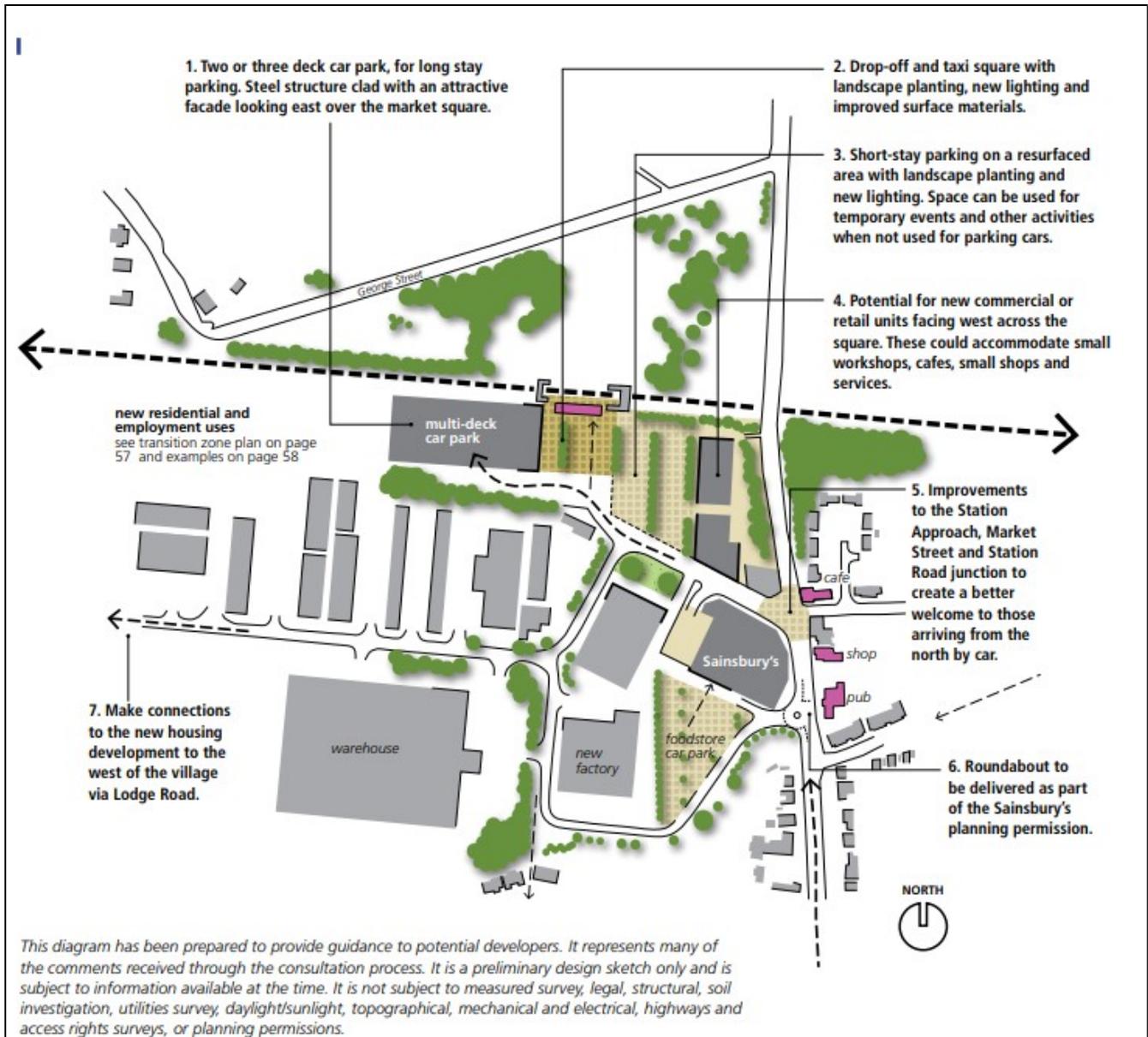


STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL

Committee, Group or Sub Group	
Station Redevelopment Group	
Meeting Date & Venue	
Report for Council meeting 16 April 2018	
Report Author	
Tom Burnham	
Report	
<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>The Station Redevelopment Group was set up as a task-and-finish group following the Council meeting on 6 March 2017 to review proposals for development at Staplehurst railway station in the light of Policy GW1 of the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan. The Group includes Councillors Buller, Burnham and Smith, and we have recently involved former Parish Councillor Simon Green, who is a regular user of Staplehurst station and has useful contacts with Southeastern at a senior level.</p> <p>Policy GW1 states that:</p> <p>“The redevelopment of sites in the railway station area will be supported, where such proposals can demonstrate that they would lead to improvements to the public realm in the area and enhance the visual approach to the village from the north. Proposals for new commercial development including any retail floor space, will be assessed in terms of any potential impact upon existing retail provision in the High Street local centre.”</p> <p>This policy was supported by an illustrative sketch and layout (shown below); for further details see the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan.</p> <p>Policy GW1 was the section of the Neighbourhood Plan which had the greatest public support in consultations.</p>	

STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL



Staplehurst station

Staplehurst station is on the main line from London via Tonbridge to Ashford and has a half-hourly off-peak service of trains from London to Dover or Ramsgate, with a more frequent service during peak periods. Trains are operated by Southeastern; the franchise is currently in the process of re-tendering, and the new franchisee is expected to take over from April 2019.

