

CPRE Maidstone supports this proposed Lenham Neighbourhood Plan and would like to make the following observations:

1. During the Local Plan Consultation we objected to the amount of dwellings proposed for the 'Rural Service Centre' of Lenham. Our objections centred on:
 - 1.1 the sensitive location of Lenham in the direct setting in the foreground of the AONB and the Heritage Asset of the Lenham Cross
 - 1.2 the possible impact on the spring line of the Stour and Len relating to the chalk aquifer of the Kent Downs AONB
 - 1.3 issues of Sustainable Transport as Lenham is the village which is the furthest away from the employment centres of Medway, Maidstone and Ashford, Faversham and is poorly served by Trains, especially into London.
 - 1.4 the impact of this much development on the historic centre of Lenham, especially the medieval market place (see 2.1.4.of LNP)
 - 1.5 the concern that the amount of new development will overwhelm the infrastructure of Lenham to such a degree that it will be unable to serve residents or provide the desired 'rural Service Centre' to the wider community in the surrounding villages and hamlets.

CPRE Maidstone has also separately objected to proposals to build immediately in the foreground of the AONB in direct view of the Lenham Cross (Local Plan H1 41) and against a small development directly next to a source of the Stour in Lenham (Local Plan H1 42) . Both of these developments were given planning permission. The fact that these sites were approved does not lessen the impact which they will have on the sensitive landscape. They were approved contrary to Maidstone's own Landscape Study and The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan.

It is, in our opinion, impossible to overcome the issues which we raised at the local Plan Consultation but we are of the opinion that this Neighbourhood Plan makes the best of a very difficult situation and actually endeavours to work with the landscape, with respect for water sources, the historic environment and centres development near the station as a

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transport hub.

Impact on Landscape

The Neighbourhood Plan endeavours to site development away from the Kent Downs AONB.

It is our opinion that the extensions to the south-west (Sites 2,3, and 4) will be invisible when viewed from the AONB.

The same applies to the extensions to the north-west (5,6. and 7), as the sites slope down towards the railway and the highest point in this location is already built upon.

Site 1 to the North-east of Lenham Village will be visible but is in the 'shadow' of the Ashmill Business Park.

CPRE Maidstone would like to support the Strategic Housing Delivers Site 1- Land South of Old Ashford Road. This site is visually in the shadow of the existing Ashmill Business Park. Views from and to the AONB will be enhanced by tree planting along the A20, the provision of the open space for sports facilities to the south of the development will guide the views from the AONB towards the landscape beyond.

Choice of Housing Sites in the light of sustainable transport and impact on headwaters of the Stour

The choice of housing sites to the South of Lenham Village and to the West of Lenham Village address, as best as possible, our original concerns for the small streams which form the Stour and the flow of water towards the Lenham Wastewater and Sewage Treatment Plant.

The choice of these sites are also , in our opinion, the best options to encourage the use of sustainable transport as they cluster around the railway station and will accommodate a new bus route. They make use of an existing railway bridge, which will allow access to the new development, thus avoiding more through traffic in the historic village centre.

CPRE Maidstone supports the Strategic Housing Delivery Site 2- Land West of Headcorn Road and North of Leadingcross Green , Strategic Housing Delivery Site 3 - Land East

We would, however, like to see increased density in some of the areas e.g. directly opposite the station where somewhat higher buildings e.g. for apartments would not impact negatively on the landscape but would offer opportunities for creative urban design.(In this context the study by Louise Thomas ,'Density and Urban Design', which was carried out for Maidstone Borough Council (STR-002-B-Appendix-B-Density-and-Urban-Design-Study-May-2016) could be inspirational.)

Infrastructure

CPRE Maidstone is very pleased to see Policy ED 1 and ED 2 as it is, in our opinion, important for integration of new residents and the social cohesion of the village to have one primary school in the older part of the village.

We are also in full support of policy ED3 and consider that the creation of **a new nursery school (policy ED4) is a real asset of this Neighbourhood Plan.**

Green Space Policy

We are very pleased to see open spaces, which have served the community for many years in their leisure pursuits, included in this policy and safeguarded for the future. We are especially pleased to see the Cricket Ground and Court Lodge included. The cricket ground, together with the green spaces around the school, will provide a green centre to the enlarged village. Court Lodge Meadow represents the most prominent access for most walkers in the village to the footpaths to the south of the village. Its proximity to the Grade 1 listed church and Grade 1 listed barn makes it very special.

Impact on historic centre, the Square of Lenham.

The choice of sites to the west of Lenham with separate access routes to the A20 and Headcorn Road will help to lessen through traffic through the square and the High Street and is a fundamentally positive feature of this plan.

We are slightly concerned that policy EMP1 could invite development which affects the historic integrity of the square and jeopardize the mix of housing and commercial use e.g. if a Nightclub were to open in Lenham Square.

Therefore we would like to see the following amendment to Lenham Square policy EMP1 (in red)

- 1. Development proposals which reinforce the pre-eminence of Lenham Square as the retail, commercial, employment and entertainment hub of the Parish will be supported as long as they do not detract from the historic integrity of the assembly of listed buildings.**

Tourism

In our opinion the policies on tourism could be enhanced and strengthened.

- 1) To our knowledge, Lenham is the parish which has more footpath miles than any other parish in Maidstone. It is in Lenham where three locally and even nationally important footpaths meet: the North Downs Way, the Stour Valley Walk and the Len Valley Walk. Lenham is very popular with walkers and cyclists. Many walks, organised by various Rambler groups, start and finish in Lenham. Groups of cyclists are often to be seen in the village centre. Low cost, low impact accommodation is required for long distance walkers on the North Downs Way.
- 2) Lenham, with its attractive village centre, is close to Leeds Castle, which is a tourism hub, but few tourists seem to gather in Lenham's hostelries and there is no place where, for example, a tour operator could park a bus.

In our opinion, it would be of great economic advantage to the businesses in the historic centre of Lenham if the village had an identified coach parking lot. We are also concerned that the existing parking facilities in the village will not be enough when the village expands (see: Transport Assessment 2019). Although it is desirable that modal shift in transport takes place, this is not always achievable and lack of parking will deter visitors (e.g. Lenham as a starting point for groups of ramblers) and it will also pose a problem for residents in the surrounding hamlets and villages wishing to use the facilities in Lenham village, therefore impacting negatively on the functioning of Lenham as a Rural Service Centre.

In our opinion the lack of parking and lack of plans to actively developing its tourism potential could contribute to a loss of facilities which are attractive to tourists such as hostelries, overnight accommodation or individual shops such as gift shops or a bakery.

We therefore suggest that Paragraph 2 of Tourism Policy TOU 1 is deleted

We hope are comments are helpful

Regards

Gary Thomas

Chairman,

