10th December 2020 – Site Assessment Zoom Meeting
Present: the Site Assessment Sub Committee (SC) - HB, DH, NS, the Technical Support Team (TST) – UM and YT

TST acknowledged amendments previously proposed by HB and confirmed that these have been made.

HB outlined the importance of the report as a solid evidence base underlying decisions made about the sites. The report needs to provide clear and unambiguous reasoning for some sites being rejected and others being proposed as suitable. The TST agreed on the need for consistency throughout the report.

The following points were discussed:

1. **Defensible boundaries – why, for example, is this a reason for rejecting sites 1 & 7 but not sites 2 & 4?**
   TST explained that this has only been cited where it is a major constraint. Defensible boundaries are a matter of judgment and it is necessary to consider multiple factors, e.g. topography. The landscape constraints are unlikely to be overcome for sites 1 and 7. Sites 2 and 4 have defined shapes with defensible boundaries around the large part of each site. The hedge between 2a and 2b can be strengthened to provide a stronger defining boundary and the gap between Little Crawley and North Crawley becomes a defensible area to prevent future development joining up the 2 settlements. On Site 4, a hedge can be used to screen the new development within the area proposed that is within the existing hedge line. A hedge around a smaller development does not provide a defensible boundary in an expansive field where there are no landscape features to define the developed area. You can create a defensible boundary but it can look very artificial and not be softly screened in the middle of a field. Developments should work with the shape of the land and existing features; the risk of incursion into open countryside is greater on some sites (e.g. sites 1 and 7) because of the shape and size of those sites'. The important aspect is to ensure that the village develops/grows sympathetically to the shape of the landscape and of the existing village.

2. **Site 9 – why is this one considered suitable when others on Folly Lane are not?**
   This is a contained site with clearly defined boundaries and thus there is a finite impact on Folly Lane. The TST will clarify this by referring to defensible boundaries. There are still significant highways constraints on this site and it is marginally suitable compared to other Folly Lane sites. The site does have pedestrian access. There should be a limited number of dwellings on the site, owing to the limited capacity of Folly Lane for increasing the number of dwellings. TST clarified that it can be potentially viable if developed in isolation from any other site on Folly Lane. TST confirmed that the cumulative impact of developing multiple sites was also a factor in deeming others on Folly Lane (e.g. site 10) unsuitable, compared to site 9 which is capable of being developed in isolation.

3. **Why was the full size of some sites assessed when the SG were assessing smaller areas within these sites?**
   TST has assessed the wider site in order to assess the impact of a smaller development on the wider area. The report considers the importance of the smaller site within the context of the larger landscape area. The report's conclusions consider whether the smaller site area sits well in the wider site.

4. **Site 8 - the report indicates that Church Walk does not have a safe walkway, it is a PRoW and thus provides pedestrian access onto Folly Lane.**
   TST agreed that clarification was required to emphasise that there is no segregated pavement and in planning terms this means that there is no existing safe pedestrian access for future developments – clarification agreed.

5. **Site 6 – the site boundary has incorporated the whole site and refers to retaining the row of terraced houses.**
   TST agreed that clarification is required to ensure that the row of terraces is not considered part of the development site. However, it is important to emphasise the existing row of terraces is in the conservation area and thus is significant in terms of defining the character of the area – an amendment will be made to ensure there is a distinction between areas to be developed and the existing houses.

6. **Apparent inconsistencies between assessments of different sites – e.g. the report states that the Orchard Way sites are favourably located – every site is favourably located. Similarly, where there is reference to open countryside, this applies to all sites equally and cannot be used as a justification for rejecting a site.**
   TST agreed that clarification is needed which will emphasise the reasons for citing particular criteria in some site assessment summaries and not in others.

7. **Subject matter of assessment points appears to differ from one site to another, making it difficult to compare sites point by point.**
   Direct comparison is difficult when comparing the site assessment summaries (pp. 15-24), however, the pro-forma (Appendix A) allow for direct comparison. In the summary, the key factors supporting judgements are emphasised rather than including every point. Agreed that, where points are equal across all sites, they should not be emphasised in the summary unless they have a material impact on the decision. For example, all sites are within open countryside but level of impact and the potential for sympathetic development and mitigation varies from site to site.

The meeting was positive and the outcome is that the TST accept that some points need to be clearer and they will amend the report following this meeting; the amended report will be sent to us next week. The SC felt that the TST may shift position slightly in terms of clarifying decisions but the TST are confident in their conclusions, based on professional judgement and planning policy, and so it is unlikely that any sites that are currently red will change.

The view of the SC is that this is a valuable, professional report and it provides an independent evidence base to support discussions with landowners, MKC and residents.