

***Pauline Raymond's short statement for the Neighbourhood Plan hearing on 19/06/17 re accesses and visual amenity re Site No.4 (Church Hill Farm, north of village hall), Site No.7 (Gate Cottage) and Site No.8 (Church Hill Farm opposite the village hall)***

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No decision has been announced regarding where the accesses to the three developments will finally be situated. There are problems on both sides of this busy "B" road where, according to a survey taken by the Parish Council last year, the amount of traffic and traffic speeds increased considerably between 2013 and 2016.

1. **Site No.4. Church Hill Farm next to Village Hall.** Two options have been put forward:
  - a. Sharing an access with the village hall – even if the Parish Council was willing for an improved access to be shared for the two purposes, it would mean that quite a few much-needed parking spaces in the village hall grounds would be lost and, in addition, removal of a length of hedgerow on the northern boundary of the village hall would open up views of the development area from both the village hall grounds and from the Red Barn Nature Park on higher ground behind the hall.
  - b. A new access to the development site off the B2244. When a very similar site to this was included in the 2013 Rother Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, a statement was included as follows "A new road.... Is not desirable for reasons of intrusion into historic unimproved grassland, loss of hedgerow and proximity to existing junction." Now with a possible three new sites opposite each other, there will be even more junctions. A plan to reduce the speed limit will only be effective if there is any enforcement of it which seems unlikely.

Wherever the access is, a substantial hedgerow would need to be maintained as much as possible on the northern boundary of the hall in order to limit the views of the site.

2. **Sites No.7. Gate Cottage and 8 Church Hill Farm.** Two options have been put forward for these two sites that share a boundary:
  - a. A new road next to Gate Cottage, the space created by demolition of part of the bungalow, and a second road somewhere nearby.
  - b. Sharing one access – Although this would appear to be the most sensible option, it seems that this may not be possible.

Three new roads in an area where there are already accesses at the village hall, Eaton Walk and Meadow Lane seems to be too many both from a road safety viewpoint but also from viewing in the wider landscape, particularly because of the need nowadays for wide visibility splays. I checked this out from the public footpaths to the east of the B2244. The site assessment mentions views from the gate on Footpath 5b which is reached via Balcombe Green. From this spot, three new roads as well as some of all three developments are likely to be visible in the otherwise unbuilt area of the AONB. Walk a little further along the footpaths towards the Parish Church on Footpath 7b and glance south and there the roads, visibility splays and developments are likely to be seen as a blot on the otherwise green AONB. Trees clothe the view in summer but, of course, in the winter, the whole view is much more open.

Sites No.7 and 8 at Gate Cottage and Church Hill Farm are likely to be equally noticeable from public footpath 28a on the western side of Church Hill. The effect on this rural public footpath

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does not appear to have been given any serious consideration, especially at the place where it meets the B2244, as it may be that there will be a couple of new roads running close by with another opposite. It is inevitable that all of the new developments at Sites 7 and 8 will be very visible from the higher ground of this footpath as people walk towards the B2244.

Views of at least two of the developments on either side of the road will also be noticeable from Church Hill and with the three sites taken together, the building of 30 plus new houses on this sensitive approach to Sedlescombe is likely to completely change the northern approach to the Village. Little concern about this has been expressed in contrast to that about the Street Farm site in Brede Lane which will be tucked in behind existing properties at Blacklands and East View Terrace and on lower ground than Gorselands behind making the new development much less obvious. The three sites taken together at Church Hill will, at the very least, be no better hidden in the landscape than a site of half the size as proposed at Street Farm.

Although it would be better for no development to take place in Church Hill at all, it is accepted that building sites in or adjacent to the development boundary in Sedlescombe are not easy to find (NB the Church Hill site next to the village hall is not currently adjacent to the development boundary – the village hall is in between!). It may be, therefore, that a much smaller development could be more easily accommodated on one of the sites now that the Street Farm development has been approved for 16 houses, so that, taken together with the proposed development at Gregory Walk, the 35 properties required in the Core Strategy can be achieved.