



**CANTERBURY DISTRICT
DRAFT LOCAL PLAN TO 2040
REPRESENTATIONS BY
FORDWICH TOWN COUNCIL
03 JUNE 2024**



CANTERBURY DISCTRICT DRAFT LOCAL PLAN TO 2040: REPRESENTATIONS BY FORDWICH TOWN COUNCIL, 03 JUNE 202

1. **Introduction**

These representations on behalf of Fordwich Town Council (“FTC”) are made in response to the publication of the Draft Canterbury District Local Plan 2040 on 12 March 2024 (the “Draft Local Plan”).

2. **Executive summary**

The council is reminded of the extensive response to the previous draft of the Local Plan prepared on behalf of FTC and Residents in February 2024. FTC notes that several of the issues identified in its response – in particular the removal of the Eastern Movement Corridor (the “Bypass”) - have been taken into account, and welcomes those amendments.

We are however disappointed at the inclusion of Policy C20, the content of some of the supporting papers – in particular and the obvious failure to address key issues affecting Fordwich, not least given the strategic issues highlighted in the draft Local Plan and in the [Sustainability Appraisal Report - Draft Canterbury District Local Plan 2040](#) prepared under Regulation 19(5) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

3. **Legal background**

Paragraph 35 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (“NPPF”) states that plans are ‘sound’ if they are:

- Positively prepared - providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities;
- Justified - an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
- Effective - deliverable over the plan period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters; and
- Consistent with national policy - enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the NPPF and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant.

4. **Policy C20: Land to the south of Sturry Road**

Considering the National Strategy for Nutrient Mitigation, FTC understands this proposal has been in existence for several years. The draft Local Plan contains scant detail. FTC expects there is more information and demands that CCC shares this for comment. While FTC supports policies that offset the impact of development on the nitrogen and phosphate levels at Stodmarsh, the location of the proposed strategic wetland is inappropriate.

The main reason for FTC's opposition is that the planned area removes 2/3rds of the **Water Meadows**. The Water Meadows are the centuries old Flood Plain protecting Fordwich.

Southern Water's planning application PA/2023/0393 with Ashford Borough Council, includes helpful evidence to indicate the increasing likelihood of flooding over the next decades as a result of climate change.

In 2014, fluvial flooding of the Great Stour overwhelmed significant areas of Fordwich, despite the existing flood defence.



In the winter of 2023/24, there were more days of flooding of the Water Meadows than residents can remember, most of it within the designated area. The picture above demonstrated this very well: it shows the George & Dragon carpark in the bottom right of the picture and the C20 land to the west of it completely overwhelmed.

Since Central Government accepts that there will be a higher probability of higher rainfall in the winters over the next decades, it is unacceptable to remove the flood defence for a community. It is not acceptable to risk an existing and old town in favour of "residential development in the catchment ahead of the recovery of this important habitat site." No further such development is appropriate.

Further, given Southern Water's record of **sewage spills**, there is deemed a likelihood that this will still occur, thus overwhelming the proposed strategic wetland, contaminating not only the river, but land in the vicinity, including the town of Fordwich.

Policy C20 states that the strategic wetland is subject to the “the **walking and cycling** route being accommodated or relocated”. Relocation is not a feasible option. The route demarcates the ancient Augustine Way between Fordwich and Canterbury and for the heritage reason itself should be preserved. Furthermore, walking and cycling amenity should be improved rather than relocated in furtherance of the council’s strategy to encourage active journeys (which FRC supports). Many Fordwich residents use the footpath on a daily basis and the extensive footpaths surrounding the town is one of the key attractions of living in Fordwich.

Finally the Water Meadows provide ancient view across Fordwich which would be obscured by the proposed strategic wetland.

In summary, FTC supports for nutrient neutrality schemes to protect the Stodmarsh National Nature Reserve but not at the cost of the flood defence of Fordwich. FTC looks forward to engaging in constructive discussion with the council on this topic with a view to amending or deleting policy C20.

It is not clear that the council has considered alternatives to Policy C20 as it is bound to do under . Regulation 12(2)(b) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

5. **Paragraph 1.35: Key evidence**

Paragraph 1.35 says” 1.35 This plan has been informed by key evidence such as the district’s Housing Needs Assessment (2021, 2024), the [Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showperson Needs Assessment \(2024\)](#), the Economic Development and Tourism Study (2020, 2022, 2024) and the Retail and Leisure Study (2020, 2022) which provide an objective analysis of the district’s development needs.”

