

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

Session 10A – Yalding Representations and Similar Issues

Submission by Vicarage Road Residents Group (Items 2.2 and 2.3)

H1(67) Vicarage Road

Introduction

- The residents of Vicarage Road welcome this opportunity to contribute to the Maidstone Local Plan Examination and regret that the Diocese of Rochester (the landowner) has made no effort to take into account the views of local residents.
- Vicarage Road stretches for half a mile east from Yalding High Street. There are 62 buildings, including a school and Youth/Community Centre, made up of an attractive mix of older and newer properties. There are rural aspects on both sides, and the local habitat includes endangered species or RSPB Red Watch birds such as barn owls, green woodpeckers and song thrushes. There are also footpaths into the village centre, the Kintons playing field and other villages.
- Over 160 individuals objected to the H1(67) in May 2014 in response to regulation 16. Since then 38 adult residents of all ages and backgrounds from Vicarage Road attended a meeting in May this year to contribute to the Yalding Neighbourhood Plan. The points made below were all raised in that meeting and used to inform the Neighbourhood Plan.

1. New Housing Proposals

- The proposed site, H1(67), lies outside of the settlement boundary of Yalding village and, apart from an infill area bordering Vicarage Road, is very much a backland proposal lying behind the primary school, the churchyard and adjacent to the allotments and the Kintons playing field. The number of properties proposed for the development will more than double the number of houses already in Vicarage Road and in a significantly more reduced and restricted parcel of land.
- Planning for 5 homes was previously rejected on the grounds that the development would materially harm the character and appearance of the area. Those grounds for concern are greatly exacerbated given the density of such a development, not only on the character of the village, but on traffic flow and congestion, the safety of pedestrians, and the effect on village amenities including the school. These points are expanded below.

- The Yalding Neighbourhood Plan is in the process of being drawn up. There is wide acceptance of the need for the parish to accommodate new housing, but there is serious concern over the number of houses proposed for this site. Other small parcels of land in the parish have been looked at for housing development. If these are accepted, it would reduce the need to build so densely behind Vicarage Road and allow more sympathetic development to take place throughout the village.
- Yalding is a historic village still containing many attractive mediaeval features, including 3 single track mediaeval bridges, one of which is the longest in Kent. Its housing stock, like that of Vicarage Road, is an attractive mixture of older and newer properties. It is therefore important that any new housing, especially in such close proximity to the village, is on a scale and in a style which is sympathetic to such an environment.

2. Traffic

- Many houses on Vicarage Road and the High Street have no off-road car parking, so for large stretches these roads are effectively single track. At peak times in the morning and evening, as well as at school opening and closing, Vicarage Road, the High Street and Town Bridge have become more heavily congested in recent years. This trend is increasing as a result of new housing in Coxheath, Boughton Monchelsea and south Maidstone as well as the use of Vicarage Road as a short-cut to main line railway stations at Paddock Wood and Tonbridge, or the Medway Valley Line at Yalding and Wateringbury. By avoiding Maidstone, the route is also used by traffic to Tunbridge Wells or west on the M25. When the roads are free from congestion, cars regularly travel in excess of 30 mph, especially along Vicarage Road where the current access and egress to and from H1(67) is proposed.
- For much of Vicarage Road there is no pavement or off-road walking for pedestrians. Walking is therefore hazardous during congested and non-congested times (given the speed of the traffic), especially for older pedestrians and for parents with young children. The same is true should residents wish to walk to the station where a single track bridge with no pavement must be crossed.
- There will undoubtedly be an increased effect on traffic congestion generated by the number of new houses proposed in the draft Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan on an area already heavily congested. Kent County Council has already estimated that traffic congestion will increase in the area by 40%, irrespective of new developments generated from the Local Plan. The concentration of 65 homes, directly accessing already congested roads will compound the traffic problems.

3. Village Amenties

- Yalding Primary School is situated in Vicarage Road on a site adjacent to the proposed development. The school is already at capacity and therefore has a narrow catchment area. A number of primary-age children in Yalding are already required to travel to schools in

other local villages due to the small catchment area. Whilst any development may benefit the school financially the concentration of a further 65 homes next to the school will not increase the catchment area. It is therefore unclear what impact a development on such a scale would have on where other children within Yalding would be educated. What is certain however is that any offsetting by increasing the school capacity will only push more cars on to the roads as more children are forced further afield.

- Yalding cemetery is on land lying adjacent to the proposed development. It only has sufficient space to meet the needs of the next 20 years. The scale of the proposed development will mean there will be no option to expand the cemetery in the future.

4. Flooding

- Although Vicarage Road lies above the flood plain, it was completely isolated by the flooding of the Rivers Beult, Teise and Medway in 2000 and 2013. This prevented traffic (including emergency services) from entering the area, prevented residents from leaving and in 2000 resulted in the evacuation of houses along the road.
- In 1953, Vicarage Road was flooded by water running down from the Greensand ridge to the north. Several houses have watercourses from the ridge running beneath them one metre below ground level.
- The proposed site lies to the north of the River Beult. The Kintons is the only land between it and the river. In 2000 and 2013 the Kintons was severely flooded. The Environment Agency has confirmed there is no viable flood plan for the River Beult. The scale of the proposed development will increase surface water run-off directly into the Beult flood plain, which will impact the flood water and put further pressure on the rest of the village. This in the context of current Environment Agency modelling that states flooding in Yalding has changed from a 1 in 100 event to 1 in 20.

5. Conclusion

- There is widespread acceptance within the village, and in Vicarage Road, that Yalding needs to find locations to build its share of the new houses needed in this part of Kent. Through its Neighbourhood Plan, it is committed to doing that through smaller developments which are more sympathetic to the character of an attractive, historic village, and which more closely meet its needs. The proposal H1(67) contained in the Maidstone Council Draft Local Plan will not achieve those objectives and risks causing great damage to the village and its residents.

Illustrations

a. Vicarage Road - Traffic outside the primary school at 9.00am (May 2016)



b. Hazardous conditions for pedestrians (May 2016, pm)



c. On-road parking in Vicarage Road

