

The Hop Farm, Paddock Wood, Tonbridge

Planning Brief

Prepared by:



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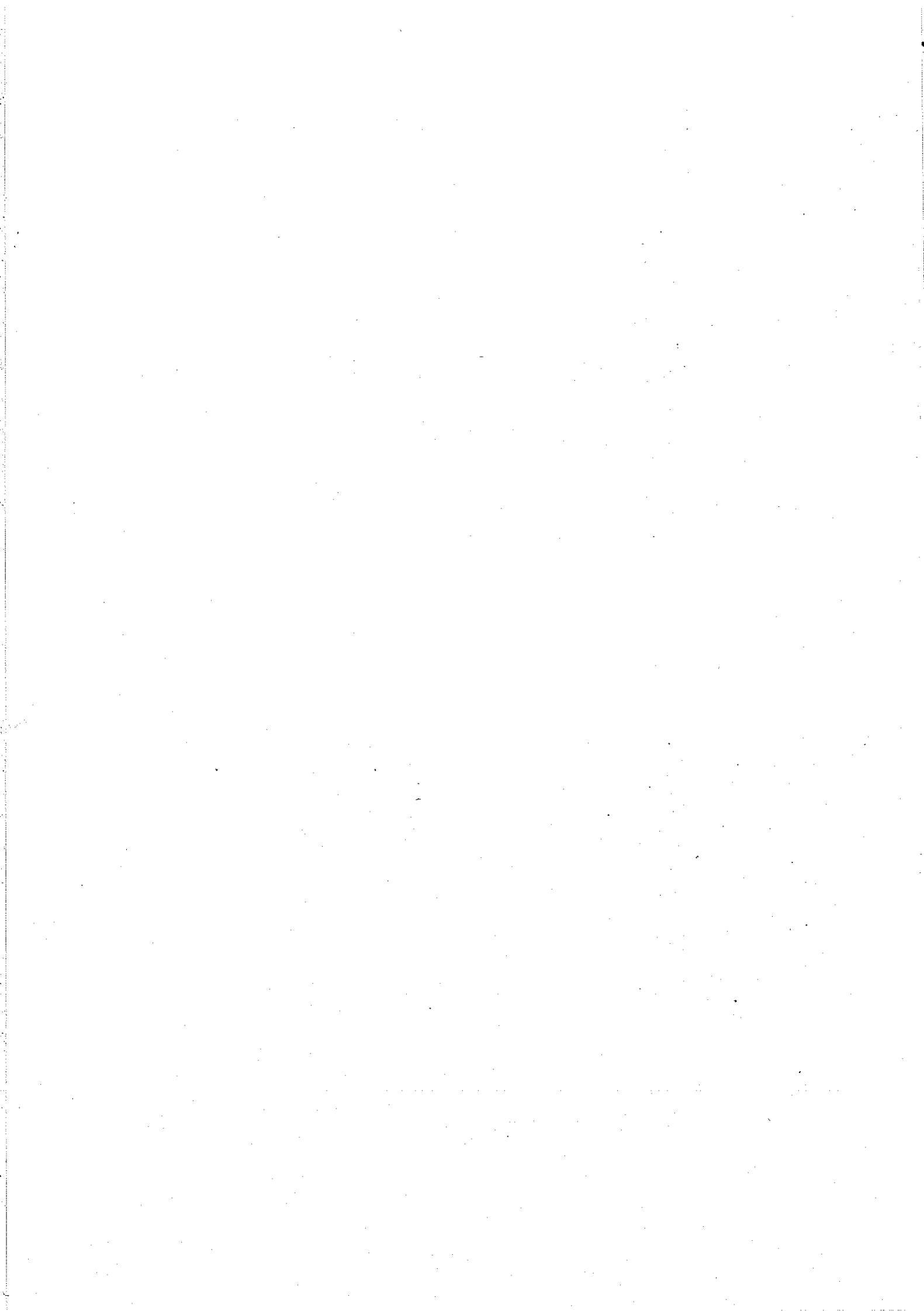
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I Introduction

I.1 This Planning Brief, that has been prepared by RPS Planning & Development, provides a framework for taking forward the next stages of tourism based development at the Hop Farm in accordance with Policy P6/26 of the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Local Plan (Adopted 1998).

I.2 Policy P6/25 applies directly to the Hop Farm (or 'Beltring Hop Farm' as it is called in the Local Plan). It states:

“Proposals for further tourist related development at Beltring Hop Farm, as defined on the Proposals Map, will be considered in the light of Policies P6/12 and P6/14. Any proposals for development within or adjacent to the defined area, will need to be considered on a comprehensive basis in the context of an approved Planning Brief and Master Plan for the whole site, including all of the open areas. Proposals should preserve and enhance the Grade II Listed Buildings and their settings and accord with Policy P4/1. Piecemeal development and any proposals which conflict significantly with the terms of the approved Planning Brief and Master Plan will not be permitted.”*

I.3 The owners' vision is to retain the Hop Farm in tourism use, which is believed to be the best way of protecting the unique collection of oast houses for the future with minimal intrusion on the buildings and minimal harm to their setting. This document has been assembled on the basis of both technical input from specialists in various fields and with account taken of the broad range of uses that the owners wish to implement.

I.4 The approach and scope for the Planning Brief and associated Masterplan has been discussed and agreed with the Council's Chief Planning Officer, and is attached to **Appendix I** for information. Our starting position has been to examine the key environmental opportunities and constraints within a defined study area (as attached to the scope document), based on the Proposals Map area for Policy P6/25 as well as 'adjacent' land.

I.5 Chapter 2 of the Planning Brief describes the key physical and land use characteristics of the site and surrounding area, and summarises the history of the Hop Farm in the context of relevant planning history and work undertaken by our specialist cultural heritage consultant. Chapter 3 contains a technical review of existing and emerging planning policies of relevance to the site at a local, regional and national level, with emphasis on the adopted Development Plan. Chapter 4 draws on the technical findings of our baseline surveys and work, focussing on issues relevant to the Green Belt, cultural heritage, landscape, ecology, transport, and flood risk and drainage. It also describes the short, medium and long-term aspirations of the owner.

1.6 Chapter 5 documents the consultation that has taken place with Council Officers and Members concerning the evolution of the Planning Brief, and reports upon the outcome of the public exhibition that took place at the Hop Farm on the 12 and 13 May 2011. Chapter 6 draws on the findings of the background work - in particular the site's constraints and opportunities - and sets out guidance on how future tourism proposals should respond to the known issues and take into account relevant planning policies. Reference is made to the Masterplan, which is also presented in this chapter.

2 Site Characteristics & History

Site & Surroundings

- 2.1 The Hop Farm is a major visitor attraction located within the Metropolitan Green Belt location, in the Weald of Kent, based around a collection of Grade II* listed oast houses. The A228 Hale Street bypass runs past the eastern boundary of the site in the form of a dual carriageway, with open farmland beyond. The hamlet of Beltring forms the closest settlement to the site east of the A228. The wooded banks of the River Medway lie to the north and west which separate the Hop Farm from the settlement of East Peckham. Farmland extends to the south of the site, 1.5km beyond which lies the town of Paddock Wood. To the south of this town the landform rises to a ridge which forms the edge of the High Weald AONB 5km from the site.
- 2.2 The Hop Farm site comprises a complex of well established buildings with an extensive surrounding area used for a variety of leisure, recreation and tourism functions. Existing built form is concentrated in the oast complex, which contains five Grade II* listed buildings representing former oast houses and associated granaries. The buildings on site, included the listed bells, house a variety of tourist attractions and exhibitions including a gift shop, banqueting and conference facilities, pottery, museum displays, an indoor play area and tea rooms. The main attractions area is located within and around these buildings, comprising children's play equipment, temporary rides, landscaped areas and hardstanding. Several mature trees lie within this area which is separated by a tall Leyland cypress hedge from the neighbouring Brookers Oast pub. A combination of timber fencing types including close board, post and rail, picket and ranch style enclose and subdivide this space.
- 2.3 The oasts are individually known as Bell 1 to Bell 5 as the field in which they were constructed was called Bell Field. The four oasts with the roundels are Bells 1 to 4 whilst the fifth oast is Bell 5. Bell 1 is occupied by White's Banqueting Suite on the first floor. It provides conference, corporate entertainment, wedding and banqueting facilities up to 180 people, with a dance floor and separate bar. The ground floor accommodates the 'Shires' restaurant and a public café. Leading off this area are two private roundel rooms, each accommodating up to 20 people. The ground floor of Bell 2 is currently split between a fully working pottery and children's play; the upper floor is currently let for B1 business uses.
- 2.4 The ground floor level of Bell 3 contains a children's play area and the 'Shire's Pottery', together with 'play shops' such as 'The Oast House Farm Store' and 'Suzy's Salon'. The 'Oast House Terrace Tea Rooms' sit to the front of the building on the first floor. The Bell accommodates the 'Hop Story

Museum' within the roundels to the rear of the oast building. Bell 4 currently houses the 'Legends in Wax' exhibition over the first and second floors, where over 70 wax figures are displayed; on the ground floor the 'Yesterdays Village' exhibition comprises rural displays. 'Happy Hoppers' adventure playground operates from the ground floor of Bell 5 and includes a café. The first floor of the building currently accommodates the administration and office space for the Hop Farm.

- 2.5 Other activities that take place on the land to the north and west of the main built complex include a caravan and camping site, 'Tree Jumpers' and the main events field. The red circus tent forms a large temporary structure which lies outside of the main defined attractions area.
- 2.6 The remaining Hop Farm site which surrounds the main development to the north, west and south west comprises a complex of interconnecting grass fields, defined by hedgerows, shelter belts and copses, used primarily for staging events and camping.

Site History & Ownership

- 2.7 The four similar oasts at the Hop Farm, each with five circular kilns (roundels) set in two parallel offset rows, were built in about 1894; the fifth later oast, with five kilns located to the south-west of the other four, was built in 1936. The group of oasts at the Hop Farm was initially listed at Grade II in 1959. In 1985 the listing grade was raised to II*.
- 2.8 The baseline work undertaken by our cultural heritage expert (see **Appendix 5**) examines the significance of the listed buildings in relation to identified heritage values. It confirms that the buildings were originally used for the range of activities associated with the drying and processing of hops. It states that the principal heritage value that can be ascribed to the group of oasts is historic value, and goes on to describe the role and social reform work of the local farmer and original investor, E.A. White.
- 2.9 In 1920 the Hop Farm and the oasts at Beltring were sold to the brewers Messrs. Whitbread & Company Limited. While Whitbread had invested substantial monies in an attempt to create a commercially viable visitor attraction, they dramatically failed in this aim. It was later sold to BM Investments Limited in November 1997. These subsequent owners did go some way towards improving the position, driving visitor numbers up from 150,000 in 1998 to almost 550,000 in 2005 and increasing turnover from £1.2 million to £3.4 million. However these results were largely achieved through renting the fields and open space within the farm for various activities and events, and there was relatively little re-investment into the built fabric. This meant that the increase in profit did not mitigate the substantial cost of maintaining the listed oast buildings, which have deteriorated as a consequence.

