

Welcome



Welcome to our Exhibition for emerging residential development proposals on land known as The Former Benenden Hospital (the Site), North and South of Goddard's Green Road.

The exhibition is an opportunity to introduce ourselves and help explain our proposals, for approximately 82 residential dwellings and to discuss matters you may have. We have a number of representatives from Esquire Developments and our consultant team to answer any specific questions you may have.

We are keen to hear your feedback to help shape our proposals as we move forward. Comments can be submitted to us today via a paper form or sent to us by post or email (benenden@esquiredvelopments.com) by Friday 17th February 2023. The material on display today is also available to download on our website www.consult-esquire.com where comments can also be submitted online.

Esquire Developments is a multi-award winning SME Housebuilder based in Longfield, Kent. Founded in 2011, we have established ourselves through the delivery of high quality bespoke residential developments in Kent and build approximately 120 homes a year. In 2020, we were awarded Gold by Whathouse as best SME Housebuilder in the Country.

We adopt a tailored approach to our developments adapting designs and layouts to reflect local characteristics and respect local communities needs. This is achieved through our local knowledge and understanding of a place, but crucially positively engaging with the local community allowing for a focussed approach to planning, design and greater understanding of the needs of the local community.

Each of our developments are bespoke, and we do not have fixed house types. This allows us to be totally flexible when it comes to choosing the right mix and design of each home. This is reflected in the high-quality architecture and use of materials, but also quality of open spaces and the environment in which each development sits within.

As an SME Housebuilder who relies on our reputation, we deliver high-quality homes that bring variation and choice to the housing market for the people in need of purchasing homes.

We are environmentally conscious and have committed to playing a positive role in addressing the Climate Change Emergency. We already commit to all electric developments alongside offering homes that exceed the bare minimum in respect of sizes and finishes that the general housing market can sometimes deliver.



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Our Approach to Climate Change



Fabric first approach to sustainability



Extensive Landscaping to benefit biodiversity



All houses to have an EV charging point



Air Source Heat Pumps installed in all homes



High Specification Glazed Windows



Electric Only Dwellings



Increased Cavity Wall Thickness



Natural material utilising local supply chains

We take a proactive approach to address the Climate Change emergency. We recognise that as a small housebuilder, we have an impact on the environment and we wish to minimise this as best we can. In this regard, we have committed to deliver ‘electric only’ developments, meaning we no longer provide homes with traditional gas boilers. Instead, we are presently installing air source heat pumps and alongside a ‘fabric first approach’ we are achieving approximately a 50% carbon reduction in our homes over and above current building regulations.

The fabric first approach means that the improved efficiency of our dwellings is inherent within the build. This means that not only is it more efficient, but also that they are not features that can be easily (if at all) removed by future homeowners, resulting in the efficiency of the building being maintained for its lifetime. By way of example, we build our homes with greater cavity wall thickness allowing for increased thermal protection, higher specification glazed windows and greater base floor depths.

Coupled with the air source heat pumps and that all our homes come with rapid charge electric vehicle chargers, we feel that we are playing our part in trying to minimise the impacts of our developments on the environment and help accelerate the culture change in regard to greener living, reducing the amount of fossil fuels used by the home and vehicle.



Why are we here?



In May 2013, planning permission was granted for the development of the new Hospital Facility (adjacent), and the redevelopment of part of the former hospital site for 24 new residential dwellings. Since then, the new Hospital has been built, but the element relating to the 24 dwellings remains extant.

Notwithstanding, the site has since been included as an allocation in the made Benenden Neighbourhood Development Plan (2020-2038).

The Neighbourhood Plan, amongst other things, identifies the land both north and south of Goddard’s Green Road for redevelopment for a total of 92 dwellings including:

- Policy SSP3: Land South of Goddards Green Road for a total of 49 dwellings (25 new dwellings in addition to the 24 dwellings with existing permission), and;
- Policy SSP4: Land North of Goddards Green Road for a total of up to 43 dwellings of which 22-25 are new dwellings in addition to the existing 18 dwellings currently on site which may also be redeveloped or refurbished.



Fig: 1 Extant permission for 23 dwellings

The site(s) were also identified as an emerging allocation in the submitted Tunbridge Wells Local Plan under policy reference AL/BE 3 and AL/BE 4 currently at Examination in Public. These two draft policies proposed to allocate the site for residential development. However, as the Neighbourhood Plan has already allocated the Sites in an adopted Development Plan, it was no longer felt necessary by the Inspector to include the allocations in the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan.

