



COXHEATH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Submission Plan January 2014



COXHEATH PARISH COUNCIL



COXHEATH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN
Submission Document
COXHEATH FUTURE - 'OUR COMMUNITY, OUR VISION'

PREFACE

The Coxheath Neighbourhood Plan will cover the whole of the parish over the period 2013-2031, which is the same end date proposed for the Maidstone Local Plan. It is being prepared in parallel with the Maidstone Local Plan in order to give the community more certainty about, and a major say in, planning decisions that affect Coxheath, as intended by the underpinning Localism Act 2011.

There is a great deal of uncertainty around planning policy in Maidstone at present because the Government's policy is to significantly increase house building, the Borough Council has no approved Local Plan, nor a five year supply of housing and has just proposed to significantly increase its housing target.

The whole parish of Coxheath was designated as the area for the Neighbourhood Plan by Maidstone Borough Council on 29th October 2012 after public consultation.

This Draft Coxheath Neighbourhood Plan was subject to pre submission consultation from 8th November to 20th December 2013. The response to the consultation was overwhelmingly in favour of the proposals in the draft plan, and is summarized in the accompanying Consultation Report. The response has been taken into account in revising the Neighbourhood Plan for submission to the local planning authority, Maidstone Borough Council.

COXHEATH TODAY

The Parish of Coxheath is built on the Greensand Ridge, and the Greensand Way runs along the Ridge on the outskirts of the village. The village has spectacular views over the Weald of Kent to the south and of the Kent Downs to the north.

It is close to the adjoining villages of East Farleigh, Hunton, Linton and Loose. This is because the parish was created from land that was formerly part of the four surrounding parishes and therefore the village does not have a large area of surrounding countryside separating it from adjoining villages.

Coxheath is surrounded by areas of outstanding landscape character and high quality agricultural land (see Plan 1). It is separated from its neighbouring villages by fields and woodland, enabling it to keep its own identity and character. Coxheath also has a network of footpaths for recreational walking and these allow magnificent views of the surrounding landscape.

Coxheath has some areas of public recreational open space (see Plan 2), but the amount of public open space in the village falls well below the standards of open space set by the Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) Open Space Development Plan Document (DPD), adopted in December 2006. The DPD standards would require an open space provision of 19.47 hectares for Coxheath, whereas the actual provision at the public open space/recreation areas listed below is 4.75 hectares, leaving a shortage of 14.72 hectares. At present there is no local nature reserve or allotment provision in Coxheath.

- The public open space areas are:
- The play area by the Village Hall;
- The field to the rear of the Village Hall with the sports wall and youth shelter;
- The play area and open space in Whitebeam Drive and Fairhurst Drive;
- The open space in Huntington Road, granted 'village green' status in 2008;
- The area of grassland and informal play area in Hanover Road;
- Two small play areas on the Avante site;
- Football Pitches:

1 full-sided football pitch and 2 x small-sided football pitches on the Parish land behind the Village Hall land.

There is also a pitch at the primary school, although this is not strictly a public open space.

1.1 Compact Form

The Parish of Coxheath has a relatively small area but a large population for its size. The 2011 Census shows that it has an area of 232 hectares, with a density of 17.58 persons per hectare. Only Bearsted and Downswood Parishes have a higher density of persons per hectare. The Rural Service Centres all have many more hectares with a considerably lower density of population.

The compact form with good access on foot to all community services and facilities is highly valued by local residents and is a key element of the character of Coxheath. The 5 and 10 minute walking zones (Plan 3) clearly shows that the vast majority of the village is within 10 minutes walk of the village centre services.

1.2 Population and Age

The 2011 Census showed that Coxheath has 4082 residents, an increase of 6% over the ten years since the 2001 Census, and that its residents are getting older.

- The greatest increase, by 28%, was in the older population, those aged 65 and over; this group makes up 23% of the population. The 85+ population increased by 49%.
- The 45-64 age group remained fairly static, with just a 4% increase; this group makes up 27% of the population.
- The 25-44 age group decreased slightly by 3%, and makes up 24% of the population.
- The number of 16-24 year olds increased by 11%, and form 9% of population.
- The 0-15 year olds decreased by 6%, and form 16% of population.

1.3 Housing Type

In the ten years between the 2001 Census and the 2011 Census, 186 new dwellings were built, increasing the number of dwellings to 1791 – a 12% increase.

- There are 388 detached houses/bungalows, this makes 22% of total household spaces;
- 970 semi-detached houses/bungalows, making up 54% of total household spaces;
- 243 terraced houses/bungalows, making 14% of total household spaces;
- 185 flats/maisonettes/apartments, making 10% of total household spaces
- 5 caravans or other temporary structures, making 0.3% of total household spaces.

The biggest increases in types of housing being built are in the “terraced houses” (36%) and “flats, maisonettes, apartments” (32%).

1.4 Housing Tenure

1410 dwellings (79%) are owner-occupied; this represents an increase of 8%.

298 dwellings (17%) are rented accommodation; again an increase of 8%. Housing association properties make up 49% of all rented accommodation.

24 dwellings (1%) are in shared ownership.

22 (1%) dwellings are let rent-free.

37 properties (2%) are unoccupied.

1.5 Employment: Total Working Age Population (Aged 16-74):

This remains quite static, rising by 7% to 2967; this category represents 73% of the total population.

Total Economically Active:

- This group also remains quite static, rising by 8% to 2108; representing 71% of the total working age population.
- Unemployed rose by 27% to 71; but this represents only 2% of the total working age population.

Total Economically Inactive:

- The number of retired residents rose by 17% to 559; this group represents 19% of the total working age population;
- There are 83 students, an increase of 8%; forming 3% of the total working age population;
- 110 people are looking after home/family, a decrease of 26%; forming 4% of the total working age population;
- 65 residents are permanently sick/disabled, a decrease of 17%; representing 2% of the total working age population.

1.6 Travel to Work

54% of the working age population travel to work by car. Only 3% of the working age population travel by bus, 3% travel by train, 4% walk or cycle to work and 3% work from home. 32% of the working age population are not in employment.

1.7 Car Ownership

Car ownership increased by 360 (16%) to 2616.

39% of households have one car and 47% of households have two or more cars. 14% of households do not have a car; this is a decrease of 27 (10%).

1.8 Village Services and Shops

Coxheath has two surgeries, which are both under considerable pressure to maintain existing facilities for their patients. A dental practice is located within the same building as one of the surgeries. There is also an NHS clinic, and Children's Centre at Heathside.

Coxheath has a church, a library, a primary school and the catchment secondary school is within easy distance.

The village hall is used by Coxheath pre-school and various other organisations. There is also a Scout Hut.

The village centre has a good range of shops; including a Post Office, a pharmacy, a bakery, a butchers shop and a convenience store. There is a restaurant, four takeaway outlets and a café.

1.9 Bus Services

Service 89 runs three times per hour to Maidstone, although the timetable changes late afternoon on Monday to Fridays. Weekday buses from Maidstone, two per hour operate the 'Hail & Ride' route through Park Way/Westway/Stockett Lane, one drives straight through to East Farleigh. On Saturdays all buses operate the 'Hail & Ride' route, and from early evening the timetable changes to one per hour. On Sundays and Bank Holidays the 89 runs hourly between Maidstone and East Farleigh.

