

COMMENTARY ON CALL FOR SITES SUBMISSIONS AFFECTING EAST FARLEIGH PARISH


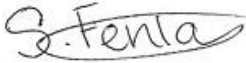
Maidstone Borough Local Plan Review

February 2020



Application by East Farleigh Parish Council

COMMENTARY ON CALL FOR SITES SUBMISSIONS
AFFECTING EAST FARLEIGH PARISH

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INTRODUCTION

1. ASP have been instructed by East Farleigh Parish Council to provide commentary on the various sites that lie within the parish boundary that were submitted during the recent 'Call for Sites' exercise undertaken by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) in early 2019.
2. This report firstly briefly sets out the background and then moves on to set out the context of East Farleigh Parish both in terms of its location and also in terms of identifiable constraints. The next section contains the individual site assessments. The final section draws the report's contents together in a conclusion.

BACKGROUND

3. The current Maidstone Borough Local Plan (MBLP) was adopted in October 2017 and as part of the Examination process it was agreed that the Council would undertake an early review of the plan with the aim of seeking to ensure a new plan would be in place in 2021. The new plan will cover the period to 2037 and potentially beyond. The current MBLP covers the period to 2031.
4. MBC have begun the evidence gathering process to support the local plan review. The housing requirement will be higher than it currently is due to the necessity for MBC to use the new Standard Methodology for calculating requirements and as a result it is highly likely that additional land will need to be identified and allocated for development. Therefore, as part of this review process, MBC launched a call for sites exercise to establish what land might be available to be brought forward. The call for sites took place between March and May 2019.
5. MBC's preferred spatial strategy for the new Local Plan has yet to be published. A greater sense of MBC's future direction in this regard is likely to emerge later in 2020. In the interim, MBC have invited the Parish Councils in the Borough to provide commentary on the sites that have been submitted on land within their jurisdiction.

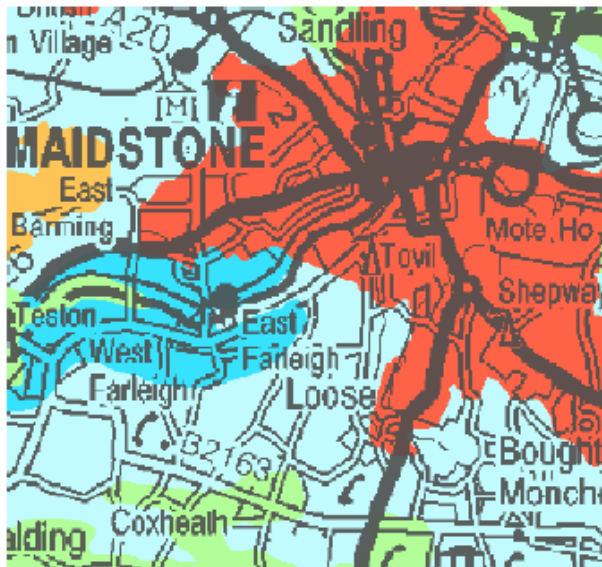
6. Submissions relating to some 16 sites lying within the East Farleigh Parish boundary were made to MBC and the Parish Council are also concerned that there are a number of sites in nearby areas that might also impact the parish. A plan showing the 16 submitted sites and their location is attached at **Appendix Two**.
7. The detailed information on the 16 sites that have been submitted in the parish indicates that the various sites could generate between 1298 and 1386 units, the latter figure derived from the maximum extent set out in the submissions.

EAST FARLEIGH'S CONTEXT

8. East Farleigh Parish is a historic parish located to the south west of Maidstone, approximately 2.5 miles from Maidstone Town Centre. The parish extends to approximately 560ha² in area and in the 2011 Census had a population of 1500 people at a density of 2.68 persons/ha.¹ There are around 650 dwellings currently in the parish. A plan showing the location of the parish relative to Maidstone and other nearby settlements is attached at **Appendix One**.
9. The MBLP 2017 and its approved Policies Map do not designate a settlement boundary for East Farleigh or any of the clusters of development inside its boundaries, so the entire parish is currently classified as countryside for the purposes of Development Plan policy.
10. The existing MBLP also did not include any sites allocated for development within the parish boundary.
11. In character, the parish comprises several clusters of development along two main connecting roads the B2010 Lower Road and Dean Street (C65) which are set within a landscape dominated by and predominantly still in agricultural use. The main clusters of development are along:
 - The B2010 Lower Road (east and west of Station Hill, along Station Hill and around Kettle Corner),

¹ [Kent County Council 2011 Census Parish Population Bulletin 2013](#)

- The C65 Dean Street (at the junction of Forge Lane/New Cut, along Workhouse Lane and north of its junction with B2163 Heath Road,
 - The southern end of Gallants Lane close to the junction with the B2163 Heath Road.
12. The majority of the agricultural land in the parish is classified as either Grade 1, along and close to the Medway Valley, or Grade 2.



Grade	Description
1	Excellent
2	Very Good
3	Good to Moderate
4	Poor
5	Very Poor
Non-Agricultural Land	
	Other land primarily in non-agricultural use
	Land predominantly in urban use

London & South East Region
 1:250 000 Series Agricultural Land Classification
 Natural England 2010

WHAT MAKES EAST FARLEIGH SPECIAL?

Landscape setting

13. East Farleigh Parish is set within attractive countryside that has retained its character despite the demise of the once dominant hop industry and the resultant change to the appearance of the agricultural land. To a large extent the parish has also been immune from the move towards intensive covered agricultural production that has taken place in recent years. Outside the settled and developed areas, orchards are still a common site, there is little large-scale arable farming on large fields except along Lower Road east of the historic village centre.

