

# CHIDDINGSTONE PARISH COUNCIL

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## DRAFT LOCAL PLAN REGULATION 18 CONSULTATION

Many residents have attended one of the Parish Council's public meetings and/or the 'pop-in' session run by Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) on 18<sup>th</sup> November and will be aware of the need to express their views on the three developments proposed by SDC in the draft Local Plan before the current Regulation 18 consultation period ends on 11<sup>th</sup> December. The Parish Council will be submitting a very detailed a planning policy-focused response objecting to the proposals, reflecting the community's stance. The key points in the Parish Council's response are summarised below.

### The Penshurst Station and Highways Depot sites

These are not objectionable in principle but too many houses are proposed for each and development of these sites should be removed from the Local Plan and instead be dealt with in the Parish Council's Neighbourhood Plan, which is in the course of preparation.

### The Airfield site (behind the Little Brown Jug)

This site should not be included at all for the following reasons:

- SDC's 2025 Settlement Hierarchy characterises Chiddingstone Causeway as a hamlet with a settlement rating of 16 in a settlement hierarchy that ranges from 0 to 784. It also states: "Settlements within the 'Villages', 'Hamlets' and 'Clusters' tiers are considered to be in unsustainable locations, characterised by a lack of services and facilities, limited public transport options, and small resident populations. These factors significantly constrain the ability of these settlements to support growth in a way that aligns with the principles of sustainable development."
- Much play has been made by SDC of the fact that the airfield site has been included because it has a station. The Settlement Hierarchy rates Penshurst Station as only a 4 on a scale from 2 up to 20. The Interim Sustainability Appraisal (2025) states: "Most notably, there is a need for careful ongoing consideration of the proposed high growth strategy for Chiddingston [sic] Causeway notwithstanding that the village benefits from a train station." The train service is very infrequent (only 1-2 trains per hour) and only runs between Tonbridge and Redhill. It has 100 times fewer passenger movements than Tonbridge station and 80 times fewer than Sevenoaks. There are no connections at Penshurst. There is no direct service to London, Sevenoaks or Gatwick; or to other points north or south. The station is unmanned and has no facilities. There is no parking. Wheelchair access to the south platform involves a trip via the B2027, Moorden Lane and the long approach road, none of which has a pavement. London commuters from the Causeway prefer to drive to Hildenborough or Sevenoaks, both of which have big car parks and fast services to London.
- Bus services to/from Chiddingstone Causeway are infrequent and are very often full when they arrive. Roads round about are rural, busy, narrow, often in poor condition and in most places without pavements, so cycling and walking are either impractical or dangerous. Access to the site would presumably be to the B2027, which is busy and already has bottlenecks in Leigh and Bough Beech. Access to Camp Hill (a small unclassified road to the north of the site) would be an unsuitable access point. Also, the very limited parking in the Causeway is normally full to overflowing.

- The transport links simply make the site unsustainable. There really is no genuine choice of transport modes, as required by para 110 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The site is certainly not well connected by public transport, walking or cycling; thus it does not comply with Policies ST1 or CC1 in the draft Local Plan.
- Chiddingstone CEP School is full. There is only very limited capacity in the Leigh and Penshurst primary schools. Certainly not enough for the children of 300 homes. The parents' 'school run' will continue to be the travel mode of choice for primary school children, given the inadequacy of transport links and the impracticality and danger of walking or cycling.
- The local GP practice's own website says "GP capacity is struggling to meet demand." It already has over 16,500 registered patients.
- Other infrastructure services: mains water, electricity and broadband presently inadequate or regularly failing.
- The site is heavy clay on a sloping gradient which already regularly results in surface flooding of Redleaf Close which adjoins the bottom of the site. This would make the site unsuitable.
- A development of 300 homes would simply swamp the existing community which only has a small village shop and a pub, destroying its intimate local character. It would likely triple the population of the Causeway. The proposal is certainly not 'modest growth' as envisaged by Para 1.22 of the draft Local Plan.
- The airfield site is in a beautiful open agricultural setting with panoramic views, surrounded by a Grade II\* historic church, and a number of Grade II houses some of which overlook the site. It is in the setting of and very closely bounded both to the north and to the south by National Landscape Areas (NLAs). The Kent Downs National Landscape lies to the north. The recent Kent Downs National Landscape Rapid Review concluded that the area between the two NLAs (which includes the Causeway) was highly likely to meet the criteria for designation as a National Landscape, having no discernible change in landscape quality or character as compared with the Kent Downs NLA. It is hard to see how it can be categorised as "grey belt."
- Valuable animal habitat would be destroyed.
- There would be a loss of good quality farmland which currently contributes to much needed home food production.