The proposals today are for the demolition of all the former hospital buildings, 6 existing dwellings facing Goddard’s Green Road, the tennis courts and the relocation of the car park to build 82 dwellings with associated roads, landscaping and open space. This is achieved by developing the Southern Parcel for 56 dwellings (including some land that does not form part of the allocation) and 26 dwellings on the northern parcel (redeveloping 6 of the 18 dwellings resulting in a net gain of 20 new dwellings and 12 existing dwellings). Overall, this results in 94 dwellings across both parcels.

Alongside the residential dwellings, we are also seeking to meet the other policy requirements, including provision of affordable homes, Net Biodiversity enhancements and public transport improvements.

We are here today to gain your views on these proposals. We will review all feedback and implement changes where we can, in order to create the most suitable scheme for all.



Site Specific Policies

Site Specific Policy 3 (SSP3) Land at Benenden Hospital, South of Goddards Green Road, East End - South East Quadrant (SEQ)

Site Selection Approach:

To support development on a brownfield site outside, but adjacent to, the High Weald AONB. A suitable development must avoid or minimise harmful impacts on the setting of the AONB and improve the character and quality of the location, while providing an opportunity to improve amenities at East End (see Context bullet points page 60).

Achieved by:

This site is allocated for residential development (C3) to provide up to an additional 25 residential units. Planning permission has already been granted for 24 new dwellings at this site; this allocation would result in a total of up to 49 dwellings on this site.

Comprehensive development proposals, in the form of a Masterplan, must be submitted in respect of the land currently held in Benenden Healthcare Society estate ownership at this location, to be delivered in accordance with a phased timetable, which indicates land to the south of Goddards Green Road (SEQ) to be developed prior to any other phases.

The Masterplan should be produced in close collaboration with the local community, Benenden Parish Council and TWBC.

The Masterplan should ideally be completed and accepted by TWBC and BPC. Before any planning application can be submitted for the development of this area.

Proposals shall:

- 1) Provide a residential development of up to 25 additional C3 dwellings, which will be in addition to the 24 dwellings already approved on part of this allocation site, with 30% affordable housing in accordance with TWBC policy and a mix of type and size integrated throughout the development to help meet locally identified needs (see Policy HS1).
- 2) Ensure that design, scale, massing and overall density create a sense of place and focus to the residential communities and reflect the character and rural nature of the East End area adjacent to the AONB, whilst acknowledging the scale of adjacent hospital buildings. Density must not exceed 22dph (see Reasoned Justification para. 2.9.3.1). Building heights should generally be restricted to two storeys.
- 3) Have close regard to the design and materials requirements specified in the BNDP under the Design and the Built Environment chapter and the policies contained therein.
- 4) Provide private garden space and/or shared semi-private spaces, all enclosure to be appropriately planted and screened with native hedging species to protect the occupiers' privacy (see Policy BD4).
- 5) Regard to be given to existing hedgerows and mature trees on site (see Policy LE4), with the layout and design of the development protecting those of most amenity value, as informed by an arboricultural survey and landscape and visual impact assessment (see TWBC Pre-SLP Policies EN 12: Trees, Woodlands, Hedges, and Development; and criterion 4 of TWBC Pre-SLP Policy EN1: Sustainable Design).
- 6) Reflect existing trees and hedges on the site, and the complex topography (particularly within the southern part of the site) (see criteria 1 and 4 of TWBC Pre-SLP Policy EN 1: Sustainable Design).
- 7) A management plan shall be submitted outlining proposals for the ongoing protection and enhancement of all the LWSs and once approved, the future management of the site shall be carried out in accordance with that plan, to protect the significance of the designated LWS in terms of its biodiversity.
- 8) In order to reduce the amount of construction traffic using local roads where possible the disposal of earth spoil generated by construction works should be redistributed on the wider site in landscape remodelling as set out in a Construction Management Plan.
- 9) The Construction Management Plan should address how to minimise the impact of construction work on existing flora and fauna, valuable micro- wildlife habitats in roadside verges, banks and ditches, in particular retaining the hedging which borders the site/mature trees on the site (see Policies LE4, LE5, LE6, LE7 & LE8).
- 10) Any proposals shall include an assessment of the feasibility of retaining the Garland Wing as part of the redevelopment of the site, which could include refurbishment and conversion of this building to provide separate residential units.
- 11) An archaeological assessment of the site to be carried out.
- 12) The occupation of the development should be phased to align with the delivery of improved sewerage infrastructure, in liaison with the service provider.

