

RESPONSE TO MATTER 6 – CHARING

- ***Are housing sites CHAR 1 and CHAR 2 the most sustainable locations for development in CHARING including consideration of village form and wildlife?***
- ***Do they represent the best strategy when considered against reasonable alternatives?***

Introduction

1. Charing has been identified as a 'tier 2' village and is therefore considered to be one of the most sustainable villages suitable for an increase in dwellings in the rural area. During the course of site selection a number of the sites put forward were considered to be too far outside the village or too small. The remaining 15 sites were subject to sustainability appraisal. Both the selected sites CHAR 1 and CHAR 2 went by different titles at the time of the Issues and Options Report. The sites are also slightly different from the way in which they were originally proposed. The changes are set out in the table below. The remainder of the sites, which were subject to sustainability appraisal have retained their original titles. The selected sites CHAR 1 and CHAR 2 in the DPD are both considered to be deliverable.

Table 1

Issues and Options report Site Reference	DPD Site Reference
Part of CHAR 05 (CHAR 05 extends further east than CHAR 1)	CHAR 1 (land adjoining the Arthur Baker Playing Field)
CHAR 03, CHAR 23, and part of 'amended' CHAR 10	CHAR 2 (land adjoining Tatchell Drive)

CHAR 1

2. The allocated site between the Arthur Baker Playing Field and the A20 is referred to as 'CHAR 1'. It has the advantage of being close to the village centre and its associated shops and services whilst adjoining the main recreation ground in the village. Its development will benefit the playing field by providing contributions towards public open space provision which can be used to improve and renew facilities here. The PPG17 Open Space Audit of recreational facilities **CD9**, notes that the pavilion and changing facilities are of poor quality and records the fact that the Parish Council has identified the need for a new sports hall to replace the pavilion on the playing field.

3. A new access for vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists from the A20 would also provide an alternative access to the playing fields to the existing one via the cul-de-sac called 'The Moat'. The site is also of sufficient size to provide affordable housing as part of its housing mix.
4. The proposed CHAR1 site would permit development on the eastern edge of the village on land currently used as pasture for sheep. However, it would not extend any further to the east than the existing row of cottages opposite the site which front onto the southern side of the A20. Housing also adjoins the northern boundary of the playing field and this extends equally as far east as the proposed development site. It is therefore considered that the development of CHAR 1 would not alter the compact nature of the existing village.

CHAR 2

5. CHAR 2 is allocated on previously undeveloped agricultural land at the western end of the village. However, development would stop at the A20/A252 roundabout, which marks the western boundary of the village, and would mirror the existing housing development on the opposite side of the road at the bottom of Charing Hill. Development of this site would wrap around the adjoining recently constructed housing development, which is on land that was allocated in the Borough Local Plan 2000. CHAR 2 is therefore considered as a natural extension to the existing new development and follows existing field boundaries so that the ancient pattern of field boundaries need not be lost. Existing hedges provide a good definitive and natural boundary to the development.
6. The existing new housing estate comprising Tatchell Drive, Ruglys Way and Ellen Close, which CHAR 2 would adjoin, provides access into the development site through Ruglys Way. In addition to this existing access, a new access either off the A20/A252 roundabout or off the A20 would be provided into the development. CHAR 2 is within 400m of the High Street, which is considered to be a reasonable distance to walk to shops, services and public transport. It is also very close to the Charing railway station and the local health centre.
7. Development of CHAR 2 would, like CHAR 1, be expected to contribute towards the upgrading and maintenance of existing facilities on the Arthur Baker Playing field. In addition, on site public open space including play facilities would be provided as a result of developing this site. Such facilities would also benefit residents of the existing adjoining residential development and would be in accordance with the Community Strategy Aim 'to provide good social community facilities for both existing communities and in line with future growth.'
8. The recently developed adjoining site includes a small lake as part of its sustainable drainage system (SUDS) and the existing system of ditches on CHAR 2 can be incorporated into a similar scheme. Policy CS20 requires SUDs to be sensitively designed and located to

promote improved biodiversity. There is a good opportunity to improve biodiversity by promoting a water environment through SUDS and adding to the trees and hedges on the site.