- Service 5 provides a service on Sundays, leaving Coxheath at 10 a.m. It leaves Maidstone at 4.53, arriving in Coxheath at 5.12 p.m.
- Service 29 provides a service on Saturdays, 7.52 a.m. from Coxheath (Stile Bridge to Maidstone).
- There is an Arriva free bus to Tesco Larkfield every Tuesday, leaving Coxheath at 10.35 a.m. and arriving at Tesco at 11:15. It leaves Tesco at 12:45.

1.10 Parking

There are approximately 50 parking spaces in the village centre; located at the Scout Hut, rear of Hamilton House, front of Elmfield Court, front of Lloyds Pharmacy to Woods the Butchers and in front of Tip-2-Toe.

Identified on-street parking problems are along Stockett Lane, Westerhill Road, Clock House Rise and Bramley Gardens.

1.11 Traffic

Heath Road (B2163) is a long, straight road which splits village down the centre. Speed and volume of traffic is a problem as it acts as an unofficial southern bypass to the congestion in Maidstone Town. There is a significant conflict between this traffic and the many pedestrian crossing movements. Traffic calming was introduced in 2006/7 which is very unpopular locally because it creates congestion, pollution and rat running.

OUR COMMUNITY VISION AND OBJECTIVES

The community vision for Coxheath is very clear. It became clear during community engagement over many years on the Parish Plan, and was confirmed by recent community engagement on the Neighbourhood Plan. A number of key planning principles have been adopted and these, underpinned the parish's input to the Sustainable Communities Workshop hosted by Maidstone Borough Council in November 2009, informed the development of MBC's Draft Core Strategy. They also underpinned the Parish Council's response to consultations on the Maidstone Local Development Framework Core Strategy. These principles are:

- To enhance the character of the village;
- To keep the village's separate identity;
- To ensure that the services and infrastructure (water, sewerage, health, community recreation, public transport etc) are sustainable in the context of existing development and are capable of sustaining any future development;
- To retain mixed development, including a range of housing, employment and business opportunities, so that the village is a balanced, sustainable community;
- To introduce traffic calming in Heath Road and residential areas;
- To improve the environment with more green space, recreation facilities and an enhanced 'village feel'.

2.1 Community Engagement on the Neighbourhood Plan

The Community Engagement Report summarises almost 1000 individual responses in the initial community engagement events. The main comments raised by local people were:

- Many respondents stated that they liked living in Coxheath because it had a nice, friendly feel; they liked its village character and its easy access to the surrounding countryside;
- One of the highest concerns was the provision of health care services. The two surgeries cannot cope with the present demands made on them. Dental care provision also needs improving;
- Another major concern was traffic, parking and traffic calming. The traffic calming causes lengthy delays at peak times, which leads to dangerous and reckless driving, and rat-running through unsuitable roads to escape the build-outs. There are not enough parking spaces in the village centre and this leads to inconsiderate parking;
- Major doubts over the need for further housing, including local needs housing, because of perceived problems with existing services and infrastructure of the village;
- Many respondents felt that the appearance of the village centre should be softened; making it less car-centred and more pedestrian-friendly;
- The need to identify and secure additional parking areas close to the village centre, coupled with a need for more effective enforcement;
- A clear desire to maintain the separate character and identity of the village;
- The importance of retaining a green belt around the village to keep its separate identity, its rural village feel and character;
- General support of environmental issues such as the enhancement of the village centre and the creation of easy access recreational walking routes and safe cycle routes around the village;
- General agreement that open space should be protected and recreational/amenity space provided but more thought to be given to the actual facilities to be included;
- The provision of local needs housing as opposed to social housing;
- Some provision of housing suited to older residents;
- The provision of recreational facilities for 10-18 year olds.

2.2 Vision and Objectives

Using the evidence gathered from the recent community engagement regarding the Neighbourhood Plan, as well as the evidence from previous community engagements on the Parish Plan and other local issues such as traffic calming and proposed development schemes, the following Vision and Objectives have been adopted to guide the development of Coxheath over the next 15-20 years.

2.2.1 Vision: To maintain the separate identity and character of Coxheath as a compact, balanced community with an enhanced, sustainable range of shopping, facilities, services and infrastructure.

2.2.2 Objectives:

- 1. CHARACTER:** Maintain the separate identity and compact character of the village with a green belt of countryside around it.
- 2. HOUSING:** Meet the need for local needs affordable housing and housing suitable for the village's ageing population.
- 3. BUSINESS:** Maintain and enhance the quality, variety and viability of shopping in the village centre and other existing employment/commercial uses in the village.
- 4. PARKING:** Increase the number of public car parking spaces available to serve the village shopping centre and key services. Ensure that all new developments have adequate off road parking provision.
- 5. TRAFFIC:** Slow traffic speed through the village on the B2163, increase pedestrian priority in the village centre and safe crossing points, minimise congestion, pollution and rat-running.
Slow southbound traffic entering the village from Stockett Lane.
- 6. AMENITY AND RECREATION:** Improve recreation facilities at, and adjacent to, the village hall site together with more amenity open space, including wildlife areas and allotments, and optimum provision of children's play areas.
- 7. HEALTH SERVICES:** Improve local health facilities and services.
- 8. GREEN TRANSPORT:** Encourage non-vehicular modes of travel by the creation of easy access recreation walking route and the development of safe cycle routes.
- 9. ENVIRONMENT:** Enhance the appearance and design of the village centre and residential areas.
- 10. PROTECT:** Potentially redundant assets of community value.

3. POLICIES

3.1 Maintain the Separate Identity and Character of the Village

It is clear from the Parish Plan consultations that there is a strong desire by the local community to maintain the separate identity of the village and protect the surrounding countryside in order to maintain the character and setting of the village. Because the parish was created from land that was formerly part of the four surrounding parishes, the village does not have a large area of surrounding countryside separating it from adjoining villages. This need is recognised by the current Maidstone Development Plan (the saved policies of the Borough-wide Local Plan, 2000) in Policy ENV 32.

The justification for this policy is as follows: "The Council (MBC) believes that the area to the south of Maidstone, broadly extending from Coxheath to Langley, is an area which requires added protection beyond the general countryside restraint afforded by policy ENV28. There are acute development pressures in this area which, when coupled with the proximity of settlements to each other and to Maidstone's urban area, renders these settlements vulnerable to coalescence. Also within this area, there are many small parcels of land, which due to their limited size and the effect of development on their character and appearance may be difficult to protect under normal countryside restraint policies. The development of such sites would lead to both coalescence and consolidation of the scattered settlements in the area, much to its detriment." This general approach has become even more necessary since 2000 and has been strongly supported by the community in the consultation process.

In recent years there has been significant urbanisation, particularly of the area to the north of the village. In order therefore to prevent creeping coalescence with adjoining settlements it continues to be necessary to have a strongly enforced village envelope and stronger countryside policies in the countryside belt surrounding the village that will prevent further coalescence/urbanisation. As this is also high quality agricultural land, future uses should be limited to

those linked with agriculture, horticulture and forestry or appropriate countryside uses that do not significantly increase coalescence, merging into the countryside with good landscaping and access.

