

Hook Parish Council Response to Core Strategy

1 Introduction

This document forms the response of Hook Parish Council to the document “Core Strategy Development Plan Document - Preferred Approach” dated July 2011, referred to below as the Core Strategy.

The responses below follow the same structure and order as the questions on Hart’s document “Core Strategy Response Form”, but we have only made responses where we believe we have a relevant point.

Hook Parish Council has identified two areas in which it believes the reasoning and housing figures used in the Core Strategy are unsound, and therefore objects to the document on these grounds. The areas are:

- Effect of the development on the character and functioning of the community
- Anomalies in the number of houses proposed.

Further details are given in section 3 below.

2 Vision for Hook

Hook is still a village. This is not because of its size, but because it still operates as a village: one school site, a single shopping area, one surgery, and a wealth of clubs and societies that draw their membership from the whole of Hook. It is our vision that Hook should stay as a village. This means that any development must be sympathetic to the existing social and physical structures. All inhabitants should share the same facilities: residents of one area should not be going to “our school” or using “our football pitches” while others go to “their doctors” or “their shops”. In practice this means:

- The schools must remain on a single site
- Investment in community facilities must concentrate on enhancing what we have rather than establishing new centres
- Retail development must be based around the existing Station Road/London Road nexus, with investment being used to repair the damage done to the village centre by previous generations
- The new site should form the new centre for outdoor sports and recreation, with indoor recreation and community facilities being based on those existing
- Investment in transport – car, bus, cycle and pedestrian should support the integration of the community and aim to overcome the barriers of the A30 and B3349
- The housing mix should recognise the needs of the existing community, especially the “hidden households” identified by our own housing survey.

The success of the new development will be measured by how well it integrates with the rest of Hook. Therefore it is not just the number of houses proposed that is a worry, but also the rate at which they are built. Hook’s experience from the 1980s and 1990s, together with recent experience of the Holt Park development show that houses must only be introduced at a rate at which the incoming population can be integrated with the existing community.

The Parish Council and residents of Hook accept that some development is inevitable in the current climate. However, we are concerned that the numbers of houses proposed may break the spirit of one of the most vibrant communities in the area. For this reason we ask that very close attention is paid to the needs of the present community as expressed in this response.

3 Policy SS2: Housing Numbers

3.1 *Effect on the character and function of the community*

The percentage growth in the number of houses in Hook proposed in this document is between 2.5 and 3 times the growth proposed for other sites in Hart. We believe that this takes little or no account of the effect that this will have on the functioning of the community.

Detailed comparison of the figures quoted in the Core Strategy shows:

- 1040 dwellings are proposed for Fleet/Church Crookham/Elvetham Heath, which have a current combined housing stock of around 15,000. This is an increase of around 7%.
- 550 dwellings are proposed for addition to Hook’s present housing stock of around 3,300. This represents an increase of approximately 17%, ie 2.5 times that for Fleet et al.

This increase is disproportionate and appears to contravene the results of the option appraisal in paras 19 and 21 of the Core Strategy:

19 ...Option 4) Extend all settlements (broadly reflecting their current scale)

21 The Council has selected Option 4 as the most appropriate option...

It also threatens the current character of Hook as described in the document:

2.5.4 [Hook] retains a village feel at its centre...

...and risks the scenario that the Core Strategy sets out to avoid:

3.1.2 If the past levels of growth were to continue, Hart would change from a green, rural area to a far more urbanised one. Its essential characteristics and qualities would be lost.

There is no doubt that Hook would find it very difficult to absorb the number of houses allocated in the plan without suffering changes to its character, especially so soon after the building of 340 houses in Holt Park. In addition, the applicants for the site to the North East of Hook have recently submitted an Environmental Screening application for up to 675 dwellings which, when added to the 50 dwellings planned in Station Road would result in an increase to Hook of 22%. This would pose far greater strain on the community of Hook than any other settlement in Hart is being asked to bear.