14. Despite its closeness to the urban area of Maidstone to the north and north east, you are aware that the parish has maintained its rural character when passing through it.
15. The northern part of the parish is dominated by the valley of the River Medway which is designated as Landscape of Local Value (LLV) in the MBLP 2017, part of the eastern side of the parish lies within the Loose Valley Landscape of Local Value. Extensive views across the Medway Valley from and towards land in the parish are possible in many places. Views along the Valley are vitally important in providing the setting for the development along Lower Road. The existing development on the south side of the River Medway settles into the valley side and is visually integrated with the agricultural land that surrounds it.
16. The open and largely undeveloped Medway valley sides outside the area along Lower Road provide a clear visual break from the very well-defined limits to the existing built-up area of Maidstone when viewed from either side of the River Medway, despite the relative closeness of the Parish to Maidstone itself. This degree of visual and physical separation and the sense that the settlement is an integral part of the wider countryside is part of East Farleigh's unique character.
17. The land to the south of the River Medway continues to rise in a southerly direction towards the crest of the Greensand Ridge located at Hunton Hill south of the B2163 Heath Road.
18. The lack of urban development and encroachment into the countryside is also evident in the southern part of the parish.

Biodiversity

19. There are areas of woodland and an abundance of connecting habitat bounding a generally irregular and intimate field pattern with numerous shelter belts, which provides a mosaic form of habitat throughout the parish. There are also areas of Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland and Plantation Ancient Woodland within and also immediately adjacent to the Parish boundaries. The River Medway also enhances biodiversity and vitality in the parish.

Heritage

20. The parish has two designated Conservation Areas within it, one centred along Lower Road and the other at the junction of Dean Street and Forge Lane/New Cut. The parish is home to one Grade 1 Listed Building (East Farleigh Bridge which is also a Scheduled Monument), one Grade 2* Listed Building (the Parish Church), some twenty-three Grade 2 listed buildings and nine Grade 2 listed monuments in the churchyard as well as a Grade 2 listed mounting block and a Grade 2 listed water trough at the top of Station Hill at its junction with the B2010 Lower Road.

21. There are a number of other buildings throughout the parish that are not classified as designated heritage assets. Nevertheless, through their use of local materials such as ragstone, or those which comprise retained and converted traditional agricultural buildings such as Oast houses, these buildings (Gallants Court, Frith Hall, the Almshouses in Workhouse Lane for example) make a positive contribution to the overall historic character and vitality of the area.

WHAT CONSTRAINTS AFFECT EAST FARLEIGH?

Community Infrastructure

22. In terms of community facilities and infrastructure, the parish has a limited range.

23. In addition to the parish church, which is linked to Coxheath, Hunton and Linton in a combined benefice, the Parish has a one-form entry primary school of around 200 pupils. This is located in Vicarage Lane with a Recreation Ground to its rear, a private Montessori School on Lower Road near Kettle Corner, a Womens' Institute Hall (Forge Lane) and the East Farleigh Social Club (Lower Road).

24. The former Church Hall on Lower Road is now privately owned but it is available for hire for community functions that include a regular day nursery. A farmers' market and antiques fair are regularly held on the site.

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25. There are four Public Houses in the parish, The Bull (Station Hill), The Walnut Tree (Forge Lane), The Victoria (Gallants Lane/Heath Road junction) and The Horseshoes (Dean Street).
26. There is also a Maidstone District Scout Camp site at Hamlet Wood on Stockett Lane in the south east of the parish.
27. There are no medical services in the parish or convenience shops serving the community's day-to-day needs. For these, residents have to look to the nearby village of Coxheath which lies adjacent to the south east corner of the parish or to the urban area of Maidstone itself. Accessing these facilities and services largely necessitates the use of private cars, given the paucity of public transport options, referred to in greater detail later.
28. It is abundantly clear that the parish lacks the necessary community infrastructure to support additional growth particularly on the scale of some of the submissions made to MBC, namely Bydews Farm (site 220), Court Lodge Farm (site 311) and Land west of Vicarage Lane (site 105) in particular.

Transport and road network

29. In terms of the public transport network East Farleigh is relatively poorly served despite its closeness to the Maidstone urban area.
30. East Farleigh is served by the Medway Valley railway line. This provides outside the weekday AM and PM peaks an hourly service in each direction to London via Maidstone West and Strood or southwards to Paddock Wood/Tonbridge. The railway station lies outside the parish boundary and is only accessible via East Farleigh bridge which is heavily trafficked and has no pavement or lighting.
31. The parish is served by a combination of bus routes 22, 23, 25, and 26, all provided by Nu Venture. Some routes operate via Lower Road and/or Gallants Lane to Lower Road and some via Dean Street. However, the services largely commence from points outside the parish, are limited in nature and range and are biased towards journeys to ensuring pupils can travel to and from schools in central Maidstone with much reduced frequency in the middle of the day. There are no services on Sundays or public/bank holidays.

32. As can be seen from the general descriptions set out above, the parish is heavily reliant on the two main routes, Lower Road (B2010) and Dean Street (C65), that cross through it. These two routes also serve as alternative routes into Maidstone from other villages in the south of Maidstone Borough and beyond in the Tunbridge Wells Borough, avoiding the need to use the heavily congested A229 Loose Road. Traffic levels on these roads have grown and continue to grow very noticeably. Dean Street in particular is very narrow and winding in places and there are no pavements for the majority of its length. Both Dean Street and Lower Road are unlit. Large HGVs using either road often cause particular problems and blockages adding to congestion and delays.

