



# Representations of Robert Brett and Sons Limited to the Regulation 18 Canterbury Local Plan

Re: Folly Farm, Land West of Hersden, St. Stephen's Hill, Land at Westbere Lakes and Land at Milton Manor.

Prepared by Hume Planning Consultancy

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 These representations are prepared on behalf of Robert Brett and Sons Limited and relate to the draft Canterbury Local Plan 2040 (Regulation 18) dated March 2024.
- 1.2 Robert Brett and Sons Limited have an extensive landholding within the district and these representations highlight specific shortcomings of the overall emerging spatial strategy (and specifically Land North of Blean Policy C12). The representations then specifically focus on 5 individual sites which are as follows;
  1. Folly Farm (site allocated under Policy C16);
  2. Land west of Hersden (omission site);
  3. St. Stephen's Hill (omission site);
  4. Land at Westbere Lakes (benefitting from a lawful use certificate for Class B2 use LPA Reference CA/22/01231);
  5. Land at Milton Manor which is "overwashed" with a Green Gap designation.
- 1.3 In each case, Robert Brett and Sons Limited would welcome the opportunity to discuss these individual land parcels with the policy makers of CCC. However, firstly it is important to set out our concerns relating to the wider framework of the council's overall spatial approach which provide the context to these representations.
- 1.4 The origins of the evidence base date back to a different draft vision from 2021 and subsequent public consultation feedback on the spatial strategy deriving from it which has later been skewed by the deletion of Cooting Farm and the strategic sites to the east of Canterbury. These sites were then substituted with a strategic allocation which was justified as a new settlement under Policy C12, (north of the University at Blean), for around 2,000 dwellings together with associated infrastructure and a mix of uses and public transport initiatives designed to make the community more 'self-contained' and less car dependant. The need for self-containment and the delivery of infrastructure alongside the housing was recognised to be at a location that the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal recognised as highly sensitive in landscape and heritage terms. This substitute spatial option also relied on critical offsite road improvements to create a suitable connection to the A2 via Harbledown.
- 1.5 Garden Communities, when incorporated within a draft local plan, are normally the building block of the spatial strategy. As a result the consideration of complementary allocations to meet the overall development needs of the district for the plan period

follow from this platform. However, in this case, the allocated land at Blean had not been identified at the start of the local plan process and was inserted belatedly as a substitute for two other strategic site locations. This substitution was undertaken for reasons of expediency to allow an opportunity for the plan to progress at pace in order for plan adoption by June 2025 which would otherwise prevent the plan period being reduced in length from 2045 to 2040 (as the plan must be for a minimum 15 year timeframe).

- 1.6 The switch in local plan thinking deriving from the removal of the eastern link road and the strategic allocations on the east side of Canterbury that funded this road building, as a response to significant local opposition, was justified as a move away from a 'road building' derived spatial strategy to a walking, cycling, public transport and park and ride focused strategy that was to 'drive' spatial decision making.
- 1.7 Brett totally support this non-car mode-based strategy which is fully in accordance with national planning guidance. However, at the point this shift in decision making took place, Canterbury's policy makers should have focused on opportunities for growth at the settlement edges of the most sustainable locations in the district. This did not occur and instead, for reasons of expediency, because of a) speed ie. to allow the plan period to be reduced in length by 25% along with the corresponding reduction in the development quantum target and b) the fact that Blean could only be justified to be sustainable if a large quantum of development was placed there so that major public transport investment, a mix of uses and new community hub, could be created/funded. Overriding the recognised landscape, heritage and transport shortcomings identified in the SA assessment, it is asserted that this choice was taken because of an underpinning justification that development of scale could make an unsustainable location 'self-contained' and therefore more 'sustainable'.
- 1.8 Other urban extension proposals could be justified as contributing to wider benefits to Canterbury through, for example, the hospital relocation, sports provision, park and ride and improved bus Fastway's. In contrast, the spatial option for justifying Blean appears to have been that development of scale could allow it to 'consume most of its own smoke', notwithstanding its own separate impact on the residents and road network of Harbledown if a junction improvement from the A2 could be delivered.
- 1.9 These representations demonstrate that there is capacity at the fringes of the urban area of Canterbury and other sustainable settlements where the objective of reducing car journey movements will be more realistically achievable in comparison with the

proposed new community at Blean. For instance, Land at Stephen's Hill has a capacity for up to 300 dwellings and land at Folly Farm (which Brett are seeking a slightly modified allocation for in the short term) could be increased, subject to a second point of access to achieve a yield of around 150 dwellings. With the additional 100 dwellings proposed within Brett's single land control at land west of Hersden, this would secure around 25% of the quantum of the Blean development through the Brett sites alone. The Brett sites supported by other urban fringe opportunities represent far more sustainable and less environmentally impactful sites that also have an increased chance of delivery in the shorter term.