Coxheath is a traditional fruit growing area and is part of the 'Coxheath Orchards' landscape area. Today its setting still contains many orchards which contribute to the landscape character. 'Old' orchards in particular are now recognized as important historical and landscape features, can also be of wildlife value, and should therefore be conserved wherever possible (see Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment Supplement 2012). The plan also aims to enhance wildlife biodiversity corridors linking the village with the surrounding countryside (see Policy E1).

Policy S1:

That in order to keep the separate identity and character of the village, prevent coalescence with adjoining settlements and further urbanisation of this key countryside resource, the village envelope and countryside belt around the village, as shown on the draft proposals map (Plan 4), be strongly enforced, and future permissions should be limited to those closely linked with existing uses of agriculture, horticulture, and forestry, together with appropriate countryside uses, and re-use of existing buildings that are not significant in terms of further coalescence, infilling and urbanisation. Proposals inconsistent with these objectives will not be permitted.

3.2 Housing and Health

Coxheath is not a Rural Service Centre but it is recognised that MBC's significantly increased housing target for the new Local Plan, together with the new National Planning Policies, has resulted in serious consideration being given to new housing development. Due to the constraints outlined in Para 3.1, Coxheath can only accept modest growth. Any development must deliver the important community benefits identified through the community engagement and the evidence collection process. This will strike the balance between achieving the Vision and Objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan and help to deliver the wider MBC housing target. The assessment of housing need in Appendix 1 shows that likely housing need, including a significant level of in-migration, will require the allocation of 161 – 196 dwellings over the plan period.

3.2.1 Development options

Three options have been considered:-

1. No growth – this is considered extremely unlikely in the current planning situation in Maidstone.
2. Modest growth rounding off the existing village envelope and giving community benefit.
3. Larger scale concentrated growth significantly extending the existing built up area.

Option 2 is much more consistent with the plan's objectives (see Appendix 1 for details) and was strongly supported by the community in the pre-submission consultation. The site allocations proposed in Policy H4 below make provision for 195 new dwellings which is at the top of the range identified by the housing need assessment set out in Appendix 1.

3.2.2 Local Needs Affordable Housing

There is an identified requirement to provide housing for people currently living, working or having a close family connection with the village who are unable to afford to purchase property of their own. This was evidenced by Local Needs Housing Surveys conducted in 2005 and 2012 under the auspices of Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK). The 2012 survey identified that:

- A total of 13 dependent children and 49 adults have a housing need;
- 15 (47%) of those needing affordable housing were single people;
- In total 29 respondents with housing need currently live in Coxheath and 3 live outside the parish but have a local connection. Overall, a need for up to 32 affordable homes for the following local households was identified – 15 single people; 10 couples without children and 7 families.

These results were very similar to the 2005 survey which identified a need for 21-32 local needs affordable properties.

Policy H1:

To facilitate the development of a local needs housing site, and to ensure that people with a local connection are able to take advantage of the opportunities presented.

3.2.3 Provision of Accommodation for a More Ageing Population:

A significant proportion of the population of Coxheath has reached or is approaching retirement age and will in future face the prospect of moving away from the village and/or requiring more access to specialised care in order to meet their living needs. Greater consideration needs to be given, therefore, to facilities such as assisted living accommodation. Comparing results from the 2001 Census and the 2011 Census shows:

- The largest increase in the 65-74 year olds; rising from 375 to 492, an increase of 117 (31% increase).
- The 75-84 age group has risen by 43 to 314 (16% increase).
- The 85+ age group has risen from 85 to 127, an increase of 42 (49.4% increase).

55% of those who responded to the Parish Plan questionnaire were over 60 years of age; 44% of respondents were retired; 66% of respondents classified the quality of life in Coxheath as 'good'; 48% of those who responded had lived in Coxheath for more than 20 years.

Policy H2:

To facilitate the provision of suitable accommodation to meet the needs of elderly people in the local community.

3.3 Health

One of the highest concerns in community engagement has been the provision of health care services. For example 88% of those who responded to the Parish Plan questionnaire used GP surgeries in the village. 33% had been unable to register at the village dental practice. 93% of older people had difficulty getting to and from local GP services, whilst 78% had difficulty getting to and from Maidstone Hospital.

The two GP surgeries cannot cope with the present demands made on them. Dental care provision also needs improving. Stockett Lane, the biggest GP surgery, is located in a converted house and cannot expand to provide the extended local services required by the NHS. It also has insufficient parking and this adds to the parking problem in Stockett Lane.

Policy H3:

To facilitate the provision of a suitable relocation site for the Stockett Lane surgery to enable the provision locally of a wider range of medical and, if possible dental, services, so that residents do not need to leave the village to obtain routine health care.

3.4 Policy H 4 - Proposed Mixed Development Sites

Taking the above considerations into account (and including the shortage of public open space identified in Section 1), mixed development sites that include housing have been identified that will help achieve the Vision and Objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan by:

- Delivering local needs affordable housing for people with a connection to Coxheath, housing for the elderly, as well as market housing for sale and private rent;
- Provide the community with significantly more open space and the potential for a wider range of recreational and amenity facilities;
- Improve GP health services;
- Maintain the separate identity and character of the village by 'rounding off' the existing built up area, rather than the start of a significant increase in coalescence that would be the result of the development of other possible sites;
- Have lesser impact on the open landscape setting of the village than other proposed sites;
- Assist traffic calming.

Policy H 4 - Proposed Mixed Development Sites (see Plan 4 - Proposals Map)

- **‘Older’s Field’** (Site 1 on the proposals map) – Approx 4.5 acres of land (approx 55 dwellings) for market housing for sale & rent plus approx 10.5 acres of land for public open space and allotments;
- **‘Linden Farm’** (Site 2 on the proposals map) – Approx 3 acres of land (40 dwellings) for market housing for sale plus approx 3 acres of land gifted for community recreation sites/public open space;
- **Clockhouse Farm** (Site 3 on the proposals map) – Approx 7 acres in total to accommodate some 30 units of market housing; 28 units of local needs housing for local people; 42 units of two storey extra care accommodation for the elderly; a badger sett protection area and approx 1 acre of land gifted for the community to facilitate the building of new GP healthcare facilities.

3.5 Transport

3.5.1 Traffic

Heath Road (B2163) is a long, straight road which splits the village down the centre. Speed and volume of traffic is a problem as it acts as an unofficial southern bypass to the congestion in Maidstone Town. There is a significant conflict between this traffic and the many pedestrian crossing movements. Traffic calming was introduced in 2006/7 which is very unpopular locally because it creates congestion, pollution and rat running.

A revised traffic management scheme has been developed in consultation with the local community and Kent County Council (KCC). This will reduce congestion, pollution and rat running together with improving the environment for pedestrians in the village centre. The proposed scheme is shown in outline on Plan 4 (Draft Proposals Map) and in detail on Plan T1.

Policy T1

To adopt and implement the revised traffic management scheme outlined on Plan T1.

