

Cliffe and Cliffe Woods Neighbourhood Plan

Heritage and environment workshop, 17th June 2017

Introduction

This is the second workshop following the Visioning Workshop held on 25th February and the Transport, Traffic (Parking) and Employment Workshop held on 29th April 2017. The workshop was postponed (from 20th May) following the sudden death of parish councillor Gill Moore¹. The event was again held at Cliffe Woods Primary School with the intention to hold the next Housing and Community Facilities Workshop on 8th July back in the Cliffe Memorial Hall.

The emerging or draft Vision for Cliffe and Cliffe Woods' Neighbourhood Plan, worked up at that original visioning workshop in February, states:

In 2035 Cliffe and Cliffe Woods will have:

- **maintained its rural environment, with wildlife corridors and agriculture,**
- **using only sustainable development and brownfield sites,**
- **with a mix of housing to meet local needs including new bungalows/chalet bungalows.**
- **The two villages will be linked by traffic calmed roads and a continuous network of footpaths and cycle ways.**

This workshop aimed to explore the issues and options that related in particular to the first bullet point in the vision: **'In 2035, Cliffe and Cliffe Woods will have maintained its rural environment, with wildlife corridors and agriculture,'** and to also address heritage, character and design issues.

Presentations

The chair of the parish council Sue McDermid gave a short introduction, a re-cap on neighbourhood plans in general and a review of progress so far.

