

## **CANTERBURY HERITAGE AND DESIGN FORUM (CHDF) response to the CCC Draft 2020 - 2040 Local Plan**

The draft Plan is quite a complex document with many elements, but its main impact is very similar to that of the previous 2022 document, in that a very large increase in Canterbury's built area and population is planned, and the Plan makes no attempt to investigate the new flexibility available in the 2023 version of the National Planning Policy Framework to reduce that growth.

CHDF is a specialised organisation whose main concern is the heritage of Canterbury, and our comments are limited to our special area of concern, the possibility of harm to the character of our city.

The greatest impact of the proposed Plan will be through the massive expansion of the city of Canterbury by creation of new suburbs, with accompanying expansion of Whitstable, Herne Bay, and Wingham. The loss of countryside and agricultural land will however particularly affect Canterbury and its historic identity as a compact city set in a shallow bowl of open countryside. We believe the Council are mistaken in their assessments that these surrounding countryside areas are valuable, but developable, and do not deserve protection.

### **CCC Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV) - Green Gaps**

CCC have carried out and updated two studies on heritage landscape areas in the district LLD's (Listed Landscape Designation) and LCA's - Landscape Character Areas.

LLDs are essentially unique examples of their type with significance beyond their natural form, and of high quality with high degrees of protection. LCA's are the lower echelon of 'special' but not irreplaceable areas, and these are fully scheduled in the CCC LCA document.

The ring of rising ground between the town of Canterbury and the skyline ridge some mile or so beyond is all designated AHLV - Area of High Landscape Value. Beyond the ridge to the south the area is designated AONB - Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There is a legal presumption against development in AONB's, but not AHLVs.

However, we believe the discussion in the CCC LCA document (prepared by LUC) gives solid grounds for allocating protection to the AHLV to the southern side of Canterbury, even though some of it has been allocated for development as the South Canterbury Urban Extension.

Additionally, although there is no green belt round Canterbury, the council rightly follows a well established practice of maintaining 'significant' green gaps between settlements, which is a consideration that comes into play with the proposed major expansion of all the settlements in the district. The 2017 Plan allocations have already brought Canterbury and Bridge to the point where only two fields separate them

### **LCA Overall evaluation**

The Inspector at the 2017 Plan Inquiry agreed with representations that the AHLV areas should be maintained as contiguous land as a ring around Canterbury, rather than disaggregated into only those discrete areas that were line-of sight visible from central Canterbury, with the residue being de-nominated and presumably thereby more available for development.

Elsewhere in the LAC document, there is one useful definition of what the value of the AHLV land is - it is not what it is, so much as what it is not - ie not its intrinsic and detailed landscape quality, but open space rather than city.

### **E3 (Amery Court) Allocation C12 and H4 (Nackington Farmlands) Allocation C6 C7**

By virtue of being on the plateau above Canterbury, ie over the skyline, E3 Amery Court is not in the AHLV. Its value lies far more in its bio-diversity and Open Space function, than landscape views.

### **H4 - Nackington Farmlands**

By contrast, H4 has a prime function as part of the green mantle around Canterbury, as well as offering from within its area excellent and classic distant views of the city, the Cathedral and the slopes beyond.

The LCA states, under 'Sensitivity'

Identified as sensitivity in LCA The dominant agricultural character extending to the urban edge of Canterbury and role of the area in providing a rural landscape between the city and outlying settlements of Patricbourne, Bridge and Lower Hardres.

and under Guidelines

Conserve the rural character of the landscape ensuring that it continues to play a role in providing a rural separation between Canterbury and the outlying villages of Bridge, Patrixbourne and Lower Hardres

We believe the comments on the SLAA assessment for H4 are ridiculous, in assessing that there are valid ways of mitigating built areas such that they substantially resemble open fields.

SLAA151, SLAA259 and SLAA128 are identified as suitable and available in the SLAA and are allocated as part of a strategic development area in South-West Canterbury. While the SA has identified significant and minor negative impacts across all three sites, it is determined when reviewed alongside the SLAA on the balance of impacts and considering possible mitigation and design, that the majority of these impacts can be addressed.

### **Housing Need**

ACRA and Canterbury Society are submitting detailed documents which we endorse, that set out reasons why the Plan should build the case that there are exceptional circumstances for Canterbury, by reason of its historic character as a compact town, because it contains the three linked areas that together form the World Heritage Site, whose setting must be protected and supported.

There is strong evidence, accepted in the Housing Needs Assessment that is the Council's own document, that shows that over the last ten years the number of dwellings proposed for construction - just under 1200 dwellings pre year for 20 years totalling 25,000 units - cannot be delivered. The average annual build rate has been approximately half of that - 600 dwellings per year. Equally clearly, the number of students attending our three universities, which is a substantial proportion of the city population, shows a peak in 2017-18, with falling numbers since then, which reduction the cumulative and ongoing impacts of Brexit will reinforce.

