

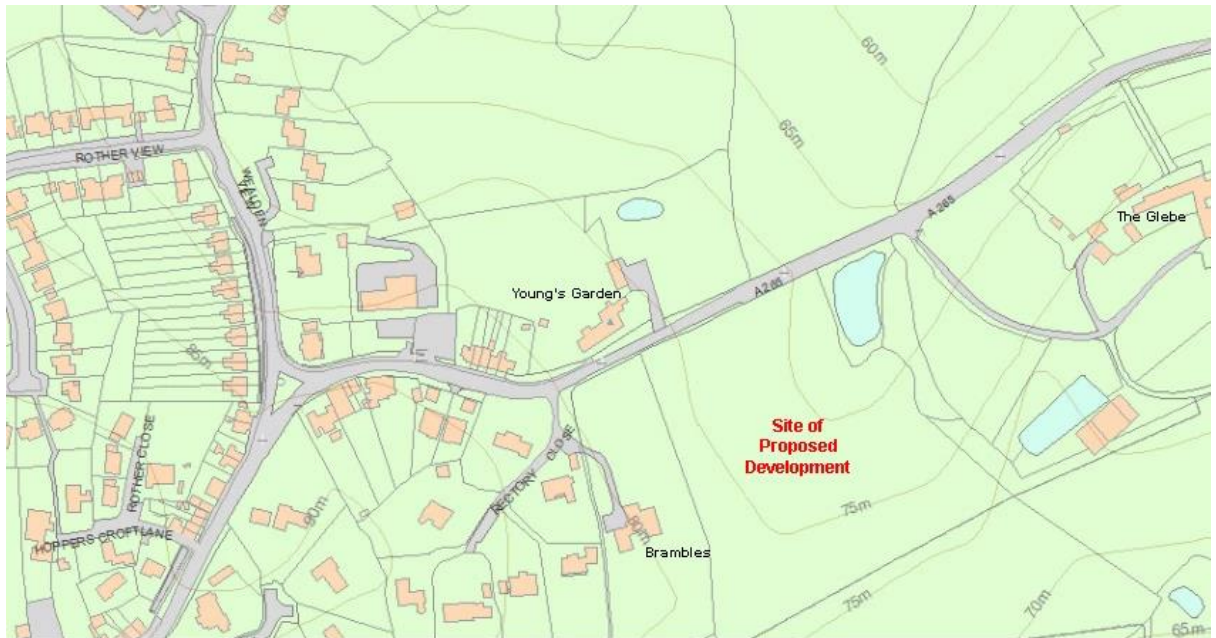
## Land at The Glebe, Burwash

### An assessment about the inclusion of The Glebe site for housing in the draft Burwash Neighbourhood Plan

- 1 On 20 March 2020 Graham Fifield, a surveyor at GRF Planning, sent an e-mail to the Clerk of Burwash Parish Council saying that there had been an application for pre-application advice about new housing on a field near The Glebe in Burwash. His client was George Arthur of The Glebe. Graham Fifield said he had been asked to write to Burwash Parish Council about including the scheme in its housing allocation in the Neighbourhood Plan. Attached to the e-mail were a submission, a site plan of the field, a site plan with housing on it and drawings of the proposed housing. The information was made available to the community and can be found at [www.burwashsaveourfields.org.uk](http://www.burwashsaveourfields.org.uk) along with photographs of the field etc.
- 2 The issues are considered.

#### The location

- 3 The field is shown on the plan below.



### **Planning history**

- 4 The field is outside the development boundary.
- 5 The planning officers at Rother District Council have rejected this site for housing on a number of occasions.
- 6 In 2013, as part of the SHLAA (Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment) planning process, this field was assessed for housing development. It was entitled BU6 and was classified as not suitable for development because the 'landscape [was] exposed to long views from multiple directions within [the] AONB (contrary to [policy] EN1 [of Rother District's Council's Core Strategy]. [It was] ribbon development in [an] area of rural character (contrary to policies including RA1, RA2, OSS1, OSS3, OSS4 [and] OSS5 [of the Core Strategy]. [It adjoins a] fast, busy section of [the] A265 with [a] lack of footpaths, effectively limiting pedestrian/cycle access (contrary to [policies] TR2 and TR3 [of the Core Strategy]'.- 7 During the preparation of the draft Burwash Neighbourhood Plan there was a 'call for sites' suitable for housing. George Arthur of The Glebe filled in a form. At the site discussion process no one attended to support the application. The site was rejected as suitable for housing, in line with past findings.

### **The housing quota and the Neighbourhood Plan**

- 8 In a letter dated 21 February 2020, Tim Hickling, Head of Services at Rother District Council told Burwash Parish Council that with the residual housing the target was 22 housing units. This is based on an original estimate of 52 units of which 30 units have counted by the grant of the outline planning permission for 30 units at Watercress Field, near Strand Meadow. On the face of it, this would solve the quota problem. However, it appears Rother District Council would insist that the Neighbourhood Plan includes the 30 Watercress Field housing units in the Neighbourhood Plan which the drafters have shown no sign of wanting to do.