2.10 The Hop Farm was acquired by Peter Bull, who owns and operates a number of UK visitor attractions, in 2007. Immediately following his acquisition he re-focused the attractions firmly in the family market, introducing attractions such as the Magic Factory, Yesterday's World and the Victorian Carousel.

2.11 There is a long and complex planning history associated with the Hop Farm. The following decisions have particular significance to the site:-

- Ref. TM/82/11025/FUL (known also as 82/355) – Conversion of oast houses to form new farm offices, agricultural museums, craft workshops, refreshment rooms and open recreational uses (including farm walk, picnic area, nature walk and fishing); approved 18 November 1982. It is understood that this permission – granted on a temporary basis under Planning Condition 1 until 1 November 1984 – applied to Bells 1, 2, 3 and 4.
- Ref. TM/85/10541/FUL (or 84/1298) – Application for continued permanent use of oast houses as farm offices, agricultural museums, craft workshops and refreshment rooms together with open recreational use for adjoining land, re-siting of car and coach parks, etc. approved 28 February 1985. This related to the continued use of the oast complex for the uses covered under the above temporary permission, as well as new access and parking works.
- Ref. TM/89/1420/FUL - Stable block (Revised Scheme); approved 10 November 1989. It is understood that this permission applies to the current stables block, situated towards the north of Bell 5.
- Ref. TM/89/1869/FUL - Change of use from disused hop store to pottery and craft workshop; approved 12 April 1990. This permission relates to Bell 2.
- Ref. TM/89/11061/FUL (or 88/2071) – Single storey entrance/administration block (revised scheme); approved 16 January 1989. This applies to the admissions block and gift shop situated on the south-west side of the main group of buildings. The gift shop is situated adjacent to the rear of the entrance hall.
- Ref. TM/91/0324 - Change of use of first floor museum to conference/function suite with internal alterations; approved 18 July 1991. This permission relates to Bell 1.
- Ref. TM/91/10197/FUL (or 91/0085) - Use of part of site for caravans and camping in conjunction with major events and erection of detached toilet block; approved 2 July 1991. This relates to the camping and caravan site situated just outside of the study area forming the subject of the Brief, towards the north-west.

- Ref. TM/97/01974/FL - Change of use of bells from general store to children's activity centre; approved 19 March 1998. This relates to the Happy Hoppers attraction within Bell 5.
- Ref. TM/99/01029/FL – Application under Section 73 for re-siting of existing animal farm and erection of buildings. Approved 10 August 2000. This concerns the animal farm located on the northern side of Bell 4.
- Ref. TM/03/02493/FLEA – Construction of 64 no. holiday let units and managers unit with associated walkways and access and parking areas. It was called in by the Secretary of State in October 2004; appeal allowed 30 December 2005. The 64 units are arranged in 16 groups of 4, on a triangular-shaped parcel of land situated towards the west of the oast complex, with shared entrances linked to a walkway which is raised 750mm above ground level. This walkway terminates to the rear of the existing Bell 5. Following the discharge of all pre-commencement planning conditions, this permission has been implemented on the site in December 2010 by virtue of the owners taking steps to commence trench works associated with the new access.
- Ref. TM/07/00861/FL - Erection of an activity and climbing course (retrospective); approved 8 August 2007. This relates to the 'Tree Jumpers' activity located adjacent to the woodland towards the north.
- Ref. TM/08/02257/FL – Retrospective application for creation of miniature driving school including construction of hard surface track with raised kerb stones, street furniture and timber post fencing and associated one storey pitched roof building with ornamental petrol pumps; refused 6 July 2010. This refusal, that relates to an attraction situated on the north side of Bell 3 adjacent to the children's fairground rides, forms the subject of an outstanding appeal combined with an appeal against an enforcement notice served by the Council (PINS Ref. APP/H2265/C/10/2139405).
- Ref. TM/08/02546/FL – Retrospective application for erection of children's climbing frame attached to elevation of Bell 3; refused 12 January 2009. This structure is also subject to an outstanding appeal against an enforcement notice (PINS Ref. APP/H2265/C/10/2139407), and an associated appeal against a related listed building enforcement notice (PINS Ref. APP/H2265/F/10/2141487).
- Ref. TM/09/00054/FL - Works to the existing reception/administration/retail building including reconfiguration of internal uses to accommodate reception area/offices/retail/tea room, associated alterations to external elevations, and the erection of a pergola structure to facilitate the sale of plants and associated products on land to the front of the building. approved 9 April

2009. This scheme is in the process of being implemented on the site. The garden nursery is located on the south side of the tea room, shop and office building.

- Ref. TM/09/00840/FL – Retrospective application for the erection of a marquee structure with hard surface base and related drainage works for a temporary period of five years; refused 6 July 2010. As with the miniature driving school, this refusal is the subject of an outstanding appeal combined with an appeal against an enforcement notice served by the Council (PINS Ref. APP/H2265/C/I0/2139404). It relates to the former blue marquee structure located towards the west of the stables block and Bell 5 (within the development area covered by the aforementioned proposal for 64 holiday units) – that was removed from the site in early 2011.
- Ref. TM/09/01015/FL – Retrospective application for the erection of stables and small scale animal enclosures including ground works sited behind Bell 4; approved 9 December 2009. This applies to the animal farm attraction located behind Bell 4.
- Ref. TM/I0/00759/FL – development of a new conference facility to replace existing building and erection of a 60 bed hotel, restaurant and 16 holiday lodges. This represents part of the site formerly approved for the development of 64 holiday lodges and managers unit, as an alternative scheme to that development. The application is currently pending determination by the Council.

3 Planning Policy Context

3.1 Future tourism development at the Hop Farm needs to be considered in the context of the relevant Development Plan and other government planning policy and guidance, to inform the issues and opportunities highlighted in this Planning Brief. Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 together require that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the statutory Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. For the purposes of this Brief the Development Plan comprises the following documents:-

- The Regional Spatial Strategy (The South East Plan);
- The saved policies of the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Local Plan (Adopted 1998) which have not been superseded;
- Tonbridge and Malling Borough Core Strategy (Adopted September 2007);
- The Managing Development and the Environment (MDE) DPD (Adopted April 2010).

3.2 A brief review of these policies and other relevant policies is set out below, which are likely to have most significance for the Hop Farm.

Development Plan

The South East Plan (2009)

3.3 The South East Plan (Adopted May 2009) sets out the long term spatial planning framework for the region over the years 2006 to 2026, until it is revoked (which the Government has stated is its intention).

3.4 Policy SP5, 'Green Belts', states that the existing broad extent of Green Belts in the region is appropriate and will be retained and supported, and the opportunity should be taken to improve their land-use management and access as part of initiatives to improve the rural urban fringe.

3.5 Policy CCI, 'Sustainable Development', is a general cross-cutting policy supporting sustainable development priorities for the South East.

- 3.6 Policy CC4, 'Sustainable Design and Construction', deals with the incorporation of sustainable construction standards and techniques in new development. It is left for local planning authorities to set their own standards.
- 3.7 In relation to natural resource management, Policy NRM4 supports sustainable flood risk management, where the sequential approach to development in flood risk areas set out in PPS25 will be followed.
- 3.8 Policy NRM5 states that local planning authorities and other bodies shall avoid a net loss of biodiversity, and actively pursue opportunities to achieve a net gain across the region.
- 3.9 Policy BE6, 'Management of the Historic Environment', seeks to protect, serve and where appropriate enhance the historic environment and the contribution that it makes to local and regional distinctiveness and sense of place.
- 3.10 Policy TSR2, that relates to rural tourism, states that opportunities to promote tourism and recreation-based rural diversification should be encouraged where they provide jobs for local residents and are of a scale and type appropriate to their location.
- 3.11 More significantly, Policy TSR4, 'Tourism Attractions', states that ***"Priority should be given to improving the quality of all existing attractions to meet changing consumer demands and high environmental standards in terms of design and access"***. In developing policies in development plans applicable to visitor attractions, local authorities should consider the following criteria:-
- a) Do they help reinforce the distinctiveness of a locality?
 - b) Are they accessible by public transport and accessible to all (Disabled Discrimination Act compliant)?
 - c) Do they provide wet weather facilities and help extend the season?
 - d) Will they facilitate regeneration?
 - e) Are they complementary to existing attractions (or will they displace existing activity)?
- 3.12 Policy TSR5, 'Tourist Accommodation', requires the diversity of the accommodation sector to be positively reflected in tourism and planning policies. In formulating planning policies and making decisions, this policy states that local planning authorities should consider the need for hotel developments to be in the proposed location, including links with the particular location, transport

interchange or visitor attraction, and seek measures to increase access for all by sustainable transport modes.

Saved Local Plan Policies

3.13 The April 2010 Compendium of Saved Policies (Annex C) refers to Local Plan policies – just 7 policies - which have been ‘saved’ since 2007, which have also not since been superseded since under the more recent development plan documents reviewed below.

3.14 As acknowledged in the introductory section of this Planning Brief, Local Plan Policy P6/25 still applies directly to the Hop Farm (or ‘Beltring Hop Farm’ in this instance). Importantly it provides the specific policy justification for the Planning Brief and Masterplan that is the subject of this report. It states:

“Proposals for further tourist related development at Beltring Hop Farm, as defined on the Proposals Map, will be considered in the light of Policies P6/12 and P6/14. Any proposals for development within or adjacent to the defined area, will need to be considered on a comprehensive basis in the context of an approved Planning Brief and Master Plan for the whole site, including all of the open areas. Proposals should preserve and enhance the Grade II* Listed Buildings and their settings and accord with Policy P4/1. Piecemeal development and any proposals which conflict significantly with the terms of the approved Planning Brief and Master Plan will not be permitted.”

3.15 The Compendium confirms here that Policy P6/12 (referred to in Policy P6/25) has been superseded by MDE DPD Policy DC5; P6/14 has been superseded by MDE Policy DC1 – see review of these policies below. However, Policy P4/1 has been neither saved nor superseded, and therefore no longer applies.

3.16 The supporting text to Policy P6/25 (Paragraph 6.8.5) states:

“Beltring Hop Farm is a major tourist attraction within the Plan area. The site is, however, sensitively located within the landscape and subject to Green Belt constraints. The Borough Council does not wish to discourage appropriate development of the site as a tourist facility but at the same time is concerned that piecemeal development could result in an adverse change in the character of the area as a whole. A Planning Brief and Master Plan setting out comprehensive proposals for the site will therefore be required in order that the impact of proposals for future expansion and/or diversification can be adequately assessed in relation to the countryside, highway capacity and the Green Belt.”

3.17 Issues, opportunities and constraints relating to the listed buildings and their settings, the countryside, highway capacity and the Green Belt, as referred to under Policy P6/25 and the supporting text, are addressed in subsequent chapters of this Planning Brief.