33. Station Hill (C76) provides a direct link across the narrow and historic Farleigh Bridge over the River Medway to the west of Maidstone, Maidstone Hospital, the Ditton/Aylesford area and Junction 5 of the M20 motorway avoiding the need to enter central Maidstone. It is also constrained by the level crossing at East Farleigh Station. This road is also very heavily trafficked particularly in the AM and PM peaks. Traffic queues regularly extend to the whole length of Station Hill from the Lower Road junction in both directions at peak times and also when the level crossing is closed to allow a train to pass or when the sheer volume of traffic passing south over the river towards East Farleigh is such that no cars can cross northbound over the bridge.

34. The B2163 which in effect forms the southern parish boundary is also heavily trafficked and used, despite its width and poor alignment as it passes through the adjacent West Farleigh Parish, as a de-facto southern bypass and distributor road for Maidstone between the A26 Tonbridge Road at Teston, through the parish and Coxheath to the A229 at Linton, thence to the A274 at Langley and ultimately as far as the A20 Ashford Road/M20 junction 8 at Leeds and Hollingbourne. This road feeds traffic onto the existing network passing through the remainder of the parish, in particular Dean Street, as motorists seek to again avoid the A229 Loose Road corridor.

35. The potential numbers of dwellings and location of the suggested development sites will clearly result in further impact and traffic growth on an already inadequate road network. Accident data for the last four years indicates a relatively large number of incidents have occurred (**Appendix Three**) within the

parish, although none resulted in fatal injuries. The risk of such incidents can only increase if development occurs. The additional traffic generated using the local network will also only further erode the rural character of the parish.

SITE ASSESSMENTS

36. The site assessments have been undertaken having regard to the background of the very evident constraints that exist in the Parish as outlined in the previous section. Furthermore, the rural character of the Parish and the integration of existing built development into the countryside surrounding it, is a key element in the prevailing character of the Parish. If any development was to take place it should respect this character and not lead to consolidation of the existing pockets of development or coalescence of East Farleigh with its neighbours. The current MBLP 2017 and the previous Borough-wide Local Plan 2000 sought to preserve this character by not defining a settlement boundary for East Farleigh or any of the pockets of development within it.

Site 005: Land Adj Dingley Dell Heath Road



FRONTAGE TO HEATH ROAD



INTERNAL

37. A former Nursery, a use that has now been ceased for a considerable period of time. Currently overgrown and used for storing plant and vehicles.

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38. Maidstone BC accepted it had a lawful B1/B8 use and that there was an extant permission for two workshop buildings at the time of an application in 2010 but nevertheless refused an application for a single dwelling on grounds of impact on the countryside and unsustainable development. A subsequent appeal in 2011 was dismissed with the Inspector agreeing with the Council that it would constitute harmful unsustainable development in the countryside.
39. The considerations applying to the site have not materially changed in the interim. The submission indicates that up to 24 dwellings could be erected. This would be significantly out of character with the established form and grain of development and add significantly to existing sporadic development in the area, which has no basic services and poor transport links.
40. The site is not considered appropriate for development or allocation.

Site 028: Rear of Mays Cottage



LOOKING WEST ALONG LOWER ROAD



LOOKING NORTH EAST OVER SITE

41. This site is prominently located on the north side of Lower Road close to its junction with St. Helens Lane. It lies in the Medway Valley Landscape of Local Value. There are extensive views across the Medway Valley to Barming.
42. The submission proposed 4 large houses or 14 smaller ones. The site is in an unsustainable location and has poor transport links. Visually, development would harm the openness of the countryside and

intensify existing sporadic development as well as bringing it further along Lower Road from the cluster of buildings at St Helens Lane harming the Medway Valley LLV. At 0.2ha the site is too small to allocate in any event.

43. The site is not considered appropriate for development or allocation

Site 040: Land at the Corner of Dean Street



HEATH ROAD FRONTAGE

44. This site is located at the junction of Dean Street and Heath Road and is proposed for up to 6 dwellings. It is currently 100% covered by coppice woodland. Any development would result in an adverse impact on biodiversity. Its location at what is a busy junction is also likely to be unacceptable in highway safety terms given the queues that form at peak times along Dean Street and the volume of traffic using the B2163. Development on the site would also reduce the visual and physical separation of the

existing sporadic development at the southern end of Dean Street from Coxheath, which is being eroded further as the development on the MBLP 2017 allocated 'Older's Field' site takes place.

45. The site is not considered appropriate for development or allocation.

Site 048: South side of Forge Lane



SITE FRONTAGE TO FORGE LANE



46. Proposed for up to 10 dwellings, this site, currently an orchard is visually prominent in the landscape when viewed from the north side of the Medway Valley from Gatland Lane. East Farleigh is very well integrated with the countryside and is clearly visually contained into the area at the western end of Forge Lane, Lower Road and Station Hill when viewed from across the river. Development on this site would result in a very harmful visual extension to built development further along and on much higher land along Forge Lane and would be clearly detrimental to the area's character. The junctions at either end of Forge Lane also suffer from restricted visibility onto busy sections of road and the additional traffic generated by this development would worsen this situation.
47. The site is not considered appropriate for development or allocation

Site 50: Army Hut Stables Stockett Lane



LOOKING NORTH FROM WORKHOUSE LANE



LOOKING NORTH TOWARDS HAMLET WOOD NORTH OF EXISTING BUILDINGS



EXISTING BUILDINGS



LOOKING SOUTH TOWARDS COXHEATH

48. The promoters of this site indicate it might be suitable for up to 75 dwellings. It is located just north of Coxheath which, as indicated previously, is expanding considerably as a result of allocations in the MBLP2017 that are now being delivered. It is visually prominent on rising ground, the existing dwelling and stable/livery buildings particularly so, as they are located on the highest point on the site. It lies within the Loose Valley LLV and Hamlet Wood to its west is Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland. Stockett Lane is narrow and has poor vertical and horizontal alignment. It has no pavements and is not lit at this point.
49. Development on this site would visually expand Coxheath northwards given the topography of the site and cause clear harm to the character of the countryside at this point. The development is also very likely to cause harm to the immediately adjacent Ancient Woodland of Hamlet Wood and it would erode the character of this part of the Loose Valley LLV. Considerable additional traffic would be

added to Stockett Lane to the detriment of highway safety on this narrow unsuitable road that carries a significant amount of AM and PM peak traffic from Coxheath to Maidstone seeking to avoid the A229 Loose Road.

