Neighbourhood Plan Review Group

Minutes 28th September 2026.

1. Present and Introductions

Bob Ham, Wendy Sheronden, Jean and Bill Osler, Elaine and Mike Cummins, Ian Day, Sonia Franklin-Smith, Caroline Henson, Bill Wallis, Joan and Malcolm Buller, plus Cllrs Arger, Sharp, Perry and Alison Eardley -Planning Consultant and the Clerk

Apologises – Laureen Rodwell, Lyn Heath, Tom Burnham, Katherine Farmer, Erika Lock, Colin Love, Mary Weatherly and Cllrs Ash and Mclaughlin

As there are a few new members Cllr Arger clarified GDPR issues regarding sharing email address and would circulate Terms of Reference for the Group. Attached to these minutes

2. Dispensations – NA

3. NDP Review – Planning Inspectors comments

The group discussed the comments from the Planning Inspector on the review of the Staplehurst NDP.

Generally, very favourable – only 3 queries to Staplehurst – one of which was a typo.

Two main queries

a) Protection of local significant views – at this point these are always indicative, so the group felt comfortable with our comments.

b) Off Street Car parking, Bell Lane. MBC who own Bell lane would prefer the option to develop. Group felt that we should try and protect the car park as off street car parking so limited in Staplehurst.

Bob Ham proposed, and Jean Oslow seconded to recommend the text below to Parish Council – agreed unanimously.

Question 3: Re. Policy S11 (Protection of Locally Significant Views) (Pages 56 and 58)

CBRE (on behalf of Wates Developments) has made representations concerning this Policy, stating that the designation of specific arcs (on Figure 23) is not supported by sufficient evidence to allow them to be included.

I have reviewed the draft Policy, paragraphs 8.23-8.28 of the supporting text and Appendix E, and I can find no evidence (possibly apart from the photographs at Appendix E) that can demonstrate to me how the extent of the arcs defined on Figure 23 have been assessed and calibrated. By way of one example, the arc defined for V2 (View

south from the High Street) on Figure 23 is clearly wider than the photograph of that view at Appendix E (Page 101).

Can the **Qualifying Body** please review the representation submitted by CBRE and provide me with a Note on how the arcs that are defined on Figure 23 have been defined with the level of accuracy that is shown.

Question 3 Qualifying Body response

The Qualifying Body has reviewed the representation concerning the extent of the view arcs shown on Figure 23.

The arcs were intended to identify broad areas from which the locally significant views are experienced, rather than to represent precisely surveyed or scientifically calibrated sightlines. They were drawn having regard to the locations identified in the Staplehurst Conservation Area Appraisal, the character and direction of the views, site observations and the supporting photographs in Appendix E.

The purpose of the arcs is therefore to provide an indicative geographical framework for considering whether development proposals may affect the identified views. They are not intended to define the precise limits of a view or imply that the significance of the view ends at the edge of an arc.

The Qualifying Body accepts that the presentation of the arcs on Figure 23 could potentially give the impression of greater accuracy than was intended. To clarify this, the Qualifying Body proposes a minor modification to the wording of Policy S11, while retaining the substance and protection provided by the policy.

We suggest amending the final paragraph of Policy S11 to read:

“As appropriate to their scale and nature, development proposals within or potentially affecting the broad areas indicated by the shaded arcs on Figure 23 should be designed in a way that safeguards the locally significant view or views concerned. The shaded arcs are indicative and are intended to identify the broad areas from which the identified views are experienced; they do not define precise or fixed sightlines. Proposals for major development should be supported by a landscape/visual impact assessment which clearly demonstrates the potential impacts that such a proposal would have on significant views where relevant and how these impacts will be mitigated.”

Can the **Qualifying Body** also please confirm that the reference to Figure 19 in the second paragraph of Policy text should be to Figure 23?

Qualifying Body Response - Yes this is correct.

Question 4: Re. Policy S14 (Publicly Accessible Parking) (Page 69)

The Borough Council has made a representation concerning this Policy and consider that it is too restrictive and not aligned with paragraph 16 of the NPPF[1], and that it should be amended to allow for such alignment, general conformity and potential for redevelopment.

Can the **Qualifying Body** please review this representation and advise me whether it wishes to suggest any amendments to the text of the Policy, which I may consider as a potential modification to the updated Plan.

