

**Date:** 26 June 2026

**Application reference:** 26/502146/EIASCO

**Site address:** Heathlands Garden Community, land between Lenham and Charing Heath, Kent

**Proposal:** EIA scoping request for a forthcoming outline planning application for Heathlands Garden Community, a residential-led garden settlement of up to 5,000 homes with employment, local centres, schools, green infrastructure, a new rail station and associated infrastructure.

We are CPRE Kent, the countryside charity. Founded in 1926, CPRE is one of the country's longest established and most respected environmental charities. CPRE Kent is the largest of the CPRE county branches. We represent 1,061 individual members across the county, together with 131 parish councils.

Our vision is of a beautiful and thriving countryside that enriches all our lives and is valued by everyone. Our mission is to promote, enhance and protect that countryside.

### Summary of CPRE Kent's position

CPRE Kent has opposed Heathlands since its earliest inception and remains of the view that this is the wrong development in the wrong location. Although the allocation is now part of the adopted Maidstone Borough Local Plan Review, the scope of the Environmental Statement (ES) remains critical. Crucially, the ES must assess what happens if the rail station, modal shift, infrastructure phasing and landscape mitigation are delayed, reduced or fail to perform as anticipated.

Specifically, the ES must test realistic worst-case scenarios, including delayed or failed station delivery, delayed social infrastructure, weaker modal shift, slower build-out and mitigation that depends on later agreement, future funding or third-party delivery. The adopted allocation does not remove the need to understand the likely significant environmental effects of the proposal, nor should scoping be used to narrow the assessment before those effects have been properly tested.

### Detailed comments

#### 1. Transport assumptions

The claimed sustainability of Heathlands depends heavily on a railway station. This however is not expected until Phase 2 at some point between around 2037 and 2039 i.e. after its anticipated 1,771 homes are already occupied. CPRE Kent considers even this assumption to be overly optimistic, and believes there is a real risk that the new railway station will not be delivered.

It's therefore our strong view that the ES must assess the reality of a large rural settlement where day-to-day services and employment are not currently within easy walking distance. It must also assess the transport consequences of occupation taking place before the railway station is operational, before bus services are embedded, and before safe and attractive walking and cycling links to Lenham and Charing are fully delivered.

The proposed transport study area also appears too narrow. The Scoping Report recognises the A20 as the main bus corridor and a key route between Maidstone and Ashford. In that context, the ES should not limit detailed transport assessment to a confined local study area around the site and a short list of highly sensitive receptors. It should assess the wider A20 corridor between Maidstone and Ashford, including the roundabouts and junctions leading to M20 Junction 8 and Junction 9, together with rural lanes, PRoW crossings, village routes, school routes and locations where additional traffic would worsen existing severance, delay, fear and intimidation.

CPRE Kent is also concerned that the proposed magnitude criteria in Table 17-8 risk understating transport effects. On the applicant's proposed approach, an increase of up to 60% in peak hour traffic or HGV volumes may still be treated as only a low adverse impact for severance and non-motorised user delay. CPRE Kent considers the proposed approach too generous in this rural context. A percentage increase in peak traffic may have limited impact where safe footways and crossings exist, but it can have a much greater effect where pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders have little protection from traffic.

Most significantly, CPRE Kent believe that MBC should require the ES to assess station-delivered, delayed-station and no-station scenarios. It should identify occupation caps if rail approvals, funding, construction, bus diversions, safe walking and cycling links, and off-site highway mitigation are not in place. A Monitor and Manage strategy must not be used as a substitute for assessing the credible worst case. The ES should not assume that the railway station, A20 corridor improvements or public transport strategy will mitigate the scheme's impacts unless their funding, approvals, timing and delivery are secured. No transport link, rural lane, junction, PRoW crossing or severance effect should be scoped out unless KCC, National Highways and any relevant neighbouring highway authority have expressly agreed that exclusion on evidenced grounds.

## **2. Best and Most Versatile agricultural land and soils**

The Scoping Report indicates that an Agricultural Land Classification survey was undertaken in early 2026, after the Heathlands allocation had already been adopted, but that the findings were not yet available for the soils chapter. That matters because the ES will now have site-specific evidence on the extent, grade and distribution of agricultural land that was not available in the same form when the allocation was made. Therefore, and notwithstanding the fact the site is now a Local Plan allocation, the permanent loss of agricultural land, including Best and Most Versatile land, remains a likely significant environmental effect and must be scoped in, quantified and assessed.

MBC should require the ES to report the full Agricultural Land Classification findings, distinguish Grade 3a from Grade 3b land, and assess the permanent loss of agricultural productivity, soil resource, soil carbon, drainage function, soil biodiversity and soil structure. It should also assess minerals safeguarding, quarry

restoration and the interaction between minerals, soil handling, wastewater infrastructure and future residential amenity. As it currently stands, it is our strong view that Best and Most Versatile land remains a likely significant environmental effect of the outline proposal and should be scoped in, quantified and assessed.