3.5.2 Safe Cycle Routes

There is a desire to make the community more eco-friendly as well as protecting the safety of motorists, pedestrians and cyclists in the village. A key aspiration is to provide safe cycle routes, particularly for children attending The Cornwallis Academy and Coxheath Primary School. The plans for the reconstruction of the Cornwallis Academy included parking for 250 bicycles and a travel plan to encourage more pupils to cycle to and from school. To be safe, the cycle routes need to be largely off road, using strips of farmland and shared use of suitable rights of way.

The community engagement showed widespread support in principle for the development of safe cycle routes, but some doubts over locations and maintenance costs. A significant proportion of people who responded to the Parish Plan questionnaire indicated that if there were more cycle routes in and around Coxheath, they would be likely to use them.

Policy T2:

To facilitate, where practicable, safe (mainly off-road) cycle routes around the village, particularly to the Cornwallis Academy, and linking where possible with routes to other parts of Maidstone.

3.5.3 Easy Access Recreational Walking Routes

It is clear from public response that many residents like living in Coxheath because it has a nice, friendly feel; they like its village character and its easy access to the surrounding countryside. The top preference (44%) of those who responded to the Parish Plan questionnaire on the use of new community land was for a wildlife area/nature walk. Bearing in mind the views from the Greensand Ridge, the proximity of the Low Weald and the Greensand Way, the footpath network, particularly the paths providing a circular countryside route around Coxheath (see Plan 2), provide a resource for recreation, health and access to nature for all ages and an opportunity to encourage tourism to stimulate the local economy. They also provide a resource for the popular Coxheath Running Club. Also the village is demonstrably short of public open space and recreational/amenity land, according to the Maidstone Borough Council Open Space DPD adopted in December 2006.

To effectively fulfil the above functions, these paths will need to be of suitable access, width, surface and maintenance. There is the potential to promote a system of volunteer footpath wardens, who will be trained and equipped by the Kent County Council Countryside Access team. The Council will also publicise/encourage greater use by residents and visitors.

Where there are missing links in the public rights of way network, particularly if there is a potential safety problem with walkers being forced to use roads with significant traffic but no footways, new links should be created if possible (see Para 75 in NPPF 2012).

Policy T3:

- To ensure the development and maintenance of suitable easy access recreational walking routes around the village, linking with recreational and wildlife areas. In particular to ensure that well used routes such as the circular countryside route (see Plan 2) are of suitable access, width, surface and maintenance;
- To seek opportunities to add missing links where this would improve the accessibility of the network or the safety of users.
- To assist this process by appointing volunteer footpath wardens to report problems and in appropriate cases undertake repair and maintenance with support from the Parish Council and KCC.

3.5.4 Multi Use Rural Lanes

There are a number of low traffic narrow rural lanes without footways that are well used for recreational cycling, horse riding and walking, in particular lanes such as Forstal Lane/ Well Street and Westerhill Road. These routes can be important landscape features and wildlife corridors, as well as making a significant contribution to community health and wellbeing. They can be linked to the new community land for a wildlife area/nature walk and the development and maintenance of suitable easy access recreational walking routes around the village, linking with recreational and wildlife areas. To fulfil their potential they need landscape and wildlife enhancement, together with protection from significant increases in volume and speed of traffic.

Policy T4:

Low traffic rural lanes which provide a significant informal recreation resource for walkers, horse riders and cyclists will be protected from significant increase in volume and speed of traffic and, where possible have their landscape and biodiversity potential enhanced.

3.6 Environment

Many respondents felt that the appearance of the village centre should be softened; making it less car-centred and more pedestrian-friendly. This would also support the traffic calming proposals set out in Policy T1. There was also a need to identify and secure additional parking areas close to the village centre to support the shopping in the village centre. This is coupled with a need for more effective enforcement as careless parking, particularly around the crossroads in the centre of the village, creates road safety and access problems. The majority of those who responded to the Parish Plan questionnaire rated the cleanliness and appearance of the village centre as 'poor'.

There is also a desire among residents to ensure that new development in both the village centre and residential areas has a 'village feel' and enhances the character and identity of the area. This includes ensuring the village approaches/gateways keep their rural, farming character and are visually attractive to both residents and visitors. New residential development should be well designed, in character, at a suitable rural density with sufficient off road parking, landscaping and amenity areas to provide an attractive environment.

Policy E1:

Village Centre

- To improve the environment of the village centre and gateways to make them greener and more attractive with a more 'village feel'. In particular to achieve this in association with the proposed new traffic management scheme.
- To explore environmental enhancement and improvement in parking provision in the lay-by and outside shops in Elmfield Court;

- To facilitate further increase in parking serving the village centre and key services
- To promote sensible and practical parking provision on land owned by private landowners in the village centre;
- To ensure that new developments add to the visual attractiveness and environmental friendliness of the village centre;
- To remove and/or discourage unnecessary signage clutter

Village wide

- To ensure that residential development is well designed, in character with the area, at a suitable rural density and with sufficient off road parking, landscaping and amenity areas to provide an attractive environment.
- To ensure the provision of adequate parking facilities in new residential development;
- To protect trees, hedges and other green infrastructure that are a key element of village character.

Countryside belt providing the setting for the village

- Enhance the local landscape character through measures to retain and reinforce features such as woodland, trees, old orchards, heath land and hedgerows;
- Enhance habitats and biodiversity taking into account the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan to allow species to move in wildlife corridors in response to factors such as climate change;
- Enhance access to natural green space and the countryside for walking and cycling, to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents.

3.7 Recreation and Open Space

It is clear from community engagement of general agreement that open space should be protected and recreational/amenity space provided but more thought to be given to the actual facilities to be included. Also there was strong support to preserve nature sites and for more to be created. Responses to the Parish Plan questionnaire indicated that 57% would use a village social club; 43% felt that there were inadequate facilities for teenagers; 23% rated amenities and activities poor for couples; 22% rated amenities and activities poor for young families. The top three preferences for the use of new community land were a wildlife/nature walk (44%), youth provision (33%) and an all weather multi-use games area (30%). The top three preferences for additional sports facilities were a fitness gym (41%), tennis (27%) and cricket (15%).

With the expansion of the village population over recent years, there is a clear demand for more social and recreational facilities for the community. These need to be close to the village hall in order to build on, and not undermine, its existing facilities. Also many activities at the Village Hall are near full capacity. There is a perceived lack of facilities for families to socialise (particularly eat and drink) and sporting facilities are limited to football and indoor pursuits such as gymnastics, dancing and table tennis. There is also a need for a local nature area and potential demand for the provision of allotments. All of these needs are identified against a background of Coxheath falling far short, by some 14.72 hectares, of the minimum standards of open space and recreational land, as prescribed in the Maidstone Borough Council Open Space DPD adopted in December 2006.

Funds are available from a variety of sources, including existing Section 106 agreements, to provide more social and recreational facilities. The major problem is the availability of land in the appropriate location adjoining the Village Hall. One option put forward in the consultation was to locate a multi use games area (MUGA) on village hall land but the Coxheath Residents Village Hall Committee has not agreed to this proposal. To be attractive and successful the MUGA needs to be located close to the Village Hall facilities. It is therefore proposed that the best location for the MUGA continue to be explored. It is also proposed that other recreational facilities for all ages be located on the amenity land proposed to be gifted to the Parish Council by the Linden Farm development (Policy H1 above), adjacent and with good access to the Village Hall.

