

Babergh District Council

**Hartest
Neighbourhood Plan
2024 – 2037**

Independent Examiner's Report

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Contents

Summary	3	
1.0	Introduction	4
2.0	The role of the independent examiner and the examination process	4
3.0	Neighbourhood plan preparation	7
4.0	Compliance with matters other than the basic conditions	8
5.0	The basic conditions	9
	<i>National policy and advice</i>	9
	<i>Sustainable development</i>	10
	<i>The development plan</i>	11
	<i>Retained European Union (EU) obligations</i>	12
	<i>European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)</i>	14
6.0	Detailed comments on the Plan and its policies	14
1.	<i>Introduction</i>	14
2.	<i>Harest Past and Present</i>	14
3.	<i>Planning Policy Context</i>	14
4.	<i>Vision and Objectives</i>	14
5.	<i>Harest Spatial Strategy (Policy HAR 1)</i>	15
6.	<i>Housing (Policies HAR 2, HAR 3, HAR 4, HAR 5 and HAR 6)</i>	17
7.	<i>Natural Environment (Policies HAR 7, HAR 8, HAR 9 and HAR 10)</i>	20
8.	<i>Historic Environment and Design (Policies HAR 11, HAR 12, HAR 13 and HAR 14)</i>	25
9.	<i>Local Economy (Policy HAR 15)</i>	28
10.	<i>Facilities and Services (Policy HAR 16)</i>	29
11.	<i>Communication</i>	30
	<i>Policies Map</i>	30
	<i>Appendices</i>	30
	<i>Glossary</i>	31
7.0	Conclusions and recommendations	31
	Appendix 1 List of key documents	32

Summary

I have been appointed by Babergh District Council to carry out the independent examination of the Harest Neighbourhood Plan.

The Plan is very well presented. It contains 16 policies covering a wide variety of topics including landscape, non-designated heritage assets and parking standards. The Plan has been careful not to duplicate policies at District level, but rather seeks to add a layer of local detail.

It has been necessary to recommend some modifications, many of which are of a fairly minor nature, to ensure the Plan is clear and precise and provides a practical framework for decision-making as required by national policy and guidance.

Subject to those modifications, I have concluded that the Plan does meet the basic conditions and all the other requirements I am obliged to examine. I am therefore pleased to recommend to Babergh District Council that the Harest Neighbourhood Development Plan can go forward to a referendum.

In considering whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the Neighbourhood Plan area I see no reason to alter or extend this area for the purpose of holding a referendum.

Ann Skippers MRTPI
Ann Skippers Planning
January 2026



1.0 Introduction

This is the report of the independent examiner into the Hartest Neighbourhood Development Plan (the Plan).

The Localism Act 2011 provides a welcome opportunity for communities to shape the future of the places where they live and work and to deliver the sustainable development they need. One way of achieving this is through the production of a neighbourhood plan.

I have been appointed by Babergh District Council (BDC) with the agreement of the Parish Council to undertake this independent examination.

I am independent of the qualifying body and the local authority. I have no interest in any land that may be affected by the Plan. I am a chartered town planner with over thirty years experience in planning and have worked in the public, private and academic sectors and am an experienced examiner of neighbourhood plans. I therefore have the appropriate qualifications and experience to carry out this independent examination.

2.0 The role of the independent examiner and the examination process

Role of the Examiner

The examiner must assess whether a neighbourhood plan meets the basic conditions and other matters set out in paragraph 8 of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

The basic conditions¹ are:

- Having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State, it is appropriate to make the neighbourhood plan
- The making of the neighbourhood plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development
- The making of the neighbourhood plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area
- The making of the neighbourhood plan does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, retained European Union (EU) obligations²
- Prescribed conditions are met in relation to the neighbourhood plan and prescribed matters have been complied with in connection with the proposal for the neighbourhood plan.

¹ Set out in paragraph 8 (2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and paragraph 11(2) of Schedule A2 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended)

² “EU obligation” was substituted for “retained EU obligation” by the Environmental Assessments and Miscellaneous Planning (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018/1232 which came into force on 31 December 2020

Regulations 32 and 33 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) set out two additional basic conditions to those set out in primary legislation and referred to in the paragraph above. Only one is applicable to neighbourhood plans and was brought into effect on 28 December 2018.³ It states that:

- The making of the neighbourhood development plan does not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

The examiner is also required to check⁴ whether the neighbourhood plan:

- Has been prepared and submitted for examination by a qualifying body
- Has been prepared for an area that has been properly designated for such plan preparation
- Meets the requirements to i) specify the period to which it has effect; ii) not include provision about excluded development; and iii) not relate to more than one neighbourhood area and that
- Its policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood area.

I must also consider whether the draft neighbourhood plan is compatible with Convention rights.⁵

The examiner must then make one of the following recommendations:

- The neighbourhood plan can proceed to a referendum on the basis it meets all the necessary legal requirements
- The neighbourhood plan can proceed to a referendum subject to modifications or
- The neighbourhood plan should not proceed to a referendum on the basis it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.

If the plan can proceed to a referendum with or without modifications, the examiner must also consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the neighbourhood plan area to which it relates.

If the plan goes forward to referendum and more than 50% of those voting vote in favour of the plan then it is made by the relevant local authority, in this case BDC. The plan then becomes part of the 'development plan' for the area and a statutory consideration in guiding future development and in the determination of planning applications within the plan area.

³ Conservation of Habitats and Species and Planning (Various Amendments) (England and Wales) Regulations 2018/1307

⁴ Set out in sections 38A and 38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 as amended by the Localism Act and paragraph 11(2) of Schedule A2 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended)

⁵ The combined effect of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) Schedule 4B para 8(6) and para 10 (3)(b) and the Human Rights Act 1998

Examination Process

It is useful to bear in mind that the examiner's role is limited to testing whether or not the submitted neighbourhood plan meets the basic conditions and other matters set out in paragraph 8 of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and paragraph 11 of Schedule A2 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended).⁶

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) confirms that the examiner is not testing the soundness of a neighbourhood plan or examining other material considerations.⁷

The fact that a modification would be of benefit is not a sufficient ground in itself to recommend it. So, for example, the fact that a policy could be added to or strengthened does not justify a modification unless this is necessary for the reasons given above.