- 1.10 There are other previous omission sites at the fringes of Canterbury that could be extended or reassessed in capacity that if allocated would then obviate the need for the Blean strategic site to be maintained as a draft allocation at the Regulation 19 Stage. The SLAA sites should be reassessed on this basis with a greater weighting toward the achievement of non car mode travel.
- 1.11 This spatial strategy would be consistent with the urban based focus and desire to reduce car-based journeys set out in the original draft vision from 2021, which can be more easily justified as being supported by the evidence base in comparison with the 'garden community' at Blean that was 'parachuted' in for reasons of expediency. As well as encouraging the inclusion of fringe growth at the most sustainable locations, (which should be justified because they will truly result in fewer car-based journeys), these sites will provide a range of opportunities for housebuilders and are not reliant on major upfront infrastructure to make them more sustainable and skew the Sustainability Appraisal scoring profile. In this way, a fundamental part of the plan, i.e delivery to meet the districts development requirements, will be more likely to come forward. This is a factor which is particularly important, given the shortened plan period (15 years if the plan can be adopted by Summer 2025).
- 1.12 For these reasons, Brett would support a further review of the opportunities at the edges of the most recognised sustainable locations in the district and these should then be assessed critically as part of the Sustainability Appraisal 'retesting process' which would include a comparison of benefits with the Blean draft allocation. This comparative exercise needs to be undertaken before the plan evidence base can be considered robust and the plan spatial testing can be concluded to be 'sound'.
- 1.13 The remaining spatial strategy is rightly ambitious and underpinned by a desire to deliver on the objective of reducing car-based travel and this is strongly supported by

Brett. The larger allocations (aside from Blean which has already been addressed) at South Canterbury and South Whitstable, rely on land uses such as hospitals, sports grounds, park and ride or Fastway bus links alongside new junctions to major roadways. These allocations and mix of uses and necessary supporting infrastructure will be complicated to deliver and this increases the need for a mix of smaller deliverable sites to balance the housing trajectory profile over the lifetime of the shortened plan. If Blean were to be retained as an allocation, this would mean that 7,000 of the total requirements of 9,346 dwellings (75% of the total requirement) for the plan period would be relied up on from only 3 strategic allocations. 15 years is a short time for schemes of this scale to be delivered and this also justifies why Brett are opposed to the proposed Blean allocation which aside from the highlighted delivery concerns, is also not as sustainable as the urban fringe options identified. All of the Brett sites are in single ownership and can be delivered within the early years of the plan period.

1.14 The specific sites referenced above, are now individually addressed:

1. Folly Farm
2. Land west of Hersden
3. St Stephen's Hill
4. Land at Westbere Lakes
5. Milton Manor

## **2. Folly Farm**

2.1 This site represents a draft allocation (draft Policy C16) for approx. 17 dwellings. These representations more generally emphasise the importance of placing more reliance on urban fringe sites to meet development needs and ensuring deliverability. The supporting Transport Technical Note by C&A Transport demonstrates that with a single point of access, the capacity of this allocation could be increased to 28 dwellings.

2.2 There is also a wayleave running diagonally north south which affects part of the allocation and the draft allocation also extends close to the overhead pylon (identified on the associated topographical plan).

- 2.3 The attached conceptual layout takes the development envelope out of these technical constraints whilst acknowledging that this is a highly sustainable location where walking, cycling and public transport modes would be realistically favoured by occupiers thereby reducing car journeys. This would fulfil a central objective of the emerging plan reflecting the advantages of this location which, with other urban fringe sites, could collectively serve as a substitute for the proposed Garden Community at Blean. As a result, the site extent of the allocation and its yield has been reassessed.
- 2.4 These representations are supported by a concept layout drawing demonstrating how the 'reshaping' of the allocation in the draft plan could address the technical and site constraints and respond to landscape considerations by placing development on the lower contours of the rising ground which would increase the capacity to 28 dwellings whilst delivering open space, strategic landscaping and BNG. This increase in site yield, as well as contributing to a revised spatial model for the district, would also deliver additional affordable housing and a superior layout as reflected in the attached draft layout.
- 2.5 The influence of the surrounding commercial development and railway line on the character of the area as well as the residential estate to the west, combined with the proximity of the site to Canterbury City Centre and the likelihood that non car modes will be favoured by future occupiers, supports the Brett central case that the suitability of this location for development is strongly aligned with the most sustainable spatial strategy. In the short term, the constraint to this site's development capacity, is the single point of deliverable highway access. Aside from this constraint, the remaining land within the Brett landholding has significant increased development capacity which we wish to flag up to LPA policymakers at this point, whilst Brett's review alternative secondary access opportunities that would realise the site's full potential. This medium-term option would be intended to be explored through the next stage of the local plan review as part of an alternative spatial strategy to the proposed garden community at Blean which it is asserted, is not sustainable.