The Policy mentions up to 500 dwellings at North East Hook between 2013 and 2023. This timescale will pose severe problems for the schools provision for Hook children, which will be discussed further elsewhere in these comments. Schools serving Hook are still coping with the population bulge caused by the development at Holt Park; a delay in starting the development, plus its spread over the entire plan period, would result in a huge benefit in the school environment which will be available to the next generation of Hook's schoolchildren.

Given the enormous burden which these proposals would place on Hook, it should follow that the further allocation of 990 dwellings should not include any additional sites in Hook.

Hook Parish Council objects to the unfairly large share of the housing requirement which is allocated to Hook, as the impact on the character and functioning of the community has not been considered.

3.2 Anomalies in the number of houses proposed

This is proposed as various figures:

At Policy SS2: Housing Distribution and Delivery

- Hook 550 [dwellings]
- North East Hook – up to 500 dwellings

At 5.9.9 it is stated that this will be achieved through:

- Approximately 500 new homes of mixed tenure and size to include affordable housing and an element of housing specifically designed for the elderly

Hook Parish Council objects to the Core Strategy on the basis that these inconsistencies make the document unsound. We must insist that the term 'up to 500 dwellings' as quoted in Policy SS2 should be used throughout and that it is recognised by Hart that this figure is a maximum and not an indication of scale.

3.3 Phasing

One item not covered in the Core Strategy but essential to our vision for Hook is the phasing of the development. The Vision as given in section 2 points out that, to preserve the character and function of the community, new houses must only be introduced at a rate that can be absorbed by the community. For this reason we believe that if the 500 houses were to be built this would have to be done over a period of at least 10 years. If introduced faster there is a serious risk that:

- Because most new residents will have children of early school age, a new school will be required, but will then become unviable after a few years.
- Village organisations will be unable to absorb the influx, leading to splits in the community and consequent social problems.

The responses below assume housing will be introduced at such a rate.

3.4 The New Homes Bonus

There is no mention of how this is to be distributed to the community. There needs to be a policy statement in the Core Strategy. Hook Parish Council expects to carry most of the burden for providing facilities for Hook's new residents, so we would expect the majority of this money to be passed to the Parish Council.

4 Policy SS4: Strategic Locations

This section gives a detailed response to para 5.9.9 of the Core Strategy, stating how the strategic aim:

“...to provide a sustainable mixed-use urban extension which will integrate with, and provide facilities for, the rest of Hook.”

is to be achieved.

4.1 Overview

Hook Parish Council has significant problems with the statements in para 5.9.9 as they show little understanding of:

- the views of the people of Hook
- how the new development can be successfully integrated with the existing community
- how the essential character of the village as outlined in section 2 - Vision for Hook, can be preserved.

Please note that Hook has a strong record of owning and running its own facilities: halls, sports facilities, playgrounds, etc. As a general principle we would expect these to be handed over to the Parish Council along with sufficient funds for maintenance.

Individual points are dealt with below.

4.2 Housing Mix

“Approximately 500 new homes of mixed tenure and size to include affordable housing and an element of housing specifically designed for the elderly”

A mixture of housing types is essential, as is the need to ensure that houses of similar type are not all gathered together in one area. It is important that careful consideration is given to the design on the basis that many potential owners will be downsizing and are not first time buyers. Proposed distribution of houses should be a discussion point with the Parish Council before the overall plan is approved. Bungalows (2/3 Bedrooms) are considered desirable by many of the older residents of Hook, who currently live in larger houses.

These points are discussed in more detail in sections 5.2 and 5.3 below.

4.3 Open Space and Sports Pitches

“Significant areas of open space including sports pitches and a strategic SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) to provide SPA mitigation land not only for the strategic development but for other developments in the Hook area that currently have no means of mitigation”

Hook has 23 football teams ranging from Adult to Under 6's. As a result, there is a need for 4 full size football pitches and 5 junior pitches on well-drained land. Hook also has a number of cricket teams that are in need of a cricket square. The pitches will require changing rooms and social facilities, thus a pavilion containing four changing rooms, 2 referee changing rooms, toilets, showers and a social area is required adjacent to the pitches. Needless to say provision of water, gas and electricity is a necessity. To ensure cost effective use of the above, the pitches and car park should all be in the same area with access to the road system. We suggest that the land to the west of Reading Road North (A3349) would seem to be very appropriate, if it can be brought into the site.