Core Strategy (2007)

3.18 The Core Strategy sets out the Council's vision, aims and objectives which will determine the future pattern of development in the Borough over the period up until 2021. It indicates general locations for delivering housing and other strategic development requirements and broad areas of constraints on development. Its vision includes making the borough a ***“safe and excellent place to live, work and visit for existing and future generations...”***

3.19 The Core Strategy seeks to deliver its vision through the following three broad aims:

- Aim 1: To ensure that new development is achieved in accordance with the principles of sustainability;
- Aim 2: To establish a spatial context to guide new development and co-ordinate the transport and community infrastructure needed to serve that development; and
- Aim 3: To ensure that new development and other actions result in a high quality environment.

3.20 The Core Strategy Key Diagram confirms the site's location within the Green Belt, to which Policy CP3.1 applies. This states that national Green Belt Policy (i.e. PPG2) will be applied generally. The supporting text to the policy states:

“The importance of Green Belts lies in preventing major expansion of settlements or their coalescence, and preventing development in the countryside that would affect its openness. A key feature of Green Belts is their permanence. Very special circumstances are required for any departure from Green Belt policy...” (Paragraph 6.2.2)

3.21 The Key Diagram further indicates that the site is situated within an Area at Risk from Flooding under Policy CP10. This policy states that within the floodplain development should first seek to make use of areas at no or low risk to flooding before areas at higher risk, where this is possible and compatible with other policies aimed at achieving a sustainable pattern of development. Flood risk is addressed in more detail in subsequent chapters of this Planning Brief.

3.22 In terms of other generic policies, Policy CPI states that all proposals for new development must result in a high quality sustainable environment. It states that the need for development will be balanced against the need to protect and enhance the natural and built environment.

- 3.23 Policy CP2, 'Sustainable Transport', seeks to reduce the overall need to travel, particularly by car; for example, new development that is likely to generate a significant number of trips should be compatible with the character and capacity of the highway network in terms of the volume and nature of traffic generated; ensure accessibility for all, including elderly people, people with disabilities and others with restricted mobility.
- 3.24 Policy CPI2 states that within the Green Belt, development will only be permitted if it is justified by very special circumstances.
- 3.25 Policy CPI4 applies to development within the countryside which will be restricted to, for example: redevelopment of the defined Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt (this does not apply to the Hop Farm); development for which a rural location is essential. It states that within the Green Belt, inappropriate development which is otherwise acceptable within the terms of this policy will still need to be justified by very special circumstances.
- 3.26 Policy CP24 seeks to achieve a high quality environment; for example, it states that all development must be well designed and of a high quality in terms of detailing and use of appropriate materials, and must through its scale, density, layout, siting, character and appearance be designed to respect the site and its surroundings.
- 3.27 In relation to leisure, culture and tourism, Paragraph 6.4.17 of the Core Strategy, which recognises that the Borough contains some significant tourist attractions, states that tourism is a major contributor to the local economy, providing a source of income, employment and activities.

Managing Development and the Environment DPD (2010)

- 3.28 This MDE DPD applies existing and emerging national and regional policies at the local level.
- 3.29 Policy DC1 (as directly linked with site-specific Policy P6/25 of the Local Plan) applies to the re-use of rural buildings. It states that proposals for the reuse of existing rural buildings that are of permanent and sound construction and capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction for commercial, industrial, recreation or tourist development will be permitted in principle, subject to various considerations.
- 3.30 Policy DC5 (as also linked with Local Plan Policy P6/25), that applies to tourism and leisure, states that within rural areas proposals for new tourism and leisure facilities will be permitted subject to all of the following criteria being met:-
- a) Proposals do not detract from the character of the area as defined in the Character Area Appraisals SPD;

- b) It is appropriately located and existing buildings are re-used where possible;
- c) It will support the local economy;
- d) The amount of any new built development is directly related to the proposed use, and the minimum required;
- e) It avoids the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land;
- f) The proposal does not result in the fragmentation and/or severance of an agricultural land holding;
- g) Full account is taken of any biodiversity interest in accordance with Policy NE3;
- h) It is adequately served by the highway network and avoids off-site highway improvements that would have an adverse impact on countryside character;
- i) There is no hazard to road safety;
- j) Provision is made for protection and enhancement of the existing rights of way network;
- k) There is no unacceptable adverse impact arising from lighting, traffic generation, activity at unsocial hours or noise.

3.31 This policy concludes by stating that proposals in the Green Belt will be considered in light of PPG2.

3.32 Policy NE3 addresses the impact of development on local biodiversity. It states that development proposals must make provision for the retention of the habitat and protection of wildlife links. Opportunities to maximise the creation of new corridors and improve permeability and ecological conservation value will be sought. Ecological issues applicable to the Hop Farm site are considered in subsequent chapters of this Planning Brief.

3.33 Policy SQ1 states that (1) development will be required to reflect the local distinctiveness, condition and sensitivity to change of the local character areas as defined in the Character Area Appraisals SPD. All new development should (2) protect, conserve and, where possible, enhance: (a) the character and local distinctiveness of the Area; (b) the distinctive setting of, and relationship between, the pattern of settlement, roads and the landscape, urban form and important views; and (c) the biodiversity value of the area, including patterns of vegetation, property boundaries and water bodies.

- 3.34 Policy SQ8 applies to road safety, transport and parking. In particular, it states that development proposals will only be permitted where they would not significantly harm highway safety and where traffic generated by the development can adequately be served by the highway network.

Other Material Considerations

Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)

- 3.35 Paragraph 5 of PPS1 states that planning should facilitate and promote sustainable and inclusive patterns of urban and rural development, by ***“making suitable land available for development in line with economic, social and environmental objectives”***. Proposals should contribute to sustainable economic development. Paragraph 5 states that planning should ensure high quality development through good and inclusive design.

PPG2: Green Belts (1995)

- 3.36 This sets out the Government’s guidance on Green Belts, and states that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. Paragraph 1.4 states:

“The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the most important attribute of Green Belts is their openness.”

- 3.37 According to Paragraph 1.5, the five purposes of including land in the Green Belt are:

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

- 3.38 In addition to the application of countryside policies within a Green Belt, there is a ***“general presumption against inappropriate development within them. Such development should not be approved, except in very special circumstances”*** (Paragraph 3.1).

- 3.39 By definition, ‘inappropriate’ development is harmful to the Green Belt. It is the responsibility of the applicant to demonstrate very special circumstances and these circumstances to justify inappropriate

development *“will not exist unless the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations”* (Paragraph 3.2). The Secretary of State will attach substantial weight to the harm to the Green Belt in considering applications or appeals.

3.40 PPG2 lists appropriate development:

- The construction of new buildings inside a Green Belt is inappropriate except for the purposes of agriculture and forestry (with special exceptions), for essential facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, for cemeteries and other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and which do not conflict with the purposes of including land in it. Certain limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings or limited infilling in Green Belt villages may not be ‘inappropriate’ as is the case with limited infilling or redevelopment of major existing developed sites where certain criteria are met (Paragraph 3.4).
- Engineering and other operations and material changes of use in land constitute ‘inappropriate’ development unless they maintain openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt (Paragraph 3.12).

3.41 Paragraph 3.13 states that when any large-scale development or redevelopment of land occurs in the Green Belt, it should so far as possible contribute to the achievement of the objectives for the use of land in Green Belts, irrespective of whether they are appropriate development or inappropriate development which is justified by very special circumstances. Paragraph 1.6 refers to these objectives as follows:-

- To provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population;
- To provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas;
- To retain attractive landscapes, and enhance landscapes, near to where people live;
- To improve damaged and derelict land around towns;
- To secure nature conservation interest; and
- To retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses.

3.42 The visual amenity of the Green Belt should not be injured by proposals, within or conspicuous from it, which are visually detrimental even when such proposals would not prejudice the purposes of including land within the Green Belt (Paragraph 3.15).

PPS4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Development (2009)

3.43 PPS4 sets out central government guidance with respect to planning for economic development.

3.44 Policy EC7, ‘Planning for Tourism in Rural Areas’, states:

“To help deliver the Government’s tourism strategy, local planning authorities should support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit rural businesses, communities and visitors and which utilise and enrich, rather than harm, the character of the countryside, its towns, villages, buildings and other features.”

3.45 The policy states that local planning authorities should, through their local development frameworks:

- a) Support the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations and, carefully weighing the objective of providing adequate facilities or enhancing visitors’ enjoyment or improving the financial viability of the facility with the need to protect landscapes and environmentally sensitive sites.
- b) Wherever possible, locate tourist and visitor facilities in existing or replacement buildings. Facilities requiring new buildings in the countryside should, where possible, be provided in, or close to, service centres but may be justified in other locations where the required facilities are required in conjunction with a particular countryside attraction and there are no suitable existing buildings or developed sites available for re-use.
- c) Support extensions to existing tourist accommodation where the scale of the extension is appropriate to its location and where the extension may help to ensure the future viability of such businesses.
- d) Ensure that new or expanded holiday and touring caravan sites and chalet developments are not prominent in the landscape and that any visual intrusion is minimised by effective, high-quality screening and examine the scope for relocating any existing, visually or environmentally-intrusive sites away from sensitive areas or from sites prone to flooding or coastal erosion.
- e) Recognise that in areas statutorily designated for their natural or cultural heritage qualities, there will be scope for tourist and leisure related developments, subject to appropriate control over their number, form and location to ensure the particular qualities or features that justified the designation are conserved.

3.46 Policy EC10.1 states that ***“local planning authorities should adopt a positive and constructive approach towards planning applications for economic development”***.

PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment (2010)

3.47 PPS5 sets out the Government's planning policies on the conservation of the historic environment.

- 3.48 According to Paragraph 7, the Government's overarching aim is that the historic environment and its heritage assets should be conserved and enjoyed for the quality of life they bring to this and future generations.
- 3.49 Policy HE7.2 states that in considering the impact of a proposal on any heritage asset, local planning authorities should take into account the particular nature of the significance of the heritage asset and the value that it holds for this and future generations. This understanding should be used by the local planning authority to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposals.
- 3.50 Policy HE10.1 states that when considering applications for development that affect the setting of a heritage asset, local planning authorities should treat favourably applications that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset. When considering applications that do not do this, local planning authorities should weigh any such harm against the wider benefits of the application. The greater the negative impact on the significance of the heritage asset, the greater the benefits that will be needed to justify approval.
- 3.51 HE10.2 states that local planning authorities should identify opportunities for changes in the setting to enhance or better reveal the significance of a heritage asset. Taking such opportunities should be seen as a public benefit and part of the process of place-shaping.

PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (2004)

- 3.52 PPS7 sets out national guidance with respect to rural areas which includes country towns and villages as well as largely undeveloped countryside up to the fringes of larger urban areas. Much of this national guidance has recently been superseded by PPS4, detailed above.
- 3.53 Paragraph 15 of PPS7 states that ***"planning authorities should continue to ensure that the quality and character of the wider countryside is protected and, where possible, enhanced"***.