50. The site is not therefore considered appropriate for development or allocation

Site 61: Kettle Lane



LOOKING EAST



LOOKING NORTH

51. A small site at 0.15ha in area, but the submission indicates up to 5 dwellings. A previous application in 2006 seeking residential development for two dwellings was refused. Kettle Lane is a narrow road of only one car width. The junction with Lower Road has poor visibility to the east and there is not room for two cars to pass at the junction. The site would consolidate the sporadic development in the area and is poorly served by public transport.
52. The site is not considered appropriate for development.

Site 68: MAP Depot Lower Road



MAP DEPOT (THE GREEN-CLAD BUILDING)

53. This is a site that was put forward during the progression of the now adopted MBLP 2017 and was considered unsuitable at that time due to its unsustainability and impact on the surrounding area. The submission suggests it might be suitable for 40 dwellings.
54. The circumstances of the site have not changed in the interim period. The development of the site would still significantly intensify sporadic development along this section of Lower Road and

furthermore would also lead to the loss of an active employment site. The site remains unsustainable and poorly served by Public Transport.

55. The site is not considered appropriate for development.

Site 69: Homelands Farm Dean Street



INTERNAL SHOTS OF SITE TAKEN FROM PROW



56. This site is located on the east side of Dean Street, north of Pleasant Valley Lane and south of Workhouse Lane. It extends to 5.58 ha in area and comprises some pasture and what appears to be an abandoned Christmas tree plantation. It is crossed by two PROW, one of which passes through the centre of the site linking Pleasant Valley Lane to Workhouse Lane. The site has a varied topography and the north west side comprises a dry valley running northwards.

57. The submission indicates that up to 167 dwellings could be developed. The key issue with this site would be the significant reduction in the separation between the existing dwellings along Dean Street and Workhouse Lane and the village of Coxheath to the south east and the risk of coalescence. Ironically, the site promoters cite the closeness of new development on the periphery of Coxheath as the justification for this development. There would be clear harm to the character of the countryside if development was to occur on the scale envisaged
58. Both proposed accesses, directly on to Dean Street and on to Workhouse Lane and then Dean Street, are narrow and unsuitable. Substantial additional movements onto the already busy Dean Street would result from the development. Workhouse Lane is unsuitable to accommodate any increase in traffic even on a small scale let alone that envisaged in the submission. Kent County Council highways' usually accepted average is 6-8 trips per dwelling/day. On that basis, development of the scale proposed here could result in between 1000 and 1350 additional trips/day on the local network. Most of these would be by private car due to the poor public transport.
59. The site is not considered appropriate for development or allocation.

Site 70: Land Adj. Willow Wood Vicarage Lane



ACCESS (ACROSS FENCED AREA)



INTERNAL SHOT OF SITE

60. A rectangular site currently used as paddock and grazing land, it is situated immediately opposite the village school and car park. Vicarage Lane is narrow and barely wide enough to allow two vehicles to pass each other safely.
61. The submission indicates up to 10 dwellings. The site sits in a prominent location on the southern Medway Valley slope and is clearly visible from the north bank of the River from the Gatland Lane area. Development would consolidate sporadic development on the east side of Vicarage Lane and be harmful to the character and appearance of the countryside.
62. The site is not considered appropriate for development.

Site 84: Land off Heath Road



LOOKING NORTH ALONG GALLANTS LANE



LOOKING NORTH ACROSS SITE



LOOKING SOUTH ACROSS SITE

63. The site extends to 1.67 ha and is located on the eastern side of the junction of Gallants Lane and Heath Road. It is currently used and divided into horse grazing plots. It is bounded by a tall hedge to Gallants Lane and Heath Road.
64. Development would add significantly to the existing development at the southern end of Gallants Lane, in this case up to 35 units have been proposed. The provision of the access to serve the development would result in a loss of much of the existing hedge, which provides a significant visual break to existing development and thus harm the character of the area. There are no facilities in the immediate area, except for the Victoria PH that any residents might conceivably use. The site is poorly served by public transport and as such is in an unsustainable location.
65. The site is not considered appropriate for development.

Site 105: Vicarage Lane Lower Road



SITE FROM GATLAND LANE

66. The site currently in active agricultural use, extends to some 6.86ha and is located west of Vicarage Lane and south of Lower Road. It is situated opposite the Parish Church and adjoins the Conservation Area. The submission indicates it could provide up to 60 units at what is a very low density of around 8.7 dwellings/ha.
67. The site slopes up the Medway valley side southwards along Vicarage Lane. Vicarage Lane is narrow and its junction with Lower Road has poor visibility. The likely site of the access close to Forge Lane would add to existing problems caused by high levels of traffic, existing on-street parking and school traffic. The site is visually sensitive and clearly visible from across the river. Development on this site would very visibly extend built development towards the village school further up Vicarage Lane from the historic centre of the village on Lower Road, removing the current separation which provides much of the setting of the Conservation Area at this point. The fact that the site promoter is only looking to provide development at around 8.7 dwellings/ha is indicative of its high sensitivity to change.
68. The site is not considered appropriate for development.