The Kent Wildlife Trust has identified an area of about 0.5 acre, on land leased by the Parish Council from MBC, as having significant wildlife value and potential to link as part of a nature trail to adjacent natural areas. This will help to address the complete shortage of such areas in Coxheath at present.

Policy R1 (see Plan 4):

- To provide additional social and recreational facilities in harmony with the existing facilities at Coxheath Residents Village Hall and to meet the aspirations of residents;
- To establish a heath land nature area (approx 0.5 acre) and nature trail on land leased by the Parish Council from MBC, behind the Village Hall;
- To provide additional informal public open space and allotments on land gifted to the Parish Council as a result of the mixed development schemes in Policy H1.
- To protect existing areas of open space and, wherever possible, to add to them.

3.8 Assets of Community Value

The Localism Act 2011 requires local authorities such as Maidstone to maintain a list of assets of community value which have been nominated by the local community. When community assets come up for sale or change of ownership, the Act gives the community the time to raise money and bid to take over the asset. Concerns over the future use of redundant facilities such as Heathside (now resolved) and proposals to cut funding for a range of local services, have underlined the need for community influence over the future use of key buildings and open spaces. Wherever possible, the community wishes to discourage inappropriate development or changes that do not have a direct benefit for the residents of Coxheath.

Identified Assets of Community Value in Coxheath include the following:-

- Coxheath Residents Village Hall;
- Coxheath Primary School and Harlequin Out of School Club;
- Coxheath Centre, including Day Centre;
- Coxheath Library;
- Coxheath Village Centre (including all shops, offices and bank);
- Bird in Hand Public House, and Spice Lounge Restaurant;
- Village Green off Huntington Road;
- Coxheath Scout Hut and public car park;
- Playing fields to the rear of Coxheath Residents Village Hall;
- Coxheath Post Office;
- Heathside complex;
- Medical centre/GP/Dental surgeries;
- Holy Trinity Church;
- Children's Play Areas in Stockett Lane, Whitebeam Drive, Adbert Drive and the Avante site;
- Bus shelters either side of Heath Road;
- Village Centre Beacon.

Policy C1:

To protect, nominate and register the above list of assets as being of key community value in Coxheath.

3.9 Infrastructure

A key principle of the plan (see Section 2) is to ensure that the services and infrastructure (water, sewerage, health, community recreation, public transport etc) are sustainable in the context of existing development and are capable of sustaining any future development. Consultation with the major utility infrastructure providers has indicated that the only major utility constraint concerns groundwater. As Coxheath is a major aquifer intermediate groundwater vulnerability zone, areas of previously used land, derelict or vacant land and intensively used agricultural sites will be required to ensure that re-development proposals deal with any contamination arising from past uses and remediate sites to minimise risks to future users, the wider environment and neighbours.

Where capacity is insufficient in the local sewerage system, the development will need to provide a connection to the nearest point of adequate capacity, as advised by Southern Water. Sustainable surface water disposal should be provided.

There are existing problems relating to health and community recreation/public open space which are addressed in the plan Policy H4.

Policy I 1:

- New and improved infrastructure will be encouraged and supported in order to meet the identified needs of the community. New residential and commercial development will be permitted only if sufficient infrastructure capacity is either available or can be provided in time to serve it.
- Should the need arise, development for essential utility infrastructure will be granted in special circumstances as an exception to the other policies in the Plan, where the benefit to Coxheath outweighs any harm, and it can be demonstrated there are no reasonable alternative sites available.
- Areas of previously used land, derelict or vacant land and intensively used agricultural sites will be required to ensure that re-development proposals deal with any contamination arising from past uses and remediate sites to minimise risks to the major aquifer intermediate groundwater vulnerability zone.

3.10 Local Business and Employment

Local employment opportunities are provided by the shops and services in the village centre, local public services such as the pre and primary schools, a number of NHS facilities (Ambulance Control Centre, Heathside Centre, Coxheath Centre, GP surgeries) and the Library. In addition there are significant business/commercial uses at Clockhouse Farm and the former GML building. A large part of the latter is vacant since the GML business folded. The village centre has lost five shops in the past few years – the former Mace supermarket site has been redeveloped for housing, two former shops are now undertakers and two former shops are now used as a large charity shop. Another former shop is now a cafe. The village's only supermarket and pub are currently being redeveloped and expanded. The village did have another pub but that was converted into a restaurant a few years ago. It is a key objective of the plan to maintain and enhance the quality, variety and viability of shopping in the village centre and other existing employment/commercial uses in the village. The loss of further shops/ bank/ offices and eating facilities in the village shopping centre will be strongly opposed. Use of vacant buildings in the village shopping centre for shops or other appropriate village centre uses will be supported.

The Clockhouse Farm employment area lies outside the proposed village envelope and consists mainly of converted farm buildings. The appropriate enhancement of those facilities within the same footprint would be supported, as would be the appropriate commercial use of the vacant GML building.

PLAN DELIVERY & VIABILITY

The plan is thought to be deliverable and viable as the Parish Council and its partners will control the land and have resources to implement its key elements.

Proposals to address the shortfall of public open space and community recreation land: The land will be gifted to the Parish Council through Section 106 legal agreements as part of the development of Sites 1&2 and the Parish Council already has some £115,000 through planning agreements, and is promised further contributions, to fund the proposals that will be finalised in detail after further consultations with the local community and other stakeholders. The community recreation provision will be adjacent to the Village Hall which already provides changing rooms, showers and toilets for recreation and other events. Management costs of the recreation facilities would be covered by user charges.

Nature Area/Trail & Wildlife Corridor: The Parish Council controls the land where the nature area/trail will be located and has received survey information and management advice from the Kent Wildlife Trust. It will also be gifted the land as part of the proposals for Sites 1&2 that will allow the enhancement of a wildlife corridor linking two areas of ancient woodland, an old fruit orchard and a hazel platt. Contributions to enhancement works and ongoing management will be sought.

Improvement of health facilities: The Parish Council will be gifted a site as part of the Site 3 proposals. A Section 106 contribution of £136,000 for improvement of GP health facilities is already lodged with the NHS and further contributions are promised. NHS England have conducted a scoping study and concluded that an improvement in facilities is required.

Revised Traffic Management Scheme for B2163 Heath Road through the village: The scheme has been agreed in principle after being strongly supported in the community consultation and the scheme is now being designed in detail by KCC. The scheme will be jointly funded by the Parish Council and KCC, and the parish contribution is held in current reserves. The scheme will also provide an opportunity to make the village centre and gateways more attractive and remove signage/build out clutter.

Appendix 1: Assessment of Likely Housing Needs and Development Options

Assessment of Housing Need

Increase in households and dwellings

Between 1991- 2011 the number of households in Coxheath rose by 257, from 1534 to 1791, an increase of 17% in 20 years (Census 1991 & 2011) and an average increase over the 20 year period of 12.85 households per annum. The major part of this increase was in the last five years with the development of the former Linton Hospital brownfield site, to provide 150 new dwellings. This was the major reason behind the 6% increase in the population of the village over the period 2001 – 2011.

In addition to the Linton Hospital site, there have been a significant number of houses built on windfall sites over the past 10 years, for example Mace Court, Orchard Place and Fir Tree Yard. In total some 39 dwellings have been built over the past 10 years, a windfall of some 3.9 dwellings per annum.

