
Sevenoaks Local Plan: Representations

On Behalf of the St Clere Estate

September 2018

Contents

1.0	Introduction	1
2.0	Existing Site and Proposed Development	3
3.0	Policy and Evidence Base	5
4.0	Justification for the Proposed Allocation	9
5.0	Exceptional Circumstances	14
6.0	Conclusion	16

Appendices

Appendix A – Site Plan

Appendix B – Savills Concept Masterplan Document

Appendix C – Transport appraisal

Appendix D – Rail Vision and Network Rail documents

Appendix E – Ecology appraisal

Appendix F – Landscape and visual appraisal

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared on behalf of the St Clere Estate¹ ('the Estate') in response to the Sevenoaks District Council's (SDC) Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan consultation. The representations relate to land owned by the Estate to the east of Kemsing, around Kemsing Station. A site plan showing the extent of the land is included at Appendix A.

Technical Work

- 1.2 The submission is supported by a number of technical reports produced by specialist consultants. This technical work demonstrates the site is suitable, available and deliverable in line with Planning Practice Guidance on Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessments². It also demonstrates the Exceptional Circumstances (EC) to justify a Green Belt release.
- 1.3 For the purposes of assessing site constraints, a larger parcel of land than that shown at Appendix A has been assessed as part of the technical work.

About the Estate

- 1.4 There has been a manor house on the site of St Clere for a thousand years, and St Clere Estate has been in the same family since 1878. In that time there has been a huge amount of collaboration between the estate and the parish of Kemsing, with the estate gifting land, buildings and trees to the parish in order to ensure the parish moves forward with the times and develops as necessary in an attractive and sensitive way.
- 1.5 This collaboration has been vital to the development of the village and also the survival of St Clere Estate. The current owner, Eliza Ecclestone, is committed to ensuring that any development done by the Estate is something that will benefit the parish and the Estate for generations to come. This shared interest in the longest term success of the project, their track record with responsible and collaborative development and the fact the estate owns the vast majority of the land on the eastern side of Kemsing makes St Clere Estate uniquely positioned to bring forward a plan on this scale.
- 1.6 The Estate recently completed a development on Green Belt and AONB land known as the 'Coney Shaw Farm' development (Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council ref: TM/15/02819/FL). In September, the development reached the final for the Kent Design and Development Awards 2018, the winner will be announced in November. This development is held in high regard, and is an example of the high quality design that the Estate is committed to.

¹ <https://stclere.co.uk/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment#factors-sitesbroad-locations-developed>

Consultation

- 1.7 As part of the process of preparing the concept masterplan (Appendix B), a number of stakeholders have been consulted, including:
- *Kent County Council (KCC) in relation to Highways* – this meeting was held on 7th August 2018 with KCC officers to discuss the technical aspects of the scheme. During the course of the meeting it was agreed that there were no ‘showstoppers’ on transport grounds that would prevent the site’s allocation. However, officers raised some technical issues that will need to be addressed. A copy of the comments are contained at Appendix C. The transport appraisal (TA) (Appendix C) has been prepared subsequent to the comments received, and therefore goes some way to addressing the issues identified. Further technical work is currently being undertaken to identify the potential for improvements on local roads. Consultation with KCC is also ongoing.
 - *Network Rail (NR) in relation to Kemsing station improvements* – this meeting was held 10th August 2018 with the NR’s Asset Protection Team. The meeting was to discuss a plan for working with NR on the project. Encouragingly, at the meeting no ‘showstoppers’ were identified. The Estate is now continuing their positive discussions with NR.
 - *Adjoining owners* - the Estate is in the process of engaging with the Chaucer business park to discuss the potential of creating an access from the site to the business park.
 - *Parish Council* – Eliza Ecclestone has attended various events within the parish, including the Kemsing Parish Annual General Meeting and the Noah’s Ark Residents Association meeting to talk about whether the land at Kemsing Station is suitable for development and to answer questions. She has also met with the Parish Council for an informal conversation about the proposal. There have been a number of site visits attended by neighbours and stakeholders and Eliza Ecclestone has been present at all of them in order to understand local views as thoroughly as possible. The plan as put forward is as a direct result of those views and many elements of this plan have come from suggestions from those stakeholders.
 - *Local ward Members* – the Estate has met with one of the ward members to discuss the emerging proposal.
- 1.8 The feedback received from the consultees has helped to shape the emerging proposals for the site.

