

Sevenoaks District Council

Rural Exceptions Housing Site Assessments

Halstead Parish

January 2020

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Executive Summary

Sevenoaks District Council SDC has been asked by Halstead Parish Council to assist in aiding with the site assessment process for delivering affordable housing. A Rural Housing Needs Survey was carried out by the Rural Housing Enabler from Rural England in June 2018, with the results published in July 2018. The survey highlighted that there is a requirement for 9 affordable homes within the Halstead Parish area.

The Parish Council identified a number of sites that could accommodate affordable housing through a localised Call for Sites. The information was then passed to the District Council for assessment. A total of 9 sites were submitted in response to the site assessment exercise. As part of the Rural Housing Needs Survey, all Parish residents were invited to respond, and respondents were asked to suggest sites that could accommodate affordable units. Sites that were suggested through the Rural Housing Needs Survey were cross referenced with sites that have been put forward in the District Council's Call for Sites exercise. This was to ensure consistency between the site assessments.

Three of the nine sites were confirmed as "available" by the Rural Housing Enabler and were taken forward into consideration to deliver affordable housing for the local area. These sites were assessed in terms of suitability, sustainability and deliverability by conducting a desk-based constraints study. The site assessments can be viewed in Appendix A to this report.

In summary, Table 1 sets out the sites that were assessed and the outcomes. The site assessments should be treated as a guide. It is the responsibility of the Parish Council and its chosen Housing Provider to determine which site(s) they wish to pursue to deliver affordable housing. Any site(s) that come forward for development will be subject to the planning process and a planning application.

Table 1 – Summary of Sites and their Conclusions		
Site No.	Site Address	Conclusion
1	Land north of the Recreation Ground	Unavailable
2	Land north west of Clarks Lane	Deliverable
3	Land north east of Clarks Lane	Unavailable
4	Land north east of Station Road	Unsuitable
5	Land north of Village Hall	Unsuitable
6	Scaffold Yard, Otford Lane	Unavailable
7	Deerleap Yard	Unavailable
8	Land north of Curry Wood Farm	Unavailable
9	Land backing onto Southdene	Unavailable

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Parish of Halstead is located towards the north western side of Sevenoaks District sharing parish administrative boundaries with Badgers Mount, Dunton Green, Knockholt and Chevening. The Parish also shares a boundary with the London Borough of Bromley to the north west. The village of Halstead is the main settlement within the Parish. The Parish area also includes a number of Gypsy and Traveller pitches, including East Hill and Knatts Valley.
- 1.2 Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) actively seeks to address the need for affordable housing within rural areas to assist local people with their housing needs. Rural exception sites are supported under paragraphs 77 to 79 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)¹ where it can be demonstrated that there is a local need in the parish for affordable housing, identified through an independent rural housing needs survey.
- 1.3 The objectives of this report are to carry out an up-to-date assessment of sites, and to consider sites for the purposes of developing affordable housing. This should be completed in the spirit of existing national and local planning policy, as well as accounting for any potential changes that might affect the delivery of sites. The aim of the site assessments is to identify suitable and available sites in the parish of Halstead that could be used to provide affordable homes for local residents. SDC has been asked by Halstead Parish Council to assist in aiding with the assessment process. This report will establish the assessment parameters, the context of affordable housing policy within the current Local Plan and consider the suitability of each site against set criteria.
- 1.4 For context, Halstead Parish has Green Belt designation with the village of Halstead and Pratt's Bottom having defined settlement boundaries which are not washed over by the Green Belt. Therefore, there is an opportunity to evaluate both settlement and Green Belt options.
- 1.5 SDC adopted its Core Strategy in February 2011. This document sets out the spatial vision for the Sevenoaks District over the plan period, up to 2026. The Core Strategy describes spatial policies that affect the District, including Policy SP4 *Affordable Housing in Rural Areas*.
- 1.6 The policy is dependant on what is defined as "local need". For the purposes of clarity to the policy, local need has been defined in the Core Strategy (para 5.3.19):

"The need of those unable to gain access to existing local accommodation suited to their needs at an affordable cost (the onus being on the household to prove they cannot afford to buy locally at current house prices within the limits of the disposable income available to them) and that fall within one or more of the following categories:

¹ National Planning Policy Framework was revised in February 2019

a) those in the Parish currently in accommodation unsuited to their circumstances for physical, medical, or social reasons and which is incapable of being improved.