PPS9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (2005)

- 3.54 PPS9 sets out planning policies on protection of biodiversity through the planning system. The key principle behind this document is that planning decisions should aim to maintain and enhance, restore or add to biodiversity interests. It states that in taking decisions, local planning authorities should ensure that appropriate weight is attached to biodiversity in the wider environment as well as in nationally, internationally and locally designated sites.

PPS13: Transport (2001)

- 3.55 The objectives of PPS13 are to: promote more sustainable choices for both people and for moving freight; promote accessibility by public transport, walking and cycling; reduce the need to travel, especially by car (Paragraph 4).

PPS25: Development and Flood Risk (2006)

- 3.56 PPS25 outlines the Government's policies in relation to flood risk and identifies a risk-based approach to assessing the appropriateness of developing in the flood plain. It requires that all proposals for development in areas at risk of flooding are accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA).
- 3.57 In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the sequential approach at a site level to minimise risk by directing the most vulnerable development to areas of lowest flood risk, matching vulnerability of land use to flood risk (Paragraph 8). If it is not possible for development to be located in Areas of lower probability of flooding, the Exception Test can be applied – a method of managing flood risk while still allowing necessary development to occur (Paragraph 18).
- 3.58 Authorities should ensure that all new development in flood risk areas is appropriately flood resilient and resistant, including safe access and escape routes where required, and that any residual risk can be safely managed (Paragraph 8).

Planning For Growth

- 3.59 Under the Coalition Government's Planning for Growth agenda, national planning policy is changing and the weight to be attached 'to economic benefits is increasing. The 23 March 2011 Government Statement of planning policy, Planning for Growth', states that Councils should generally support planning applications for development which will be beneficial to jobs and the local economy.

4 Baseline Surveys & Research

- 4.1 This section draws on the technical findings of our baseline surveys and work, focussing on issues relevant to the Green Belt, cultural heritage, landscape, ecology, transport, and flood risk and drainage. It also describes the short, medium and long-term aspirations of the owner of the Hop Farm to secure a sustainable long-term future for the site.

Green Belt Issues

- 4.2 It has already been established that the Hop Farm site is located entirely within the Green Belt, to which relevant Development Plan policies and PPG2 apply. Arguably, the Hop Farm site does not itself constitute a particularly sensitive part of the Green Belt in terms of contributing towards the fundamental aim of the Green Belt identified in PPG2, since the developed and brownfield characteristics of parts of the site already reduce its openness.
- 4.3 Taking into account relevant planning policies such as Core Strategy Policy CP3.1 and PPG2, we consider that there are four fundamental planning issues which need to be addressed in determining the suitability of future tourist related development, both strategically as part of this Planning Brief and as part of future planning application submissions, as follows:-
- Whether the sort of development likely to be sought by the owners of the Hop Farm is likely to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt;
 - Whether it is likely to harm openness and conflicts with any purpose of the Green Belt;
 - Whether it is likely to harm the visual amenity of the Green Belt;
 - And if so, whether there are very special circumstances which outweigh the harm identified.

Inappropriate Development

- 4.4 PPG2 sets out clear guidance on the limited forms of development that are appropriate in the Green Belt. This is summarised under Paragraph 3.40 of the previous chapter.
- 4.5 It is clear that new buildings in the Green Belt would be inappropriate, unless for one for the specific purposes listed. As can be seen in a later section of the report, hotels, conference centre and holiday lodges would technically constitute buildings and would be inappropriate.

- 4.6 Much of what the owners of the Hop Farm are seeking to achieve are not 'buildings' as such. It constitutes pathways, new fencing, play equipment, outdoor activities, signage, picnic tables, landscaping, and small children's rides. The installation of kiosks would fall into this category. Much of this type of development would fall under the definition set out under Paragraph 3.12 of PPG2. It would be inappropriate if it would harm the openness and conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt. In our view some of the items listed above could be appropriate. By definition, if the Planning Brief was to allow this type of development, but restrict it to that which does not harm openness, it could be considered appropriate.
- 4.7 However, the Brief needs to provide a framework for a range of tourism uses, and to consider whether certain types of inappropriate development would be acceptable so that it provides a level of certainty to the owners. Therefore the Brief must be clear about types of appropriate structures (i.e. those which do not harm openness) and inappropriate structures (i.e. those which do harm openness, but in a limited way and/or where very special circumstances may justify it).

Openness

- 4.8 In terms of harming openness and conflicting with any purpose of the Green Belt, the extent to which development keeps land permanently open is a matter of fact and degree, and the word 'openness', which is not defined in PPG2, is to a large extent subjective. However, as a general rule, the extent of harm to the openness of the Green Belt is likely to be more significant where development is located further away from existing clusters of existing development, and/or is more visible from within or outside the site as a result of its actual or perceived scale and bulk.
- 4.9 There are a large number of visitor attractions in Green Belt locations. Much of the development associated with attractions in the Green Belt is not built development and therefore falls within the PPG2 Paragraph 3.12 definition. On the assumption that a large proportion of tourism development does have a negative impact on openness (even a small impact) it will be necessary to assess each proposal on its merit.
- 4.10 However, in order for this Brief to provide a clear framework on what type of open tourist activities would be acceptable, we have reviewed the types of attraction that are located in the Metropolitan Green Belt.
- 4.11 We have not considered in detail attractions that are on Major Developed Sites (MDS), such as Thorpe Park, Chessington World of Adventure, or Legoland. Smaller attractions such as Willows Farm Village, Old MacDonald's Farm and Paradise Wildlife Park have been reviewed.
- 4.12 It is, however, worth noting that in the case of Thorpe Park, Chessington World of Adventures and Legoland, the respective councils (Runnymede, Kingston-upon-Thames and Windsor and Maidenhead)

have consistently granted permission for developments that move outside the MDS 'envelope', either by allowing development outside its boundaries, allowing significant intensification within the boundaries, or allowing development that is significantly higher than existing development within the MDS. In the case of Chessington World of Adventures, the council has recently granted planning permission for a hotel at the theme park and zoo, which is now implemented and operating. In the case of Legoland, outline planning permission for a hotel was granted in 2009. At Thorpe Park, Runnymede Council has consistently approved rides and attractions that are significantly higher than the existing development. Most recently, in March 2011, the Council granted permission for a 40m high roller coaster, and most notably in 2006 permission was granted for the 62m high Stealth ride, which can be clearly seen from the M25 and M3 motorways. In all cases, the very special circumstances case put forward was on the basis of the economic benefit of the parks to their respective areas, and this was given significant weight by the councils.

Willows Farm Village

- 4.13 Willows Farm Village is a traditional farm park located within the administrative area of Hertsmere Borough and was established as a tourist attraction in 1989. Willows Farm Village attracts around 500,000 visitors a year and is located entirely within the Green Belt. It is not a Major Developed Site.
- 4.14 The outdoor areas of the farm village includes animal displays, extensive children's adventure play equipment, small fairground rides, maze, sand play areas, animal buildings and other structures, crazy golf, an arena for outdoor shows and various outdoor games. A series of photographs of Willows Farm Village are enclosed at **Appendix 2**. Most of these structures and activities, whilst not all technically appropriate, generally do not harm the openness of the site.

Old MacDonalds Farm

- 4.15 Old MacDonald's Farm Educational and Leisure Park is located close to the small settlement of St. Vincent's Hamlet, approximately 6 miles west of Brentwood. It falls within the administrative area of Brentwood Borough Council. The Farm has been open to the public since 1994 and is entirely located in the Green Belt. The park consists of a similar mix of attractions to Willows Farm Village, although on a smaller site, and is therefore more dense. The attractions include animal displays and associated buildings, various open activities, adventure play equipment, buildings containing shows, fairground rides and bouncy castles and various kiosks. Some photographs of Old MacDonald's Farm are included at **Appendix 3**. As with Willows, this site avoids the erection of buildings, and the mix of activities and outdoor equipment are generally not harmful to the openness of the site.

Paradise Wildlife Park

- 4.16 Paradise Wildlife Park originated as Broxbourne Zoo in the 1960s, but its more recent development has been carried out by its current owner, the Sampson family, which acquired the site in 1984. Most of the park's redevelopment occurred in the 1990s and 2000s, as much of the park's infrastructure was upgraded. This is a very different site to the major theme parks referred to above and the two farm parks. Paradise Wildlife Park has a much greater appearance of built development, with extensive large animal buildings and substantial enclosures for dangerous animals. The visitor facilities are also very built-up and it has a sizeable amusement park area with various fairground rides and attractions, with restaurants and indoor facilities. Some photographs of Paradise Wildlife Park are enclosed at **Appendix 4**.
- 4.17 In reviewing these sites, it is clear that councils within the Metropolitan Green Belt have generally provided a high level of flexibility for tourism-related development. In the case of the three theme parks briefly considered, these are all Major Developed Sites, but the respective councils have allowed significant development outside the MDS parameters on the basis of very special circumstances being found that outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. It is interesting that in the case of the three theme parks, particularly Thorpe Park, the councils have accepted very special circumstances regularly, so whilst the circumstances may well be special, they certainly cannot be said to be unique. Clearly, whilst this shows that significant built development is being allowed in the Green Belt, this is of a scale that would be difficult to justify in the case of the Hop Farm given the importance of the listed buildings.
- 4.18 In the case of the two farm parks, both Willows and Old MacDonald's have been established for 22 and 17 years respectively. The range of activities taking place at both parks do not appear to harm openness although the parks do have a 'cluttered' appearance. With good landscaping, these types of activities could be accommodated at the Hop Farm, although there does need to be control over the quality of attractions, the extent to which they may harm openness and their relationship to the listed buildings (as neither Willows nor Old MacDonald's Farm contain any listed buildings within the core area of the sites). Paradise Wildlife Park is a heavily developed site and large parts of this site would be inappropriate in the Green Belt. It is significant that the council continues to support built development at this site again on the basis of the importance of the attraction to the local economy. In general, therefore, the approach taken by most councils in relation to tourist attractions in the Metropolitan Green Belt is to generally facilitate developments that assist in maximising the contribution of the attractions to the local economies and ensuring that these attractions are sustainable in the long-term. This is a materially different approach to that taken by councils for other forms of development in the Green Belt, where Green Belt boundary reviews are often required.

