

STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL

1st November 2016

Ms Louise St. John Howe
Programme Officer,
PO Services
PO Box 10965,
Sudbury
Suffolk
CO10 3BF.

Parish Office
Staplehurst Village Centre
High Street, Staplehurst
TONBRIDGE, Kent
TN12 0BJ

Parish Clerk
Mr MJ Westwood

Tel
01580 891761

email
clerk@staplehurstvillage.org.uk

website
www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk

Dear Ms St. John Howe

Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan Examination – Session 5A Housing Supply – Inspector’s Question 5.1

Staplehurst Parish Council has become aware of Maidstone Borough Council’s written response to the Inspector’s question ‘Is the Council proposing a formal modification to the land supply information in the Local Plan?’ and wishes to comment on the response. The Parish Council’s comments refer specifically to sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 of the response and proposed amendment reference PC/76.

The proposed amendment updates the housing land supply information by making an additional housing allocation of 90 homes on land at Lodge Road ‘to reflect the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan (ORD 026) in accordance with the Inspector’s letter (ORD 026 (A))’. The Parish Council does not agree that the proposed allocation is in accordance with either the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan or the Inspector’s comments for the reasons set out below.

The Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan Policy H6 (pages 59-61) promotes protection of existing employment facilities at Lodge Road and the enhancement and expansion of the area as one for mixed residential and employment use, with no net loss of employment space and with provision of a master plan to ensure good connection to residential land to the west and southwest. The policy is supported by an illustrative layout and photo examples of comparable locations. The amendment proposed by Maidstone Borough Council and illustrated in section 5.1.2 of its response is for solely a new housing site for 90 homes located to the west of existing commercial land and with limited access to the residential area to the west and southwest. In brief design terms, the Neighbourhood Plan proposes a genuine mixed-use site whilst the Local Plan amendment simply adds a proposed housing site to the edge of an existing commercial one.

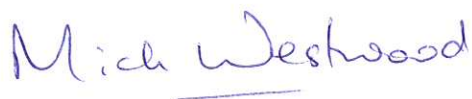
It is the Parish Council's contention that the proposed amendment does not faithfully reflect either the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan or the comments in the Inspector's Examination report dated 2nd August 2016. In this respect section 4.60 of the Inspector's report provides a helpful and succinct endorsement of the Neighbourhood Plan's proposals: 'In my assessment, there is a realistic opportunity to provide a link between the Hen and Duckhurst Farm site and the Lodge Road area, and this would be of significant benefit for people travelling to/from the railway station. I also consider that it is realistic to consider that the land covered by Policy H6 does represent a good opportunity to secure a mixed-use development possibly with an emphasis on flexible Class B1 floorspace, suitable for start-up and small businesses. Accordingly, as it still allows for employment usage, I do not recommend any modifications to Policy H6 or its supporting text, which I consider to be satisfactory, and based upon a key objective of the Plan (Objective 12).'

The Parish Council is concerned that the proposed amendment introduces into the Local Plan a potential housing site that has previously been rejected by the borough council's Cabinet (February 2015) and Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee (July 2015) when it was considered as a potential site for 60 homes (not 90 as now proposed). Cabinet stated that '... this new site should not be taken forward to Regulation 18 consultation on the grounds that the site should be retained for employment use given the economic upturn and that infrastructure must be improved to enable this to happen and the cumulative impact of residential development in Staplehurst on social balance.' The proposed housing site has therefore not undergone any public consultation.

As a point of information, the current status of the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan is that it has passed examination and is to be put to residents at referendum in two days' time (3rd November). It is therefore as far advanced as possible without being formally made and significant weight should be attached to it. In the light of this status the Parish Council believes that a more appropriate amendment of the Local Plan would be for it to incorporate reference to Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan Policy H6 as the guiding policy for the Lodge Road area.

In conclusion, the Parish Council submits that the amendment proposed in sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 of Maidstone Borough Council's response to Question 5.1 does not reflect the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan and is therefore based on an incorrect premise. The Parish Council is disappointed that the amendment has been proposed in this way and requests that the amendment be withdrawn or rejected.

Yours sincerely



Mick Westwood
Parish Clerk