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I am writing on behalf of the Hook Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group about:

APP/N1730/W/18/3206951 Appeal by Wilbur Developments Ltd Site Address: Land at Owens Farm, Newnham Road, Hook, Hampshire, RG27 9AS (nearest) Application number 17/02317/OUT. Members of the Steering Group respectfully request that the appeal is dismissed because:

Since the original planning application, the Hook Neighbourhood Plan has moved on with strong resident support and is close to a Regulation 14 submission, therefore the Steering Group members request that this emerging Development Plan is now a material consideration.

From the comments in the 840+ objections received in response to this planning application, the gap between Newnham and Hook is greatly valued by residents in both Hook and Newnham. The Parish Council and residents are exceptionally concerned that the development will lead to effective coalescence of the much larger, more modern village of Hook to the historic, rural and much smaller community of Newnham. It will damage their separate identities as well as damage their character and appearance.

The proposal is in contravention of Policy NBE1 Development in the Countryside, Policy NBE2 Gaps between Settlements in the emerging Local Plan and saved Policy Con 21.

This proposal would result in the loss of the Local Gap between Hook Parish and the hamlet of Newnham Parish. The Hook Neighbourhood Plan (scheduled to be made in early 2019) defines Hook as a village and civil parish within Hart District Council in north Hampshire. The village is bounded on the east side by the picturesque valley of the River Whitewater, and to the south by two areas of common land, Hook Common and Bartley Heath. To the north and west farmland and woods form gaps to the small villages of Newnham and Rotherwick, each of which sit in separate parishes. The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to maintain a gap and sense of separation between Hook and the surrounding settlements, particularly Newnham, Rotherwick and Phoenix Green.

Maintaining the gap between Hook and Newnham

The countryside around Hook plays an important role in defining its character, but to the west it is relatively close to Newnham. Gaps are designated to prevent the coalescence of settlement and maintain their separate identity. They also provide green open space which supports wildlife and may contain public rights of way.

The Emerging Hart Local Plan identifies the existing gap between Hook and Newnham as an important asset to both of the adjoining communities. Policy NBE2 of that plan states that development in the gap will only be permitted where it does not lead to the physical or visual coalescence of the settlements or damage their separate identity. The principle of a gap between the two settlements is established in the Hart Local Plan, but the precise detail of the boundary is set out in the Neighbourhood Plan. Newnham does not have a settlement boundary. It is considered by Basingstoke and Deane DC Local Plan to be all in the Open Countryside. Although, Newnham is not currently preparing a Neighbourhood Plan, they have jointly, with Hook, agreed the gap between Hook and Newnham to be designated in the Hook Neighbourhood Plan.

This proposal would breach Policy NBE2 'Gaps between Settlements' because Development in Gaps will only be permitted where it does not lead to the physical or visual coalescence of settlements, or damage their separate identity, either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed developments'. Policy section ix specifically refers to the area of open countryside between Hook and Newnham. The justification for the gap is set out in Appendix 12 Assessment of the Gap between Hook and Newnham in the Strategy and Sites 2016-2032 Gaps and Settlements document.

The emerging Local Plan also states that The Gaps are shown indicatively on the Key Diagram and the Policies Map. The precise boundaries of Gaps will be determined through a separate development plan document or through Neighbourhood Plans.

See Map attached as Appendix A.

CON 21 Development which would lead to the coalescence or damage the separate identity of neighbouring settlements will not be permitted in the following local gaps: v) Hook to Newnham;

RUR 2 Development in the open countryside, outside the defined settlement boundaries, will not be permitted unless the local planning authority is satisfied that it is specifically provided for by other policies in the local plan, and that it does not have a significant detrimental effect on the character and setting of the countryside by virtue of its siting, size and prominence in the landscape.

An Inquiry for an appeal on a site between this application and the existing settlement boundary was held on 12-14 May 2015 and 9-10 June 2015 Appeal Ref: APP/N1730/A/14/2226609 Land at Owens Farm, Hop Garden Road, Hook, Hampshire.