Conflict with Purpose

- 4.19 The extent to which harm is caused by conflict with any purpose of the Green Belt will similarly depend upon the nature and location of the proposed development.
- 4.20 In relation to the first purpose, checking unrestricted sprawl, at present, in addressing the purposes under Paragraph 1.5 of PPG2, the site as a whole arguably plays a limited role in the checking of unrestricted sprawl, as it does not directly abut any of the main surrounding areas.
- 4.21 In terms of the second purpose, preventing neighbouring towns from merging, it also plays a limited role in preventing neighbouring towns from merging with one another, although it is accepted that it sits roughly mid-way between East Peckham and Paddock Wood. Clearly any buildings or other significant built development could potentially harm this purpose, so outside of the main cluster of buildings it will be necessary to restrict buildings, unless very special circumstances apply that outweigh harm to this purpose.
- 4.22 In terms of safeguarding the countryside, the third purpose, much of the site cannot in practice be classed as 'countryside' as it forms built development associated with a major tourist attraction, however the open areas of the site (i.e. those which do not currently have buildings on them or have planning permission for built development) would be classed as open countryside. It is therefore essential that the uses in these areas are restricted to those that require a countryside location.
- 4.23 Preserving the setting and special character of historic towns is not applicable in this case: the fourth purpose.
- 4.24 Lastly, in terms of assisting in urban regeneration, it is unlikely that the outdoor tourism uses proposed at the Hop Farm would be developed within an urban location.

Conflict with Visual Amenity

- 4.25 The extent to which the visual amenity of the Green Belt is affected will also depend upon the nature and location of development proposed on the site, taking into account the landform and any landscape mitigation measures included.

Very Special Circumstances

- 4.26 Subject to an assessment of whether any proposal at the Hop Farm is appropriate or inappropriate, and its likely effect on openness, it may be necessary to demonstrate very special circumstances to outweigh the harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm. It is not the role of this Brief to set out very special circumstances; that is a requirement of an applicant on submission of a planning application. However, it is the role of this Brief to take a view as to whether very special

circumstances are likely to apply to development proposals and, if they are, what circumstances would be likely to be considered 'very special'. Taking into account PPG2, the Development Plan and our review of other major tourist attractions in Green Belt locations, this is likely to relate to some, or all, of the following considerations:-

- The need and economic case for the development, in terms of its support of the local tourism industry, jobs and the local economy.
- The need to ensure a viable business and ensure the long-term future of the attraction;
- The need for indoor attractions to extend the season;
- The tourism need for specific facilities;
- The positive impact that a viable business will have on the ongoing maintenance of the listed buildings;
- Lack of harm, including lack of harm to openness;
- Enhancement of landscape features and mitigation, and in particular the benefits of comprehensively improving the landscape setting of the site;
- The extent to which the impact on openness of any inappropriate development proposed would be similar to specific types of development that are appropriate;
- Planning policy support for tourism development;
- The extent to which development (such as small rides) are reversible, and therefore any harm whilst technically permanent could be reinstated by the easy removal of the equipment;
- Precedent set at other day-visitor attractions; and
- The 'fallback' position regarding the development precedent established by the permission for 64 holiday let units (LPA Ref. TM/03/02493/FLEA).

4.27 In any event, irrespective of any of the considerations above, any large-scale development should so far as possible contribute to meeting the objectives for the use of land outlined under Paragraph 3.13 of PPG2, such as providing opportunities for access to the open countryside and retaining attractive landscapes. The Brief will require any such proposals to demonstrate this.

Cultural Heritage

- 4.28 The technical note attached to **Appendix 5**, produced by RPS's cultural heritage expert, relates to the setting of the listed buildings based on site visits, background research and discussions/meetings with English Heritage and the Council.
- 4.29 The note confirms that the group of five oasts at the Hop Farm are collectively listed as a single entry as Grade II* - particularly important buildings of more than special interest.
- 4.30 The note assesses the significance of the heritage assets, as well as the contribution that setting makes to the significance of the heritage assets, in the context of relevant legislation and guidance, especially PPS5 and its related Practice Guide, English Heritage's 2008 publication titled 'Conservation Principles: Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment', and English Heritage's 2010 consultation draft document titled 'The setting of heritage assets: English Heritage guidance'.
- 4.31 Key elements contributing to the significance of the listed buildings are summarised as follows:-
- Overall large number of kilns quite tightly grouped, with the cowls in particular being visible and thus the group being distinctive;
 - Oasts known as Bells 1 to 4 clearly contemporary and therefore represent a very deliberate increase in processing capacity linked to significant changes in the hop-growing industry;
 - Oasts not isolated but clear focal point within a landscape that included many smaller buildings;
 - Association with welfare reform; and
 - A clear link to a major brewery.
- 4.32 It makes clear that any assessment of the likely effects of a proposed development on the significance of a heritage asset as a result of changes within the setting of the asset should seek to address the following questions:
- Will the proposed development form part of the surroundings of the heritage asset?
 - If so, will it make a positive or negative (or neutral) contribution to the significance of that heritage asset, or the ability to appreciate that significance?

- In the case of the contribution being positive or negative, what level of impact on the significance of the heritage asset is likely to occur, i.e. high, medium, low or negligible.

4.33 Whilst the technical note mentions that some of the factors that contribute towards the significance of the listed buildings are unlikely to be affected by changes within the setting, changes within the setting could affect the significance that is provided by the large, distinctive and mainly contemporary group of oasts and also the spaces between and around them. In this context it contains the following advice for future development at the site:-

- Development within the setting of the listed buildings should be designed to avoid or limit changes that detract from views (including long views) towards the overall group of cowls, in particular the cowls of Bells 1 to 4.
- Development should also consider the spaces between the listed buildings in order to allow for appreciation of the concept that the significance of the buildings comes from their group value rather than as individual structures. This consideration should include surface treatments.
- None of the above should preclude change within the vicinity of the listed buildings, including the construction of new buildings, but any development should be designed appropriately with regard to the matters of setting discussed here.

Landscape

4.34 A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is attached to **Appendix 6**, prepared by RPS, that contains a summary of the existing landscape and visual baseline conditions within the study area; details of published landscape guidance and other information; description of the types of development; constraints and opportunities for future development.

4.35 In terms of landscape character, the LVIA mentions that the site is located within the 'Low Weald' character area 121 based on the Countryside Agency's guidance. At a local level, based on Kent County Council landscape assessment guidance, the core development at the Hop Farm lies within the 'Low Weald Fruit Belt' character area; land to the north falls within the 'Medway Valley' character area. In particular, in relation to the Low Weald Fruit Belt, this guidance describes the area as being flat or gently undulating landscape of predominantly dwarf fruit trees, extensive open arable fields, with hops and pasture locally important. It also states:

"Frequent and often large groups of oasts, such as the Whitbread Hop Farm at Beltring, form strong features in the landscape although others have been swallowed up in bland 20th century suburbanisation, for instance around East Peckham. These oasts have

usually been converted for housing or occasionally are used for storage. Scattered hamlets are characteristic here as elsewhere in the Low Weald.”

- 4.36 The condition of the Low Weald Fruit Belt character area is defined as ‘Good’ within Kent County Council’s assessment and its sensitivity to change is defined as ‘Moderate’. The overall recommendation is to ‘Conserve and Reinforce’ this landscape character area through the conservation of rural elements of the landscape, the tranquillity of settlements and the mature tree stock and the reinforcement of enclosure patterns and ecological interest of watercourses.
- 4.37 The Medway Valley area is described in the guidance as a corridor of flat, open landscape bordering the river Medway from Penshurst in the south up to Nettlestead close to the Greensand, but one of considerable interest for its complex network of small streams and ditches. The condition of this landscape area is defined as ‘Poor’ within Kent County Council’s assessment and its sensitivity to change is defined as ‘Moderate’. The overall recommendation is to ‘Restore and Create’ within this landscape character area through the restoration of riparian vegetation and field boundaries and the creation of wetland areas and seasonal accessibility to the floodplain.
- 4.38 The LVIA defines the ‘Areas of Theoretical Visibility’ and indicates that the visibility of the development of the Hop Farm within the wider rural landscape is limited. It lists the main visual receptors with views of any part of the site, and then describes various public viewpoint locations with reference to attached photographs (Viewpoints 1 to 9).
- 4.39 It also describes views from within the main attractions area. The bouncing pillows, children’s play equipment, private events lawn and area between oast houses 1 to 4 are relatively well contained by surrounding buildings and tall *Leylandii* cypress hedges. These spaces are generally concealed from public vantage points in the surrounding area. The miniature driving school, children’s fairground rides and hardstanding are partially enclosed by surrounding buildings and close board fencing; however, the lack of more significant screening along the northern boundary exposes these attractions to views from users of footpaths and roads to the north. The red circus tent lies outside of the main fenced area of attractions and is therefore more readily visible from the events fields.
- 4.40 In assessing the effects (Chapter 3), the LVIA briefly considers the landscape and visual effects of existing development within three hierarchies of space at the Hop Farm site: enclosed areas, semi-enclosed areas and open areas. Within the internal ‘courtyard’ spaces (enclosed areas) development does not affect visual amenity or the character of the rural landscape. Within semi-enclosed areas, development potentially has some effects on visual amenity and influence over the character of the rural landscape, although it is screened in views from the south and west. Within open areas, development also has some effects on visual amenity and influence over the character of the rural

landscape. It goes on to list a series of constraints and opportunities associated with future development, that are addressed in Chapter 6 of this Planning Brief.

Ecology

- 4.41 RPS was commissioned by the owners of the Hop Farm to carry out an ecological desk study, the findings of which are attached to **Appendix 7**.
- 4.42 According to the Study, there are two statutory designated sites (River Beult SSI and Foal Hurst Wood Local Nature Reserve) within the 5km defined search area and eight non-statutory designated sites within the 2km search area. Three of the latter lie within or border the Hop Farm site. East Peckham Ponds Local Wildlife Site (LWS) abuts the northern boundary of the site and a small parcel of the wildlife site is within the Hop Farm site boundary. Roadside Nature Reserve TM04 abuts part of the eastern boundary and a section of the East Tonbridge Copses & Dykes & River Medway LWS is some 350m to the west of the site. These wildlife sites are important for the conservation of wildlife and are recognised in government policy.
- 4.43 The consultees, including the Kent & Medway Biological Record Centre, also provided the following information: records of 7 species of bat and 3 other protected mammal species, 100 protected or other notable bird species, 6 protected herpetofauna species, 4 notable invertebrate species and 10 protected or other notable species of flora.
- 4.44 The Study also contains (in a separate report) confidential findings concerning the location of records of badgers and certain protected bird species. A total of three records of badgers have been recorded within 2km of the site boundary – on the south east boundary of the site near the A228, to the north-east of the site in Stoneham & the Lees Local Wildlife Site, and due south of the site boundary near Paddock's Wood. In terms of birds, Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* have been recorded breeding within 1km south-west of the site boundary near Whetsted.

Transport

- 4.45 The attached transport report (**Appendix 8**), prepared by RPS, identifies the key issues applicable to the Planning Brief and Masterplan, in the context of relevant policy and planning history, the highway network and current accessibility. The existing transport and highways situation within the vicinity of the site has been discussed with the Local Highway Authority (LHA) – Kent County Council (KCC), Arriva Buses and the Community Rail Project Officer for Rural Kent.
- 4.46 Based on a review of the planning applications applicable to the 64 holiday let units (LPA Ref. TM/03/02493/FLEA) and hotel/lodge/conference proposal (TM/10/00759/FL), it is considered that with

further development of the site assessments may be required of the accessibility to and from the site, trip generation and the impact of proposals on the capacity of local junctions (particularly at the site access roundabout and the Boyle Way roundabout).