Objections to CHAR 1

9. Concern over the development of CHAR 1 for housing purposes has been expressed by Kent Wildlife Trust (TPV 209 and TRSC 84). The two main areas of concern are firstly the effect that drainage of CHAR 1 would have on the wildlife site and secondly the effect of increased visitor pressure and resultant trampling.
10. The wildlife site belongs to the Charing Playing Field Committee to whom it was donated in 1999 and it has pedestrian access from the adjoining playing field. There is also a car park accessed from Pett Lane at the northern end of the site. The southern part of the site is wooded and the northern part is a grazed meadow. An informative leaflet is available on the internet at www.clarity-consultancy.co.uk/alderbed_wildlife_guide.pdf which explains the history of the site and the wildlife accommodated by this 2.6 ha site. Access by members of the public is easy and is actively encouraged.
11. The chalk streams which supply the water environment that characterises the area are important to the abundance and variety of wildlife inhabiting the site. The streams flow from the foot of the Downs in the north and southward to the river Stour. CHAR 1 has a drainage ditch running parallel with the A20 close to its southern boundary. As the water is flowing from north to south, the development of CHAR 1 is considered unlikely to be a problem to the water table of the Alderbeds. A map showing the streams and their direction can be seen at <http://extranet7.kent.gov.uk/klis/default.asp> by locating Charing (to the north west of Ashford) and enlarging the scale to 1:5000.
12. The map showing the drainage patterns for this location quite clearly shows that the streams, which run through and alongside the Alderbeds, do not cross the CHAR 1 site. Development on CHAR 1 need not interfere with the current flow of water by either drawing water away from the wildlife site or by causing excess water to run onto it. A survey of the development site's hydrology with recommendations as to how the development of the site can assist the retention of the present wet environment of the Alderbeds can be used to inform planning conditions likely to be attached to planning permission when this is granted.
13. All development must conform to Core Strategy policy CS11 which requires that development proposals should avoid harm to biodiversity and geological conservation interests. Sensitive landscaping of the development site in the area closest to the Alderbeds can be used to create continuity between the protected woodland and the development site.

14. A kissing gate provides pedestrian access from the playing field into the wooded part of the site and there are level surfaced paths leading into the wildlife site from this gateway. Visitors are asked to keep to the footpaths and boardwalks but there are no restrictions on entry to the site. The Charing website invites people to take part in activities such as organised bat walks, birdsong mornings, mammal hunts and moth trapping but the site is accessible at all times. It is evidently able to cope with its current level of visitors and has been arranged to provide easy public access. It is considered unlikely that the additional 35 dwellings proposed for CHAR 1 would give rise to a harmful degree of pressure upon the woodlands especially as the site adjoins a large recreation ground.

Objections to CHAR 1 and 2

15. Both sites are described by Mr R Brasier as being distant from local services and prominent in the landscape (TPV42) the Hillreed comments (TPV160) echo this theme. CHAR 1 has little screening along its boundary with the A20 but appropriate planting can be added as part of a landscaping scheme, subject to the avoidance of vision splays for the new access. A landscaped edge as required by policy CHAR 1 (d) will also help to development on this site within the landscape. CHAR 2 has trees along much of its boundary with the A20 and a substantial hedge on its north western borders, both of which can be reinforced with additional planting to help the new development sit more comfortably into the landscape. The boundaries of Both CHAR 1 and CHAR 2 are within 400m of the shops in the High Street. CHAR 2 is within 400m of the railway station and CHAR 1 within some 530m of the station by way of the footpath alongside CHAR 4.

Objections to CHAR 2

16. The Environment Agency has requested that amendments should be made in the supporting text to emphasise the need to alleviate on site drainage problems and ensure that flood risk off site is not worsened by development on this site (TPV124 and 125). However, this is already a requirement of policy CS20 and the site has a system of drainage ditches that could be incorporated into the scheme. The adjoining development already has a SUDs scheme which includes a small lake in one corner of the site.
17. GOSE (TRSC100) has suggested that the Council should, prior to the examination, clarify that relevant stakeholders such as landowners, are fully aware of the infrastructure requirements for individual sites. The landowner of CHAR 2 is represented by David Hicken Associates who are supportive of change 10 (sewerage) on the basis that this represents an accurate reflection of the current position and is therefore fully justified.

