on Figure 19 as site E will be supported if it:

- a. meets the requirements of policy S55 in Ashford’s Local Plan;
- b. provides an indicative capacity of 180 dwellings less the number built in “Land south of the Swan”;
- c. provides at least 10 bungalows of varying sizes to cater for an ageing population in Charing wishing to downsize but remain in the area;
- d. provides appropriate contributions to any necessary community and transportation infrastructure improvements within the Plan area, in accordance with Policy C2 in the Plan and Policies COM1 and IMP1 in the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030;
- e. it provides approximately 0.5 hectare of land for use as allotments provided that the need for such allotments is demonstrated by the Parish Council; and
- f. provides a safe footpath linking to the existing footpath network, and ensures safe walking to the proposed new community centre.

Affordable housing and housing need

The Rural Housing Enabler for Action with Communities in Rural Kent (reference 8) surveyed housing need in Charing in January 2021 (results published in April). Surveys were posted to every home in the parish (those living away seeking housing in Charing were also entitled to reply), and there was a 25% response rate. Main findings were:

- 19 households need affordable housing – 8 of these being older people. All of these lived in the village or had a strong local connection. This is a substantial reduction from the number (42) identified in the 2014 survey.
- Of the 11 working-age households needing affordable housing, 6 were single people, one couple, and 4 families. 28 older households needed new homes now or in the near future. 20 of these required open-market properties, either to downsize or to meet their needs. 11 of these were single people and 17 were couples.

Affordable homes comprise social, rented, and intermediate (shared ownership) housing, provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the open market.

While the need for affordable housing overall is limited, there is a continuing need for accommodation for single people and for older people, a number of whom need bungalows. There is a need for both affordable and open-market housing for older people.

The AECOM Housing Needs Assessment (Project 103) looked at the *type* of housing required. Taking account of the needs and characteristics of Charing and the “Ashford Rural North” area, it supported the requirement for 40% affordable housing on larger sites that is in the Local Plan, but recommended that the 40% affordable housing required across the Charing neighbourhood plan area should be divided as follows:

- 40% affordable/social rented products
- 60% affordable home ownership products of which
 - 35% Shared Ownership;
 - 15% Starter Homes; and
 - 10% Discounted Market Housing.

As this was a specific local study, it was considered to be more representative of local needs than the split shown in Policy HOU1 of the ABC Local Plan.

So, for example, if, in the Plan period, the new housing build is say 100, the affordable content would be 40 units, which would comprise:

- 16 affordable/social rented units
- 14 shared ownership
- 6 starter homes and
- 4 discounted market homes.

This is a higher proportion of affordable/social rent, relative to other forms of affordable property, than is currently found in Ashford’s policy HOU1, but justified by the results from AECOM’s assessment of local need.

Policy H8: Affordable housing

40% of new dwellings in developments of 10 or more dwellings, or sites of 0.5 hectare or more, shall be affordable housing, in accordance with Policy HOU1 in the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030. All proposals are expected to meet their full affordable housing provision on-site.

The tenure mix of affordable housing to be provided shall be agreed with the Borough Council, but will include social rented homes, and affordable home ownership schemes, including shared ownership and First Homes. The proposed tenure mix should take account of the Housing Needs Assessment 2017 (RPR 103) prepared alongside this Plan.

Should independently verified viability evidence establish that it is not possible to deliver the affordable housing in full as required by this policy, and the viability position is agreed by the Borough Council, the Borough Council will consider on a case-by-case basis flexibility in the provision of affordable housing in accordance with clause 2 of Policy HOU1.

In a Charing Parish Council study of November 2020, 57% of the residents in Poppyfields affordable housing had a local connection* with

Charing. On the November 2020 housing waiting list, there were 16 people over the age of 55 years that had a connection to Charing.

Policy H9: Local-needs housing

A minimum of 50% of all new affordable housing provided in the Plan area, either on developments proposed in the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030 or in this Plan shall be made available initially to persons with a local connection and whose needs are not met by the open housing market.

The local connection to be considered in relation to this policy shall be confirmed by the Borough Council in accordance with the requirements of Policy HOU2 in the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030 and the accompanying guidance.

Policy H10: Local-needs housing on exception sites

Proposals for the development of local needs housing schemes on suitable sites beyond the village confines of Charing village, where residential development would not normally be permitted by other policies, will be supported, provided that:

- the need is clear; *and*
- such development would not adversely affect the character of the area and surrounding landscape; *and*
- such development would not have a negative impact on local infrastructure and amenities; *and*
- the scale of development is compatible with the character and density of the surrounding area.

Type and size of new houses

Charing has twice the proportion of detached houses (44%) as the average for England (22.3%): It also has around half as many terraced homes – 11.5% compared to the England average of 24.5% [figures from section 7.1.1 of AECOM HNA]. The village is a much-sought-after rural location with excellent communication networks, so house prices attract a considerable premium. Returns for developers are larger as house prices increase, and this may explain the increasing number of planning

applications for development in the village of Charing and the parish.

The housing stock needs rebalancing with the construction of smaller houses, chiefly two- and three-bedroom properties and bungalows, to attract younger families and enable older people to downsize. This will also require more affordable housing, which should be fully integrated into the community. Because of this, and also the wishes of residents (see Figure 14), we are including the following policy.

Policy H11: Size of homes

Developments of 10 or more houses will not be supported unless they approximate the following mix:

- 10% one bedroom
- 40% two bedrooms
- 40% three bedrooms
- 10% four or more bedrooms,

unless viability or other material considerations show a robust justification for a different mix, or other policies in this Plan indicate a different mix.

This policy is compatible with the AECOM Housing Needs Assessment (paragraph 136) which stated clearly that housing needs require "...2-3 bedroom units with a particular focus on bungalows and terraced housing, to compensate for their relative under provision...".

Further, it meets the requirement of local residents, where the highest response in the community questionnaire to housing need was for "smaller property".

It redresses the housing imbalance in the village/parish.

It produces smaller and therefore more affordable properties.

It meets the requirement for those residents that wish to downsize.

Retirement housing provision

Demographics show an ageing population in the parish, which will lead to an increasing need for housing provision for the elderly. While many residents are happy to continue into retirement in their current homes, there will be a need for alternative accommodation:

- to suit those who have a wish to downsize, due to declining family size or capability to look after their current property;
- secure 'sheltered or age-related' housing for those capable of living independently or with limited support; and
- care-home provision for those no longer capable of independent living.

National standards for accessible homes and the Local Plan policy HOU14 should therefore be followed.

Mixed development

Research for this Plan has shown declining employment in Charing village over the last five years, while employment nationally has been growing. Achieving a sustainable Plan will require new employment opportunities, not just for current residents, but for the expected increase in the adult population over the Plan period. For this reason, it should become an aspiration for all large developments to have a mix of residential and commercial properties.

Policy H12: Mixed-use development

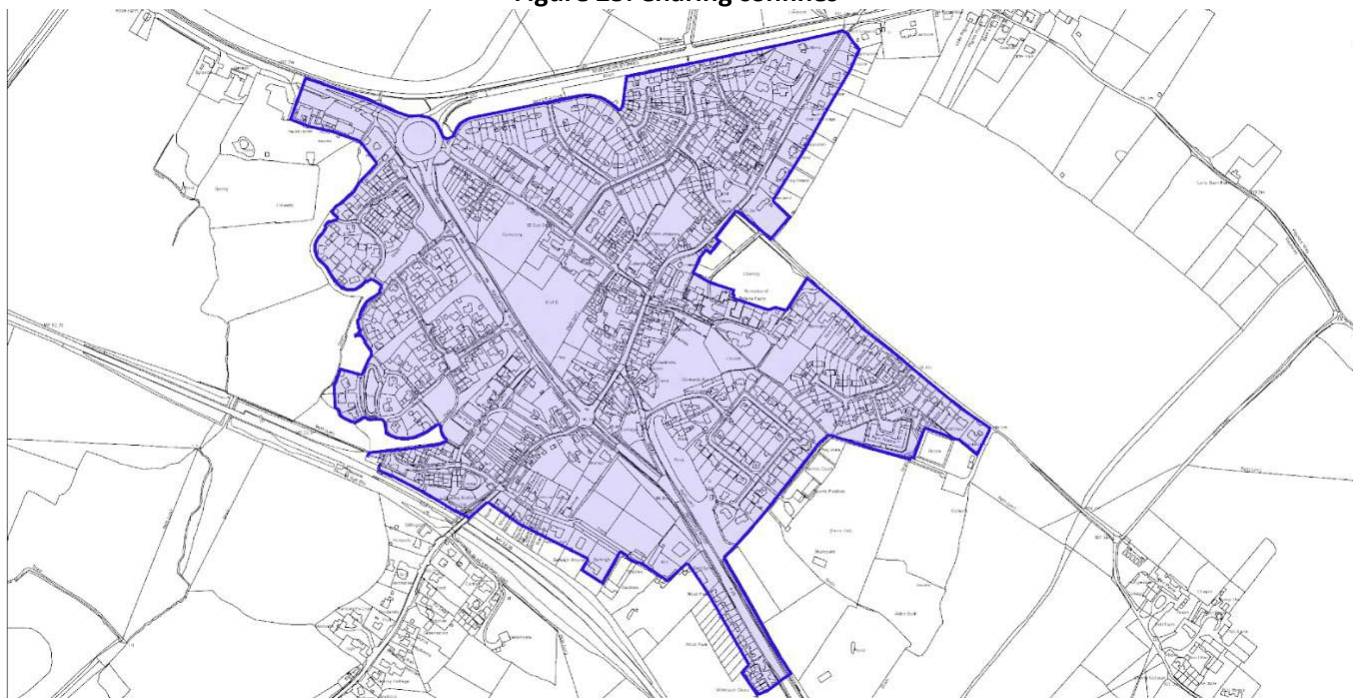
Proposed developments of 10 dwellings and above which provide a mix of both new dwellings and commercial floorspace within Use Class E, to create local employment opportunities for residents and reduce traffic movements, will be supported, subject to the proposals being planned and designed to take account of other relevant policies in this Plan and the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030 and not leading to any loss of residential amenities in the vicinity of the development.

10.11.10 Village confines

Village confines include the existing main built-up area, but exclude open spaces, rear gardens which about open countryside, peripheral buildings such as free-standing individual or groups of dwellings, and nearby farm buildings or other structures which are not closely related to the main built-up area. Outside this area, all land is regarded as open countryside. Permission for residential development outside village confines will normally only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

This therefore meant that the confines needed mapping. Charing NP opted to produce maps for Charing and Charing Heath. The draft confines for Charing were submitted to residents. 40 people provided valid responses. 32 (80%) approved the confines without qualification. Of the remaining 8, three people suggested one small change to exclude the allotments at the end of Burleigh Road, and this was adopted. The final version of Charing village submitted to ABC, and adopted in this Plan, is shown here:

Figure 23: Charing confines



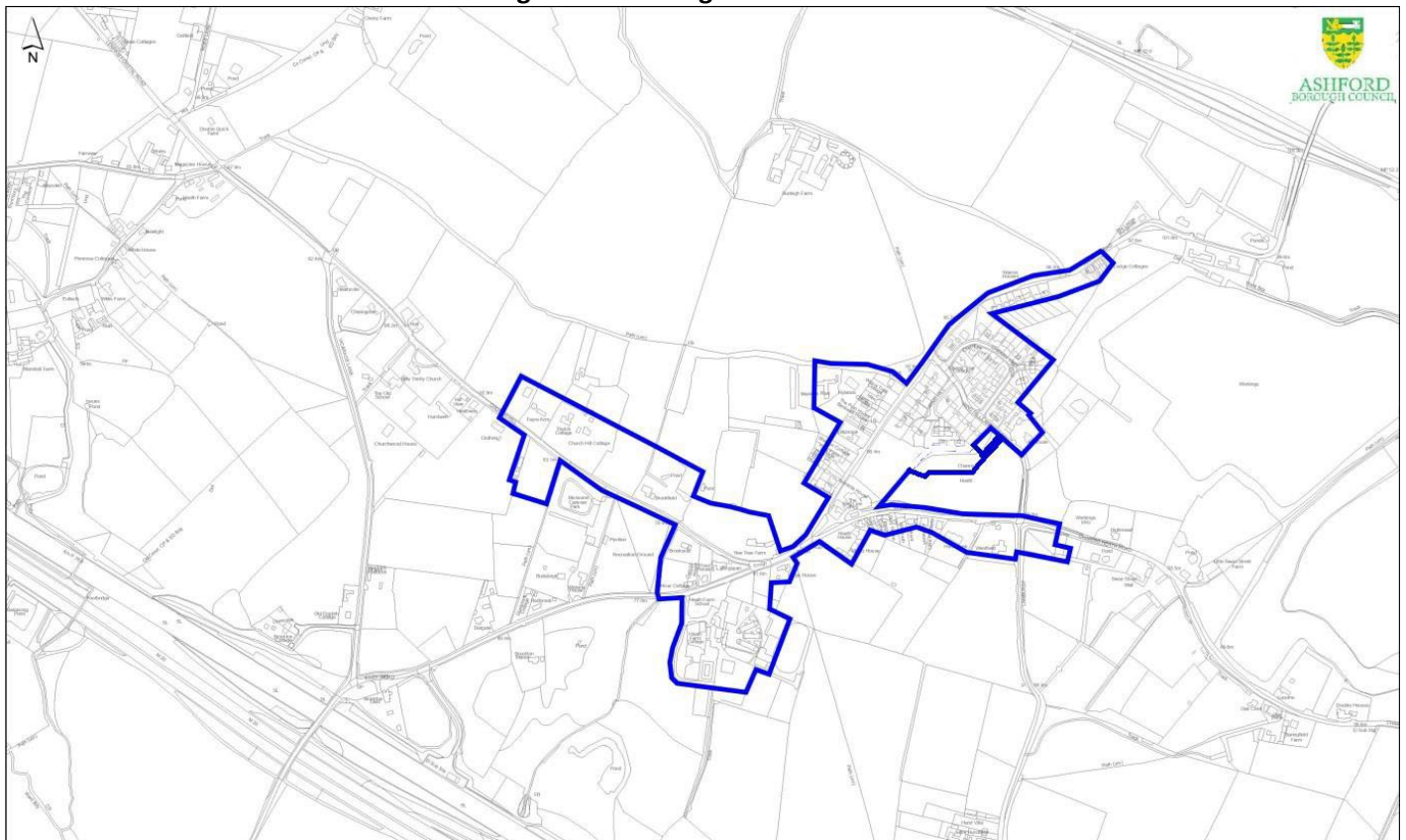
For Charing Heath, where the precise lines of the confines are particularly sensitive, two versions were submitted to residents in a survey (as with Charing, this was carried out online with Survey Monkey and via a paper questionnaire at the Post Office). One was more restricted than the other.

30 people responded. There was a small majority in favour of the more restricted option (13 to 11). 6 people made comments. 5 simply suggested a small change in the vicinity of Brookfield. The final respondent suggested that the confines should be

much larger and include all properties in Charing Heath.

The confines proposed are therefore the more restricted version plus a small change in the vicinity of Brookfield. The final version adopted for this Plan is shown below, although a small adjustment will need to be made to take account of the late allocation of land behind the Red Lion, assuming the proposed development obtains planning permission (see section 11.8.4).

Figure 24: Charing Heath confines



It was considered that these village confines were essential going forward, for the following reasons:

1. To limit the potential for future development in Charing village and Charing Heath.
2. To protect the countryside from encroachment of land uses more characteristic of built-up areas, and to conserve and enhance cultural heritage and natural beauty.
3. To maintain the compact nature of the settlement.
4. To respect the historic core.
5. To help sustain the identity of separate communities, and maintain the local distinctiveness of settlements and traditional built form.

6. To allow small-scale incremental growth in certain areas to assist in the longer-term sustainability and vitality of the village.
7. To identify land available for commercial development, to stop the further loss of business and employment opportunities and provide work for new residents.
8. To respect natural boundaries such as trees, hedges, springs, streams, and rivers.
9. To preserve current open spaces.
10. To ensure development is directed to more sustainable locations, both in terms of accessibility to and support of existing services and transport, and in terms of landscape.

Policy H13: Housing in Charing Heath

Proposals for new residential development within the village confines of Charing Heath, as defined in Figure 24, must ensure that the development integrates satisfactorily with the existing form and pattern of the settlement, taking account of other relevant policies in this Plan.

10.11.11 Infill

Charing Parish has an open, rural character with many wooded areas and open spaces, as well as the Kent Downs AONB which makes an important contribution to the local character. It is important

that infill development does not destroy this essentially open character, and does not adversely affect the natural beauty and landscape throughout the parish.

Policy H14: Infill development

Infill development within the village confines of Charing as defined in Figure 23 and Charing Heath as defined in Figure 24 will be supported provided that:

- a. It is sympathetic in scale, style, and location to the form and character of the village and surrounding area.
- b. It would not create a significant adverse impact on the amenity of existing residents.
- c. It would not result in significant harm to, or the loss of, public or private land that contributes positively to the local character of the area.
- d. It would not result in significant harm to the landscape, heritage assets, or biodiversity interests.
- e. It is able to be safely accessed from the local road network and that additional traffic generated can be accommodated on the road network.
- f. It has safe pedestrian access.
- g. It would not displace an active use such as employment, leisure or community facility.
- h. It has been planned and designed to take account of all other relevant policies in this Plan concerning new development within the village confines of Charing and Charing Heath.

10.11.12 Housing outside the Charing village confines

During the formulation of this plan, grave concerns were expressed about major development spreading into the countryside around the village, adversely affecting the village character, impacting negatively on the environment resulting from greater vehicle movements, stretching facilities and amenities to an extent that existing residents would suffer a welfare deficit, and changing village life from an integrated

society to that of a dormitory town.

Charing will grow in terms of new housing and population by over 50% in the Plan period, principally through the construction of two very large adjoining 'estates' adjacent to the A20. The village is ill-equipped to deal with further large estates outside the village confines, but would be sensitive to small-scale development outside the confines in limited circumstances, as detailed in policy H15.

Policy H15: New development, including extensions outside village confines

- a. Sensitive small-scale development, compliant with design policies in this Plan, adjoining or close to the confines of Charing village will be supported.
- b. Development elsewhere in the countryside will only be supported if it meets the requirements of Policy HOU5 in the Local Plan.

10.11.13 Development in gardens

Charing has a great many houses with large rear gardens; this Plan outlines a policy to minimise the over-development of garden land, in order to

preserve and enhance the open and rural character of the settlements of the Plan area.

Policy H16: Development in residential gardens

Development proposals involving the complete or partial redevelopment of residential garden land will be supported, provided the proposed development complies with Local Plan space standards as laid out in Local Plan Policy HOU15. Windfall development will be supported if it complies with Policies HOU3a and HOU5 and does not result in significant harm to the character of the surrounding area or harm wildlife corridors and biodiversity habitats.

The use of rear gardens for new housing within the centre of Charing village will only be supported provided that it does not harm the character of the village.

10.11.14 Development on groundwater protection zones

Charing Parish has a number of Groundwater Protection Zones which lead to the supply of fresh drinking water to Charing residents and others further afield.

A Hydrological Appraisal of Charing's Future Development and Public Water Supply was undertaken by Water Resources Associates (see reference 9). They concluded "The proposals for large-scale development across an important Chalk scarp spring-line demonstrates an inherent lack of understanding of hydrological processes. They would have an adverse impact on public water

supply and environmental baseflows in the Upper Stour. Groundwater discharge at the Chalk-GC spring-line and Gault Clay run-off at Charing provides a significant contribution to the water available in the Folkestone Beds aquifer used for public water supply and baseflow in the Upper Stour.

The aim of SuDs is to promote water infiltration and water retention so that run-off rates are similar to pre-development conditions: in practice, a natural regime is rarely achieved with large-scale developments."

It was concluded that a policy was needed (see policy H17).

Policy H17: Development on groundwater protection zones

a. Where a site for development overlies a Groundwater Protection Zone, an appropriate site investigation and risk assessment will be required to be undertaken, in consultation with the Environment Agency, *prior* to the grant of planning permission.

b. Proposed housing site S55 in Charing Village contains Groundwater Protection Zones, and all proposals for the development of this site will be required to confirm to the satisfaction of the Borough Council and the Environment Agency that any development will not contaminate drinking water supply sources or create flooding risks.