- 4.47 The report draws attention to highway constraint issues within the vicinity of the site, particularly concerning the capacity of the A228/B2160 roundabout, which further development would need to address and potentially make contribution/improvements towards. In relation to traffic safety, based on personal injury accident data provided by Kent County Council, it states that a significant number of accidents have occurred at the A228/B2160 roundabout, and that a further cluster has occurred at the Branbridges Road/A228 roundabout to the north of the site as well as the Beltring Road/A228 priority junction. However, general enhancements of the existing use may not raise traffic/highway issues as they would not materially increase the number of visitors to the site.
- 4.48 In terms of accessibility, the report indicates that the combined public transport and shuttle bus services provide good sustainable access from Paddock Wood to the site. Potential improvements to pedestrian and cycle amenities including crossings on the A228 and a new link to East Peckham would encourage walking and cycling from the surrounding residential areas and to the public house/café on Beltring Road as well as provide a link to Beltring Rail Station.
- 4.49 The transport report summarises the key issues associated with further development as follows:-
- Possible capacity issues at the A228/B2160 roundabout with further development at the site; (although an assessment would be undertaken to establish whether the proposed development has a material impact on the capacity);
 - Road safety issues at the A228/B2160 roundabout and Branbridges Road roundabout (although site traffic is unlikely to have a material impact on this);
 - Potential exit capacity issue with future development at the site (dependent on the nature of that development);
 - Lack of access via sustainable modes;
 - Pedestrian/Cycle access (No surfaced footways into the site, no formal crossings on A228, no footway/cycleway on west of A228); and
 - Service and Delivery Vehicle Access.
- 4.50 The opportunities and constraints identified in the report are addressed under Chapter 6 of this Planning Brief.

Flood Risk & Drainage

- 4.51 A preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (FRA), prepared by Evans & Langford, has been produced in accordance with Annex E of PPS25 and is attached to **Appendix 9**. The report considers the risk of flooding to any future development at the site as well as measures that may be required to manage this risk. The potential impacts of climate change together with the risk of flooding to and from other sites have also been taken into account.
- 4.52 The FRA describes the proximity of the site to the nearby River Medway and related tributaries, as well as the significance of the Leigh Barrier, some 11km to the east of the site, that was constructed to address the historic flooding problem on the Medway and Eden that threatened towns and villages on their course.
- 4.53 The FRA draws attention to previous objections raised by the Environment Agency (EA) to the planning applications for 64 holiday let units (LPA Ref. TM/03/02493/FLEA) and the hotel/lodge/conference proposal (TM/10/00759/FL), concerning the site's location within the floodplain and its refusal to accept flood risk assessments based on defended levels associated with the function of the Leigh Barrier. Significantly, the Inspector in 2005 (related to the appeal for the 64 units) over-ruled the EA's objection because he did not see it as a bar to development and he considered it reasonable to accept that the Barrier provided a significant benefit. Evans & Langford consider the EA's 'precautionary approach' to be excessively cautious given the flooding records over the last 40 years and comparison of the 1968 and 2000 events.
- 4.54 The EA's previous objections were based on its recent modelling that apparently showed the whole site as being within Flood Areas 3b – functional floodplain with a greater than 5% chance of flooding each year. Within such Areas, PPS25 states that only water-compatible developments are acceptable with any essential infrastructure uses being subject to an Exception Test.
- 4.55 Based on recent information obtained from the EA, the FRA states that the whole site lies within the modelled outline for the 1 in 20 year event. That is approximately equal to the Flood Areas 3b. According to Evans & Langford, the water-compatible development allowed for by PPS25 would include further small scale outdoor attractions within the visitor attraction, such as outdoor activities, small rides, interpretation and associated pathways. It would also include marinas and water based recreation, but exclude sleeping accommodation. Other built, tourism related, development such as hotel, restaurant, further holiday lodges, further indoor assembly space and large areas of hardstanding will require more detailed assessment of modelled flood levels and climate change effects to locate areas of the site where they can be considered appropriate uses in terms of PPS25 Appendix D (that relates to the Sequential and Exception Tests). Other tourism related uses such as

holiday or short let caravans and camping would come into this category but would require an Exception Test, as would other built developments that are not tourism related, such as Nurseries.

The Owners' Aspirations

- 4.56 The owners of the site wish to invest in the Hop Farm as a well established major visitor attraction, to improve the existing business and experience for visitors, regardless of the weather, as well as to improve the economic benefits for the local economy through job creation and spend, whilst protecting and enhancing the historic and landscape attributes of the site. They wish to capitalise on the historic element of extended families coming together on the site (to mix play with work), combined with utilising the following themes to make the best of the 5 common senses (sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing):-
- 'Doing things' – activities for families, including low key rides and attractions.
 - 'Custodians of place' – giving visitors a sense of pride in the place, and an understanding of its historical connection associated with the hop processing industry.
 - 'Open and exclusive' – making the attraction accessible to everyone, irrespective of age, gender, disability, etc.
 - 'Service excellence' – delivering a high standard and good value experience, that will draw visitors back to the attraction in the future.
- 4.57 The Hop Farm Family Park, as the core feature of the site, will be expanded beyond the immediate surroundings of the listed buildings to embrace the surrounding countryside, with open farming/countryside based attractions and facilities for the family, including opportunities for outdoor play and learning, countryside walks and a small number of carefully positioned rides. The setting of the listed buildings will be improved through the careful management of the site's hard and soft landscape features, with a reduction in the intensity of activities in the main vistas between the buildings. The Family Park will be complemented by historic exhibitions telling the story of the Hop Farm and the hops industry; the holding of corporate events; the selling of locally-produced food and produce; and the introduction of on-site accommodation.
- 4.58 The owners wish to develop this vision into a series of proposals in partnership with the Council and local community. They see this Planning Brief as a key element of this process and acknowledge the benefits of looking at the site comprehensively.

4.59 Although outside the study area of the Planning Brief, the owners will continue to improve the wider estate, with the aim of holding high quality events, providing sites for touring caravans/camping, opening up access to the riverside and by the introduction of water-based activities, to include a possible marina.

5 Stakeholder Consultation & Feedback

Background Discussions with Statutory Consultees

- 5.1 The previous section, Chapter 4, draws attention to various statutory consultees and other organisations that have been consulted as part of the baseline survey and research work undertaken for this Planning Brief. The technical note on The Setting of the Listed Buildings (**Appendix 5**) was informed by background discussions and on-site meetings with English Heritage; The Ecology Desk Study (**Appendix 7**) was informed by technical information and data provided by organisations such as Natural England and the Kent & Medway Biological Record Centre.
- 5.2 The transport report (**Appendix 8**) documents and responds to various emails received from the Local Highway Authority, Kent County Council, Arriva Buses and the Community Rail Project Officer for Rural Kent. The Flood Risk Assessment (**Appendix 9**) refers to recent and historic information and feedback provided by the Environment Agency.
- 5.3 As mentioned at the beginning, the approach and scope for the Planning Brief was first discussed and agreed with Council Planning Officers following a meeting on the 3 December 2010. We subsequently met with Officers on the 14 February 2011 to discuss the contents of an initial draft version of our Planning Brief and concept masterplan. The emerging Planning Brief and Masterplan has incorporated a number of changes and recommendations made by the Chief Planning Officer at that meeting, and a subsequent email setting out the Council's formal response dated 15 March 2011. For example, we have confirmed that the children's play area adjacent to Bell 3 is to be removed and re-located towards the west of Bell 5; we have made reference to additional Green Belt related policy contained in The South East Plan (2009).

Public Exhibition

- 5.4 We held a public exhibition at the Hop Farm on the 12 and 13 May 2011, to put the main content of the Planning Brief and Masterplan on display and to seek feedback. Drawing on feedback and advice from Council Planning Officers, the event was advertised in the local newspaper and through personal invitations; for example, emails were sent to contacts within individual organisations, parish councils, etc; letters were sent to nearby local residents. Members from the Council's Planning and Transportation Advisory Board and 'Area 2' Planning Committee, including the Cabinet Member for Planning and the local ward Member, were invited to attend. The local press was also invited to the event.

5.5 Amongst these groups, in addition to including Planning Officers from Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, the following consultees were invited:-

- Kent Highway Services;
- Environment Agency;
- English Heritage;
- KCC Heritage Conservation Unit;
- Maidstone Borough Council;
- Southern Water Services;
- Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board;
- Kent Wildlife Trust;
- South East England Tourist Board;
- Fire Prevention Officer;
- East Peckham Parish Council;
- Nettlestead Parish Council; and
- Yalding Parish Council.

5.6 A copy of our exhibition display boards for this event is included under **Appendix 10**. It can be seen that the first display board highlighted key features of the existing site. The second, third and fourth boards considered key planning and environmental issues, including cultural heritage, landscape, Green Belt, transport and flood risk. The fifth board drew attention to key development constraints and opportunities, and set out the owner's overall vision for the site. The subsequent two boards jointly contained our latest draft concept masterplan at that time, with the main proposals and aspirations highlighted. The final eighth board set out our envisaged timetable for finalising the Planning Brief and described how exhibition attendees could provide us with their written feedback and comments, with particular attention to the following questions:

5.7 Written feedback has been received from various 15 separate parties or individuals attending the public exhibition, the details of which are summarised in the attached 'Summary Analysis of Public Responses to Questions Raised' – **Appendix 11**. In response to particular questions asked, our interpretation of key points raised or over-arching themes (together with number of corresponding responses) are summarised below. This is followed by our own follow-up thoughts and response to various matters highlighted.

A) What do you like about the ideas proposed?

- Looks good on plans or in principle, including single aim/comprehensive approach. [5 responses]
- Bringing back Hop Farm heritage welcomed. [4 responses]
- Inappropriate fairground/circus rides should be removed. [2 responses]

B) Is there anything you dislike?

- 'New' developments close to historic buildings should be moved. [2 responses]
- Too many lodges envisaged and/or unsure about hotel proposal; for example, could lead to more traffic. [3 responses]
- Dislike noise associated with wedding events, especially if held outdoors. [1 response]
- Only one entrance could adversely affect residents' business. [1 response]
- Proposals might lead to closure of local businesses. [1 response]
- Major outdoor events, such as War & Peace and related helicopter rides, disliked. [3 responses]
- The cost of the attraction has been prohibitive. [1 response]

C) What tourist related development would you like to see at The Hop Farm site?

- More historic/hop related experiences and events; for example, horse-drawn carriages, costumes, hoppers' party, micro-brewery. [3 responses]
- More for families and children; for example, bike tracks. [2 responses]
- Provide historic and educational garden/farm. [2 responses]

- Open the site to the River Medway, including ferrying people to farm. [2 responses]
- Courtesy mini-buses from Paddock Wood Station. [1 response]
- The need for hotel with conferences and weddings understood, to supplement income. [1 response]

D) Is there anything that we have missed?

