

Comprehensive Review of the Development Proposal for Site C12

1. Impact on Blean Primary School

The proposed development includes plans for two access points on Whitstable Road, approximately 400 meters apart. One of these access points requires the demolition and reconstruction of Blean Primary School elsewhere on the site.

Educational Disruption: Blean Primary School is the only Outstanding-rated primary school in this part of Kent. The current school infrastructure is functioning well, and recent initiatives have included the development of a forest school. Replacing this school with a much larger facility could undermine its strengths and unique character. Furthermore, continuous noise and air pollution during the extended construction period would significantly disrupt the students' learning environment and overall educational experience.

2. Traffic and Congestion

The SLAA's Sustainability Assessment identifies Site C12 as a "car-dependent development." This assessment remains valid despite the council's new bus policy initiatives. The primary access points for traffic are on Whitstable Road, near the Rough Common roundabout. Rough Common Road will need extensive "highways improvements," including two new slip roads on the A2 at Harbledown.

Traffic Flow and Congestion: Rough Common is expected to become a major route for traffic moving in and out of Canterbury. Increased traffic is anticipated along Whitstable Road towards St Dunstan's roundabout and down St Stephen's Hill, leading to heightened congestion and poorer air quality. The presence of on-street parking, which cannot be restricted due to the lack of off-street parking options for many homes, will make congestion much worse, especially during peak hours.

Surrounding Roads: The roads surrounding the development are narrow, winding, and hilly, with a history of speeding and accidents. Although the development plan claims to minimize traffic flow onto Tyler Hill Road, this is unlikely. Increased local traffic, particularly from motorists using Tyler Hill Road as a shortcut between major roads from Whitstable and Herne Bay, will likely lead to heavier traffic and more accidents on this route.

Walking and Cyclist Safety: Access from Tyler Hill to major cycling and walking routes, like the Crab and Winkle Way, is already hazardous. The situation is expected to worsen with more local traffic. Additionally, pinch points along Tyler Hill Road and Calais Hill, where the road is too narrow for two cars to pass, present further safety concerns and will also contribute to peak-time congestion.

3. Character and Heritage

The Council's 2021 Landscape Character Assessment emphasizes the "strong rural character" of the area, featuring woodlands, orchards, and farmland, and underscores the necessity of preserving this landscape.

Landscape and Environmental Impact: The southern portion of Site C12 lies within Canterbury's Area of High Landscape Value, located between two Sites of Special Scientific Interest: RSPB Blean and West Blean Reserve. The C12 development proposals do not align with the 2021 Land Character Assessment, which the Local Plan requires. The development would merge the villages of Tyler Hill and Blean into a suburban extension of Canterbury, thereby erasing the rural character of these villages and the surrounding area.

Heritage Concerns: The proposed development threatens many "heritage assets," including the Church of St Cosmus and St Damian, the remains of a Roman Villa, and Mediaeval Tile Kilns (both scheduled monuments), as well as multiple Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas. The council's Environmental Strategy in the Local Plan highlights the sensitivity of heritage assets to change and commits to their protection and enhancement. However, the C12 proposal fails to demonstrate that these conservation areas can be preserved. The Church of St Cosmus and St Damian, historically a part of Blean village, would lose its cultural significance, becoming an indistinct feature within a suburban extension of Canterbury.

4. Nature and Biodiversity

The development site is centrally located within the Blean Woods area, surrounded by parts of the National Nature Reserve. This region is home to many rare and endangered species inhabiting fields, ponds, hedgerows, and the Sarre Penn valley.

Biodiversity and Ecosystem Disruption: Council policies, including SS1.10, aim to enhance the connectivity of the Blean Woodland Complex. However, this development would disrupt these efforts, making connectivity impossible. Over the past decade, the area has seen a natural increase in biodiversity, contrary to national trends. The thriving population of buzzards indicates a robust ecosystem supporting these large birds of prey. Other significant wildlife, such as great crested newts, are frequently observed in the area's waterways and ponds. The development contradicts policy SS1.10 and threatens to destroy a mature, vibrant ecosystem.

Loss of Agricultural Land: The proposed development would also result in the loss of extensive areas of high-quality agricultural land, classified as Grade 2 and Grade 3. The Local Plan includes a policy to protect such land outside urban and settlement boundaries. Given the growing importance of food security and the increasing awareness of soil degradation, building over some of the best agricultural land in the area is a concerning decision.