

CABINET
05 November 2015 at 7.00 pm

At the above stated meeting the attached documents were tabled for the following items:

5. **Property Disposals Update**
8. **Otford Village Design Statement**

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TABLED

For sale as a whole or in four Lots. An attractive block of amenity/agricultural land in the Kent Downs AONB. A 213.1 acre (86.2 hectare) farm comprising arable and pasture land and a range of farm buildings at Timberden Farm. Two lots are on Shacklands Road and lie to the west of Shoreham and the other two lots adjoin the village on its western flank.

LOCATION

Timberden Farm offers an excellent opportunity to both agricultural and amenity purchasers to buy a property in an attractive setting. Two parcels lie in an undulating valley and the other two lots are on the escarpment lying to the west of Shoreham. Shoreham is a vibrant village with a shop, 4 public houses, shops and tea room. There is a strong community spirit in Shoreham village which has a primary school and cricket club and there are many country walks some of which pass through the property being sold.

The farm is well located with access to the M25 at J4 within two miles and there are excellent rail links to London via Shoreham, Sevenoaks and Chelsfield. The main town Sevenoaks lies 5 miles to the south and the town has a full range of shops, restaurants and facilities.

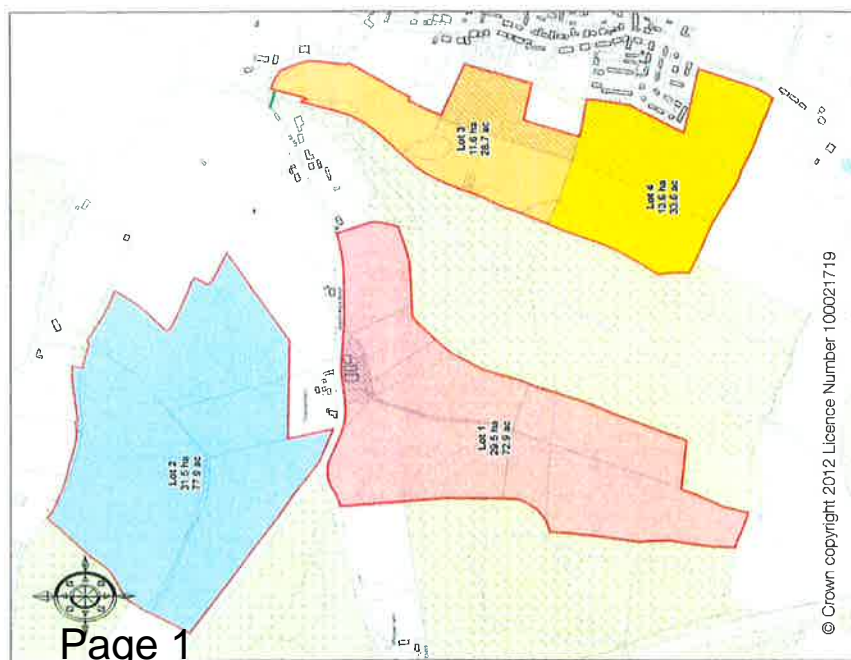
TIMBERDEN FARM

A predominantly livestock farm which was purchased by Sevenoaks District Council in 1990 and has since been let under a series of agricultural tenancy agreements.

The Council have now decided to dispose of its interest.

The land has the benefit of being registered with the Rural Payments Agency for single farm payments and the entitlements are available by separate negotiation.

It should be noted that there are footpaths crossing the land and the parts of the land hatched on the individual lot plans are the subject of an overage/development covenant.



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Addressing Cabinet: 5.11.15

Shoreham Parish Council

- **Shoreham Parish Council** understands the reasoning behind the proposed sale of the land by SDC.
- **Both councils** function within the **Greenbelt** and **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**. This is a huge privilege but with privilege comes **RESPONSIBILITY**.
- Loss of biodiversity is a worldwide threat we need to take seriously. **Chalk grassland** is one of Western Europe's most intricately diverse plant communities, supporting a whole range of wildlife from butterflies and wildflowers including many **rare orchids**, to insects, mammals and birds – many of these species are **specialists**, unable to live anywhere else. Over 50% of such areas lie with the UK and of that 70% exists in the Downs. Where there has been good land management, areas that were in decline are being re-generated.
- **This is a really important area.** Recognition of that was given in the £2 million National Lottery Fund grant to the **Darent Valley Landscape Partnership** for a scheme to be worked through involving several conservation organisations.
- **Land asset managers** have divided the area to be sold in lots for maximum income, apparently without regard for the complex process of **good land management**.
- The future of **Lots 3 and 4** will have most **impact** on Shoreham Village and the valley. **It is essential** that any purchaser is experienced in managing chalk grassland in an AONB and is prepared to work with relevant agencies. The erection of temporary buildings and/or sub-dividing the area into smaller paddocks has the potential to **despoil both landscape and ecology**.
- **Separating** lots 1 and 2 might in fact be a **premature** decision. Any purchaser of Lot 1 wishing to develop an Equestrian Centre or small holding for example, could be anxious to acquire the adjoining land for grazing and hay making. Whilst sheep are the optimum species choice for grazing, with special care horses can be used to conserve grasslands if managed appropriately.

