

**APPENDIX C****Hernhill Parish Council Statement**

English Rural has been working with local Parish Councils in the Swale Borough for over 20 years, developing local needs affordable housing in the rural areas. We currently have 43 homes in five villages in the Borough. Importantly, all these homes have provided much needed affordable housing for local people, helping to ensure the future sustainability of these rural communities. There is always an overwhelming demand for our homes which continue to remain affordable for local people in perpetuity.

The English Rural planning application to be discussed tonight, is the result of a joint project with Hernhill Parish Council and has followed the well-established rural exception site process. Two independent housing needs surveys have been carried out by the Rural Housing Enabler at Action with Communities in Rural Kent. The results from the latest survey show a need for affordable rented or shared ownership homes from 11 households. These are people not only meeting the local connection criteria, but also having a proven housing need; unable to afford to rent or buy in their home village.

The site selection process was carried out by the Rural Housing Enabler, in partnership with the Parish Council and with advice from planning officers at Swale Borough Council.

Early in 2016, English Rural was invited by Hernhill Parish Council to work with them on the local needs housing project. We were asked to review the preferred sites which had arisen from site selection process. This was carried out carefully in accordance with established procedures and over the months and years that followed, we have continued to work closely with the Parish Council, from the early stages of preliminary sketches and layouts, to the fully-designed scheme we see today.

There have been two community consultation events and following these, we have attended further meetings with the Parish Council and Hernhill Village Conservation Society, to discuss the comments made by the wider community. We have endeavoured to respond to design and highways comments wherever possible and have made significant changes to address concerns or take due account of the observations or suggestions made.

We appreciate from the comments on the planning portal, that there are still some local concerns, particularly from people living near the site, who would, perhaps understandably, prefer not to see any development take place. However, experience has shown us that villages like Hernhill benefit significantly from retaining local households who would otherwise be priced out of their home community. Local people help to define and make a village what it is. Retaining local households, who often work locally or support local family networks, brings a broader social sustainability, which helps to retain the very fabric of community life in rural areas. In these difficult times

there is an argument that projects such as this one, aimed at bringing the community together, are needed more than ever.