It is expected that planning obligations will be required towards the following to mitigate the impact of development and enhance the sustainability of the location:

- i. Provision of an active travel link between the site and Benenden village (see BNDP Supporting Document TA2 and Policies T1, T2 & T5).
- ii. Include an area for sport and recreational use by the local community and a children's play area, in part repurposing the existing tennis courts located in the North East Quadrant.
- iii. The means to secure the public use of the hospital café and the provision of a small publicly accessible retail outlet within the existing hospital building for a minimum of 10 years from the occupation of 50% of the residential units on the allocation site.
- iv. Provide a community space for events and to provide amenities such as a pre-school or play group. An appropriate building might be the existing old chapel building to the west of the site.
- v. Provide a financial contribution to fund the purchase and ongoing maintenance of a minibus for the use of Benenden Primary School to run the minibus service to/ from Benenden village/Primary School, to serve school times, thus reducing traffic and improving sustainability. This service to be for 10 years from the occupation of 50% of the gross residential units on the allocation site.
- vi. Promote and support the Kent County Council Hopper Bus trial and other DRT initiatives.

Site Specific Policy 4 (SSP4) Land at Benenden Hospital, North of Goddards Green Road, East End - North East Quadrant (NEQ)

Site Selection Approach:

To support development on a brownfield site outside, but adjacent to the High Weald AONB. A suitable development must avoid or minimise the harmful impacts on the setting of the AONB and improve the character and quality of the location, while providing an opportunity to improve amenities at East End (see para. 2.9.4.4).

Achieved by:

This site is allocated for residential development (C3) to provide 22-25 residential units, in addition to the 18 dwellings currently on the site, which may also be redeveloped or refurbished.

Comprehensive development proposals, in the form of a Masterplan, must be submitted in respect of the land currently held in Benenden Healthcare Society estate ownership at this location, to be delivered in accordance with a phased timetable, which indicates land to the north of Goddards Green Road (NEQ) will be developed as the second phase. No work to commence on phase two of the Masterplan until the south site (SEQ) is fully built-out.

The Masterplan should be produced in close collaboration with the local community, Benenden Parish Council and TWBC.

The Masterplan should ideally be completed and accepted by TWBC and BPC. Before any planning application can be submitted for the development of this area.

Proposals shall:

- 1) Provide a residential development of 22-25 C3 additional dwellings, with 30% affordable housing in accordance with TWBC policy and a mix of type and size integrated throughout the development to help meet locally identified needs (see Policy HS1).
- 2) Ensure that design, scale, massing and overall density create a sense of place and focus to the residential communities and reflect the character and rural nature of the East End area adjacent to the AONB, whilst acknowledging the scale of adjacent hospital buildings. Density must not exceed 22dph (See Reasoned Justification para. 2.9.4.1). Building heights should generally be restricted to two storeys.
- 3) Have close regard to the design and materials requirements specified in the BNDP under the Design and the Built Environment chapter and the policies contained therein.
- 4) Provide private garden space and/or shared semi-private spaces, all enclosure to be appropriately planted and screened with native hedging species to protect the occupiers' privacy (see Policy BD4).
- 5) Regard to be given to existing hedgerows and mature trees on site (see Policy LE4), with the layout and design of the development protecting those of most amenity value, as informed by an arboricultural survey and landscape and visual impact assessment (see TWBC Pre-SLP Policies EN 12: Trees, Woodlands, Hedges, and Development; EN 13: Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees; and criterion 4 of TWBC Pre-SLP Policy EN 1: Sustainable Design).
- 6) In order to reduce the amount of construction traffic using local roads, where possible the disposal of earth spoil generated by construction works should be redistributed on the wider site in landscape remodelling as set out in a Construction Management Plan.
- 7) The Construction Management Plan should address how to minimise the impact of construction work on existing flora and fauna, valuable micro-habitats in roadside verges, bands and ditches, in particular retaining the hedging which borders the site/mature trees on the site (see Policies LE4, LE5, LE6, LE7 & LE8).
- 8) Development on this site can only commence once construction is complete on the SEQ site.
- 9) A Management Plan shall be submitted outlining proposals for the ongoing protection and enhancement of the LWS and once approved, the future management of the site shall be carried out in accordance with that plan, to protect the significance of the designated LWS in terms of its biodiversity.
- 10) An archaeological assessment of the site to be carried out.
- 11) The occupation of the development should be phased to align with the delivery of improved sewerage infrastructure, in liaison with the service provider.

