

STAPLEHURST NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REVIEW GROUP

COMMENTS ON THE RESULTS OF MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL'S CALL FOR SITES FOR HOUSING AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan, made in December, 2016, describes how the countryside informs the village setting and how the proposed new housing should create an integrated framework to manage change.

Policy PW1 – Access and Movement, acknowledges the rural character of the village and encourages more choice of routes throughout the parish to reduce traffic congestion on the A229 and Marden and Headcorn roads.

The issues relating to drainage infrastructure have not been resolved with the housing developments currently under construction and cannot continue to be ignored.

Policy PW2 states that future development should be assessed in terms of the impact such development would have upon the visual setting and landscape features as well as the biodiversity of the area. There is a presumption against development outside the village envelope.

Neighbourhood Plan Objectives speak of networked footpaths with connected streets and lanes, improved cycle routes and improved pedestrian access. There should be safeguards for the green and rural feel of Staplehurst.

There has been no benefit of the Community Infrastructure Levy for Staplehurst.

Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan Review Group comprises parish and borough councillors and residents tasked with keeping the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan, 2016 under review. As part of the Maidstone Borough Council's (MBC) process of drafting a new Local Plan, landowners and speculators were invited to submit sites for consideration for housing and commercial development. A total of 31 sites were offered within Staplehurst parish and these were discussed by the Group at their meeting on 4th December 2019. Most of the sites can only be accessed via narrow country lanes which have no pedestrian footways, or from the A229 road which is designated as a primary route for traffic between the Medway Towns and the South Coast. The A229 is heavily trafficked, particularly at peak times, when, due to congestion, it can take an hour to drive from Staplehurst to Maidstone. Some of the sites are located North of the railway line, an area which has always been regarded by both Maidstone Borough Council and the Parish Council as unsuitable as it could become ribbon development. The main route for traffic from many of the sites offered would at some point have to negotiate the A229/Headcorn Rd/Marden Rd. traffic lights which are already over their design capacity. Few of the sites offered have easy access or are within walking distance to the centre of Staplehurst or the railway station, so residents will need to use cars which then raises the issue of parking. Parking within the centre of Staplehurst is very limited and there is no land which could be turned into parking facilities. The station car park has recently been extended and is already heavily used with few spare spaces during weekdays. Commuters tend to use on street parking where this is permitted, as it is free. The foregoing indicates that any further housing development should not be permitted without improvements to the highways and other infrastructure. Consideration should also be given to the effect that the construction of housing within Tunbridge Wells Borough, i.e. at Cranbrook, Sissinghurst and Hawkhurst, will have on the traffic on the A229 to and from Staplehurst Station. Part of the Sainsbury's supermarket site in Station Approach is currently used for commuter parking but if and when work starts on the construction of the supermarket the present users of the parking facility will have to re-locate to the station car park as on-street parking in the vicinity is banned for a period during the middle of the day.

The results of the discussion are shown below.

The site numbers are those shown on the MBC 'Call for Sites' documents and plans.

The following codes relate to locations and areas as shown and described on the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan 2016.

POL – Land shown as protected open land.

NOR – Land north of the railway line

IGS – Important green space

COMMENTS

- 007 The Paddocks, Brickfield Cottage. This is the land between Brickfield cottage and the railway line which tends to be very wet. Access to the A229 Maidstone Road would be at the foot of the incline leading to the bridge over the railway, opposite George Street and could be a problem. IGS NOR (See also comments on site 184)
- 027 Land at George Street . Care dwellings. Access would be via George Street which is single lane without footway and joins the A229 Maidstone Road at the foot of the incline leading to the bridge over the railway and could be a problem. A previous planning application for this site was refused by MBC and subsequently refused on appeal. It has been suggested that pedestrians could access this part of George Street via the foot crossing of the railway but it should be noted that this crossing has seen three deaths of pedestrians hit by trains which run at speeds of up to 90 miles/hour. POL NOR
- 034 Land at George Street. Natural regeneration of trees and bushes means that the site now has significant wildlife. Site acquired by Tesco, between the railway line and George Street. Site is badly drained and access is via George Street with similar problems to those shown in 007 and 027 above. IGS NOR.
- 037 Land rear of The Gables, Marden Road. Previous planning applications have been refused by MBC and on appeal by the planning inspector. POL
- 056 Orchard House, Clapper Lane. Access is via the Marden road/ Clapper Lane crossroads along Clapper Lane which is narrow, without footway. There would be problems with disposal of foul and surface water from this site. There is no public transport nearby and the primary school and shopping facilities are not within walking distance.
- 060 Rush Farm, West of Couchman Green Lane, south of railway. Access could be via Pile Lane or Couchman Green Lane, both of which are narrow with no footway. IGS
- 064 Land South of Marden Road. Accessed via Marden Road which lacks a footway on this part of Marden Road. Subject to outline planning application 16/507661/OUT which was refused by MBC and subsequently refused on appeal by the Planning Inspector. POL
- 066 Land at Lodge Road owned by Civils. Mixed housing and commercial. A new road could provide route from Dickens Gate site to Lodge Road and railway station.
- 076 Land east of Couchman Green Lane (opposite 060) for day nursery. The landowner submitting this site claims that the parish council are in favour of this project but this is not the case. If this was used as a day nursery for children it would involve them being dropped off by vehicles accessing the site via Pile Lane or Couchman Green Lane, both of which are narrow and without footways which would preclude the use of pushchairs by pedestrians. IGS
- 114 Land at Home Farm, Pile Lane, currently used at greyhound kennels and dog track. Site is between Pile Lane and Magnetic Shields industrial premises. There may be noise emanating from Magnetic Shields works. Pile Lane is narrow without passing places or footway.
- 119 Land north of Thorn View, Park Road, Marden. Shown as for specialist housing, for what? Site is in Marden and Staplehurst parishes. Accessed from Park Road in Marden parish. Long distance from shopping and other facilities in either Marden or Staplehurst and therefore not sustainable. POL
- 132 Land at Knoll House and Tower House, Maidstone Road. Access on to Maidstone Road. POL NOR
- 134 Land at Baldwins Farm on north side of Marden Road. No footway in this section of Marden Road. Not sustainable. POL
- 137 Land South of Marden Road, East of Pagehurst Road. No footway POL