Projecting the historical rate of housing/household growth, including the significant element of in-migration, would give a likely housing growth level of 231 dwelling over the 18 year period of the plan (18x12.85 per annum). The likely expectation based on previous experience of windfall provision over the same period would be 70 dwellings (18x3.9 dwellings per annum). Even if windfall provision declined to say half that experienced over the past 10 years it would provide 35 dwellings.

The assessment is therefore that the Neighbourhood plan will be required to allocate between 161 and 196 dwellings (231-70 =161, 231-35=196) to meet the housing need in the plan period up to 2031. The plan proposes a total allocation of 195 dwellings which should be more than sufficient to meet the assessed need. Within that total need, provision will need to be made for identified local needs affordable housing and accommodation suitable for a more ageing population –see below.

Local Needs Affordable Housing

The Local Needs Housing Surveys conducted 2012 under the auspices of Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK) identified that:

A total of 13 dependent children and 49 adults have a housing need;

15 (47%) of those needing affordable housing were single people;

In total 29 respondents with housing need currently live in Coxheath and 3 live outside the parish but have a local connection. Overall, a need for up to 32 affordable homes for the following local households was identified – 15 single people; 10 couples without children and 7 families.

These results were very similar to the 2005 survey which identified a need for 21-32 local needs affordable properties.

Accommodation for a More Ageing Population:

A significant proportion of the population of Coxheath has reached or is approaching retirement age and will in future face the prospect of moving away from the village and/or requiring more access to specialised care in order to meet their living needs. Greater consideration needs to be given, therefore, to facilities such as assisted living accommodation. Comparing results from the 2001 Census and the 2011 Census shows:

The largest increase in the 65-74 year olds; rising from 375 to 492, an increase of 117 (31% increase).

The 75-84 age group has risen by 43 to 314 (16% increase).

The 85+ age group has risen from 85 to 127, an increase of 42 (49.4% increase).

The Local Needs Housing Survey (ACRK, 2012) also showed that a large proportion of respondents had lived in the village for 26+ years, and that about a third of the housing need identified by respondents was for accommodation suitable for the elderly, including sheltered /assisted care accommodation. 48% of those who responded to the Parish Plan questionnaire had lived in Coxheath for more than 20 years.

Assessment of Development Options - Summary of Sustainability Appraisal

A1 No Growth

The Government's policy is to significantly increase house building, and delay in producing an updated Maidstone Local Plan has lead to MBC recently increasing the housing target by nearly 50% to 14,800 and 'seriously looking' at sites in Coxheath. Also it does not at present have a five year supply of housing and this makes it very difficult to refuse planning applications for new housing. It is therefore considered that a 'no growth' option is very unlikely for Coxheath as it is one of the larger villages in rural Maidstone.

However the advantages and disadvantages of 'no growth' could be:

ADVANTAGES: No development outside the existing village envelope, no loss of good quality agricultural land, and a relatively smaller increase in future traffic (however see note on traffic below) and demand on local services.

DISADVANTAGES: No community benefits providing improved GP health facilities, not meeting need for accommodation for growing elderly population, local needs housing for people with a connection to Coxheath, improved recreation facilities and public open space.

A2 Modest Growth with Community Benefit (Preferred Option)

ADVANTAGES: The modest scale developments proposed would be consistent with the Vision and Objective 1 of the draft plan because they would 'round off' the existing village envelope without significant extension into surrounding countryside or coalescence with surrounding villages. Coxheath would retain its compact character with the village centre services within 10 minute walking distance. The proposals would also provide community benefit to meet the Plan's objectives to improve GP health facilities, extra care housing for growing elderly population, local needs housing for people with a connection to Coxheath, together with improved recreation facilities and public open space that would create a community controlled 'green belt' around the North West sector of the village. Coxheath would therefore be a more sustainable community with a better balance of population and facilities.

DISADVANTAGES: Some development outside the existing village envelope (although one of the sites -site 1 Older's Field - already has planning permission for commercial development on most of the land that would be used for housing), some loss of good quality agricultural land, and a relatively larger increase in future traffic and demand on local services than 'no growth'.

A3 Larger scale Concentrated Growth

Theoretically this could be located at the edge of the north-east, south-east and north-west sectors of the village, the south-west being restricted by ancient woodland.

Three adjacent sites totalling 14.6 hectares in the north-east sector have been put forward to MBC for development as part of SHLAA under the new Local Plan process (see Plan 5). These sites could accommodate some 370 houses. Such development would be contrary to the objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan because it would be a major extension

of the built up area into the green buffer separating Coxheath from Loose, and in the longer term would make a matching extension on the south side of Heath Road (Clockhouse Farm land) more likely, thereby exacerbating coalescence with both Loose and Linton. Because these sites are more open, less treed and more sloping than the three smaller sites, the landscape impact on the setting of Coxheath would be considerably greater. This scale of development would also be far too large and completely inappropriate to the character and amenities of Coxheath. It would also lead to the loss of a key section of the countryside footpath around the village. These developments would be outside the 10 minute walk area from the village centre necessary to maintain good access to services, the compact character and separate identity of the village.