The application Ref 14/00867/MAJOR, dated 8 April 2014, was refused by notice dated 16 July 2014.

- The development proposed was erection of 48 no. residential dwellings together with associated access and parking.

The Inspector concluded that:

“Clearly, development on the appeal site would not result in the physical coalescence of the two settlements. However, if that was to be regarded as the ultimate benchmark then, taken to its conclusion, the Gap could have been much more narrowly defined in the first place, with development of the two settlements being permitted to advance to within metres of each other provided a gap were maintained. It was not, however. The Gap’s function, as noted above, is wider than that. Given the impacts from the PROW the proposed development would, in my judgment, undermine the function of the Gap and result in an increased perception of coalescence, with the further advance of Hook towards its smaller neighbour. This would, in turn, further erode the distinct identities of the two settlements, notably with regard to Newnham’s sense of rural isolation and separation. I conclude, therefore, that the appeal proposal would have an adverse impact upon the Local Gap between Newnham and Hook. It would conflict with Local Plan policy CON21, the requirements of which are outlined above. It would also conflict with Local Plan policies RUR1, RUR2 and RUR3, which seek, among other things, to restrict development in the open countryside beyond settlement boundaries”.

It is noted that a Planning Permission was granted for 60 houses on a separate site to the north east of this application, which were to be accessed off Brown Croft. This effectively extended the settlement boundary, because there was no Local Plan in place and Hart District Council were unable to defend the application. Although, this Permission is extant the Inspector’s decision at the Hop Garden Appeal confirmed that he did not consider the permission for these 60 houses set any kind of precedent for further residential development in the Gap between Hook and Newnham.

There are a significant number of housing sites with relatively recent planning permissions granted or having prior approval currently in Hook Parish. The level of housing development with current permissions is illustrated below. There are also several small brown field sites and other available sites, which are more integrated with Hook Village, that are currently being brought forward, providing 142 additional dwellings. This totals 1,454 dwellings, representing a 42% increase in the amount of housing in Hook. Even if this proposal was not remote from the Village Centre, in open Countryside and without adequate access, Hook Parish could not reasonably sustain these dwellings. There is insufficient social and economic infrastructure to support a further 700 dwellings, which would bring the total increase in Hook’s housing stock to approx. 63%.

Development	No of Dwellings	Type	Status
NE Hook	550	Greenfield	Under construction
Reading Road	70	Greenfield	Under construction
High Ridge (Brown Croft)	60	Greenfield	Approved
Bartley House	102	Brownfield	Under construction
Pembroke Manor (Landata House)	78	Brownfield	Under construction
Providence House	107	Office conversion	Part occupied - incomplete
Europa House	77	Office conversion	Prior approval granted
Virgin Media	116	Office conversion	Prior approval granted
Rawlings Yard	124	Brownfield	Approved

Stratfield House	18	Office conversion	Prior approval granted
Acorn House and Car Park	10	Office conversion and brownfield	Prior approval and full planning granted
Total	1312 - 38% increase in dwellings		

The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group further fully support and endorse the comments made by Hook Parish Council regarding the Developers wholly inadequate proposals for provision of new or improved transport infrastructure to both mitigate the forecast traffic movements and to promote sustainable modes of travel. There is no real attempt by the Developer to provide safe and commodious facilities for walking and cycling which would enable 24/7 use by these modes and hence integrate the Development with Hook Village.

As the road to Newnham has locally long been regarded as dangerous to walk along (there is an inadequate footway and it is not lit in parts), it is feared that the rural PRoW No 25, that is widely used by residents to access each village and to walk for recreational activities, will become urbanised and the residents will lose a greatly valued community asset. Surveys of PRoW users have highlighted that the leisure related usage would significantly fall if it becomes urbanised. This PRoW has become even more popular since the re-opening of the public house in Newnham, The Old House at Home, in the summer of 2018. Although this is an enjoyable leisure route, it is not at all suitable for the main walking and cycling route between the Development and Hook Village as it would still cross open fields before reaching the existing settlement boundary.

The Steering Group wishes to please reserve the right to speak at the Inquiry.