### 3. Land West of Hersden

- 3.1 Significant development growth was directed to Hersden as part of a planned expansion in the adopted Canterbury Local Plan (2017). Hersden's elevated position in the settlement hierarchy for the district (as a 'Rural Service Centre') is also reflected in the allocation of the Bread and Cheese Field site to the south west of Hersden (Policy R5). Brett support this allocation which through the strategic landscaping identified in the concept Masterplan, is designed to create a permanent edge to the west of Hersden (south of the A28).
- 3.2 The emerging local plan recognises the potential for growth at Hersden, as a sustainable location and the desirability of creating a permanent boundary to further expansion, which are objectives which can be met by the additional allocation of the identified Brett landholding to the west of Hersden (north of the A28) for the site-specific reasons explained below. The potential yield of this site (circa 100 dwellings) would, with other medium sites, offer a short term and more sustainable spatial growth substitute to Blean for the reasons outlined in the context section of these representations. It will also be shown that the concept masterplan demonstrates how the Green Gap protection afforded to this area between Westbere to the west and Hersden to the east will be safeguarded and reinforced by the provision of open playing fields as part of a package of measures delivered by the allocation. Having established the emerging local plan recognises that Hersden as a settlement, is suitable for expansion and development is recognised in achieving benefits and a permanent and defensible edge to the settlement, these objectives can both be met by the allocation of the identified land to the west of Hersden which directly adjoins the recently constructed Montgomery Gardens (former KCC school site) off Breadlands Lane. This site was not selected as an allocation partly because it formed part of a larger site proposal, reflecting Robert Brett and Sons Limited total land ownership. The July 2022 SLAA assessment identified the land as technically suitable for development but it was then discounted because of its location within the Green Gap. Because of earlier conclusions on the deliverability and sustainability of aspects of the emerging local plan and specifically Land at Blean, in this context, it is asserted that this initial assessment of the Green Gap should be reevaluated.
- 3.3 The purpose of the Green Gap is to maintain a sense of separation between Westbere to the west and Hersden to the east. This is an objective that is recognised as having greater value because of the recent planned expansion of Hersden. To the north of the

A28 the 'gap' is achieved by a significant block of existing woodland and central break in the developed frontage between a site that is currently being redeveloped for housing and the car showroom which completes this built-up frontage with further development (the Parker Steel storage site) to the west beyond this central break.

- 3.4 The omission site would be enclosed by the recent Montgomery Gardens residential development to the east and its western boundary is enclosed by an extensive area of existing woodland with the remainder of this boundary already built up. The existing tree/hedgerow screen to the frontage would be retained, so that the proposed housing would be screened from the A28. In this way, an allocation of approximately 100 dwellings could be provided within an enclosed parcel of land that would not serve to erode the sense of separation between Hersden and Westbere. In fact, this sense of separation could be enhanced because of Robert Brett and Sons Limited wider land holding that would offer the creation of a playing field for use by the wider community. This sports field would be located in the most visible and central part of the Green Gap and would represent a significant long-term benefit.
- 3.5 In this way, the allocation of the eastern and most enclosed part of the Robert Brett and Sons Limited landholding (screened by existing woodland) could deliver up to 100 dwellings to meet the districts development requirements in an area which would maintain the sense of separation between Westbere and Hersden. The long term function of this gap would be strengthened by the linked allocation of an area of central open space with an open frontage to the A28, in the most vulnerable part of this 'Green Gap' which is offered as a sport field for the local community.
- 3.6 We would welcome the chance of discussing this vision with policy officer's of the LPA in advance of the publication of the Regulation 19 Canterbury Local Plan as it is concluded this proposal would achieve the twin objectives of delivering housing at a sustainable location whilst strengthening the sense of separation between Westbere and Hersden by creating a defensible boundary to the western edge of the village (north of the A28) and the linked transfer of an area for recreational/sports field provision in the 'Green Gaps' most vulnerable area.