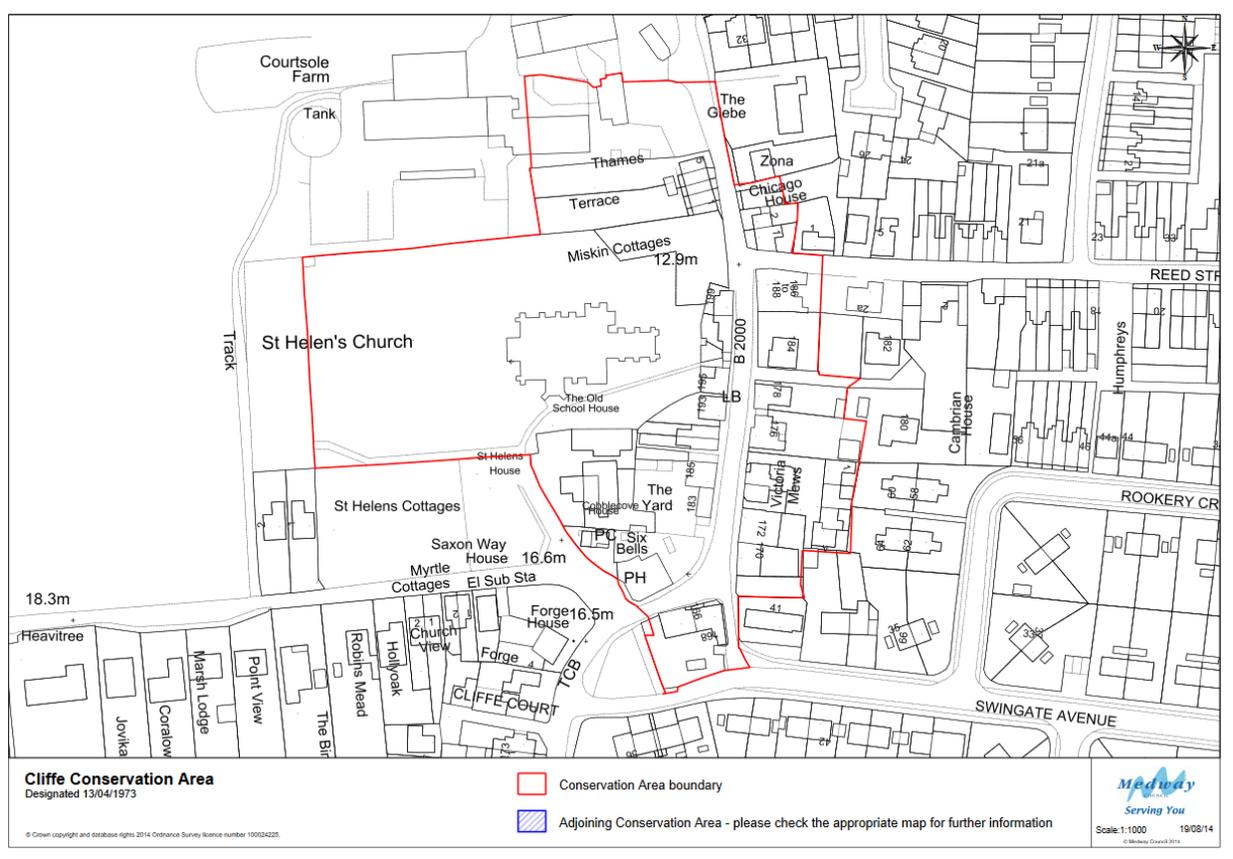
Heritage and Character

Frank Withers and Dave Green from the Neighbourhood Plan steering group gave a presentation on the Heritage and Character of Cliffe and Cliffe Woods villages dating from the Paleolithic period 500,000 BC to the present (see slides in Appendix A). The presentation started by focussing on the built heritage including listed buildings: 1 Church, 1 Charnel House, 3 Churchyard Monuments, 7 Farm Houses, 2 Granaries, 2 Barns, 8 Houses, Cliffe Fort (National [scheduled ancient] Monument), 2 Local Monuments (Curtis & Harvey explosives works and GHQ stop Line Not Listed).

A map showing the current conservation area² where stringent planning conditions already apply for new build or changes to existing buildings.

¹ Also of the Friends of the North Kent Marshes

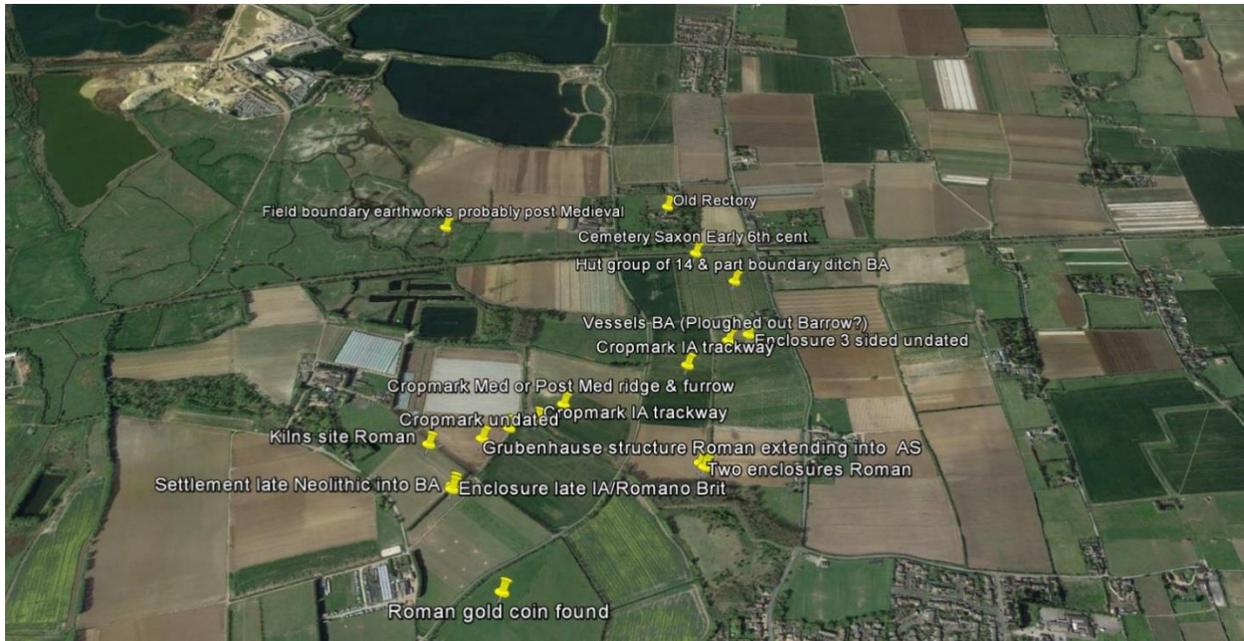
² Medway Council have committed to undertake a Conservation Area Appraisal to support the NP.



