

Response to Lewes District Local Plan Part 2: Site Allocations and Development Management Policies DPD – Pre-Submission version

Plumpton Parish Council

15 October 2018

Plumpton Parish Council (PPC) offers the following consultation responses to Lewes District Local Plan Part 2: Site Allocations and Development Management Policies DPD – Pre-Submission version (the Part 2 Document):

1. PPC has one minor comment, relating to paragraph 2.117:

This paragraph reads: **‘Any future planning applications, or potential review of the Newick Neighbourhood Plan which considers housing allocations, will need to take into consideration policies within the adopted development plan.’**

PPC presumes that the reference to ‘Newick Neighbourhood Plan’ is a typographical error and should read ‘Plumpton Neighbourhood Plan’.

2. PPC has major comments on Policy GT01 – Land south of The Plough.

2.1 PPC recognises LDC’s obligations under the Government’s national Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS). We note that paragraph 2.132 introduces this policy, but without reference to which version. Paragraph 2.142 explicitly refers to a 2012 version of this document. PPC understands that the current version is 2015, and our responses refer to that version of the PPTS.

2.2 First, PPC comments that the PPTS explicitly states under Policy A: Using evidence to plan positively and manage development (paragraph 7):

‘In assembling the evidence base necessary to support their planning approach, local planning authorities should:

pay particular attention to early and effective community engagement with both settled and traveller communities (including discussing travellers’ accommodation needs with travellers themselves, their representative bodies and local support groups).’

PPC has had a long, collaborative and successful relationship with LDC throughout the Neighbourhood Planning process. However, Policy GT01 was first communicated to PPC via a meeting on 05/09/18. This is not consistent with ‘early and effective engagement’ with the settled community; there has been very little time for quantitative assessment of Policy GT01 in a consultation period running from 24/09/18 to 04/11/18. It is not in accordance with the introductory aim of the PPTS (i) ‘to reduce tensions between settled and traveller communities in plan-making and planning decisions’ and suggests to us that either there was deliberate concealment of these plans or that the decision to allocate this site was made hastily, without due consideration, which we regard as inappropriate for such a sensitive proposal and when the village community is already having to come to terms with large-scale development within the settlement.

3. Plumpton Neighbourhood Plan

With respect to planning policy, and in the spirit of localisation, comments hereafter are presented with reference to the made Plumpton Parish Neighbourhood Plan (PPNP), the Local Plan, NPPF and PPTS incorporated into that framework, as relevant.

With respect of the PPTS, comments are restricted to those relevant to **Plan-making** as enacted in the Part 2 Document. PPC has concerns about further information received from LDC in respect of PPTS **Decision-taking**, but these are not immediately relevant to this response.

While GT01 specifically addresses the needs of gypsies and travellers, the PPC response reflects the fact that the policy primarily represents an additional new development of five permanent dwellings.

With regard to the made Plumpton Neighbour Plan (PPNP), Policy GT01 is regarded as not in accordance with the following policies:

- Policy 1: Spatial plan for the parish
- Policy 2: New-build environment and design
- Policy 3: Landscape and biodiversity
- Policy 5: New housing
- Policy 6: Local employment
- Policy 7: Plumpton Green Village Centre

The consultation response will deal with these in policy order.

3.1 PPNP Policy 1: Spatial plan for the parish

PPNP Policy 1 states the primary objective:

‘New development proposals within the planning boundary for Plumpton Green (see Map C) will be supported, provided they accord with the other provisions of the PPNP and the development plan for the area.’

LDC retained Policy CT1 aims to resist development outside existing planning boundaries unless it meets certain criteria. Plumpton Green is the only settlement in the parish that has a planning boundary, and the land allocated in Policy GT01 is not within the Plumpton Green planning boundary, or indeed near that boundary (it lies approximately 650m to the north). The ‘certain criteria’ rider of Policy CT1 is covered in subsequent paragraphs.

While it is acknowledged that PPNP Policy 1 would ultimately have to include the Local Plan Part 2 once that is adopted, it was not envisaged that Part 2 would apply additional new development targets to Plumpton, and propose extension of the planning boundary to areas regarded as unsuitable for development in respect of Local Plan Part 1 policies.

The parish of Plumpton is rural, and comprises two distinct characteristics:

- Plumpton Green – a Service Village where new development should be sited
- Plumpton – a Hamlet where no development should be sited.