- Road access into site needs improvement, including introducing one-way system. [2 responses]
- Swimming pool for locals and tourists needed. [2 responses]
- More bus routes to and from site required. [2 responses]
- Public right of way access needs clarifying. [1 response]
- Presently poor signage. [1 response]
- Utilise traditional style fencing. [1 response]
- Drainage of site access to river required. [1 response]
- Golf buggies to transport disabled included, and small train for visitors. [1 response]
- Marina, water park or wetlands could be included. [1 response]

Other Comments

- Pleased more 'tacky' elements to be removed and returned to more rural theme. [1 response]
- Farming and countryside attractions area appears to overlap with existing large outdoor events area. Any re-location of existing events should be included on Masterplan. [1 response]
- Danger of relying too heavily on the Leigh Flood Barrier. [1 response]
- Wastewater not seriously considered. If on site treatment plant abandoned, will need to pump to Paddock Wood wastewater treatment works. [1 response]

Commentary

- 5.8 The overall message from the exhibition was positive. Many visitors did not complete forms, but the general view of those that did not was similarly positive about the proposals, with most of the negative comments being reserved for licensing matters relating to events. At a specific session at the public exhibition arranged for stakeholders and parish councils, support for the hotel and conferencing proposal was particularly strong. Support for the hotel was a theme that ran through a large proportion of the verbal comments on the day.
- 5.9 The owners of the Hop Farm welcome all the useful comments that have been received in response to the Public Exhibition. In relation to Question A), the overall principle of the proposals, including focussing on the historic Hop Farm heritage of the site, is supported by the vast majority of respondents.
- 5.10 The comments raised in relation to Question B) are also noted. In terms of introducing a hotel/conference and lodges centre, it has been demonstrated on a national basis that the long-term viability of major attractions, and their contribution to their respective local economy and local businesses, can be improved by the addition of accommodation. In a sector that has seen little growth in visitor numbers over the past decade, it is essential to develop accommodation to ensure the attractions can prosper. In this instance, this element would also help to fund the other plans and improvements envisaged as part of this Planning Brief. The overall message from attendees was to highlight the hotel as a specific aspect of the proposal to be supported. In particular, the link between a hotel and wedding/corporate events at the Hop Farm was strongly recognised. The provision of a second vehicular access to the A228, whether for visitors and/or service vehicles, will be considered as part of the traffic modelling and assessment for any major development that comes forward for a planning application submission. Whilst the comments concerning the dislike of existing major outdoor events are noted, as well as the cost for visitors, these aspects fall outside of the remit of the Planning Brief and Masterplan that relate to the future and form of future tourist related development at the Hop Farm. Amenity, noise, issues, etc, concerning the outdoor events will continue to be controlled via licensing, rather than through the planning process.
- 5.11 In terms of what development people would like to see at the site (Question C)), the ideas that aim to provide more historic/hop related experiences and events (the most popular response), more for families, historic and educational garden/farm and hotel/conference facilities are consistent with the owners' vision that seeks to capitalise on the historic elements of the site and provide more facilities and experiences for families, as well as introduce on-site accommodation. An 'informally' laid-out bike track, on soft landscaped trails, could be considered within the land, fields and/or woodland areas towards the north and would not affect the openness of the Green Belt. The ideas for historic events will be considered by the owners within existing outdoor areas, and a micro-brewery could be

included as part of the Hop Farm Experience. Furthermore, the idea of (re-introducing) a shuttle bus operation from Paddock Wood Rail Station was highlighted in the accompanying Transport report (**Appendix 8**), and this should be considered as part of a technical Transport Assessment which might be required for any future planning application submission for major development, such as a hotel/conference facility. Lastly, the idea of making the River Medway more accessible is consistent with the owners' long-term plans for the Hop Farm estate, although this falls outside of the study area for the Planning Brief.

- 5.12 The comments raised in relation to Question D) are again noted and welcomed. As mentioned above for Question B), potential improvements to the road access will be considered as part of any future planning application for development that is likely to materially affect highway safety and congestion. Similarly, enhancements to local bus services should be considered as part of any future planning application, where this is proportionate and necessary taking into account the scale of development proposed. The final Masterplan drawing will show accessibility to and along the public right-of-way network more clearly. In agreeing that the existing quality of signage is poor, the Planning Brief will promote improvements to this provision. Traditional style fencing and boundary treatment can also be encouraged, although the use of fencing needs to be rationalised in our opinion to respect the setting of the historic listed buildings. Drainage solutions for the site access will be considered as part of future planning application submissions, where the existing arrangement is materially affected by the type of development proposed. The idea of making the site more accessible to the disabled forms part of the owners' overall vision, although the use of a small train to this effect is not likely to justifiable within open areas outside of the main oast complex area. Apart from the suggested marina that is already being considered by the owners outside the remit of this Planning Brief, the other water-based attractions suggested do not sit comfortably with the overall vision for the site.
- 5.13 Finally, in response to the 'Other Comments', we would add that any displacement of existing outdoor major events as a result of development or uses coming forward in accordance with the Masterplan will be considered under licensing, separate to this Planning Brief. In relation to the Leigh Flood Barrier, our engineers have advised us that this does provide some protection for the Hop Farm site, and that this has been previously accepted by an independent inspector. However, types of built-tourism related development such as hotels, restaurants and additional holiday lodges (beyond areas on which built development already exists or is approved) will require more detailed assessment of modelled flood levels and climate change effects to locate areas of the site where they can be considered appropriate uses. In relation to wastewater, the owners are aware of the need to review options for wastewater treatment, in liaison and agreement with Southern Water where applicable.

Final Consultation Stage and Adoption

5.14 [TBC following final consultation with Officers and Members]

6 The Brief

- 6.1 Drawing on the findings of previous chapters of this report including site history and policy review, work undertaken by specialist consultants concerning the Green Belt, cultural heritage, landscape, ecology, transport and flood risk and drainage, and feedback from the Council and other statutory and non-statutory consultees/stakeholder, it is possible to list and summarise the key constraints and opportunities on the site that have implications for future development. From this, and taking into account the future vision and aspirations of the site's owners, guidance is provided on the broad form and location for further comprehensive tourist related development at the Hop Farm. This guidance should be read in conjunction with the accompanying Masterplan.

Constraints

- Location of the Hop Farm within the Green Belt (Core Strategy Policies CP3.1 and CPI2; PPG2). Very special circumstances are required for any departure from Green Belt policy.
- Grade II* listed oast houses (PPS5) – particularly important buildings of more than special interest. The local planning authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
 - Development within the setting of the listed buildings should be designed to avoid or limit changes that detract from views (including long views) towards the overall group of cowls, in particular the cowls of Bells 1 to 4.
 - Development should also consider the spaces between the listed buildings in order to allow for appreciation of the concept that the significance of the buildings comes from their group value rather than as individual structures. This consideration should include surface treatments.
- Countryside, including local level Character Area status as 'Low Weald Fruit Belt' or 'Medway Valley' (MDE Policy DC5).
 - Proposed development, due to its scale and height, should not conflict with or challenge the roofline of cowls in views of the oast house group which is an important element within the landscape setting of the Low Weald Fruit Belt.

- Location of site within an Area at Risk from Flooding (Core Strategy Policy CPI0 and PPS25). Within the floodplain development should first seek to make use of areas at no or low risk to flooding before areas at higher risk.
 - Site is potentially within Flood Areas 3b, in which only water-compatible developments are acceptable (subject to more detailed modelling) with any essential infrastructure uses being subject to an Exception Test. Water-compatible development could potentially allow for small scale outdoor attractions within the visitor attraction. Other built development such as hotels and lodges will require more detailed assessment of flood levels and climate change effects.
- Potential problems with the existing on site treatment plant, including a significant amount of infiltration that affects performance. Installation of a new main, to pump to Paddock Wood wastewater treatment works, could take considerable time.
- Highway capacity and accessibility.
 - The A228/B2160 roundabout could be a constraint to certain types of development which might materially increase the number of visitors to the site, as the capacity of the existing roundabout layout may be exceeded. However, this could be addressed via junction improvements.
 - Difficult to provide suitable facilities along Beltring Road for pedestrians.
 - Unlikely to be feasible to provide a footway or cycleway along the B2160 linking the site to Paddock Wood. Access via sustainable modes from Paddock Wood to the site is likely to be constrained to the shuttle bus and bus services.

Opportunities

- Contribute to the PPG2 objectives for the use of land within the Green Belt: provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population; opportunities for recreation; enhancing the poor landscape setting of the site; improve damaged and derelict land around towns; secure nature conservation interests; retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses (PPG2).
- Preserving and enhancing the Grade II* listed buildings and their setting (South East Plan Policy BE6; Local Plan Policy P6/25), by the implementation of a comprehensive Masterplan that provides a clear framework for development;

- Protect, conserve and enhance the character and distinctiveness of Local Character Areas, including important views (MDE Policy SQ1):-
 - Small and brightly coloured attractions could be placed in the central enclosed area with no adverse effects on views, however this needs to be balanced with potential effects on the settings of the listed buildings. Consider replacing all brightly coloured attractions with those that are of a less prominent appearance.
 - Create an open axis through the oast houses to maintain views of the historic building group.
 - Proposed planting to infill the gap in the perimeter screen between the oasts and the A228 would screen intrusive views of traffic.
 - Proposed planting belt around the northern edge of the main attraction or further north within the landscape and protected by deer fencing would screen development from views gained by users of the public footpaths to the north, and start to provide some structure to the landscape which is currently lacking.
 - Planting in the north east corner of the events fields would provide an attractive backdrop to the Hop Farm site, screen most views of the A228 whilst allowing limited framed views back into the site for occupiers of vehicles.
 - Creation of a series of linked spaces within an activities and attractions area, towards the north of the oast complex, defined by a landscape framework would contain future outdoor tourism activities and minimise and mitigate visual encroachment in the countryside. Such outdoor activities to be defined in the Brief limiting to those which are either appropriate or capable of being found acceptable through very special circumstances/lack of harm.
 - Inclusion of hop bines and orchards as locally distinctive land uses within future proposals for a master plan.
 - Avenue planting of fruit trees (as typical to the Low Weald Fruit Belt character area) along the access road through the centre of the site to the heart of future areas of activity.
 - Landscape proposals should comprise native species to reflect the rural character and enhance biodiversity i.e. hedgerows, trees and woodland copses. Internal spaces could incorporate more gardenesque treatments.