10.11.15 Housing strategy and policies meet general conformity to the Local Plan

This Plan is in general conformity with the Local Plan, and in many ways enhances the plan:

- The plan supports a broad mix of housing to meet known needs of first-time buyers and downsizers wishing to remain within the community they were brought up in (see 11.3).
- Proportionately, Charing will see the construction of more housing than Ashford borough as a whole, by taking 3.6% of the Borough Objectively Assessed Need. Charing had 2.6% of houses in the borough at the start of the Plan period (see 11.4).
- While the Borough has been experiencing 167 windfall dwellings per annum, Charing has experienced 8, or 4.8% of the Borough *total*, so once again has proportionately experienced a greater rate (see Table 8).
- As one of the more sustainable villages in the Borough, Charing has responded positively to major development, but with expected new housing exceeding the Local Plan requirement by around 100%, there are issues of sustainability. To overcome this, new facilities and infrastructure are proposed on an allocated site at Parsons Mead (see 11.8.1).
- This plan supports the Local Plan approach of not building in the wider countryside but does express concerns about continuously extending development from within the confines out into the countryside which will damage the village character.
- The Local Plan allocates 235 houses for Charing. In addition, the age-restricted Orbit development of 46 flats and five bungalows is near completion. This plan has estimated housing growth to be of the order of 650 new dwellings over the Plan period, and 540 from 2021 to 2030, significantly exceeding the requirement in the Local Plan (see 11.5 again, as well as 11.1, 11.2, and 11.4).

10.12 Design Policies

Considerable information became available to assist with the development of effective design policies. Much of the work undertaken in preparing the Charing Parish Design Statement in 2002 is very relevant today in terms of development, and is therefore confirmed in this Plan. The AECOM Heritage and Character Assessment identified some important issues, and parishioners made their views clear in the community questionnaire.

Further, with six large developments planned involving the construction of over 300 new dwellings, there is a real opportunity to enhance the

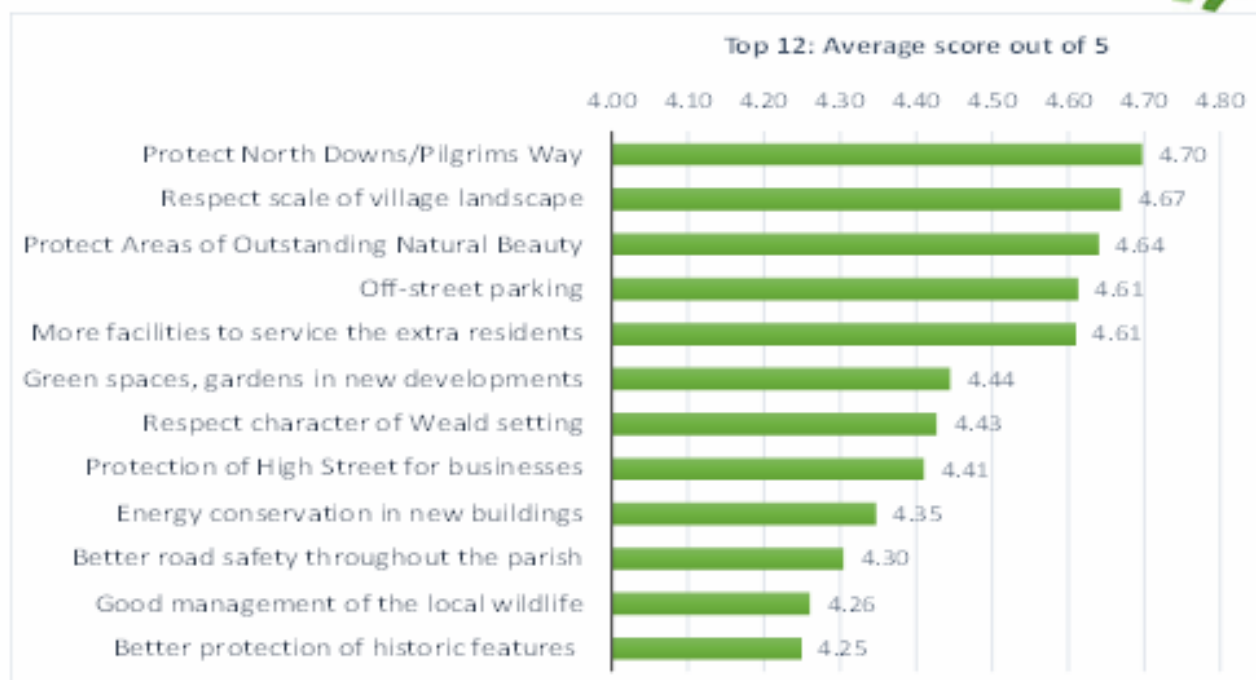
built environment and improve the quality of the design to fully reflect the character of the village.

10.12.1 Parishioners' views

Parishioners were asked, in the community questionnaire, what would be important when building new developments in the parish. The results are shown in Figure 25. The three main issues all relate the benefits of living in beautiful countryside, including: protection of the North Downs AONB and the Pilgrim's Way, and respect for the scale of the village landscape.

Figure 25: Important issues when building

What's important when building



10.12.2 The AECOM heritage and character assessment

This assessment identified issues regarding design of recent housing in the Plan area including:

- Standard design of modern housing that is out of proportion with existing buildings within Charing village, and does not add to sense of place; and
- new developments on the edge of Charing village that are expanding into the surrounding open landscape, and consequently affecting the village's setting, as well as that of the Kent Downs AONB.

10.12.3 The Charing Parish Design Statement

This 2002 statement laid down recommendations with which developers should comply. Where these are still relevant, they have been introduced into our policies.

Policy D1: Good design

Proposals for all forms of new development within the Plan area should seek to achieve high-quality design, whilst also demonstrating that they recognise local distinctiveness and traditional patterns of development within the Plan area, such as the scale and setting of buildings, architectural detailing, and materials, and the protection of important views and heritage assets. Where appropriate to the specific nature and future use of the proposals, the following design principles should be taken into account in the planning and design of new developments:

Water conservation:

There is an expectation that new homes should be designed to achieve a maximum water efficiency of 110 litres per person per day.

Climate change:

New buildings, infrastructure, and landscape should be resilient to climate change and other environmental threats in the long term. Policies and plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate-change impacts, such as periods of increased and reduced precipitation (i. e. surface water flood risk and water use/supply); increased temperatures (through use of shading and air-conditioning vegetation, including green walls, pale-coloured materials, positioning of units, use of water features); landscape design for biodiversity (utilising connectivity and complex topography, shade, and wetlands); optimising air quality (utilising extensive new woodland and street tree planting and avoiding areas of 'still air'); reducing fire risk (through avoiding conifers and non-native trees which create a heavy litter layer); and enhancing biosecurity (avoiding invasive non-native trees and shrubs), utilising local-provenance native planting and natural regeneration while enabling dynamic natural processes across new natural habitats such as floodplain, woodland and scrub which function without human intervention.

Sustainable design:

Sustainable design and construction methods, and the incorporation of renewable and decentralised power generation, must be considered, to ensure that the development remains resilient into the future, does not contribute to climate change and local air pollution, facilitates affordable utility bills, and delivers resilient local energy supplies.

New buildings:

Use should be made of simple design and proportions, reflecting the locality in scale, form, and detail. They should generally be of one or two storeys and not more than three, with a variety of roof heights. *Roofs* should be usually of plain clay tile at appropriate pitch, with a mixture of hipped and gabled forms, together with chimneys and dormer windows conforming to local details. *Walls* should match local colouring, with forms of local facing to achieve variety, e. g. painted brickwork, painted weatherboarding, tile hanging, flint, or ragstone. *Windows* should normally be or resemble white-painted joinery, preferably two- or three-light casement windows. *Doors* should be simply panelled or vertically battened under flat hoods or within plain tiled

gabled porches. *Garages* of a flat-roofed, prefabricated concrete box type are not acceptable; they should complement associated housing. Open-sided “car ports” will be preferred, to encourage use for parking rather than storage.

Extensions, conversions, and alterations:

Should reflect the character of the existing building and its setting, and be carried out with similar materials and detail. Replacement doors and windows should similarly mirror the existing, and avoid inappropriate materials and styles.

Surfacing:

Surfacing of large areas (parking areas, paths, etc., though not roads) with concrete or tarmac is discouraged. Brick or block paving should be encouraged in areas of light use; pea shingle on hoggin would be a viable alternative. In general, a permeable or semi-permeable surface would assist with minimising run-off and localised flooding.

New industrial developments:

Should be considered not only in context with the locality, but also in environmental terms of noise, smell, and light pollution.

Boundaries:

Ragstone and flint with brickwork should be encouraged for screen walling. Where fencing has to be used, a living screen of planting should be established on the public side. Native species should be encouraged in rural areas, in conjunction with paling fences of natural colour. Picket fencing is acceptable in other situations.

Proposals which fail to demonstrate good design and appropriate regard to other policies in this Plan, for example on matters regarding landscaping, village character and biodiversity, will not be supported.

Policy D2: Good, imaginative, and innovative design

Development proposals which demonstrably address the following considerations will be supported in principle:

- a. The incorporation of outstanding and innovative designs which are complementary to the surroundings;
- b. Housing adjacent to service roads should be at variable distances from the verge, to avoid monotony, provide privacy, and reduce the impact of car parking;
- c. Terraced residential developments should normally not exceed six houses;
- d. All developments should be planned in the context of the site and its surroundings, taking account of existing developments, natural features such as trees, hedgerows, watercourses, and wildlife habitats.

Policy D3: Street furniture

Where appropriate, development proposals will be expected to take into account the following considerations:

- a. Materials for street furniture or railings should be appropriate to their site, particularly in the Conservation Area.
- b. Poles, wires, aerials, and satellite dishes should be discreetly sited in all new developments, and if possible concealed when alterations take place to older properties.
- c. External lighting fittings, including street and security lighting, should avoid excessive glare and utilise solar energy and LED lamps wherever possible.
- d. Village approaches should be improved by restricting the number and size of signs and advertisements, and increasing tree planting and boundary screening.

Charing is a rural area with the Kent Downs AONB to the north, and farmland to the south. Much of the Kent Downs and the farmlands enjoy low levels of light pollution, an important aspect of their landscape character and tranquillity that it is important to conserve. With a large proportion of

new development planned in the setting of the AONB, it is vital that all obtrusive lighting, which harms residential amenity and the diurnal rhythms of biodiversity, is avoided. The Local Plan policy ENV4 should apply to all developments in Charing.

10.13 The Plan's Flagship Programme at Parsons Mead

The policy supporting this proposal is detailed in policy H1 and the Housing section of the Plan.

Charing is likely to experience one of the fastest and heaviest housing growth rates in the borough, and probably in Kent, during the Plan period. This is certain to create a welfare deficit unless infrastructure, facilities, and amenities are substantially improved. In order to ensure sustainable development, the proposed new community centre at Parsons Mead will include a health and well-being centre, new business units, and a new car park, together with a new housing development focusing on mainly smaller dwellings.

10.13.1 Setting the scene

Housing and growth is estimated at over 600 new houses during the Plan period, which is 55% more than required by the AECOM housing needs assessment. To cope with this level of growth, adequate infrastructure, facilities, and amenities need to be in place, and the Parsons Mead project is designed to meet much of this demand.

Current facilities are inadequate to meet expected growth in population.

House prices are increasingly becoming unaffordable for local people.

There has been a downward trend in jobs. In the 5 years to 2018, 9% of jobs were lost in the village as a whole, and 57% in the village centre. The Local Plan makes no provision for job creation in Charing, other than transient construction trades.

Number of cars in the parish is estimated to increase by 45%.

Cumulative development in Charing and the surrounding area may well lead to increased air pollution.

No new vehicle parking spaces have been created around Charing village, and this is negatively affecting the remaining few businesses in and around the High Street.

Traffic volumes, speeds, parking, and congestion are growing issues.

While Charing Medical Practice has plans to expand its facilities to cater for the expected population growth in Charing and surrounding villages, additional off-site accommodation for ancillary services would be welcome.

Charing is increasingly becoming a commuter town.

10.13.2 Existing facilities

The village has six facilities for holding public meetings. Charing Primary School is rarely available. Of the other five:

- the *Methodist Church* has limited space, and, outside its religious activities, tends to hold small group events. It has no car parking.
- The *church barn* is used for some public meetings, but has virtually no car parking and has limited capacity.
- The *sports pavilion* and the *scout hut* have significant parking but also have limited seating capacity.
- The parish hall has the largest capacity, but has no car parking, and very limited facilities for the disabled.

The current facilities are not conducive to the holding of important major public meetings, and cannot cater for *current* demand safely: certainly, the parish hall is oversubscribed at many public events (see picture below), and the Parish Clerk has had to turn down applications for events due to the limited size and the lack of facilities for disabled people.

This situation will worsen with a 50% increase in population. This is recognised by parishioners who have given good support to the development of a new community hall, and this project has been integrated with other known key needs in the community.

Picture 44: An example of parish hall use



Meeting facilities

Picture 45: The Methodist Church



No parking
Maximum people capacity 40

Picture 46: The parish hall



No parking
Maximum people capacity 130

Picture 47: Charing primary school



Limited parking
Maximum people capacity 175

Picture 48: The sports pavilion



Parking for 80 cars
Maximum people capacity 55

Picture 49: The church barn



Parking for 4 cars
Maximum people capacity 75

Picture 50: The scout hut



Parking for 50 cars
Maximum people capacity 70

10.13.3 The need for the Parsons Mead project

There is a great need for this project:

1. to provide enough space for public meetings, with state-of-the-art facilities and flexible space to accommodate both large and small events;
2. to meet the needs of population growth of around 50% in Charing, as well as growth in nearby villages;
3. to provide improved facilities for local societies, including storage for important documents and equipment;
4. to provide a facility for council meetings, large enough to enable more members of the public to attend;
5. to provide office space for the Parish Clerk and the Finance Officer;
6. to establish a proper facility for council archives;
7. to maintain and develop activities and services for local people;
8. to give full and effective disabled access;
9. to provide car parking for around 40 cars;
10. to establish a 'mini museum' and visitor information centre;
11. to establish health and wellbeing facilities capable of enabling a range of services such as: podiatry; dietary guidance; and social well-being activities. This will relieve pressure on the local GP surgery, giving it more room for core medical activities;
12. to create flexible office space for use by local businesses or individuals with rental income used to meet hall running costs and loan repayments;
13. to provide education and training for local people, and a facility for third-party training to add to the hall's income;
14. to create a café/tearoom for users of the new facility, residents, and visitors;
15. to provide meeting rooms for hire, adding further income; and
16. to have a reception area to welcome visitors and tourists, with a small exhibition space highlighting aspects of the parish history.

10.13.4 The new facility

The need is clear because of the current shortage of facilities, and the significant population growth expected in Charing. The purpose of the community hall is to create a central hub and hive of activity. It will be a lively and well-used facility, with a focus on supporting the Charing villagers and those from further afield.

The building will be as sustainable as possible, with an aspiration to achieve a BREEAM certification. It will focus on implementing as many sustainable measures as possible, including sustainable and healthy materials, utilising green energy, operable windows, presence detection to reduce power consumption, water saving measures, reduction of carbon use and emissions, waste management, and a focus on increased well-being and health.

In order to encourage as many people as possible to use the hall, there will be several technology solutions that will attract users. The hall will have free and accessible Wi-Fi throughout the building. The business units, meeting rooms, and council chambers will have video and audio conferencing. The hall will also provide free power for visitors with laptops and other devices. Security and lighting technology will be as advanced as possible. There will be several digital displays for hall and community announcements.

The hall will be multifunctional and multipurpose. The intention behind most of the spaces within the hall is that they can flex and change throughout the day and into the evening. The potential uses of the space are still in development and could change and be enhanced once the hall is occupied. Some of the requests from the community are as follows:

- Social events (weddings/funerals/parties/lunches/dinners)
- Large public meetings such as the Annual Parish Meeting
- Training (small and large capacity, single and several-day events) as well as educational events for all ages
- Community activities (council meetings and events, holiday, and seasonal events)
- Sports (yoga, dancing, pilates, ballet, aerobics, other low-impact sports)
- Classes (language, cooking, other etc.)
- Senior events (dancing, exercise classes, dinners/lunches)
- Youth activities (sports, ballet, martial arts, music, tutoring etc.)
- Young children and baby classes and groups
- Business Units (targeting co-working and start-ups) which will create significant new employment opportunities in the village
- Leisure facilities (concerts, theatre, café, and social events)
- Farmers' markets and other local outreach
- Self-help classes (Slimming World, weight watchers, other support groups)

- Health and well-being as an extension of the Charing Surgery non-clinical services
- Charing Parish Council office, meeting space, and archive.

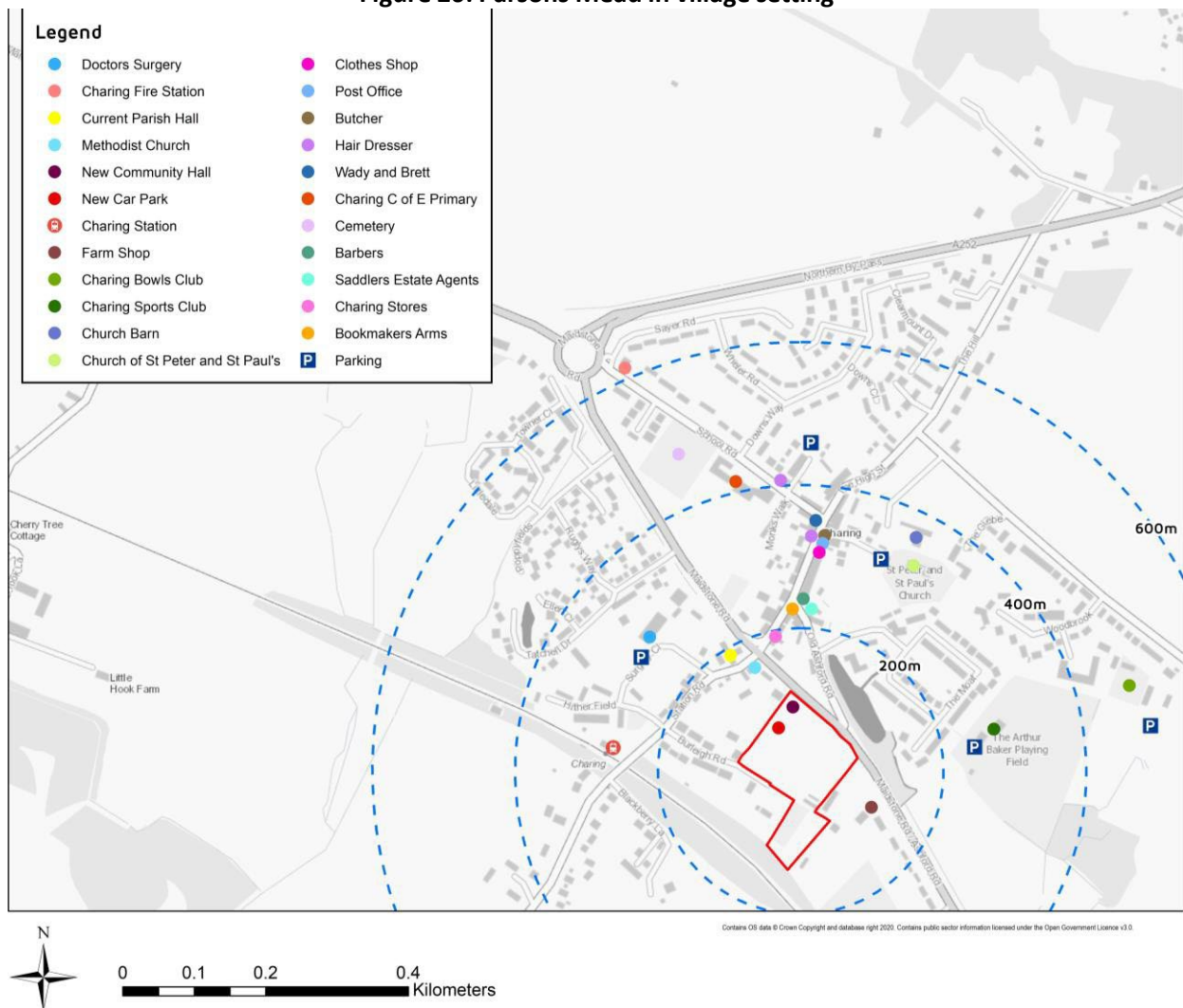
10.13.5 The location – Parsons Mead – and project viability

Exhaustive investigations were undertaken to determine a satisfactory location which was available and deliverable, and Parsons Mead was the only location meeting the criteria. The owners philanthropically wished to give something back to the community, and, in exchange for reduced S106 provisions, they will also make a substantial financial contribution. This will help with construction costs of the new community facility (see ‘Community Hall Delivery Statement’, produced by DHA, March 2020). Other funding will

come from the sale of the existing parish hall (subject to approval in a referendum), possible grants, and from the Charing Parish Council taking out a loan (e.g. from the Public Works Loan Board). Any sale of the parish hall would require moving the War Memorial which is currently the hall porch. This is a sensitive and important issue which would need to be considered carefully, taking into account the views of both parishioners and, where possible, relatives of those commemorated. It would give the opportunity to add any names of those who lost their lives but may have been inadvertently left off the memorial at the time.

