

Brenchley & Matfield
Neighbourhood Plan

Position Statement

March 2018

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FROM VENUE



Campaign to
Protect Rural
England, Kent

CPRE Kent Statement to Brenchley and Matfield NDP Design Forum

1. CPRE Kent is the Kent Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, a national charity. It is our objective to retain and promote a beautiful and thriving countryside valued by everyone. We believe **the planning system should protect and enhance the countryside in the public interest** for the important contribution it makes to people's physical and mental well-being, as well as its vital role in feeding the nation and providing clean air and water. It is our position that local planning authorities should seek to ensure the impact of development on the countryside, both directly and indirectly, is kept to a minimum and development is sustainable in accordance with national planning policy.

The Parish

2. The greater part of the Parish lies in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which enjoys special protection under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and the remainder, in the north of the Parish, comprises equally attractive countryside that used to be designated a Special Landscape Area and remains important as the AONB's setting. We support the high level of protection given to all AONBs by the NPPF.
3. The High Weald AONB is characterised by a dispersed pattern of settlement and there are farmsteads and other small settlements spread throughout the Parish that are of historic importance and make a positive contribution to the landscape.
4. Despite 20th-century housing developments, the villages, and the conservation areas in particular, have retained much of their historic character and remain closely connected with the surrounding countryside. The views of Brenchley's church tower from a wide area of the surrounding countryside and from the Memorial Field are important and any new development should be designed in a way that will retain these views.

CPRE general policy

5. CPRE supports sustainable development that meets local needs and accords with the principles and specific protections provided under the NPPF. As general policy, CPRE adopts a 'brownfield first' approach to development, to limit urban and suburban spread into the countryside.
6. We also support strong local involvement in the planning process and wish to assist the Parish Council, as far as we are able, with the neighbourhood planning process on which it has embarked.
7. With these considerations in mind, CPRE accepts the need for some further development, including new housing, in the Parish, subject to the constraints imposed by planning law and national and local planning policies. In general, such

developments should be on a small scale; well designed, respecting local building traditions; sustainable; and well connected to the settlement of which they will form part. Such developments may help to sustain the vitality of the villages and support the remaining services they provide.

8. It must be recognised, however, that national law and policy on planning (including the protection of heritage assets, ancient woodland and the AONB), correctly interpreted, severely constrain the scope for development, particularly large-scale development, in this parish.
9. The impact of new development on the conservation areas and other heritage assets and on the AONB should be minimised. The green spaces in the villages are an important part of their character, which limits the scope for developments in the conservation areas without harming their character. The fullest possible use should be made of brownfield sites in the Parish, or within the footprint of other existing settlements. Some small-scale, well designed development in the villages, hamlets and isolated settlements in the Parish may be acceptable, but account needs to be taken of the effect of additional traffic on the narrow and historic lanes in the parish.

Density

10. To promote efficient use of land, limit the loss of countryside and preserve farmland for food production, to encourage sustainable development that promotes good health through walking and cycling, and to ensure that dwellings intended to fill a need for small dwellings remain small and are not promptly converted to larger houses, CPRE advocates a much higher density of housing in new developments than the 20 to 25 dwellings per hectare (dph) that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is currently understood to be averaging and the 12 dph or less that the Council sometimes approves. (The Government's now withdrawn Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 used to recommend a density of between 30 and 40 dph and the density of housing in Cranbrook's historic centre, which is still considered a desirable place to live, is considerably higher than 40 dph.)
11. To illustrate this, if the parish were to need to provide sites for 160 new dwellings in the Plan period, at 12 dph this would require 13.3 hectares (almost 33 acres) of land; at 20 dph this would require eight hectares (almost 20 acres) of land, whereas building instead at a density of 40 dph would require four hectares (less than 10 acres), potentially saving large areas of countryside.
12. The Parish Plan survey indicated a desire among residents for more bungalows, perhaps to provide suitable accommodation for elderly residents. However, not only would this be wasteful in terms of land, but bungalows in the rural area often don't remain as small one-storey dwellings (see for example the attached note showing what happened to four bungalows close to each other in Castle Hill). CPRE Kent would suggest there are ways of providing high-quality accommodation for elderly or disabled people that make better use of land and better ensure the accommodation remains suitable and affordable for them than building bungalows. We would urge the Parish to think very carefully before planning for new bungalows.

What happened to four bungalows in Castle Hill, Brenchley

Pear Tree House (previously known as The Bungalow), Crook Road (in the setting of AONB, just outside the boundary)



Originally a small bungalow

1988: Single-storey extension and conversion of roof space to four bedrooms permitted;

2018: Extensions permitted to make it a five-bedroom, four-bathroom house, increasing volume from 396m³ to 728m³ (not yet built).

The Farthings (previously known as Fagins), Crook Road (in AONB)



2000: First-floor extension and dormer windows approved

2004: Conversion of internal garage and new detached garage approved

2011: Ground-floor extension approved

It is now a four- or five-bedroom house

Poulhurst Bungalow, Furnace Lane (in AONB)



Originally a two-bedroom, one-bathroom farmworker's bungalow
It is now a substantial four-bedroom, two-bathroom house with large separate double garage

The Mount (previously known as Pippins), Furnace Lane (in AONB)



Originally a two-bedroom, one-bathroom farmworker's bungalow.
Various planning permissions obtained but not built before...
2010: Permission granted to demolish and build a three-storey, six-bedroom, four-bathroom house
2012: Permission for brick-built two-car garage
2014: Further extensions permitted