

# Staplehurst Parish Council

<b>Meeting Details</b>	
Site on corner of Station Road/Station Approach	
<b>Meeting Date &amp; Venue</b>	
5.00pm 13 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	
<b>Report Author</b>	
Alison Smith, Parish Clerk	
<b>Report</b>	
<p>Visitors from Tesco's party: Thomas Marley (TM), Louise Ford (LF), Martin Williams (MW), Sergio Gutierrez-Saunders (SGS), James Ainsworth (JA) Paul B (PB)</p> <p>Attending for SPC:</p> <p>Parish Councillors, Adele Sharp, Paddy Riordan, Richard Smith, Joan Buller, Parish and MBC Councillor John Perry (Part-meeting) Parish Clerk Alison Smith,</p> <p>During the introductions, Councillor Riordan explained that whilst Councillors were happy to hear and see information about Tesco's plans for the site, that any discussions/questions/points raised should not infer any pre-determination by SPC in respect of any future application that may be brought forward.</p> <p>TM explained that these were just very initial discussions to gain feedback to help them finalise their plans, prior to any application being submitted. He and LF acknowledged that anything discussed would not indicate predetermination on behalf of the Council. TM also noted that AS (Parish Clerk) would be taking notes.</p> <p><b>Background:</b> The meeting was held at Tesco's request to engage SPC on their proposals for the land on the corner of Station Road and Station Approach.</p> <p><b>Current Status of Land:</b> The land is currently occupied by a retail unit, and owned by Tesco's.</p> <p><b>History &amp; Current status of Plans:</b> LF explained that previously Tesco had launched an unsuccessful attempt to gain planning permission for a Tesco Food store to be located south of the station and railway line, which included the site being discussed in this meeting. As a result, of not winning the planning application and Sainsbury's now having a unit open and trading, Tesco were now looking at how best to maximise value from its property portfolio in the village.</p> <p>During the introduction TM has advised that they wished to update SPC on their plans for the site on the corner of Station Road/Station approach (referred to in these notes at the Garage site) but that they also wished to update SPC with regards proposals for a second large site, just north of the railway line, between the station and George Street; a site also owned by Tesco (referred to in these notes as George Street site).</p> <p><u>Garage site</u> Tesco's confirmed that the site in question did not include the commercially occupied site to the west and rear of their site, commonly referred to as the car wash site.</p> <p>MW explained that they wanted to produce an attractive plan that complimented and respected the surrounding area, buildings and type of materials to be used. He advised that their plans included a commercial unit (likely to be registered as Class E) that could be one or divided into up to 3 units, on the ground floor with 10 1- or 2-bedroom flats above (built to NHB standards). They</p>	

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were keen to also include a small amenity space for the flat occupiers and vehicular and cycle parking. He confirmed that the plans would allow for dual access (from the car park and a pedestrian access from Station Road) with an enclosed internal bin store area. Each flat would have its own balcony.

Councillors questioned if parking would also be for customers of the retail units or just the flats. SGS explained that the intention was just for the flat occupiers and small retail van deliveries. The commercial units would not have customer parking. PB explained that the type of commercial units that the site would be suitable for would effectively self-regulate the market, leaning towards those types of units reliant on foot fall and not customer parking. Councillors also raised concerns that one parking space per unit might not be enough.

Councillors asked if a lift would be included for the flats; it was explained that this was really too small a site and would add significant charges to the service charge for the flats and therefore unlikely to be popular with future owners. Additionally, it was not required with only 3 floors of flats.

Councillors enquired how the flats would be brought to market. Tesco's explained that they had an agent on board who would deal with the sale of the whole site. They also explained that Tesco's would have no ongoing interest as the site once sold, as it was not identified as suitable for a Tesco Express.

Councillors asked when the plans were likely to be brought forward, and it was confirmed that they hoped the application would be made in the next 2-3 weeks.