2.0 The Existing Site and the Proposed Development

Overview of the Existing Site

- 2.1 The site is located to the east of Kemsing and Noah's Ark, and is adjacent to Kemsing Station. The hamlet of Heaverham is located to the north of the site. To the east of the site is the Chaucer Business Park which comprises a range of commercial uses, predominantly light industrial in nature.
- 2.2 The site comprises of approximately 24Ha of greenfield land, including grassland which is used for occasional grazing. It is private land and offers no public benefit. There are a number of trees and woodland areas around the site, including areas of Ancient Woodland. Access to the site is provided direct from Watery Lane (along the eastern boundary of the site).
- 2.3 To the north of the site is the M26 motorway, to the south is the railway line which connects to Otford (in the west) and Borough Green (in the east). The area to the west of the site is greenfield agricultural land.
- 2.4 Further detail on the site and the surrounding area is contained in the Masterplan Concept document prepared by Savills (Appendix B).

Ownership

- 2.5 The site, and much of the adjoining land, is wholly owned by the Estate.

Kemsing Station

- 2.6 The site is located to the north of Kemsing Station³. Kemsing station is a rural station which benefits from a regular train service between London Victoria and Ashford International. However, the station currently suffers from a number of constraints:
 - It is disconnected from Kemsing Village and local residents must drive to the station, or potentially walk or cycle along rural roads which do not have a dedicated pedestrian and cycle provision.
 - It only has a small car park (10 spaces) and suffers from people double parking on local roads which is a safety issue. This means that local Kemsing residents drive to other stations (e.g. Otford) which results in congestion on local roads and a reduction in car parking provision at other stations.
 - There is no disabled access to the station.
 - There is insufficient space for vehicles to drop-off.
 - There are no formal cycle parking spaces.
 - The platforms are currently too short for the trains which means that people have to move carriage to alight.
- 2.7 Due to limited public finances and other spending priorities, investment in rural rail infrastructure is often limited. This development therefore provides a rare opportunity to unlock funding and stimulate investment in an important piece of public transport infrastructure.

³ http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/stations_destinations/KMS.aspx

The Proposed Allocation

1.9 A concept masterplan for the site is included at Appendix B. In summary, the proposed development would include the following:

- Up to 300 homes including affordable housing and other models of housing (e.g. self-build, etc.);
- New and upgraded pedestrian and cycle routes to link to Kemsing Station and the wider area;
- Upgrades to the local rail infrastructure, including a new station car park;
- Opportunities for live/work units, self-build and extra care housing in line with SDC's Housing Strategy and the results of a forthcoming Local Housing Needs Survey (HNS);
- Affordable housing including the potential for almshouses; and
- Open and amenity space including a village square, allotments, children's play space, etc.

3.0 Policy and Evidence Base

Planning Policy Context

Saved Local Plan

- 3.1 The site is located outside of a settlement boundary and falls within the Green Belt and Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is located outside but adjacent to a Local Wildlife Site. There are areas of Ancient Woodland close to, and within the site. Site EMP 2 is an existing employment allocation for the Chaucer Business Park.