While some regard the hamlet as only existing to the south of the Parish, and largely within the South Downs National Park (SDNP), it is clearly identifiable on Policies Map Inset Map 8 Plumpton Green that the character of the parish to the northern boundary is very similar to that of the

southern hamlet, and that is reflected in PPNP Policy 1. We therefore regard this as an unsuitable area to site permanent dwellings, in which category we include static caravans.

The choice of site also does not meet LDC Core Policy 3 – Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation, which sets the objectives:

‘To deliver the homes and accommodation for the needs of the district and ensure the housing growth requirements are accommodated in the most sustainable way’, and

‘To maximise opportunities for re-using suitable previously developed land and to plan for new development in the highly sustainable locations without adversely affecting the character of the area.’

On the first objective, we do not regard the proposed site as sufficiently sustainable by virtue of its likely impact on local employment, discussed below under PPNP Policy 6.

On the second objective, the proposed site is greenfield and we regard its development as adversely changing the character of the area by replacing arable land with residential development, in addition to the previously discussed spatial plan issues.

In addition, the site cannot be regarded as highly sustainable in respect of CP3 policy statement 2:

‘The site is well related to, or has reasonable access to settlements with existing services and facilities such as schools, health services and shops.’

Accordingly, the site would not score well under the sustainability assessment criteria applied under PPNP Policy 1 for the selection of sites (Soc/3: Promote walking and cycling and other forms of sustainable transport with the aim of reducing the need to travel by car), as it is approximately 650m outside the existing planning boundary (which represents the 800m recommended maximum distance limit for walking), and completely lacks safe pedestrian access, as residents must walk along a national speed limit minor road to reach the village amenities, including the primary school and shop.

LDC asserts that this aspect of sustainability can be adequately met by providing a footpath north to the nearest bus stop at The Plough. This relies on a bus service that is currently under threat and therefore cannot be guaranteed in the near future (PPC is unsure whether the provisions of the Bus Services Act 2017 will provide any protection against the deficit in funding for ESCC and LDC).

Accordingly, the choice of site for GT01 also appears not to confidently address the responsibility within the PPTS under Policy B: Planning for travellers sites (13 c) to ‘ensure that children can attend school on a regular basis’.

The proposed site is also in conflict with LDC Core Policy 10 – Natural Environment and Landscape Character. This states the Key Strategic Objectives as:

‘To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area’ and

‘To conserve and enhance the high quality and character of the district’s towns, villages, and rural environment by ensuring that all forms of new development are designed to a high standard and maintain and enhance the local vernacular and “sense of place” of individual settlements.’

The proposal is to erect a toilet block of unspecified dimensions, plus hardstanding for up to 10 caravans (static and mobile) plus cars for each pitch's residents. Accordingly, we consider the choice of site for GT01 does not adequately address the responsibility within the PPTS under Policy B: Planning for travellers sites (10 e) to 'protect local amenity and environment'.

Finally, the assessment in the 2018 SHLAA shows this site 03PL as 'Fails proximity Assessment' and regarded as undevelopable for residential development. LDC has subsequently documented (in its presentation to parishioners at the PPC meeting of 09/10/18) that the proximity criteria for residential development will need to be adapted to gypsy and traveller accommodation. At the same presentation, it was stated that the site is not regarded as suitable for traditional residential housing development and would be extremely unlikely to receive planning permission, even if GT01 was implemented.

PPC questions under what planning statute LDC is applying a different test of suitability. This appears contrary to PPTS Policy B: Planning for travellers sites (11), which states: 'Criteria based policies should be fair and should facilitate the traditional and nomadic life of travellers whilst respecting the interest of the settled community.' It appears potentially discriminatory, as a lower threshold would seem to apply to the proposed gypsy and traveller residents than to residents of permanent, brick-built housing, especially when there is still uncertainty as to whether the site will be used for gypsies and travellers with protected characteristics under English law, or whether it is available to all travellers as under the definition of 'gypsies and travellers' under PPTS Annexe 1.

3.2 PPNP Policy 2: New-build environment and design

PPNP policy 2 states:

'New development should reflect the scale, density, massing, landscape design and material of surrounding buildings, having regard to the Plumpton Design Statement.'

Five permanent dwellings in the form of static caravans, together with five mobile caravans (as stated at the meeting with LDC of 09/10/18), are entirely out of keeping with the rural hamlet nature of the site.

3.3 PPNP Policy 3: Landscape and biodiversity

PPNP policy 3 states:

'Layout and landscape schemes of new development should be informed by the landscape character of the area.'

Principle 3 supports the retention and, where possible, enhancement of existing green corridors, ponds and other wildlife features. GT01 impinges on a prominent green corridor used by wildlife, including deer.

