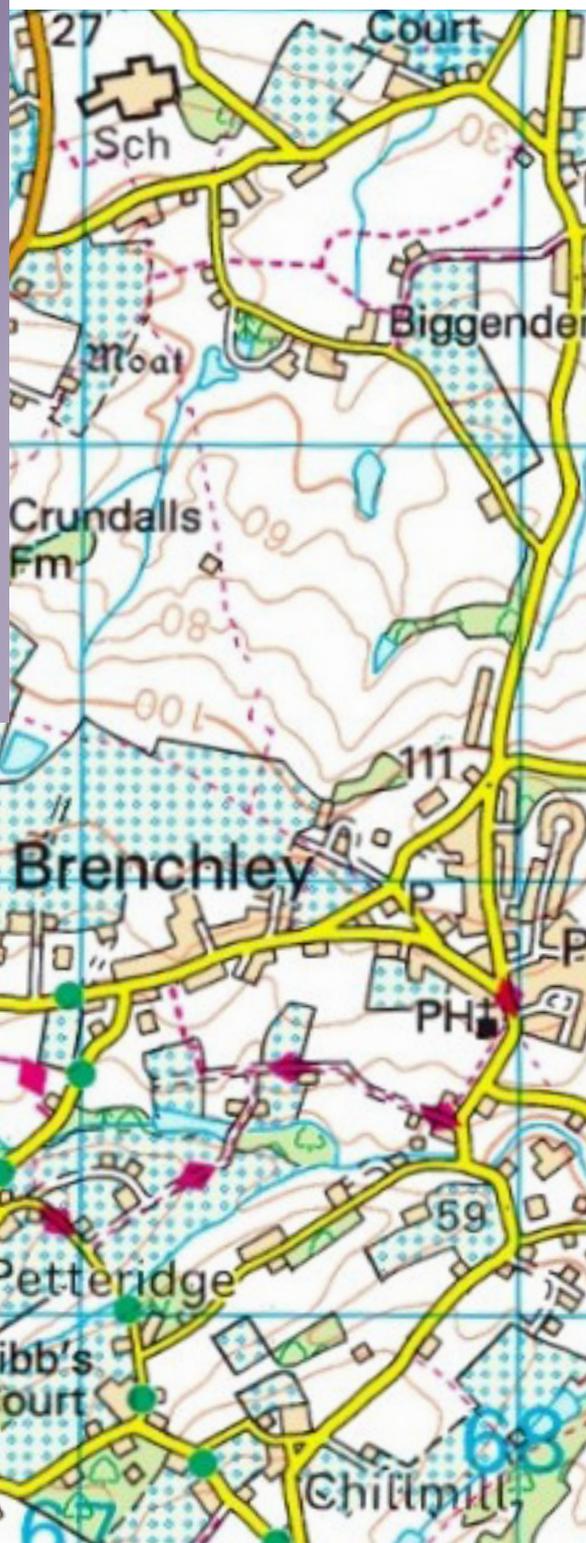


Brenchley & Matfield  
Neighbourhood Plan

# Position Statement

March 2018

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Simon O'Donnell

## **Matfield & Brenchley Neighbourhood Plan**

### **Some thoughts on new development**

1. The Rydon Homes proposed development in Matfield is typical of many new developments in that it provides 3 & 4 bedroom homes and 1 & 2 bedroom flats, but it does not provide 2 bed houses. We should be looking to developers to provide some 2 bed houses in all new development as they are a natural stepping stone either for young couples or downsizers. However, as they are less cost efficient developers try to avoid providing them.
2. Instead of each new house having a garage we should be turning more towards communal parking areas so that new developments are less planned to meet the needs of cars. More shared open space would be preferable.
3. Given the rural nature of the area no new developments have looked at courtyard style development with all the houses fronting on to a shared area. This form of development can provide different size units as well as private and Affordable in a mix.
4. Future planning arguments and delays could be avoided if the developers plan agreed extensions with TWBC, that are approved at day one and once the development is started the consent would be triggered. TWBC then will only require notification of planned approved extension and Building Regulation Approval. Divergence from original design would require planning consent. This way roof extension and conservatories can be planned in advance.
5. In terms of design the villages should develop a Design Code. Most people consider the new developments that have taken place to be of poor or of inappropriate design with many new houses looking like mock Tudor suburban properties. The Design Code can still see both traditional and contemporary designs come forward.
6. An opportunity should be found in the villages for the development of apartments with the ground floor made available for commercial use. If more new homes are built then demand for new shops and other facilities will need to be provided. Such a development even though apartments can look like a house.
7. The Council in preparing their new Local Plan are bound by the rules to pursue a Sustainable Development strategy so the villages will have to follow suit. This means ready access to the centre of the villages, shops and pubs as well as access to Brenchley School and Doctors. This is currently not the case in either village so there is the opportunity to make both villages more accessible by the enhancement of existing footpaths and Rights of Way for use by cyclists and pedestrians and the creation of new footpaths should also be planned and delivered by working closely with landowners and farmers. This will require an element of a new surface to be paid for cycles.