Alternative Sites

18. The objection by Hillreed Homes, who have control over 1.3 hectares which comprises CHAR 04 in the SA, is on the basis that CHAR 04 would be a preferable site for development (TPV160,161 and 162). Whilst this site is close to the village centre and the railway station, it currently forms a pleasant area of open space which complements the Conservation area of which it forms an integral part. It also forms a buffer between the employment site to the east and the adjoining housing to the west. Although the land is not public open space, and is currently used for grazing horses, there is a footpath alongside the western edge of the area, which provides a pleasant pedestrian route with a view over the fields. Development of this site would require 2.4 by 120 metres vision splays onto the A20 which would have a significantly adverse impact upon this green undeveloped margin to the Conservation Area. The selected sites would not have an impact upon the historic parts of the village and are able to accommodate the required number of new dwellings.
19. The employment site to the east of CHAR 04, referred to as CHAR 22 in the SA and also known as 'Morrison's depot', scores well in the sustainability appraisal. In addition to being relatively central to the village, it is a brownfield site. However, the site has only been suggested by Mr R Brazier (TPV42) who is not the owner of the site but has made representations in favour of his own land which adjoins Burleigh bungalow in Burleigh Road. His site in Burleigh Road could possibly gain access via CHAR 22 if the latter were to be developed as a housing site but would otherwise need to be accessed via an unmade private road (Burleigh Road).

The Morrison's depot is still in active use as an employment site and its redevelopment for housing would mean the loss of a local employment opportunity. Saved Local Plan policy RE2 seeks to retain such rural employment sites and this policy will be replaced by the similar policy TRS7 in the DPD. The site is ideally located for employment use having direct access onto the A20, which is part of the secondary road network in the county. It is also easily accessible to Charing residents and it would be difficult to find an alternative employment site of this nature in the village. Importantly, as CHAR22 has not been proposed for redevelopment by its owners it cannot be assumed to be available and deliverable.

20. The agents Carter Jonas acting on behalf of the owner of land to the west of CHAR2 object (TPV188) to the detailed boundary as shown on the map which accompanies the publication (Regulation 27) version of the DPD. Their proposal is that if the site were to be expanded to the west, it would be possible to achieve a softer more uniform edge to the development. It is also argued that it would provide more land, if needed, as a contingency. This land was discounted at the Issues and Options stage as being too prominent in the landscape when viewed from the west and too far removed from the centre of the village, where amenities such as open space

provision would be less beneficial to the village. CHAR 2 is considered to extend to an appropriate boundary beyond which development would impinge unacceptably upon the AONB which lies to the north of the A20.

Conclusion

21. Both CHAR1 and CHAR 2 are considered to be acceptable with regard to the effect that development of these sites would have upon the form of the village and the surrounding landscape. Both sites adjoin existing residential development and are close enough to the village centre to enable easy walking and cycling to local services.
22. In the case of CHAR 1, development of this site would not encroach any further to the east of the village than existing development to the north of the playing field or the row of houses opposite the site and fronting the A20. Similarly development of CHAR 2 would not extend the village further to the north west, than the existing housing development on the northern side of the A20. The existing field boundaries would provide a definitive limit to development and the new housing would not extend beyond the A20/A252 roundabout, which is located at the point of entry to the village from the west.
23. Concerns over the effect of development at CHAR 1 upon the Local Wildlife Site by trampling and overuse are considered to be overstated given the level of management of the site by local people and the evidence that the site is well used without detriment at the present time. The necessity of maintaining the balance of land drainage so that the site neither dries out nor becomes inundated with water is appreciated but the direction and pattern of existing streams and ditches suggest that this would not be an issue. Planning conditions can be used to require mitigation measures should these be considered necessary as a result of a hydrological survey.
24. The two selected sites have been chosen for their proximity to the village centre, opportunity for good access, ability to bring forward affordable housing, and contributions to public open space. In addition, the form of the existing village would be conserved, the conservation area of the village would not be affected and only the tip of one corner of the site would adjoin the Alderbeds, the concerns over which have been addressed above. Alternative sites have been carefully considered but have not been found to outweigh the merits of the two allocated sites.