In addition, PPG is clear that neighbourhood plans are not obliged to include policies on all types of development.⁸

Often representations suggest amendments to policies or additional policies. As explained above, where I find that policies do meet the basic conditions, it is not necessary for me to consider if further amendments or additions are required and plans do not have to contain site allocations or address housing supply.

PPG⁹ explains that it is expected that the examination will not include a public hearing. Rather the examiner should reach a view by considering written representations. Where an examiner considers it necessary to ensure adequate examination of an issue or to ensure a person has a fair chance to put a case, then a hearing must be held.¹⁰

After consideration of all the documentation and the representations made, I decided that it was not necessary to hold a hearing.

In 2018, the Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral Service (NPIERS) published guidance to service users and examiners. Amongst other matters, the guidance indicates that the qualifying body will normally be given an opportunity to comment upon any representations made by other parties at the Regulation 16 consultation stage should they wish to do so. There is no obligation for a qualifying body to make any comments; it is only if they wish to do so. The Parish Council made comments on the Regulation 16 stage representations and I have taken these into account.

⁶ Paragraph 11(3) of Schedule A2 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and PPG para 055 ref id 41-055-20180222,

⁷ PPG para 055 ref id 41-055-20180222

⁸ Ibid para 040 ref id 41-040-20160211

⁹ Ibid para 056 ref id 41-056-20180222

¹⁰ Ibid

I am grateful to everyone for ensuring that the examination has run so smoothly and in particular Paul Bryant at BDC.

I made an unaccompanied site visit to familiarise myself with the Plan area on 21 November 2025.

Modifications and how to read this report

Where modifications are recommended they appear in a bullet point list of **bold text**. Where I have suggested specific changes to the wording of the policies or new wording these appear in ***bold italics*** in the bullet point list of recommendations. Modifications will always appear in a bullet point list.

As a result of some modifications consequential amendments may be required. These can include changing policy numbering, section headings, amending the contents page, renumbering paragraphs or pages, ensuring that supporting appendices and other documents align with the final version of the Plan and so on.

I regard these issues as primarily matters of final presentation and do not specifically refer to all such modifications, but have an expectation that a common sense approach will be taken and any such necessary editing will be carried out and the Plan's presentation made consistent.

3.0 Neighbourhood plan preparation

A Consultation Statement has been submitted.

Work began in earnest on the Plan when the Plan area was designated in 2014. A Household questionnaire, Housing Needs Survey, some public meetings, village walks, stands at the Harest Fete all took place from 2014 – 2016.

A first period of pre-submission (Regulation 14) period of consultation was undertaken between 3 March – 17 April 2017 with the end date subsequently extended to 20 May 2017.

A second pre-submission (Regulation 14) period of consultation was held between 21 March – 3 May 2018. This second period was held as a result of comments received during the earlier consultation and due to the nature of the changes made.

A third pre-submission (Regulation 14) period of consultation was held between 18 January – 15 March 2021. This period was held as a result of changes to the District level planning policy context, changes to policies and the addition of new policies.

A fourth pre-submission (Regulation 14) period of consultation was undertaken between 5 October – 18 November 2024. This fourth period was held as the Plan would

have become out of date given the District level context and significant changes to the draft Plan which included the removal of a new settlement boundary at Cross Green and a number of other changes to the policies. A helpful table in the Consultation Statement¹¹ sets out those changes.

The pre-submission stage was publicised by a leaflet distributed to every household and business in the Parish. The period of consultation was launched to coincide with the farmers market held at the Institute. Both hard copies and online copies were made available.

I consider that the consultation and engagement carried out is sufficient.

Submission (Regulation 16) consultation was carried out between 26 August – 10 October 2025.

The Regulation 16 stage resulted in 14 representations. I have considered all of the representations and taken them into account in preparing my report.

4.0 Compliance with matters other than the basic conditions

Qualifying body

Hartest Parish Council is the qualifying body able to lead preparation of a neighbourhood plan. This requirement is satisfactorily met.

Plan area

The Plan area is coterminous with the administrative boundary for the Parish. BDC approved the designation of the area on 5 June 2014. The Plan relates to this area and does not relate to more than one neighbourhood area and therefore complies with these requirements. The Plan area is shown on page 4 of the Plan.

Plan period

The Plan period is 2024 – 2037. This is clearly stated in the Plan itself. The requirement is therefore satisfactorily met.

Excluded development

The Plan does not include policies that relate to any of the categories of excluded development and therefore meets this requirement. This is also helpfully confirmed in the Basic Conditions Statement.

¹¹ Consultation Statement page 7

Development and use of land

Policies in neighbourhood plans must relate to the development and use of land. Sometimes neighbourhood plans contain aspirational policies or projects that signal the community's priorities for the future of their local area, but are not related to the development and use of land. If I consider a policy or proposal to fall within this category, I will recommend it be clearly differentiated. This is because wider community aspirations than those relating to development and use of land can be included in a neighbourhood plan, but actions dealing with non-land use matters should be clearly identifiable.¹²

In this case, Community Actions are found throughout the Plan. They are clearly distinguishable from the planning policies and accompanied by a good explanation of their status.¹³ I therefore consider this approach to be acceptable for this Plan.

5.0 The basic conditions

Regard to national policy and advice

The Government replaced previous versions of the NPPF with a new NPPF which was published in December 2024. This was amended in February 2025 to correct some cross-references to footnotes and to clarify the intent of paragraph 155.

The NPPF is the main document that sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

In particular it explains that the application of the presumption in favour of sustainable development will mean that neighbourhood plans should support the delivery of strategic policies in local plans or spatial development strategies and should shape and direct development that is outside of these strategic policies.¹⁴

Non-strategic policies are more detailed policies for specific areas, neighbourhoods or types of development.¹⁵ They can include allocating sites, the provision of infrastructure and community facilities at a local level, establishing design principles, conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment as well as set out other development management policies.¹⁶

The NPPF also makes it clear that neighbourhood plans give communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area.¹⁷ However, neighbourhood plans should not

¹² PPG para 004 ref id 41-004-20190509

¹³ The Plan, page 7

¹⁴ NPPF para 13

¹⁵ Ibid para 29

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid para 30

promote less development than that set out in strategic policies or undermine those strategic policies.¹⁸

The NPPF states that all policies should be underpinned by relevant and up to date evidence; evidence should be adequate and proportionate, focused tightly on supporting and justifying policies and take into account relevant market signals.¹⁹

Policies should be clearly written and unambiguous so that it is evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals. They should serve a clear purpose and avoid unnecessary duplication of policies that apply to a particular area including those in the NPPF.²⁰

On 6 March 2014, the Government published a suite of planning guidance referred to as Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). This is an online resource available at www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance which is regularly updated. The planning guidance contains a wealth of information relating to neighbourhood planning. I have also had regard to PPG in preparing this report.

