

STAPLEHURST NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REVIEW GROUP

Minutes of virtual meeting held on 20th September, 2022 at 7.45pm

1. **Present.** Chairman Tom Burnham (TB), Cllr. Joan Buller (JB), Robin Oakley, (RO), Secretary, Colin Love (CL), Robin Kenworthy (RK) Richard Griffiths, Parish Clerk (RG) attended as an observer and hosted the meeting on Zoom. The Secretary advised those present that Cllr. Natasha Davidson-Houston (NDH) has recently been co-opted to a vacancy on the Parish Council and she has expressed a wish to join the Neighbourhood Plan Review Group. It was agreed that she will be welcome to the next meeting.
2. **Apologies for absence:** Margaret Arger, Cllr. Paddy Riordan (PR). Cllr. Davidson Houston (NDH) was unable to attend as she had a prior engagement and sent her apologies. Dr. Richard Smith sent his apologies as he had a business commitment abroad.
3. **Minutes of Meeting held on 16th August, 2022:** Agreed as a true record.
4. **Matters arising.** None.
5. **Review of Policy H6 Employment Facilities and Objective 12 Support for the local economy.**

It was agreed that if the Ilke Homes housing development went ahead this would use up the last remaining piece of land which was allocated for a mixed housing/industrial development. It was noted that there is still some land on the south side of Lodge Road at the rear of the Amethyst warehouse which would be suitable for industrial development. There are currently small brownfield sites at Slaney, Brattle and Saynden farms which could be used for small scale commercial development but they would be limited by road access.

It is acknowledged that Hush Heath Winery now provides employment for viticulture, fruit growing and hospitality although it is noted that some of the work is seasonal. It is also noted that there are small industrial sites at Durgates in Clapper Lane and Homeleigh's Woodford site. It is acknowledged that Sainsburys supermarket has brought employment opportunities, some of the jobs being part time. RO pointed out that the area shown as being for a multideck car park was no longer relevant as the railway station has two car parks which are adequate. CL said that any small commercial sites should be protected as being for employment and not classed as brown field sites for housing. RK said that employment offering high wages was important to support people paying high prices for houses. He suggested that rentable office space was needed for those wishing to avoid commuting. RG said that good speeds on broadband are important for home working. JB said that small craft workshops with dwellings above were put forward the original NP but the planning inspector was not in favour. RK pointed out that dwellings above shops were not lived in by the shop owners or staff and quoted the flats above the shops on the parade, which were mostly let to tenants.

JB said that the Home Farm site was not really suitable for commercial as the north end of the site is subject to flooding and there is poor road access. CL suggested that the Home Farm site would be a prime location for a sports centre.

RG suggested that the former golf course could have potential for commercial use but JB pointed out that it is on the south side of Headcorn Road and as such is in the Low Weald area and protected. After some discussion it was agreed that Policy H6 needs to be re-written and RO agreed to draft a new Policy H6 for discussion at the next meeting.
6. **Consideration of draft Policy H6 New Development Access Links prepared by Cllr. Joan Buller.**

It was agreed that housing developments with more than one access point in and out will be preferred but they must be where it is feasible to connect to nearby road infrastructure to ensure that an alternative safety route is available. It was agreed that all new developments should, where feasible, be connected to existing housing by road, cycle and pedestrian routes. JB said that we do not want more housing without infrastructure improvements. TB considered that reference should be made to the Kent Design Code and that the supporting text needed some adjustment and CL offered to adjust JB's document and send it to the Secretary for circulation prior to the next meeting.

7. **FOI Request to Southern Water.** RO reported that the Clerk had sent an FOI request but that SW had replied, seemingly not understanding what information is required. RO had suggested a simplified wording but RG said that he had some experience with dealing with SW in his previous post with Hawkhurst PC and he suggested that a Zoom meeting with SW might produce better results. After some discussion it was agreed that until the results of the next part of the Population Census are available later this year we do not have an accurate number of people served by the treatment works. RG agreed to circulate a new draft of an FOI request.
8. **FOI Request to UK Power Networks.** RO reported that UKPN have confirmed that their infrastructure has sufficient capacity to accept any energy produced by the photovoltaic panels which would be fitted on the 94 houses currently the subject of a planning application by Ilke Homes.
9. **Housing Needs Survey.** RG reported that AKRC has quoted a fee for carrying out a housing needs survey and the Parish Council has reserved funds in the financial year 2023-4 for this. It is anticipated that the survey will be carried out in the Spring of 2023 and a draft of the survey questionnaire will be produced for approval in January, 2023.
10. **Revision to Neighbourhood Plan.** RG reported that the PC has agreed that the Group's comments and suggested revisions to the NP should be sent to Fera and Richard Needham will then be able to give a quotation of fees for carrying out the revision of the plan.
11. **Update on the Tar Pits.** RG reported that MBC Conservation Officers consider that they are of historical importance and worthy of being recognised as a Non-designated Heritage Asset and that their list will be updated accordingly. It was agreed that the Group should request the Parish Council to write to the land owner of Mathurst Farm informing him of this so that he cannot demolish it and plead ignorance.
12. **Inclusion of the River Beult in the Neighbourhood Plan.** It was agreed that the Beult is important as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and that it drains a large area of the Low Weald, and therefore it should be mentioned in the NP. The discharge of treated wastewater, untreated sewage or contaminated surface run-off from roads to the Beult or its feeder watercourses could be a constraint on future development in its catchment area. The mention should probably be in the form of one or two concise paragraphs, drawing attention to the river and its importance. As the river is the responsibility of the Environment Agency, a meeting should be sought with the agency to discuss what wording would be mutually acceptable to the agency and the parish council. The Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board also have an interest in the river and as Cllr. John Perry is a Board Member he is asked to obtain their views on this.
13. **Work for next meeting.** Consider RO's draft of H6 and CL's amendment to JB's draft. Consider NP Objective 12. Support for the local economy.
14. **Any Other Business.**

Green Spaces. JB commented on the recently produced Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Neighbourhood Plan which is currently at Regulation 16 stage with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, and she noted the importance of the section on protection of green spaces. RK stressed the importance of leaving green corridors between old and new build and the retention of original hedges.

Bin Stores. It was agreed that there should be some mention in the NP of the need to provide space adjacent to dwellings for siting of refuse wheelie bins.

MBC Local Plan. JB updated the group on the current position with the Local Plan. The meeting on Rural Service Centres which JB had intended to attend has been postponed, but when it is held she intends to challenge the designation of Staplehurst as an RSC. After major challenges on the proposal for garden villages at Lenham and Lidsing, MBC have produced additional documentation in support of their proposals and this has caused the Planning Inspector to delay any further meetings on the LP until November.
15. The Chairman closed the meeting at 9.30 and thanked Richard Griffiths for his attendance and hosting.
16. **Dates of future meetings:**

Wednesday, 26th October, 2022

Wednesday, 30th November, 2022

Robin Oakley 21st September, 2022