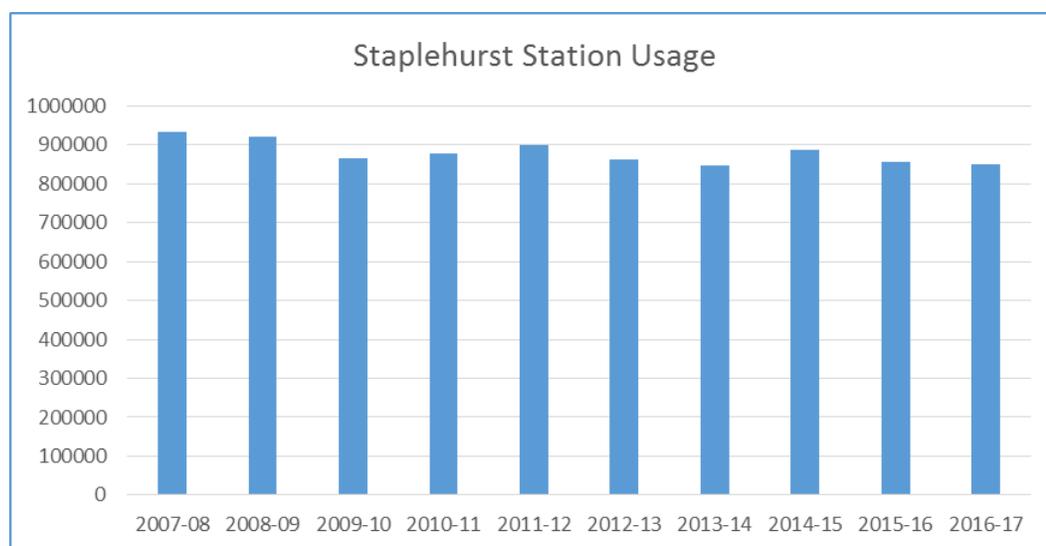
Network Rail's estimate of usage of the station for 2016-17 (the latest published) is 851,240 – this figure is the total of entrances and exits, i.e. if a passenger travels from Staplehurst and returns this counts as 2. As a rule of thumb, the number of regular passengers might be around the usage figure divided by 500 – say 1700. We have no information on where the passengers who use Staplehurst station live (Southeastern would have information on their season ticket holders) but a survey by John Swannick's group about 10 years ago suggested that about half of the passengers at that time lived more than 3 miles from the station. Certainly Staplehurst acts as a railhead for places south on the A229 (particularly Sissinghurst, Cranbrook and Hawkhurst) and also for places to the north, including parts of south Maidstone.

STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL

For comparison, 2016-17 usage figures for other stations in the Maidstone area are:

Bearsted	390,814
Headcorn	609,120
Maidstone Barracks	271,710
Maidstone East	1,363,702
Maidstone West	846,586
Marden	526,820
Staplehurst	851,240

Usage figures have fluctuated slightly over the last ten years. They may be affected by general levels of economic activity, and by the gradual move towards more flexible working arrangements, but it is difficult to identify any definite trend.



Facilities at the station include a booking office on the up (London-bound) platform built in 1988. This provides two booking windows and a newspaper/refreshment sales counter, together with toilets, which are only available when the station is staffed (apart from the disabled toilet which can be accessed with a RADAR key). There are modern waiting shelters on both platforms. An accessible covered footbridge (with lifts) was installed in 2008. A concrete footbridge dating from 1961 is now out of use and will be removed by Network Rail at some time in the future.

The station car park advertises 438 spaces and is in process of expansion (see below).

Maintenance Issues and Short-Term Improvements

The drainage channel along the eastern side of the car park (near the A229) has been cleared out, but the soil removed has been dumped on the edge of the car park, preventing run-off. This has been raised with Southeastern. The channel also receives effluent from the car wash.

The culvert under the railway which allows this channel to drain into the area north of the railway appears to be blocked. Southeastern have raised this with Network Rail.

The 10-year-old accessible footbridge could do with being thoroughly cleaned and repainted in some areas.