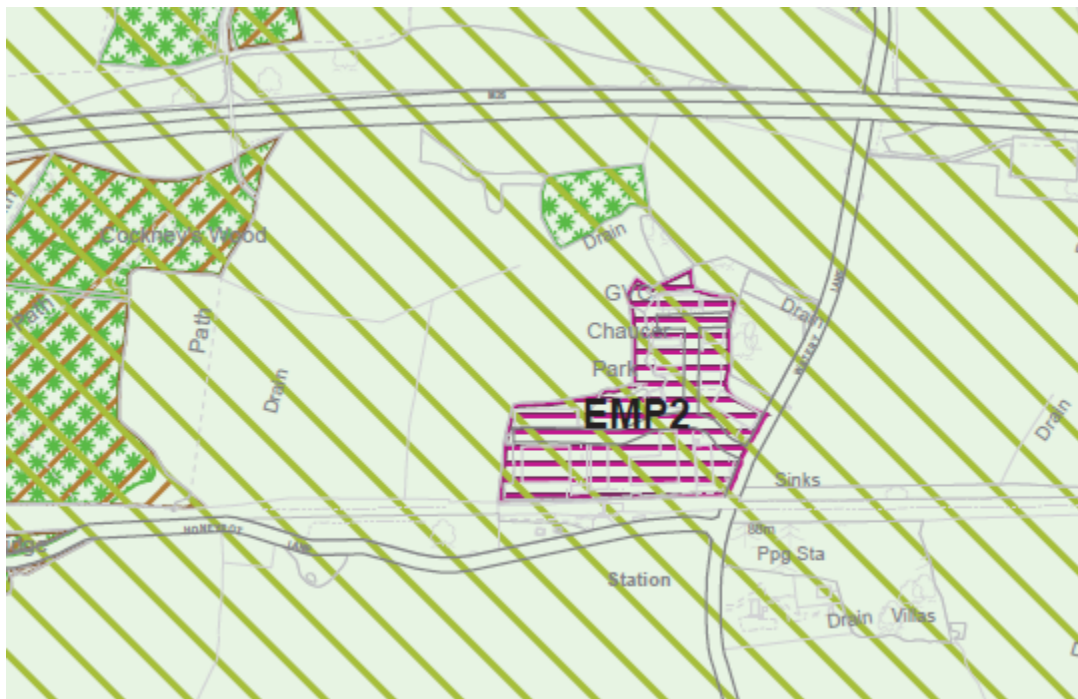


Figure 1: extract from adopted planning policy proposals maps

National Planning Policy Framework (2018)

- 3.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at paragraph 103 is relevant where it states that (emphasis added):

'The planning system should actively manage patterns of growth in support of these objectives. Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. This can help to reduce congestion and emissions, and improve air quality and public health. However, opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in both plan-making and decision-making.'

- 3.3 At paragraph 134 the NPPF states that the Green Belt serves five purposes:
- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
 - c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 - d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 - e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 3.4 At paragraph 138 (page 41) (emphasis added) it is stated that:
- 'Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and/or is well-served by public transport. They should also set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land.'*
- 3.5 The national policy stance shows a clear move towards encouraging new development around transport hubs, including in the Green Belt.
- 3.6 Paragraph 172 explains that (emphasis added):
- 'Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited. Planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:*
- a) *the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
 - b) *the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
 - c) *any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.'*
- 3.7 While paragraph 172 explains that AONBs have the highest status of protection, the policy makes it clear that development can be allowed if EC exist to justify it.

Local Evidence Base

Sevenoaks Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment

- 3.8 The site is referenced as EM10 in the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA). The eastern part of the site currently benefits from a draft allocation for 2.27 Ha of employment land for B1 – B8 uses. This draft allocation would have an associated level of impact (e.g. transport, landscape, ecology, etc.) which appears to have been accepted.



Figure 2: extract from Sevenoaks SHELAA

Housing Strategy 2017 Wellbeing Starts at Home (2017)

- 3.9 SDC's Housing Strategy is an important document as it sets out a number of key priorities for housing to be delivered across the district. The document highlights the lack of rural affordable housing as a key issue and is something that the Council is actively seeking to address.

SDC Playing Pitch Strategy (April 2018)

- 3.10 Page 54 of the Playing Pitch Strategy recommends that following possibility be explored:

'...identifying and levelling a suitable area to enable the installation on an additional pitch. This additional pitch will help to prevent the existing pitches being over played as well as providing additional capacity at peak times'

Open Space Study (June 2018)

- 3.11 The SDC Open Spaces study grades the open spaces in the district, and concludes some in Kemsing are in need of investment and the quality of open space is poor.

Other Relevant Evidence Base Documents

Rail Policy

- 3.12 A recent Transport Paper (Connecting People: a Strategic Vision for Rail) encourages the growth of new homes around stations:

'Rail services have the potential to unlock housing growth, as part of a wider transport network. New connections and stations can support locally-led development and help deliver more housing. There are also strategic opportunities to change local transport patterns, and provide communities and people with new opportunities' (para 2.23, pg.22) (Appendix D)

- 3.13 Network Rail has also produced a number of documents which make clear their support for new housing development around rail infrastructure. Network Rail's most recent report, 'The Role of Rail in Unlocking Housing Supply' (September 2016), explains that:

'Railways are not just important because more and more people are choosing to use them, they are also a major driver of economic growth. We know that rail can unlock housing supply to bring communities that have traditionally been cut off within reach of major urban conurbations.' (Appendix D).

