

Harston Neighbourhood Development Plan

Examiner's Clarification Note

This Note sets out my initial comments on the submitted Plan. It also sets out areas where it would be helpful to have some further clarification. For the avoidance of any doubt, matters of clarification are entirely normal at this early stage of the examination process.

Initial Comments

The Plan provides a clear and concise vision for the neighbourhood area. It is underpinned by a series of background documents which directly inform some of the policies. This is best practice. The Character Appraisal is a very impressive document.

The presentation of the Plan is good. The difference between the policies and the supporting text is very clear. In addition, the Plan makes good use of various high-quality maps. The theme-based objectives helpfully provide a structure for the Plan and its policies.

Points for Clarification

I have read the submitted documents and the representations made to the Plan. I have also visited the neighbourhood area. I am now able to raise issues for clarification with the Parish Council.

The comments made on the points in this Note will be used to assist in the preparation of the examination report and in recommending any modifications that may be necessary to the Plan to ensure that it meets the basic conditions. I set out specific policy clarification points below in the order in which they appear in the submitted Plan:

Policy HAR1

The policy takes a positive approach to design. It is helpfully underpinned by the Design Guidance and Codes and the Harston Landscape Character Appraisal. The design principles are locally-distinctive.

In the round the policy and its supporting documents are an excellent local response to Section 12 of the NPPF.

Policy HAR3

This is a good policy which is underpinned by the Landscape Character Appraisal.

Policy HAR4

The fifth part of the policy reads as supporting text rather than as a land use policy.

I am minded to recommend that this part of the policy is relocated into the supporting text. Does the Parish Council have any comments on this proposition?

Policy HAR6

The Button End Industrial Estate (as addressed in the second part of the policy) is defined on Map 9. Could the Plan also define the area to which the first part of the policy applies?

I understand the thinking behind the fifth part of the policy and experienced the road conditions in Button End first-hand. However, the wording of the policy may encourage development proposals which would conflict with Green Belt policy. I am minded to recommend its deletion. Does the Parish Council have any comments on this proposition?

Policy HAR7

I looked at the proposed local green spaces carefully during the visit. The policy takes the matter-of-fact approach in paragraph 107 of the NPPF.

Policy HAR9

This is a good policy which is underpinned by the Landscape Character Assessment. Given the content of Policy HAR 3, are sections 3 and 4 of the policy needed?

Policy HAR10

Could the second part of the policy be relocated in the supporting text as it restates national policy?

The seventh section of the policy is very helpful and consolidates the more general approach towards biodiversity net gain in the sixth section.

Policy HAR11

The policy takes a positive and non-prescriptive approach towards sustainable design and construction.

I am minded to recommend that the second part of the policy is applied in a proportionate way. Does the Parish Council have any comments on this proposition?

Policy HAR12

Is the reference in the first part of the policy to the delivery of community benefits necessary given the broader benefits of low-carbon development proposals?

Policy HAR14

Does this policy bring any added parish value beyond national and local planning policies?

Policy HAR15

The first part of the policy takes an appropriate and balanced approach.

The second part of the policy acknowledges that small schemes may struggle to meet the mathematical requirements of the policy. In this context what is meant by 'schemes large enough to include a mix in terms of size and/or tenure'?

Has the policy's requirement for a 50% discount for First Homes been assessed for its potential impact on commercial viability?

Policy HAR16

Does the first part of the policy bring any added parish value beyond national and local planning policies?

Policy HAR 17

I noted the traffic issues in Church Street during the visit.

On the one hand, the intentions of the policy are clear. However, on the other hand, the policy appears to apply the generalities of national and local planning policies on traffic movements to a specific part of the parish. In this context, it would be helpful if the Parish Council elaborated on its intentions and the extent to which a specific policy is needed.

Policy HAR 20

I looked at the Telephone exchange site carefully during the visit. I noted its relationship to the Village Hall to the west and to the surrounding houses.

For clarity, does the final sentence of the policy support proposals for the redevelopment of the site as a car park, or other proposals which would help to deliver that objective?

How would any such car park be delivered and managed? Would it effectively provide an extended Village Hall car park?

Policy HAR 21

I note the Aspirations listed in the third part of the policy. Three questions arise:

- is it likely that the aspirations will be delivered in the Plan period?
- what type of proposals might help to deliver such aspirations?
- is there a potential risk that a development proposal may incorporate such aspirations but otherwise conflict with development plan policies?

Policy HAR 23

I looked at the pavilion and the associated recreation areas carefully during the visit. This is an excellent policy with locally-distinctive criteria.

Policy HAR 24

I note the issues about the numbers of children attending the school in paragraph 13.13. However, should the resulting policy be more general, rather than directly commenting about housing which is targeted at younger families given that younger families may not occupy such homes and/or send children to the school?

Policy HAR 26

This is a good policy with locally-distinctive criteria.

Policy HAR27

I looked carefully at the site during the visit. I note its overlap with Policy HAR24. For consistency, I suggest that the reference to Policy HAR24 is removed. Does the Parish Council have any comments on this proposition?

I am also minded to include an additional element within the policy to safeguard the East West rail route. Does the Parish Council have any comments on this proposition?

I note the commentary in paragraphs 14.9 and 14.10 about the location of the site in the Green Belt and the determination of a planning application some years ago. However, the policy itself simply restates national policy on the Green Belt. Did the Parish Council consider including further details about the number of homes that would be appropriate for the site, their height and massing, and the layout of the site (both generally and in response to the Planning Inspector's decision on the earlier proposal)?

Representations

Does the Parish Council wish to comment on any of the representations made to the Plan?

I would find it helpful if the Parish Council commented on the representation received from East West Railway Company Limited.

The District Council make a series of comments both on the policies and other general matters. It would also be helpful if the Parish Council responded to this representation.

Protocol for responses

I would be grateful for responses and the information requested by 4 April 2025. Please let me know if this timetable may be challenging to achieve. It is intended to maintain the momentum of the examination.

If certain responses are available before others, I would be happy to receive the information on a piecemeal basis. Irrespective of how the information is assembled, please could it come to me directly from the District Council. In addition, please can all responses make direct reference to the policy or the matter concerned.

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Independent Examiner

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13 March 2025