

Wooburn & Bourne End Parish Council
Neighbourhood Development Plan 6th Draft
Supporting Document: Consultancy Report 4.

**Technical Research for Wooburn &
Bourne End Parish Council in respect
of their Neighbourhood Plan:
Matter 4: Proposed Policy for Hawks
Hill & Harvest Hill**

On Behalf of:

Wooburn & Bourne End Parish Council

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Prepared by: Steve Pickles, BA, MSc, Dip TP, MRTPI
Checked by: Ifti Maniar, BArch MA MSC MRTPI

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Wooburn and Bourne End Parish Council have commissioned West Waddy to undertake some technical research into matters raised by Buckinghamshire Council and Catesby Estates in their comments on the ‘Wooburn and Bourne End Neighbourhood Development Plan: Local Consultation Draft – 31 March 2020.’

1.2 The matters addressed relate to:

- ✦ Matter 1: Local Infrastructure;
- ✦ Matter 2: Local Green Space;
- ✦ Matter 3: Proposed policy relating to the development brief for Hollands Farm Development; and
- ✦ Matter 4: Proposed Policy WBE/HH1 – preserving the character of Hawks Hill and Harvest Hill;

1.3 The analysis relating to each of these matters is contained in a separate report. This report relates to Matter 4: Proposed Policy WBE/HH1 – preserving the character of Hawks Hill and Harvest Hill.

1.4 In order to take these matters forward it is strongly recommended that members of the Parish Council meet with Buckinghamshire Council and Catesby Estates to discuss their representations and how the Parish are proposing to address them.

2 MATTER 4: POLICY WBE/HH1- PRESERVING THE CHARACTER OF HAWKS HILL AND HARVEST HILL



2.1 **Wooburn & Bourne End Parish Council comment:**

2.2 With regard to the proposed policy for preserving the character of the Hawks Hill and Harvest Hill area the: *Planning Authority says “There appears to be no justification, evidence from the old Local Plan is not considered up to date. A new character appraisal is required if this policy is to be maintained.”*

2.3 West Waddy advises: *“While the evidence from the earlier Local Plan and the Inspector’s findings respecting this designation are pertinent, they do need to be brought up to date. This can be done partly through using the Council’s landscape character assessment, but I also consider it to be important to carry out field work both to bring the evidence up to date & to provide more detailed evidence not available in more broad based studies such as the Council’s Landscape Character Assessment. In this respect evidence of damage through inappropriate development is as pertinent as evidence of features that are of value and therefore continue to merit protection.”*

2.4 **Agreed Scope of Work:** It is requested that: *‘West Waddy if they would be able to bring the Council’s landscape character assessment up to date and conduct a local area appraisal of Hawks Hill, Harvest Hill and Widmoor. In addition to review the revised policy wording of WBE/HH1 (the revision) to advise any changes required to improve the Policy and/or make compliant.’*

2.5 In this respect, we consider that as a first step we should undertake a desk-based review of the Council’s landscape character assessments; and the Landscape Character Assessment of Hollands Farm, Bourne End & Surrounding Area undertaken by the Pegasus Group on behalf of KBEG. We would also review recent planning applications approved in the area to determine the extent to which they have changed the character of the area, plus reviewing the proposed revision to the policy. However, in our view it may then be beneficial for a professional landscape consultant, who would need to be separately appointed, to undertake a further assessment based on up-to-date fieldwork, but this would be beyond the scope of our initial desk-based review.

Response on Matter 4

2.6 The results of this investigation are set out below:

Landscape Character Assessments (LCA)



2.7 The Wycombe District Landscape Character Assessment was carried out by Land Use Consultants with the report completed in October 2011. It forms part of the evidence base for the Wycombe District Local Plan 2019 underpinning the Council's landscape policies and can therefore be considered to be up to date. The assessment was underpinned by field surveys and the assessment states that: '*A systematic and rigorous approach was adopted for the survey, with information recorded on 1:25,000 scale maps and a Field Survey Sheet (see Appendix 2). A comprehensive photo record was also made.*' The field survey involved:

- ✦ Recording landscape character;
- ✦ Assessing sensitivities and strength of character/intactness to inform the landscape strategy and guidelines.

2.8 The assessment was undertaken by Land Use Consultants who are recognised experts in carrying Landscape Character Assessments.