## Road safety

The access road would be sited at the north-west corner of the field.



The proposed housing and the access road to the A265

- 9 Graham Fifield says at page 2 of his submission that the existing roadside hedge would be retained. This would mean that vehicles leaving the site would have a minimal view of traffic coming on the nearside from Etchingham (from the right in the sketch). Graham Fifield in his submission points out that the access point for the development is within the 30 mph area. It is in fact only a short distance within the 30 mph area. Prior to that, as the SHLAA assessment states, is a fast, busy section of road. New access roads from developments have to conform with Ministry of Transport Manual for Streets 2 visibility splays. The required calculation is the 85th percentile wet weather calculation. With the hedge in place the entrance would never be acceptable to East Sussex Highways assessors. If the applicant considers removing the hedge, that would be in breach of the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 1997/1160, which prohibits the destruction of hedges without a very good reason. Enabling an applicant to destroy a field in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to make money should never be considered a very good reason. Looking at the ancient maps, this hedge was likely to have been there



in Saxon times and may have been there in Celtic times. Ancient hedges are accorded the highest protection.



A view of where the exit road would meet the A265

- 10 The above photograph, which was taken on 2 April 2020, and shows the proposed exit from the development. There are three telegraph poles on the left hand side of the road. One in the middle of the photo. One is covered in ivy. The third is leaning towards the road and is surrounded by vegetation. The one with ivy marks the proposed exit from the development. The last one is next to where the road narrows after the exit. The photograph shows how close the 30 mph sign is to the proposed exit.
- 11 It shows the narrowing of the road after the exit. In his submission, Graham Fifield says at page 6 that there is 'a public footpath immediately opposite the access'. In the architect's sketch on page 2 of this submission the footpath is shown as carrying on past the house, Young's Garden. In fact at the exit point there is no footpath on the other side of the road as the above photo and the photos on the next page show.



The proposed exit at the telegraph pole.



The view of Young's Garden exit on the other side of the road, taken from the proposed exit to the development

- 12 The footpath only goes to the front gate of Young's Garden.
- 13 Clearly pedestrians leaving or entering the site would be in danger from the traffic. Also at night pedestrians would be in the shadow of the tall trees and would if wearing dark clothing be very hard to see. If the developer were to consider a street light, he would fail

to satisfy High Weald AONB Housing Design Guide November 2019 page 37, which prohibits street lighting and light pollution. For some time the people of Burwash have been vociferous in their support for Burwash's 'dark sky' policy in the interest of its residents and its wildlife.

- 14 The proposed exit from the housing estate would enter a busy road where the 30 mph sign is routinely ignored opposite a private exit track. East Sussex Highways would need to consider that problem.
- 15 If it is suggested that the road should be altered to assist traffic flow, that would be contentious. The beauty of Burwash is not just the High Street there is also the stunning, rural approach to the village centre particularly from the Etchingham side. Many villages in Kent and Sussex have been disfigured by such road alterations.
- 16 As the SHLAA assessor found, the site adjoins a fast, busy section of the A265 which lacks footpaths and thus effectively limits pedestrian/cycle access (contrary to policies TR2 and TR3 of the Core Strategy). It is also contrary to C06 of the Core Strategy, which deals with road and pedestrian safety.
- 17 Had this been a planning application a Transport statement or Transport Assessment would be required, see National Planning Policy Framework July 2018 para 111 and the Core Strategy TR3. It would need to be written by an expert. The absence of a proper assessment makes evaluation more difficult.

#### **The development boundary and ribbon development**

- 18 As already stated, this development is outside the development boundary. The boundary has recently been assessed and this part of the boundary was supported by Rother District Council, Burwash Parish Council and the residents of Burwash who expressed an opinion. There has never been a policy that the field next to the development boundary is suitable for development. If that were the case, every five years or so another development could be added on to the last one as the development boundary is continually extended.
- 19 The Core Strategy para 7.62 says 'The use of development boundaries is maintained'. Principle OSS2 says 'Development boundaries will continue to differentiate between areas where most forms of new development would be acceptable and where they would not.
- 20 As the SHLAA assessors found, housing here would be ribbon development in an area of rural character (contrary to policies including RA1, RA2, OSS1, OSS3, OSS4 and OSS5 of the Core Strategy).
- 21 Graham Fifield's in his submission at pages 5-6 says the proposal is not a ribbon development, because the development 'would be compatible with the current situation'. This statement should be considered carefully.





A view of the field towards the south-east corner

### **The AONB**

- 22 The protection of the AONB is given the highest priority. As this photo shows, this field is a very beautiful field. The destruction of the AONB is contrary to Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 s 85, the National Planning Policy Framework July 2018 para 172 and Policy RA2 of the Core Strategy.

### **The Glebe's footpath**

- 23 There has been a track from the Church to The Glebe for many centuries. It is currently a footpath. The footpath is extensively used by both visitors and the residents of Burwash. It provides commanding views both north to this field and towards the north Rother ridge and south to Fontridge Lane and Brightling. The footpath would be greatly changed if there were houses and roads etc. If the development were built, walkers in years to come would not only see the houses and roads etc. but would also see a contrived plantation screen (see para 9). There is also a danger that this would not be properly maintained.