It is expected that planning obligations will be required towards the following to mitigate the impact of development and enhance the sustainability of the location:

- i. Provision of an active travel link between the site and Benenden village (see BNDP Supporting Document TA2 and Policies T1, T2 & T5).
- ii. Include an area for sport and recreational use by the local community and a children's play area, in part repurposing the existing tennis courts on the site.
- iii. The means to secure the public use of the hospital café and the provision of a small publicly accessible retail outlet within the existing hospital building for a minimum of 10 years from the occupation of 50% of the gross residential units on the allocation site.
- iv. Provide a community space for events and to provide amenities such as a pre-school or play group. An appropriate building might be the existing old chapel building to the west of the site.
- v. Provide a financial contribution to fund the purchase and ongoing maintenance of a minibus for the use of Benenden Primary School to run the minibus service to/from Benenden village/Primary School, to serve school times, thus reducing traffic and improving sustainability. This service to be continued for 10 years from the occupation of 50% of the gross residential units on the allocation site.
- vi. Promote and support the Kent County Council Hopper Bus trial and other DRT initiatives.



The Site



The site is mostly previously developed land located in the East End area of Benenden Parish, north of the village of Benenden and outside, and adjacent to the High Weald AONB. The site is occupied by the former Benenden Hospital buildings with some 100,000sqft of redundant building footprint, internal roads and hardstanding along with some existing residential properties – owned by the Benenden Society. The site also includes adjacent fields/open spaces that form part of the site’s curtilage.

The Site is both north and south of Goddards Green Road and lies to the east of the new complex of buildings, structures and associated land that comprises the new Benenden Hospital facility. The site is bounded by the wider countryside to the south and east with sporadic residential properties and farms in the wider locality.

The southern parcel is currently accessed from Goddard’s Green Road (main access) and Green Lane (2No. accesses). This part of the site has considerable level changes and established trees and local wildlife site designations.

The northern parcel also benefits from a number of accesses including off Goddard’s Green Road (accessing an existing car park and tennis courts) and via Wood Lane, served off Mockbeggar Lane which also serves the existing 8 no. residential dwellings. This part of the site also includes a former cricket pitch and includes Local Wildlife Sites. This part of the site has a gentle gradient.



Design Development



Opportunities & Constraints

An assessment of the site identifies a number of constraints and opportunities.

This site has a number of opportunities. The key one being the delivery of a previously developed allocated site for 82 high-quality dwellings along with a policy compliant level of affordable housing.

Development creates an opportunity to improve the overall sustainability of the area and create a shared use of new and existing facilities and resources including the improvement of sustainable transport links and the potential for improved connectivity throughout the site.

One of the largest constraints that needs to be recognised is the extensive work and costs associated with the demolition and remediation of contaminated land that will be required, including how the development can work with the tight gradients of the southern parcel. To this degree, it is necessary to maximise the opportunity of the site and ensure that the site represents the most viable position it can, whilst still delivering other important policy requirements (such as affordable housing). This is the principal reason as to why the modest greenfield part of the site, known as 'the bite' is proposed for 8No. residential dwellings.

One of the key matters we have identified as important ongoing considerations in the design and delivery of the proposals are the importance of protecting the ecology found on site including the opportunity to enhance Local Wildlife Sites. The scheme will deliver Biodiversity Net Gain.

Other important considerations include the potential to improve the setting of the High Weald AONB by the reduction in overall building heights and massing with more traditional 2 storey dwellings.



The Proposals



The Proposed Layout

The scheme proposes a full application for 82 residential dwellings resulting in a net gain of 76No. dwellings (once the 6 demolished units are taken account of). This includes 25No. Affordable Homes (30%) and will include 6No. 'First Homes'.

- 01

EXISTING WILDLIFE AREA
Existing dedicated wildlife area retained and incorporated into the proposed development, including the existing informal paths.
- 02

DWELLINGS FRONTING THE WILDLIFE AREA
Dwellings carefully arranged around the edge of the established wildlife area.
- 03

EXISTING ACCESS POINT IMPROVED.
The proposals largely utilise existing access points into the sites from Goddard's Green Road, Green Lane & Mockbeggar Lane. A slightly relocated access point is proposed into the Northern site from Goddard's Green Road
- 04

DWELLINGS FRONTING GODDARD'S GREEN ROAD
A strong linear frontage is proposed either side of the existing road.
- 05

TREE LINED AVENUE
Existing Trees retained to form a tree lined avenue into the site.
- 06

RETAIN EXCITING TREES
The proposals aim to retain as many existing trees as possible with the proposed dwellings carefully arranged around them.
- 07

AFFORDABLE HOUSING
Proposed affordable housing, including First Homes, arranged in two small clusters.
- 08

PUBLIC OPEN SPACE
Publicly accessible recreation space located to the north of Goddard's Green Road.
- 09

DWELLINGS FRONTING OPEN SPACE
Proposed dwellings arranged to overlook the existing open space to the north.
- 10

WORKING WITH EXISTING TOPOGRAPHY
Proposed dwellings arranged to utilise the existing site topography, sloping down towards the wildlife area in the south.
- 11

INFORMAL LANDSCAPED AREAS
Dwellings arranged around a number of distinct informal landscaped areas.
- 12

PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIVITY
Potential pedestrian connectivity to the existing public rights of way to the east.