- Proposed planting and grassed areas to replace hardstanding within the children's fairground ride area and miniature driving school would break up the mass of development.
 - Rationalise the use of fencing treatments and planting styles.
 - Progressive removal of conifer shelter belts within the wider site area and replacement with locally characteristic native species.
 - Neutral or subdued colour schemes for smaller scale attractions within landscaped areas beyond the main development cluster would conserve visual amenity and the rural character of the landscape.
- Locate holiday accommodation within the area established for 64 holiday let units and managers unit, given the fallback position of this approved (part implemented) appeal decision dated 30 December 2005. Alternatively, consider a site that is further away from the collection of buildings and well screened as a replacement for this planning permission.
 - Improve the quality of existing attractions to meet challenging consumer demands and high environmental standards in terms of design and access (including reinforcing the distinctiveness of the locality (South East Plan Policy TSR4).
 - Seek measures to increase access for all by sustainable transport modes (South East Plan Policy TSR5; Core Strategy Policy CP2) and improve highway capacity (where these are proportionate to the acceptable scale of proposed development within the Green Belt):-
 - Potential to implement signals at the A228/B2160 roundabout to improve road safety, capacity and crossings for vulnerable road users.
 - Provision of a second service/bus vehicle access to the north of the existing access linking directly to the A228. This could separate visitor and service/bus vehicle movements.
 - Provision of a second access to the south of the existing access to intercept vehicle movements from the south before the A228/B2160 roundabout.
 - Provision of a footway/cycleway on west side of A228 linking the site to East Peckham to improve sustainable access to and from the site.

- Provision of a crossing on A228 linking the site to Beltring Road. This would provide a suitable cycle route between the site/East Peckham and Beltring Rail Station.
- Possibility of implementing traffic calming measures and speed restrictions on Beltring Road to increase the attractiveness of the route for cyclists and pedestrians.
- Improvements to Paddock Wood Rail Station to encourage travel via bus/rail through enhancing the connection between the services.
- Improvements to Beltring Rail Station to encourage travel via rail.
- Reintroducing shuttle bus operation to improve access from Paddock Wood and potentially other areas.
- Enhancements to the existing Arriva bus services to increase the operating times.
- Enhancements to other existing local bus services to serve the site.

These proposals are long-term aspirations and would be brought forward in phases, depending on the development proposed. We do not consider that restructuring the existing attraction to better reflect its Green Belt location and the setting of listed buildings would require any specific transport measures.

- Re-use of rural buildings allowed which are of permanent and sound construction and capable of conversion without major reconstruction (MDE Policy DC1).
- Support the local economy (South East Plan Policy TSR2;MDE Policy DC5)
- Take full account of biodiversity interests and improve ecological conservation value (MDE Policies DC5 and NE3).

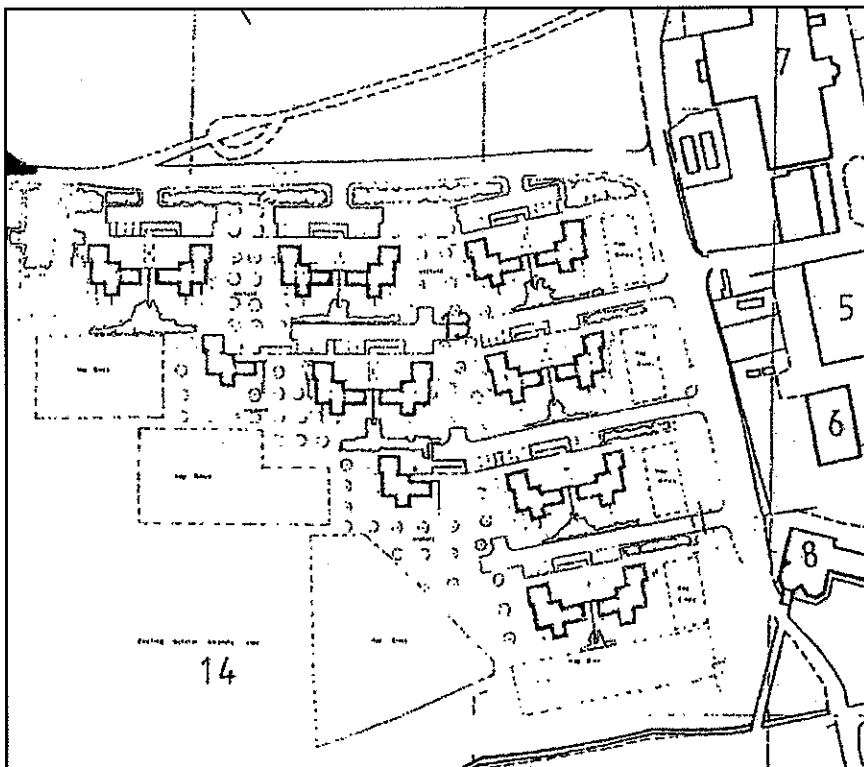
Guidance & Masterplan

6.2 Taking into account the above constraints and opportunities, the technical work undertaken, the aspirations of the owners and the public consultation exercise, we have developed a framework for the site based on a series of identified areas and themes. This is set out in the Masterplan: **Figure 1**. This section of the report provides guidance that accompanies the Masterplan and should be read in conjunction with the Masterplan.

- 6.3 Fundamental to the Masterplan is the reconfiguration of the Hop Farm Family Park so that it is no longer confined to the areas immediately surrounding the oast houses. It will embrace the surrounding countryside, bringing the open areas back into use set within a strong landscape framework. The number of attractions in the areas immediately around the oast houses will be decreased.

Accommodation

Opportunities for visitors to stay at the Hop Farm will be introduced. Planning permission has already been granted in the area to the west of the stable buildings and Bell 5 for 64 holiday let units. This permission has been implemented. However, it has been recognised by the owners that a hotel would have a stronger link with other activities at the Hop Farm, such as weddings and corporate events. This would assist with the objective of securing a long-term use for the listed buildings that does not harm their fabric, and some additional conference space can be developed alongside the hotel to provide facilities that are not already available in the oast houses. A reduced number of lodge units could be included to provide for a different market (family holidays at the Hop Farm and the surrounding area), each designed to a high standard. The conference centre could also contain a community centre for use by the local community.



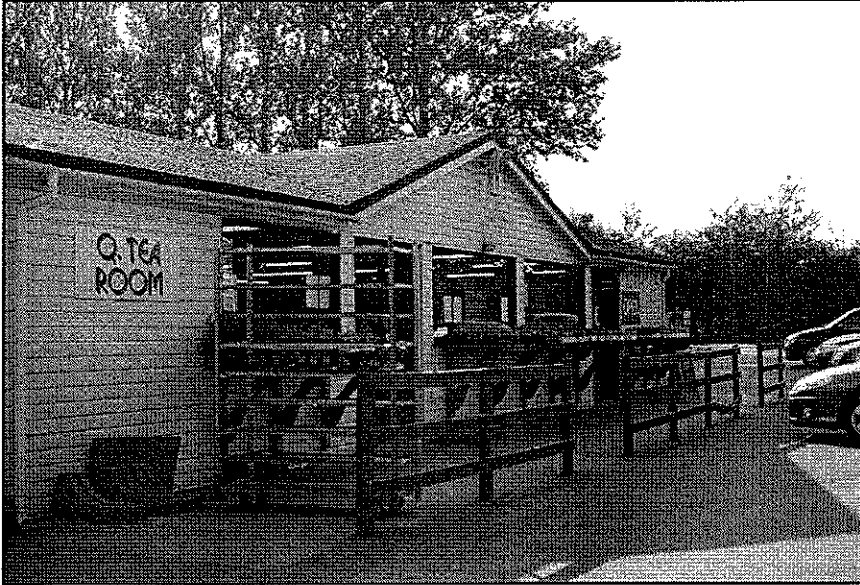
Proposed Site Plan for approved 64 holiday let units

6.4 The following aspects will need particular consideration as part of any future planning application:-

- As this type of built development technically constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt, very special circumstances will need to outweigh any adverse harm to openness and conflicts with any purpose of the Green Belt, and any harm to visual amenity.
- Particular consideration will need to be given to the visual impact of the hotel, particularly from the A228, surrounding footpath network, the AONB and Beltring.
- The extent to which it conflicts with Green Belt purposes.
- In considering any very special circumstances the fallback position regarding the precedent established by the permission for 64 holiday let units, that has been implemented, should provide a baseline for assessing the form, location and scale of development proposed. The need and economic case for development, in terms of its support for the local economy and the need to ensure a viable and sustainable long-term business should also be considered. The extent to which accommodation may be able to fund other improvements contained in the Planning Brief and Masterplan, and/or maintenance of the listed buildings, should also be set out in any planning application.
- It would need to be demonstrated that the hotel is capable of being developed without an impact on flood risk, with reference to the existing permission for lodges. Means of escape would also need to be considered. Any application must be accompanied by a detailed flood risk assessment with flood modelling.
- The height of the hotel also needs to be carefully considered to ensure that it is not overly prominent in the landscape and to ensure it does not harm the setting of the oast houses. Buildings should not exceed two storeys in height, and individual building blocks should be 'broken up' to reduce scale and massing.
- The scale of any revised scheme for holiday lodges should not exceed the scale of lodges approved as part of the previous scheme for 64 units. Their design rationale should be informed by the hop-pickers' huts which historically existed on the site.

Local Produce and Food

The area in and around the entrance/administration block and shop can be enhanced to provide a location for selling local produce (food and plants), including a café and garden centre.

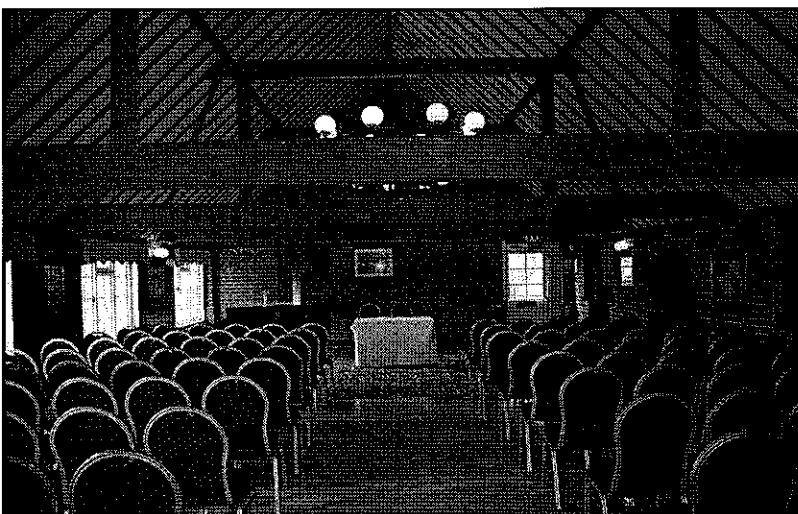


Photograph image of farm shop showing locally produced food produce

- 6.5 Utilising the recent planning permission approved in April 2009 (Permission Ref. TM/09/00054/FL) the uses could be centred around an open 'courtyard'. This development should be small-scale and rural in appearance as it is visible from the site entrance.

Corporate Area

The area comprising Bells 1 and 2 and the land immediately towards the south (that currently provides outdoor space for private wedding events), could be used to accommodate corporate and private business events, including weddings, which are a growing area of the business.



Photograph of White's Banqueting Suite within Bell 1