The site is very close to the village centre and within easy walking distance of all major amenities, and no other site offers those benefits. Figure 26 demonstrates its setting in relation to important local facilities.

Figure 26: Parsons Mead in village setting



This plan at Parsons Mead provides an opportunity to improve the well-being of residents in Charing and surrounding villages. There are no alternatives, and no prospect of a similar alternative on the

horizon. That is why this Flagship Proposal is central to the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Strategic Environmental Assessment concluded that the Regulation 14 version of the

Neighbourhood Plan is likely to lead to significant long-term positive effects in relation to the population and community and health and well-being themes. These benefits largely relate to the Neighbourhood Plan's focus on providing significant

new community and health infrastructure in Charing. An artistic impression of what the new community centre will look like is shown in Figure 27.

Figure 27: Artist's impression of new hall, and floor layout



The hall is to have (not shown in the above plans) a lift for the disabled to reach the first floor.

In conclusion, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to improve the well-being of local residents at a time of significant population growth, and ensure a new facility which will enhance the lives and well-being of all age groups in the community and further afield. It will be beneficial to all parties involved: Charing, the landowners, and (through adding further to the

housing supply) Ashford.

10.13.6 Implementation

In addition to meeting the requirements of Policy H1 in the Plan, the successful planning and implementation of the project will need to take account of other relevant policies in this Plan and the Ashford Local Plan 2030. To that end, the Parish Council will continue to work in partnership with the Borough Council and other key stakeholders to ensure that the proposals can be taken forward for planning approval by the Borough Council.

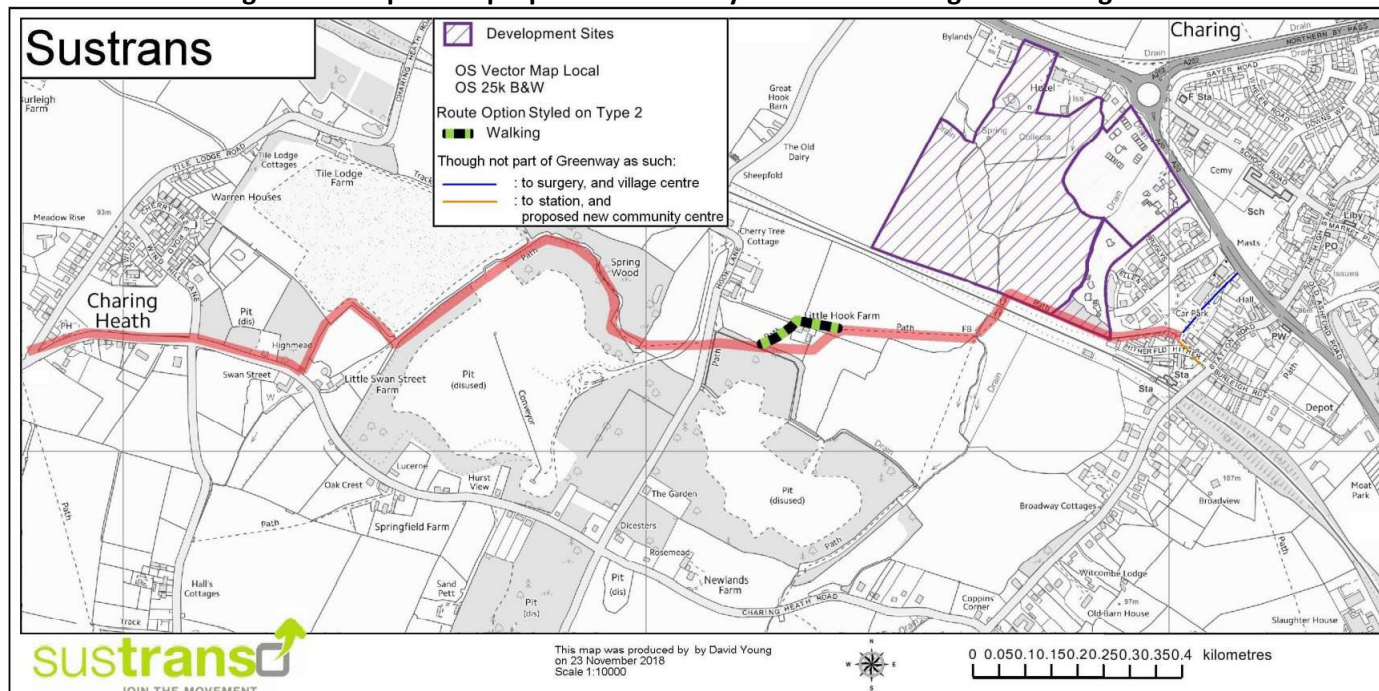
10.14 Other Community Needs

10.14.1 Cycle and footpath from Charing Heath to Charing

Roads between Charing and Charing Heath are narrow and bendy, and are generally hazardous to cyclists. Charing Heath has limited facilities, and its residents need to use facilities in Charing almost daily. A safe cycle and pedestrian route would be of considerable value and it would provide much safer travel for youngsters in particular (see project 145). It is pleasing that ABC has given this high priority in 'Ashford Cycling and Walking Strategy' 2019-2029

(see reference 12). The proposed route is shown in Figure 28. Current users of the footpath walk very close to a farmhouse and can see right into the family's living room (the route marked green and black passes alongside the farmhouse). It is planned to divert away from it in exchange for its owners providing at their expense suitable alternative land to ensure the footpath continues its route.

Figure 28: Map of the proposed 'Greenway' between Charing and Charing Heath



10.14.2 New green cemetery

The existing cemetery (see project 133) will reach capacity in about 13 years' time, which virtually coincides with the end of this Plan period. It is therefore important to identify, and have in place, a new cemetery around the year 2030. A site in Westwell Leacon has been identified.

10.14.3 New skateboard park

Charing has a skateboard park on its main sports and social club recreation field. The equipment was acquired second-hand some 15 years ago, and is in poor condition. It is much-valued equipment for mainly young people and a replacement is needed.

10.14.4 New allotments

Currently research is taking place to determine the best location for community-use allotments.

10.14.5 Air-quality monitoring

While air quality in the parish is within World Health Organization guidelines, there are real concerns of air pollution from increased traffic flow, specifically

in the area of the A20 crossroads with the High Street and Station Road, which could impact negatively on the health of residents. Developers should be mindful of the full extent of all proposed developments when assessing traffic and air-quality impact.

10.14.6 New employment/business opportunities

With an expected increase in population in Charing village of over 50%, it is vital that new permanent jobs are created to reduce the harmful effects of vehicle movements and to apply a stimulus to the local economy. While there are specific proposals to create employment at Parsons Mead, it is hoped that the Plan policies concerning mixed development will come to fruition, enabling many current and future residents to work locally.

10.15 Plan period, monitoring, and review

The Charing Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan will run from 2011 to 2030, aligning its period to the ABC Local Plan. It is, however, a response to the needs and aspirations of the local community as understood at the time this Plan is being developed, and it is recognised that challenges and concerns may change over the Plan period.

CPC, as the Neighbourhood Development Plan authority, will be responsible for maintaining and periodically revising the Plan to ensure relevance and to monitor delivery.

A team, involving CPC and members of the community, will be established to monitor the

10.16 Conclusions

This Neighbourhood Development Plan covers the period 2011 to 2030. It has been developed following comprehensive and inclusive consultations, and is underpinned by a robust evidence base, which ranges from specialised technical studies to the full use of extensive local knowledge. The Neighbourhood Development Plan is consistent with the strategic aims of the Ashford Local Plan 2030 and – through its policies and recommendations – sets the framework for ensuring that Charing Parish develops in a sustainable manner, taking into account the needs and aspirations of parishioners.

The Plan provides clear policies which support sustainable development at the appropriate scale, bringing social, economic, and environmental co-benefits, and which address the priorities of Charing Parish. These include, but are not limited to: the preservation and enhancement of the well-being of existing residents and strengthening of community assets; the creation of a variety of employment opportunities; and the conservation of the built environment, its cultural heritage, and the natural beauty of the Parish.

New and appropriate development, compliant with the policies and recommendations set out in this Neighbourhood Development Plan over the Plan period, will be the principal mechanism to deliver the priorities above, and meet the needs of existing and new residents, as the community within Charing Parish absorbs its share of increased population and housing requirements in the borough.

ongoing effectiveness of the plan. That group will aim to meet with ABC and KCC, possibly twice per year, but could vary that on a needs basis to ensure the policies are working well, and that recommendations attached to the Plan are progressing.

If necessary, the Plan will be formally reviewed and subject to statutory consultation and examination in accordance with the legislative requirements, to ensure that it continues to take into account national policy and the strategic policies of the Ashford Local Plan.

As a statutory document, residents of the parish will be pleased to see their concerns and aspirations addressed in the decision-making processes affecting the parish, including politicians, developers, local authority officers, and other relevant stakeholders.

10.17 Appendix A: ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Ashford Borough Council
AECOM	AECOM Infrastructure & Environment UK Limited
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Kent Downs)
CPC	Charing Parish Council
HNA	Housing Needs Assessment
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
KCC	Kent County Council
NP	Neighbourhood Plan (<i>this document</i>)
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
NPSC	Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee
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
SAC	Special Area(s) of Conservation
SPA	Special Protection Area(s)
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, & Threats (analysis)

10.18 Appendix B:

PROJECTS/EVIDENCE BASE, AND CONSULTATION STATEMENT

The analysis, objectives, and proposals in this Neighbourhood Development Plan have drawn on a variety of sources/evidence, including:

- **Population, employment, housing, health, and vehicle ownership details**, obtained largely from the Office of National Statistics and Action with Communities in Rural Kent.
- **Housing need**, determined from an *independent survey* undertaken by AECOM (project 103), Action with Communities in Rural Kent, and *views of residents* gained during public consultation and via a community-wide questionnaire.
- **Life in the village**, obtained from previous appraisals and plans, views of residents expressed at public meetings, workshops, and through the community and other questionnaires.
- **Information regarding important amenities**, obtained through specific projects undertaken by volunteers and other principals in the planning process, as well as from residents, primarily through the community questionnaire.
- **Landscape information**, obtained primarily from the Department of the Environment, and the *Heritage and Character Assessment* undertaken by AECOM.
- **Water and drainage data**, obtained from water companies and the Department of the Environment, and from a *Hydrological Appraisal of Charing's Future*, undertaken by Water Resource Associates, February 2018 (project 131).

project nº	project
101	government grants
102	grant from village SOS
103	housing needs assessment completed by AECOM
104	steering committee terms of reference
105	full report on the development and outcomes of the questionnaire
106	exhibition main exhibits, July 2017
107	development of email database (no reports)
108	sign-up volunteers (no reports)
109	key photos (held in a photographic library)
110	site assessments
111	vision & objectives workshop
112	business/employment survey
113	consultants and experts appointed to assist with the plan
114	review of public open green spaces
115	air quality
	vehicle parking survey including

project nº	project
116	(1) station/Station Road car park and close-by roads (2) the High Street/Market Place/Old Ashford Road (3) School Road/Brenchley car park/Downs Way (part)
117	traffic management (1) Pluckley/Station roads and part A20 (2) the High Street/Old Ashford Road (3) School Road (4) A252 Charing Hill (5) Faversham Road (6) Charing Heath
118	heritage & character assessment undertaken by AECOM
119	engagement, attendance at public meetings
120	landscape studies
121	protecting & improving the High Street
122	Charing Primary School capacity
123	GP capacity to meet growing population
124	pharmacy future
125	train services and usage
126	bus travel through Charing/Charing Heath
127	exhibition November 2018 results
128	facilities survey results 04-12-2018
129	Archbishop's Palace, document collection
130	tourism – need for promotion
131	hydrological study
132	village confines
133	capacity of cemetery and additional site
134	Poppyfields' study on resident behaviours on a range of subjects
135	tourism grant possibilities
136	findings from NP launch
137	findings from first workshop October 2016
138	CPC/SC position after NP launch and first draft local plan
139	councillors' views of Charing in 2032
140	vehicle origination survey
141	new community hall
142	listed buildings survey
143	house planning consents 1996 to 2017
144	potential car park sites
145	cycle-/footpath Charing Heath To Charing
146	PRoWs in parish
147	parish demographics
148	impact on Westwell Leacon and Charing Heath of M20 and HS1 rail link
149	call for sites information
150	environmental problems at Poppyfields
151	quarrying and minerals in Charing
152	broadband progress
153	housing growth and estimates for plan period
154	traffic accidents in Charing
155	parish ownership/management of land
156	favoured sites for residential development
157	groundwater protection zones
158	amended approach to village confines

project nº	project
159	parishioners' views gained at Annual Parish Meeting for the new community facility at Parsons Mead
160	issues with the planning process which may have environmental and other impacts in the locality (Poppyfields experience)
161	documents used in the appeal by Gladman Development Limited for planning permission to build on Wheler South land (the appeal was subsequently withdrawn shortly after the appeal hearing)
162	analysis of 2021 Traffic Surveys

10.19 Appendix C: ASHFORD LOCAL PLAN POLICIES

The following list of Ashford Local Plan policies should be read alongside those of this Neighbourhood Development Plan:

HOU1	affordable housing
HOU3a	residential development within settlements
HOU10	development of residential gardens
EMP6	promotion of fibre to premises
EMP10	local and village centres
TRA3a	parking standards for residential development
TRA5	planning for pedestrians
TRA7	provision for cycling
ENV3b	landscape character and design in the AONBs
ENV5	protecting important rural features
ENV8	water quality, supply, and treatment
ENV9	sustainable drainage
ENV12	air quality
ENV13	conservation and enhancement of heritage assets
COM1	meeting the community's needs
COM4	cemetery provision

10.20 Appendix D: LINKING VISION, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

VISION

Our vision for the parish of Charing at the end of the Plan period is that both new and existing residents will be enjoying the same or greater benefits of living in the village and parish as current residents do, and that the area will be an even more attractive community in which to live and work.

Community well-being

plan objectives	policies
To establish a multipurpose community centre with attractions for all (Section 7.2)	Policy C1: New community centre at Parsons Mead, and improved sports facilities Policy H1: Land allocation at Parsons Mead & Burleigh Bungalow
To ensure the village character and spirit are maintained, and, where possible, enhanced (Sections 10.5 and 12.3)	Policy E4: Local green space development Policy D1: Good design Policy D2: Good, imaginative and innovative design Policy D3: Street furniture Policy E3: Local green spaces Policy H16: Development in residential gardens
To support the enhancement of, and improvement in, the level of healthcare provision (Sections 7.2, 7.7, and 11.8.1)	Policy C1: New community centre at Parsons Mead, and improved sports facilities Policy C6: Health and health care Policy H1: Land allocation at Parsons Mead & Burleigh Bungalow
To support actions likely to re-establish a pub/restaurant/hotel in the heart of the village (Section 7.1)	ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE (Statement of fact) Where a community facility plays a significant role in contributing to the enjoyment of life in the parish and the sustainability of the community, Charing Parish Council will support the seeking of designation as an Asset of Community Value.
To promote retail activity in the parish, especially Charing High Street (Section 7.6)	Policy C1: New community centre at Parsons Mead, and improved sports facilities Policy C5: Shopping Policy H1 also applies but has been specified under other objectives.

Housing

plan objectives	policies
To provide existing and future residents with the opportunity to live in a decent home	All housing policies (policies H1 to H17)

Traffic and transport

plan objectives	policies
To improve and increase Charing village parking (Section 8.4)	Policy C1: New community centre at Parsons Mead, and improved sports facilities Policy H1: Land allocation at Parsons Mead & Burleigh Bungalow Policy T4: Charing village parking
To take actions to ensure road traffic congestion does not get worse and that road networks in the parish are safe for both vehicle users and pedestrians (Sections 8.1 and 8.2)	Policy T1: Traffic congestion and speed Policy T2: Pedestrian safety
To establish a formal cycle and footpath between Charing and Charing Heath (Section 8.5)	Policy T5: Rights of way, bridleways, and cycleways

Employment creation and business development

plan objectives	policies
To enhance the prospects of local business. and take actions to create additional employment (Sections 9 and 11.9.4)	Policy EC1: Locations allocated for new business units Policy EC2: Protection of existing commercial/industrial zones Policy H12: Mixed development
To promote sustainable tourism (Sections 6, 7.6)	Please see policy H1 already detailed under other strategic objectives.

Environment and countryside, including heritage

plan objectives	policies
To minimise the impact of new developments on the surrounding countryside, landscape and ecosystems (Section 10.7)	Policy H14: Infill development Policy E3: Local green spaces Policy E4: Landscape strategy, and safeguarding and enhancing biodiversity
To ensure the beautiful views inwards and outwards are not compromised, and the public open spaces are protected (Section 10.8)	Policy E5: Views
To reduce harm to the environment by seeking to minimise pollution (Section 10.9)	Policy E6: Climate change
To support the full restoration of the Archbishop's Palace (Section 10.3)	Policy E2: The Archbishop's Palace
To support all initiatives which preserve heritage in the parish (Sections 10.3 and 10.1)	Policy E1: Historic environment

10.21 Appendix E: RECOMMENDATIONS

This Plan recommends that Charing Parish Council takes appropriate action with regard to these recommendations.

10.21.1 Parish Facilities

- Continue to support initiatives which would enable the Oak to return to a successful pub/restaurant/hotel.
- Maintain the community-wide working party to develop, and subsequently implement, the plans for a new community facility with integrated health and well-being centre, business units, and a new car park at Parsons Mead.
- Lobby for bus services to be maintained and improved to meet the needs of rapid and significant population growth.

10.21.2 Traffic and Transport

A Highways Improvement Group has been established to progress highways issues. The Parish Council should maintain this group, or take alternative steps to ensure highways matters are regularly reviewed.

- Maintain a Highways Improvement Plan for the Parish with continual dialogue with KCC Highways and other relevant parties. In particular:
 - Lobby for measures to reduce the speed of traffic on the A20 through Charing village, ideally enabling a 30mph limit to be imposed.
 - Maintain dialogue with KCC Highways over proposed changes to the crossroads.
 - Lobby for changes to the entrances to Land South of the Swan, and to the Charing Motors/site S28, to avoid having two full junctions so close together.
 - Monitor the impact of the 2020/2021 changes to the A252.
 - Discuss possible improvements to Faversham Road, e. g. the extension of the 40mph limit.
 - Based on the information from the 2021 surveys (see project 154), draw up a scheme to help reduce speeding in selected roads through the use of gateways, roundel markings on roads, and possibly vehicle-activated reminder signs.
 - Consider ways to improve traffic management and parking in Charing village centre, and to reduce through traffic.

- Engage with KCC, ABC, and other relevant Parish Councils, to ensure that the existing funding streams to Wealden Wheels are retained.
- Resuscitate, if possible, Charing Speedwatch, and extend it to Charing Heath.
- Continue to engage with all relevant organisations to create a formal cycle/footpath (known as a Greenway) between Charing and Charing Heath, with funding coming from developers in the parish and other relevant sources.

10.21.3 Tourism

- Establish a working group, comprising representatives of traders, societies, CPC, and other interested parties, to develop a really attractive tourist agenda, together with a fully detailed implementation strategy.

10.21.4 Education

Engage with the governing board (and KCC Education if relevant), with a view to:

- establishing a drop-off/collection place for vehicles on the school grounds, to minimise traffic hazards on School Road.
- the introduction of staggered finishing times for different years, to reduce congestion and improve both vehicle and pedestrian safety.

10.21.5 Housing

- Continue to engage with Orbit and Countryside, with A Better Choice for Property Ltd, with Shepherd Neame, and with any other developer of multi-housing sites, as well as ABC, to ensure that such developments meet local needs as closely as possible.
- Liaise with the owners of Crofters to assist in having First Homes built on the site.
- Engage with Orbit and ABC to establish a resale policy to ensure local needs are *continually* met.
- Meet with ABC to determine the future use of Pym House and, where possible, influence decisions in favour of local people.