"Improvement" in this context means any improvement achievable with grant assistance;

b) those who are dependants of households who have been resident in the Parish either for a continuous period of three years or alternatively any five years out of the last ten;

c) those who have been members of households currently living in the Parish and who have recognised local connections, i.e. having family resident in the area for a minimum of ten years;

d) those employed full-time in the Parish on other than a short-term basis, or those who will be taking up such employment there, or those who provide an important service requiring them to live locally.

- 1.7 Therefore, Policy SP4 is an important mechanism to delivering affordable housing to meet an identified local need. When determining an appropriate scheme, Policy SP4 states:

"Small scale developments for affordable housing only will be developed to meet local needs identified through rural housing needs surveys. The following criteria will be applied in identifying sites:

a) the local need identified through the rural housing needs survey cannot be met by any other means through the development of sites within the defined confines of a settlement within the parish or, where appropriate, in an adjacent parish;

b) the proposal is of a size and type suitable to meet the identified local need and will be available at an appropriate affordable cost commensurate with the results of the appraisal. The proposal is accompanied by a financial appraisal proving the scheme will meet the defined need. Schemes which propose an element of cross subsidy will not be acceptable;

c) the proposed site is considered suitable for such purposes by virtue of its scale and is sited within or adjoining an existing village, is close to available services and public transport, and there are no overriding countryside, conservation, environmental, or highway impacts The initial and subsequent occupancy of sites developed under this policy will be controlled through planning conditions and agreements as appropriate to ensure that the accommodation remains available in perpetuity to meet the purposes for which it was permitted."

- 1.8 Since early 2015, SDC has been working to produce a new Local Plan. This document will eventually replace the existing Core Strategy (February 2011) and the Allocations and Development Management Plan (February 2015) and will cover the period through to 2035. While Rural Housing Need Surveys do not form a core basis of evidence in the preparation of the new Local Plan, the Council has undertaken a Housing Need Study to gain a more detailed picture of the District's housing

requirements, including by ward and parish levels². Further consideration has also been given in the District-wide Housing Need Study to the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) areas, to understand the requirement of bed spaces for older people.

- 1.9 All submission and evidence base documents which support the Local Plan can be found on the Council's website (www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/localplanexamination).

² SDC Local Housing Needs Study (May 2017)
https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/download/278/local_housing_needs_study_may_2017

2. Methodology

- 2.1 The methodology outlined in this section takes into account both the Rural Housing Needs Survey and SDC's Call for Sites exercise.
- 2.2 The Rural Housing Needs Survey was conducted by Rural Kent, a charity which supports rural communities and raises awareness of rural issues including affordable housing. The survey was designed to ascertain the level of need required for affordable housing in the Halstead Parish area. The survey was answered by local residents who required affordable housing. 708 surveys were distributed with 154 surveys being returned; this represented a response rate of approximately 22% within the Parish. As part of the survey, respondents were invited to suggest suitable sites within Halstead Parish that could be used to accommodate affordable housing, of which there were 59 responses.
- 2.3 The Parish Council conducted a localised "Call for Sites" exercise. This allowed landowners and members of the public to suggest suitable sites that could be used to accommodate the need identified for the Parish.
- 2.4 For the purposes of clarity, this localised Call for Sites process (by the Parish Council) is separate from the District Council's Call for Sites for the new Local Plan. While it is acknowledged that there might be some overlap between the two processes, the District Council's Call for Sites focuses on identifying all available land for a variety of uses, including land that can accommodate both market and affordable housing. The Call for Sites process run by Halstead Parish Council was for delivering affordable housing only. Where sites were submitted to both processes, this will be set out clearly in the site assessments.
- 2.5 The submissions and the list of sites from the Rural Housing Need Survey were compared to see whether any duplications were made. As a result, 9 sites were identified and submitted for consideration as suitable locations for affordable housing.
- 2.6 The sites put forward were not submitted with their currently availability. Therefore, each site has been independently and objectively assessed against an appropriate set of criteria before land availability has been taken into account. This has allowed the assessment process to be fair and objective. Arrangements were made by Halstead Parish Council and Rural England for landowners to be aware that a site visit was to take place.
- 2.7 The full list of site options can be found in Section 3: Site Assessments.
- 2.8 Letters regarding land availability were sent to land owners. Where a site was available it was taken forward in the site assessments. Where a site was not available and not supported by the landowner, the site was described as unavailable and removed from the process. This approach was also taken when the landowner did not give a response by the prescribed deadline, as availability could not be determined. Further information can be found in the individual site assessments within Section 3 and the summary in Section 4.