2.9 Paragraph 2.12 of the assessment states that: '*This is an assessment of the rural landscape. The land within the development limits of villages and settlements was not studied in detail as part of the LCA. The smaller villages have been considered and form part of the description on landscape character, with a particular emphasis on understanding settlement pattern and the relationship of settlements to their landscape setting. However, no specific townscape or urban character assessments were undertaken of the more built-up areas such as High Wycombe. Where these occur within the boundaries of Character Areas it is the undeveloped area surrounding the settlement to which the description refers.*'

2.10 The area to which the former C16 policy related falls within two character areas, with the lower part within the Local Character Area 19.1 High Wycombe Settled River Valley and the upper part within Local Character Area (LCA) 24.1: Burnham Beeches Wooded Terrace.

LCA 19.1: High Wycombe Settled River Valley

2.11 This character area includes High Wycombe; Loudwater; Wooburn Green; Wooburn and Cores End. Some of the key findings that are relevant to the Hawks Hill/Harvest Hill area are outlined below:

Key Characteristics



- 2.12 LUC state that although *'Main roads and railways are integrated by settlement along the valley floor and the M40 crosses the valley on pillars,' 'winding rural roads climb the valley side often contained by tall hedgerows or woodland.'*
- 2.13 The valley sides, such as those around Hawks Hill and Harvest Hill are also important as: *'Views are from either side of the valley to the other, to development climbing up the valley sides in the west and wooded and convex farmed slopes in the east. The valley slopes in the south and east, including woodland, farmland and parkland provide an important setting to High Wycombe which extends along the valley floor.'*
- 2.14 **Landscape Character:** The High Wycombe Settled River Valley contains the River Wye as it flows through High Wycombe to meet the Thames. The settled valley floor is contained by largely undeveloped valleys slopes with some significant blocks of ancient beech and yew woodland (e.g. Kingswood and Deangarden Wood) and fields of arable and pasture farmland. Some areas of chalk grassland and remnants of orchard occur on the west facing valley slopes. *'The River Wye is hidden in the wider landscape by settlement and is often culverted. It flows through the Rye, an open space on the edge of High Wycombe which adjoins historic parkland at Wycombe Abbey on the valley slopes. The valley is crossed by the M40 and rail and road links are contained within settlement along the valley floor otherwise rural roads enclosed by woodland and tall hedges wind down the valleys sides. The undeveloped wooded and farmland slopes are important in providing a setting to High Wycombe and views across the valley are afforded from the slopes. Despite the dominance of settlement along the valley floor, the valley slopes retain a rural character.'*
- 2.15 It is clear from this description that the rural character of the valleys sides and rural roads, including the semi-rural area at Hawks Hill and Harvest Hill are an important component of the character of the area and maintaining the distinction between the settled valley floor and the more rural character of the valley slopes.
- 2.16 **Perceptual/Experiential Landscape:** LUC state that: *'The valley floor is dominated by settlement but the undeveloped slopes in the south and east retain a rural character with farmland, woodland and parkland. These remaining undeveloped slopes are important in containing the valley and*



provide a setting to the town of High Wycombe. Main road and rail routes are contained within the valley bottom with the raised M40 crossing the valley more intrusively. The woodland and rolling farmed valley sides provide pockets of tranquillity contrasting with the busy valley bottom. Views are afforded from each side of the Wye valley across to the other, to development climbing up the valley sides in the west and to woodland and convex farmland slopes and parkland in the south and east with High Wycombe relatively contained in the valley bottom. From the south eastern valley slopes views are afforded out towards the

Thames Valley and back up the Wye Valley.' This again emphasises the distinct contrast between the character of the valley floor dominated by settlements and roads, the more rural tranquility of the valley sides and the important role they play in providing views across the valley.

Landscape & Visual Sensitivities

2.17 LUC state that the landscape and visual sensitivities include: ○ *'The remaining undeveloped valley sides in the south and east which form a setting to High Wycombe which extends along the valley floor.*

- ✦ *Views from either side of the Wye Valley, across the valley to wooded and convex farmed slopes and parkland in the south and east.*
- ✦ *The rural roads and lanes up valley slopes, which may be under pressure to expand and be widened.'*

2.18 There is an overlap here with LCA 24.1: Burnham Beeches Wooded Terrace, which also emphasises the importance of the undeveloped valley sides; the views across the Wye Valley and the character of the rural roads and lanes up valley slopes, which may be under pressure to expand and be widened.