PPG indicates that a policy should be clear and unambiguous²¹ to enable a decision maker to apply it consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. The guidance advises that policies should be concise, precise and supported by appropriate evidence, reflecting and responding to both the planning context and the characteristics of the area.²²

PPG states there is no 'tick box' list of evidence required, but proportionate, robust evidence should support the choices made and the approach taken.²³ It continues that the evidence should be drawn upon to explain succinctly the intention and rationale of the policies.²⁴

Whilst this has formed part of my own assessment, the Basic Conditions Statement clearly sets out how the Plan's objectives and policies correspond to the NPPF.

Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development

A qualifying body must demonstrate how the making of a neighbourhood plan would contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

The NPPF confirms that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.²⁵ This means that the planning system has three overarching and interdependent objectives which should be pursued in mutually

¹⁸ NPPF para 30

¹⁹ Ibid para 32

²⁰ Ibid para 16

²¹ PPG para 041 ref id 41-041-20140306

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid para 040 ref id 41-040-20160211

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ NPPF para 7

supportive ways so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives.²⁶

The three overarching objectives are:²⁷

- a) an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
- b) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
- c) an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

The NPPF confirms that planning policies should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but should take local circumstances into account to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.²⁸

Whilst this has formed part of my own assessment, the Basic Conditions Statement sets out how the Plan's policies will help to achieve each of the objectives of sustainable development as outlined in the NPPF.

General conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan

The development plan consists of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Part 1 (JLP) which was adopted by BDC on 21 November 2023 and some saved policies from the Babergh Local Plan Alteration No. 2 (LP) adopted in June 2006 and the Core Strategy (CS) adopted in February 2014. None of the saved policies are relevant to this examination.

The Suffolk Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2020 and other made neighbourhood plans also form part of the development plan, but are not directly relevant to this examination.

Whilst this has formed part of my own assessment, the Basic Conditions Statement sets out the relationship between the strategic policies of the JLP and the Plan policies.

²⁶ NPPF para 8

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid para 9

Retained European Union Obligations

Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment

The provisions of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the 'SEA Regulations') concerning the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment are relevant. The purpose of the SEA Regulations, which transposed into domestic law Directive 2001/42/EC ('SEA Directive'), are to provide a high level of protection of the environment by incorporating environmental considerations into the process of preparing plans and programmes.

The provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the 'Habitats Regulations'), which transposed into domestic law Directive 92/43/EEC (the 'Habitats Directive'), are also of relevance to this examination. They constitute retained EU law under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 and section 5 of the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 were amended by the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019/579 but they were not intended to introduce any change in policy²⁹.

Regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations requires a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) to be undertaken to determine whether a plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. The HRA assessment determines whether the Plan is likely to have significant effects on a European site considering the potential effects both of the Plan itself and in combination with other plans or projects. Where the potential for likely significant effects cannot be excluded, an appropriate assessment of the implications of the Plan for that European Site, in view of the Site's conservation objectives, must be carried out. Case law has established that article 6(3) requires a strict "precautionary approach" and the Habitat Regulations should be interpreted "purposively".

On 28 December 2018, the basic condition prescribed in Regulation 32 and Schedule 2 (Habitats) of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) was substituted by a new basic condition brought into force by Regulation 3(2) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species and Planning (Various Amendments) (England and Wales) Regulations 2018/1307 which provides that the making of the plan does not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

A Screening Determination dated December 2024 has been prepared by BDC. This in turn refers to a SEA Screening Opinion Final Report prepared by Land Use Consultants Ltd dated October 2024 which concluded that the Plan was unlikely to have significant environmental effects.

²⁹ CG Fry & Son Limited V Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government (formerly known as SoS for LU, H&C) & anor [2025] UKSC 35 at para 32

Consultation with the statutory bodies was undertaken. Natural England sent an automated response that did not offer any specific comment on the screening stage. The Environment Agency did not make any specific comments on the SEA screening. Historic England concurred with the conclusions of the SEA Screening Report.

I have treated the Screening Opinion Final Report and the Screening Determination to be the statement of reasons that the PPG advises must be prepared and submitted with the neighbourhood plan proposal and made available to the independent examiner where it is determined that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects.³⁰

Taking account of the characteristics of the Plan, the information put forward and the characteristics of the areas most likely to be affected, I consider that retained EU obligations in respect of SEA have been satisfied.

Turning now to HRA, a Habitats Regulations Screening Determination dated December 2024 has been prepared by BDC. This in turn refers to a HRA Screening Report of October 2024 prepared by Land Use Consultants.

Two European sites lie within 20km of the Plan area. These are the Breckland Special Protection Area (SPA) and Breckland Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

The Screening Report concludes that no likely significant effects are predicted, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.

Natural England was consulted, but only sent an automated response.

The Screening Determination concludes that Appropriate Assessment (AA) is not required.

On 28 December 2018, the basic condition prescribed in Regulation 32 and Schedule 2 (Habitats) of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) was substituted by a new basic condition brought into force by the Conservation of Habitats and Species and Planning (Various Amendments) (England and Wales) Regulations 2018/1307 which provides that the making of the plan does not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

Given the distance from, the nature and characteristics of the European sites and the nature and contents of the Plan, I agree with the conclusion of the Screening Determination and consider that the prescribed basic condition relating to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 is complied with.

³⁰ PPG para 028 ref id 11-028-20150209

European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

The Basic Conditions Statement contains a comprehensive statement in relation to human rights and equalities. Having regard to the Basic Conditions Statement, there is nothing in the Plan that leads me to conclude there is any breach or incompatibility with Convention rights.

6.0 Detailed comments on the Plan and its policies

In this section I consider the Plan and its policies against the basic conditions. Where modifications are recommended they appear in **bold text**. As a reminder, where I suggest specific changes to the wording of the policies or new wording these appear in **bold italics**.

The Plan is presented to a high standard and contains 16 policies. There is a helpful contents page at the start of the Plan.

1. Introduction

This is a very clear, well-written and helpful section that sets out information about the Plan and how it has evolved. There is a clear diagram which shows the different stages of the neighbourhood planning process and an interesting SWOT table.

