



Hamsey Parish Council

Responding to Evidence Document: LAA 19HY Land North of Cooksbridge

The Proposal: 1,100 housing at Cooksbridge, one of 'The Big 3 Sites'.

To date LDC still has not shared the Icen proposal with Hamsey Parish Council. A local Housing Campaign made a Freedom of Information request, otherwise the parish council and residents would be completely unaware of what misleading information had been presented to Planners, many of whom are not at all familiar with this area. For two years this information has been withheld from Hamsey Parish Council, a statutory consultee. In our naivety we had been patiently awaiting the results from the Land Sensitivity Assessments of 'The Big Three' including Cooksbridge when all at once we were informed of the intention to include this 'site' in the Local Plan, and omit comparable 'North Barn Farm', without explanation. The patience and cooperation that HPC afforded LDC Planners has seriously hindered our community's right to transparency and time in responding to this consultation.

We cannot find reference from any other Planning sources of 1100 homes being classed as either Medium Scale, or an Extension. Both definitions seem particularly inappropriate given the size of Cooksbridge village (161 homes). 1,100 seems in the Planning World better categorised as 'Large Scale Mixed Use', so why is it being assessed as Medium Scale, if not to tilt the balance in favour of development? This larger site is neither 'North of Cooksbridge', or an Extension. In the middle of the 'site' which sprawls east to join Hamsey, Offham and North End, is Hamsey Common.

To include this 'site' in the Local Plan will encourage this and other sites into costly applications across the district which will conflict with NPPF and LDC's own policies. Given the current rate of planning appeals being upheld, this is a floodgate best left closed.

Hamsey Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2030

Hamsey Parish Council is not against suitable development. The HNP adopted by the community in 2014 recognised the housing target for 30 additional homes in Cooksbridge. HNP did not allocate sites because the Parish Council was already supporting a brownfield development of 29 homes within the planning boundary to be approved at the old Covers Yard, Chatfield Close. The resultant homes from Chatfield Close (29) plus windfall housing at Old Hamsey Brickworks /Lakes of 87 homes (49 homes + 8 business units (2014) + 12



(2017), +13 more (2023) + 13 custom builds (2022) = 87 homes) and a brand new live work units at McBeans Orchids Cooksbridge has provided more than 4 times the housing target for Cooksbridge, and all on brownfield land. Notably, between Chatfield Close and Old Hamsey Brickworks/Lakes major developer community benefits remain undelivered.

Landscape & Environment Policies

EN1 - 'Development of land outside of the Cooksbridge Settlement Boundary that would result in an adverse impact on the countryside and/or the defining characteristics of the landscape will not be permitted.'

EN3 - 'Developments should protect and enhance existing local ecological corridors, landscape features and habitats. Development proposals that result in materially adverse impacts will not be supported.'

EN6 - 'Reduce emissions: Development that would result in high levels of pollution, or noise, or traffic congestion, will not be permitted.'

EN8 - 'Protection of Views: Development that would adversely affect the distinctive views of the surrounding countryside from public vantage points within and adjacent to, the built up area and the Rural Park will not be supported.'

Housing Growth & Development

Overall Policy - 'New housing should be focused on Cooksbridge in order to maintain the rural character of the environment of the Parish.' (Overwhelmingly supported by 78% in the survey).

H1 - 'Brownfield developments in Cooksbridge. Priority will be given to proposals for up to 30 dwellings on Brownfield sites within the Cooksbridge Settlement Boundary.'

H3 - 'SDNP character and ecology protected. Development sites shall not adversely affect the landscape character of the South Downs National Park or reduce the ecological capacity of the site without appropriate mitigation.'

Transport & Travel Policies

TT1 - 'Development must ensure highway safety. Where appropriate, development should be accompanied by a Road Safety Audit and a transport assessment of the potential impact of new traffic & not give rise to reduced levels of highway safety (or increased levels of highway danger).'

Building on greenfields is in direct conflict with ESCC Nature recovery strategies, and LDCs own green policies and objectives.



View from the South Downs National Park

Freedom of Information request emails provided by the Information Governance Officer at LDC

Emails shared with HPC appear to show that the Landscape Sensitivity Maps by SDNPA (which show the whole site as being highly visible to the national park), can be discounted following a site assessment by the AECOM assessors. The score system was suggested as a means of overriding this important evidence at the assessor's discretion.

Assessing the view

The assessor does not appear to have assessed these fields from a vantage point of the national park which might have included Offham Escarpment/ Chalkpit and Blackcap. The view from the fields to Lewes castle, which works both ways, was not noted either.