**MATFIELD & BRENCHELY**  
**NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**  
**AFFORDABLE HOUSING & HOUSING TYPES**

**Background**

1. Currently Tunbridge Wells Borough Council 'TWBC' has a requirement for any new housing development of 15 or more units to provide an Affordable content of 30%.
2. Affordable in this context can mean social rented, low cost home ownership or housing for key workers. In some locations Councils have required developers to reduce the price of their market housing by say 20% and through a covenant running with the property this discount must always remain in place.
3. Most Affordable Housing is owned and managed by Housing Associations. In Matfield & Brenchley, Town & Country Housing has been the most active.

**Issues**

1. If TWBC does not reduce its threshold then few Affordable homes will be built in Matfield & Brenchley. Many Councils who like TWBC have fallen behind on their Affordable target have reduced their thresholds on new development with 10 units now commonly used as the minimum scale of development before an Affordable requirement kicks in. For example on a development of say 18 units we could therefore expect to see 6 units (30%) falling into the Affordable category. However, if the development was 12 units and 4 units were deemed required for Affordable then this would only leave 8 private units for sale over which impact on overall viability if previously unknown costs such as S106 came into play.
2. On a market purchased site with an existing non-agricultural use a developer might challenge the provision for a 30% requirement on 'viability grounds' arguing that with a full 30% Affordable content his profit would be diminished to such a level that might make returns too low, the project too risky or an inability to raise debt. Logically these costs should have been reflected in the land value at day one but S106 and other higher costs not known at the outset might impact viability.
3. On most but not all developments, the developer will enter into an agreement with a Housing Association to take over the ownership and management of the Affordable houses or as in many cases the Housing Association will undertake the development themselves. Generally, the developer must provide the land at zero cost but will look to recover a proportion of the infrastructure costs and fees. Where shared ownership is involved then some land value will be released.
4. If as could well be the case in Matfield & Brenchley all the sites selected for development are virgin sites, then unless there is an unknown such as contamination then coming from an Agricultural Use value should mean that viability is not a problem and the full percentage of Affordable Housing can be delivered.
5. The ongoing management of Affordable Housing is of vital importance where maintenance and tenant selection are key elements to both the Housing Association as well as nearby residents.
6. However, managing two houses on a small development in Matfield might be inefficient for the Housing Association, whereas five or more homes can see the cost of shared resources spread over more units thus reducing unit cost.

### **Matters for consideration in Matfield & Brenchley**

- TWBC have yet to confirm what their minimum Affordable threshold should be. In my view it should be lower than the present 15 units and reduced to 10 units. We need to feed this back to TWBC.
- It makes sense to work with the same Housing Association so that there is consistency on all fronts.
- Not many people have been impressed with the design of the units in Matfield – windows too small – preferring the style developed in Brenchley.
- Housing for Key Workers is an option and I think we should seek to procure units for say a local teacher(s), for Nurses working at Pembury Hospital and for a local Policeman.
- Undertaking a local housing needs study is required to identify the type and size of properties required.

### **Rural Exception Sites**

The National Planning Policy Framework outlines that a rural exception site is a small plot of agricultural land, usually brought forward at a fraction of open market value, that can be used for housing. However, the homes built must be affordable forever and are reserved solely for local people.

These sites are usually relatively small and generally located within the confines of an existing village, meaning that building extra homes there will not over-burden existing infrastructure in or around the village.

That these sites exist at all is usually thanks to the generosity of rural landowners who gift or sell the land to a housing association at a low price, maximising the affordability of the homes that will be built there.

Around one fifth of all rural affordable homes last year were built on rural exception sites – making a vital contribution to rural housing supply.

Most importantly though these sites are led by the community and the landowners and generally due to a good experience one which often leads to a request for a second, third or even fourth scheme delivered in the same way.

### **Sheltered Housing**

This also comes under the Affordable banner and might prove appropriate for a development of this nature in the villages given the high percentage of elderly people. It would be an option to down size to and as with housing can be rented or co-ownership.

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