Strength of Character/Intactness

2.19 *'The strength of character and intactness of the High Wycombe Settled River Valley is moderate. Despite the presence of settlement and busy roads along the valley bottom, the undeveloped valley slopes in the east retain a rural character.'*

2.20 **Strategy Vision:** *'Conserve the remaining undeveloped slopes which contain High Wycombe in the valley. Conserve the mosaic of parkland, farmland, woodland and chalk grassland which creates a rural character contrasting with the busy, built character of the valley floor.'*

Landscape Guidelines:

- 2.21 LUC state that these include:
- *‘Conserve the remaining undeveloped valley sides in the south and east which contain and form a setting to the developed valley floor. Restrict incremental development that would alter the character of the valley;*
 - ✦ *Conserve views from each side of the Wye Valley, across the valley to wooded and farmed slopes.*
 - ✦ *Maintain the rural character of roads, avoiding road improvements and widening which would alter their character.’*
- 2.22 This emphasises the importance of maintaining the undeveloped valley sides, which includes the semi-rural character of the Hawks Hill/Harvest Hill area; the views across the Wye Valley and the rural character of the roads, which means avoiding road improvements and widening which would alter their character.

LCA 24.1: Burnham Beeches Wooded Terrace

- 2.23 This character area covers a broad area extending to Burnham Beeches but extends to include the eastern part of the Hawks Hill and Harvest Hill area.
- 2.24 Some of the key findings with regard to this LCA area are outlined below:

Landscape Character:

- 2.25 LUC state that *‘The landscape is a mosaic of small to medium fields, dominated by paddocks, and woodland.This is an enclosed landscape, with tall hedgerows and trees containing rural winding roads. The dense woodland and few settlements create an intimate and tranquil landscape, with contained views.’*

Land Use & Settlements:

- 2.26 LUC state: *‘Settlement is sparse and highly dispersed, mainly comprised of individual properties, or small hamlets. Settlement is well integrated within the landscape, often nestled within woodland.’*
- 2.27 With regard to roads and footpaths it is stated that: *‘A number of smaller winding tracks and rural lanes, some of which are sunken lanes cross the*



landscape. Road side ditches and scrubby verges are a common feature (often including bracken), and roads are frequently enclosed by tall hedgerows or lined with trees. There is a good network of footpaths and bridleways, including the long distance footpath Beeches Way, and numerous smaller tracks wind through woodland areas.'

- 2.28 Tree cover is also acknowledged to be extensive, with roads commonly lined by trees.

Landscape & Visual Sensitivities

- 2.29 LUC state that the landscape and visual sensitivities include:
- The strong sense of tranquillity and intimacy, associated with low settlement and quiet roads;
 - Low level of dispersed settlement, vulnerable to infill.

Strength of Character/Intactness

- 2.30 LUC state: *'The strength of character and intactness of Burnham Beeches Wooded Terrace is strong. Key characteristics are distinctive, and the physical and visual intactness is strong, despite the prevalence of paddocks in this character area.'*
- 2.31 **Strategy Vision:** *'Conserve and manage Burnham Beeches Wooded Terrace as a peaceful, natural landscape mosaic of wood-pasture, heathland, woodland, paddocks and historic parkland. Maintain the intimate and enclosed character.'*

Landscape Guidelines

- 2.32 These include:
- ✦ *'Maintain the essentially undeveloped character, with limited settlement development and quiet rural lanes. Avoid infilling between settlement, particularly around Farnham Common.'*
 - *Seek to reduce road traffic pressures which could alter the tranquil, rural character of the landscape.*



- *Ensure that new buildings and development is sensitively integrated into the landscape through careful siting.*

2.33 These are all very much in line with the aspirations of the former Local Plan policy C16 and the proposed Wooburn and Bourne End Neighbourhood Plan policy.