The focus then shifted to the more recent heritage of Cliffe Woods:

- The land was sold to speculators post WW1 divided into plots which were then sold on to individuals in a “plotlands” development called Rochester Park Estate.
- Strood Rural District Council (SRDC) started Compulsory Purchase and planning in the mid 1960's with planning permission granted in Feb 1970.

A slide on the archaeological heritage was accompanied by a map showing recent finds:



The final slide relating to 'Maintaining Desirable Character' identified the existing character of both villages:

Cliffe Village

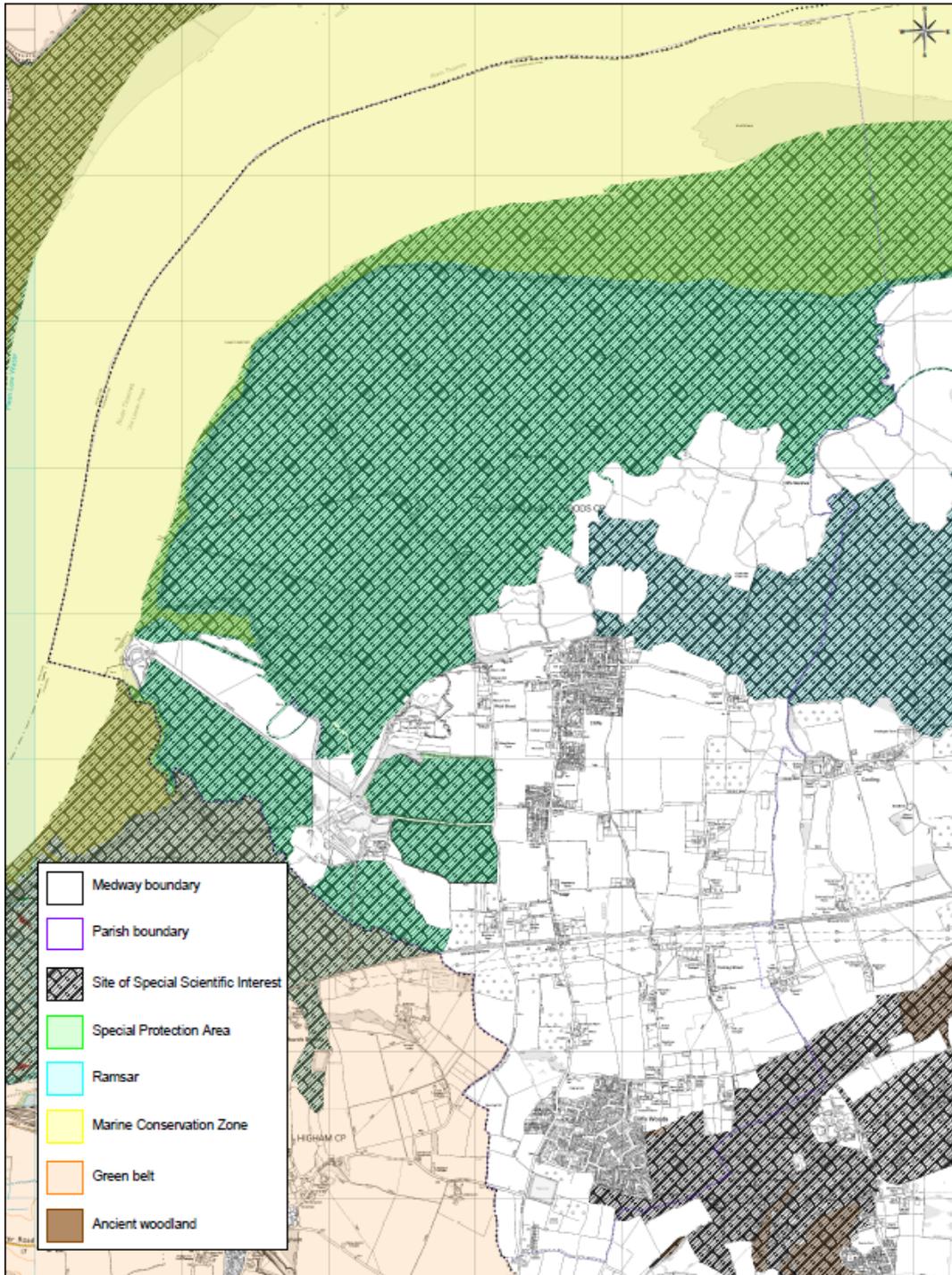
- You can chart the history of the village from late medieval to modern day walking through the village by the architecture and materials of the buildings and walls.
- Timber frame construction, Georgian red brick, yellow local stock brick 19th cent and 20th cent modern red brick.