South Downs National Park website: 'The picturesque villages of Cooksbridge, Offham and Hamsey sit within a serene mixed landscape of chalk downland, water meadows and the woodlands of the Low Weald. Be sure to take a good camera as there are great viewpoints from the top of Offham Chalk Pit!' NPPF 182: 'great weight should be given' and which has the 'highest status of protection'

The gravity of impact from the proposed decimation of the countryside which straddles the national park was not fully recognised in the survey.

Settlement Boundaries erased

The fields in 19HY would entirely join Cooksbridge, Old Cooksbridge*, Offham*, North End and historic Hamsey. The two places are markedly different in terms of history, character, landscape and function. The separation which respects the unique identity and sense of place for each must be respected. *Conservation areas

Quiet Lanes

The majority of fields are set in quiet lanes (Hamsey Lane, The Drove) which are proposed by HPC for formal designation as such. The low traffic and speeds lend themselves to pedestrian and cycle prioritisation and HPC hopes to include these in future active travel routes. Cycleway charity Sustrans has just completed a feasibility study which shows these Quiet Lanes to be the preferred route. Large scale development would entirely overwhelm these narrow country lanes, which actively calm traffic through their narrow and winding nature.



Transport Assessment

To our knowledge, no Transport Assessment has been carried out. The absence of a proper report leaves us to draw conclusions from the Transport Assessment of nearby Chatfield Close in 2019, which would indicate this development would generate 5,000 car journeys every single day. If Planners witnessed the pandemonium every time the A275 is closed for railway works you would see some glimpse into the future of living every day with this development.

The A275 suffers tailbacks of at least half a mile northbound and southbound during peak time. Traffic from new developments would be unable to even pull onto A275 to join and contribute to the tailbacks, so cars would remain idling in the developments exacerbating the air pollution.

It is quite bizarre that the Icen proposal for 19HY repeatedly links Cooksbridge to Uckfield and Hassocks- two places not at all connected on a day to day basis. People only tend to drive through Hassocks when the A27 is shut. Most people don't travel 20 minutes to Uckfield or Hassocks to meet their daily needs; they travel 8 minutes to Lewes or 20 minutes to Haywards Heath- often to catch more regular trains to London. This fabrication of east and west bound journeys through congested Ditchling was to deflect attention away from Lewes Prison Crossroads to the south, which is confirmed to be at capacity with no scope for improvement.

Level crossings

It is the calm and quiet lanes which lend themselves to the simple half level crossing at Hamsey/The Drove. Currently barriers remain closed for just 28 seconds per passing train, and still there are incidents of cars passing through the barriers which only close half of the road. A development here would require a full replacement of this crossing which would cost millions. This crossing currently has around 240 vehicle crossings per day, plus cyclists and pedestrians. Only equipped with automatic half barriers, Hamsey is not at all suitable for a greater number of cars, and entirely inappropriate for a higher population base, many of which would be children.

Malthouse level crossing has no protection at all. Upgrading these crossings to deal with the development would be costly and potentially impractical, given the proximity of the crossings to South Downs National Park.

The Malthouse Way stile pedestrian level crossing between Cooksbridge and Hamsey has no protection at all. It is risky to use as it is entirely dependent on human judgement, with trains approaching around a corner from the east. Trains currently sound their horns from either direction to alert local people crossing here. Adding thousands of people and their dogs to the mix will be a recipe for disaster of the worst kind.



Cooksbridge Level Crossing is one of the busiest in the country. According to Network Rail's data, around 10,500 vehicles cross Cooksbridge level crossing each day, making it one of the busiest in the network. (There are 6,200 level crossings in England and Wales. Cooksbridge ranks around the 60th most busy, from the perspective of vehicles.) This activity explains the half mile queues both north and south of the Cooksbridge level Crossing which remains closed for every stopping train and even longer for 12 coach trains which overhang the crossing. Cooksbridge Station should be treated as a limitation, certainly not an opportunity.

Settlement Boundary

The fields lay well outside of Cooksbridge's Settlement Boundary, defined in the Local Plan and the Hamsey Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2030.

Loss of agriculture

The fields are of a good quality for producing food, and are currently managed on a rotational basis. A potential housing development offers no incentive to improve this offering in the short term. These fields should be removed from the Local Plan so that farmers can plan farm management in the longer term.

Recreation

This 'site' forms well known and loved publicised walking routes (SDNPA, Ramblers, OS, Komoot, Strava are some examples). During lockdown, this is where Lewesians escaped to. This is where locals walk their dogs in the fields; show their children the car free route to Lewes; and most take pictures several times a month because they never want to forget the beauty of that landscape. The pictures never do them justice, yet we keep taking the photos.

Cooksbridge 19HY is one of the most unsuitable proposals in the LAA, and should be removed at this stage of the Local Plan.

Instead consider making Cooksbridge 19HY a BNG Site to offset the impacts of developments already happening to the north of Lewes.