Pegasus study

2.34 The Pegasus 'Landscape Character Assessment of Hollands Farm, Bourne End and Surrounding Area,' was prepared on behalf of Keep Bourne End Green (KPEG) and was produced in 2017. It has a section on the Hawk's Hill and Harvest Hill Character Area, (paragraphs 1.37 – 1.44), which emphasises the semi-rural character of the area, as the residential properties are set back from the country lanes, and the curtilages of these properties accommodate a significant number of mature trees, mainly of native species, which create a strongly wooded feel to the character of the area. It is also stated that the area accommodates a network of local country lanes, which are sinuous in character and narrow in terms of their width. This accords with the findings of the LUC study.

2.35 Further details of the field survey of the Hawk's Hill/Harvest Hill area are contained in Appendix 1 to the Pegasus report.

Recent Planning Application History of the C16 Policy Area

2.36 A check of the Buckinghamshire website indicates that there have been a number of planning applications for infill development over the past five years. These include:

- White Stile, Wash Hill, Wooburn Green, where permission was granted on 30 December 2015 for erection of 5-bedroom detached dwelling (application 15/08020/FUL);
- Land adjacent Summerhill, Heavens Lea, Hedsor, where permission was refused on 5 September 2016 for 'outline application (including details of access) for construction of 4 dwellings consisting of 1 x detached five bed



dwelling, 1 x detached four bed dwelling and 2 x semi-detached three bed dwellings,' (16/06782/OUT) & the application subsequently dismissed at appeal;

- Formosa & Land adjacent to Formoso, Kiln Lane, where permission was granted on 8 January 2019 for demolition of Formoso & erection of 4 x detached dwellings with associated garages (3 x 5 bed and 1 x 4 bed) & stopping up of vehicular access to Grassy Lane, (application 16/07347/FUL);
- Land at rear of Hedsor Stud, Harvest Hill, where permission was granted on 18 May 2018 for erection of 6 x 5 bed detached dwellings and garages, together with associated access, landscaping and parking, (application 17/07352/FUL);
- Sunrise House, Harvest Hill, Hedsor where permission was granted on 12 December 2019 for demolition of existing dwelling, garages and studio and erection of 2 x detached dwellings with associated garaging and alterations to existing access points, (19/07364/FUL);
- Hill House, Harvest Hill, Hedsor where an application is currently awaiting determination for demolition of existing dwelling and erection of replacement 6 bed detached dwelling with detached garage to front, landscaping and associated external works, (20/07594/FUL);
- Land adjacent Summerhill, Heavens Lea, Hedsor, here an application is currently awaiting determination for erection of a two storey detached dwelling with basement, 3-bay car port and store, creation of new access and new footpath link with associated works, provision of informal public open space, (20/07819/FUL);

2.37 While there have therefore been a number of applications, the indications are that in most cases the development proposals are having respect to the character of the area. Indeed, extensive reference is made to the former Local Plan policy C16 in the committee reports. For example, in the report relating to the erection of four dwellings at Formoso, Kiln Lane (16/07347/FUL), paragraphs 5.1 to 5.8 relate to policy C16. Paragraphs 5.16 to 5.24 also relate to design issues, with reference being made to policy C16, with the conclusion made that the scheme is '*considered to meet the parameters of policy C16 in terms of achieving a spacious design of individually designed dwellings,*' (para 5.19). In the transport section of the report reference is also made to the



access, where it is stated that *'it is proposed to access the site using the existing shared private driveway onto Kiln Lane. A previous application for development on the site taking access from Kiln lane was dismissed at appeal, however this involved creating an entirely new access removing a substantial section of the roadside bank, which was judged to have an adverse impact on the character of the area,'* (para 5.12).

- 2.38 Similarly with the case of application for the erection of six dwellings at Hedsor Stud (17/07352/FUL), extensive consideration is given to compliance with policy C16 in paragraphs 5.1 – 5.5 and 5.18 – 5.24 of the officer's report. It is stated that *'the requirement of Policy C16 is that development should be of individually designed dwellings in substantial plots....With the use of different detailing and materials to give each house an individual appearance it is considered that the scheme includes sufficient variety and individuality in terms of the design and appearance of the six plots to meet the requirements of Policy C16,'* (para 5.19). Reference is also made to the development's *'spacious layout, with generous gaps between houses. This is considered to be compatible with the surrounding area [and] is therefore acceptable,'* (para 5.22).
- 2.39 The indications are therefore that there have been no developments for high density development uncharacteristic of the area within the former C16 area, and that a significant consideration in the determination of planning applications has been compliance Policy C16.
- 2.40 There is a risk that without this policy and with the text in the 2019 adopted Wycombe Local Plan being in the supporting text of paragraph 6.132, that Council officers may be less aware of its presence or indeed of the boundaries of the area it is intended to cover, as it no longer appears on the Policies Map. This suggests the need for a replacement policy within the Neighbourhood Plan.