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Placemaking

Character Areas

The Proposed site layout carefully responds to the ongoing analysis of constraints and opportunities and a rigorous design development programme. As part of this design development, a number of character areas are being developed, each responding to the unique setting and character of the development.



PARKLAND EDGE

CHARACTER AREA 01
PARKLAND EDGE
Larger family dwellings arranged around strong outward looking views towards the Wildlife areas.
RED BRICK & WHITE WEATHERBOARD



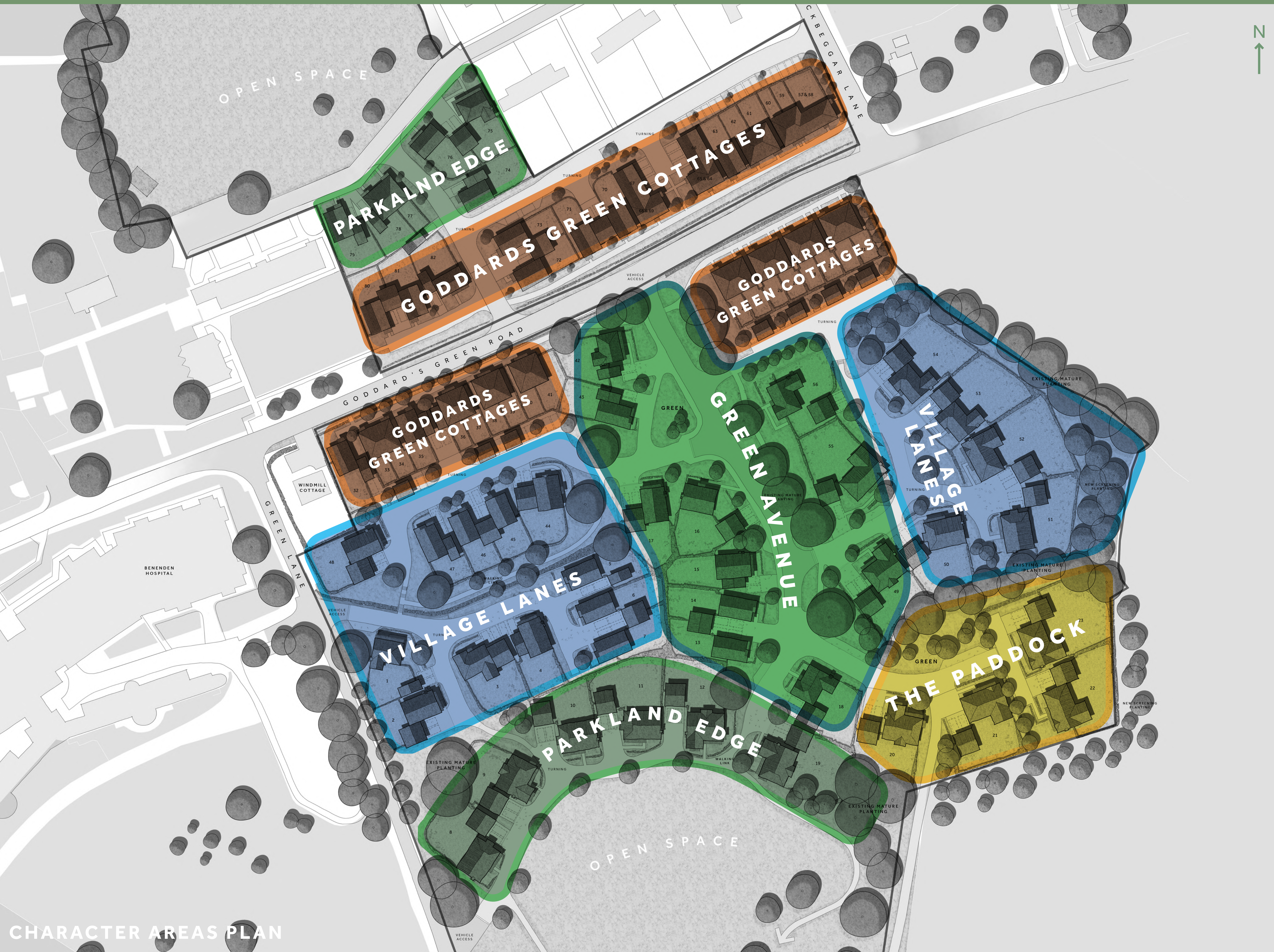
TREE LINED AVENUE

CHARACTER AREA 02
TREE LINED AVENUE
Predominantly detached dwellings arranged along a tree lined avenues working with the site topography.
VARIED MATERIALS & TYPOLOGIES