10.22 Appendix F: REFERENCES

<i>reference</i>	<i>title</i>	<i>source (e. g. URL)</i>	<i>date</i>
1*	Technical Note re HGV percentages on Pluckley Road	<i>Campaign for the Protection of Rural England/CPC</i>	<u>2018</u>
2	Traffic Assessment for CPC on Station/Pluckley Roads	Advanced Transport Research	<u>October 2017</u>
3	AADT and AAWT Calculations	made by <i>DHA Transport</i> (retained by Future Biogas Ltd)	<u>March 2012</u>
4	Proof of evidence of Mrs Jill Leyland and Mr Colin Burns re: Gladman Appeal	PINS Ref. APP/E2205/W/17/3182838; ABC Ref. 17/00303/AS	
5	“Charing Heritage and Character” Assessment	AECOM Infrastructure and Environment UK Limited	<u>May 2017</u>
6	Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Landscape Character Assessment– Hollingbourne Vale, Landscape Character Area 7		update <u>2017</u>
7	ABC Older Persons Accommodation Survey	Ms Tessa O’Sullivan, Rural Housing Enabler, Action with Communities in Rural Kent	<u>March 2010</u>
8	Charing Housing Needs Survey		<u>May 2014</u>
9	Hydrological Appraisal of Charing’s Future Development and Public Water Supply	Water Resources Associates	<u>February 2018</u>
10	Rural community profile for Charing (Parish)	Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) Rural evidence project	<u>October 2013</u>
11	Charing Parish Council HNA	AECOM Limited	<u>September 2017</u>
12	“Cycling and Walking Strategy 2019 to 2029” booklet	<i>Ashford</i> https://www.ashford.gov.uk/cycling-and-walking-consultation	
13	Housing Needs Assessment, Charing Parish	conducted by Rosemary Selling, Rural Housing Enabler for Action with Communities in Rural Kent	April 2021

* Reference 1 is “study undertaken to refute findings submitted in the Gladman appeal against the refusal by ABC to grant planning permission for development on the Wheler south fields behind Pluckley Road”.



Intelligent Plans
and examinations

Report on Charing Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2030

An Examination undertaken for Ashford Borough Council with the support of Charing Parish Council on the May 2022 Submission version of the Plan.

Independent Examiner: Derek Stebbing BA (Hons) Dip EP MRTPI

Date of Report: 20 December 2022

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Main Findings - Executive Summary

From my examination of the Charing Neighbourhood Development Plan (the Plan) and its supporting documentation including the representations made, I have concluded that subject to the modifications set out in this report, the Plan meets the Basic Conditions.

I have also concluded that:

- the Plan has been prepared and submitted for examination by a qualifying body – the Charing Parish Council (the Parish Council);
- the Plan has been prepared for an area properly designated – the Charing Neighbourhood Area, as identified on the map at page 2 of the Plan;
- the Plan specifies the period to which it is to take effect – from 2011 to 2030; and,
- the policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood plan area.

I recommend that the Plan, once modified, proceeds to referendum on the basis that it has met all the relevant legal requirements.

I have considered whether the referendum area should extend beyond the designated area to which the Plan relates and have concluded that it should not.

1. Introduction and Background

Charing Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2030

- 1.1 The Parish of Charing in the Borough of Ashford in Kent is situated between the towns of Maidstone and Ashford, and partly within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The village of Charing lies at the foot of the chalk escarpment of the Kent Downs and this results in an attractive setting for the village. The Parish contains the principal settlement of Charing which is centrally located within the Parish, the smaller village of Charing Heath at the west of the Parish and the hamlet of Westwell Leacon to the east. At the 2011 Census, the population of the Parish was 2,765 persons within 1,228 households.
- 1.2 There is evidence of occupation in the area before and during the Roman period, but the earliest recorded history of settlement at Charing village dates from the 8th century. During the Middle Ages, the manor of Charing belonged to the Archbishops of Canterbury who built a palace in the centre of the village. This was one of a number of palaces owned by the Archbishops and used on their travels. Many of the current palace buildings at Charing date from the early 14th century, with later additions and rebuilding, and in 1952 the site was designated as a Scheduled Monument and four of the buildings were listed as Grade I. A large part of

the historic village centre is a designated Conservation Area (designated July 1996) including the Archbishop's Palace.

- 1.3 Historically, major transport routes have passed through the area, and today the M20 motorway and the HS1 high-speed railway line pass through the southern parts of the Parish. The village of Charing is at the junction of the A20 road between Maidstone and Ashford and the A252 leading to Canterbury. The railway station at Charing is on the London (Victoria) to Ashford line, and this provides good connections to London and other parts of Kent. The A20 road bisects the village and it also serves as a relief route for the M20 when there is disruption on that motorway, which leads to significant congestion within the village.
- 1.4 Charing has a good level of community facilities to support the needs of residents, mainly concentrated around the centre of the village, with local shops, the Parish Hall, a library, Charing Primary School, G.P. practice and two churches. However, the remaining public house, The Oak P.H., has closed, although it is presently designated by the Borough Council as an Asset of Community Value. The principal business and industrial sites are located outside the village.
- 1.5 The Parish has ten public open spaces mainly within Charing village but including recreation grounds at Charing Heath and Westwell Leacon. The Plan proposes the designation of these public open spaces as Local Green Spaces. Beyond the settlements the landscape of the Parish is dominated by the steep wooded scarp slope of the Kent Downs AONB. Developments within, or in the setting of the AONB, must take account of the strategies and policies contained in the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2021-2026. Beyond the AONB, the landscape character of the Parish is more varied, with some extensive areas of woodland, including ancient woodland, agricultural land and watercourses. The underlying chalk of the North Downs and sand of the Folkestone Sand Beds has led to some extensive, and continuing, quarrying within the Parish, parts of which are designated Mineral Safeguarding Zones. The Parish is also rich in protected sites of wildlife importance, with a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at Charing Beech Hangers, three roadside Nature Reserves and seven Local Wildlife Sites.
- 1.6 The introduction to the Plan states that it has been prepared in the context of further housing growth in the Parish, with some 600 new homes being planned for the Plan period, of which some 500 will be built during this decade, and the need to ensure that there are suitable new facilities and infrastructure in place to support the needs of new and existing residents. Proposals for a new multi-use community centre at Parsons Mead in Charing, as set out in the Plan, are seen as an important element of meeting such needs.

The Independent Examiner

- 1.7 As the Plan has now reached the examination stage, I have been

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appointed as the examiner of the Plan by Ashford Borough Council (ABC), with the agreement of the Parish Council.

- 1.8 I am a chartered town planner, with over 45 years of experience in planning. I have worked in both the public and private sectors and have experience of examining both local plans and neighbourhood plans. I have also served on a Government working group considering measures to improve the local plan system and undertaken peer reviews on behalf of the Planning Advisory Service. I therefore have the appropriate qualifications and experience to carry out this independent examination.
- 1.9 I am independent of the qualifying body and the local authority and do not have an interest in any of the land that may be affected by the Plan.

The Scope of the Examination

- 1.10 As the independent examiner, I am required to produce this report and recommend either:
- (a) that the neighbourhood plan is submitted to a referendum without changes; or
 - (b) that modifications are made and that the modified neighbourhood plan is submitted to a referendum; or
 - (c) that the neighbourhood plan does not proceed to a referendum on the basis that it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.
- 1.11 The scope of the examination is set out in Paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) ('the 1990 Act'). The examiner must consider:
- Whether the plan meets the Basic Conditions.
 - Whether the plan complies with provisions under s.38A and s.38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) ('the 2004 Act'). These are:
 - it has been prepared and submitted for examination by a qualifying body, for an area that has been properly designated by the local planning authority;
 - it sets out policies in relation to the development and use of land;
 - it specifies the period during which it has effect;
 - it does not include provisions and policies for 'excluded development'; and

- it is the only neighbourhood plan for the area and does not relate to land outside the designated neighbourhood area.
- Whether the referendum boundary should be extended beyond the designated area, should the plan proceed to referendum.
- Such matters as prescribed in the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) ('the 2012 Regulations').

1.12 I have considered only matters that fall within Paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 4B to the 1990 Act, with one exception. That is the requirement that the plan is compatible with the Human Rights Convention.

The Basic Conditions

1.13 The 'Basic Conditions' are set out in Paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B to the 1990 Act. In order to meet the Basic Conditions, the neighbourhood plan must:

- have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
- be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan for the area;
- be compatible with and not breach European Union (EU) obligations (under retained EU law)¹; and
- meet prescribed conditions and comply with prescribed matters.

1.14 Regulation 32 of the 2012 Regulations prescribes a further Basic Condition for a neighbourhood plan. This requires that the making of the neighbourhood plan does not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 ('the Habitats Regulations').²

¹ The existing body of environmental regulation is retained in UK law.

² This revised Basic Condition came into force on 28 December 2018 through the Conservation of Habitats and Species and Planning (Various Amendments) (England and Wales) Regulations 2018.

2. Approach to the Examination

Planning Policy Context

2.1 The Development Plan for this part of Ashford Borough Council, not including documents relating to excluded minerals and waste development, consists of the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030 (ALP) prepared by ABC and adopted in February 2019. The ALP covers the period from 2011 to 2030 and contains a suite of strategic policies (Policies SP1-SP7) for the Borough, thematic policies covering matters such as housing, transport and employment, and village site policies, of which Policies S28, S29 and S55 are relevant to Charing. The ALP sets out the scale of housing and employment development required within the Borough and seeks to provide 13,118 new dwellings (between 2018 and 2030) and 63 hectares of new employment land (between 2014 and 2030). Within the Plan's spatial strategy, Charing is categorised as a Village, below the towns of Ashford and Tenterden in the strategy's settlement hierarchy. Policies S28, S29 and S55 are housing allocation policies, as follows:

Policy S28 - Northdown Service Station, Maidstone Road, Charing – proposed for residential development with an indicative capacity of 20 dwellings.

Policy S29 - Land south of the Arthur Baker playing field, Charing – proposed for residential development, with an indicative capacity of 35 dwellings.

Policy S55 - Land adjacent to Poppyfields, Charing - proposed for residential development with an indicative capacity of 180 dwellings.

2.2 The adopted ALP will be superseded in due course by a Local Plan Review (LPR) but the Borough Council's most recent Local Development Scheme (July 2022) does not yet set out a timetable for the preparation of the LPR.

2.3 The Basic Conditions Statement provides an overview assessment at page 9 of the compliance of the Plan with the legal requirements. A detailed assessment is provided of how the policies proposed in the Plan have regard to national policy (at pages 12-21) and are in general conformity with the relevant strategic policies in the adopted Development Plan, which is the ALP (at pages 27-33).

2.4 The planning policy for England is set out principally in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The PPG offers guidance on how this policy should be implemented. A revised NPPF was published on 20 July 2021. All references in this report are to the 2021 NPPF and its accompanying PPG.

Submitted Documents

2.5 I have considered all policy, guidance and other reference documents I consider relevant to the examination, including those submitted which comprise:

- the draft Charing Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2030 Submission Version (May 2022);
- the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Report and Determination (prepared by ABC) (January 2019, updated October 2020 and December 2020);
- the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Report (prepared by AECOM) (October 2019);
- the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report (prepared by AECOM) (December 2019);
- the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Report (prepared by AECOM) (October 2021) and the updated Nutrient Neutrality calculations (prepared by AECOM) (15 June 2022);
- the Basic Conditions Statement (March 2022);
- the Consultation Statement (April 2022); and
- all the representations that have been made in accordance with the Regulation 16 consultation.³

The submission Plan and its accompanying documents are also supported by a series of nine Evidence Books (1-9), containing 62 research project reports (Refs. 101-162) which were prepared during the course of the Plan's preparation. These are listed in full at Appendix B to the Plan. Where appropriate, I refer to these research project reports in this report by their reference number, e.g. RPR 116.

Examiner Questions

2.6 Following my appointment as the independent examiner and my initial review of the draft Plan, its supporting documents and representations made at the Regulation 16 stage, I wrote to ABC and the Parish Council on 6 October 2022 seeking further clarification and information on eight matters contained in the submission Plan, as follows:

- First, with regard to nutrient neutrality and in relation to Policies C2, H1, H2, H3, H4, H6, H7, H10, H12, H14, H15 and H16 and Sub-section 10.10.2, in light of the Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) report (October 2021) and the update note (15 June 2022), I stated that I considered that Policies H1, H3 and H4, and potentially also Policies H2, H6, H7, H10, H12, H14, H15 and H16, will need to reflect the advice contained in the HRA report and update note. I noted that Section 11 of the Plan does not, at present, reflect that advice directly, and I considered that, in order to address the issue, a new sub-section

³ View at: <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/planning-and-development/planning-policy/neighbourhood-plans/charing-neighbourhood-plan/>

within Section 11 ahead of existing sub-section 11.7 should be included in the Plan, rather than by the addition of a policy requirement similar to criterion h) in Policy C2 to each of the above-mentioned Housing Policies. In that respect, I noted that the new sub-section will need to make a suitable cross-reference to sub-section 10.10.2, or possibly include some of the material within 10.10.2. I further noted that it will be important that such a modification and its advice/requirements is identical to that being applied by the Borough Council to the existing housing allocation sites within the Plan area contained in the adopted Local Plan, as listed at Table 7 (Page 58) in the Plan. I therefore invited the Borough Council to consider the matter and advise me of the current advice being provided to applicants for new residential development in the Neighbourhood Plan Area, including that for the allocated sites in the Plan area in relation to the mitigation measures necessary to demonstrate nutrient neutrality regarding the Stodmarsh Special Area of Conservation (SAC)/Special Protection Area (SPA).

- Second, with regard to Policies C6 and C7, I noted that, as drafted, these policies do not provide sufficient information for users of the Plan on how new health care and educational facilities will be secured. I further noted that, commonly, this is achieved by planning contributions secured through Section 106 agreements linked to planning permissions for new residential development. I noted that Policies C6 and C7 could be linked by suitable cross-references to clause k) of Policy C2 in order to address this point. I therefore sought the Qualifying Body's views on that approach and, subject to their position, the Qualifying Body might wish to provide draft text for the policies which sets out the proposed approach to securing the new facilities. I also noted that the Qualifying Body should take into account Kent County Council's comments on Policy C7 provided in their Regulation 16 representation.
- Third, with regard to Policy T1, I noted that, as titled, Policy T1 and potentially some parts of its policy wording are not land-use planning considerations, but rather are the responsibilities of the Local Highway Authority (Kent County Council) under other legislation, e.g. road safety, traffic speed and HGV restrictions. I considered that the policy will require modification to address the environmental impacts of traffic generation potentially arising from new developments upon the surrounding area. I therefore invited the Qualifying Body to provide me with some suitable draft text for consideration as a modification, which excludes matters that are the direct responsibility of Kent County Council under the Highways Act and related legislation. I also noted that such matters are addressed in the supporting text, for example at sub-section 8.1, and that I am content with that approach. I further noted that Kent County Council have made some detailed representations concerning this policy, which the Qualifying Body might wish to take account of in their response.
- Fourth, with regard to Policy EC1, I noted from the Borough Council's representations that the allocation of the Charing Motors site for new business units is considered to not be in general conformity with the

adopted Local Plan, and specifically with site allocation S28, in that it reduces the potential to boost the supply of housing by delivering a mixed-use scheme, or an entirely residential scheme. As noted by the Borough Council, this appears to contradict part of Policy EC2 (a policy which is supported by the Borough Council). I invited the Qualifying Body to provide me with a note setting out their preferred approach for addressing the future planning of the Charing Motors site. This approach should remove the contradiction that is presently evident between Policies EC1 and EC2. The contradiction is also evident between Figures 7 and 19. I also observed that, bearing in mind the Parsons Mead site is also addressed by both Policies EC1 and EC2, I saw some merit in consolidating those policies to constitute a 'Business and Mixed-Use Developments' policy and I also welcomed the views of the Qualifying Body on that point.

- Fifth, with regard to Policies E3 and E4, in my assessment, I considered that these policies should be combined, to form a 'Local Green Spaces' policy, which should be linked by cross-references to Figures 10-12. I invited the Qualifying Body to consider this matter and, if appropriate, to provide draft text for a replacement Policy E3 that I may consider as a modification to the Plan.
- Sixth, with regard to Policy H1, I noted the Borough Council's representations concerning this policy, and that I was concerned at the length of the policy. In particular, I considered that the policy requires greater clarity on the precise mix of uses being proposed for this site. (By way of comparison, albeit at a much smaller scale, I observed that the drafting of Policy H3 does provide such clarity). In my assessment, I commented that much of the 3rd and 4th paragraphs of the policy text concerns viability. It is unusual for a site allocation policy in a development plan to set out potential viability issues in such detail, and in my view the matter could be simplified to state that a future planning application should be accompanied by a full viability assessment in order to demonstrate the viability and deliverability of the development proposals. I also noted that the contents of Section 13 of the Plan, and in particular sub-section 13.5, may need some consequential amendments. I therefore invited the Qualifying Body to consider this matter and, if appropriate, to provide draft text for suitable amendments to the policy text, including to its supporting justification if necessary, in order to address my concern at the length of the policy and also the points raised by the Borough Council.
- Seventh, with regard to Figure 21 (Land next to Crofters) in the Plan, I observed that as produced, this plan appears to be a copy of a plan prepared by an external party (G.W. Finn & Sons). I noted that this must be avoided, and I requested that a suitable replacement site allocation plan on an Ordnance Survey base be prepared either by the Borough Council (under their licence) or by the Qualifying Body in order that I can substitute the plan as a modification.
- Finally, with regard to Policies H4, H7, H8, H9, H10, H11 and H12, I noted that the Borough Council had raised representations to each of the above policies stating that, in their assessment, the policies are not in general conformity with the adopted Local Plan. I further noted

that, in some cases, similar such representations were made by the Borough Council at the Regulation 14 stage in January 2020. I commented that, in due course, I would consider fully the relationship of the draft policies to the strategic policies in the adopted Local Plan for the area, but I invited the Qualifying Body to consider the Borough Council's representations, a number of which could be resolved by amendments to the draft policy text. Where appropriate, the Qualifying Body might wish to provide a note setting out any proposed amendments that I may consider as modifications to the Plan.

- 2.7 In response to my letter of 6 October 2022, ABC and the Parish Council provided me with responses to the questions listed above on 13 and 20 October 2022 respectively.⁴ I have taken full account of the additional information contained in these responses as part of my assessment of the draft Plan, alongside the documents listed at paragraph 2.5 above.

Site Visit

- 2.8 I made an unaccompanied site visit to the Neighbourhood Plan Area on 13 October 2022 to familiarise myself with it and visit all relevant sites and areas referenced in the Plan, evidential documents and those referenced in representations to the Plan.

Written Representations with or without Public Hearing

- 2.9 This examination has been dealt with by written representations. I considered hearing sessions to be unnecessary as the consultation responses clearly articulated the objections and comments regarding the Plan and presented arguments for and against the Plan's suitability to proceed to a referendum. I am satisfied that the material supplied is sufficiently comprehensive for me to be able to deal with the matters raised under the written representations procedure, and that there was not a requirement to convene a public hearing as part of this examination. In all cases, the information provided has enabled me to reach a conclusion on the matters concerned.

Modifications

- 2.10 Where necessary, I have recommended modifications to the Plan (**PMs**) in this report in order that it meets the Basic Conditions and other legal requirements. For ease of reference, I have listed these modifications in full in the Appendix.

⁴ View at: <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/planning-and-development/planning-policy/neighbourhood-plans/charing-neighbourhood-plan/>

3. Procedural Compliance and Human Rights

Qualifying Body and Neighbourhood Plan Area

- 3.1 The Plan has been prepared and submitted for examination by the Charing Parish Council. An application to the Borough Council for the Parish Council area to be designated a neighbourhood planning area was made on 3 March 2016⁵ and was approved by the Borough Council on 31 May 2016 following public consultation between 18 March and 29 April 2016.
- 3.2 The designated Neighbourhood Area comprises the whole of the Parish of Charing. The designated area is shown on the map at page 2 in the submission Plan. The Charing Neighbourhood Plan is the only Neighbourhood Plan in the designated area.
- 3.3 Charing Parish Council is the Qualifying Body for the preparation of the Plan. The preparation of the Plan has been led by a Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee, which was established in 2016, initially comprising a combination of Parish Councillors and local residents.

Plan Period

- 3.4 The draft Plan specifies (on the front cover and on page 10) the Plan period for which it has been prepared, which is from 2011 to 2030. This is the same plan period of the adopted ALP. There is no published timetable at the present time for a future review of the ALP.

