



# Hodson's Mill project update

Thank you for the invitation to attend the Salehurst & Robertsbridge Annual Parish Meeting and apologies for being unable to attend. The following has been prepared to provide you with an update on the progress that has been made on the development proposals for Hodson's Mill.

Homes England is the government's housing and regeneration agency, dedicated to delivering new homes and sustainable places across England, and playing a key role in enabling sites that have struggled to come forward due to viability challenges, infrastructure constraints, or planning complexities.

Hodson's Mill is one of the largest brownfield sites in the Rother District and planning permission for 96 homes at Hodson's Mill was granted in 2021. Those proposals ultimately proved to be commercially unviable. Challenges such as site constraints, viability issues, and infrastructure requirements prevented progress, leaving the site undeveloped. The 2021 planning permission has since expired.

Homes England acquired Hodson's Mill and the neighbouring land in March 2024, with the aim of unlocking its regeneration and redevelopment.

Homes England held a first stage of public engagement in November 2024. Key themes which came out of those sessions included access by pedestrians and vehicles, the site's heritage, flooding and water management, biodiversity, landscape, and the need for high-quality housing.

Since then, a considerable amount of technical work has been undertaken to increase the understanding of the site. These studies include site levels, wildlife surveys (including assessment of birds, dormice and badgers), trees, and landscape impact assessments. There have also been structural condition reports of the existing Mill building and Oast House, as well as research on commercial demand for space and the local housing market.

The project team are currently carefully working through this large amount of evidence and using it to inform the preparation of financially viable options for the site.

We had hoped to be further advanced in this process, but are also aware of the importance of taking the time to find the right solution for this key site in Robertsbridge.

Our next steps are to continue our thorough, evidence-based approach to ensure the best possible outcome for the site, balancing heritage, ecology, and economic viability to deliver a sustainable and deliverable development. Homes England remain committed to exploring a long-term solution for the Hodson's Mill site.





# Background information

## Who are Homes England?

Homes England is the government's housing and regeneration agency, dedicated to delivering new homes and sustainable places across England. The agency works in partnership with developers, local authorities, and community stakeholders to unlock land for development, address housing shortages, and create communities that meet local needs. Homes England plays a key role in enabling sites that have struggled to come forward due to viability challenges, infrastructure constraints, or planning complexities.

## The Site

Homes England acquired Hodson's Mill to facilitate its redevelopment, recognising its potential to deliver much-needed housing in an area with a shortage in supply and with affordability pressures. In addition to the original mill site, further land has been included in the plans to enable a more comprehensive approach to regeneration.

## Previous Planning Consent

The site previously secured planning consent for development; however, the proposals ultimately proved to be undeliverable by the market. Challenges such as site constraints, viability issues, and infrastructure requirements prevented progress, leaving the site undeveloped. Homes England is taking a fresh approach, underpinned by careful and diligent research, to ensure that any new proposals are deliverable, sustainable, and aligned with community needs.

## Public Engagement November 2024

A public engagement exercise was held in November 2024 to gather feedback from residents, businesses, and stakeholders. This process included public exhibitions, workshops, and feedback sessions. Key themes emerging from the engagement included concerns about access, heritage preservation, environmental impacts, and the need for high-quality housing. This feedback is being carefully considered as plans for the site evolve.

## Technical Studies

Since acquiring the site, Homes England has undertaken a range of technical studies to assess its constraints and opportunities. These include:

- Levels and Earthworks – analysis of site topography and potential earthworks strategy
- Ecology Surveys – investigations into habitats, including protected species such as badgers, birds, and bats
- Arboricultural Assessments – review of existing trees, including identification of veteran specimens requiring protection





- Building Condition Reports – assessment of the existing structures to establish their condition, what can be retained and how they might be repurposed
- Views and Landscape Impact – understanding visual impacts on the surrounding area
- Commercial Space Demand – market testing to gauge demand for employment and mixed-use spaces
- Housing Market Testing – analysis of demand for different housing types

### **Key Findings: Flood Risk**

Flood risk modelling has been carried out to assess the impact of potential development. The studies confirm that a route for emergency vehicles to access the site in the case of severe flooding will be required. This will be along the northern edge of the site to the lay-by on the A21.

### **Key Findings: Trees**

The arboricultural survey has graded all trees on site, identifying key specimens that must be retained. Notably, several veteran trees have been discovered in the northeastern area of the site that will require specific activities to ensure that they are protected. A tree survey plan has been prepared to illustrate these findings and guide the masterplan for the site.

### **Key Findings: Heritage Significance**

A detailed heritage assessment has provided a clearer understanding of the site's historical significance. Each building has been evaluated to determine its importance and potential for retention. A set of coloured existing plans illustrates these findings, helping to shape proposals that respond to the site's industrial heritage.

