

Burwash Parish Council

Response to the Consultation on Rother District Council's draft Local Plan 2025-2042

Introduction

This response focuses on the proposed site allocations in Burwash (4 sites) and Burwash Common (2 sites) in the draft Rother District Council Local Plan 2025 – 2042, January 2026 only.

In constructing this response to the district council, the parish council has taken account of the views of the local community expressed at two consultation events held in the parish on Saturday, 21 February 2026.

All six sites in the parish sit wholly within the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL), development within which is restricted under primary legislation, in particular the Countryside and Rights of Way (2000) Act, Section 85.

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase (2004) Act, Section 38(6) requires the planning authority to make planning decisions in accordance with its own Development Plan, of which the Local Plan is part.

The general comments and the site-specific comments below are made in the context of the foregoing legislative framework and in the context of the proposed policies set out in the consultation draft of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the draft Local Plan.

General comments from the community consultation event fall into five categories:

- Protection for the National Landscape.
- Housing need and affordability.
- Safety and site access, pre- and post-development.
- Infrastructure concerns.
- Environmental concerns.

Protection for the National Landscape

National policy requires that “substantial weight” is given to conserving and enhancing landscape and beauty in National Landscapes. In practical terms this means that the bar for development is demonstrably higher than for countryside land outside the National Landscape (NL). Decision-makers must show that they have actively avoided or minimised harm, not just noted it and balanced it away. Density and layout must be landscape-led: a generic “housing estate” approach is typically incompatible with the NL unless exceptionally well designed and demonstrably low impact.

The parish council's position is policy-led and evidence-based. We are not opposed to housing in principle, but we are questioning whether some of these sites is consistent with the national policy for protected landscapes. The parish council therefore requests publication of:

- the landscape sensitivity/capacity assessments for these specific sites;
- a clear statement of why these particular sites in the NL are necessary compared with less sensitive options;
- realistic, landscape-led evidence supporting the quantum and density proposed.

Housing need

The housing need in Burwash (as evidenced from 2011 and 2021 census data and ONS household projections) is for smaller, more affordable houses for young families and to allow older people to downsize whilst remaining in their community.

The current housing mix does not support this requirement. Currently, Burwash has a proportion of detached houses (45%) which is twice the national average (23%) and a lower proportion of apartments and one- and two-bedroom houses (22%) compared with that of the figure for England as a whole (38.5%).

A recent development of 7 three-bedroom terraced houses on the former Oakley's Garage site in Burwash village remained unsold for many months and has now been let on a long-term basis to the London Borough of Croydon. A mixed development of 12 properties at the former Ashwood nursing home site in Burwash Common remains largely unsold more than a year after it was finished and prices have just been reduced in an attempt to encourage buyers.

Infrastructure

Availability of infrastructure to meet increased housing is a major concern for any development, but this is not unique to this Parish.

This relates to Water Supply, Sewerage, Electricity, Schools places availability and Doctors lists. Southern Water faces significant challenges in meeting sewage demands in the Rother area, with infrastructure in the wider region struggling to cope, leading to reliance on emergency measures. While investing in upgrades to boost capacity, the network faces risks of overloading from new developments, with limited powers to refuse connections. Locally, the Burwash Common Sewerage Farm in Willingford Lane has been subject to a number of leaks due to current lack of capacity.

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Site specific

Burwash

Site BW1 (formerly BUR0042) – Land north of Shrub Lane, Burwash

Not Suitable for Development

- There is no access from Shrub Lane to the site. Inquiries have been made and the access which was available when planning permission was applied for in 2017, RR/2017/456/P, is no longer available.
- Site is under multi ownership
- Significant damage to the National Landscape. Rother District Council rejected the site in 2017 because of the impact the proposed development would have on the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, now called the High Weald National Landscape. Para 1 of the Decision Notice was as follows
- As the 2017 Decision Notice points out any development would 'be beyond the build boundary and [beyond the] established edge of village [creating] an undesirable extension to the village.' That comment remains true today.
- As the HELAA report dated April 2024 and January 2026 points out there is a ancient woodland and a Priority Habitat to the west.
- As the HELAA report dated April 2024 and January 2026 points out there is surface water flooding in the east and west boundaries.
- Significant development would increase traffic access onto Shrub Lane

Site BW2 (formerly BUR0010) – Land at 101 Shrub Lane, Burwash

Deserving Consideration

- There would be minimal damage to the National Landscape.
- The development would be using an existing residential area rather than ribbon development.
- There is no footpath and it is 0.80 miles from the village centre (Londis/entrance to car park).
- Shrub Lane within the Burwash development boundary.
- It was previously found to be suitable in the SHLAA (2013), for redevelopment for at least 6 dwellings.