Cliffe Woods

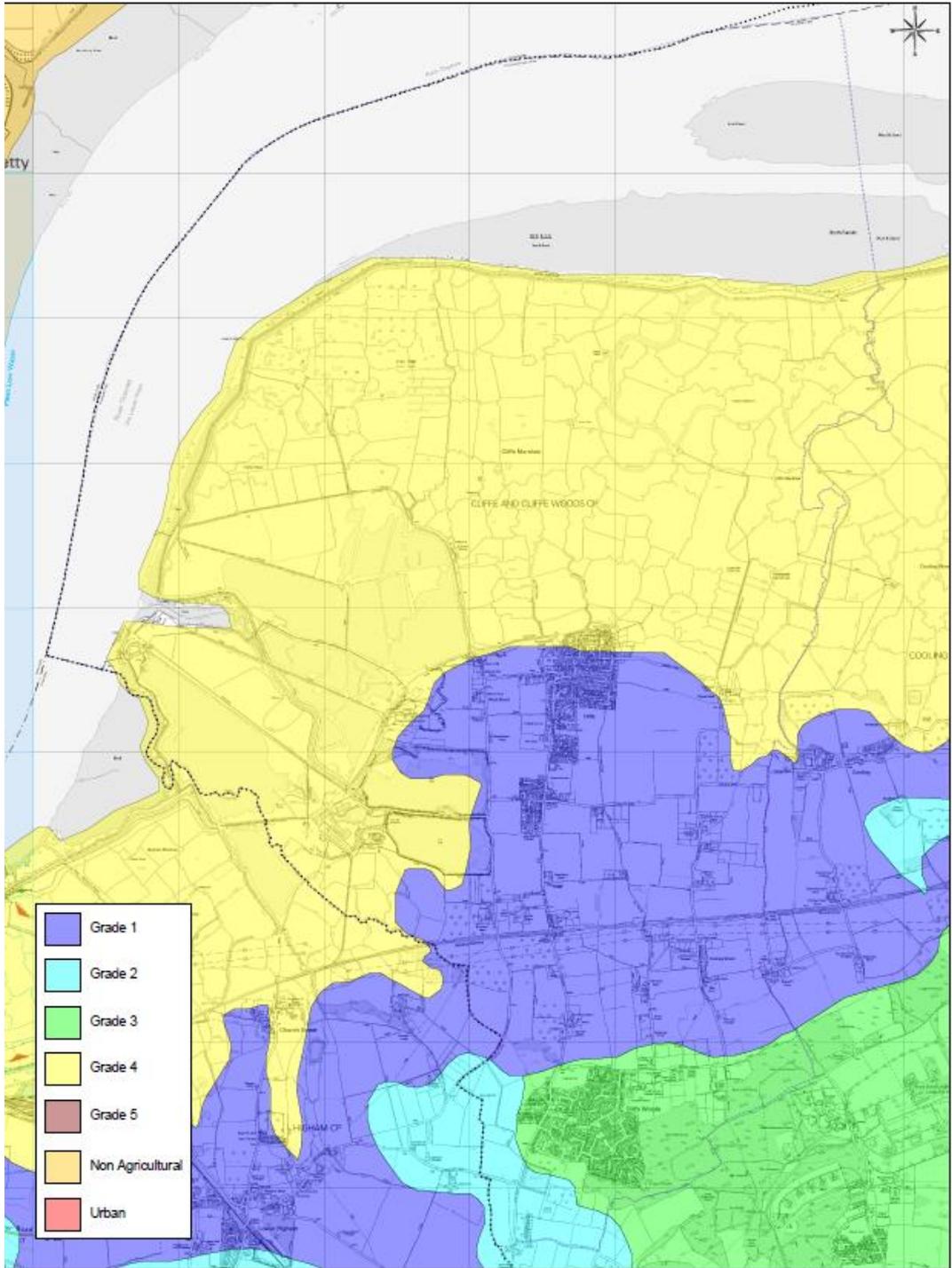
- Plotlands heritage with 1920/30's bungalows plus approximately 2 surviving plotland dwellings.
- 1970's development that included self-build with varied build styles.
- More uniform estate development included for remainder.