Some natural updating will be needed as the Plan progresses towards the next stages. The Plan refers to the pre-submission stage in paragraphs 1.5 and 1.6 for example and there is repetition between paragraphs 1.7 and 1.12.

2. Harkest Past and Present

This is an informative section about the history and present attributes of the Parish.

3. Planning Policy context

This section usefully explains the policy context for the Plan.

Some natural updating to paragraph 3.2 on page 11 is needed to reflect the NPPF of December 2024.

4. Vision and Objectives

The vision for the area is:

“The parish of Harkest will:

- continue to be a thriving and inclusive community; and

- retain the unique and special character of the built and natural environment.”

The vision is underpinned by eight objectives across the seven themed areas of spatial strategy; housing; natural environment; historic environment and design; local economy; facilities and services; and communications.

Both the vision and the objectives are clearly articulated and relate to the development and use of land and put sustainable development at the heart of the Plan.

5. Hardest's Spatial Strategy

Policy HAR 1 – Spatial Strategy

It is useful to set out the planning context for this Plan area.

JLP Policy SP01 sets out the housing figures for the District; in Babergh District, the JLP will seek to deliver some 7, 904 net dwellings. The policy indicates that the mix of tenure, size and type of housing development should be informed by needs assessments.

JLP Policy SP03 sets out an expectation that housing will come forward through extant permissions, allocations in neighbourhood plans, windfall development and through allocations in the JLP Part 2. It indicates that settlement boundaries will also be reviewed as part of the work on the JLP Part 2. However, BDC has announced its intention to undertake a full Joint Local Plan review and not a Part 2 Plan in the light of various Government announcements about changes to the planning system. It would be reasonable to expect that the review of settlement boundaries and any site allocations would now form part of the work on a full Joint Local Plan review.

JLP Policy SP03 essentially carries forward settlement boundaries from previous development plan documents. The JLP recognises that the existing settlement boundaries have been in place for some time.

JLP Policy SP09 requires development to support and contribute to the conservation, enhancement and management of the natural and local environment and networks of green infrastructure.

Non-strategic JLP Policy LP01 supports windfall infill housing outside settlements where there is a cluster of at least 10 well-related dwellings subject to various criteria. These include the effects on the character and appearance of the settlement, landscape, residential amenity or any heritage, environmental or community assets; that the proposal would not result in consolidating sporadic or ribbon development or result in loss of gaps between settlements resulting in coalescence; and would usually be for one or two dwellings.

Policy HAR 1 – Spatial Strategy does not alter the settlement boundary defined in the LP 2006 which is reproduced on Map 4 on page 13 of the Plan. The policy sets out how development will be managed within and outside the settlement boundaries.

Policy HAR 1 directs new development to those areas within the settlement boundary. Outside the settlement boundary, development is only permitted where it would be in accordance with national or district or neighbourhood level policies and where there would be no detrimental impact on any heritage or landscape designations and the overall landscape character of the Parish.

I note that JLP Policy SP03 explicitly states that outside the settlement boundaries, development is only permitted where a site is allocated for development, it is in accordance with a made neighbourhood plan, it is in accordance with JLP policies or it is in accordance with the NPPF.

The Plan explains that Hartest village is centred around the Green with later ribbons of development and the remainder of the Parish is characterised by four clusters of development loosely based around farms or former farms. This is supported by a Character Appraisal of July 2025 which identifies and describes each cluster. The Character Appraisal recognises that all four clusters have “subtly different characteristics, defined by their historic and economic functions, their proximity to the village, their layouts, their building types and materials and their boundary treatments”.³¹

The Hartest Conservation Area Appraisal also refers to “a few outlying hamlets such as Cross Green and Hartest Hill...”.³²

The policy refers to “settlement gaps” and a number are identified on Map 5 and the Policies Maps. These are intended to prevent the clusters merging to help retain the individual identity of these areas, but also the historic character of the Parish taken as a whole.

Two representations request an addition to the settlement gap along Smithbrook Lane. However, this has not been identified or assessed in the supporting documentation and furthermore would not be subject to consultation. This is not an addition I need to make a recommendation on bearing in mind my remit. This is not to say this would not be appropriate for consideration at a future date.

Policy HAR 1 also refers to important views which are also covered by Policy HAR 9 and discussed at that point in this report.

Therefore the policy reflects the relevant District strategic policies and will help to achieve sustainable development.

³¹ Character Appraisal page 25

³² Conservation Area Appraisal pages 5, 13

Paragraph 5.10 on page 14 refers to the settlement gaps. BDC has suggested some amended wording to assist with clarity and a modification is made for this reason. In addition Map 5 refers to “Important Gaps” rather than “Settlement Gaps” and there should be consistency in the references. I have amended this to “Settlement Gaps” as this is the terminology used in Policies HAR 1 and HAR 12.

Some natural updating will be needed to the supporting text to reflect the current situation at BDC level, for example paragraph 5.2 on page 13 of the Plan.

Policy HAR 1 meets the basic conditions by having regard to national policy, being in general conformity with the JLP given it supports the strategy within that document and the strategic policies referred to above and will help to achieve sustainable development.

- **Amend paragraph 5.10 on page 14 to read:**

“In preparing the Neighbourhood Plan residents’ have identified that the gaps between clusters of buildings outside the defined Settlement Boundary are features they especially wish to see preserved. These *settlement gaps* are identified on Map 5. The distinct clusters, accentuated by these gaps, are historically significant to the character of the Parish. Accordingly, *the gaps* should be preserved from all but essential development that cannot be located elsewhere.”

- **Change the title of Map 5 on page 15 of the Plan from “Important Gaps” to “Settlement Gaps”**

6. Housing

Policies HAR 2 – Housing Development; HAR 3 – Housing Mix; HAR 4 - Replacement Dwellings; HAR 5 - Residential Parking Standards and HAR 6 - Affordable Housing on Rural Exception Sites

The NPPF states that to help support the Government’s objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land comes forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay.³³ It continues that the overall aim should be to meet as much of an area’s identified housing need as possible, including with an appropriate mix of housing types for the local community.³⁴

Within this context, it is clear that size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in policy.³⁵ These groups include affordable housing, families with children, older people and those with

³³ NPPF para 61

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid para 63

disabilities.³⁶

To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.³⁷

In rural areas, the NPPF explains that policies should be responsive to local circumstances and support housing developments that reflect local needs.³⁸ This includes proposals for community-led housing.³⁹

The NPPF offers support to rural exception sites that provide affordable housing to meet identified local needs and indicates that some market housing on these sites may help to facilitate this.⁴⁰ However, the NPPF differentiates between rural exception sites and sites suitable for community-led housing whereas non-strategic JLP Policy LP07 treats the two types of development in largely the same way except for ensuring that community-led housing schemes are initiated and led by a legitimate local community group and that the scheme has general community support.