4.0 Justification for Site Allocation

4.1 This section provides the justification for the proposed site allocation.

Housing Need

4.2 To meet local housing need the Council would need to accommodate 13,960 units. Even with the EC sites up to a maximum of 13,400 units have been identified. This means there is capacity for at least another 560 units (page 33 of the draft Local Plan). Furthermore, it is acknowledged that some of the EC sites may drop out of the process.

‘These are greenfield Green Belt sites which claim to have exceptional circumstances. These sites are currently being tested and are included in this consultation for comment, but this does not guarantee their inclusion in the final Draft Local Plan.’ (page 20 of SDC Local Plan)

4.3 If some of the existing EC sites drop out this would leave SDC under more pressure to find alternative sites. The Estate’s land around Kensing Station provides an opportunity to deliver new homes to help meet housing need while simultaneously providing EC.

4.4 The Estate is currently liaising with SDC and the Parish Council in relation to a Local Housing Needs Survey to be undertaken by the rural housing enabler. This will help to better inform the housing mix to ensure that it responds to local needs in the Parish.

Green Belt Purposes

4.5 The site will not undermine the purposes of the Green Belt set out at 134 of the NPPF for the following reasons. The table below explains why this is the case.

Green Belt Purpose	Site’s Response
a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	The allocation of the site will not result in the sprawl of a large built-up area
b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	The allocation of the site will not result in a merging between neighbouring towns
c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	The allocation of the site will result in encroachment into the countryside but this will be limited and will be contained by defensible barriers (the M26 to the north, the railway line to the south, Watery Lane to the east and Ancient Woodland to the west). There are also limited views into the site from the surrounding area.
d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	The allocation of the site will not have a detrimental impact on the setting and special character of any historic towns
e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.	SDC has exhausted its supply of derelict and other urban land.

Sustainability of Location

- 4.6 Currently, the site is not highly sustainable because there is very limited access to the train station direct from Kemsing. However, the proposed allocation would provide a significant opportunity to encourage the use of public transport, walking and cycling, as well as facilitating opportunities for more sustainable travel patterns in the wider area.
- 4.7 This would be achieved through the following measures:
- Integration of the site into the existing footpath network and upgrading of existing footpaths. This will allow future residents safe cycle and pedestrian access to the village of Kemsing where the following services and facilities are available:
 - Local shops including a convenience shop and a pharmacy;
 - Kemsing Primary School;
 - Kemsing Village GP Surgery;
 - A library;
 - Bell Inn at Kemsing and the Chequers pub at Heaverham; and
 - A Church.
 - If the train platform is extended Kemsing residents will have direct pedestrian and cycle access to Kemsing station and facilities located on the site.
 - Access by Chaucer business park employees to the shop and café and through to Kemsing so they do not have to drive off the site for lunch, etc.
 - Opportunities for existing employees at Chaucer business park to live on the site and walk to work;
 - Direct pedestrian access to the railway station for existing Kemsing residents and future residents of the site.
 - A general upgrade and improvement of the footpath network for the benefit of all.
 - A larger station car park that will allow more people to use the station.

Technical Work and Constraints

- 4.8 The following technical information has been undertaken to support this representation:
- Transport;
 - Ecology; and
 - Landscape.
- 4.9 The technical work demonstrates that there are no overriding constraints that would prevent the site from being allocated for development. Commentary is also provided on the following technical issues:
- Noise;
 - Flood Risk; and

- Heritage.

Transport

4.10 A Transport Appraisal (TA) has been prepared by PellFrischmann (Appendix B) which demonstrates that suitable and safe access on to the site can be achieved on to the site to accommodate approximately 300 dwellings. The TA also assesses the sustainability of the site by analysing its proximity to services and facilities including sustainable infrastructure.

4.11 One of the issues raised by KCC was:

'The site is located some considerable distance from facilities and I am concerned that the rural road network between the site access, local facilities and the primary and strategic highway appears unsuitable to accommodate the increase in traffic arising from this scale of development. The roads are narrow, forward visibility is restricted in places and safety issues may arise. Further information could be provided to evidence the traffic distribution of the traffic generated by the development and its impact on the existing highway network with mitigating measures identified where appropriate.'

4.12 The Estate own much of the land around the site so there are opportunities to provide local road widening, passing places and vegetation management to improve forward visibility. Further technical work is currently being undertaken to address these issues. If they are implemented they would result in an improvement on the existing situation and therefore have a wider public benefit.