Environment and nature conservation

Following Cllr Gill Moore's recent death, Alan Johnson South East Conservation Manager for the RSPB gave a presentation on the key sites of nature conservation value in or nearby Cliffe and Cliffe Woods parish. The two main areas are the Chattenden Woods and Lodge Hill Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and South Thames Marshes SSSI (also a Ramsar and Special Protection Area – formerly Cliffe and Cooling Marshes and Higham Marshes SSSI). Alan particularly focussed on the international, European and national importance / significance of the two areas for their bird and other wildlife including the largest UK population of breeding avocets (South Thames Marshes), turtle doves, black winged stilts (the only UK breeding pair) and nightingales (both sites – with UK's largest breeding population at Lodge Hill).



Jim Boot who is advising the parish council on the neighbourhood plan also showed a slide showing the relationship between the two built settlements of Cliffe and Cliffe Woods, the areas adjoining these and their Agricultural Land Classifications (see illustration over):



The map shows that while the ancient settlement of Cliffe sits within Grade 1 Agricultural Land, Cliffe Woods seems deliberately to have been built on Grade 3 or lesser land and adjoining Grade 2 Agricultural Land. The National Planning Policy Framework (see Presentation 2) Paragraph 112 states: ‘Local planning authorities should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality.’

Medway Local Plan

Catherine Smith, Planning Policy Manager at Medway Council then gave an update and overview of the Medway Local Plan (see Presentation 3). To follow are some key points relating to the emerging Medway Local Plan:

- Legal requirement setting out a framework for the future development of an area
- Medway’s population is projected to grow significantly from 276,492 in 2015 to 330,200 in 2035
- MC have identified a need for approx. 30,000 homes, employment, shopping, services and infrastructure

Heritage policy approach

- Historic environment key to local character and sense of place.
- Support conservation & appropriate enhancement of historic environment through:
 - Restricting development that could have an unacceptable impact on a designated heritage asset and its setting;
 - Ensuring that new development in Conservation Areas enhances and respects character
 - New development contributes to local distinctiveness and identity
 - Sensitive use of historic assets
 - Promote preservation of historic buildings at risk
 - Resisting demolition of heritage assets
 - Heritage Asset Review supporting Local Plan

Natural Environment Policy Approach

- Celebrate Medway’s rich countryside and parks
- Much of Medway designated of national and international importance for wildlife
- Policy to secure network of green infrastructure, including ecological and landscape interests, and footpaths and links
- Protection of estuary and marshes

Catherine’s final slide showed how the two plans could complement each other by:

Linking local and neighbourhood plans

- Sharing information
- Identifying local heritage assets
- Opportunities to strengthen green links
- How can development be sensitive to natural and historic surroundings?
- Policies need to align to avoid conflicting guidance between plans.

