

STAPLEHURST NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REVIEW GROUP

Minutes of virtual meeting held on 27th October, 2021 at 7.45pm

1. **Present**, Robin Oakley, Secretary(RO), Margaret Arger, Chairman (MA), Cllr. Adele Sharp (AS), Cllr. Colin Bowden(CB), Cllr. John Perry(JP).
2. **Apologies:** Cllr. Paddy Riordan (on Training Course), Cllr. Joan Buller (unwell), Tom Burnham (TB), Colin Love(CL).
3. **Minutes of Meeting held on 29th September, 2021:** Agreed, with matters arising.
4. **Review of Neighbourhood Plan Policies C1 to C6.** Various Group members have contributed by the deadline of 20th October their comments and suggestions as to revisions and additions which should be considered. Some discussion took place at the meeting and it was agreed that the best way forward would be to composite the comments for each policy and produce them as a separate document which would be discussed at the next meeting. The PC would be asked to liaise with the Health Centre's landlord regarding maintenance. The PC would also be asked to assess the traffic using Hurst Close/Newlyn Drive/Fishers Road when doing their traffic assessment on Headcorn Road.
5. **Maidstone Borough Local Plan.** Cllr. John Perry has produced an appraisal of the draft local plan and this has been circulated in full to all parish councillors and to members of this group. MA thanked John for his excellent document. John explained the position regarding Staplehurst and how it would be affected by the local plan, and the relevant section of his appraisal is shown below.

STAPLEHURST POSITION

It may be recalled that the main driver behind the site distribution in the current Local Plan was what was known as the dispersal policy. This created a lot of problems. In particular, many sites were not large enough to generate enough funding for infrastructure whilst spreading a lot of development, particularly in urban and rural areas. The revised Local Plan does try to avoid this with the development of Garden Communities. Hence the Heathlands and Lidsing proposals. The LPR also safeguards land in the Langley area to secure funding for a possible Leeds/Langley relief road, which would at last generate support from KCC.

Nevertheless, given the high target, the above would still leave MBC still short of the number required. The Call for Sites in fact identified more potential sites than were actually needed. At the time, I was leader of the largest political group and I took the view that we should try and get a cross party agreement as to how we should take this forward and a number of meetings took place to reach a consensus conclusion. The result was what went out to consultation at Regulation 18(b) as the preferred sites. I accept that it is not perfect and there is an element of compromise. Ideally I would like to see no development at all in the rural areas but that is just not realistic. However, I do believe that what is being preferred is the minimum we could get away with and if we achieve this we should have prevented massive further development. Therefore the Staplehurst position has NOT changed from the preferred sites as proposed under Regulation 18(b). These are highlighted below:

- Site Reference LPRSA066 Land East of Lodge Road: 78 Units.
- Site Reference LPRSA114 Land at Home Farm: 49 Units

The Lodge Road site had been earmarked for mixed use and has a lot of advantages in terms of sustainability. It should cause the least disruption for our community. The Home Farm site is possibly the least worst option, especially when compared with the other Headcorn Road possibilities. It is on a site that could be developed and is close to the current Redrow site. All in all these proposals amount to 127 units, which over the period of the plan while not ideal is liveable.

Unfortunately this is not quite the whole story. You may recall that there is a site in the current Local Plan – H1(50) North of Henhurst Farm for 60 units. This was slipped in by certain town based Councillors at the last minute after hours of debate. It is a bad site for a variety of reasons not the least being its visual impact on our village. To date nothing has happened but we know that Wates are keen to build circa 300 houses on the site and this must be resisted. I have raised this with Officers but because it has been approved by an Inspector and is in the current adopted Local Plan it cannot be taken out. However, the 60 units must be a red line. I suspect that if this is made clear Wates may not bother as the financial return would be too low; our Officers are aware of this so hopefully it is a classic case of letting sleeping dogs lie; but we shall need to watch the situation closely.

CONCLUSION

I understand that residents would prefer to resist any additional development and this would reflect the position of the current Neighbourhood Plan. However, the draft LPR is in effect a new Local Plan and has to reflect the revised housing targets for the Borough. Therefore, I think it is unrealistic not to allow for some additional development in Staplehurst. The current preferred sites do reflect some damage limitation, but given the initial number of sites put forward, this might well be considered a reasonable result; we have avoided any expansion of the site North of Henhurst Farm, the sensitive sites on the Headcorn and Marden Roads have been excluded and there is no development North of the railway.

Finally, we have to recognise that without a revised Local Plan we should no longer have a 5 year housing land supply and it would be a developers' charter. The timescale is still tight but I believe that we are still on track.

6. Design Code for Housing in Staplehurst. MA reported that she has received an E-mail dated 25 October which informed her that our submission for the National Model Design Code Phase 2 Pilot is in the process of being assessed but the government's Department of Communities has seen personnel changes which means that additional time is required to assess and notify successful local authorities and neighbourhood planning groups.

7. Any other business.

CB commented on the fact that the site on the East side of High Street, opposite the public library is currently up for sale with planning permission for one single dwelling at a cost of £400k. He suggested that it would be an ideal site for a heritage centre as this would not require vehicular access. RK suggested that the southbound bus stop on the High Street by Cornforth Close would be better located in a layby in front of the petrol station which is currently under consideration for redevelopment as warden assisted sheltered homes for the elderly. Some members expressed the view that moving the bus stop north to a layby would add to traffic congestion. MA advised that the next Village Update would not have an item from SNPRG as at this time there is nothing new to report.

8. Dates of future meetings. There was some discussion as to whether the Group should continue with Zoom virtual meetings and it was felt that this suited those present and it was agreed that Zoom meetings should continue.

The next meetings are at 7.45pm on the following dates:-
November 24, December 22 in 2021 and January 19 in 2022.

The meeting closed at 8.48 pm

Robin Oakley 28 October 2021