The NPPF is clear that support for community-led housing (defined in the NPPF's glossary) is for exception sites which would not otherwise be suitable as rural exception sites.⁴¹ These sites must be adjacent to existing settlements and proportionate in size to them, not compromise the protection given to areas or assets of particular importance in the NPPF which includes NLs, and comply with any local design policies and standards.⁴² The criteria set out in the NPPF is largely mirrored in non-strategic JLP Policy LP07 which states that a rural exception site must be well-connected to an existing settlement and proportionate to it.

There are five policies in this section. The Plan explains that, after community consultation, the preference is for an environmental led approach to guide both the location and capacity of new development. No site allocations are made in this Plan. The settlement boundary falls wholly in the Conservation Area (CA). This is seen as limiting opportunities other than for conversions and small-scale infill development.

Policy HAR 2 – Housing Development refers to housing development and supports windfall and infill sites subject to acceptable impacts. This is in line with the stance of the NPPF and strategic policies and is appropriate for this historic village.

Policy HAR 3 - Housing Mix supports housing development that contributes to meeting the local needs of the Parish. It particularly supports two or three bedroomed dwellings designed to be adaptable for lifetime occupation.

³⁶ NPPF para 63

³⁷ Ibid para 83

³⁸ Ibid para 82

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid para 76

⁴² Ibid

Work on the Plan has identified a higher proportion of larger houses than nearby parishes, typically achieved through extension. The Census 2021 confirms this with nearly 28% of homes having four or more bedrooms and only 6.7% of one bedoomed units. This compares to data from the Census 2021 that shows 68.4% of households were of one or two persons. Despite this, evidence gathered in the Household Survey showed that 35% of respondents wished to move into larger properties.

The need for smaller dwellings is also supported by the most recent Ipswich and Waveney Strategic Housing Market Assessment.

The policy has regard to national policy, is in general conformity with, and adds a layer of local detail to, JLP Policy in particular and will help to achieve sustainable development.

Policy HAR 4 - Replacement Dwellings adds a local layer of detail to District level policy.

With regard to conversions, I note that JLP Policy SP03 refers to non-strategic JLP Policy LP04. In turn JLP Policy LP04 supports replacement dwellings and conversions subject to various criteria. Coupled with this, there are various permitted development rights for the change of use of agricultural and outlying buildings into residential.

Although arguably the criteria in Policy HAR 4 could be said to be more restrictive than national policy and the JLP, this is appropriate in this rural location.

There is a minor typo to correct in the policy.

Policy HAR 5 – Residential Parking Standards, sets parking standards for new development.

The Plan explains that there are high levels of car ownership compared to the District as a whole. This is expected to continue into the foreseeable future.

The Design Codes and Guidance document refers to the verges being eroded by vehicle overrun and suggests greening the verges to help with this.⁴³ Certainly my visit confirmed that the narrow rural roads do not lend themselves to on-street parking.

The NPPF supports local parking standards provided that accessibility, type, mix and use of development, the availability of public transport, local car ownership levels and the need to provide adequate provision of plug-in and other ultra low emission vehicles is taken into account.⁴⁴

Suffolk County Council (SCC) has produced guidance for parking. Policy HAR 5 sets out minimum requirements which are higher than the SCC guidance for 1 and 3 bedroom dwellings. It also requires electric vehicle charging points indicating that one charging

⁴³ Design Codes and Guidance pages 47 and 52

⁴⁴ NPPF para 112

point should be installed for each off-street parking space. The Design Codes and Guidance document refers to charging points for off and on-street parking.⁴⁵

Given the local circumstances, the policy is acceptable. I also note that SCC at pre-submission stage did not object to the higher provision set out in the policy.

Policy HAR 6 – Affordable Housing on Rural Exception Sites sets out support for small-scale affordable housing schemes on sites outside the settlement boundary, but well related to the existing settlements. It sets out clearly the expectations attached to such development.

Policies HAR 2, HAR 3, HAR 4, HAR 5 and HAR 6 meet the basic conditions by having regard to national policy and guidance, being in general conformity with, and add a layer of local detail to, JLP Policies SP01, SP02 which sets out local expectations for affordable housing and SP03 in particular, and helping to achieve sustainable development.

There is an update to a reference to the NPPF in the supporting text to be made.

- **Correct the word “landscaper” to “*Landscape*” in the second paragraph of Policy HAR 4**
- **Change the reference to “Paragraph 111...” at the start of paragraph 6.18 on page 22 of the Plan to “Paragraph 112...”**

7. Natural Environment

Policies HAR 7 – Biodiversity; HAR 8 – Area of Local Landscape Sensitivity; HAR 9 - Protection of Important Views and HAR 10 - Local Green Spaces

The NPPF states that policies should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment including through the protection and enhancement of valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services including of trees and woodland and minimising impacts on, and providing net gains for, biodiversity.⁴⁶

To protect and enhance biodiversity, the NPPF encourages plans to identify and map and safeguard local wildlife rich habitats and ecological networks, wildlife corridors and promote priority habitats as well as pursuing net gains for biodiversity.⁴⁷ It continues that plans should promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the recovery of priority species and pursue opportunities for measurable net gain.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Design Codes and Guidance page 33

⁴⁶ NPPF para 187

⁴⁷ Ibid para 192

⁴⁸ Ibid

JLP Policy SP09 requires development to support and contribute to the conservation, enhancement and management of the natural and local environment and networks of green infrastructure including landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and the historic environment and historic landscapes. It also expects all development, through biodiversity net gain, to protect and enhance biodiversity ensuring measures are resilient to climate change.

Non-strategic JLP Policy LP16 refers to biodiversity and geodiversity including the loss of irreplaceable habitats and ancient woodland and biodiversity net gain. Non-strategic JLP Policy LP17 seeks to conserve and enhance landscape character including through the reinforcement of local distinctiveness and the identity of individual settlements, consideration of topographical impact and dark skies. Non-strategic JLP Policy LP18 refers to National Landscapes.