- 2.10 Each site assessment carried out has been subject to the same criteria considerations. The criterion used includes the requirements of Core Strategy Policy SP4, as well as taking into account the constraints of the area.
- 2.11 The criteria considerations used for the purposes of assessment are briefly described in Table 2:

Table 2 – A summary table of the Site Assessment Criteria		
	Criteria	Commentary
A)	Proximity – the distance of the site in relation to local facilities and services of the local service centre. This can include education provision (i.e. a primary school), public transport connections and retail provision.	According to the Sevenoaks Settlement Hierarchy, Halstead has 4 or more sustainability services or facilities. Sites that are beyond easy walking distance of these facilities were considered as less sustainable locations.
B)	Landscape – this categorisation takes into account of landscape designations including Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA)/ Green Infrastructure designations, including Ancient Woodland, Local Wildlife Sites etc.	Where the development of a site would have a greater impact on the landscape (i.e. visual impact), it scored lower than a site that has a lesser impact. As such, sites with high levels of screening were generally preferred.
C)	Topography – concerns with the physical attributes of the site (i.e. water bodies, screening, vegetation, and the gradient of the site).	Sites were be considered more favourably where the topography is flat and has good screening. Where a site had an undulating topography with minimal screening it was considered less favourably.
D)	Access – the way in which the site can be accessed (to and from), taking into account different types traffic movement (including vehicular, cyclist, pedestrian).	A site would be considered more favourably were the existing access is good for both vehicles and pedestrians. Good pedestrian access is characterised as a properly constructed footpath with good links from the site to local services. A site would be considered less favourably where there are issues with access to the site.
E)	Conservation – the constraints that could affect the development upon its immediate area and surroundings including Conservation Areas, Tree	Potential impacts on heritage assets is a key constraint. A site was considered more favourably where the development had a less significant impact on Heritage designations. Sites

	Preservation Orders (TPOs), Scheduled Monuments and Listed Buildings. The test should take into account the level of harm to the character and setting of a heritage asset, where development is being proposed.	having a greater impact on Heritage assets considered as less favourable.
F)	Environmental – the factors that may impact development, including flood risk, potential contamination risks, noise and air pollution and drainage. The impact of existing residents was also considered in this category.	Development of a site will score more favourably where the site has a lesser impact on the environment, with sites having a greater impact on the environment scoring less favourably. As this is an initial site assessment, further consultation should be sought with the Environment Agency to determine the levels of impact on development.
G)	Land Availability & Capacity for Development – this is whether a site is willingly made available by the landowner. The capacity for development identifies whether a site would be able to provide the number of units, to meet the identified need for the Parish.	

2.12 Each site proforma included the following:

- *Suitability assessment* - site size, site boundaries, site location, current land use and character, land uses and character of surrounding area, physical constraints (e.g. access, contamination, steep slopes, flooding, natural features of significance, location of infrastructure/utilities), potential environmental constraints;
- *Availability assessment* – is the site available for the proposed use?
- *Achievability assessment* – have any abnormal costs or other constraints to development been identified which would prevent or delay the site being delivered?

2.13 To consider whether a site is deliverable and developable, the site assessments will account for the Government's definitions as prescribed in the NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance:

- To be considered **deliverable**, sites should be available now, offer a suitable location for development now, and be achievable with a realistic prospect that housing will be delivered on the site within five years. In particular:
 - Sites which do not involve major development and have planning permission, and all sites with detailed planning permission, should be considered deliverable until permission expires, unless there is clear evidence that homes will not be delivered within five years (for example

because they are no longer viable, there is no longer a demand for the type of units or sites have long term phasing plans);

- Where a site has outline planning permission for major development has been allocated in a development plan, has a grant of permission in principle, or is identified on a brownfield register, it should only be considered deliverable where there is clear evidence that housing completions will begin within five years.
- To be considered **developable**, sites should be in a suitable location for housing development and there should be a reasonable prospect that the site is available and could be viably developed at the point envisaged.³

³ National Planning Policy Framework (Feb 2019) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>) and Planning Practice Guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>)