Suggested Policy & Overall Assessment

- 2.41 The suggested policy is:

'POLICY WBE/HH1 - PRESERVING THE CHARACTER OF HAWKS HILL AND HARVEST HILL AREA

Policy for Hawks Hill and Harvest Hill



- 1) *development in the Hawks Hill/Harvest Hill area will not be permitted where it would:*
 - a) *introduce an urban character to the area through its design, density, layout or location;*
 - b) *necessitate highway improvements or other changes that would damage or destroy features such as but not limited to trees, hedgerows or banks which contribute to the landscape characteristics of the area;*

- 2) *proposals should provide for individually designed buildings set in their own substantial grounds in an informal layout commensurate with the semi-rural character of the area. Landscaping details should reflect the semi-rural nature of the surroundings and should include indigenous species.*

- 3) *infill or the sub-division of existing plots will not be permitted where this would result in urban forms out of character with the surrounding area*

Objective: *Preserve the character of Harvest Hill/Hawks Hill area'*

2.42 The policy is substantially the same as the wording of policy C16 in the old Wycombe Local Plan 2011, but the words in red are additional.

2.43 Given that Policy C16 has been in operation for a long period of time it is necessary to assess whether the policy is still up-to-date. Buckinghamshire Council has stated:

"There appears to be no justification, evidence from the old Local Plan is not considered up to date. A new character appraisal is required if this policy is to be maintained."

2.44 This chapter has reviewed the two existing landscape character assessments by LUC in 2011 and Pegasus in 2017. The former is a Buckinghamshire wide assessment and therefore reviews the details in relatively broad-brush terms. The C16 areas is almost entirely divided between two character areas, namely LCA 24.1: Burnham Beeches Wooded Terrace and LCA 19.1: High Wycombe Settled River Valley. Both assessments make reference to the rural character of the roads and the wooded low density character of the valley sides and plateau which include the C16 area. This is also emphasised in the Pegasus Landscape Character Assessment of 2017. A review of recent applications also indicates that applying policy C16 has been a key policy consideration and it is considered that this has had an important role in retaining the

predominantly semi-rural character of the area and the rural character of the local lanes.

2.45 This view that the area has special characteristics is also supported by the Wycombe

Local Plan adopted in 2019 which states in paragraph 6.132 that: *'Some areas of the District, such as the Hawks Hill/Harvest Hill area, display a semi-rural character and this should be protected from development that would introduce an urban character through its design, density or layout. Features such as sunken lanes and low density development are more characteristic of a rural area and development proposals that introduce features that have urban characteristics would not be appropriate as they are likely to have an adverse impact on these semi-rural areas.'*

2.46 This provides part of the supporting text to policy DM32 on Landscape Character & Settlement Patterns which states that:

- '1. Development is required to protect and reinforce the positive key characteristics of the receiving landscape and existing settlement patterns.*
- 2. Development is required to evidence a thorough understanding of the landscape and demonstrate a positive response to its attributes, taking account of:
 - a) Existing landscape/townscape character appraisals and design guidance;*
 - b) The existing and historic pattern of fields, hedgerows, woodlands, trees, water bodies, the underlying topography, and other landscape features on and around the site;*
 - c) Tranquility and darkness;*
 - d) Views and vistas, both from and towards the site, paying particular attention to hilltop and skyline views and areas that contribute to separation between settlements.**
- 3. Development is required to demonstrate that a mitigation hierarchy has been followed in a cumulative way, to avoid, minimise and mitigate harm; and that opportunities for enhancement have been taken.*
- 4. Development must not, individually or cumulatively, result in the actual or perceived coalescence of settlements.'*

2.47 The evidence base underlying Policy DM32 and the supporting text predominantly consists of the LUC Landscape Character Assessment and



demonstrates that the Local Plan Inspector and Council acknowledge that there is a continuing case for protecting the character of the Hawks Hill/Harvest Hill area. The proposed policy wording simply seeks to put the principles contained in the Local Plan text into a formal policy in order to give it added weight and greater prominence in order to ensure that it is taken into consideration when determining planning applications.