The Plan is supported by a thorough Character Appraisal which also includes a hedgerow survey, two river corridor studies commissioned from the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and observations at Longs Farm.

Policy HAR 7 – Biodiversity seeks to protect and enhance the biodiversity in the Plan area. The policy sets out principles for determining planning applications which reflect those set out in the NPPF.

The Suffolk Wildlife Trust recommend an addition to the policy's first sentence and this is recommended in the interests of clarity.

Policy HAR 8 – Area of Local Landscape Sensitivity seeks to establish a new local landscape designation. The area is shown on Map 6 on page 30 of the Plan.

The Plan explains that much of the Parish fell within a Special Landscape Area (SLA), a designation originally identified in the 1980s, but not taken forward in the JLP. Work on the Plan shows that the area has a distinct undulating landscape which provides a backdrop for Harkest village and extends north and east along the valleys which converge on the Green.

I saw at my visit that this area has an extraordinary landscape and is readily distinguishable from surrounding land and the remainder of the Parish and I consider that the area has been appropriately designated. I note that SCC at pre-submission stage, supported the policy.

Turning now to the wording of the policy, it is clearly and flexibly worded. It does not prevent development per se, but seeks to ensure any development within this area is appropriate given the qualities of this landscape.

The policy has regard to the NPPF. It is in general conformity with JLP Policy SP09 in particular.

Paragraph 7.15 on page 29 of the Plan refers to a “Landscape Character Appraisal”, but the document is titled “Character Appraisal” and so this should be corrected in the interests of clarity.

Policy HAR 9 – Protection of Important Views identifies 13 important views in the Parish. Their identification is generally supported by an Assessment of Important Views document dated March 2025. They are not the same as the key views identified in the Design Code and Guidance document.⁴⁹

Some of the views are identified on Map 7 on page 31 of the Plan, some on Map 1 in the Assessment of Important Views and others are on the Policies Maps. Obviously all the maps should tie up and a modification is made to ensure that the maps align and are accurate. It would also be helpful if the important views could be numbered to align with the Assessment of Important Views document which describes each view and includes a photograph.

Views 1 and 2 are actually 360 degree and there is even a bench that faces south in this vicinity. Views 1 and 2 should be made clearer on the respective maps to show that these views are 360 degree.

I saw at my site visit that all the identified important views are important to the setting of the village or the very special landscape and demonstrate the intrinsic character of the natural and built environment.

The Plan rightly points out that these are not the only views of merit; indeed many more could have been identified for specific protection under this policy. Three representations also request additional important views. Whatever the merits of these requests, these are not additions I can make having regard to my remit although I feel sure the Parish Council will carefully consider them in any future review of the Plan.

The policy seeks to ensure that the key features of the views are conserved. It requires a Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal or similarly appropriate document for new buildings outside the settlement boundaries to, amongst other things, demonstrate any impact on the views. The policy does not prevent any development per se.

I consider the policy recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and seeks to protect a strong sense of place in line with the NPPF and JLP Policy SP09.

Paragraph 7.16 on page 31 refers to typical views and some photographs of these are included in Appendix 2. I found the inclusion of Appendix 2 quite confusing and make a recommendation on this later in this report.

Paragraph 7.16 refers to an “Appraisal of Important Views” and, in the interests of clarity, this reference should be changed to “Assessment of Important Views” to reflect the supporting document’s title.

⁴⁹ Design Codes and Guidance pages 18, 37

Policy HAR 10 – Local Green Spaces seeks to designate three areas of Local Green Space (LGS). They are shown and numbered on the Policies Maps to align with the policy and Map 8 on page 33 of the Plan. More detailed information is contained in Appendix 3, a Local Green Spaces Assessment.

The NPPF explains that LGSs are green areas of particular importance to local communities.⁵⁰ The designation of LGSs should be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services.⁵¹ It is only possible to designate LGSs when a plan is prepared or updated and LGSs should be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period.⁵²

The NPPF sets out three criteria for green spaces.⁵³ These are that the green space should be in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves, be demonstrably special to the local community and hold a particular local significance and be local in character and not be an extensive tract of land. Further guidance about LGSs is given in PPG.

1. *The Green* is formed of three areas. It forms the historic centre and focal point of the village. It is surrounded by mature trees and buildings. It is the location for the annual village fair, is a green corridor and offers views of the countryside to the east. It falls within the CA.
2. *The Crown Garden* consists of two areas located to the rear of the Crown Public House. The areas are at the heart of the village and provide an important focal point near the Church and primary school. It falls within the CA.
3. *Hartest Wood* is an area of woodland managed for habitat creation and is one of the Woodland Trust's Woods on Your Doorstep created to commemorate the millennium. The Character Appraisal tells us that its layout represents a map of the village with a sculpture "The Gift" forming a focal point at the centre. It is planted with many native species and maintained by volunteers.

Based on the information in the Assessment and my site visit, in my view, all but one of the proposed LGSs meet the criteria in the NPPF satisfactorily. Whilst the Crown Garden would clearly meet the criteria for LGS designation, there is no physical demarcation or features on the ground to indicate where the LGS to the rear of the public house would start and end. Although a common sense view could be taken, I do not feel this sufficient in this instance to offer the necessary clarity in applying the policy. For this reason, I recommend the rear part of that proposed designation is deleted from the Plan. If, of course, this issue can be overcome, then the proposal can be revisited at any future review of the Plan.

⁵⁰ NPPF para 106

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid para 107

The LGSs proposed for retention are demonstrably important to the local community, are capable of enduring beyond the Plan period, meet the criteria in paragraph 107 of the NPPF and their designation is consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services given other policies in the development plan and this Plan.

Turning now to the wording of the policy, it simply designates the LGSs. The NPPF is clear that policies for managing development in LGSs should be consistent with national policy for Green Belts.⁵⁴ This then is acceptable.

There are some corrections to NPPF references to make throughout this section.

With the modifications below, **Policies HAR 7, HAR 8, HAR 9 and HAR 10** will meet the basic conditions by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and seeking to protect a strong sense of place in line with the NPPF and adding a local layer to strategic policies and especially JLP Policy SP09. They will all help to achieve sustainable development.