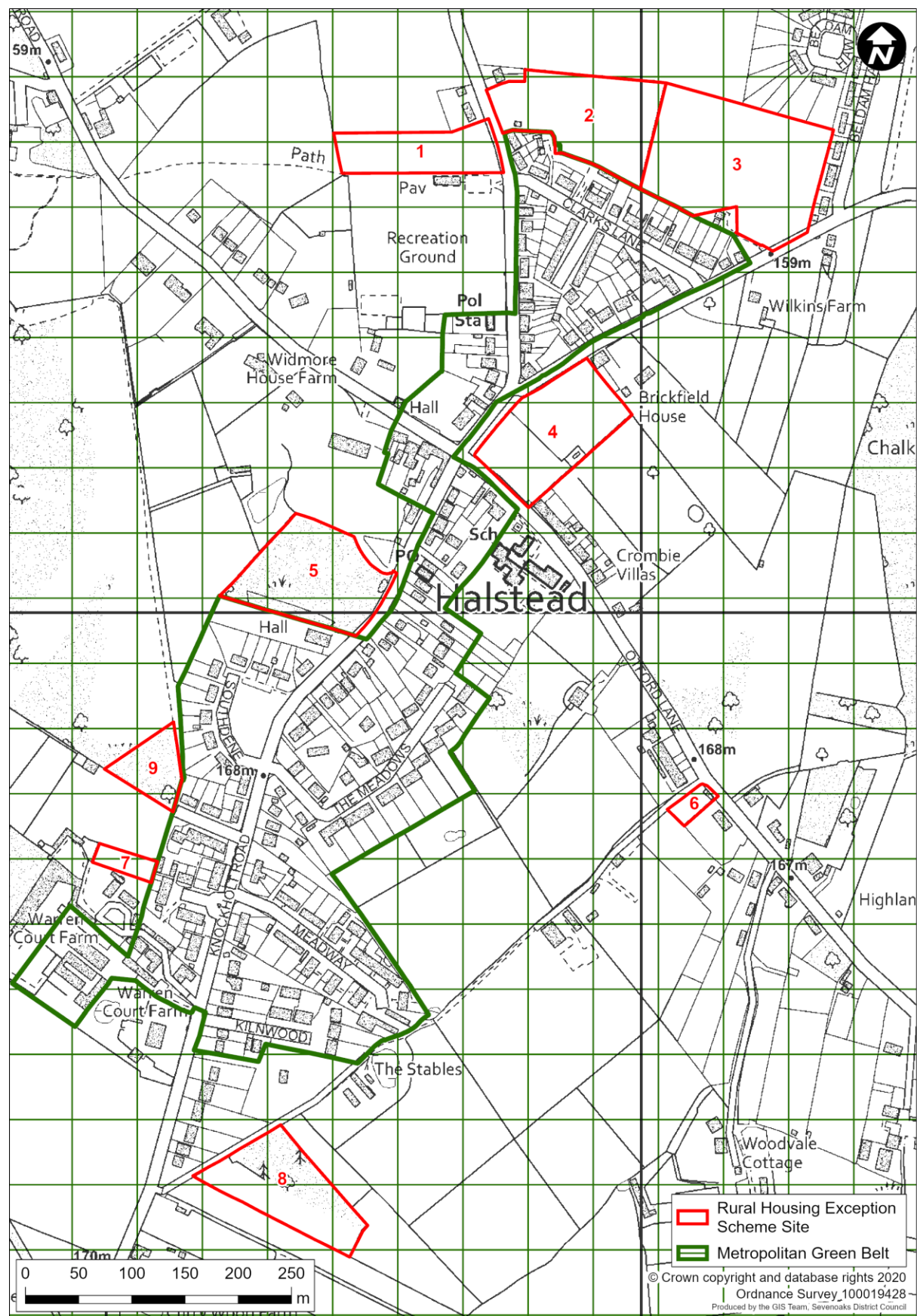
3. Site Assessments Overview

- 3.1 A total of 9 sites were put forward for consideration for a rural housing exception scheme. All sites were identified by the Parish Council through a localised “Call for Sites”. These were submitted to the District Council in order to carry out the assessments. A map of the all sites which were identified is provided on page 13. The full list of sites that were put forward for consideration are listed in Table 1.
- 3.2 Letters were sent to landowners by the Rural Housing Enabler to determine the availability of their site for the development of affordable housing. If a positive response was received and the landowner indicated that the site was available, it was taken forward to be assessed. Where a response was not received or where the landowner indicated that the site was not available, it was removed from the site assessment process. The Rural Housing Enabler received a response from the landowner of all nine sites put forward. Out of the nine responses received, seven landowners indicated that their sites were available for the development of affordable housing to meet the needs of the parish, and therefore taken forward for consideration in the site assessment process.