4.13 In summary, access is achievable and development can be accommodated without significant detriment to the local highways network. There are also a number of wider benefits that can be recognised by allocating the site. The allocation of the site would comply with paragraphs 103 and 138 of the NPPF.

Ecology

4.14 An ecology report has been prepared by Arbeco (Appendix E) which identifies that there are some ecological constraints affecting the site. However, it goes on to explain that these can be addressed through further survey work and the implementation of appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures.

4.15 Additional survey work has also been undertaken in relation to identifying any particularly sensitive grassland habitats. This demonstrates that any future development would not have a negative impact on any plant species of Principal Importance or any Habitat of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

4.16 In summary, the ecology report reaches the conclusion that adequate mitigation and enhancement measures can be provided to address the ecological constraints.

Landscape

4.17 A Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) has been undertaken by Fabrik (Appendix F). This comes to the conclusion that the site can accommodate a modest amount of sensitive development. Notably, the railway line provides a defensible barrier to the south, the M26 provides one to the north, and Watery Lane to the

east and areas of Ancient Woodland to the west.

- 4.18 Significantly, a proportion of the site already benefits from a draft employment allocation (EM10) which suggests that a certain level of landscape impact has been accepted in this location. There will also be the opportunity to provide mitigation and enhancement measures to soften the site and its surrounds. This will include new planting to the north which will screen the motorway and provide ecological benefits. There will also be opportunities to reinforce and enhance the existing Ancient Woodland belts.

Flood Risk

- 4.19 The majority of the site falls outside of any flood risk area. Part of the land parcel to the south of Honeypot Lane is located within flood risk zone 3. However, this area is not proposed for any sensitive development (e.g. residential) and is most likely to be used for a new station car park.

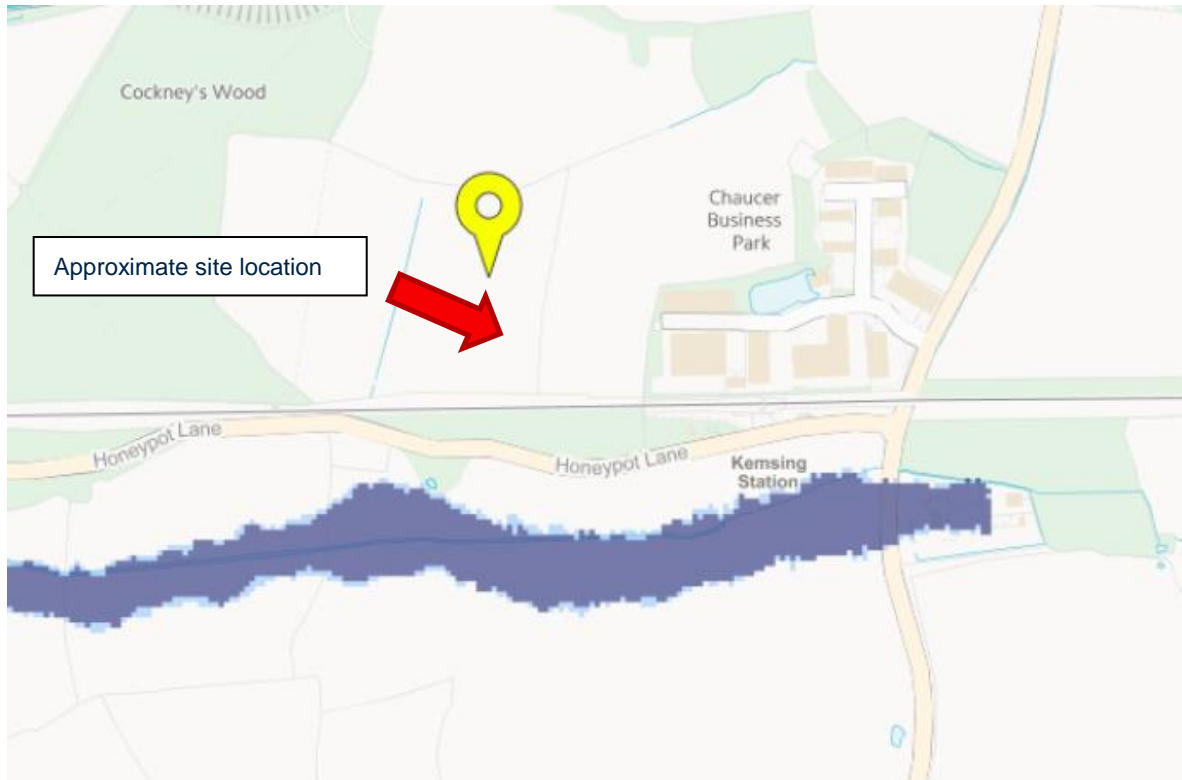


Figure 3: extract from Environment Agency Flood Mapping (Source: Environment Agency)