Site 163: Land opposite Dingley Dell Heath Road



LOOKING WEST ACROSS SITE

69. A long narrow linear site on the south side of the B2163 Heath Road that stretches from the Dean Street junction to beyond Gallants Lane. The land to the south is a Local Wildlife Site and also classified as Plantation Ancient Woodland. It is currently overgrown and appears to be regenerating naturally.
70. Development on this site would be very harmful to the character and appearance of the area as little or no development exists on this side of Heath Road. The site is poorly served by public transport and there are no local services in the area for residents to utilise on a day to day basis. Access on to the B2163 would also result in the removal of substantial sections of the existing hedgerow to achieve the necessary vision splays further impacting on the character of the area.
71. The site is not considered appropriate for development.

Site 220 Bydews Farm



LOOKING EAST TOWARDS BYDEWS PLACE: DEAN STREET TO RIGHT OF PHOTO



LOOKING WEST PAST LONE COTTAGE

72. This site extends to some 26.46 ha and is located on the north side of Lower Road, stretching eastwards from Priory Close towards Bydews Place. It has a frontage to both Lower Road and Dean Street and is bounded by the River Medway to the north. The promoter considers it may support up to 500 dwellings. The site lies entirely within the Medway Valley LLV and a significant portion of just under 10ha is classified as Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland. Bydews Place contains a group of Grade II listed buildings. It comprises the highest grade agricultural land at Grade 1.
73. The site is particularly sensitive in that development would extend built development significantly eastwards to the edge of Tovil and urban Maidstone eroding the strong sense of openness that currently exists. The site has very open boundaries to both Lower Road and Dean Street and apart from the woodland comprises a single large arable field, which only serves to increase the sense of openness.

74. Lower Road and Dean Street are already heavily trafficked and the additional trips added to the network from this development would be significant affecting both these roads and almost certainly Station Hill as well. The site is not well served by public transport nor are local services readily available. It is not sustainable.
75. Development of this scale would completely overwhelm the existing character of the area and cause substantial harm to the character of this very sensitive area of countryside and irreparably damage the setting of East Farleigh. The setting of the woodland would be harmed by development and the purpose of the Medway Valley LLV seriously undermined. There would be considerable loss of the best and most versatile Grade 1 agricultural land.
76. This site is considered particularly unsuitable for development due to the likely level of harm that would result.

Site no 257: Junction of Dean Street and Heath Road



SITE FRONTAGE TO DEAN STREET

77. This site extends to 1ha in area and is located on the west side of Dean Street just north of its junction with Heath Road B2163. It is currently overgrown agricultural land. There is a tall hedgerow to the road frontage. The promoter considers it potentially able to deliver 25 dwellings.
78. Similarly, to nearby sites 05, 40 and 163 in particular, the site is not considered to be sustainable, in that it has a poor public transport service despite being on a bus route. Whilst there is a footpath link to Coxheath, reaching the shops and other services involves crossing the busy B2163 twice at least. The closeness of the potential access point to the Dean Street/Heath Road junction may also prove problematic.
79. Development on this site would consolidate the ribbon of development along this part of Dean Street and also extend built development further into open countryside in a sensitive location causing harm to its character.
80. The site is not considered appropriate for development.

Site no 283: North of Victoria PH



THE SITE LOOKING TOWARDS GALLANTS LANE



SITE TO RIGHT SIDE OF PHOTO BEHIND EXISTING HEDGE

81. This site extends to 0.25ha and is promoted for up to 8 dwellings. It is located off Victoria Court which serves an existing 5 home development and which will serve a permitted but as yet unimplemented local needs housing scheme of 5 further units approved in 2017. The site currently comprises an open field with a tall hedge to Gallants Lane.
82. Similar constraints and considerations to those that applied to site 84 on the opposite side of Gallants Lane apply to this site. There are no facilities in the immediate area, except for the Victoria PH that any residents might conceivably use. The site is poorly served by public transport and as such is in an unsustainable location. Development would represent a further and inappropriate consolidation of the existing development in the area. In essence unacceptable infilling. There is a clear distinction between planning considerations as they relate to local needs housing and open market housing which accounts for the extant permission on the land to the rear of the submission site.
83. Development on this site is not considered appropriate.

Site 311: Court Lodge Farm



THE WEST END OF COURT LODGE FARM FROM GATLAND LANE (ALSO SITE 48)



EXISTING BUSINESS UNITS AND THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN SECTIONS OF COURT LODGE FARM



EXISTING BUSINESS UNITS AND FARM BUILDINGS



LOOKING NORTH EAST FROM FORGE LANE BOUNDARY



LOOKING NORTH TOWARDS LOWER ROAD



WESTERN END OF COURT LODGE FARM

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84. A site of some 40ha promoted for between 226 and 274 dwellings. The development parcels would be interspersed with retained agriculture parcels so development would not take place across the whole 40ha. The site primarily comprises open Grade 1 agricultural land with some commercial buildings (B1) and agricultural buildings to its south. There are also two orchards at the northeast and south of the site.
85. It occupies rising ground along Forge Lane on the Medway Valley side and has a long frontage to Lower Road including being opposite part of site 220 Bydews Farm. Almost the entire submission site is currently visible from Gatland Lane. Three access on Lower Road are indicated to serve three pockets of development, two accesses are proposed from Forge Lane, one that serves the existing commercial area that would be retained and an access close to the Walnut Tree PH.
86. Despite the greater detail contained in this submission compared to the majority of other submissions and some consideration to wider visual impact, it is still the case that any development on this site would be very harmful visually in the landscape. It would infill currently very open land east of the cluster of dwellings at the junction of Forge Lane and Vicarage Lane. Planting would take many years to mature on this currently open arable land to even begin to screen the development. The current visual appearance of East Farleigh as a settlement integrated and surrounded by countryside would be irrevocably lost.
87. Creating three access onto the already busy Lower Road, which is narrow and has poor horizontal alignment would not only be visually harmful through loss of the hedging but add additional traffic of which a proportion would use Station Hill adding further to congestion and safety hazards on this road as well. The private car would be the most dominant choice for residents given the lack of suitable and reliable public transport alternatives.
88. East Farleigh does not have the community facilities to enable it to support the envisaged scale of development on this site. Development would add to already high levels of traffic in the area. The development would irrevocably alter the setting of East Farleigh and the appearance of the countryside

on the southern side of the Medway Valley and result in the loss of Grade 1 agricultural land. The site is not considered appropriate for development.