GODDARDS GREEN COTTAGES

CHARACTER AREA 03
GODDARDS GREEN COTTAGES
Close knit cottages terraces and semi detached typologies reflective of historic Benenden.
RED BRICK & FIRST FLOOR TILE HANGING



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Technical Considerations

We are in the process of gathering a full suite of up-to-date technical information. However, given the site’s history and the information known to date, we have a considerable amount of background data which has helped inform the current layout. Surveys, assessments and reports continue to be ongoing to fully assess the latest scheme and assess any necessary mitigation that is required.

Highways

The impact of additional traffic has been assessed using industry standard calculations (independent TRICS database) which demonstrates that the following trip rates are likely to occur in the peak hours and over a 12-hour period.

The following table summarises the forecast vehicular trip generation of 82 residential dwellings.

PERIOD		TOTAL
AM Peak Hour (0800 - 0900)	-	36
PM Peak Hour (1700 - 1800)	-	39
Daily (0700 - 1900)	-	369



In line with Site Specific Policy 3 of the Neighbourhood Plan, the development will provide a financial contribution towards the purchase and ongoing maintenance of a minibus for the use of Benenden Primary School to provide services to and from the village centre at the beginning and end of the school day. Engagement is also being undertaken with Kent County Council’s Public Transport Team with a view to providing a further contribution towards wider public transport services in the area, which could potentially include the Kent Karrier Demand-Responsive Transport service.