There is a general litter problem in the Station Approach and car park area. We have asked Southeastern (yet again) to provide and service a litter bin near the exit from the platform.

Southeastern would have no objection in principle to Staplehurst Parish Council providing a

STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL

community notice board at an agreed location.

Southeastern would be sympathetic to planting schemes around the station. At some Southeastern stations there are gardens maintained by local volunteer groups, and others provided by garden centres and the like. In the latter case, a small advertising sign would be acceptable.

Land Ownership

Land Registry searches show that with certain exceptions, the land between Station Approach (and its continuation as a footpath) and the railway is owned by Network Rail. Apart from the Network Rail works compound at the western end, and the site leased to the car wash business on Station Approach, the Network Rail land is now substantially all leased to Southeastern (and will transfer to the new franchisee in 2019 if not Southeastern). The bed shop on the corner of Station Approach and the A229 is owned by Tesco, and KCC Highways own a narrow strip of the road embankment.

Car Park Extension

Having increased the area of land they lease from Network Rail, Southeastern are in process of bringing the area of the former "informal" car park to the west of the station approach into use as an official car park. Site clearance and levelling has been carried out and new security fencing installed on the south side. The new area will be integrated with the existing west side car park, and appropriate lighting and security will be provided. There will be a single entrance, somewhat to the south of the existing gates. Disabled access from the western car park to the station will be improved. This scheme should provide about 225 additional spaces, with a possibility of a modest further addition in the longer term.

Southeastern have indicated that the layout of the eastern car park (which dates back to the use of lifting barriers) might well be changed early in the new franchise to locate both entrance and exit at the present exit (widened), with automatic number plate recognition (ANPR). This would improve safety for the many pedestrians who cross Station Approach near its junction with Lodge Road.

Section 106 Agreements

Planning consents for the three major housing developments in Staplehurst (outline only for the Hen and Duckhurst site) include conditions requiring Section 106 contributions to improvements at Staplehurst railway station (through Network Rail):

Hen and Duckhurst Farm, Marden Road (now David Wilson Homes) 14/502010/OUT: £1429 per housing unit (index linked)

Fisher's Farm, Headcorn Road (Bovis) 14/505432/FULL: £238,643 (index linked)

Fisher's Farm, Headcorn Road (Redrow) 15/510186/FULL: £264,365 (index linked)

Given that only the Redrow development is at present under construction, and that Section 106 payments are phased according to the proportion of the homes occupied, it will clearly be several years, at least, before the allocated money is available.

The proposed design, referenced in the various Section 106 agreements, was drawn up in 2014:

STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL

to create space for the "Town Square". Indicative costings for prefabricated car park decks are not easy to come by, but we understand the cost to be of the order of £15,000 per additional space created. The additional top deck spaces are offset to an extent by the need to provide space for columns and ramps at ground level. In 2014-2015, this type of car park extension was provided at Orpington and Tonbridge at reported costs of £1.9 million (142 extra spaces) and £2.6 million (about 172 extra spaces), respectively. Given that the cost of providing a ground level car park is likely to be around £4000 to £5000 per space, this appears unattractive. However, we understand that the design of the new western car park extension would support a second deck should this be favoured in future.

Solum Regeneration

On 20 June 2017, the group, with Parish and Borough Councillor Perry met MBC Senior Planning Officers Richard Timms and Andrew Thompson and William Cornall, MBC Director of Regeneration and Place. The planning officers were reluctant to consider any change to the improvement scheme proposed in the various Section 106 agreements, but William Cornall was interested in the Neighbourhood Plan's proposals for economic regeneration of the station area. He subsequently contacted Solum Regeneration, a joint venture of Network Rail and Keir Properties which specialises in innovative use of land near railway stations (the Keir Ltd interest in Solum is to be acquired by Capital & Counties Properties PLC). In December 2017, William Cornall and Councillor Perry met representatives of Solum who thought there was a possibility of investing in the Staplehurst station area.

Conclusions

The current surroundings of the station are unsatisfactory and need to be improved in order to

- Enhance the safety and convenience of Staplehurst residents using the station.
- Provide a welcoming environment for people arriving at Staplehurst by train.
- Create economic activity to offset the environmental damage resulting from use of the station by people arriving there by car.

Staplehurst Parish Council is recommended to:

- Note this report.
- Endorse continued contacts with Southeastern and Network Rail to carry out necessary repairs and improvements.
- Encourage local residents and businesses to cooperate with Southeastern to improve the environment of the station in the short term.
- Request Maidstone Borough Council to review the proposals for longer term station improvements intended to be funded by Section 106 agreements in the light of the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan and current operational requirements.
- Request Maidstone Borough Council to invite representatives of Solum Regeneration to a meeting with Parish Council representatives at Staplehurst.