3.4 PPNP Policy 5: New housing

PPNP Policy 5 states:

'Residential development will be supported on the sites allocated in Neighbourhood Plan Policies 5.1 to 5.4 inclusive, and on suitable windfall sites within Plumpton Green.'

We do not regard the site proposed in GT01 as suitable as it would not qualify under PPNP Policy 1 (and LDC CT1, SP3 etc), as stated previously (para 3.1).

3.5 PPNP Policy 6: Local employment

PPNP Policy 6 states:

‘New development proposals that result in the loss of an existing employment or business use will be resisted, unless it can be demonstrated that its continued use is no longer viable.’

This policy conforms to NPPF paragraph 28 (especially bullet point 4) and aligns to the JCS policy E1 (point (i)), which reflects NPPF paragraphs 18–20 and is designed to secure the future of the existing employment uses within the parish and plan for their growth to serve parish needs.

PPNP Policy 6 also records under paragraph 5.67:

‘Comments made during the consultation events made it clear that parishioners wished to see existing businesses preserved as far as possible and that they had no wish to see Plumpton become a dormitory community.’

There are significant concerns regarding the direct and indirect employment implications of Policy GT01. There are 3 major employers in the parish:

- Plumpton College – an outstanding rural education centre covering 2500 acres, predominantly within the SDNP, specialising in land-based courses
- Plumpton Racecourse – a National Hunt racecourse to the south of Plumpton Green that saw its first race in 1884
- The Old Brickworks – a light industrial business park to the north of Plumpton Green and directly adjacent to the site proposed in GT01.

Of the three, the Old Brickworks is the only one in the northern section of the parish. It comprises 21 businesses on what was formerly a brownfield site. These businesses between them employ in excess of 50 permanent employees, many of whom live in or locally to Plumpton. The businesses are categorised as ‘quiet, non-industrial businesses’, and the site is well respected and supported within the parish.

The Old Brickworks conforms to the principles of NPPF (July 2018): ‘Supporting a prosperous rural economy’, as set out in paragraph 84. It is outside existing settlements, and not well served by public transport, but is on previously developed land and is sensitive to its surroundings.

The businesses at the site contribute significantly to the local and regional economy through business rates, employment and use of local amenities and other businesses such as the village shop (and post office) and local public houses - the Plough immediately to north of the site proposed in GT01, the Fountain in Plumpton Green, and The Half Moon to the south of the parish.

GT01 proposes to locate the site directly adjacent to the Old Brickworks, with no meaningful separation between the two. The businesses of the Old Brickworks have made it clear that they chose the site because of its quiet, rural location and existing ‘soft security’ and that their continued use of it is dependent on those conditions continuing. They have all stated that any kind of development adjacent to the boundary could result in re-location of their businesses elsewhere, at some cost and inconvenience. They are prompted by concerns about the need for greater security

and potential restriction on current and future operations due to their proximity to residential development.

Even if those businesses remain, or other businesses take their place, the presence of a residential development immediately adjacent to commercial activity is highly likely to result in the need for additional security measures (notably, as a condition of insurance) that will be highly intrusive, such as security fencing and also security lighting in what is 'dark skies' parish where 91% of respondents to one questionnaire informing the PPNP supported preservation dark skies as one of their primary valued aspects of current village life. Dark skies is also a policy of the SDNPA.

The challenges of maintaining public houses in general, and rural ones in particular, is well documented. Plumpton Green has already lost one pub in the past five years.

3.6 PPNP Policy 7: Plumpton Green Village Centre

PPNP Policy 7 states:

'New development proposals requiring planning permission that result in the loss of existing shops or commercial units in the village centre and elsewhere in the parish will be resisted, unless it can be demonstrated that their continued use is no longer viable.'

It further states in paragraph 5.68:

'Over the past 25 years the centre of Plumpton Green has lost one general store, one public house and a garage to housing. The remaining businesses in the village centre, in particular the village shop/post office, are important to the community as a whole but especially to residents without their own transport, as public transport services are limited. Development proposals that might negatively affect the remaining facilities and businesses will be resisted.'

While it is acknowledged that GT01 does not in itself mandate the loss of the businesses located at the Old Brickworks, the real threat of loss exists, based on the same concerns as under PPNP Policy 6 discussed above. The income arising from the occupants of the new development is unlikely to offset the likely loss in custom from the departing businesses.

Accordingly, the choice of site for GT01 does not appear to adequately address the wider responsibility within the PPTS under Policy B: Planning for travellers sites (13) to 'ensure that traveller sites are sustainable economically'.