It appears that the council adopts “evidence” , without considering its own strategic objectives. Policy SS3 - Development Strategy for the district states that “between 2020/21 and 2040/41 provision is made through the granting of planning permission and the allocation of sites for ...”(b) 54 pitches for gypsy and traveller accommodation;”. This is then supplemented by Policy DS5 – specialist housing provision, which contains the following criteria for additional gypsy pitches – “In considering applications for seasonal, temporary or permanent use of land by to use of land by Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, planning permission will be permitted if the following criteria are met:

- The site is within a reasonable distance of local services and facilities, including shops, public transport, schools, medical and social services, and would not place undue pressure on these services;
- The site is capable of being provided with on-site services such as water supply, sewage disposal and power supply;
- Where the site is within the built up area or on the outskirts of a settlement, it should be of a scale which respects, and does not dominate, the settled community;
- The use of the site should not have an adverse impact on residential amenity or existing buildings or uses, either by the design, close proximity, activities or operations on the site which would be detrimental to the surrounding area;

- Access to the site should not be detrimental to highway safety for vehicles and pedestrians;
- Proposals for day rooms should be of a size commensurate with their function as outbuildings serving caravans; and
- Proposals should incorporate a landscape strategy and an environmental management plan where appropriate.”

These factors are quoted from the NPPF.

It is therefore extremely surprising that the document the council has had regard to, the [Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showperson Needs Assessment \(2024\)](#), suggest the siting of more caravans at Romany Green Acres.

Together the Romany Green Acres and Moate Farm sites are large compared to Fordwich with its c.380 inhabitants; and dominate certain areas on the outskirts of Fordwich, especially Well Lane. Well Lane is effectively a polluted, poorly maintained “no-go” area for Fordwich residents. They pose an environmental hazard and risk to the Stodmarsh RAMSAR. Access is poor, and in breach of highways requirements. FTC calls on the council to clarify that it has not adopted the “evidence” in the referenced paper and will oppose (i) further development at Romany Green Acres and (ii) the legalisation of the illegal pitches at Moate Farm, on the basis that they cannot meet the NPPF criteria set out in Policy DS5. A further reason for opposing any further gypsy sites is that Fordwich has not been identified for any further development.

Policy DS5 – specialist housing provision also contains paragraph on the loss of gypsy accommodation as follows: “The loss of existing gypsy and traveller accommodation will be supported where:

- It is demonstrated that the site no longer caters for current or future needs; or
- Acceptable replacement accommodation is provided, prior to the loss of the existing site.”

These criteria are inappropriate, when considering existing illegal development such as that at Moate Farm and we call on the council to clarify that this part of the policy applies only to sites which currently have appropriate planning permission

FTC calls on the council to identify a council owned, sustainable, site in the district on which gypsies can be accommodated and which meets the criteria set out above rather than incrementally endangering existing local settlements, the environment, the Stodmarsh RAMSAR, and highways safety.

6. Omissions

The draft Local Plan does not mention Fordwich in particular. Fordwich has a number of unique features which should, as a matter of strategy, be protected. These include:

- **Heritage assets.** The Local Plan addresses as strategy the preservation of Canterbury as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Fordwich has important heritage assets, including an important archaeological site.

The Pleistocene sands and gravels capping the high ground south of Fordwich (sometimes known as the 'Fordwich Plateau') contain some of the most important Palaeolithic archaeology in Britain. The Palaeolithic artefacts that have been recovered from these deposits include the 'Fordwich Handaxes', which likely represent the earliest evidence for the Acheulean stone tool industry in Britain and probably the earliest and most northern location for this industry.

The entire town of Fordwich is a Conservation Area, an area that the Council has recognised as being of special architectural and historical interest. The original size of the Fordwich Conservation Area was extended in 1993 expressly to recognise the wider character of Fordwich and the importance of the land included within the extended area in preserving the historic character of Fordwich. There are 23 listed heritage assets in Fordwich, including the Grade 1 listed Church of St Mary and Two Grade 2* listed buildings.

- **Environment/Ecology.** Fordwich is set in Countryside which functions as an important green infrastructure supporting species such as great crested newts, turtle doves (and in the river) beavers and Fordwich trout. It is surrounded by ancient woodland also representing a high quality, high value habitat.

To ensure the preservation of these important assets, FTC calls on the council to address them in the local plan and to adopt as strategy the protection of these assets.

Further, in support of these important heritage, archaeological and environmental assets, FTC calls on the council to set out a plan for dealing with the excessive traffic movements through Fordwich (FTC has obtained professional analysis showing more than 6,000 traffic movements through the town a day). FTC supports the council's objective of a bus-led transport strategy as set out at Policy SS3 - Development Strategy for the district, but calls on the council to adopt a bolder vision.

- in Fordwich, encourage active transport by designating the town a low traffic neighbourhood; and
- in the district more generally, considering an extensive mass public transport such as trams or guided buses connected to the national rail network.

FORDWICH TOWN COUNCIL

03 JUNE 2024