4.4 Sports and Recreation

“A new indoor sports and recreation facility”

Other than the requirement for pavilion identified above, we would like to concentrate such facilities in existing locations, ie by enhancement of the existing Community Centre facilities in Ravenscroft. However, we have identified a need for the provision of a “sports barn”, to be co-located with the pavilion, to provide extra facilities for indoor sports and large meetings. This has particular importance as with regard to Hook's Annual Village Meeting. This is currently running near the capacity of our current hall facilities and, with an increase in the number of houses, we will no longer have a large enough hall to accommodate those who wish to attend.

4.5 Community Hub, Retail and School Provision

“Community hub to include opportunities for local retail facilities, medical facilities, and land retained on-site for a primary school”

Hook Parish Council is strongly opposed to splitting Hook by providing a second centre to the Village. Therefore additional retail facilities on the new site are not required.

From our consultations residents would prefer medical facilities to be co-located with the existing.

Similarly, the residents are very much against splitting the Hook schools across two sites. This would cause great difficulties for parents with children at both schools and would remove the social integration engendered by the existing single site. To add a new school would not be in line with our vision as given in 2 above.

Preliminary discussions with the Infant and Junior schools indicate:

- The school governors and Heads are very much against splitting the school sites
- Provided the rate at which houses are built is planned appropriately, there is sufficient capacity in both existing schools, especially as the Holt Park “bulge” in numbers will have largely passed through the schools
- Significant enhancements and reconfiguring of the schools will, however, be required.

The above assumes a reasonable phasing of housing as discussed in 3.3 above.

A list of enhancements required for the Infants School is given in Appendix 1 – Indicative Requirements for Hook Infants School - below.

4.6 Robert May’s School

“Funding towards the expansion of Robert May’s Secondary School”

It is imperative for the equality and integration of the community that all Hook children should be able to go to Robert May’s. Therefore we strongly support this requirement.

4.7 Cycleway/pedestrian links

“Cycleway/pedestrian links to the village centre and beyond the station”

It is essential that cycle tracks and safe routes to school are provided as detailed in section 5.5 below.

4.8 Environmental Improvements

“Funding for environmental improvements within the village”

There are many improvements required to the environment within Hook. To realise our vision we believe the following should be specifically addressed:

- Improved car parking, making greater use of the existing under-utilised Crossways car park
- Measures to deter commuter parking in residential streets
- Redevelopment of the area surrounding the public toilets (currently closed)
- Redevelopment of the public toilets - possibly for retail space.

We would need to discuss specific projects and funding before the development is approved.

4.9 Local Community and Sporting Facilities

“Improved local community and sporting facilities both on site and for funding towards improvements to existing facilities within the village to include football pitches and changing facilities”

Major facilities should be provided as detailed in sections 4.3 and 4.4 above. There will be a requirement for at least 2 high quality play areas on site, with a suitable amount of parking space adjacent to each one and a sum of money, to be agreed with Hook Parish Council, for future maintenance.

4.10 Allotments

“Funding toward allotments”

Although allotments have recently been established in Hook, we believe that increased provision will be needed for the new residents and that land and/or a suitable sum of money should be provided for this purpose. We understand that Hook Allotment Association have made a separate submission on this subject.

4.11 Highways

“Local highway improvements to include safety/traffic issues around the A30 and B3349”

As covered in section 5.5 below, it is essential that the traffic improvements address the existing congestion problems on the A30/B3349 roundabout. This will require school transport and parking issues to be addressed (covered further in Appendix 1), with consideration given to an improved bus service and safe crossings of both roads to reduce traffic flows.

4.12 Water Supply

“Major off-site reinforcement works regarding water supply”

We support this requirement, as covered in section 5.1.2 below.