- **Add the words “...and semi-natural...” before “...features such as ponds.” in the first sentence of Policy HAR 7**
- **References to the NPPF should be updated in paragraphs 7.8, 7.9, 7.17**
- **Change the reference in paragraph 7.15 on page 29 of the Plan to the “Landscape Character Appraisal” to “Character Appraisal”**
- **Include views 6 and 7 on Map 7 on page 31 of the Plan and on the Policies Map and Inset**
- **Number the views to align with the description in the Assessment of Important Views document and ensure all views are included in that document (check view 13)**
- **Clarify views 1 and 2 on the maps to show that together they form a 360 degree vista**
- **Change the reference in paragraph 7.16 on page 31 of the Plan to the “Appraisal of Important Views” to “Assessment of Important Views”**
- **Delete the rear part of proposed LGS 2 The Crown Garden**

⁵⁴ NPPF para 108

8. Historic Environment and Design

Policies HAR 11 Buildings and Features of Local Significance; HAR 12 - Design Principles; HAR 13 – Flooding and Sustainable Drainage; and HAR 14 – Light Pollution

There are four policies in this section.

Policy HAR 11 – Buildings and Features of Local Significance seeks to designate two assets.

The NPPF is clear that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.⁵⁵ It continues that plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment.⁵⁶

JLP Policy SP09 expects development to contribute to the conservation, enhancement and management of the natural and local environment including the historic environment and historic landscape. Non-strategic JLP Policy LP19 sets out detail relating to the historic environment.

The Plan area has a rich history including the CA and a large number of listed buildings, many of which fall within the CA. Recognising the benefits of an updated CA Appraisal in due course, work on the Plan has identified two assets; the Institute, The Green and Hartest Stone, The Green.

Non-designated heritage assets are buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes which have heritage significance, but do not meet the criteria for designated heritage assets. PPG advises there are various ways that such assets can be identified including through neighbourhood planning.⁵⁷

However where assets are identified, PPG advises that it is important decisions to identify them are based on sound evidence.⁵⁸ There should be clear and up to date information accessible to the public which includes information on the criteria used to select assets and information about their location.⁵⁹

The Plan sets out details about each asset. They have been identified using Historic England advice. The Boxted and Hartest Institute is described in the CA Appraisal document as the “best unlisted building” [in the CA].⁶⁰ I was able to see the assets or understand their context at my site visit. I consider they have both been appropriately designated.

⁵⁵ NPPF para 202

⁵⁶ Ibid para 203

⁵⁷ PPG para 040 ref id 18a-040-20190723

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid para 040 ref id 18a-040-20190723

⁶⁰ Conservation Area Appraisal page 9

In relation to non-designated heritage assets, the NPPF explains that a balanced judgment will be needed having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.⁶¹

The policy identifies the assets which are also shown on the Policies Map in a general location.

The wording of Policy HAR 11 reflects the NPPF's stance on such assets. However, the syntax seems a little clumsy and so a modification is made to address this.

Policy HAR 12- Design Principles covers varied criteria. It seeks to deliver locally distinctive development of a high quality that protects, reflects and enhances local character taking account of the NPPF's stance on design.

The NPPF states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.⁶² Being clear about design expectations is essential for achieving this.⁶³

It continues that neighbourhood planning groups can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of an area and explaining how this should be reflected in development.⁶⁴ It refers to design guides and codes to help provide a local framework for creating beautiful and distinctive places with a consistent and high quality standard of design.⁶⁵

It continues that planning policies should ensure developments function well and add to the overall quality of the area, are visually attractive, are sympathetic to local character and history whilst not preventing change or innovation, establish or maintain a strong sense of place, optimise site potential and create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible.⁶⁶

JLP Policy SP10 in addressing climate change, seeks, amongst other things, to support sustainable design and construction.

Non-strategic JLP Policy LP23 refers to sustainable design and construction. Non-strategic JLP Policy LP24 refers to design and residential amenity.

Policy HAR 12 refers to the Character Appraisal and the Design Codes and Guidance (produced by AECOM) as part of the work on the Plan as well as the CA Appraisal. A modification is made to ensure the documents are consistently referenced.

A Development Design Checklist based on the work by AECOM is included as Appendix 5 of the Plan and the policy requires demonstration of how those requirements have

⁶¹ NPPF para 216

⁶² Ibid para 131

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid para 132

⁶⁵ Ibid para 133

⁶⁶ Ibid para 135

been satisfied. Appendix 5 is incomplete and I make a recommendation later on in this report to remedy this.

Policy HAR 12 then supports proposals where, amongst other things, key features and character have been addressed, a sense of place is maintained, there is no loss of garden or important open, green or landscaped areas that contribute to the character of the village and no adverse impact on heritage assets. Reference is also made to flooding and broadband provision.

The policy provides appropriate criteria for the consideration of development proposals with a view to ensuring that the distinctiveness, character and sense of place across the Parish are conserved.

Policy HAR 13 – Flooding and Sustainable Drainage sets out a requirement for all new development to ensure that drainage and water resources are managed appropriately and encourages the appropriate use of sustainable drainage systems (SuDs).

The NPPF is clear that inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk (whether existing or future).⁶⁷

The latter element of Policy HAR 13 is in line with the NPPF which encourages new development to incorporate SuDs where appropriate.⁶⁸ SuDs are also referred to in the Design Codes and Guidance document.⁶⁹

JLP Policy SP10 sets out a requirement to mitigate and adapt to climate change including through approaches to the impacts of flooding. Non-strategic JLP Policy LP26 refers to water resources and infrastructure including the use of water efficiency measures. Non-strategic JLP Policy LP27 deals with flood risk and vulnerability and also refers to SuDs.

The supporting text explains that the surrounds by the stream fall in flood zone 3. Surface water flooding can also be an issue. As a result, the policy seeks to ensure that new development addresses flood risk.

The last policy in this section is **Policy HAR 14 – Light Pollution**.

The NPPF indicates that policies should ensure new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development.⁷⁰ In so doing, the NPPF refers to limiting the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature

⁶⁷ NPPF para 170

⁶⁸ Ibid paras 181, 182

⁶⁹ Design Codes and Guidance page 40

⁷⁰ NPPF para 198

conservation.⁷¹ This policy seeks to ensure that this aim of the NPPF is realised.

The Design Codes and Guidance document also refers to dark skies.⁷² I note the Suffolk Wildlife Trust support this policy.

There are some updates to NPPF references in this section.

With the modifications below, **Policies HAR 11, HAR 12, HAR 13 and HAR 14** will meet the basic conditions particularly having regard to the NPPF, being in general conformity with the JLP and especially those strategic policies referred to above and helping to achieve sustainable development.