Table 3 – Sites Identified through the localised “Call for Sites” and their Availability

Site No.	Site Address	Type of Site (Settlement or Green Belt)	Is the Site Considered Available?
1	Land north of Recreation Ground	Green Belt	No
2	Land north west of Clarks Lane	Green Belt	Yes
3	Land north east of Clarks Lane	Green Belt	No
4	Land north east of Station Road	Green Belt	Yes
5	Land north of Village Hall	Green Belt	Yes
6	Scaffold Yard, Otford Lane	Green Belt	No
7	Deerleap Yard	Green Belt	No
8	Land north of Curry Wood Farm	Green Belt	No
9	Land backing onto Southdene	Green Belt	No

Map showing all sites identified through the Parish Council's Call for Sites



4. Conclusions

- 4.1 Table 4 sets out the conclusions of the site assessment process. Further details on each individual site assessment can be found within Appendix A.

Table 4 – Site Assessment Conclusions		
Site No.	Site Address	Conclusion
2	Land north of Recreation Ground	Deliverable
4	Land north east of Station Road	Unsuitable
5	Land north of Village Hall	Unsuitable

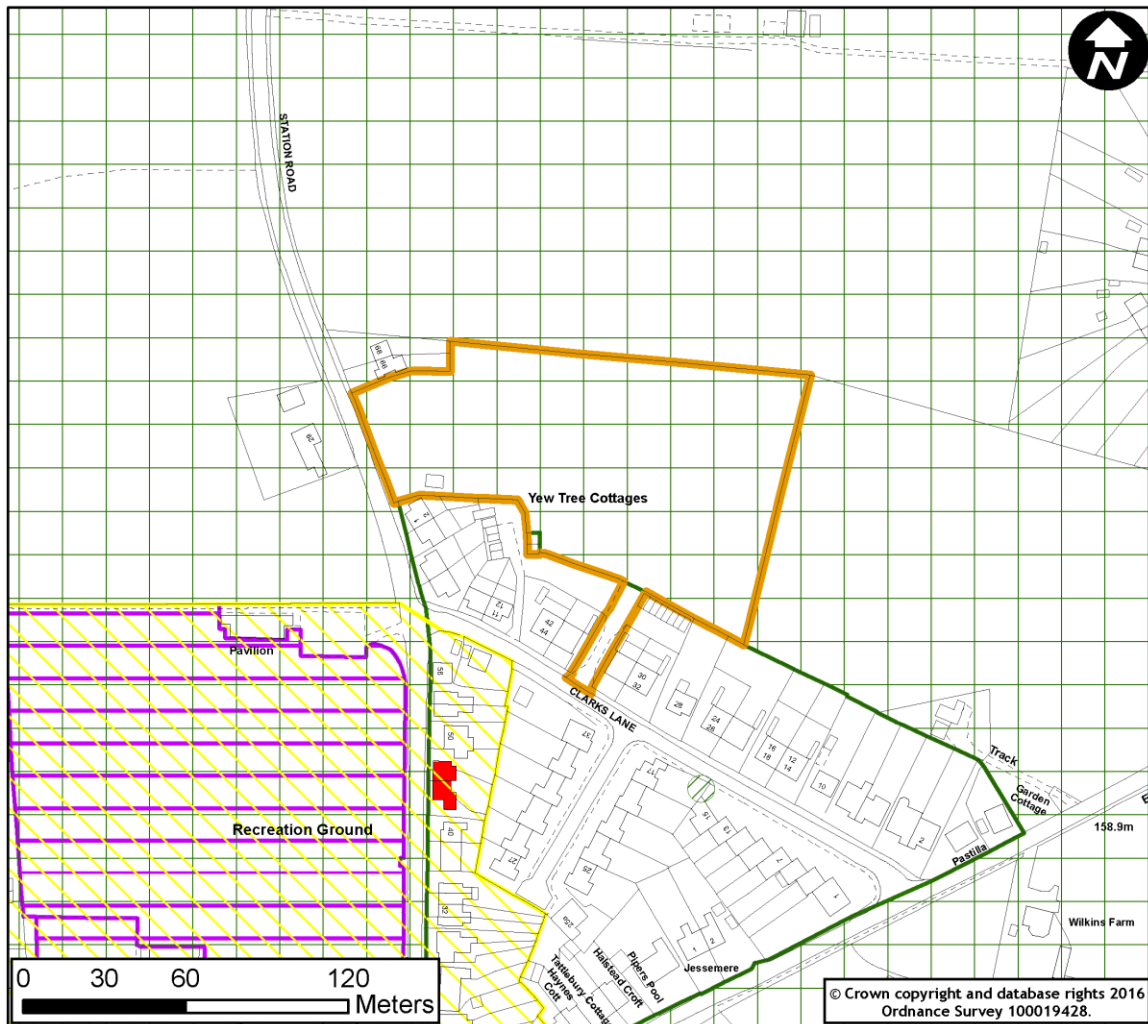
- 4.2 Based on the conclusions of this report and the individual site assessments, it is recommended that Halstead Parish Council consider the list of available sites and potential locations for affordable housing as shown in Table 4.
- 4.3 Although some sites are identified as unsuitable, this does not mean that those sites are ruled out of the process. The site assessments should be used as a guide. Any decision to progress a site should take into account the requirements of Core Strategy Policy SP4, and the “buy-in” from the landowner and the Parish Council’s preferred Housing Provider. It will be for the Housing Provider to determine the viability of the preferred site(s) for development purposes. It is expected that further consultation with the District Council will be taken, with regards to the planning application process including any pre-application advice, once the preferred site(s) have been identified.
- 4.4 The emerging Local Plan sets out policy in relation to rural exceptions housing schemes. Therefore, it is recommended that Halstead Parish Council are aware of the implications of new policy H3 Housing for Rural Areas in relation to the delivery of affordable units on the sites identified in this assessment.