Sites in adjacent areas

89. A number of sites have been submitted in areas adjacent to the Parish. Three (095 Half Yoke, 262 Fant Farm and 315 Homewood Orchard Garden Centre) are located on the north side of the Medway Valley whilst three sites have been proposed at Bydews Place (010, 011 and 203) as well as Abbey Farm (265). A further site (093) has been promoted on land to the north of Linden Barn, partly in Coxheath Parish and partly in East Farleigh which is located at the junction of Stockett Lane and Workhouse Lane adjacent to site 50 (Army Hut Stables).
90. The first group of three sites mentioned above raise two main concerns. Firstly, all three are prominent and highly visible in views across the Medway Valley from East Farleigh. All are just beyond a very clear urban edge to this part of Maidstone. Any development will erode the current openness on the valley side and increase the perception of urban creep edging ever closer to East Farleigh and thus also physically adversely affecting the setting of East Farleigh. Secondly, whilst the majority of traffic is likely to move northwards from Gatland Lane, it is still inevitably the case that there will be some increased use of Farleigh Lane and Station Hill adding to existing congestion levels and delays at the level crossing and East Farleigh bridge and the junction with Lower Road. The Parish Council urges the Borough Council to carefully consider these issues in assessing the suitability of these sites for development.
91. The second group of sites are located around Bydews Place and Abbey Farm in Tovil. The concerns here mainly relate to the potential for increased traffic passing through the Parish along Lower Road and Dean Street. Those traveling to destinations west and south of Maidstone are very unlikely to enter and journey through the centre of Maidstone to make their journeys due to lengthened journey times and congestion. There is also the issue of development drawing ever closer to East Farleigh, site 203 in particular adjoins the large 500 dwelling Bydews Farm submission.

92. With regard to Abbey Farm since the call for sites submission were made, there has been a potentially significant change in circumstances in that the land across which the indicative access is shown in the submission has been leased by Maidstone Borough Council on a 50 year lease to the Hayle Place Nature Reserve Trust and will be managed as wildflower meadows where there will be limited public access. Areas which were not formerly used as a household waste deposit site will have public access.
93. The proposed site promoted for 5-9 dwellings at Linden Farm Barn (site 93) would extend built development to the edge of Workhouse Lane and therefore intrude into what is currently largely undeveloped countryside. The setting of the existing barn would be further adversely affected, as the space around it has already been eroded by a new residential development to its south and as the proposed development would take place on the open area to its north.