Councillors commented that having the car wash site immediately neighbouring the new development might be off putting and again requested confirmation that this site was not included. PB acknowledged the point and confirmed that the site would not be included. He commented that it might be that the market would approach the car wash site to ascertain if a 'marriage' was viable, but Tesco's had no intention of doing this themselves. It was also commented that acoustic fencing was planned for the car park area with some landscaping to mitigate the issue of the neighbouring site.

Councillors raised concerns about the potential height of the development particularly at the front of the proposed building and enquired as to how MBC might perceive this point. It was explained that during pre-application meetings, the height had not seemed to be an issue. Discussion took place about whether the plan might be altered to step the height more to the rear of the development.

It was also commented that the architects may wish to ensure that the visual representations, CGI imagery etc should more accurately reflect to road layout and approach, particularly from the north with the railway bridge, as Councillors had concerns that this site would be the first visible upon the northern gateway approach into the village.

Councillors generally commented that they were pleased to see the concept of the dual entrance, the amenity space and the internal bin stores. They also commented that it was always good to see employment opportunities being created within the village and that the potential for smaller, cheaper properties that could be positioned within the 'starter' home market would be a positive.

Councillors were asked if they had any indications as to the type of commercial unit that might be acceptable, and broad indications were that a café/tea shop type of concern may be suitable.

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Councillors did express hopes that if the development were to proceed that the flats would be entered into market for locals to purchase. Paul B confirmed that the site would be unlikely to attract larger investment property owners, but couldn't guarantee as it would be market dependent.

Councillors commented that they were aware that Tesco's had a plot of land south of the village near the Goudhurst Road and enquired if Tesco's had plans for this site. Tesco's confirmed that the intention of this land had been to offer a biodiversity translocation site had the original superstore application succeeded. It was their intention to retain this site for this purpose in light of their possible plans for the George Street site.

## George Street Site

Paul B explained that Tesco were aware of the Local Plan process taking place in Maidstone currently and that they were now looking to promote the site through the consultation process. He commented that they were aware of the high level of sensitivity of building to the north of the railway line, but advised that Tesco were wanting to exhaust all opportunities for their assets in the location, now that a retail store was no longer viable.

It was explained that the site was seen as being highly sustainable, being so close to the railway station. It was their approach to test the viability of the site through the Local Plan process rather than just put in an application. It was confirmed that pre-application conversations had been commenced with MBC.

Councillors asserted that the view of the village was that it is a village settlement and that the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan made it very clear that sites north of the railway line are not considered appropriate for development.

Tesco's confirmed that they would respect the outcome of the Local Plan discussions and that this would determine if the site was suitable or not. They showed Councillors images of an indicative plan of the site, which was being considered for 61 units which would be a blend of private and affordable housing.

PB confirmed that they were looking for a pre planning agreement with MBC with a view to seeking consultee views and responses, which they then hoped to use to support their application through the Local Plan process. He advised that they wanted the agreement to confirm that the application would not be determined until after the outcome of the Local Plan, therefore they saw this application as a longer-term project, likely to be brought forward in 2022.

Councillors enquired as to why this had not been included in the Call for Sites process from MBC. PB explained that it was simply a timing point, but that they were submitting two rounds of representation through the Regulation 18 and 19 processes. Councillors pointed out that following the 'Call for sites' all those north of the railway line did not progress into being 'preferred sites' and that to date MBC had agreed with the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan that the railway line is the northern boundary of the built-up area of Staplehurst.

A query was raised as to the sizes of the two sites, George Street and the Goudhurst Road site. PB confirmed that George Street was approximately 7 hectares and Goudhurst Road site was approximately 2.9 hectares.

## Closing

Councillors requested copies of the presentation slides. Tesco's asked for time to consider this. They were particularly mindful that they had a tenant currently in the existing retail unit and

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wished to be sensitive to this. It was agreed that the matter would remain confidential between parties until such time as an application for the Garage site was submitted.

Thanks to all parties present were shared and the meeting ended at 6pm.

<b>Date &amp; Venue of next meeting</b>	
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Not applicable at this point.
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