Neighbourhood Plan Preparation and Consultation

- 3.5 The Consultation Statement and its Appendices sets out a comprehensive record of the Plan's preparation and its associated engagement and consultation activity between mid-2016 and Spring 2020. The Consultation Statement includes (at page 14) a summary of the main issues and concerns that were raised by local residents during the various consultations undertaken in the course of the Plan's preparation.
- 3.6 The decision to undertake the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan was taken in early-2016, and the Parish Council then sought designation of the whole Parish as a Neighbourhood Area, which was approved by ABC on 31 May 2016.
- 3.7 The official launch of the Plan took place in September 2016 with a series of public meetings attended by over 300 residents. Information gained from the launch meetings was used to develop emerging themes for a series of engagement workshops held in November 2016. The information gained from the workshops was then used to help develop a community

⁵ View at: <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/planning-and-development/planning-policy/neighbourhood-plans/charing-neighbourhood-plan/>

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questionnaire survey. Questionnaires were delivered to every household and by Spring 2017 54% of households had responded.

- 3.8 The preparation of the Plan and the associated community engagement and consultation has broadly involved five main stages, as follows:
- Stage 1: Initial work and consultation (Summer 2016 to Spring 2017).
 - Stage 2: Workshops, Public Exhibitions, evidence base work, data collection and consultation (Summer 2017 and throughout 2018).
 - Stage 3: Additional survey work, preparation of research project reports and preparation of draft Plan for pre-submission consultation (2019).
 - Stage 4: Pre-submission consultation on the draft Neighbourhood Plan (Regulation 14) (January-February 2020).
 - Stage 5: Submission to ABC, Regulation 16 consultation and Examination (Spring 2022 to Autumn 2022).
- 3.9 Stage 1 comprised the initial public meetings, workshops and household survey that took place during 2016 and early 2017, and the identification of the key themes for the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee and its project teams to address during the preparation of the Plan.
- 3.10 Work during Stage 2, extending between Summer 2017 and throughout 2018, focused on the collection of relevant evidence for the Plan's preparation, including a number of themed surveys such as a Facilities Survey, and the analysis of results. A Vision and Objectives workshop was held in October 2017 (attended by 51 people), and two public exhibitions were also held during this period (in July 2017 and November 2018) where work on the Plan's preparation was displayed, including (at the 2018 workshop) suggested policies and recommendations to meet the Plan objectives.
- 3.11 Stage 3 of the Plan's preparation extended throughout 2019 and involved the preparation and finalisation of evidence base material, including a large number of research project reports (which are numbered 101-162) covering a wide range of topics covered by the Plan, and which have been brought together in nine volumes (Evidence Books 1-9). The preparation of this evidence base material has informed the drafting of the Plan and its policies. I have considered all of the various research project reports and am satisfied that they provide an extremely comprehensive evidence base for the draft Plan and that, where relevant, are appropriately referenced within the Plan itself for the benefit of future users of the Plan.
- 3.12 The principal consultation event during Stage 4 was the publication of the Regulation 14 draft Plan for public consultation between 1 January and 21 February 2020. There was extensive local publicity, with a flyer distributed to all households, a major exhibition in the Parish Hall and a series of subsequent 'mini-exhibitions'. Some 300 people visited the various exhibitions. There was further local publicity within the Plan area and on local media. A total of 73 formal consultation responses were received, comprising 58 from residents and 15 from a range of

organisations and stakeholders. Statutory consultees, many organisations and ABC were notified individually of the consultation, as set out at Appendix I of the Consultation Statement. The Consultation Statement contains a comprehensive record (at Section 6 and at Appendices E-J) of the Regulation 14 consultation, the responses received, and the amendments made to the draft Plan following those responses.

- 3.13 Stage 5 of the Plan's preparation was the formal submission of the draft Plan by the Parish Council to ABC in May 2022 for examination under Regulation 15. Regulation 16 consultation was then held for a period of eight weeks from 17 June to 12 August 2022, accompanied by relevant local publicity.
- 3.14 I consider that the Consultation Statement and its accompanying Appendices provide a full record of the consultation and engagement work that was undertaken during the preparation of the Plan. This includes the actions that were taken to amend or modify the draft Plan following consultation responses received at the Regulation 14 consultation stage in January/February 2020.
- 3.15 I have taken account of the responses received at the Regulation 16 consultation stage and I am satisfied that a transparent, fair and inclusive consultation process has been followed for the Plan that has had regard to advice in the PPG on plan preparation and engagement and is procedurally compliant in accordance with the legal requirements.

Development and Use of Land

- 3.16 Subject to my recommend modification in **PM6** to Policy T1: Traffic congestion and speed (see paragraph 4.40 below), I am satisfied that the draft Plan sets out policies in relation to the development and use of land in accordance with s.38A of the 2004 Act.

Excluded Development

- 3.17 From my review of the documents before me, the draft Plan does not include policies or proposals that relate to any of the categories of excluded development.⁶

Human Rights

- 3.18 Neither ABC nor any other party has raised any issues concerning a breach of, or incompatibility with Convention rights (within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998). From my assessment of the Plan, its accompanying supporting documents and the consultation responses made to the Plan at the Regulations 14 and 16 stages, I am satisfied that the Plan has had regard to the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights and

⁶ The meaning of 'excluded development' is set out in s.61K of the 1990 Act.
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complies with the Human Rights Act 1998. In this respect, I have taken particular account of the Equality Impact Assessment contained in the Basic Conditions Statement. I consider that none of the objectives and policies in the Plan will have a negative impact on groups with protected characteristics. Many will have a positive impact.

4. Compliance with the Basic Conditions

EU Obligations

- 4.1 ABC issued a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Determination in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 ('the SEA Regulations') and the Habitats Regulations in January 2019 (which was then updated in October 2020 and again in December 2020). The screening (as updated) determined that an SEA and HRA were both required in respect of the Plan.
- 4.2 An SEA Scoping Report was prepared by AECOM for the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee in October 2019 and was subject to consultation with the statutory consultation bodies (the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England) between 28 October and 2 December 2019. The consultation response from each of these bodies are set out at Table 3.1 of the Environmental Report (see below).
- 4.3 An SEA Environmental Report was then prepared by AECOM in December 2019. The Report concludes at paragraph 5.68 that "*The assessment has concluded that the current version of the Charing Neighbourhood Plan is likely to lead to significant long-term positive effects in relation to the 'Population and Community' and 'Health and Wellbeing' themes. These benefits largely relate to the Neighbourhood Plan's focus on providing significant new community and health infrastructure in Charing, the delivery of appropriate scale housing to meet local needs, support for the vitality and vibrance of the parish, and the protection and enhancement of the quality of the public realm and neighbourhood distinctiveness*". Paragraph 5.69 notes that the allocations proposed through the Plan have the potential to have impacts on the setting (but not the fabric) of features and areas nationally and locally designated for the historic environment in Charing and Charing Heath. It goes on to note that the Plan's policies respond proactively to these constraints, including through having a close focus on conserving and enhancing the fabric and setting of the historic environment, and on protecting landscape/villagescape character and on the setting of the historic environment. Paragraph 5.70 notes that the overall significance of impacts in relation to the 'Land, Soil and Water Resources' SEA theme is uncertain, in part due to the lack of detailed agricultural land classification in the Parish, although it notes the Plan's recognition of the importance of Groundwater Protection Zones in the Parish and the protection of groundwater resources through new development. Finally, paragraph 5.71 notes that, in terms of the 'Air

Quality', 'Biodiversity', 'Climate Change' and 'Transportation' themes, the Plan will initiate a number of beneficial approaches, but which are not considered to be significant in the context of the SEA process.

- 4.4 I have considered the SEA Framework established to assess the environmental effects of the Plan's proposals and policies (as described at paragraphs 1.15-1.19 in the Scoping Report and more fully at paragraph 3.5 in the Environmental Report). I have looked at the process by which the Plan was then assessed to determine whether the Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects, bearing in mind also that the policies in the adopted ALP were subject to sustainability appraisal at the relevant stages. Overall, I am satisfied that a comprehensive approach has been taken and that the SEA Environmental Report takes full account of any potential effects upon interests of environmental, landscape, historic and heritage importance within the Plan area and beyond.
- 4.5 As noted above, ABC also determined that an HRA is required for the Plan under the Habitats Regulations. There are no sites of European importance within the Plan area. However, there are two sites of European importance within 10 kilometres of the Plan area boundary, those being the Wye & Crundale Downs SAC and the Swale SPA/Ramsar site. Furthermore, the Plan area lies within the hydrological catchment of the Stodmarsh SPA/Ramsar/SAC site, which has been identified as being under threat from eutrophication. Therefore, Natural England presently require that all new residential development in hydrological connectivity with that designated site are phosphorous and nitrogen neutral.
- 4.6 AECOM have prepared an HRA Report (dated October 2021) to accompany the submission draft Plan. The HRA Report contains a full description of the European designated sites referred to above and the current threats and pressures that are evident at each site. Section 5 of the report contains a screening assessment of each of the Plan's draft policies in order to assess whether those policies will have Likely Significant Effects on the European Designated sites. It indicates that two of the Housing Policies, Policies H1 and H3, could lead to Likely Significant Effects to water quality at the Stodmarsh SPA/Ramsar/SAC site and are screened in for the requisite Appropriate Assessment. All other draft policies in the Plan are screened out for Appropriate Assessment. Section 6 of the report contains the Appropriate Assessment arising from the proposals for at least 57 new dwellings on two sites covered by Policies H1 and H3. The Appropriate Assessment considers the hydrological effects of new residential development upon water bodies flowing into the Stodmarsh SPA/Ramsar/SAC site and notes that all allocated sites are within the basin catchment and within the close proximity of the River Stour which connects directly with the Stodmarsh European site. Therefore, there is a risk of pollution during and post-construction, in the absence of mitigation.
- 4.7 A supplementary note to the HRA Report was prepared by AECOM on 15 June 2022 which contains updated nutrient neutrality calculations. The

supplementary note concludes that both of the housing allocations assessed (Policies H1 and H3 in the Plan) generate a nutrient surplus that would need to be offset to ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of the Stodmarsh European site. Given that position, the note re-states the conclusions of the main HRA report (at paragraphs 6.30 and 6.31 in that report) that Policy C2 in the Plan should be amended to state that “*the development will only be supported if it demonstrates nutrient neutrality regarding Stodmarsh SAC/SPA, both in relation to phosphorus and nitrogen*” and also that an explanatory note could be added to that policy setting out a range of six potential mitigation measures to offset and/or reduce the projected increase in nutrient concentrations. The main HRA report also states (at paragraph 6.32) that, in practice, experience in the Stour catchment indicates that the most effective way to establish nitrogen and (particularly) phosphorous neutrality at an individual development level is to deliver a wetland (to a minimum of 2 ha. in size) to treat runoff from the site itself and from surrounding agricultural land.

- 4.8 As noted at paragraph 2.6 above, upon my initial assessment of the draft Plan and its supporting documents including the HRA Report and its accompanying supplementary note, I posed a question to the Borough Council with regard to nutrient neutrality. I stated that, in addition to Policy C2, I considered that Policies H1, H3 and H4, and potentially also Policies H2, H6, H7, H10, H12, H14, H15 and H16, will need to reflect the advice contained in the HRA report and update note. I noted that Section 11 of the Plan does not, at present, reflect that advice directly, and I considered that, in order to address the issue, a new sub-section within Section 11 ahead of existing sub-section 11.7 should be included in the Plan, rather than by the addition of a policy requirement similar to criterion h) in Policy C2 to each of the above-mentioned Housing Policies. I therefore invited the Borough Council to consider the matter and advise me of the current advice being provided to applicants for new residential development in the Neighbourhood Plan Area, including that for the allocated sites in the Plan area in relation to the mitigation measures necessary to demonstrate nutrient neutrality regarding the Stodmarsh SAC/SPA site.
- 4.9 The Borough Council provided me with a comprehensive response to this question on 13 October 2022 noting that, in July 2020, Natural England issued advice to the Local Planning Authorities located in the Stour catchment setting out the deteriorating water quality at the Stodmarsh Lakes. The advice affects all types of development proposals that provide overnight accommodation including new homes and requires such proposals to demonstrate that they can deliver nutrient neutrality. The response further notes that the Borough Council are committed to responding to the wider Stodmarsh nutrient issue in a strategic way and is continuing to actively pursue its own ‘Stodmarsh Mitigation Strategy’ as a means of providing a strategic solution within the Borough boundary, to enable the LPA to release housing schemes on sites that are not capable of delivering mitigation on site. The core component of the strategy is the creation of strategic wetlands, and a report considered by the Borough

Council's Cabinet on 27 October 2022 indicates that the proposed strategic wetlands on a site within the Borough is likely to come forward in phases, with phases 1 and 2 being the subject of a detailed planning application in 2023 which, if approved, would provide sufficient strategic mitigation to release around 5,000 dwellings. Planning applications for phases 3 and 4 of the strategic wetlands are expected to follow in 2024 which, if approved, would then extend the strategic mitigation to cover some 10,000 new dwellings.

4.10 To accompany the strategic wetlands and provide clarity for developers on the process for their developments to rely upon it, the Council is also preparing a Stodmarsh Mitigation Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The SPD will address the following points:

- What information developers should submit as part of planning applications, which are required to demonstrate nutrient neutrality;
- Details of the Council's nutrient mitigation hierarchy, which encourages developers to deliver mitigation on site, wherever feasible;
- Information and relevant planning considerations for different types of nutrient mitigation; and
- Details of the strategic nutrient mitigation, including how to "apply", the cost of nutrient mitigation, the payment mechanism, and some 'rules' around using the mitigation, in so far as it is tied to that specific development proposal.

4.11 On the basis of the Council's response to my question, and my further evaluation of the advice provided by Natural England and the contents of the HRA Report and its accompanying supplementary note, I consider that an appropriate modification can be made to the draft Plan. This should reflect the Borough Council's proposed measures for addressing nutrient mitigation relating to the Stodmarsh European site, as it will affect proposed developments within the Plan area. I address this matter at paragraphs 4.94-4.95 below.

4.12 Therefore, taking account of the matters set out at paragraphs 4.5-4.11 above, I conclude that, on the basis of the information provided and my independent consideration of the SEA Environmental Report, the HRA Report and its accompanying supplementary note, and the assessments contained within those reports, together with the Plan itself, I am satisfied that the Plan is compatible with EU obligations under retained EU law.

Main Assessment

4.13 The NPPF states (at paragraph 29) that "*Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area. Neighbourhood plans can shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development, by influencing local planning decisions as part of the statutory development plan*" and also that "*Neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies for the*

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area, or undermine those strategic policies". The NPPF (at paragraph 11) also sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development. It goes on to state (at paragraph 13) that neighbourhood plans should support the delivery of strategic policies contained in local plans; and should shape and direct development that is outside of these strategic policies.

- 4.14 Having considered above whether the Plan complies with various legal and procedural requirements, it is now necessary to deal with the question of whether it complies with the remaining Basic Conditions (see paragraph 1.13 of this report), particularly the regard it pays to national policy and guidance, the contribution it makes to sustainable development and whether it is in general conformity with strategic development plan policies.
- 4.15 I test the Plan against the Basic Conditions by considering specific issues of compliance of the Plan's 43 policies, which address the following themes: Community Wellbeing; Traffic and Transport; Employment Creation and Business Development; Countryside and Environment; Housing; Design; and The Plan's Flagship Programme at Parsons Mead. As part of that assessment, I consider whether the policies in the Plan are sufficiently clear and unambiguous, having regard to advice in the PPG. A policy should be drafted with sufficient clarity that a decision maker can apply it consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. It should be concise, precise and supported by appropriate evidence.⁷ I recommend some modifications in this report as a result.

Overview

- 4.16 The Plan is addressing the period from 2011 to 2030 and seeks to provide a clear planning framework for Charing Parish which delivers benefits for the residents of the Parish by incorporating their needs into sound policies, as well as some recommendations for the Parish Council and the Borough Council. Sections 7-12 of the Plan contains specific policies in respect of each of the themes listed above.
- 4.17 Section 1 of the Plan sets out its Contents, including listings of the Figures, Pictures, Tables and Policies within the Plan. Section 2 is the Introduction to the Plan, noting that Charing faces a period of significant growth up to 2030 with nearly 500 new homes being planned. The implications of this growth have informed the preparation of the Plan and have largely driven its proposals.
- 4.18 Section 3 of the Plan is entitled 'The Parish' and contains a brief history and description of each of the settlements of Charing, Charing Heath and Westwell Leacon, together with details of the important landscape and nature conservation features within the Parish.

⁷ PPG Reference ID: 41-041-20140306.

- 4.19 Section 4, entitled 'Preparing the Plan', contains a brief description of how the Plan has been prepared since 2016, and includes a list of the strategic policies within the ALP with which the Plan must be in general conformity. The roles of the Parish Council as the qualifying body and the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee are explained.
- 4.20 Section 5, entitled 'Community Engagement', contains a summary of the various community consultation and engagement activities that were undertaken from the launch meetings held in September 2016 through to the Regulation 14 consultation in early 2020. It describes the work of the various formal and informal task groups who prepared many of the research project reports, and also of the volunteers who assisted in the consultation and engagement work.
- 4.21 Section 6 sets out the Plan's Vision and the sixteen Objectives that were developed during the initial stages of the Plan's preparation (see also paragraph 3.9 above). The Vision of the Plan is as follows:

"Our vision for the parish of Charing at the end of the Plan period is that both new and existing residents will be enjoying the same or greater benefits of living in the village and parish as current residents do, and that the area will be an even more attractive community in which to live and work."

The Objectives of the Plan are as follows:

1. *To minimise the impact of new developments on the surrounding countryside, landscape and ecosystems.*
2. *To ensure the beautiful views inwards and outwards are not compromised, and the public open spaces are protected.*
3. *To improve and increase Charing village parking, including provision of charging facilities to encourage the use of electric vehicles.*
4. *To establish a multi-purpose community centre with attractions for all.*
5. *To provide existing and future residents with the opportunity to live in a decent home.*
6. *To enhance the prospects of local business and take actions to create additional employment.*
7. *To reduce harm to the environment by seeking to minimise pollution.*
8. *To ensure the village character and spirit are maintained, and, where possible, enhanced.*
9. *To support actions likely to re-establish a pub/restaurant/hotel in the village heart.*
10. *To support the enhancement of, and improvement in, the level of healthcare provision.*
11. *To promote retail activity to the parish, especially Charing High Street.*
12. *To take actions to ensure road traffic congestion does not get worse, and that road networks in the parish are safe for both vehicle users and pedestrians.*
13. *To establish a formal cycle and footpath between Charing and Charing Heath.*

- 14. To support full restoration of the Archbishop's Palace.*
- 15. To support all initiatives which preserve heritage in the parish.*
- 16. To promote sustainable tourism.*

The relevant links between these Objectives and the draft policies in the Plan are set out in the introductory paragraph to each of the following parts of this report that address Sections 7-12 of the Plan.

- 4.22 The Basic Conditions Statement (at Sections 4.1 and 4.2) describes how the Plan, and its objectives and policies, has regard to national policies contained in the NPPF and contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. Section 4.3 of the Basic Conditions Statement sets out how the Plan's policies are in general conformity with the strategic policies in the adopted ALP.
- 4.23 As noted at paragraph 2.6 above, I noted, as part of my initial assessment of the Plan, that with regard to Policies H4, H7, H8, H9, H10, H11 and H12, ABC had raised representations to each of those policies stating that, in their assessment, the policies are not in general conformity with the adopted Local Plan. As my eighth question, I invited the Qualifying Body to consider the Borough Council's representations, a number of which could be resolved by amendments to the draft policy text. I considered that, where appropriate, the Qualifying Body might wish to provide a note setting out any proposed amendments that I may consider as modifications to the Plan.
- 4.24 In response to that question, the Qualifying Body duly provided some draft amended text for Policies H4, H7, H8, H9 and H10, which I consider further at paragraph 4.78 below, and more general responses regarding Policies H11 and H12, which I also consider below.
- 4.25 Overall, and subject to the modifications that I recommend to specific policies below, I am satisfied that individually and collectively the Plan's policies will contribute to the achievement of sustainable patterns of development. There are also a number of other detailed matters which require amendment to ensure that the policies have the necessary regard to national policy and are in general conformity with the strategic policies of ABC. Accordingly, I recommend modifications in this report in order to address those matters.