So a mixture of necessity and good sense dictates the Plan should be withdrawn and recast around building the case that the Standard Methodology in the NPPF be set aside, as is allowed under the new wording, to set realistic and benign growth rates based on recent performance of the housing sector in Canterbury District.

## **Flawed Transport Planning**

It is particularly notable that the Draft Plan does not offer an update on the 2022 Draft which had a major Transport Study by Jacobs, a document that declined to investigate the traffic implications of **Free Standing Settlements**, arguing **a priori** that they were not a CCC preferred solution. It offered the argument that the definition of an FSS is commonly based on a 5000 dwellings threshold, so the South Canterbury Urban Extension did not qualify in any case. Thus, we are wholly sceptical of the validity of the labelling of the Blean area Allocation (C12) as a stand alone settlement of **1800** dwellings, and the concomitant likelihood of a high take up of active travel or public transport. The rules of CCC transport planning are clearly being made up to suit pre-determined targets.

## **Lack of safeguards against associated harms - congestion, air quality**

Many other harms, to do with transport impacts or congestion and air pollution, but also carbon usage, will flow from pursuit of the higher target, which will inflict social, health and economic damage on the city and its residents. The Plan accepts the gravity of these harms, but asserts with no evidence that an aspirational approach should be adopted in promoting novel travel plans.

In these, developers would be charged not only with paying for new bus or other services as necessary to provide public transport fully matched to residents' commuting needs, in perpetuity, but also with persuading residents to actually use this public transport once provided. Enforcement of these policies on the developer and the public is sketched out in the loosest of terms in policies C2.1, DS6.8 (Sustainable development), DS13 (Movement Hierarchy) DS 14 (Active Travel) DS16 (Air Quality), where the onus for effective action continues to be placed on developers, with an undefined back up enforcement of increased mitigation measures or fines should sufficient modal shift fail to be delivered. The same pattern of devolved aspirational thinking is shown in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan arguments (IDP) section 9.3.

These arguments are developed by CAST (Canterbury Alliance for Sustainable Transport) in their response, which we endorse.

## **Heritage in Canterbury**

Turning to specific heritage policies in the proposed Plan, given the major importance of heritage to Canterbury's identity, and the gradual but cumulative deterioration of the City fabric, we are surprised to see so few specific policies. The new wordings generally re-

provide the minimal controls and objectives contained in the 2017 current Plan, but there are aspects of these that seem to us to have weaker wordings, and certainly fail to deal with current and emerging pressures on the city and its heritage assets.

#### Policy 2.1 City Centre - Item 8 - WHS

For example, we are very concerned to see that this policy only envisages the need to avoid **substantial harm** to the World Heritage Site. This is quite unacceptable as a general position and while it satisfies the letter of NPPF 206 (b) we are quite disturbed to see that CCC as the custodian of a such and important heritage portfolio, should apparently be quite happy to countenance minor harm to WHS assets.

206. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:

- a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional;
- b) assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II\* listed buildings, grade I and II\* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional<sup>72</sup>.

We would like to see the Plan pushing for coordinated action between the city and county agencies on highways or street design issues, and for the city to commit to a comprehensive heritage plan that looks at preventative issues, and the impact of new development on listed buildings and conservation areas. Many of these issues were dealt with in a 2022 Purcell Report for CCC - Canterbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP)

This report was largely positive about Canterbury, but did contain critical notes that reminded us strongly of the 2022 Levelling Up Fund bid introduction, written by CCC itself, that said

*Despite its iconic place in the history of England, the reality is that Canterbury is failing to offer a diverse and attractive experience to visitors and lags behind its peers. This is impeding the city's ability to recover fully from the pandemic. . . . Key parts of the public realm and pedestrian environment have deteriorated in quality or are underused which has constrained growth and is damaging public pride in the city.*

CAAMP said

*There has been some loss of historic and architectural features to buildings within the conservation area, this in particular relates to the loss of historic boundary treatments and traditional shop fronts. The loss of these, and any other original or historic building features, can cause incremental harm to the character of the conservation area by diluting its historic interest.*

The CAAMP Report singled out highway design and streetscape as producing poor spaces that do localised harm

*There are therefore opportunities to work with Kent County Council and other partners to make improvements to the public realm, both at a local and a more general level. . . . there often exists inconsistency within individual character areas and even within the same street.*

We would call on CCC to take positive action on this issue, and have in mind for example the recent major difficulties in reconfiguring Longport, a scheme managed by KCC, with initial construction that harmed the setting of the WHS St Augustine's Abbey having to be corrected.