- **Please remember the original reason** for the purchase of this land by SDC: **to ensure its protection.**
- **Shoreham Parish Council** urges the Cabinet to make a responsible decision that ensures:

the value of the land to us all takes precedence: it is owned and managed by those who will conserve it now and for future generations.

Councillor Lesley Spence

Responses to the requirements of the Planning and Advisory Committee. (Below)

The Planning and Advisory Committee have recommended to Cabinet that the VDS be accepted, subject to the following:

- a change in the tone of the Forward and the remainder of the document so that it reads as an adopted document and therefore it is a material consideration rather than saying for example that it may be considered as material guidance.
- Change the wording in Paragraph 1.1 to meet the current Policy test which is that the natural beauty of the AONB should be conserved and enhanced.
- That the reference to 'Buffer Zone' is removed from paragraph 1.4.
- That the second paragraph of section 3.5 is removed.

THE OTFORD VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT 2 SELECTED SECTIONS

Words shown scored through are the original copy from VDS2

Words shown in red are the recommended replacement copy approved by the Otford community.

FOREWORD

The first Otford Village Design Statement, (VDS) prepared in 2007, was accepted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by Sevenoaks District Council in 2008. Since then, much has undergone change in our parish. It was the declared intention of those who contributed to the first VDS that a revised version be updated as circumstances in planning changed.

This new document (VDS2) has subsequently been approved by Sevenoaks District Council as a further Supplementary Planning Document, superseding the earlier VDS document of 2007. The revised edition (VDS 2) seeks to provide a clear expression of the community's wishes in 2015. It has taken several years in its compilation but we believe it encompasses the importance of good design within all the elements which make up a village, not just its houses. It is our hope that in the coming years VDS2 will continue to provide architects, developers and district planners with helpful information when considering applications for any buildings or extensions in Otford.

The status of this document ensures that it ~~may be~~ should be considered as material guidance by planners within Sevenoaks District Council, when considering planning applications within Otford parish in the future. It will join the Otford Parish Plan as well as the

Agenda Item 8

Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan as providing material guidance on all planning matters within the community.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has radically changed much planning regulation. Mr. Greg Clark, the minister responsible, has written: *"it makes clear that all plans and all decisions should respect the special character of each area, and in particular, the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside."* It is with that statement in mind that the Otford VDS 2 has been prepared. This document seeks to point out and emphasise the special character of Otford and its buildings, which any future planning proposals should respect.

There are still many outside pressures put upon a rural village which is in such close proximity to the Sevenoaks urban area. The parish is under threat of concentration and enlargement. Developers are continually on the look-out to purchase properties throughout the village often with the intention of replacing them with atypically larger buildings or cramped, two-for-one developments.

On our borders, large developments like the recently-expanded Sainsbury's superstore dominate our landscape and continual applications for large, new development in this important ~~buffer zone~~ rural area, **protected by the Green Belt**, demonstrate how ~~close~~ **vulnerable** we are to urban creep. To be able to maintain and nurture the integrity of our historic, rural village, we desperately need as much legislation and support on our side as possible. It is for that reason that this new Village Design Statement 2 is as important today as the first edition was, seven years ago.

1: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND OPEN SPACES

1.1 Otford's rural setting

The landscape surrounding Otford plays an integral part in the village. It is the result of many centuries of evolution. The pattern of roads, tracks, field boundaries and hedgerows is firmly rooted in the past. Our community recognise this and have made clear that they are committed to maintaining these patterns of the historic landscape both in the village and outside. Much of Otford village and all the surrounding countryside is fortunate to be located within an area designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). As such **the community has a responsibility to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. Meanwhile** it is afforded protection against **any** development which ~~fails to protect or enhance~~ **acts against these intentions.** (See Appendix map 3)