Specific Issues of Compliance

- 4.26 I turn now to consider each of the proposed policies in the draft Plan, which are contained in Sections 7-12 of the Plan, and I take into account, where appropriate, the representations that have been made concerning the policies.

Community Wellbeing

- 4.27 Section 7 of the Plan addresses the theme of Community Wellbeing in the Plan area and contains eight policies (Policies C1-C8). The draft policies are linked specifically to three of the Plan's Objectives (Nos. 9, 10 and 16 as listed above).
- 4.28 Policy C1 (New community centre at Parsons Mead, and improved sports facilities) relates to the Plan's flagship programme for a new community centre at Parsons Mead, which is described in more detail at Section 13 in the Plan (see paragraph 4.102 below), and also to the Plan's support for additional sports, recreation, social and educational facilities within the Plan area. I consider that the policy is appropriately drafted, subject to a cross-reference to Section 13 and the more detailed material therein, for the benefit of users of the Plan, and recommended modification **PM1** addresses that matter.
- 4.29 Policy C2 (Infrastructure, services and facilities) is a lengthy policy setting out a series of eleven criteria concerning infrastructure, services and facilities that development proposals will be expected to address. The Borough Council has raised a detailed representation concerning certain parts of the policy, and I am also concerned that the length of the policy and its present structure leads to a lack of clarity regarding its specific requirements. In order to improve its clarity, I therefore recommend modification **PM2** which has the effect of re-structuring the policy requirements in a more concise way, for the benefit of users of the Plan.
- 4.30 Policy C3 (New burial ground) relates to the proposal to use land owned by the Parish Council at Westwell Leacon (as identified on Figure 4 in the Plan) for a new cemetery suitable for natural burials, subject to satisfactory site investigations. I consider that the policy and its supporting justification is appropriately drafted.
- 4.31 Policy C4 (Communications infrastructure) seeks to improve and extend the coverage of digital and high-speed broadband communication networks in the Plan area. This accords with national policy, and I consider that the policy is appropriately drafted.
- 4.32 Policy C5 (Shopping) states that proposals for additional retail services in and around the High Street in Charing, and also that proposals to increase footfall within retail units through appropriate forms of tourism development will be supported. I also consider that this policy is appropriately drafted.
- 4.33 Policy C6 (Health and health care) states that proposals to expand the Charing GP Surgery and Practice will be supported. In my assessment, the policy does need further qualification to state that proposals to expand the Surgery will be supported subject to planning criteria including access, car parking and impact on local amenities being addressed satisfactorily.

I therefore recommend an amendment to cover this matter, as part of my recommended modification **PM3** (see paragraph 4.36 below).

- 4.34 Policy C7 (Education) states that, where justified, development proposals will be required to provide for necessary education infrastructure and facilities, and that such provision must be in place to support the needs of the development.
- 4.35 With regard to both Policies C6 and C7, I noted as part of my preliminary assessment of the Plan that, as drafted, both policies do not provide sufficient information for users of the Plan on how new health care and educational facilities will be secured. I further noted that, commonly, this is achieved by planning contributions secured through Section 106 agreements linked to planning permissions for new residential development. I considered that Policies C6 and C7 could be linked by suitable cross-references to Policy C2 in order to address this point. As my second question (see paragraph 2.6 above), I therefore sought the Qualifying Body's views on that approach and, subject to their position, the Qualifying Body might wish to provide draft text for the policies which sets out the proposed approach to securing the new facilities. I further noted that the Qualifying Body should take into account Kent County Council's comments on Policy C7 provided in their Regulation 16 representation.
- 4.36 As part of the Qualifying Body's response to me on 20 October 2022, revised wording for the text of both Policies C6 and C7 was suggested. I have considered that suggested replacement text, and subject also to the matter covered at paragraph 4.34 above with regard to Policy C6, I consider that the replacement text does address the points that I raised with some small revisions. Recommended modifications **PM3** and **PM4** therefore cover the required amendments to Policies C6 and C7 respectively, in order to provide improved clarity on the interpretation of these policies for users of the Plan.
- 4.37 Policy C8 (New skate park and other recreational facilities for older children) states that proposals to build a new skate park on the Arthur Baker Playing Fields in Charing will be supported. In this case, the title of the policy, and its supporting justification, also indicate that it addresses the provision of other recreational facilities for older children and I consider that the policy text should be extended to cover that matter. Therefore, I recommend modification **PM5** accordingly.
- 4.38 With recommended modifications PM1-PM5, I consider that the Plan's section on Community Wellbeing and its accompanying policies (Policies C1-C8) is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the ALP, has regard to national guidance, would contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and so would meet the Basic Conditions.

Traffic and Transport

- 4.39 Section 8 of the Plan addresses the theme of Traffic and Transport in the Plan area and contains five policies (Policies T1-T5). The draft policies are linked specifically to two of the Plan's Objectives (Nos. 3 and 12 as listed above).
- 4.40 Policy T1 (Traffic congestion and speed) sets out five criteria by which development proposals can be assessed in order to seek to reduce traffic congestion and speed and improve road safety within the Plan area. Upon my preliminary assessment of the Plan, I noted that, as titled, this policy and potentially some parts of its wording are not land-use planning considerations, but rather are the responsibilities of the Local Highway Authority (Kent County Council) under other legislation, e.g. road safety, traffic speed and HGV restrictions. I considered that the policy will require modification to address the environmental impacts of traffic generation potentially arising from new developments upon the surrounding area, rather than matters covered by other legislation. As my third question, I therefore invited the Qualifying Body to provide me with some suitable draft text for consideration as a modification, which excludes matters that are the direct responsibility of Kent County Council under the Highways Act and related legislation. I also noted that such matters are addressed in the supporting text, for example at sub-section 8.1, and that I am content with that approach. I further noted that Kent County Council have made some detailed representations concerning this policy, which the Qualifying Body might wish to take account of in their response. As part of the Qualifying Body's response to me dated 20 October 2022, it was proposed that criteria b) and e) be deleted from the text of the policy. I have considered this proposal, which does address the points that I raised in my question and which I therefore recommend as modification **PM6** to the Plan.
- 4.41 Policy T2 (Pedestrian safety) sets out four criteria by which development proposals can be assessed in order to achieve satisfactory pedestrian safety and accessibility at key points within the Plan area. Whilst this policy also includes matters that are covered by other legislation, I am again satisfied that its primary purpose is to ensure that new development proposals ensure that satisfactory provision is made for safe and accessible pedestrian movement.
- 4.42 Policy T3 (Residential car parking spaces) sets out three criteria relating to the provision of on-site car parking spaces for new residential developments in the Plan area, including the adequate provision of electric vehicle charging points. I note that criterion a), which covers the provision of visitor parking spaces at sites close to certain roads within the Plan area, exceeds the Borough Council's adopted parking requirement (as set out in ALP Policy TR3a). I have given careful consideration to the evidence which supports this criterion, notably RPR116, and I further note that the Borough Council has not raised a specific objection to the requirements of criterion a). On that basis, I am satisfied that the policy,

and each of its three criteria, are appropriately drafted in the context of both national and local policies reflecting the specific circumstances that are evident in Charing. I do not recommend any modifications to the policy.

- 4.43 Policy T4 (Charing village parking) states that development proposals for additional public car parking within or close to the centre of Charing village will be supported, and that larger residential developments more than 1.0 kilometre from the village centre should contribute to the costs of adding to or improving car parking facilities in the village centre. In my assessment this specific requirement could potentially exceed the national policy requirement that developer contributions should be directly related (my emphasis) to the impacts and demands that are generated by the new developments. Notwithstanding the parking survey information set out in section 8.4, and in RPRs 116 and 140, in the case of developments which are located more than 1.0 kilometre from the village centre, it will be difficult to quantify and justify an increase in public car parking provision in the centre of Charing that is directly attributable to one or more new developments. Furthermore, in the context of both national and local policy objectives which seek to promote the use of more sustainable modes of transport than the private car, such a policy requirement could reduce or even negate the opportunities for achieving those objectives. Accordingly, I consider that the policy should be modified by the deletion of criterion b) as drafted, and be replaced by a reference to Policy C2 (as recommended for modification) which covers developer contributions. Recommended modification **PM7** addresses these points.
- 4.44 Policy T5 (Rights of way, bridleways and cycleways) contains two criteria for improving and enhancing the connectivity of new development proposals to the network of public rights of way, bridleways and cycleways in the Plan area, including by the provision of new such links where appropriate. I consider that the policy is appropriately drafted.
- 4.45 With recommended modifications PM6 and PM7, I consider that the Plan's section on Traffic and Transport and its accompanying policies (Policies T1-T5) is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the ALP, has regard to national guidance, would contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and so would meet the Basic Conditions.

Employment Creation and Business Development

- 4.46 Section 9 of the Plan addresses the theme of Employment Creation and Business Development in the Plan area and contains three policies (Policies EC1-EC3). The draft policies are linked specifically to two of the Plan's Objectives (Nos. 6 and 11 as listed above).
- 4.47 Policy EC1 (Locations allocated for new business units) allocates three sites for the development of new business premises, these being the Parsons Mead (for six business units and a shared space area), the

Charing Motors site (formerly known as Northdowns Service Station), where planning permission exists for some retail/commercial units on part of the site, and land at the Hatch Engineering site to the south of the Charing village for industrial development. The sites are identified on Figure 7 with further information on potential E Class uses for each site being set out at Table 6. The policy also sets out appropriate requirements for development proposals, including design, access, servicing and connections to footpaths and cycleways.

- 4.48 Policy EC2 (Mixed-use developments) is a short policy stating that mixed-use developments, comprising commercial and domestic properties, will be supported on Parsons Mead, sites S28, S29 and S55 (c.f. paragraph 2.1 above), and any new housing sites.
- 4.49 Upon my initial assessment of the Plan, and with regard to Policy EC1, I noted from the Borough Council's representations that the allocation of the Charing Motors site for new business units is considered to not be in general conformity with the adopted ALP, and specifically with site allocation S28, in that it reduces the potential to boost the supply of housing by delivering only a mixed-use scheme, or an entirely residential scheme. As noted by the Borough Council, this appears to contradict part of Policy EC2 (a policy which is supported by the Borough Council). I invited the Qualifying Body, as my fourth question (see paragraph 2.6 above), to provide me with a note setting out their preferred approach for addressing the future planning of the Charing Motors site. I noted that this approach should remove the contradiction that is presently evident between Policies EC1 and EC2, and that the contradiction is also evident between Figures 7 and 19. I also observed that bearing in mind that the Parsons Mead site is also addressed by both Policies EC1 and EC2, I saw some merit in consolidating those policies to constitute a 'Business and Mixed-Use Developments' policy and I also welcomed the views of the Qualifying Body on that point.
- 4.50 As part of their response to me dated 20 October 2022, the Qualifying Body set out a full note on the Charing Motors site including relevant extracts from the adopted ALP. It is the Qualifying Body's view that the residential site allocation S28 in the ALP has erroneously included some land at the site which was not intended or put forward by the site owners for residential development, particularly as it includes a vehicle repair workshop built as recently as 2015/16 to facilitate the relocation of the business from a site elsewhere in Charing.
- 4.51 The Qualifying Body also included in their response to me draft policy text for a consolidated new Policy EC1 (Locations allocated for new business units) which seeks to remove the inconsistencies that I identified between current draft Policies EC1 and EC2.
- 4.52 From everything that I have read and seen regarding the Charing Motors site, including observations on my site visit, I consider that it is probably the case that the ALP Policy S28 site allocation has included land, whether

in error or not, which the owners did not intend to be put forward for redevelopment for new housing. Nevertheless, it is the case that the whole of the Charing Motors site is allocated for the development of ca. 20 dwellings in the adopted ALP, which could lead to the loss of the existing business. In their representations, the Borough Council seek the removal of the site from Policy EC1, but do also state that "*alternatively, the Council suggest that the criteria should be amended to allow a flexible approach to the redevelopment of the site in conformity with Policy S28*". It is my conclusion that such a flexible approach is necessary in order to address the future development of the site and I consider that it should be possible, subject to appropriate design, layout and access to accommodate a mixed-use development, with appropriate conditions attached to a planning permission to safeguard residential amenities, at the site in order to retain and secure employment opportunities. I understand that a current Reserved Matters application (following an earlier outline planning permission) for details of a new residential development on the southern part of the site does contain details of 20 new dwellings, which would achieve the indicative residential capacity for the site set out in the ALP.

- 4.53 To conclude on both Policies EC1 and EC2, I therefore recommend modifications to Policy EC1, taking account of the suggested replacement text proposed by the Qualifying Body and my own assessment, the deletion of Policy EC2 and an amendment to Figure 7 and Table 6 in the Plan. These modifications are necessary to ensure that the Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the adopted ALP. Recommended modifications **PM8** and **PM9** address these matters.
- 4.54 Policy EC3 (Protection of existing commercial/industrial zones) sets out eight sites in the Plan area (which are shown on Figure 8) which should be maintained for continued commercial/industrial use. The Borough Council has raised representations to certain aspects of this policy stating that it diverges from the approach set out in Policy EMP2 of the ALP.
- 4.55 In my assessment, the policy as drafted is overly restrictive and does lack clarity on how any future development proposals at the sites concerned would be considered. The Borough Council's representations contain details of a similar, but somewhat more flexible, policy approach that applies within Tenterden and the villages. I consider that this provides a more effective approach than the policy as presently drafted, and I therefore recommend modifications to the policy text, to reflect that approach and in order to ensure that the Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the adopted ALP. Recommended modification **PM10** addresses this matter.
- 4.56 With recommended modifications PM8-PM10, I consider that the Plan's section on Employment Creation and Business Development and its accompanying policies (Policies EC1-EC3, to be replaced by revised Policies EC1 and EC2) is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the ALP, has regard to national guidance, would contribute to the

achievement of sustainable development and so would meet the Basic Conditions.

Countryside and Environment

- 4.57 Section 10 of the Plan addresses the theme of Countryside and Environment in the Plan area and contains seven policies (Policies E1-E7). The draft policies are linked specifically to five of the Plan's Objectives (Nos. 1, 2, 8, 14 and 15 as listed above).
- 4.58 Policy E1 (Historic environment) states that proposals which conserve and enhance designated heritage assets in the Plan area will be supported, and that proposals that affect non-designated heritage assets (NDHAs) will be considered taking account of any harm or loss, and the significance of the assets and their setting. I visited the sites of the proposed NDHAs during the course of my site visit and I do not disagree with the proposed identification of any building, structure or site as a NDHA from all that I have seen and read. An amendment is necessary to clause a) in order that the policy has regard to national policy, and I also consider that suitable references should be made in the policy to the relevant maps and listings of heritage assets in the Plan area for the benefit of users of the Plan. These matters are addressed by recommended modification **PM11**. Kent County Council considers that there are other assets and sites in the Parish worthy of consideration as NDHAs, but I have examined the submitted Plan on the basis of the proposed NDHAs listed therein. This is a matter that might be considered in a future review of the Plan.
- 4.59 Policy E2 (The Archbishop's Palace) states in essence that proposals for the ongoing restoration of The Archbishop's Palace (which is a scheduled ancient monument with four Grade I listed buildings in the centre of Charing village) that enhance public access will be encouraged, if shown to be possible. RPR 129 contains further information about this important heritage asset. I concur with the objectives and draft text of this policy.
- 4.60 Policy E3 (Designation of local green spaces in the Parish) states that ten sites within the Plan area are designated as Local Green Spaces. Eight are at Charing village, one is at Charing Heath and one is at Westwell Leacon, as shown on Figures 10-12.
- 4.61 Policy E4 (Local green space development) states that proposals for development in such locations will only be allowed in very special circumstances and sets out the criteria which would apply should any development take place.
- 4.62 Upon my initial assessment of the Plan, I considered that Policies E3 and E4 should be combined, to form a 'Local Green Spaces' policy, which should be linked by cross-references to Figures 10-12. As my fifth question, I therefore invited the Qualifying Body to consider this matter and, if appropriate, to provide draft text for a replacement Policy E3 that I may consider as a modification to the Plan. As part of the Qualifying

Body's response to me dated 20 October 2022, revised policy text for a combined policy (to be Policy E3 - Local Green Spaces) was suggested.

4.63 I have assessed the proposed designation of each Local Green Space against the criteria set out in the NPPF (at paragraph 102), which states that the Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green space is:

- "a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;*
- b) demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and*
- c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land."*

In addition, paragraph 101 states that Local Green Space should be capable of enduring beyond the end of the Plan period.

4.64 During the course of my site visit, I observed that the ten proposed Local Green Spaces fall into three categories. Firstly, the sites at the Picnic Area Maidstone Road (A20), Piquets Meadow (A20), Clewards Meadow, Sundial Garden, Sayer Road, Arthur Baker Playing Fields, the Westwell Leacon Recreation Ground and the Charing Heath Recreation Ground are green spaces of varying size that are used by their local communities for a variety of informal and formal recreational activities. Secondly, Charing Cemetery at School Road is an important and well-tended public space close to the centre of Charing village. Finally, Alderbed Meadow is an area of wet grassland and woodland immediately to the east of the Arthur Baker Playing Fields and is a designated Local Wildlife Site.

4.65 In the national policy context, I am satisfied that all of the sites listed above justify their designation as proposed Local Green Spaces. I have taken into account the supporting material contained in RPR 114 and my own observations in reaching that conclusion. I have noted that Alderbed Meadow is already protected by its designation as a Local Wildlife Site, but I do consider that it also fulfils the necessary criteria for designation as a Local Green Space.

4.66 With regard to the policy text, and specifically in relation to managing development within a Local Green Space, this should be consistent with those for Green Belts (NPPF paragraph 103), and development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. I am satisfied that the proposed text for revised Policy E3 (see paragraph 4.62 above) does have due regard to national policy. It is therefore my conclusion that, having regard to NPPF paragraphs 101-102 and the guidance in the PPG⁸, the ten sites identified within the Plan should be designated as Local Green Spaces and that Policy E3 (as proposed to be modified) meets the Basic Conditions. Recommended modifications **PM12** and **PM13** address the necessary amendments to Policies E3 and E4.

⁸ PPG Reference IDs: 37-005-20140306 to 37-022-20140306.

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- 4.67 Policy E5 (Landscape strategy, and safeguarding and enhancing biodiversity) contains four criteria which state, firstly, that development proposals should include a proportionate landscape strategy and demonstrate consideration of both near and distant views of the development. It states, secondly, that each such development should put forward proposals to enhance the biodiversity and green infrastructure of the Parish wherever possible. Thirdly, it states that development proposals should safeguard features of nature conservation interest and should include measures to retain, conserve and enhance habitats and networks of ecological interest. Finally, it states that development proposals which minimise impacts on, and provide net gains in, biodiversity will be supported in principle. I consider that the policy and its supporting justification is appropriately drafted. However, it will now be re-numbered as Policy E4 and this amendment is addressed by modification **PM14**.
- 4.68 Policy E6 (Views) states that developments will not be supported that significantly detract from certain views within the Plan area that are listed within the policy (which are identified on Figure 13, and accompanying photographs on pages 51-55 in the Plan). During the course of my site visit, I visited the locations identified on Figure 13, and I am satisfied that all of the views listed warrant their inclusion in this policy. I consider that the policy should make reference to Figure 13, for the benefit of users of the Plan, and the policy will now also be re-numbered as Policy E5. These matters are covered by recommended modification **PM15**.
- 4.69 Policy E7 (Climate change) is a lengthy policy and contains five clauses which contain measures by which development proposals in the Plan area can address the effects of climate change. These cover a wide range of matters including green infrastructure, energy reduction and efficiency, waste recycling, maximising thermal efficiency and environmental sustainability, the provision of sustainable transport infrastructure, flood protection and drought-resistant planting. The policy states that development proposals will be supported where such measures are addressed as appropriate. Although it is a lengthy policy, I am satisfied that it provides clear guidance on the many measures that can be incorporated in development proposals in order to address climate change. This accords with national policies. I consider that the policy and its supporting justification is appropriately drafted. However, it will now be re-numbered as Policy E6 and this amendment is addressed by modification **PM16**.
- 4.70 With recommended modifications PM11-PM16, I consider that the Plan's section on Countryside and Environment and its accompanying policies (Policies E1-E7, to be replaced by revised Policies E1-E6) is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the ALP, has regard to national guidance, would contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and so would meet the Basic Conditions.