## 4. St Stephen's Hill

- 4.1 This site of over 24 ha represents an extension to the northern edge of Canterbury and lies to the east of the University campus. The surrounding residential catchment has strong links to the University. The land was not allocated in the emerging local plan because of the earlier emphasis during the local plan process on large strategic sites being identified that were reliant on infrastructure. In the case of the proposed allocation to the north of Blean, the scale was necessary to create a "critical development mass" that could justify an unsustainable location being described as more 'self-contained' and thereby helping to align this strategic site option with the central objective of the plan which is to promote non car travel modes.
- 4.2 Robert Brett and Sons Limited assert that this spatial decision making is flawed from a locational/sustainability perspective and also because of the reliance on major infrastructure for all of the main strategic sites which are proposed to be delivering 75% of the overall development requirement for the entire plan period. The delivery of housing in the early phases of the plan period for these reasons, is a key concern which is exaggerated in this case by the shortened lifespan of the plan period.
- 4.3 It is acknowledged that the St. Stephen's Hill site has heritage constraints and will result in some landscape change to the character of the area. However, because of the ridgeline to the north these impacts will be localised and can be addressed through a comprehensive masterplanned approach which will;
- Avoid direct impacts on the Scheduled Ancient Monument;
  - Will promote improve cycleway and footpath connections to the university and city centre;
  - Can incorporate a recreational/landscaped corridor as part of a wider vision of a connection linking up with the proposed Broad Oak reservoir and country park to the north;
  - Can safeguard the Conservation Area by providing open space and development areas that reflect the topography.
- 4.4 Robert Brett and Sons Limited seek to work with LPA policy makers to develop the conceptual masterplan before the Regulation 19 Stage of the Local Plan.
- 4.5 Locationally this urban extension which could deliver between 200-300 dwellings is more aligned with the central objectives of the local plan (delivery and encouraging non

car travel modes) which make it sustainably superior to the land at north Blean and therefore whilst there are also heritage and landscape impacts to consider (.....like land north of Blean) the concept masterplan shows a provisional means by which housing development of this quantum can be achieved within a landscaped setting. We look forward to discussing how this site can better serve the local plan objectives. This is shown conceptually on the attached masterplan vision.

- 4.6 These representations are supported by an updated Transport Technical Note from C+A Transport confirming that with a main access from St. Stephen's Hill and a range of options for an emerging access, the main site access that has been designed could acceptably serve up to 300 dwellings.

## **5. Land at Westbere Lakes**

- 5.1 Robert Brett and Sons Limited representations with respect to this site relate more to a point of administrative regularisation following the permission issued for a certificate of Lawful Use under LPA CA/22/01231. This permission identified the lawful use for general industry Class B2 Use of the area hatched on the attached plan which falls within Brett's wider landholding. This permission effectively represents a "commitment", and it is requested the site is allocated as such in the emerging local plan. As currently drafted this part of the wider landholding is over washed with a number of environmental designations that are not consistent with its lawful use. This change is requested for reasons of plan consistency.

## **6. Milton Manor**

- 6.1 Robert Brett House is located beyond the Milton Manor Road close to the position of the new link and allocations to the south of Canterbury (west of Thanington) and west of the Milton Farm allocation which combine to form a new western development edge to Canterbury demarcated by Milton Manor Road. To the west of this road, the emerging local plan allocates all of the intervening land up to the eastern edge of Chartham as a

Green Gap, for a distance of over 1.5km. Within this area and west of the Brett office hub is an area of worked quarry that is available for future development.

- 6.2 The purpose of this over washing designation affecting the Robert Brett and Sons Limited landholding west of Milton Manor Road, appears to offer further compensatory safeguards for the southwest expansion allocations proposed in the plan. For these reasons, Robert Brett and Sons Limited oppose this safeguarding designation. As a principle, the southwest Canterbury allocation should be mitigating its own impact without reliance on land beyond its control. The removal of these designations affecting the former quarry beyond the existing Brett offices could serve to prejudice the future development potential of this area and the environmental benefits that possible future development could bring forward on the quarry land. Brett would accept a Green Gap designation on the land closest to the highway east of the office hub up to Milton Manor Road and this area can be specifically identified following further discussion with CCC.