- **Amend Policy HAR 11 to read:**

“The retention, protection *and where appropriate, the enhancement*, of the following buildings and features of local significance *identified* on the Policies Map, including their setting, will be secured.

- 1. The Institute, The Green**
- 2. Harkest Stone, The Green**

Proposals for any works that would lead to the loss of, or substantial harm to the above should be supported by an appropriate analysis of the significance of the asset.”

- **Change the reference to “Character Assessment” in Policy HAR 12 to “Character Appraisal”**
- **References to the NPPF should be updated in paragraphs 8.3 and 8.27**

9. Local Economy

Policy HAR 15 – Farm Diversification

The NPPF states that, in the rural area, policies should enable the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of businesses, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed, new buildings.⁷³ It supports the diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses and sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside.⁷⁴ It seeks to retain accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.⁷⁵

⁷¹ NPPF para 198

⁷² Design Codes and Guidance pages 33 and 61

⁷³ NPPF para 88

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Ibid

The Plan recognises the importance of providing employment opportunities and the importance of local services. Given the characteristics of the Parish, opportunities are relatively limited, but conversions of existing buildings such as barns can provide that opportunity. Tourism is a potential area to explore given the location of the Parish near to Bury St Edmunds, Cambridge and the Dedham Vale National Landscape. There are few tourism related developments at the moment.

JLP Policy SP07 supports the development of appropriate tourism enterprises. Non-strategic JLP Policy LP09 supports a prosperous economy subject to various criteria including sensitivity to surroundings and high quality design. Non-strategic JLP Policy LP12 supports tourism and leisure facilities subject to varied criteria including when they provide for local employment. It also supports proposals outside settlement boundaries if access, enjoyment and interpretation of the countryside is appropriately increased, improves accessibility and is of an appropriate scale. Non-strategic JLP Policy LP13 refers to countryside tourism accommodation.

Policy HAR 15 – Farm Diversification supports new employment uses in redundant rural buildings preferring economic reuse. This is arguably acceptable in this area given the Plan's recognition of the importance of local services and job creation.

The policy refers to a "Landscape Character Assessment" and this reference should align with the title of the document. With this small correction, **Policy HAR 15** will meet the basic conditions by having regard to national policy and guidance, being in general conformity with the JLP and helping to achieve sustainable development in this local area.

10. Facilities and Services

Policy HAR 16 – The Crown Public House

There are a number of services and facilities available in the village. The Plan explains that the Crown Public House is a registered Asset of Community Value. It is a listed building that falls within the CA.

Policy HAR 16 – The Crown Public House supports proposals that provide overnight accommodation which would assist in securing the Crown's future. These uses should be ancillary to the main use and be of appropriate siting, design and scale.

Policy HAR 16 meets the basic conditions by having regard to the NPPF, being in general conformity with the JLP including JLP Policy SP07 which supports sustainable tourism and helping to achieve sustainable development.

11. Communication

This section of the Plan does not contain any planning policies but does have two Community Actions.

SCC have commented that Map 12 on page 49 of the Plan is not fully aligned with the SCC Definitive Map and suggest an amendment to the Map's key. In the interests of clarity and accuracy, a modification is therefore made.

- **Amend the key for the red coloured routes on Map 12 on page 49 of the Plan to read: “*Permissive routes with public access*”**

Policies Map

A very clear and useful Policies Map and Inset are provided. Changes to the Policies Map may be needed as a result of modifications in this report.

Appendices

There are five appendices. Appendix 1 is the explanation of JLP Policy SP03. References to the NPPF should be updated accordingly.

Appendix 2 is titled “Typical views around Hartest”. These are not the same as the important views referred to in Policy HAR 9. For this reason, I consider their inclusion may cause potential confusion, particularly given they are numbered and as I have recommended the important views be numbered. I therefore recommend this appendix be deleted.

Appendix 3 is the Local Green Space Assessment connected with Policy HAR 10.

Appendix 4 is a list of heritage assets in the Plan area and is future proofed.

Appendix 5 is the Development Design Guidelines based on the work undertaken in the Design Codes and Guidance document and referenced in Policy HAR 12. However two sections in the Design Codes and Guidance document do not appear in Appendix 5. I consider they should be included in the interests of completeness and delivery of sustainable development. A modification to include the missing sections is therefore made.

- **Delete Appendix 2**
- **Include sections 6 (Building line and boundary treatment) and 7 (Building heights and roofline) from the Design Codes and Guidance document⁷⁶ in Appendix 5**

⁷⁶ Design Codes and Guidance page 67

Glossary

A helpful glossary is included at the end of the Plan. The definition of “affordable housing” should be changed to reflect the definition in the most recent NPPF.

- **Change the definition of “Affordable housing” in the glossary to that in the NPPF 2024**

7.0 Conclusions and recommendations

I am satisfied that the Hartest Neighbourhood Development Plan, subject to the modifications I have recommended, meets the basic conditions and the other statutory requirements outlined earlier in this report.

I am therefore pleased to recommend to Babergh District Council that, subject to the modifications proposed in this report, the Hartest Neighbourhood Development Plan can proceed to a referendum.

Following on from that, I am required to consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the Neighbourhood Plan area. I see no reason to alter or extend the Plan area for the purpose of holding a referendum and no representations have been made that would lead me to reach a different conclusion.

I therefore consider that the Hartest Neighbourhood Development Plan should proceed to a referendum based on the Hartest Neighbourhood Plan area as approved by Babergh District Council on 5 June 2014.

Ann Skippers MRTPI

Ann Skippers Planning
12 January 2026

Appendix 1 List of key documents specific to this examination

Hartest Neighbourhood Plan 2024 – 2037 Submission Draft Plan July 2025

Basic Conditions Statement July 2025 (Places4People Planning Consultancy)

Consultation Statement July 2025 (Places4People Planning Consultancy)

Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulation Assessment Screening Determination Notices December 2024 (BDC)

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Opinion Final Report October 2024 (LUC)

Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report Final Report October 2024 (LUC)

Character Appraisal July 2025

Design Codes and Guidance Draft Report June 2023 (AECOM)

Assessment of Important Views March 2025 (Places4People Planning Consultancy)

Regulation 15 Checklist (BDC)

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Part 1 adopted 21 November 2023

Hartest Conservation Area Appraisal 2012 (BDC)

List ends