Housing

- 4.71 Section 11 of the Plan addresses the theme of Housing in the Plan area and contains seventeen policies (Policies H1-H17). The draft policies are linked to one of the Plan's Objectives (No. 5 as listed above). This section of the Plan is informed by supporting studies including a Housing Needs Assessment prepared by AECOM in 2017 (RPR 103), a Call for Sites in March 2017 (RPR 149) and site assessments (RPR 110), the results of which are summarised in sub-sections 11.4 and 11.6.
- 4.72 Policy H1 (Land at Parsons Mead) covers the proposed development of two adjoining sites of Parsons Mead and land adjoining Burleigh Bungalow in Charing, but which are referred to as just 'Parsons Mead' throughout the Plan. The combined site is shown on Figure 20. The policy is lengthy and sets out details of the proposed development of a new community centre incorporating a number of potential uses, including employment floorspace, uses promoting health and wellbeing and events space. This is the Parish Council's 'flagship' project for the Parish and for this Plan, and which is further described at Section 13 in the Plan (see paragraph 4.102 below).
- 4.73 The policy further states that 'enabling' residential development (with an indicative capacity of 48 new dwellings) is proposed for the site, the exact quantum of new housing being determined by viability evidence to support a future planning application. It is envisaged that the proposed site for the community centre will be transferred to the Parish Council's ownership at an early stage in the overall development, subject to the site being laid out and serviced to include access and utility supply connections, such as water, drainage and electricity.
- 4.74 Upon my initial assessment of the Plan and consideration of the representations made by the Borough Council regarding this policy, I was concerned at the length of the policy. I also considered that it requires greater clarity on the precise mix of uses being proposed for the site, noting by way of comparison, albeit at a much smaller scale, that the drafting of Policy H3 does provide such clarity. I noted that much of the third and fourth paragraphs of the policy text concerns viability issues and that it is unusual for a site allocation policy in a development plan to set out potential viability issues in such detail. In my view, that matter could be simplified to state that a future planning application should be accompanied by a full viability assessment in order to demonstrate the viability and deliverability of the development proposals. As my sixth question, I therefore invited the Qualifying Body to consider the points that I had raised and, if appropriate, to provide draft text for suitable amendments to the policy text, including to its supporting justification if necessary, in order to address my concern at the length of the policy and also the points raised by the Borough Council.
- 4.75 The Qualifying Body's response to me of 20 October 2022 sets out further details on the development of this policy and includes the suggested text

for a shorter revised policy. I have taken full account of the Qualifying Body's response in my further assessment of the policy. It is clear from that response that the provision of affordable housing as part of the proposed residential development at the site is a key factor in affecting the viability of the project as a whole. However, any reduction in the requirement for affordable housing is a matter for the Borough Council to consider in due course as part of its assessment of a planning application, which will need to be supported by a full viability assessment. Therefore, subject to some further revisions, I recommend a number of amendments to the policy which take account of the draft text suggested by the Qualifying Body and which lead to improved clarity for this policy, for the benefit of users of the Plan. Recommended modification **PM17** addresses these points.

- 4.76 Policy H2 (Housing in Charing Heath) states that small-scale residential developments will be supported on appropriate sites within the confines of Charing Heath, as defined on Figure 24. Two amendments are necessary to secure the clarity of the policy, and these are addressed by recommended modification **PM18**.
- 4.77 Policy H3 (Allocation of land next to Crofters) states that development of land next to Crofters, Charing Heath for an indicative total of nine dwellings will be supported. The site is identified on Figure 21. It is proposed that at least five of the dwellings shall be First Homes, and this accords with national policy for a site of this nature. I noted that Figure 21 in the submission Plan appears to be a copy of a plan prepared by an external party (G.W. Finn & Sons). I therefore requested, in my seventh question (see paragraph 2.6 above), that the Qualifying Body or the Borough Council prepare a replacement plan on an Ordnance Survey base in order that I can substitute the plan as a modification. The Qualifying Body have provided a suitable replacement plan as part of their response dated 20 October 2022. Subject to the replacement of that plan, as addressed by recommended modification **PM19**, I am satisfied that this policy is appropriately drafted.
- 4.78 With regard to Policies H4, H7, H8, H9, H10, H11 and H12, I noted, as part of my initial assessment of the Plan, that the Borough Council had raised representations to each of these policies stating that, in its assessment, the policies are not in general conformity with the adopted Local Plan. I further noted that, in some cases, similar such representations had been made by the Borough Council at the Regulation 14 consultation stage in January 2020. In my eighth question (see paragraph 2.6 above), I commented that, in due course, I would consider fully the relationship of the draft policies to the strategic policies in the adopted Local Plan for the area, but I invited the Qualifying Body to consider the Borough Council's representations, a number of which could be resolved by amendments to the text of the draft policies. I also stated that, where appropriate, the Qualifying Body might wish to provide me with a note setting out any proposed amendments that I may consider as modifications to the Plan. As part of their response dated 20 October 2022

to the questions, the Qualifying Body has suggested amendments to the text of Policies H4, H7, H8, H9 and H10 together with comments on Policies H11 and H12. I have taken account of the Qualifying Body's response with regard to each of these policies as part of my assessment.

- 4.79 H4 (Land rear of Red Lion, Charing Heath) concerns the proposed development of land to the rear of the Red Lion P.H. at Charing Heath for up to nine new dwellings. Although the policy states that part of the site (which comprises the land coloured blue on Figure 22) "*is gifted to the Parish Council*" this is not an appropriate policy requirement and would need to be the subject of either a Section 106 agreement linked to a planning permission or a separate transfer to the Parish Council. I take account of the Qualifying Body's suggested amendments to the policy text, in my assessment. A number of amendments are necessary in order that the policy is in general conformity with the adopted ALP, and these amendments are addressed by recommended modification **PM20**. Furthermore, Figure 24 should be amended to include the land coloured red on Figure 22 within the village confines boundary and this is also addressed by **PM20**.
- 4.80 Policy H5 (First Homes) states that all large-scale developments should meet the Government's policy guidance for the provision of First Homes as part of the affordable housing to be provided at such developments. I consider that the policy and its supporting justification is appropriately drafted.
- 4.81 Policy H6 (Larger new developments) states that further larger-scale developments (that are not already identified elsewhere in the Plan) will only be supported if they do not create a significant adverse impact on infrastructure and amenities, take away land that contributes positively to the local character, damage the character, form, heritage or attractiveness of the settlements and countryside, be disproportionate to the size of the settlement or compromise vehicle movements and pedestrian safety. As drafted, the policy is not an effective planning policy but rather is a series of statements which do not provide a sufficiently clear planning context for the assessment of any proposals for larger-scale developments that might be proposed during the Plan period. The policy therefore requires substantive amendment, and I recommend modification **PM21** to address this matter, in order that the policy is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the adopted ALP.
- 4.82 Policy H7 (Rest of site S55 (S55/2)) concerns land that forms part of the wider ALP Policy S55 site allocation (see paragraph 2.1), which is shown as sites D and E on Figure 19 in the Plan. Policy H7 concerns the land at site E. Together, sites D and E have an indicative capacity for 180 dwellings, and outline planning permission has previously been granted 135 dwellings on site D. As drafted, there is some duplication between the criteria listed in this policy and other policies in both the Plan and the

adopted ALP.⁹ To reduce such duplication and also to improve the clarity of the policy, I recommend a number of amendments to the policy text which are addressed by recommended modification **PM22**. I have taken into account the Qualifying Body's suggested amendments to the policy as part of my assessment.

- 4.83 Policy H8 (Affordable housing) states that 40% of dwellings in developments of 10 or more dwellings, or sites of 0.5. hectare or more should, wherever possible, be affordable housing. It then sets out a tenure mix for such affordable housing. It further states that deviations from this policy should be exceptional and only occur in cases where alternative benefits are being provided to the local community to improve its wellbeing. Finally, it states that this policy will not apply to the housing development proposed for Parsons Mead (c.f. paragraphs 4.72-4.75 above).
- 4.84 The Borough Council has raised significant concerns regarding this policy, and I am clear that the policy is not in general conformity with policy HOU1 in the adopted ALP in a number of respects. In particular, the statement that in cases where any deviations from this policy requirement (40% affordable housing) should be accompanied by community benefits of equal or greater value and the statement that the policy will not apply to the Parson Mead development (Policy H1) are wholly contrary to strategic Policy HOU1 in the adopted ALP. The policy also fails to identify First Homes as part of the affordable housing to be provided in new developments. These matters necessitate a number of amendments to the draft policy in order that it is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the adopted ALP, and these amendments are addressed by recommended modification **PM23**. I have taken into account the Qualifying Body's suggested amendments to the policy as part of my assessment.
- 4.85 Policy H9 (Local-needs housing) states that a minimum of 50% of all new affordable housing in Charing provided by the Plan will initially be made available to those with a local connection and whose needs are not met by the open market. The policy goes on to set out the criteria for meeting the definition of "local connection". The Borough Council has made representations concerning this policy, stating that it is not in general conformity with Policy HOU2 of the adopted ALP. In my assessment, and taking account of the Qualifying Body's suggested amendment to the policy text, I do consider that some amendments are necessary in order that the policy is brought into general conformity with the ALP. Such amendments are addressed by recommended modification **PM24**.
- 4.86 Policy H10 (Local-needs housing on exception sites) states that proposals for the development of small-scale/subsidised special housing schemes in or around Charing village, where housing would not normally be permitted by other policies, will be supported, subject to satisfying four criteria,

⁹ See NPPF, paragraph 16 f).

relating to the need for the development, its scale and potential impacts upon the character of the surrounding area. Following a representation made by the Borough Council, the Qualifying Body has suggested some amendments to the text of this policy as part of its response to my questions (see paragraph 2.6 above). I have taken into account the Borough Council's representation and the Qualifying Body's response in my assessment. I consider that amendments are necessary to the policy text to ensure that the policy is in conformity with Policy HOU2 of the adopted ALP, and these are addressed by recommended modification **PM25**.

- 4.87 Policy H11 (Size of homes) states that developments of 9 or more houses will not be supported unless they approximate the following mix – 10% one bedroom, 40% two bedrooms, 40% three bedrooms, 10% four or more bedrooms – unless viability or other considerations show a robust justification for a different mix, or other policies in the Plan indicate a different mix. The Borough Council considers that this policy is not in conformity with Policy HOU18 of the adopted ALP. However, on the basis of the supporting evidence for the policy, which includes the Housing Needs Assessment 2017 (RPR 103) and the outcomes of public consultation during the preparation of the Plan, I am satisfied that the policy is justified subject to a numeric amendment to the policy text that is addressed by recommended modification **PM26**.
- 4.88 Policy H12 (Mixed development) states that support will be given to developments of 10 or more dwellings which provide a mix of residential and commercial premises, to create local employment and reduce vehicle movements. In my assessment, some amendments are necessary to the title and text of this policy in order to provide greater clarity for users of the Plan, and these are addressed by recommended modification **PM27**. (The Borough Council has submitted a representation citing this policy number, but I consider that this was an error and that the representation should relate to Policy H15. I therefore duly consider that representation at paragraph 4.91 below).
- 4.89 Policy H13 (Housing in Charing Heath) is a short policy stating that the confines of Charing Heath are shown in Figure 24, wherein new development proposals must satisfactorily integrate with the existing settlement. In order to meet the Basic Conditions, I consider that it should be redrafted in accordance with the more conventional drafting of such planning policies. I therefore recommend revised text for the policy as modification **PM28**.
- 4.90 Policy H14 (Infill development) states that infill development within the village confines of Charing and Charing Heath will be supported subject to meeting the requirements of seven planning criteria which are listed in the policy. I consider that the policy is appropriately drafted, provided a further criterion be added stating that such development proposals should take account of other relevant policies in the Plan. This is addressed by recommended modification **PM29**.

- 4.91 Policy H15 (New development, including extensions outside village confines) states that sensitive small-scale development (normally up to 5 dwellings or extensions), compliant with design policies in the Plan, adjoining or close to the confines of Charing village may be supported. It goes on to state that development elsewhere in the countryside will only be supported if it meets the requirements of Policy HOU5 in the Local Plan. The Borough Council has raised representations concerning this policy and considers that it is not sufficiently in general conformity with ALP Policy HOU5. I concur with that view and some amendments to the policy text are necessary as addressed by recommended modification **PM30**.
- 4.92 Policy H16 (Development in residential gardens) states that development proposals involving the complete or partial redevelopment of residential garden land will be permitted provided the proposed development complies with ALP space standards laid out in Policy HOU15. The policy goes on to state that the use of rear gardens for housing within the centre of Charing village will only be permitted provided that it does not harm the character of the village. Subject to amendments for accuracy, I am satisfied that the policy is appropriately drafted. Recommended modification **PM31** addresses the necessary amendments.
- 4.93 Policy H17 (Development on groundwater protection zones) relates to proposed developments which may overlie Groundwater Protection Zones. There are a number of such Zones in the Plan area which are designated to protect the supply of fresh drinking water to the Charing area and beyond. The Borough Council has raised some representations to the policy stating that it results in some duplication to ALP Policy ENV8. However, in my assessment, and taking account of the information provided in RPR 131 and RPR 157, I consider that it is an important policy for this Plan to contain. Subject to an amendment to clause b), which is addressed by recommended modification **PM32**, I consider that the policy is in general conformity with the strategic policies in the adopted ALP.
- 4.94 The final important matter that I need to address with regard to this section of the Plan concerns the issue of nutrient neutrality at the Stodmarsh SAC/SPA site as it affects new residential developments and other developments providing overnight accommodation in the Plan area. The issue affects a number of the proposed Housing Policies, and specifically those which either propose or support new residential developments of whatever type and scale. I have considered this issue in detail at paragraphs 4.5-4.11 in this report, in which I note that Section 11 of the Plan does not, at present, reflect the Borough Council's advice or that of Natural England directly. I considered that, in order to address the issue, a new sub-section within Section 11 ahead of existing sub-section 11.7 should be included in the Plan, rather than by the addition of a policy requirement to each of the relevant Housing Policies.
- 4.95 I have taken account of the Borough Council's response dated 13 October 2022 to my question on this matter, and I therefore recommend the

insertion of a short new sub-section 11.7 in the draft Plan, which will supplement the more detailed information presently set out at sub-section 10.10, in order to provide clarity for users of the Plan and specifically for those considering new residential developments. This is addressed by recommended modification **PM33**.

- 4.96 With recommended modifications PM17-PM33, I consider that the Plan's section on Housing and its accompanying policies (Policies H1-H17) is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the ALP, has regard to national guidance, would contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and so would meet the Basic Conditions.

Design

- 4.97 Section 12 of the Plan sets out the Design policies for new developments in the Plan area and contains three policies (Policies D1-D3). The policies are not specifically addressing any of the Plan's Objectives, but rather are carrying forward recommendations into the Plan from the Charing Parish Design Statement (2002) and the AECOM Heritage and Character Assessment (May 2017).
- 4.98 Policy D1 (Good design) is a lengthy policy, covering a wide range of design considerations for all forms of new development in the Plan area, including extensions, conversions and alterations. In my assessment, the scope of the policy does justify its length. However, in order to ensure clarity for users of the Plan, I do consider that some presentational and other textual amendments are necessary. I therefore recommend modification **PM34** which encompasses the necessary amendments and revisions.
- 4.99 Policy D2 (Good, imaginative and innovative design) supports the introduction of innovative design features in the planning and layout of new developments within the Plan area. In my assessment, I consider that some amendments to the policy text are necessary to generally conform with the strategic policies of the adopted ALP and to have regard to national policy advice. These amendments are addressed by recommended modification **PM35**.
- 4.100 Policy D3 (Street furniture) concerns the planning and design for street furniture within the Plan area. I have assessed this policy in the context of the many Permitted Development Rights for residents and statutory bodies which apply to some of the matters raised within the scope of this policy. Nevertheless, I do recognise that the policy establishes good principles for the siting, design and appearance of street furniture, particularly in the Conservation Area. However, I do recommend certain amendments to the text of the policy in order to provide the necessary clarity for future users of the Plan. These amendments are encompassed by modification **PM36**.

4.101 With recommended modifications PM34-PM36, I consider that the Plan's section on Design and its accompanying policies (Policies D1-D3) is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the ALP, has regard to national guidance, would contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and so would meet the Basic Conditions.

The Plan's Flagship Programme at Parsons Mead

4.102 Section 13 of the Plan provides a full description of the Parish Council's proposal for a new multi-functional community centre at Parsons Mead, Charing. The proposal is stated to be central to the Plan, and I am in no doubt that it represents a major proposal which will have wide-ranging positive benefits for the Charing community, which is confirmed in the SEA Environmental Report. A number of the draft policies in the Plan have a bearing on the successful implementation of the project, most notably Policy H1 (see paragraphs 4.72-4.75 above), but in my assessment Section 13 also requires some additional commentary regarding the need to ensure that the proposals for the development of the community centre take account of the relevant policies in the Plan and also the adopted ALP. I am also cognisant of the Qualifying Body's response to me regarding my sixth question, which relate to the proposed amendments to Policy H1 (see also **PM17**). I therefore recommend the addition of a new sub-section (to be numbered 13.6) to provide additional commentary on the implementation of the project, and this is addressed by recommended modification **PM37**.

Other Community Needs

4.103 Section 14 of the Plan covers other topics which are of importance to the Charing community but which are not generally the subject of land-use planning policies in the Plan. Notwithstanding this, some of these matters do have implications for policies in the Plan and, where appropriate, I have recommended modifications to reflect these.

Plan Period, Monitoring and Review

4.104 Section 15 of the Plan covers the Plan period, monitoring and review. There is the likelihood that there will be a need for formal review of the Plan during the Plan period, particularly following the adoption of a review to the ALP and any relevant changes in national policy. Although this section does cover the periodic review of the Plan, I consider that it should be strengthened to state a commitment to undertake a formal review, if necessary. This is addressed by recommended modification **PM38**.

Other Matters

4.105 As an advisory comment, when the Plan is being redrafted to take account of the recommended modifications in this report, it should be re-checked for any typographical errors and any other consequential changes, etc. that may be necessary. The Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee

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has advised that two matters (Picture 3 and Paragraph 10.6) require minor correction. These can be undertaken as minor, non-material changes.¹⁰

Concluding Remarks

4.106 I conclude that, with the recommended modifications to the Plan as summarised above and set out in full in the accompanying Appendix, the Charing Neighbourhood Plan 2011-2030 meets the Basic Conditions for neighbourhood plans.

5. Conclusions

Summary

- 5.1 The Charing Neighbourhood Plan 2011-2030 has been duly prepared in compliance with the procedural requirements. My examination has investigated whether the Plan meets the Basic Conditions and other legal requirements for neighbourhood plans. I have had regard to all the responses made following consultation on the Plan, and the supporting documents submitted with the Plan together with the Parish Council's and ABC's responses to my questions.
- 5.2 I have made recommendations to modify certain policies and other matters to ensure that the Plan meets the Basic Conditions and other legal requirements. I recommend that the Plan, once modified, proceeds to referendum.

The Referendum and its Area

- 5.3 I have considered whether or not the referendum area should be extended beyond the designated area to which the Plan relates. I conclude that the Charing Neighbourhood Plan 2011-2030, as modified, has no policy or proposal which I consider to be significant enough to have an impact beyond the designated Neighbourhood Plan boundary, requiring the referendum to extend to areas beyond that boundary. I therefore recommend that the boundary for the purposes of any future referendum on the Plan, should be the boundary of the designated Neighbourhood Plan Area.

Overview

- 5.4 It is clear that the Charing Neighbourhood Plan is the product of much hard work undertaken since 2016 by the Parish Council, its Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee and the many individuals and stakeholders who have contributed to the preparation and development of

¹⁰ PPG Reference ID: 41-106-20190509.

the Plan. In my assessment, the Plan reflects the land use aspirations and objectives of the Charing community for the future planning of their Parish up to 2030. The output is a Plan which should help guide the area's development over that period, making a positive contribution to informing decision-making on planning applications by Ashford Borough Council.