4.13 Sewage

“New/improved sewage pumping station to be constructed to service the area together with a new rising main”

This is essential for the well-being of the existing population and the new development, as detailed in 5.1.3 below. It must be addressed before development begins.

5 Core Policies

5.1 Policy CP1: Infrastructure

5.1.1 Infrastructure

Hook Parish Council has observed that much of the infrastructure of Hart District is defective with respect to the Parish of Hook. We are concerned that the services (Gas, Water, Electricity and Sewage Removal) currently provided are incapable of supporting long-term provision to Hook as currently installed. As such the system will not provide for a further 500 Houses without considerable upgrading.

5.1.2 Water Provision

The Loddon CAMS (Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy) 2003 states that much of the area is over abstracted. Abstraction is currently licensed at 6.82 Ml/d (megalitres per day); actual abstraction ranges between 5 and 6.4 Ml/d, and the average abstraction is 5.7 Ml/d. This abstraction supplies many communities in Hart and is having a serious impact on the ecology of the area. The Loddon CAMS (September 2003) classified the entire Loddon area as suffering from severe water stress (see also Hart Water Cycle Study Scoping Report page 48, figure 5.2 and pages 51-52).

In view of this position, unless Hart Council can demonstrate that domestic water can be provided from other sources, we believe it is unsustainable, and unsupportable, to build more dwellings in any location in the district that depends on this water source. It follows that further building at Hook is unsupportable unless water supplies can be provided from another source.

5.1.3 Sewage Effluent

Hook Parish Council is particularly concerned that raw sewage is regularly transported by road tanker from the Hook Holt Lane Sewage Treatment Works to the Chineham Sewage Treatment Works because of insufficient pumping capacity at the Hook Plant. Currently there is a risk that sewage can - and has been known to - overflow and ultimately pollute the River Whitewater. Quite apart from the regular escape of malodorous gases for which Holt Lane has now become infamous, transportation to Chineham provides a continuing risk of accidents and pollution. As the pumping station is currently operating beyond capacity it follows that all effluent from new housing would have to be transported to Chineham, greatly increasing the risks.

It is, therefore, essential that extra sewage pumping capacity be provided prior to any new build commencing. A major failure of this pumping station could become a health hazard.

5.1.4 Hart Water Cycle Study

It is also essential that the issues of abstraction and sewage treatment are the subject of a full Hart Water Cycle Study and that the results will lead to a long-needed update of the services in Hook **before** any work commences on the further increasing of the number of dwellings in Hook.

5.1.5 Gas and Electricity Provision

The core infrastructure for gas and electricity in Hook depends on a system that dates from the very beginning of the provision of these services to the area, and has been added to over many years. Virtually every major storm causes faults to occur, leading to outages across large areas of Hook. These are only preventable by a major overhaul, which must obviously be done before increasing the loading on both services by up to 20%.

5.2 CP2: Affordable Housing

A housing survey undertaken by the Parish Council and recent consultations with residents has indicated that there is a requirement for shared ownership in order to allow ‘hidden households’ in Hook to enter the housing market. The stated percentage of social housing and shared ownership therefore needs to be changed, with a greater emphasis on shared ownership.

We therefore suggest that the Affordable sector is split as follows:

Intermediate 75%

Social Rented 25%

5.3 CP3: Housing Mix

A housing survey undertaken by the Parish Council and recent consultations with residents has indicated a shortage of smaller intermediate housing and little requirement for 3- and 4-bed+ houses. Therefore we suggest the following better represents the needs of Hook:

	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4-bed+
Market Sector	10%	30%	35%	25%
Intermediate	40%	40%	20%	-
Social Rented	25%	35%	30%	10%

The survey also indicated a requirement for quality smaller homes to allow older residents to downsize, together with sheltered accommodation. We therefore would like these to be specifically included in the Core Strategy as part of the total allocation.

5.4 CP4: Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

No comments at this stage.