24 A view of the footpath from the Southern boundary



The view of field from the footpath





The view from the footpath to Brightling

### The heritage site

- 25 James Goodwin, in his book *Burwash and the Sussex Weald*, dated 1959, wrote about the history and buildings of Burwash and made some important findings. Looking at the records, he concluded that the Burwash manorial mansion was situated at The Glebe. The current Glebe was built in 1721 by the rector of Burwash, Rev George Jordan.<sup>1</sup> Previously the rector lived at Rectory Court in the centre of Burwash. That building was likely to have been built about 1430.<sup>2</sup> James Goodwin notes the beautiful and ancient avenue of oaks leading from the church to The Glebe on the crest of the ridge.<sup>3</sup> He considered that the avenue was not planted for the benefit of some working yeoman, but to shade the path of the baronial lord and enhance the splendour of the estate. He measured the girth of four of the oaks and contacted the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew. An official estimated that the oaks were at least 500 years old. Many believe the manorial mansion was on this site shortly after the Norman Conquest.

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<sup>1</sup> See John Berkshire's book *Burwash* at pp 48-9.

<sup>2</sup> See David Martin's article 'Chateaubriand, Burwash' in the *Sussex Archaeological Collection*, Vol. 112, Sussex Archaeological Society, 1974, p 21 about the Chateaubriand house in Burwash village when he reconsiders his estimate for the building of the Rectory.

<sup>3</sup> See Goodwin, *Burwash and the Sussex Weald*, p 31 onwards.



The ancient track from the church to the Glebe, which is now a public footpath





The second ancient track. It is on eastern boundary of the field and runs from the A265 towards the public footpath

- 26 James Goodwin then examined the western approach to The Glebe, which is the ridge that has the footpath and adjoins the field where the housing is suggested to be. He found an 'extraction running from north to south, leaving only a causeway intersection on the crest of the ridge, as a gateway [presumably gateway]. It is wide and deep enough to have been a formidable defensive work and was possibly of early Saxon origin – prior to the final submission of East Sussex to Alfred the Great, of Wessex. Or it could have been of earlier date – Celtic or Belgae'.
- 27 In fact, it is likely there has been a settlement here for much longer. In the East Sussex Heritage Environment Records (HER) the finding of an early bronze age (3300-2100 BC) axe is listed. It was found at or near where the second ancient track meets the A265. It is described as an 'early bronze age copper straight sided flat axe'.
- 28 The applicant needs to apply the guidance produced by Heritage England and Historic Environment Local Management (HELM). The Core Strategy at EN2 para (vi) requires applicants for planning permission to 'ensure appropriate archaeological research and investigation of above and below ground archaeology and retention where required'.
- 29 The importance of this field needs to be properly investigated and considered.

#### **Sightlines**

- 30 The SHLAA assessor found, the landscape was exposed to long views from multiple directions within the AONB (contrary to policy EN1 of Rother District's Council's Core Strategy).



### **The adverse effect on the neighbours**

- 31 Two neighbours would be very significantly affected by the development. There are the residents at Brambles, whose property overlooks the field. It has a panoramic view of the whole field.



Brambles is in the middle distance

- 32 There are also the residents at Young's Garden, their property is near the north-west corner of the field on the other side of the road. It is a Grade II listed building.



Looking from the footpath to Young's Garden

### **Rother District Council and its housing targets**

- 33 Houses of the type and likely cost proposed are not currently selling in Burwash and its surroundings. The real housing need is for houses which the young and the elderly can afford. The greatest need is for social housing and to a lesser extent affordable housing. The scheme currently proposed contains no social housing.
- 34 Graham Fifield seeks to support the application to the Parish Council by relying on the housing deficit (which is the difference between houses built and the targets). The problem with this argument is that it overlooks the fact that even when an area has a housing deficit all the planning rules remain in place. The only difference is that there is a tilt in the presumption for development. However, as the planning inspectors' reports clearly show, where there are significant planning objections to a housing application that application must be refused.
- 35 On many occasions the planning officers have said they do not know any possible sites for housing in Burwash and have rejected all sites (except Watercress Field, where outline planning application was granted, and Shrub Wood meadow, where the developer abandoned his appeal after the planning committee rejected the site). There are sites for housing such as the Oakleys site, the Higher Nature site and the Ashwood site, but they are not in Burwash village so are unacceptable to planning officers at Rother District Council. Even if given planning permission for houses, these sites would not count towards the housing quota as they are not near Burwash village. The residents are left with the situation where Rother District Council sets the target, no doubt based on percentages and not on the number of suitable sites, and over the years has rejected all sites.

- 36 Rother District Council has been unable to justify this contradiction. It remains of significance that the planning officers have always rejected this site for housing.

**Conclusions**

- 37 The conclusion will be decided by the core group and all comments are useful.

Robert Banks

2 April 2020