Site BW3 (formerly BUR0011) – Land east of Shrub Lane (north), Burwash

Not Suitable for Development

- There would be significant damage to the National Landscape.
- The site is 0.75 miles from the village centre.
- There is no footpath at the site. If one was created it should not destroy the ancient hedge. If a footpath was created on the field side, it would not connect with another footpath and so create traffic dangers. Highway Authority comments have raised concern that any such footway would not be continuous and that
- Shrub Lane may be of an insufficient width to otherwise accommodate a footway.
- It would be ribbon development.
- It would remove an important green gap in the lane.

Site BW4 (formerly BUR0012) – Land east of Shrub Lane (south), Burwash

Not Suitable for Development

- There would be significant damage to the National Landscape. The site comprises the roadside portion of an open field on the north-eastern edge of Burwash village, which forms part of a historic fieldscape.
- The site is 0.66 miles from the village centre.
- There is no footpath at the site. If one was created it should not destroy the ancient hedge. Initial Highway Authority comments have raised concern that any such footway would not be continuous and that Shrub Lane may be of an insufficient width to otherwise be accommodated

Burwash Common

Not Suitable for Development

Site BC1 (formally BUR27) The field near Clover Lees Cottage, Heathfield Road, Burwash Common

- It is an ancient field. There would be significant damage to the High Weald National Landscape. The HELAA 2026 and the draft Local Plan points out the historic field boundaries are significant.
- This site has been designated by Sussex Nature Recovery as an “Area that Could become Important for Biodiversity (ACIB)”. If developed, this opportunity will be irretrievably lost. It is not clear that a 20% measurable biodiversity net gain could be delivered by any development if, at the same time, the site is lost as an ACIB.
- The site is a raised site and therefore views to the site would become more prominent.
- Significant surface water run-off risk
- The draft Local Plan suggests the houses would ‘front the road’, so the development would be ribbon development.
- The site sits 400 metres outside the current Burwash Common development boundary. Expanding the boundary to this extent is unlikely to be justified as it will not “promote a sustainable rural economy” or “meet recognised local needs for facilities or affordable housing”.
- The draft Local Plan raises the issue of access and suggests removal of the ancient hedgerow to facilitate a safe access point. A very significant part of the hedge would have to go before there would be sufficient sight lines for safe vehicular access onto the road. It is within a 40mph stretch of the A265, while the speed limit rises to 50mph east of the site’s western boundary.
- The draft Local Plan indicates that a new hedge would have to be created and so the damage to the ancient field system and the ancient hedge would be very significant.
- The site is not “sustainable”. As the HELAA 2026 states Burwash Common has limited services and development will therefore inevitably be ‘car-led’.

Site BC2 (formerly BUR0039) - The Old Orchard Nursery site, off Heathfield Road, Burwash Common

Deserving Consideration

- The site was formerly used as a nursery. It is now redundant. As it had a former commercial use it could be described as a brownfield site. It now forms excess land that lies to the rear of the remaining sections of the business.
- The site is a well contained, infill site with developed areas to the south, the east and north-east, while trees provide dense screening to the west, north and east, which would be important to retain.
- There would be minimal damage to the National Landscape. The site is enclosed and so it would not be visible to others.
- The development would be infilling rather than ribbon development.
- The site is also served by an existing pedestrian footway that connects to a bus stop some 130m beyond the junction to the east.
- The trees need retaining and the drainage needs to be improved.
- The East Sussex Highways authority objected to the site at a planning in principle application on the basis of access. The application reference number is RR/2025/185/P. The application, re-submitted, awaits a decision and has recently been amended. It is anticipated that the access could be improved so that highways authority would drop their objection.
- Density – there are concerns that the 9 properties proposed for this site represent a significant over-development.

Other factors:

- The major concern is the threat to the café. This is a key asset to the Village and not only is it a useful food outlet it also has an important social element. The original plans had the cafe being replaced. Rother District Council said it would not be acceptable. Currently the staff used the provisionally allocated site for parking. If the allocated site became houses, the staff would then park in the customer's car park. A customer's car park is currently inadequate for the popular café. The lay by on

the road takes few cars. Rother District Council is considered imposing a site requirement that the car parking spaces should be increased by using part of the allocated site.

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