Noise

- 4.20 The area to the north of the site suffers from increased noise levels because of its proximity to the M26. This area of the site has been kept free from noise-sensitive development (e.g. residential).

Heritage

- 4.21 The nearest designated heritage asset close to the site is 'Broughton', a Grade II listed building on Watery Lane. The site will not have any significant impact on any designated heritage assets.



Figure 4: extract from Historic England mapping – blue triangle denotes a heritage asset (Source: Historic England)

5.0 Exceptional Circumstances and Deliverability

- 5.1 The majority of the district (93%) is Green Belt and there is not enough brownfield land to accommodate the required number of new homes in the district. This means that Green Belt land will need to be allocated, and key to this will be the need to demonstrate Exceptional Circumstances in line with paragraph 136 of the NPPF. This also applies for allocating land in AONBs (para 172).
- 5.2 In addition to having a number of Exceptional Circumstances the site will only have limited harm on the Green Belt and AONB. This is because:
- The site is enclosed and screened on all sides by vegetation;
 - There will be no opportunity for further sprawl (because of the M26 to the north, the railway line to the south, Watery Lane to the east and Ancient Woodland to the west);
 - The existing site is already affected by the presence Chaucer business park, and M26 in landscape and visual terms;
 - There are limited views into the site; and
 - Opportunities to improve the existing landscape and visual character (e.g. additional planting to reinforce the Ancient Woodland belts and screen the M26).
- 5.3 This section sets out the EC which include the following opportunities:
- Opportunities to stimulate investment in a rural railway station with the potential for disabled access and longer platforms (so rail passengers can get off anywhere on the train) so it is better-used by new residents and residents in Kemsing;
 - Investment in Kemsing Station car park to facilitate better use from the surrounding villages (e.g. Seal, Kemsing, Heaverham, etc.) and reduce unnecessary trips from Kemsing to other local stations (e.g. Otford) which will reduce congestion on local roads;
 - Potential for a new drop-off and pick up area on the site of the existing car park which will allow taxis, and potentially public transport, to make more, and easier use of the station;
 - Wider improvements to the local highway network including more passing places and better vegetation management to improve forward visibility;
 - Investment in pedestrian and cycle links to Kemsing and the wider footpath network;
 - A new shop and café that would cater for local residents and the adjoining business park to reduce trip generation by employees;
 - The investment will help to make the site a more sustainable location, close to services and facilities including sustainable transport infrastructure. This includes residents of Kemsing and Noah's Ark being able to use facilities at the site (e.g. café and shop) and vice versa;
 - Opportunities for affordable and other local needs housing to be provided. In this particular case, the Estate is considering retaining ownership of a proportion of the housing in a model similar to almshouses to be used by local people and estate workers;

- New native planning and other ecological enhancements;
- Provision of public open space (e.g. parks, allotments, amenity greenspace) and recreational space for local people;

Deliverability

- 5.4 The land is wholly owned by the Estate, and is free from any legal constraints. The site is therefore available for development.

Viability

- 5.5 Whilst the land is in the early stages of planning promotion and there is a significant amount of detail still to establish, we have assessed the viability of the proposed scheme and are comfortable that on the basis of the assumptions within these representations, it represents a viable scheme. Kemsing is within a strong market area both in terms of house price values and house builder appetite and we do not consider there to be any financial impediment to delivering the scheme.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 This report sets out that the Estate's site is suitable, available and deliverable in line with Planning Practice Guidance. This is confirmed by the accompanying technical reports. It also demonstrates that there are a number of EC that justify the allocation of the site; and explains how the development provides a rare opportunity to unlock funding and stimulate investment in an important piece of public transport infrastructure.

- 6.2 The Estate would like to thank SDC for the opportunity to comment on and influence this important process and would like to meet with officers in due course to discuss the contents of this report.