Derek Stebbing

Examiner

Appendix: Modifications

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
PM1	Page 22	<p><u>Policy C1 – New community centre at Parsons Mead and improved sports facilities</u></p> <p>Add new second sentence to the policy text to read as follows:</p> <p>“Further details regarding this project are set out at Section 13 in the Plan.”</p>
PM2	Page 24	<p><u>Policy C2 – Infrastructure, services and facilities</u></p> <p>Delete existing text in full and replace with:</p> <p>“Proposals for new development in the Plan area will be required to make adequate provision for new infrastructure, services and facilities that may be necessary to address the environmental, transportation and social impacts directly arising from such new development.</p> <p>Such provision may include off-site improvements and enhancements that will be secured, where appropriate, by financial contributions linked to the grant of planning permissions.</p> <p>Contributions may be sought by the Borough Council, Kent County Council and service providers for capacity improvements and enhancements to infrastructure, services and facilities which include education, health care, community facilities such as recreational and sports facilities, public open spaces, footpaths and cycleways, allotments and burial spaces, utilities including sewerage, surface water drainage and water supply, and any necessary highway improvements.</p> <p>The Parish Council may seek contributions towards the provisions of a new community centre, including a range of</p>

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		<p>community services and facilities and associated car parking, at Parsons Mead, Charing, and also towards the provision of a new all-weather footpath and cycleway between Charing and Charing Heath.</p> <p>Proposals for new residential development and other development including overnight accommodation within the Plan area will only be supported if they demonstrate nutrient neutrality regarding the Stodmarsh SAC/SPA/Ramsar designated site, both in relation to nitrogen and phosphorous. All such proposals must take account of the guidance on this issue published by Natural England and the Borough Council."</p>
PM3	Page 28	<p><u>Policy C6 – Health and health care</u></p> <p>Extend the first sentence of the policy text by the addition of the following text:</p> <p>"subject to the proposals making satisfactory provision for vehicular and pedestrian access, car parking for patients and staff, and having no adverse impacts upon local amenities.</p> <p>Add new second sentence of policy text, as follows:</p> <p>"Where justified, qualifying developments within the Plan area should provide S106 contributions towards this purpose in accordance with Policy C2 in this Plan."</p>
PM4	Page 29	<p><u>Policy C7 – Education</u></p> <p>Delete the second sentence of the policy text as drafted, and extend the first sentence by the addition of the following text:</p> <p>"in accordance with Kent County Council plans and Policy C2 in this Plan."</p>
PM5	Page 29	<p><u>Policy C8 – New skate park and other recreational facilities for older children</u></p>

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		<p>Add new second sentence to the policy text, as follows:</p> <p>“Other proposals at appropriate sites for new recreational facilities that are suitable for older children will also be supported.”</p>
PM6	Page 32	<p><u>Policy T1 – Traffic congestion and speed</u></p> <p>Delete criteria b) and e) in full.</p> <p>Accordingly, criteria c) and d) will become criteria b) and c) respectively, without any further amendment.</p>
PM7	Page 35	<p><u>Policy T4 – Charing village parking</u></p> <p>Delete criterion b) of the policy text, and replace with:</p> <p>“Contributions may be sought from new developments within the Plan area, in accordance with Policy C2 in the Plan, towards the provision of additional public car parking, including at the proposed new Community Centre at Parsons Mead, Charing, where justified.”</p>
PM8	Pages 38 and 39	<p><u>Policy EC1 – Locations allocated for new business units</u></p> <p>Delete existing policy in full, and replace with:</p> <p><u>“Policy EC1 – Business and Mixed-use developments</u></p> <p>The following sites (as shown on Figure 7) are proposed for new business or mixed-use developments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Parsons Mead, Charing (as part of the Parsons Mead Community Centre scheme – see also Policy H1 and Section 13) b) Charing Motors site (as part of the Ashford Local Plan Policy S28 allocation for new residential development)

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		<p>c) Hatch Engineering site</p> <p>Table 6 sets out the Class E uses that would be considered suitable at each of the above sites.</p> <p>Development proposals for each of these sites will need to demonstrate the suitability of building design and layout for the proposed use(s), taking account of all other relevant policies in the Plan, the provision of satisfactory vehicular access and servicing arrangements, the provision of suitable access for pedestrians and cyclists and adequate on-site car parking for staff and visitors. All proposals must ensure that there are no adverse impacts upon residential amenities and the natural environment in the vicinity of the site.”</p> <p><u>Figure 7</u></p> <p>Amend title to read:</p> <p>“Sites suitable for new business or mixed-use developments”.</p> <p>Delete notation currently shown for Site 1 – Northdowns, and replace with a notation that covers the whole of the Charing Motors site (as contained at Policy S28 of the adopted ALP). The site should be described in the Plan and on Figure 7 as the “Charing Motors” site as the former name of “Northdowns Garage” is now defunct.</p> <p>Add new notation panel to Figure 7 containing the following text:</p> <p>“1. <u>Charing Motors site</u> – suitable for mixed-use development together with new residential development</p> <p>2. <u>Parsons Mead</u> - suitable for some business and/or mixed-use development (see also Policy H1)</p> <p>3. <u>Hatch Engineering</u> – suitable for</p>

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		<p>business development”.</p> <p><u>Table 6</u></p> <p>Add colour coded “Yes” for Class Eb (Sale of food, consumption on premises) at column 4 for the “Charing Motors” site.</p>
PM9	Page 39	<p><u>Policy EC2 – Mixed-use developments</u></p> <p>Delete this policy in full (with a consequential amendment to the Contents at page 9)</p>
PM10	Page 40	<p><u>Policy EC3 – Protection of existing commercial/industrial zones</u></p> <p>Re-number this policy as EC2 (with a consequential amendment to the Contents at page 9).</p> <p>Amend title of Policy to read:</p> <p>“Loss or redevelopment of existing employment sites and premises”.</p> <p>Delete the final sentence of policy text, and replace with the following text:</p> <p>“Proposals for the loss or redevelopment of the above employment sites will not be supported, unless any of the following criteria apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The site is no longer appropriate for continued employment use in terms of its serious adverse impact upon neighbouring occupiers or the environment; b) The site or premises is vacated by the relocation of the existing business to another appropriate site within or close to the Plan area and which ensures the retention of local employment opportunities; c) It has been demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Parish Council and the Borough Council that the site or

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		<p>premises has remained unlet or unsold for continued employment use, despite genuine and sustained marketing of the site or premises on reasonable terms over a period of not less than three years.”</p>
PM11	Page 45	<p><u>Policy E1 – Historic environment</u></p> <p>Clause a) delete the word “and” and replace with “or”.</p> <p>Add new paragraph at the end of the policy text, as follows:</p> <p>“Details of the listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments in the Plan area are set out in supporting document RPR 142. Details of the non-designated heritage assets in the Plan area are set out in section 10.3 of the Plan.”</p>
PM12	Page 48	<p><u>Policy E3 – Designation of local green spaces in the parish</u></p> <p>Delete existing policy in full and replace with revised Policy E3 – Local Green Spaces, as set out in the Qualifying Body’s response to Question 5 dated 20 October 2022¹¹, with no amendments.</p>
PM13	Page 48	<p><u>Policy E4 – Local green space development</u></p> <p>Delete this policy (with a consequential amendment to the Contents at page 9).</p>
PM14	Page 49	<p><u>Policy E5 – Landscape strategy, and safeguarding and enhancing biodiversity</u></p> <p>Re-number this policy as E4 (with a consequential amendment to the Contents at page 9).</p>
PM15	Page 51	<p><u>Policy E6 – Views</u></p>

¹¹ View at: <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/s5dhlfad/charing-pc-response-to-examiners-questions.pdf>

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		<p>Re-number this policy as E5 (with consequential amendments to the Contents at page 9 and the titles on pages 51-55).</p> <p>Second line of policy text - insert the words "as identified on Figure 13," after the words "within the village".</p>
PM16	Page 56	<p><u>Policy E7 – Climate Change</u></p> <p>Re-number this policy as E6 (with a consequential amendment to the Contents at page 9).</p>
PM17	Page 66	<p><u>Policy H1 – Land at Parsons Mead</u></p> <p>Delete second paragraph of policy text in full, and replace with:</p> <p>"The site is also allocated for new residential development, with an indicative capacity of 48 dwellings."</p> <p>Delete third and fourth paragraphs of policy text in full.</p> <p>Amend fifth paragraph of policy text to read as follows:</p> <p>"Proposals for the development of the Parsons Mead site shall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) be planned and designed in such a way as to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Charing Conservation Area and its setting in accordance with Policy ENV 14 of the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030; b) retain and enhance the existing landscape features of the site, where possible; c) provide safe vehicular and pedestrian access to serve the proposed residential development and the proposed Community Centre;

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		<p>d) provide adequate car parking including electric vehicle charging points for the proposed residential development in accordance with the parking standards set out in Policy TRA 3(a) of the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030;</p> <p>e) provide adequate on-site car parking including electric vehicle charging points for the staff and users of the proposed Community Centre;</p> <p>f) include a full Viability Assessment as part of any planning application(s) for the development of the site;</p> <p>g) ensure that the amenities of neighbouring residential properties are safeguarded;</p> <p>h) protect the alignment of Public Footpath AW349 which crosses the site;</p> <p>i) include an Archaeological Assessment of the site, and if necessary, include a programme for archaeological mitigation;</p> <p>j) take account of all other relevant policies in this Plan and the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030, as they affect the specific development proposals.”</p>
PM18	Page 67	<p><u>Policy H2 – Housing in Charing Heath</u></p> <p>Insert the word “residential” after the words “Small-scale” in the first line of policy text.</p> <p>Delete clause b) in full and replace with:</p> <p>“Proposals for such developments should take account of Policy H13 in the Plan, and its supporting text.”</p>
PM19	Page 68	<p><u>Figure 21 – Land next to Crofters</u></p> <p>Delete the existing plan at Figure 21 and replace with the plan supplied by the Qualifying</p>

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		Body at page 9 of their response dated 20 October 2022. ¹²
PM20	Pages 69, 70 and 77	<p><u>Policy H4 – Land rear of Red Lion, Charing Heath</u></p> <p>Amend the policy title and the title of Figure 22 to read “Red Lion P.H.”</p> <p>Amend the first sentence of policy text to read:</p> <p>“Proposals for the residential development of land to the rear of the Red Lion P.H. at Charing Heath, with an indicative capacity of nine dwellings, as shown coloured red on Figure 22, will be supported subject to:”</p> <p>Amend criterion iii) to read as follows:</p> <p>“iii) The land coloured blue on Figure 22 is allocated for use as public open space for recreational purposes or for other public benefit, and includes the land occupied by the Charing Heath and Lenham Heath Memorial Hall.”</p> <p>Amend criterion iv) to read as follows:</p> <p>“iv) The development shall provide a pedestrian and cycle route that connects the site to the proposed ‘Charing/Charing Heath Greenway’ via Windhill Lane.”</p> <p>Amend criterion v) by replacing the words “policy C2g” with “Policy C2”.</p> <p><u>Figure 24 – Charing Heath confines</u></p> <p>Amend Figure 24 by the inclusion of the land coloured red on Figure 22 within the village confines of Charing Heath.</p>
PM21	Page 71	<p><u>Policy H6 – Larger new developments</u></p> <p>Delete existing policy text in full, and replace with the following text:</p>

¹² See footnote 11.

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		<p>“Proposals for any larger-scale residential developments within the Plan area that are not presently identified by site allocations in this Plan or in the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030 will only be supported if the proposals demonstrate that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the development will not lead to any adverse impacts upon existing community and transportation infrastructure provision within the Plan area; and, b) the development will not result in the loss of any land that contributes positively to the character, form, heritage or attractiveness of any part of the Plan area; and, c) the development will not lead to adverse impacts upon any sites of nature conservation importance within the Plan area; and, d) the development will not lead to any adverse impacts upon the designated heritage assets within the Plan area; and, e) the proposals satisfy the requirements of Policies HOU3a and HOU5 of the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030; and, f) provides appropriate contributions to any necessary community and transportation infrastructure improvements within the Plan area, in accordance with Policy C2 in the Plan and Policies COM1 and IMP1 in the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030.”
PM22	Page 72	<p><u>Policy H7 – Rest of site S55 (S55/2)</u></p> <p>Amend the policy title to read:</p>

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		<p>“Local Plan residential site allocation S55 – land to the west of Poppyfields, Charing”.</p> <p>Amend first sentence of policy text to read:</p> <p>“Residential development of the second phase of Local Plan site allocation S55 (S55/2) as shown on Figure 19 as site E will be supported if it:”</p> <p>Delete criteria d) and e) in full, and replace with:</p> <p>“d) provides appropriate contributions to any necessary community and transportation infrastructure improvements within the Plan area, in accordance with Policy C2 in the Plan and Policies COM1 and IMP1 in the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030;”</p> <p>Criterion f) will now become e) and amend the text to read:</p> <p>“e) it provides approximately 0.5 hectare of land for use as allotments provided that the need for such allotments is demonstrated by the Parish Council;”</p> <p>Criterion g) will now become f).</p>
PM23	Page 73	<p><u>Policy H8 – Affordable housing</u></p> <p>Delete existing policy text in full, and replace with:</p> <p>“40% of new dwellings in developments of 10 or more dwellings, or sites of 0.5 hectare or more, shall be affordable housing, in accordance with Policy HOU1 in the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030. All proposals are expected to meet their full affordable housing provision on-site.</p> <p>The tenure mix of affordable housing to be provided shall be agreed with the Borough Council, but will include social rented</p>

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		<p>homes, and affordable home ownership schemes, including shared ownership and First Homes. The proposed tenure mix should take account of the Housing Needs Assessment 2017 (RPR 103) prepared alongside this Plan.</p> <p>Should independently verified viability evidence establish that it is not possible to deliver the affordable housing in full as required by this policy, and the viability position is agreed by the Borough Council, the Borough Council will consider on a case-by-case basis flexibility in the provision of affordable housing in accordance with clause 2) of Policy HOU1.”</p>
PM24	Page 74	<p><u>Policy H9 – Local-needs housing</u></p> <p>Delete bullet points in this policy</p> <p>Amend first sentence of policy text to read as follows:</p> <p>“A minimum of 50% of all new affordable housing provided in the Plan area, either on developments proposed in the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030 or in this Plan shall be made available initially to persons with a local connection and whose needs are not met by the open housing market.”</p> <p>Delete second sentence of policy text, and replace with:</p> <p>“The local connection to be considered in relation to this policy shall be confirmed by the Borough Council in accordance with the requirements of Policy HOU2 in the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030 and the accompanying guidance.”</p>
PM25	Page 74	<p><u>Policy H10 – Local-needs housing on exception sites</u></p>

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		<p>Amend the first sentence of policy text to read as follows:</p> <p>“Proposals for the development of local needs housing schemes on suitable sites beyond the village confines of Charing village, where residential development would not normally be permitted by other policies, will be supported, provided that:”</p> <p>This text to be followed by the four criteria as presently drafted, but with the insertion of the word “and” after each of the first two criteria.</p>
PM26	Page 74	<p><u>Policy H11 – Size of homes</u></p> <p>Delete the figure “9” in the first line of policy text and replace with “10”.</p>
PM27	Page 75	<p><u>Policy H12 – Mixed development</u></p> <p>Amend title to read “Mixed-use development” (with a consequential amendment to the Contents at page 9).</p> <p>Delete existing policy text in full, and replace with:</p> <p>“Proposed developments of 10 dwellings and above which provide a mix of both new dwellings and commercial floorspace within Use Class E, to create local employment opportunities for residents and reduce traffic movements, will be supported, subject to the proposals being planned and designed to take account of other relevant policies in this Plan and the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030 and not leading to any loss of residential amenities in the vicinity of the development.”</p>
PM28	Page 77	<p><u>Policy H13 – Housing in Charing Heath</u></p> <p>Delete existing policy text in full, and replace with:</p> <p>“Proposals for new residential development within the village confines of Charing Heath, as defined on Figure 24,</p>

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		must ensure that the development integrates satisfactorily with the existing form and pattern of the settlement, taking account of other relevant policies in this Plan."
PM29	Page 78	<u>Policy H14 – Infill development</u> Add new criterion h) to the policy text to read as follows: "h. It has been planned and designed to take account of all other relevant policies in this Plan concerning new development within the village confines of Charing and Charing Heath."
PM30	Page 78	<u>Policy H15 – New development, including extensions outside village confines</u> Delete "(normally up to 5 dwellings or extensions)" in the first line of policy text. Delete the word "may" in the third line of policy text and replace with "will" .
PM31	Page 79	<u>Policy H16 – Development in residential gardens</u> Delete the word "permitted" in the 2 nd , 4 th and 8 th lines of policy text and replace with "supported" .
PM32	Page 79	<u>Policy H17 – Development on groundwater protection zones</u> Clause b) – amend the policy text to read as follows: "Proposed housing site S55 in Charing village contains Groundwater Protection Zones, and all proposals for the development of this site will be required to confirm to the satisfaction of the Borough Council and the Environment Agency that any development will not contaminate drinking water supply sources or create flooding risks."

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
PM33	Page 63	<p>Insert new sub-section 11.7, to read as follows:</p> <p>“Addressing nutrient neutrality</p> <p>All proposals for new residential development in the Plan area including those covered by the policies in this section of the Plan and those contained in the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030 for the Plan area will be required to take full account of the advice published by Natural England and the Borough Council on the measures necessary to demonstrate that the proposals satisfactorily mitigate any potential adverse effects on the designated Stodmarsh SAC/SPA/Ramsar sites.</p> <p>All planning applications for new residential development in the Plan area will be assessed on the basis of such advice, and in due course in the context of the Stodmarsh Mitigation Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) prepared by the Borough Council. This matter is also addressed in detail at Section 10.10 in the Plan.”</p> <p>Re-number existing sub-sections 11.7-11.14 as 11.8-11.15 (with consequential amendments to the Contents at page 5).</p>
PM34	Pages 82 and 83	<p><u>Policy D1 – Good design</u></p> <p>Delete clause a) in full and replace with the following text:</p> <p>“Proposals for all forms of new development within the Plan area should seek to achieve high quality design, whilst also demonstrating that they recognise local distinctiveness and traditional patterns of development within the Plan area, such as the scale and setting of buildings, architectural detailing and materials and the protection of important views and heritage assets. Where</p>

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		<p>appropriate to the specific nature and future use of the proposals, the following design principles should be taken into account in the planning and design of new developments:"</p> <p>Delete clause lettering b)-i) inclusive.</p> <p>Place the existing policy text under the following sequence of sub-headings:</p> <p>"New buildings (<i>deleting bold font for Roofs, Walls, Windows, Doors and Garages</i>)</p> <p>Extensions, conversions and alterations</p> <p>New industrial developments</p> <p>Sustainable design</p> <p>Climate change</p> <p>Water conservation</p> <p>Surfacing (<i>deleting the word "prohibited" in the second line of text and replacing it with the word "discouraged"</i>)</p> <p>Boundaries".</p> <p>Delete clause j) in full and replace with the following text:</p> <p>"Proposals which fail to demonstrate good design and appropriate regard to other policies in this Plan, for example on matters regarding landscaping, village character and biodiversity will not be supported."</p> <p>All sub-headings and blocks of text should be separated for presentational clarity.</p>
PM35	Page 83	<p><u>Policy D2 – Good, imaginative and innovative design</u></p> <p>Criterion a) – delete the words "The introduction of imaginative and" and replace with "The incorporation of outstanding and".</p>

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		<p>Criterion c) – delete the words “Simple terracing” and replace with “Terraced residential developments”.</p> <p>Criterion d) – delete existing text, and replace with:</p> <p>“All developments should be planned in the context of the site and its surroundings, taking account of existing developments, natural features such as trees, hedgerows, watercourses and wildlife habitats.”</p>
PM36	Page 83	<p><u>Policy D3 – Street furniture</u></p> <p>Criterion a) – delete the word “suited” and replace with “appropriate”.</p> <p>Criterion b) – delete the word “hidden” and replace with the words “discreetly sited”.</p> <p>Criterion c) – delete existing text in full, and replace with:</p> <p>“External lighting fitments, including street and security lighting, should avoid excessive glare and utilise solar energy and LED lamps wherever possible.”</p>
PM37	Page 89`	<p><u>Section 13 – The Plan’s Flagship Programme at Parsons Mead</u></p> <p>Add new sub-section 13.6, to read as follows:</p> <p>“13.6 Implementation</p> <p>“In addition to meeting the requirements of Policy H1 in the Plan, the successful planning and implementation of the project will need to take account of other relevant policies in this Plan and the Ashford Local Plan 2030. To that end, the Parish Council will continue to work in partnership with the Borough Council and other key stakeholders to ensure that the proposals can be taken forward for</p>

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
		planning approval by the Borough Council.”
PM38	Page 91	<p><u>Section 15 – Plan period, monitoring and review</u></p> <p>Add new 4th paragraph to this section, to read as follows:</p> <p>“If necessary, the Plan will be formally reviewed and subject to statutory consultation and examination in accordance with the legislative requirements, to ensure that it continues to take into account national policy and the strategic policies of the Ashford Local Plan.”</p>