- 154 Land at Duckhurst Farm, West of Clapper Lane, currently an indoor riding school. Access is via Clapper Lane with no footway. This site is not within walking distance from the primary school and shopping facilities. NOR.
- 184 Brickfield and Rosemount, East of Maidstone Road and West of Couchman Green Lane. Access would need to be from Maidstone Road as Couchman Green Lane is unsuitable for heavy traffic in its present form. No footway on eastern side of Maidstone Road. Parts of the site are brownfield where land drains were manufactured. Parts of the site were excavated to obtain clay for the process and the excavated areas are believed to have been filled with refuse or waste material. (See also comments on Site 007 above) NOR
- 186 Land on South side of Headcorn Road, opposite Magnetic Shields and Jubilee Field. Site has been subject of planning applications which have been refused by MBC. POL
- 190 Iden Manor Farm, Cranbrook Road. Access from A229 via the Iden Manor Care Home/Woodland House drive. POL
- 197 Golf Course Car Park, Cradducks Lane POL
- 198 GOLF Course, Cradducks Lane POL. A development on the scale implied by the size of sites 197 and 198 would require significant investment in infrastructure, particularly to resolve traffic problems, and a robust masterplan.
- 209 Rectory Fields, Frittenden Road. This site adjoins the churchyard. Access from Frittenden Road would need to be to the East of the sewage pumping station as the burial ground and its adjacent field are wildlife protected. POL
- 212 Land at The Grange, George Street. Planning application(s) have been refused. Access via George Street has all the hazards shown above. NOR POL
- 214 Brattle Farm, Five Oak Lane. Mixed development POL
- 222 Land at Henhurst Farm, Pinnock Lane. Part of the site is already included in the current Local Plan, but access would be problematic as only the unadopted section of Bell Lane, or The Bartons (which was not designed for through traffic) could be used. Land North of Henhurst Farm is protected Low Weald with stunning views across rolling, productive, currently farmed agricultural land, with a network of native hedges, trees and ponds. The site also enjoys fine views of the All Saints' Parish Church situated at the highest point of the village. In addition, this site abuts the Wimpey Field Nature Reserve, soon to be designated a 'Local Nature Reserve' by Maidstone Borough Council and the wildlife would be isolated from their corridors of travel over the fields forming this site. The area also has thriving bat colonies of different types. Parts of the site have accumulations of surface water. The bottom field nearest The Bartons lays with water throughout the Autumn, Winter and Spring even without extreme weather conditions. Water flows off the field and floods PROW KM302A, despite the attempts of volunteers to keep the ditches clear. Vehicular access is planned to be via Pinnock Lane on to the junction with the A229 which has a history of road traffic accidents. POL
- 225 Woodford Yard, Maidstone Road. Employment and Trade. Currently owned and used by Homeleigh Timber Supplies and will probably be developed further. A major employer in the village. NOR
- 226 Land South West and West of Cross at Hand, extending towards Stile Bridge, is mostly in Marden parish. Described as Garden Village of 1800 houses. This would use valuable agricultural land currently used for arable and fruit farming. The proposal to divert the present bus service, which runs hourly between Maidstone and Sandhurst and is not reliable, would increase journey times for passengers and so make public transport less attractive to them. Should be POL
- 228 Land adjacent to, and north of West View for 4 – 5 houses, currently subject of planning application. Should be POL.

- 229 Land at Stanley Farm, south of Headcorn Road and East of Slaney Road. Planning application 15/507124 was refused and subsequent appeal was withdrawn. POL
- 244 Land north of Iden Park. Planning application 15/509999 was refused. POL
- 307 Land North of Marden Road, East of Clapper Lane for mixed development . There is no footway on this section of Marden road and is not sustainable. POL
- 318 Pagehurst Farm – No information given POL