### **3. Landscape, visual and lighting effects**

CPRE Kent welcomes the commitment to a GLVIA3-based LVIA, but considers that the Scoping Opinion must be clear that this is not simply a visibility or screening exercise. We are also particularly concerned that lighting appears to have been scoped out as a discrete ES topic, despite the generally unlit rural baseline and the scale of lighting likely to arise from a new settlement of this size.

The LVIA must assess the actual change from countryside to settlement, including effects on rural character, settlement separation, tranquillity, dark skies, long-distance views, PRoW, historic field patterns, wooded skylines, land north of the railway, quarry restoration, the proposed railway station, utilities and the setting of the Kent Downs National Landscape. It should also take account of the updated Maidstone District Landscape Character Assessment.

Future planting, open space and landscape buffers should be assessed as mitigation, not treated as reasons to understate the initial harm. The ES should distinguish clearly between baseline conditions, construction effects, early occupation, maturing mitigation and residual effects at completion. Verified visualisations should be provided at key phases, including winter views, night-time views and views before structural planting has matured. The ES should identify where harm would remain even after mitigation, and should not treat landscape-led design, future planting or low-light design intentions as a substitute for assessing the loss of countryside character and dark skies

### **.4. Materials and waste**

CPRE Kent does not agree that materials and waste should be scoped out. A settlement of up to 5,000 homes, delivered over decades and requiring roads, bridges, utilities, schools, local centres, employment land, a railway station and WWTW works, will generate substantial demand for construction materials, aggregates, imported fill, soil movement, waste handling and construction traffic.

As such, MBC should require materials and waste to be scoped into the ES, either as a standalone chapter or as a clearly identifiable and cross-referenced assessment. The ES should quantify construction materials, excavated material, topsoil and subsoil movements, construction and operational waste, disposal routes, landfill capacity, circular economy opportunities and related traffic effects. Major accidents and disasters should only be scoped out if the ES first demonstrates that there is no likely significant interaction with flood risk, ground conditions, minerals, wastewater infrastructure, construction traffic or climate-related hazards.

### **5. Water, nutrients, wastewater and Stodmarsh**

The Scoping Report confirms that water is a central issue for Heathlands. The River Great Stour passes through the site, Lenham WWTW sits within it, and existing nitrogen and phosphorus pressures are already affecting the Stour and Stodmarsh downstream. The Council will be aware that inadequate

wastewater capacity in the locality has already had practical consequences, with sewage tankers being used daily because Harrietsham WWTW is operating over capacity. The Council will also be aware of Housing Secretary Steve Reed's recent confirmation that there can be no new homes until there is a plan for fresh water supply<sup>1</sup>.

MBC should therefore require one integrated water assessment covering all water-related issues, including the River Great Stour, aquatic ecology, surface water, groundwater, flood risk, SuDS, water supply, abstraction, wastewater treatment, nutrient neutrality and climate resilience across the whole build-out period. The ES assessments absolutely need to be clear on what infrastructure is required before first occupation, who will deliver it, how it will be funded, and what occupation caps would apply if it is not in place. No water body, downstream habitat, spring, wetland, groundwater-dependent receptor or aquatic ecological receptor should be scoped out before modelling is complete and the Environment Agency, Natural England, Southern Water and KCC as lead local flood authority have confirmed the approach on evidenced grounds.

## **6. Ecology, BNG and long-term stewardship**

The Scoping Report confirms that further surveys are still required, including for land that has previously been inaccessible. CPRE Kent therefore does not consider it appropriate to scope out ecological receptors before the survey evidence is complete and tested against the outline parameters.

MBC should therefore require a full Ecological Impact Assessment supported by sufficient site-wide survey evidence to fix the outline parameters, with update surveys and phase-specific EclA work required before later parcels come forward. The ES should assess habitat loss and fragmentation, ancient woodland and veteran tree buffers, lighting, hydrology, recreational pressure, pet predation, road mortality, construction disturbance and long-term management. It should also explain how each phase will contribute to the site-wide 20% BNG target and maintain ecological connectivity over the full build-out period.

Use of a District Level Licence for great crested newt may address species licensing, but the ES must still assess how the loss, alteration or fragmentation of ponds, terrestrial habitat and connecting corridors affects the wider ecological network. Long-term stewardship must be legally secured, with clear responsibility, funding, monitoring, remedial triggers and management arrangements for the lifetime of the development.

Further, BNG should not sit outside the EIA as a separate exercise. The 20% BNG target must be used to shape the layout, phasing, buffers and green infrastructure strategy from the outset, not treated as a later accounting process. BNG should also not be used to justify avoidable harm to existing habitats, ancient woodland, veteran trees, hedgerows, ponds, watercourses, Local Wildlife Sites or ecological corridors.

## **Conclusion**

The ES must test credible worst-case scenarios and should not scope out any topic where evidence is incomplete, mitigation is uncertain, or delivery depends on later agreement, future funding, third parties

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn8k2n500zeo>

or reserved matters. It should also include a clear mitigation and monitoring schedule setting out each measure, trigger, delivery body, funding route, enforcement mechanism and monitoring period.