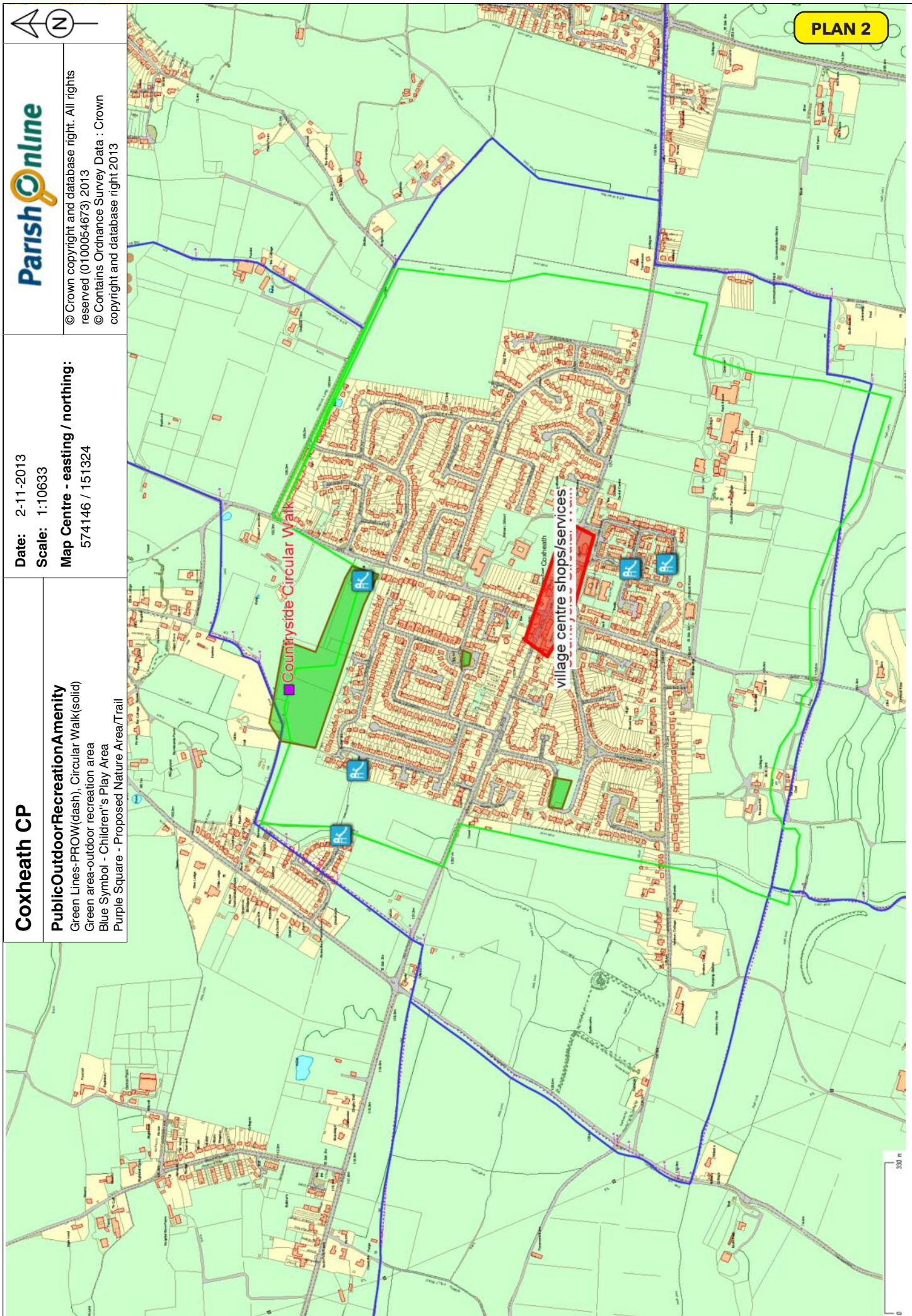
Similar considerations in terms of adverse impact on the separate identity and compact character of the village would also apply to larger scale development in the Clockhouse Farm, Linden Farm and Older's Field areas.