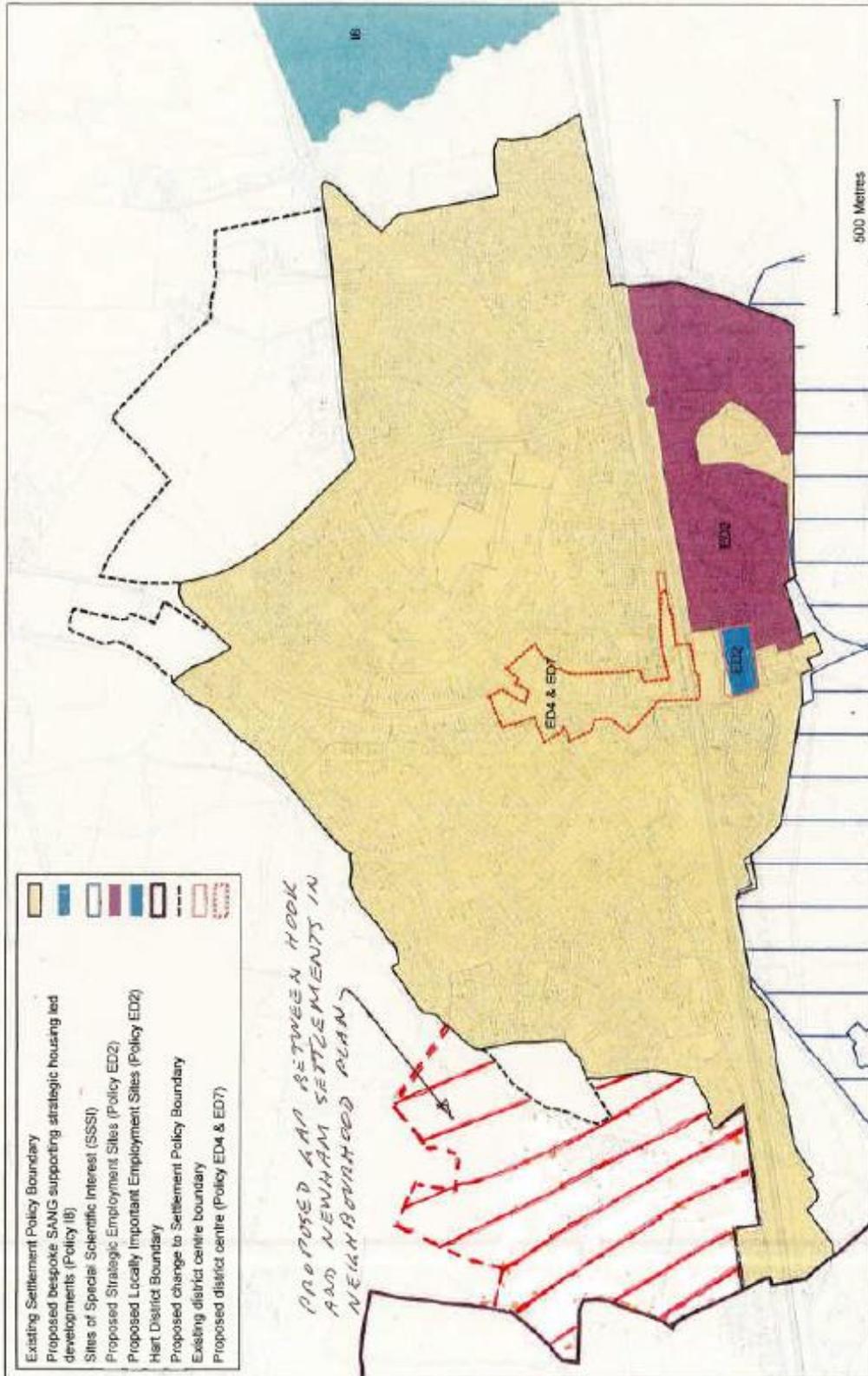
Christine Randall (Secretary)

On behalf of the Hook Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

26th September 2018

APPENDIX A

Map - Hook



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