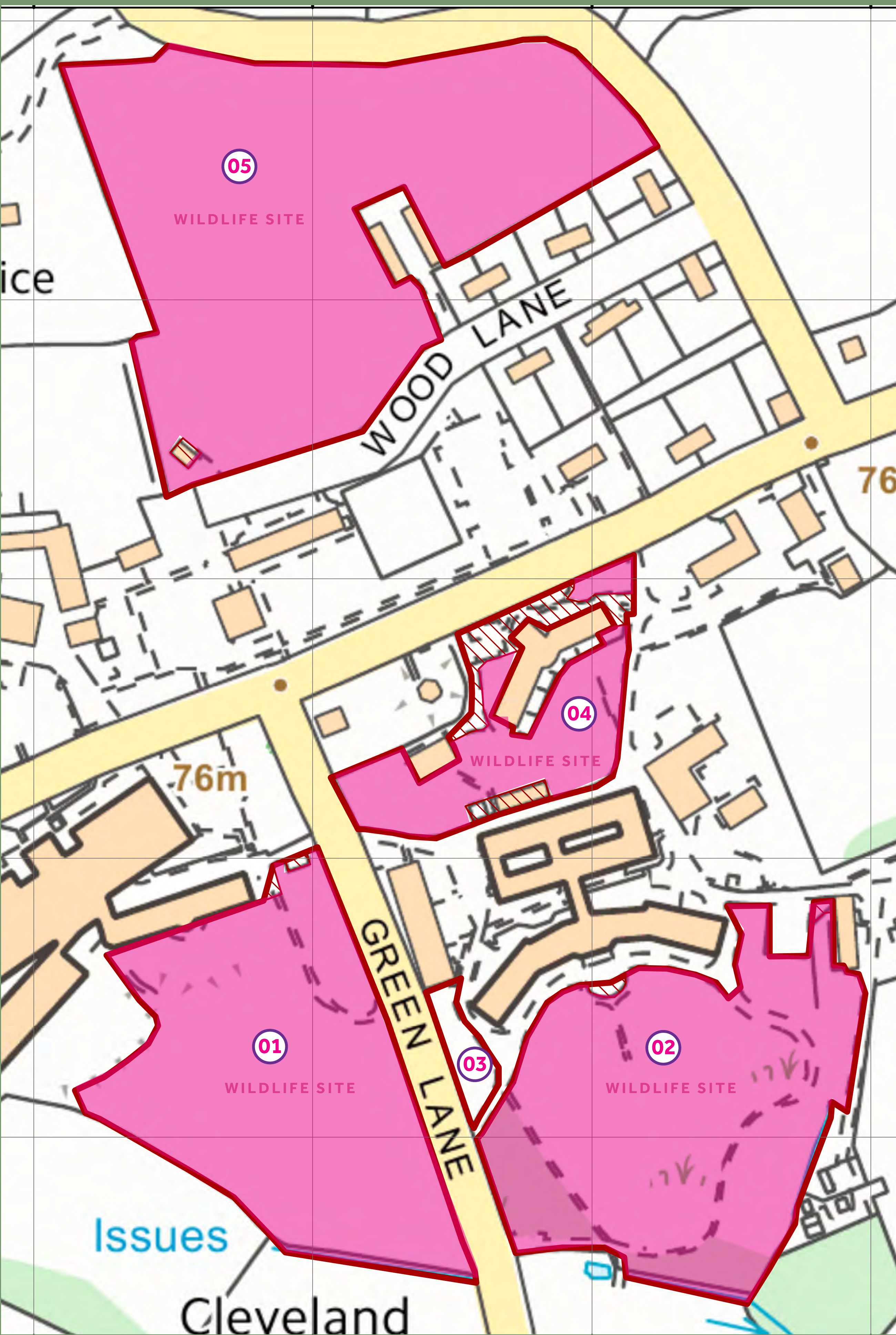
Ecology

There are a number of Local Wildlife Sites within and surrounding the site as identified on the adjacent plan (areas 01 to 05).

The Local Wildlife Sites classification is a non-statutory designation therefore does not give the site any legal or statutory protection. Within Tunbridge Wells, these are identified and monitored on a county-wide basis by the Kent Wildlife Trust according to nationally set criteria for biodiversity and local distinctiveness.

They are still nevertheless important habitats to consider and where we can we are proposing to enhance and improve the retained Local Wildlife Sites (areas 01, 02, 03 & 05).

Additional surveys, including those covering roosting bats and grassland and the local wildlife sites will continue to be undertaken throughout 2023.



Technical Considerations

Heritage

There are no designated heritage assets within the proposed site although there are two Grade II listed buildings nearby.

The adjoining hospital site contains a Grade II Listed Building known as Lister Wing and there is a Grade II Listed building to the south of the site known as Clevelands.

THE GARLAND WING

The Garland Wing was opened in 1907 to provide an environment for treating tuberculosis. Policy SSP3 of the Benenden Neighbourhood Plan requires an assessment of the feasibility of retaining the Garland Wing as part of the redevelopment of the site. In accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan Policy, we have reviewed the feasibility of retaining the Garland Wing however this has been considered to be unviable.



During the examination of the Neighbourhood Plan, it was the conclusion of the Examiner that due to the extant consent which specifically allowed for the demolition of the Garland Wing, it must be accepted that the building can legitimately be demolished at any time. The only way demolition could be legally prevented would be for the building to be added to the statutory list of building of architectural and historic interest.

The Garland Wing was reviewed in 2020 by Historic England and was rejected for listing at a national level following an initial assessment.

“Benenden Sanatorium is clearly of some architectural and historic interest, but having carefully considered the facts of the case, the criteria for listing are not met. The claims to historic interest are not sufficient to overcome the alteration, which has undermined the integrity of West’s design to a great extent, the surviving building has either lost or had replaced many of its most distinctive features.” (Initial Assessment Report, Historic England, 21 April 2020)

Drainage

The approach to drainage at this site will be in the form of SuDs (Sustainable Drainage System) to a pump station and into the main network. SuDs are a natural approach to managing drainage in developments and work by slowing and holding back the water that runs off from a site, allowing natural processes to break down pollutants. A full drainage strategy will be submitted with the application setting out the technical details.



Landscape Proposals



Landscape Considerations & Proposals

The development is not within an Area of Natural Beauty (AONB), however a key feature of the proposed development is the potential to improve the setting of the High Weald AONB through the delivery of a more sensitive redevelopment of the existing buildings. This is achieved through a reduction in build heights and dwellings that reflect the character of the local area. In addition to this, we are proposing to provide additional planting along the eastern edge of the development. This strengthens the buffer and creates additional screening into the development.

- | | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|---|
| 01 | RETAINED AND ENHANCED LOCAL WILDLIFE SITE | 09 | ECOLOGICAL CORRIDORS WITH SENSITIVE INTEGRATED FOOTPATHS |
| 02 | RETAINED TREES | 10 | GATEWAY ARTWORK/FOLLIES |
| 03 | PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY (PROW) 0019/WC343/1 | 11 | SHARED STREETS/YARDS WITH TREE PLANTING |
| 04 | LISTED BUILDING | 12 | RAISED DECK AREAS WITH SEATING |
| 05 | HIGH WEALD AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (AONB) | 13 | INFORMAL PLAY AREAS |
| 06 | POTENTIAL FOOTPATH CONNECTION | 14 | GREEN STREETS CONNECTING AS A SOFT TRANSITION TO GREEN OPEN SPACE |
| 07 | HIGH WEALD AONB HISTORIC ROUTEWAY – ROAD | 15 | TREE LINED STREETS |
| 08 | WEALDEN CYCLE TRAIL ASHFORD TO TUNBRIDGE WELLS | 16 | PROPOSED TREE BUFFER PLANTING. MIN 15m |



Development Viability

The viability of a development is a material planning consideration within the National Planning Policy Framework (‘NPPF’). It covers the balance between sustainable development which benefits the local community and realistic returns for landowners and developers, so that development is commercially viable.

The government provide guidance via the NPPF 2021 and the Planning Practice Guidance on Viability (‘PPG on Viability’) and RICS Professional Statement Financial Viability in Planning: conduct and reporting (First Edition, May 2019), which contain mandatory rules, best practice guidance and related commentary for all members undertaking viability assessments. This means that all viability appraisals undertaken on a site have a common methodology and ensures consistency throughout the country.

Assessing the financial viability is crucial in deciding whether a project should proceed. This is most critical on Brownfield sites, where the financial viability of sites of this nature are more acute, in part because of Existing Use Values and Abnormal costs associated with construction.

A project is viable if the value (revenue) generated exceeds the development costs with an allowance for profit for the developer. The profit is necessary to incentivise the developer to undertake the risk of redevelopment and investment necessary. The RICS Guidance Note confirms that a developer’s profit should range between 17.5% and 20% of GDV.

The equation the RICS Guidance Note sets out as follows, “Gross Development Value (GDV) less Development Costs (DC) less Developer’s profit provides the Land Value of the proposed development – known as the Residual Land Value (RLV)”

The RLV is then compared to the Benchmark Land Value (BLV)

The Benchmark Land Value is based upon the Existing Use Value of the site i.e. the value of the site in its existing use - plus a premium to incentivise a landowner to release the land for development. In the absence of any premium, no land would ever come forward for new housing.

This is not affected by the price paid for the site. The amount paid for the site is immaterial to the viability of the development. This figure is discounted so that the proposed development / Benchmark Land Value are assessed objectively without reference to the price paid by the developer. Indeed, the RICS guidance explicitly states that purchase price is to be disregarded in viability assessments.

Scenario

If RLV is higher than BLV then scheme is viable and can proceed

If RLV is lower than BLV then scheme is not considered viable. Accordingly, the scheme is assessed to understand if any factors can make the scheme viable, such as a reduction in Affordable Housing and/or Planning Contributions; increase the GDV (through more development), or the Developer accepts a position less than the recommended 17.5% minimum level of profit.

In the case of this site, a scheme of 74 dwellings based on a fully policy compliant scheme as set out in the Benenden Neighbourhood Plan, is not viable. It shows a very low margin which is insufficient to bring any scheme forward given the intrinsic risks associated with property development.

Rather than seek to reduce Affordable Housing provision or other Section 106 Contributions, the decision has been taken by Esquire Developments to try and increase the GDV by additional dwellings to see if this can improve the overall viability of the site. The decision has been taken to bring a small greenfield parcel into the scheme, which can deliver approximately 8No. dwellings. By bringing this parcel into the scheme and increasing the overall number of dwellings to 82 in total, the GDV increases and the scheme does become more viable, albeit still well below the RICS Guidance.

Notwithstanding, Esquire Developments is prepared to redevelop the site at a reduced margin – recognising the need to redevelop the long-standing vacant brownfield site and seeking to maintain other key policy requirements – such as policy compliant levels of Affordable Housing.

Whilst the development of a small greenfield parcel is not recognised in the Neighbourhood Plan, it crucially makes the difference in bringing the scheme forward.



The Way Forward



Thank you for taking the time to read this exhibition. We are extremely interested to hear your views in order that we can review the responses received and understand how we can improve our scheme.

Comments can be submitted to us today via a paper form or sent to us by post or email by Friday 17th February 2023. The material on display today is also available to download on our website where comments can also be submitted online.

The window for submitting comments runs for just over 2 weeks, after which we will review the responses and address comments where we can.

Following review of all comments received, it is anticipated that an application will be submitted within the coming months. At this point, there will be the opportunity to comment on the application to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

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