Appendix A – Site Assessments

Site Map Legend

	Air Quality Management Areas
	Ancient Woodland
	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
	Conservation Areas
	Flood Zone 2
	Flood Zone 3
	Listed Buildings
	Local Nature Reserves
	Local Wildlife Sites
	Metropolitan Green Belt
	Registered Parks And Gardens
	Sites of Special Scientific Interest
	Tree Preservation Orders

Site address:	Site 2 Land north west of Clarks Lane	Considerations:	Green Belt
Parish:	Halstead		
Ward:	Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount		
Site location:			

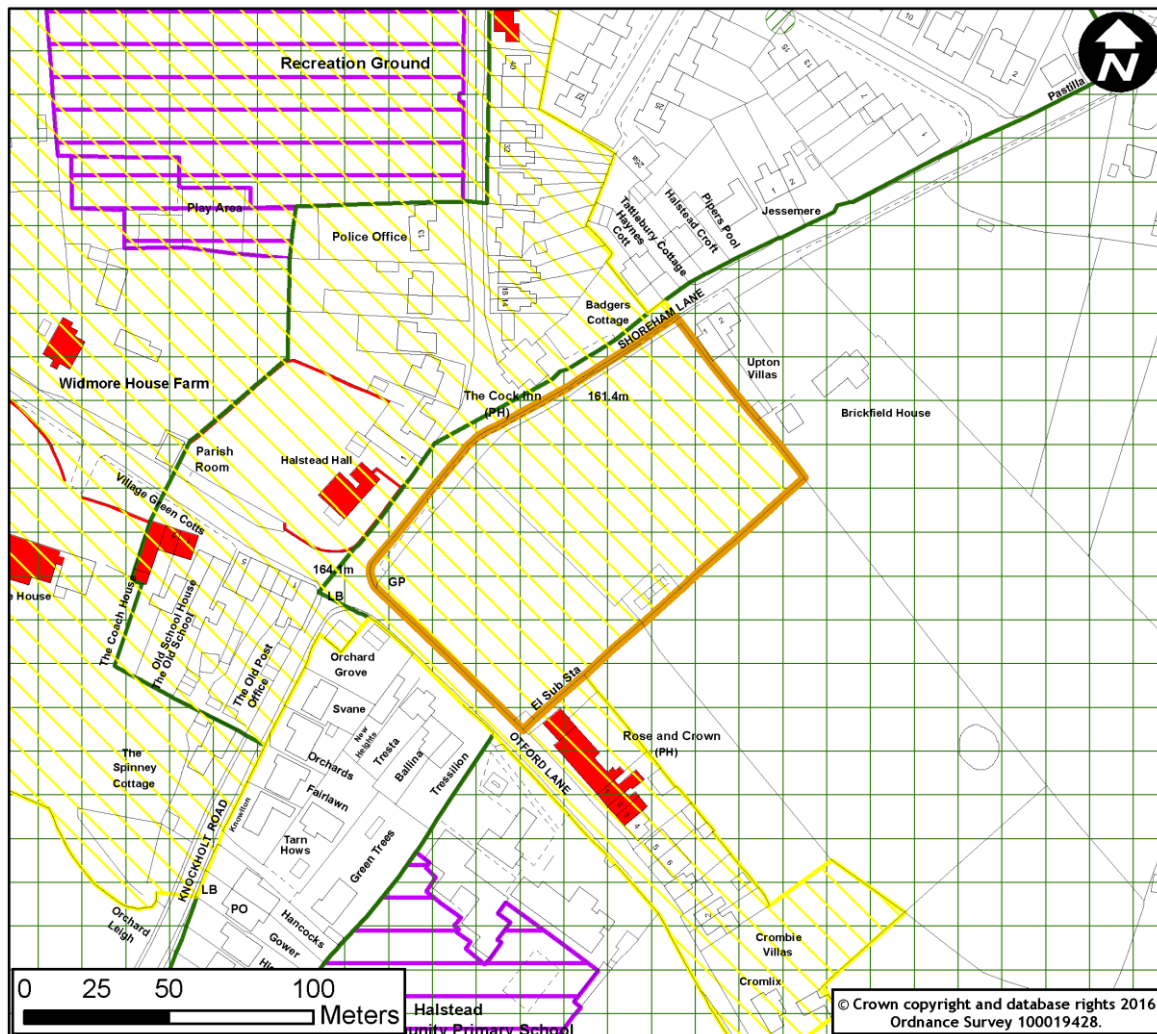


Site description:	The site comprises a parcel of land containing agricultural land not in active use. Bounded by Clarks Lane and residential development to the south, Station Road to the west, and open countryside to the north and east. Established hedgerows line the boundaries of the field
Suitability:	The site is located adjacent to Halstead urban confines. The existing access onto Clarks Lane could be utilised. It is considered that the site is well contained within the landscape. Overall the site is considered able to accommodate development of this scale.

Availability:	The site has been identified through the landowner by the Parish Council. The site is considered as available from the landowner. It has also been submitted to the District Council under its Call for Sites exercise (HO221) and has been identified as a Category 4 site (Greenfield Green Belt sites adjacent to Settlements). The site is considered available by the landowner.
Achievability:	No constraints that would render the site financially unviable are identified at this time.
Conclusion:	Deliverable.

Site address:	Site 4 Land at the corner of Shoreham Lane and Otford Lane, Halstead	Considerations:	• Green Belt • Conservation Area • Listed Buildings
Parish:	Halstead		
Ward:	Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount		

Site location:

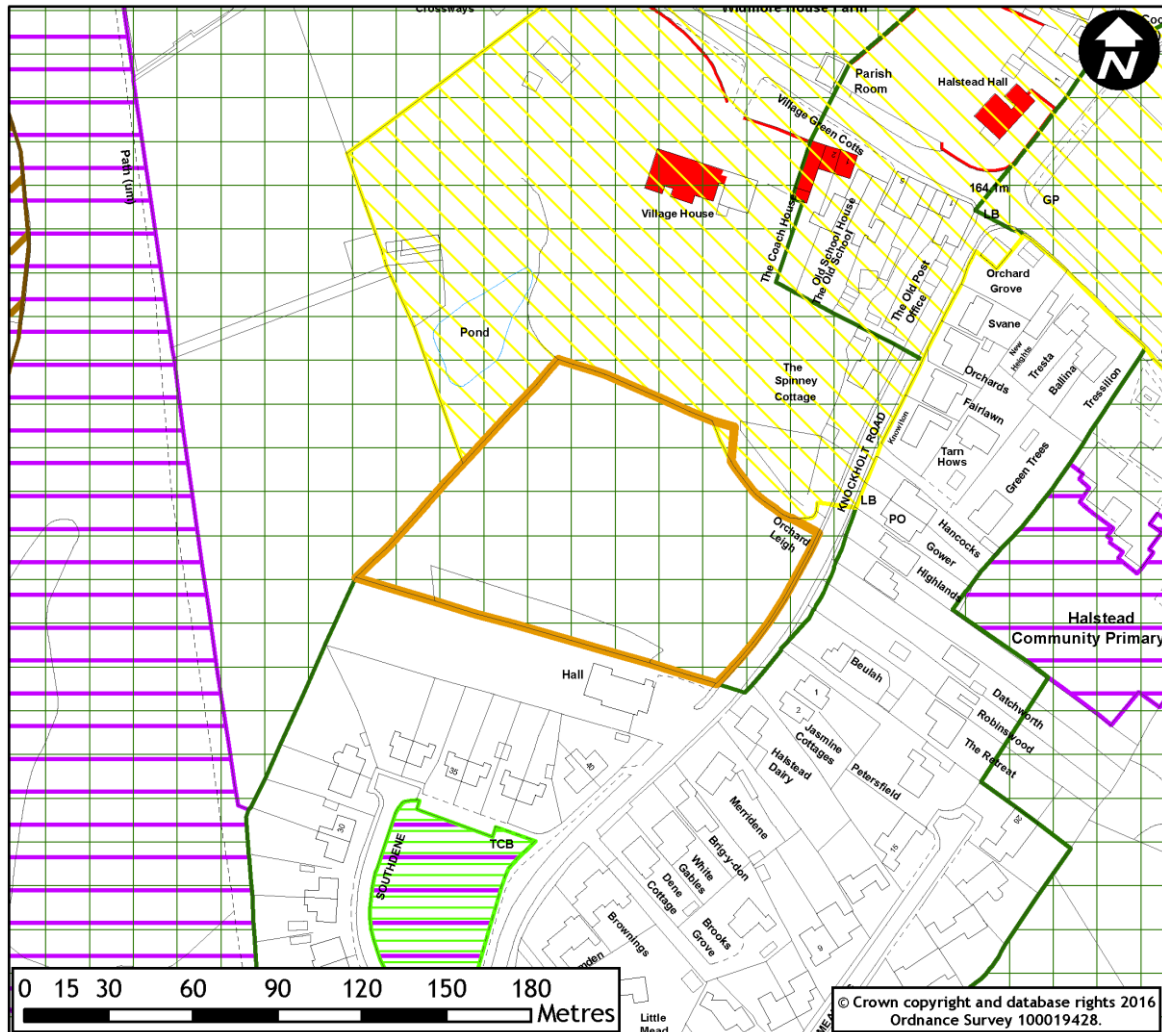


Site description:	The site comprises a parcel of land containing grassland, separated into paddocks, used for grazing. Bounded by Shoreham Lane to the north, Otford Lane to the west, and open countryside to the south and east. Mature trees and hedgerows line the boundaries of the site and the topography is very flat.
Suitability:	The site is located adjacent to Halstead urban confines. A new access onto Shoreham Lane would be required. The site lies within the conservation and is adjacent to a number of listed buildings. Concerns are raised regarding the impact that development of this site would have on these heritage assets. Overall the site is considered unsuitable

	for development given the heritage constraints and impact on the character of the area.
Availability:	The site has been identified through the landowner by the Parish Council. The site is considered as available from the landowner. It has also been submitted to the District Council under its Call for Sites exercise (HO13) and has been identified as a Category 4 site (Greenfield Green Belt sites adjacent to Settlements). The site is considered available by the landowner.
Achievability:	No constraints that would render the site financially unviable are identified at this time.
Conclusion:	Unsuitable due to site-specific constraints that cannot be overcome.

Site address:	Site 5 Land north of Village Hall	Considerations:	• Green Belt • Conservation Area
Parish:	Halstead		
Ward:	Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount		

Site location:



Site description:	The site comprises an area of woodland. Bounded by Knockholt Road to the east, Halstead Village Hall to the south, residential development to the north and south, and open countryside to the west.
Suitability:	The site is located adjacent to Halstead urban confines. A new access onto Knockholt Road would be required. Concerns are raised over any impact a development would have on the setting of the adjacent listed building and conservation area. The woodland provides an important habitat for wildlife and should be protected. Any development proposal would be subject to an ecological survey. Overall the site is considered unsuitable for development given the ecological value of the woodland.

Availability:	The site has been identified through the landowner by the Parish Council. The site is considered as available from the landowner. The site forms part of a larger parcel of land which had been submitted to the District Council under its Call for Sites exercise (HO244) and has been identified as a Category 4 site (Greenfield Green Belt sites adjacent to Settlements). The site is considered available by the landowner.
Achievability:	No constraints that would render the site financially unviable are identified at this time.
Conclusion:	Unsuitable due to site-specific constraints that cannot be overcome.