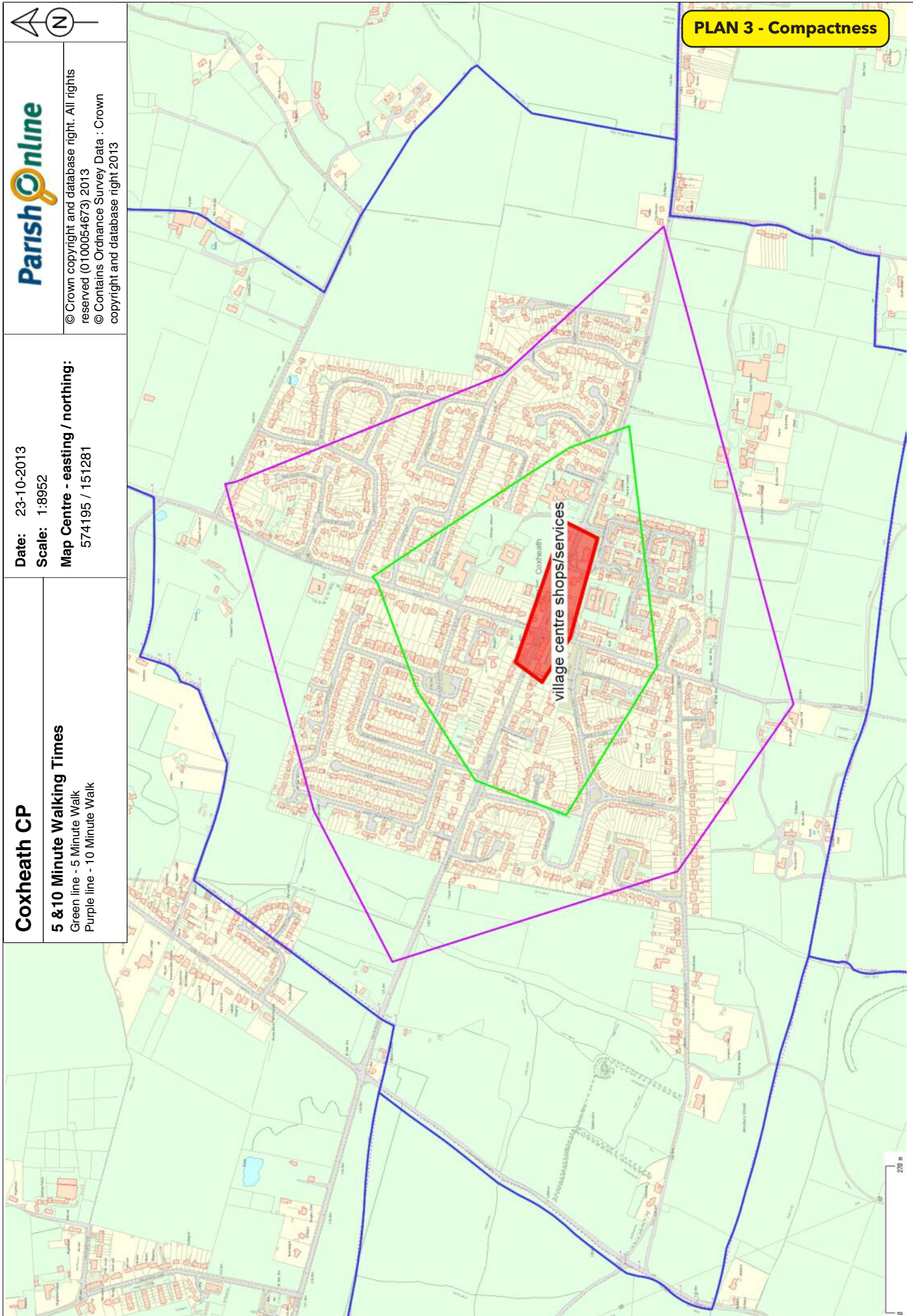
A4 A Note on Traffic

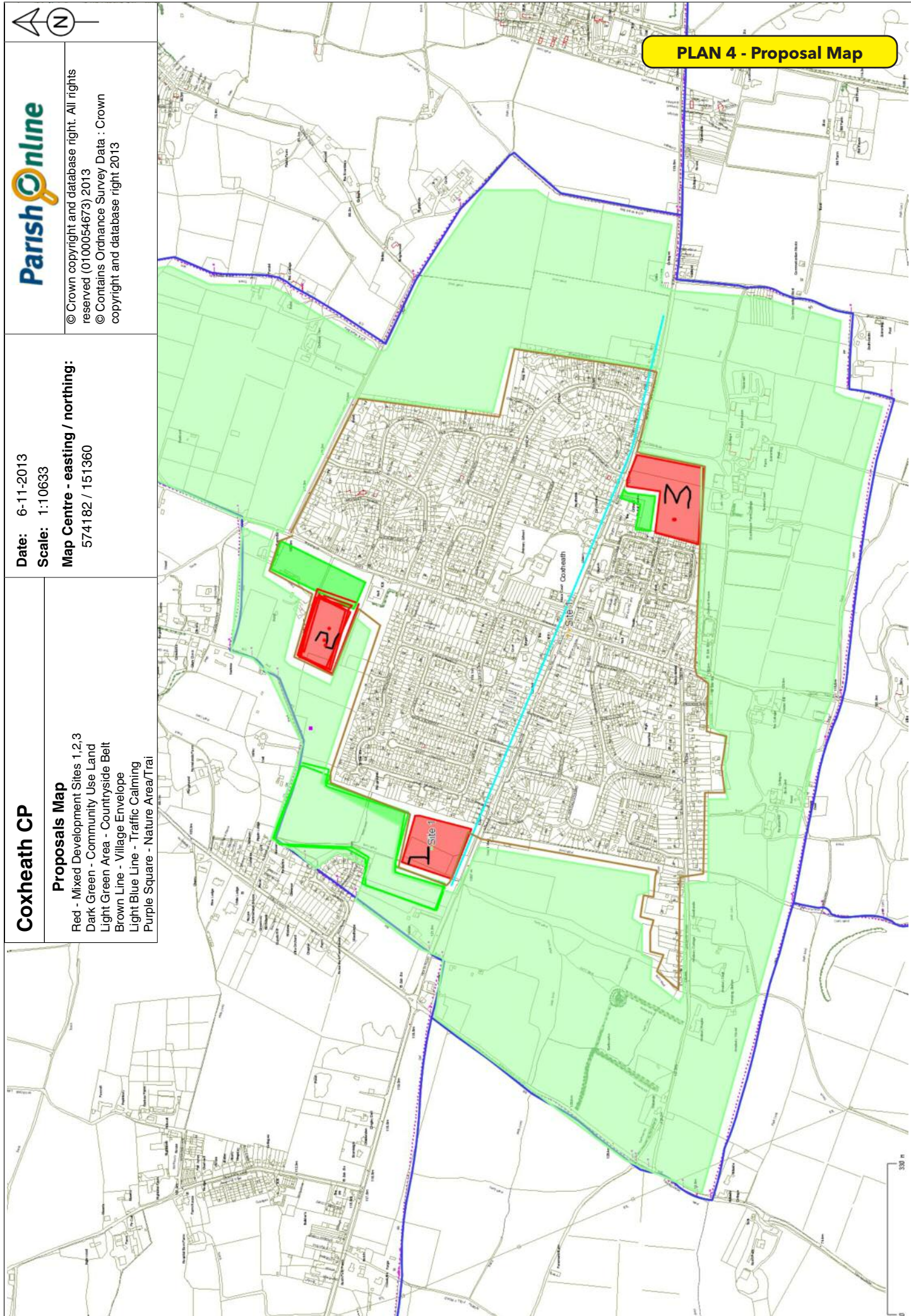
Heath Road (B2163) mainly carries through traffic and is, we understand, one of the most heavily trafficked B roads in the country. As it splits the village and its centre in two, it already creates significant safety, air pollution, separation and congestion issues. Increasing car ownership and growth, both outside and within Coxheath, is likely to increase future traffic and therefore exacerbate existing problems. KCC, the Highway Authority, must ensure that these issues are managed to minimise impact on community amenity as much as possible. In addition, KCC must ensure that key infrastructure such as the Linton Crossroads can deal with traffic from Coxheath at peak periods without excessive delay.

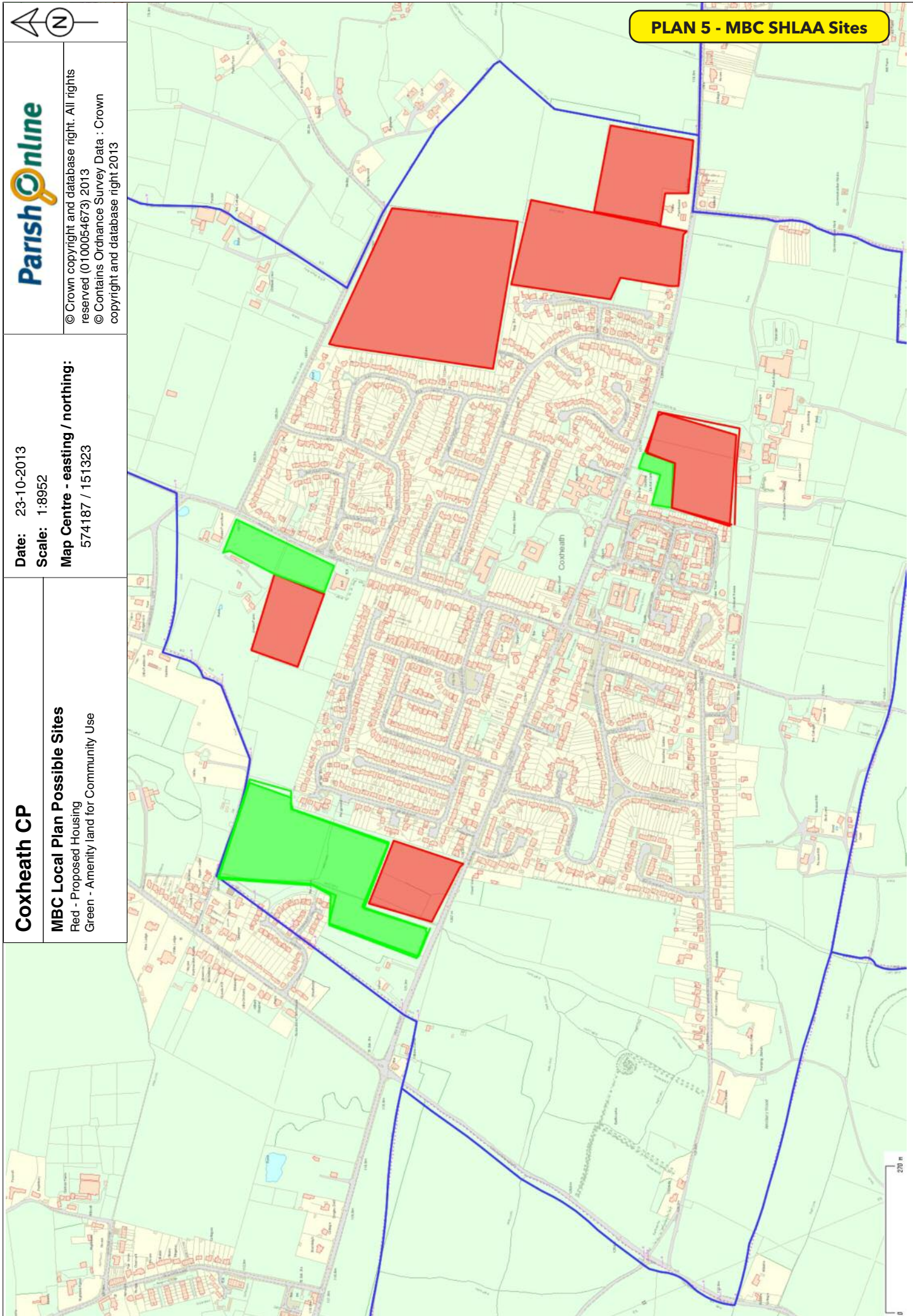
[illegible][illegible]

Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. The Maidstone Borough Council Licence No. 1000196306, 2013.











‘Coxheath Village Mural’
Created by the children of Coxheath Primary School