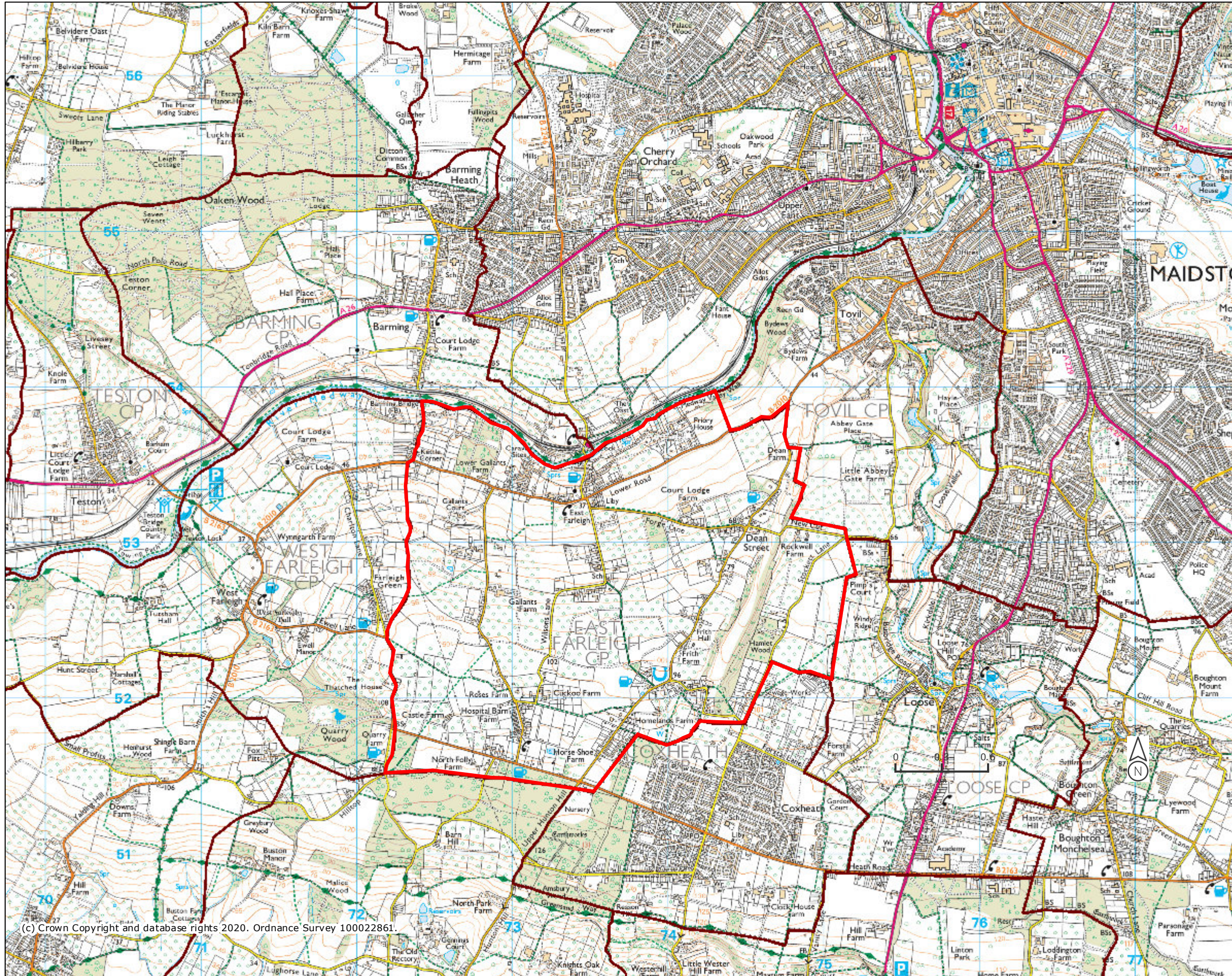
CONCLUSION

94. The key theme that runs through these assessments is the existing rural character of the Parish, the inadequacy of public transport connections despite the relative proximity to the Maidstone urban area, the severe limitations of the existing local road network coupled with the existing levels of traffic that use it on a daily basis and the lack of community facilities across the Parish as a whole.
95. Essentially, the defining character of East Farleigh comprises the dispersed pockets of development centred on historic key junctions on a road network that has remained unchanged for centuries apart from a few minor improvements, interspersed by large areas of countryside much of which, given its Grade 1 land classification, largely remains in productive agricultural use.
96. Additional development even on the smaller sites would detract from this pattern and result in clear harm to this established character either through consolidation of the sporadic areas of development. Development at sites 105 Lower Road/Vicarage Lane, 220 Bydews Farm and 311 Court Lodge Farm would be especially harmful to the setting and established character of the countryside surrounding the area centred on Lower Road and Station Hill, visibly pushing development further onto the prominent valley slopes.

97. Coupled with the lack of community facilities and available and adequate public transport, the Parish is not capable of absorbing additional development sustainably without harming the established character that makes it special.
98. Sites that have been proposed in nearby locations such as along Farleigh Lane/Gatland Lane on the northern Medway valley side and at Abbey Farm and Bydews Place in Tovil, are also likely to have an impact on the Parish largely through the additional traffic that is very likely to seek to use Farleigh Lane/Station Hill and Lower Road/Dean Street. In the case of the sites at Farleigh Lane and Gatland Lane, development in these areas will harm the backdrop of the Medway Valley LLV and increase the perception of coalescence and urban encroachment for the residents of East Farleigh as the urban area of Maidstone gets closer, as would development at Bydews Place, particularly the larger of the three promoted sites.

APPENDIX 1

Parish Boundary Map



Legend

- Parishes (GB)
- East Farleigh Parish

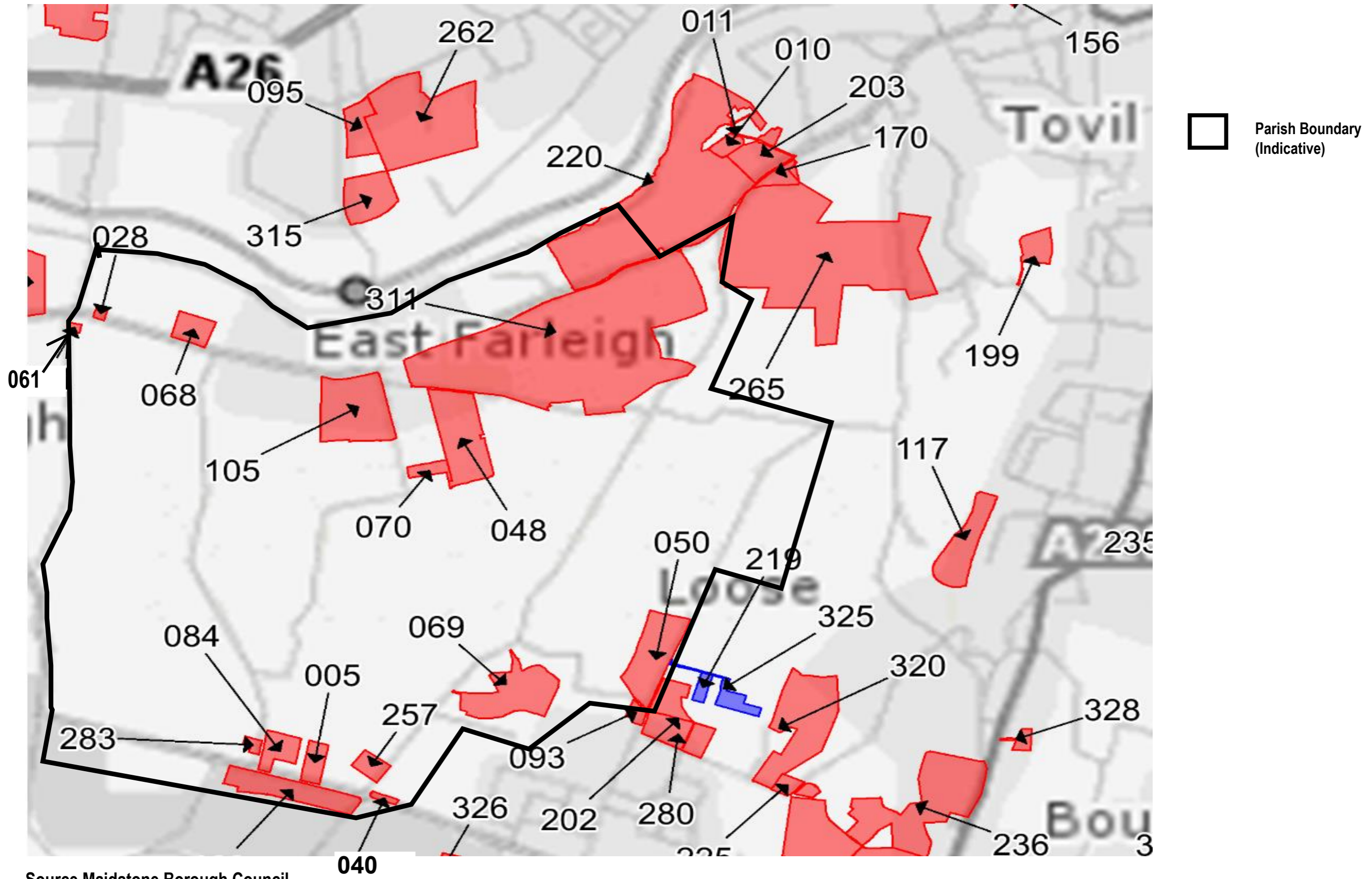
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APPENDIX 2