5.5 CP5: Transport

We welcome Hart's pledge to reduce congestion and encourage sustainable transport, as this fits in with the Parish Council's plans. However, it is not clear how the transport needs generated by so many houses can be accommodated using the existing infrastructure. Particular problems include:

- The A30/B3349 roundabout is the most congested part of Hook during the morning peak period. The new development will most likely have exits onto both roads close to the roundabout, possibly exceeding the effective capacity of the junction.
- A significant part of the congestion is caused by school traffic in Griffin Way South turning into Ravenscroft to use the Parish Council's car park. On wet days the increased traffic can cause the car park to become overfull, causing gridlock at the junction.
- The imminent withdrawal of the bus service between Hook and Camberley, and the poor service provided on this route in the past, contribute to traffic problems on the A30. When it is withdrawn there will be no bus service to the eastern part of Hook – including both Holt Park and the new development.
- Recent experience with Holt Park shows that if parking spaces are heavily restricted, this does not reduce car ownership but causes congestion and obstruction by forcing cars to park in unsuitable places.

There are, however, areas of success:

- Transport services to Basingstoke from the centre of Hook, both by bus and train, are very good.
- The cycle track between Holt Park and the centre of Hook, funded as part of the Holt Park development, has been a great success.

With this in mind we would seek improvements to the roads providing access to the new development, contributions to an improved bus service to the east, plus safe and effective cycle and pedestrian routes to the school, shops and station. We would also like to take the opportunity brought by this development to review foot and cycle paths and bring them up to the standards set by the Holt Park track. This will help reduce vehicle traffic in Hook and alleviate problems in areas where congestion is likely to be caused by the new development.

5.6 CP6: Green Infrastructure

No comments at this stage.

5.7 CP7: Biodiversity

This states:

- 6.8.4 Where damaging impacts cannot reasonably be avoided, appropriate mitigation, restoration or compensation measures will need to be agreed and implemented.

We would like this amended to show that such measures should be agreed before development is approved.

In addition, because of the environmental sensitivity of the Whitewater valley, Hook Parish Council insists that an Environmental Impact Assessment is undertaken as well as ecological and arboricultural assessments.

5.8 CP8: SPA

No comments at this stage.

5.9 CP9: Design Quality

No comments at this stage.

5.10 CP10: Renewable Energy

We would like to see an agreed proportion of zero carbon homes as part of any development.

5.11 CP11 Sustainable Construction

This states:

- 6.12.3 Unless it can be demonstrated that it would not be technically feasible or financially viable, new housing should meet at least Code Level 3...

We would like to see a commitment on this development to low or zero carbon homes, in advance of the Government requirement.

6 Conclusion

The residents of Hook are concerned that our community is at risk of severe disruption, if not destruction, by the proposed development. Though we accept that some development is inevitable, we must object to the Core Strategy as it stands as it contains a number of errors and proposals that the residents of Hook cannot accept.

Should development in some form proceed, however, we believe we have identified the essential provisions and enhancements required to preserve the character of the place in which we spend most of our lives.

Appendix 1 – Indicative Requirements for Hook Infants School

- Two new additional permanent classrooms
- A new Head Teacher's office, staff room, medical room, reception area and storage cupboards
- Additional accommodation for the staff room
- A new IT suite
- An extension to the hall
- Works to The Year R outside learning area
- A new security fence
- Works to the main playground
- A new play area
- Works to the temporary playground on the Infants School field
- All pathways and gates to be widened to allow better access to and from the school premises and to make room for wheelchairs, double buggies etc
- An extension to the school playing field
- An extension to the school car park with the possible use of the far end of the Junior School field as staff car parking, and access via the Community Centre car park
- A sum of money to provide additional parking spaces
- Additional secure bicycle and scooter racks
- Works to Hartletts Park to operate a drop system at school drop off and pick up times to alleviate the parking and traffic problems at these times; this could possibly operate from the Community Centre end of Hartletts Park and a 'walking bus' would then bring them into school
- Funding to establish 'walking buses' from the new development and from existing areas such as Newnham Road and Holt Park
- A separate entrance into an out of Ravenscroft needs to be considered and a 'left turn only' system should operate when exiting Ravenscroft to ease traffic congestion.