Issues and options

Following the presentations the residents and other stakeholders present were then asked to examine three themes or issues in three groups using a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) matrix with a member of the Neighbourhood Plan steering group acting as facilitators and recording the key points. The results were:

Issue 1: Agricultural land and economy

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High quality land• Employment for locals• Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reclassification of sites• Local people don’t want work on farms• Low wages

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local produce Wildlife corridors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caravan accommodation [for workers] Poor farming husbandry / mono-culture
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reclassification of land – independently More self-sufficiency Farmers’ market and shop [in or nearer to settlements] National Park [or equivalent status] 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of land to development Ageing farmers giving up – pension pots Piecemeal development [rather than planned] Pollution / traffic Loss of wildlife corridors between SSSI (Sites of Special Scientific Interest)

Issue 2: Heritage and character

Strength <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designated sites – LB, SAM, CA Diversity – historical periods, industry and other facets of the area’s past Landmarks – visible aspects of heritage Importance of marshes over time Number of undesignated features eg Stop Line 	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some ‘hidden’ heritage not visibly understood Historical records not as detailed for Cliffe area as other locations Some modern development not very sensitive to historic character Ground conditions – impact on fabric of buildings
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate and record ‘hidden’ heritage Keep ‘old character’ Influence design of new development Should be sensitive and in keeping with character Retain local distinctiveness – avoid uniform / standard developer products. ‘Self-build’ would continue pattern of how village evolved. 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unrecorded – unknown hidden heritage could be lost through development Development pressures – especially speculative planning applications Decisions could be made on appeal outside of local views

Issue 3: Nature conservation and infrastructure

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> World class, unique and special environment / landscape Highly designated and protected – SSSIs, Ramsars, SPAs Natural capital – unseen services Wonderful, calming landscape – relief from urbanisation 	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of access – public transport / network of public paths Lack of facilities – toilets / parking Pressure of housing / other needs v environment More community / visitor centres / hub needed Balance between wildlife and visitor needs
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Huge asset for Medway / close to London Improving information / knowledge Lodge Hill – could be green space for area Visitor hub? Employment – small café 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brexit – any possible threats to protection of designated areas Agri-environment payments from EC likely to cease

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat improvement – managed realignment policies [of coast] • Community access to marshes etc • National park [status] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing agenda – balance v pressure of need • Flooding? Physical loss of land • Disturbance • Climate change
--	---

Reasonable alternatives

Under the neighbourhood plan regulations and in keeping with the requirements of Sustainability Appraisal (often undertaken to demonstrate plans meet the objective of sustainable development – a basic condition), areas are required to consider ‘reasonable alternatives’ or options to address key issues identified in their plans. As a follow up exercise to the SWOT, the groups tried to identify three options or reasonable alternatives for each issue:

Issue 1: Agricultural land and economy

Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Reclassify land to being a ‘national park’ to preserve landscape and wildlife corridors. High quality land maintained and kept as now.	Greater local market[ing] of produce ringfenced as part of national park – more self-sufficiency.	Limited development of low / Grade 3 land (bungalows off View Road, land off Merryboys Road currently horsefields – Grade 3).

Issue 2: Heritage and character

Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Survey and record heritage – especially important for hidden heritage.	Policy guidance and design codes – put information in place to detail what distinguishes local character. What materials and approach would be ‘sensitive’ and in keeping with local character?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-build / custom build housing – avoid ‘uniform’ developer schemes – mixed character • Continue building approach that forms area’s history • Would need to [be] in keeping with local character and environment.

Issue 3: Nature Conservation / Infrastructure

Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Protection and retention of our unique and special landscape / environment. Uncovering hidden jewel Maintaining and preserving area for future generations	Improved info / education / knowledge understanding of our natural wildlife and landscape. Linking all history / heritage / landscape / wildlife assets of area. Enhancing profile of peninsula	Development of national park Green lung Air quality preserved Quality of life – respite from pressures and stresses.

Conclusion and next steps:

These options – along with those from the other workshops – will now be worked up in detail by the Neighbourhood Plan steering group and examined against the key sustainability objectives in the emerging and parallel Sustainability Appraisal of the Neighbourhood Plan. The next workshop on Saturday 8th July will explore issues and options relating to Housing and Community Facilities. The parish council would like to thank the following who attended the workshop:

Attendees:

(to be inserted)

Jim Boot MSc

Community Planner and advisor to Cliffe and Cliffe Woods Parish Council

21st June 2017