2.48 There are in the Hawks Hill/Harvest Hill area, several different characteristics that contribute to the character of the area:

1. **There is the overall semi-rural characteristic of the area, characterised by large amounts of trees and residential dwellings being set in large gardens:** protection of this semi-rural character is a legitimate aspiration given that the C16 area is located on a valley side, providing the setting to the surrounding residential areas in Bourne End; Cores End and Hedsor Road and to the wider Wye and Thames Valleys. The proposed policy also fully accords with the advice in Paragraph 70 of the National Planning Policy Framework that: *'Plans should consider the case for setting out policies to resist inappropriate development of residential gardens, for example where development would cause harm to the local area.'*
2. **There is the rural character of the lanes:** This is one of the most remarkable characteristics of the area, with Kiln Lane, Heavens Lea and Harvest Hill, in particularly, being narrow and rural in character and sunken between wooded banks. This is an evident characteristic being noticeable to anyone travelling around the area. If a large number of dwellings were permitted in this area this would require significant highway improvements which would destroy the rural character of the lanes and thereby have a significantly detrimental impact on local character.
3. **Views over the Wye and Thames Valleys:** Although much of the area is enclosed, notwithstanding its location on a valley side, owing to the extensive tree cover and the sunken characteristic of the lanes, there are particular locations where there are extensive views over the Wye and Thames Valleys. One particular location where there is such a view is at the field side gate near the top of Heavens Lea. However, although the viewpoint is within the area formerly covered by the C16 policy, the adjoining field is not and is now covered by the area covered by the Hollands Farm development site. As the C16 policy never referred directly to views it would not be possible to protect this view under either the former C16 policy or the proposed replacement policy. As there is also no reference to views in the



Wycombe Local Plan 2019 text this would be outside of the scope of the proposed policy. However, should highway improvements be proposed here as part of the Holland farm development this would be within the scope of the policy.

4. **There are open spaces** which have been designated under a separate policy DM12 in the Delivery & Site Allocations Plan but have never been protected under the C16 policy and are therefore not further considered here.

2.49 With regard to the specific wording, I consider that this is generally satisfactory. However, paragraph 16 d) of the NPPF states that Plans should '*contain policies that are clearly written and unambiguous, so it is evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals;*'

2.50 In this respect it is our view that there are two phrases in the suggested wording that are potentially ambiguous, which are the references to '*or other changes,*' and '*but not limited to.*' I would therefore recommend the deletion of these phrases as indicated below:

'POLICY WBE/HH1 - PRESERVING THE CHARACTER OF HAWKS HILL AND HARVEST HILL AREA

Policy for Hawks Hill and Harvest Hill

1) *development in the Hawks Hill/Harvest Hill area will not be permitted where it would:*

a) *introduce an urban character to the area through its design, density, layout or location;*

b) *necessitate highway improvements ~~or other changes~~ that would damage or destroy features ~~such as but not limited to trees, hedgerows or banks~~ which contribute to the landscape characteristics of the area;*

2) *proposals should provide for individually designed buildings set in their own substantial grounds in an informal layout commensurate with the semi-rural character of the area. Landscaping details should reflect the semi-rural nature of the surroundings and should include indigenous species.*

3) *infill or the sub-division of existing plots will not be permitted where this would result in urban forms out of character with the surrounding area*

Objective: *Preserve the character of Harvest Hill/Hawks Hill area'*

3 Conclusion on Matter 4

- 3.1 In our opinion, there is already sufficient evidence to support a replacement to Policy C16 in the Wooburn and Bourne End Neighbourhood Plan given the findings of the LUC Landscape Character Assessment and the wording of both policy DM32 and paragraph 6.132 in the Wycombe Local Plan. However, if the Council considers that further fieldwork is required to support the policy, we consider it to be important to agree the scope of this work at the forthcoming meeting with the Council to discuss their comments on the draft Wooburn and Bourne End Neighbourhood Plan.
- 3.2 The proposed policy relating to the protection of the Hawks Hill/Harvest Hill area is considered robust, with a few minor word changes needed to remove potential ambiguity in the policy.