CAAMP also noted the impact that tall buildings are beginning to have on Canterbury,

*The height of buildings will be an important consideration in assessing the acceptability of new development. The majority of the city centre is composed of buildings of between two and six storeys and in the residential suburbs buildings in the conservation area are generally no more than three storeys. Generally, proposed buildings should fit within their context in terms of height. Where buildings are proposed that would be substantially taller than their surroundings or have the potential to affect important views or the dominance of landmark buildings due to their height, proposals will need to demonstrate that they preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, important views, the setting of other heritage assets such as the World Heritage Site and the setting and*

*prominence of landmark buildings.*

CHDF called on CCC to take note of this direction, and are disappointed to see no new policies that refer to context-sensitive approaches, for design codes for height, or design quality generally.

We note that CCC planners are clearly encouraging developers to set a six storey norm for buildings, even when they encroach closely on much lower buildings, as is clearly the case at Riverside.

We remind CCC of the basic guidance in the NPPF

**206 c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness**

because

**195. Heritage assets range from sites and buildings of local historic value to those of the highest significance, such as World Heritage Sites which are internationally recognised to be of Outstanding Universal Value. These assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed**

TIM CARLYLE

Chair, for Canterbury Heritage and Design Forum 3 June 2024

Notes

NPPF

206 c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and

207. Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

LUF and CAMP 2022 comments

*LUF*

8.2.2 part C

#### LOSS OF HISTORIC FEATURES

There has been some loss of historic and architectural features to buildings within the conservation area, this in particular relates to the loss of historic boundary treatments and traditional shop fronts. The loss of these, and any other original or historic building features, can cause incremental harm to the character of the conservation area by diluting its historic interest.

There are therefore opportunities to work with Kent County Council and other partners to make improvements to the public realm, both at a local and a more general level. Owing to the differing characteristics in different parts of the conservation area, some

variation is desirable, for example what might be appropriate within the historic centre might not be appropriate in the suburbs. However, there often exists inconsistency within individual character areas and even within the same street. An approach where there is a familial relationship to the public realm across the whole city, whilst allowing different areas to have their own identity and respond to local characteristic, would be beneficial.



#### 8.2.4 part c

##### *re recommendations*

*06 That views of city-wide and local importance both from within and from the setting of the conservation area, in particular those of Bell Harry Tower, are preserved.*

#### 9.4.2

The height of buildings will be an important consideration in assessing the acceptability of new development. The majority of the city centre is composed of buildings of between two and six storeys and in the residential suburbs buildings in the conservation area are generally no more than three storeys. Generally, proposed buildings should fit within their context in terms of height. Where buildings are proposed that would be substantially taller than their surroundings or have the potential to affect important views or the dominance of landmark buildings due to their height, proposals will need to demonstrate that they preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, important views, the setting of other heritage assets such as the World Heritage Site and the setting and prominence of landmark buildings.

#### **Heritage Guidance (2021 to 2022)**

*Comment - This would be invaluable, but we are not aware of any such publications to date.*

**We call on CCC to develop a meaningful heights policy limiting new building heights, making it a special case needing particular justification for new buildings within or near the walls etc to be five or more storeys.**

Landscape Character ` Assmt LCA

Area H4 Merton Park Hollow Lane

1795 dw

E3

Sensitivity in LCA

No, not a character area wide sensitivity (gap is a very small part of area)

Guideline

Conserve the rural character of the landscape ensuring that it continues to play a role in the separation of Blean and Tyler Hill with Rough Common and the University of Kent to the south.

H4

Guidelines

Conserve the rural character of the landscape ensuring that it continues to play a role in providing a rural separation between Canterbury and the outlying villages of Bridge, Patricbourne and Lower Hardres

Character

The dominant agricultural character extending to the urban edge of Canterbury and role of the area in providing a rural landscape between the city and outlying settlements of Patricbourne, Bridge and Lower Hardres.

SLAA - 151 etc. Appendix B (2022)

Column - Reason for allocation/rejection

SLAA151, SLAA259 and SLAA128 are identified as suitable and available in the SLAA and are allocated as part of a strategic development area in South-West Canterbury. While the SA has identified significant and minor negative impacts across all three sites, it is determined when reviewed alongside the SLAA on the balance of impacts and considering possible mitigation and design, that the majority of these impacts can be addressed.

## 2017 Plan policy HE3 extract

Through the careful siting and design of buildings and appropriate landscaping, developers should demonstrate how their proposals will respect or enhance the landscape and topographical features which contribute to the Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage Site.

Views into, out of and across the World Heritage Site are identified in the Canterbury Conservation Area Appraisal. Development proposals will be assessed against their impact on identified views.