Submitted Sites East Farleigh



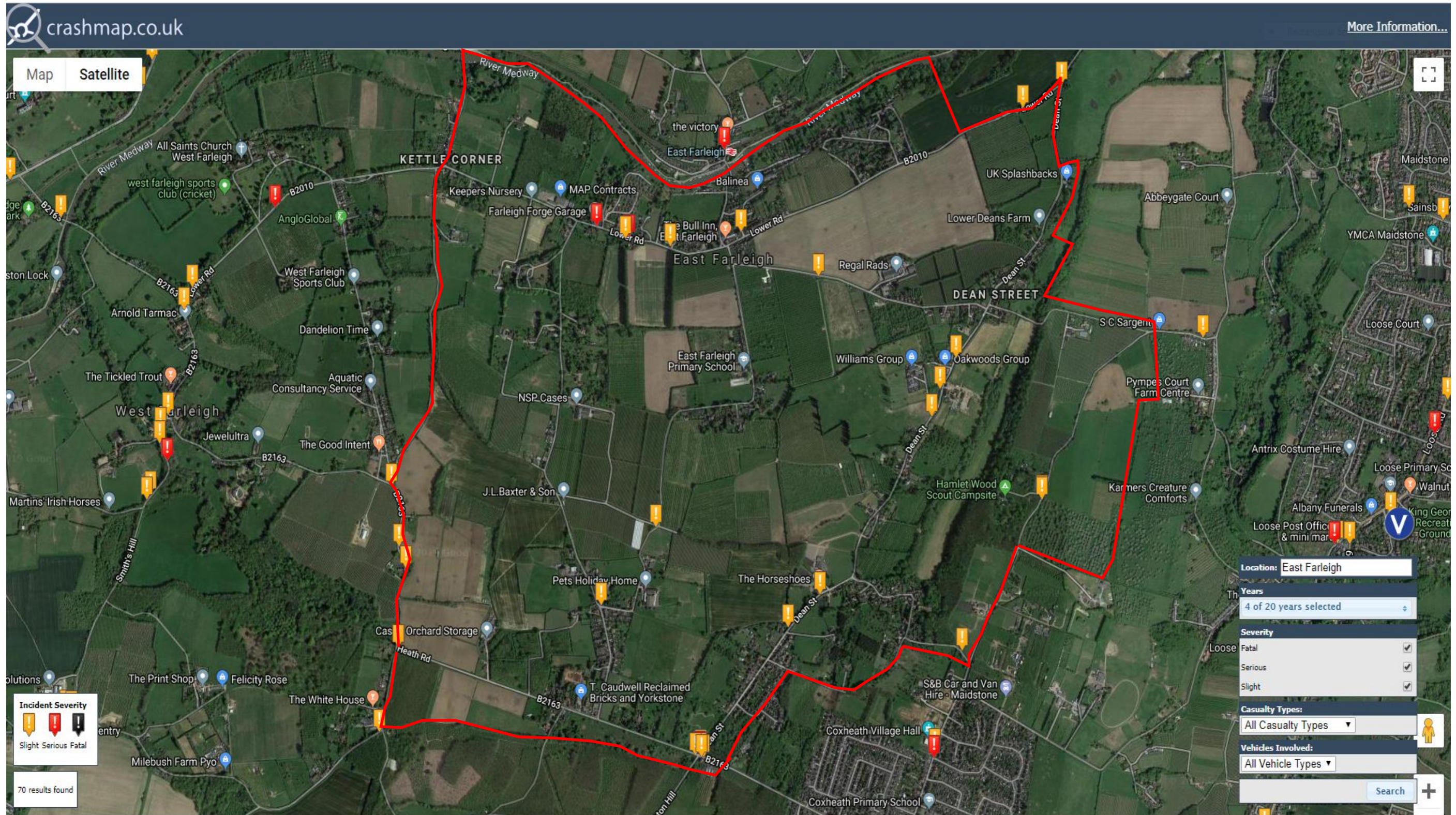
Source Maidstone Borough Council.

APPENDIX 3

Injury Accident Data 2015-2018

Injury Accidents 2015 to 2018

All categories.....no Fatal injury incidents



Incidents resulting in Slight injury 2015-2018