1.2 Preserving the countryside to the North of the village

The North Downs escarpment, below which Otford is sited, has changed little since the last Ice Age. Its high position forms an iconic backdrop to the whole village. Any proposals to introduce new housing or to extend homes located on the periphery of this important landscape feature could potentially have an effect upon the whole community. Thus visible prominence should be taken into account in consideration of any proposals or applications which can affect an unspoilt view of the Downs. The SDC Core strategy states: *"The distinctive features that contribute to the special character of its landscape ...will be*

protected and enhanced where possible...The character of the Kent Downs... and their settings, will be conserved and enhanced...to ensure that all development conserves and enhances the local landscape character.” (Policy LO8) This is a view shared by Otford residents. Protecting the biodiversity of the whole downland area is also reflected in the designation of the Otford to Shoreham Downs as an area of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Otford community have indicated a clear commitment to its protection.

1.3 Green areas within the village

Otford village contains a number of green areas adjacent to homes. These include the central *Green* and *Palace Field* as well the *Recreation Ground* and *Allotments*, all located close to the village centre. Less evident are other green areas like the *Chalk Pits*, beyond the station, *Telston Park* and *Hale Lane Recreation Ground*, to the west of Otford, the *Community Woodland* beside Sevenoaks Road and *Oxenhill Woods* to the south of Tudor Drive. Each of these areas is of great importance to the community and is continually maintained and in continual use.

1.4 Preserving the countryside to the South of the village

Most of the countryside surrounding Otford is contained within the Metropolitan Green Belt (*see appendix*). It therefore enjoys national protection from creeping development.

The fields, woods and water meadows located to the south of Otford, stretching to the M26 and the nearby parish boundary, are valued by all as a green breathing space establishing the village as an independent entity separated from the northern urban area of Sevenoaks. The major role of this area is to absorb and hold heavy rainfall and reduce the risk of serious flooding by the river Darent. They form an important part of our green infrastructure.

Land lying to the north of the Vestry Estate has been worked farmland for over a century. The introduction of the M26 motorway, however, left a narrow unproductive strip running along the rising ground of Ladds Hill beside the Old Otford Road. This continues to be designated ‘Green Belt’ land. Residents have indicated its importance to the village as it forms an important ~~buffer zone~~ **but vulnerable strip of land** between the green fields and the light-industrial buildings of the Vestry Estate. ~~Its role~~ **Given its prominent siting on a rising area of land overlooking the water meadows**, it is perceived as protecting our village from creeping development from the Sevenoaks urban area.

Design Principles

- 1a** The community wish to retain the existing pattern of roads, footpaths and field boundaries. (CS SP11/ LO.8 and ENV 13)
- 1b** All areas within the current designated Metropolitan Green Belt should ideally be kept free of inappropriate new development. However we accept that in the light of Supplementary Local planning policy, applications may be considered under certain circumstances. (ADMP GB1-GB9; CS SP10; RESPD 3.2, GBSPD)
- 1c** Proposals for new homes or extensions sited on or near the periphery of the North Downs, should not compromise the uninterrupted views of this area of outstanding natural beauty. (CS LO8:)
- 1d** Every effort should be taken to protect the important agricultural land to the south of Otford. The community has indicated that particular care is required to protect ~~the~~

- this vulnerable** Green Belt ~~'buffer zone'~~ **area** ~~lying~~ **located** beside the Vestry Estate from intrusive development. (CS LO8; RESPD 3.2)
- 1e** The community supports the preservation of all remaining areas of permanent pasture, cultivated land and woodland within and adjoining the village envelope and which contribute to the sense of open space within the village.
- 1f** The community fully supports all opportunities to extend or promote safe cycle routes within the parish (CS SP2)
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3.5 The future of the Archbishop's Palace Tower and Palace Field

The remains of the Archbishops Palace' (c. 1518) are an iconic Otford landmark and amongst the oldest in the Sevenoaks region. They form an important part of Otford's identity. There has been a recent proposal that ownership and responsibility for the whole site be transferred from Sevenoaks District Council, to the Otford community. This proposal has been received with a great deal of local support.

The District Council is currently undertaking essential structural works on the tower which were identified by their condition survey. ~~Following this first stage, if the financial means can be found to restore the Tower to an acceptable state as a heritage asset which will permit it to be visited by the public, then~~ There is every hope that, **at some future date**, the site ~~can~~ **will** form part of an active community asset, benefitting **both the community and** the district. How the Tower may be enhanced and made of greater benefit to the village and district, will be a decision made with the support of English Heritage, the conservation architect and the outcome of much local discussion. (NPPF 6:55)