Question 4 - Qualifying Body response:

The Qualifying Body has carefully considered the Borough Council's representation and **does not propose any amendment to Policy S14**.

The purpose of the policy is to protect an important local resource, namely publicly accessible off-street parking, particularly at Bell Lane. The policy does not prevent redevelopment; rather, it seeks to avoid the loss of publicly accessible parking as a consequence of development.

Criterion B also recognises the potential for major development by encouraging the incorporation of publicly accessible parking, while Criterion C encourages improved cycle parking and EV charging provision.

The Qualifying Body therefore considers that the policy is appropriately balanced, has a clear local purpose and is not unduly restrictive. The fact that the Bell Lane site is Borough Council-owned does not, in itself, justify weakening a locally important policy.

The Borough Council appears to be saying that because the land is Borough Council-owned, the policy needs to be flexible enough to permit future redevelopment. But S14 doesn't say that redevelopment cannot happen. It says:

"Development proposals that would result in the loss of existing publicly available off-street car parking spaces … will not be supported." That is a much narrower proposition.

The policy regulates one particular consequence of development—the loss of publicly accessible parking—not development itself.

Accordingly, having reviewed the Borough Council's representation, the Qualifying Body wishes Policy S14 to remain unchanged.

4. Call for sites link to MBC call for sites -discuss

Cllr Arger explained the Call for Sites see link to MBC website **Maidstone Borough Council - Map**

a) Process

MBC seeks land to be put forward for houses, business etc, This is now closed.

These are assessed by MBC against national criteria and given an indicative score: Green potential, Amber maybe and Red unlikely.

Then a consultation phase take place - when this group can consider and put forward the groups view to the Parish Council to formerly reply

Action: Clerk to clarify with MBC formal Local plan process, timescale and how Call for Sites fits in.

Staplehurst is defined as a service centre –

Action: review service centre criteria

b) Current background

Currently a challenging climate due to:

- MBC – beneath the 5-year housing land supply
- New National Planning Policy Framework – more in favour of development – such as near well-connected stations
- National changes in planning process being forced on MBC and SPC planning Committees such as
- Applications in two schedules
- Schedule 1 – Planning officer
- Schedule 2 – Could be Planning officer or referred to planning Committee
- Call in removed form ward MBC Councillors and Parish Council
- Thresholds amended
- If MBC refuse an application over 150 houses – this could be referred to Secretary of State to review decision.
- Outline planning application allowed up to 499 houses

In last call for sites 32 sites put forward in Staplehurst only 3 came forward

Note several sites already in the MBC Local Plan so they will progress – Grehound Track, Lodge Rd and small segment near Bell Lane.

c) Evidence

It is important to gather any evidence we can NOW and collate information

Such as traffic / road jams - incidents; transport problems (bus, train) ;water problems; sewage issues; flooding, environmental issues such as nesting birds, rare flowers or issues with accessing medical care - surgery, dentist, school

It will be collated to be used moving forward,

Group discussed some specific sites

ID 1699 – Henhurst Farm – William, Jean Oslow

ID 1605 – Iden Park (Behind Garage) -

ID 1656 – Land South of Headcorn Rd – already had an environmental scoping report – Bob Ham, Wendy Sheronden, Caroline Henson

ID 1653 – Former Golf Course (plus several other sites associated with it) Bob Ham, Wendy Sheronden, Caroline Henson

ID 1620 – Land north of Sweetlands Lane - Sonia Franklin-Smith

ID 1661 – Land North of Staplehurst - already had an environmental scoping report

Important everybody should look out for evidence and forward to clerk@staplehurst-pc.gov.uk

Action: Review why sites failed in the past – are the reasons still valid

d) Major issues

Some major issues in Staplehurst were discussed.

Traffic – problem at Cross Roads – Council undertaking a Road Traffic Survey – plus a few bridges in the parish such as Hawkenbury Bridge.

It was noted that traffic surveys appeared to have been tampered with – although the traffic survey reports are for a full week.

Water supply – numerous low pressure reports and outages – link with SEHT for details

Foul water – some serious problems as much of the drainage in Staplehurst is "dual drainage" therefore in rain storms drains flood and bring sewage into the street, gardens and sometimes properties.

Also, several spillages at Staplehurst Water treatment plant.

Action – FOI Southern water on number and volume of spillages from Staplehurst Water Treatment

e) What do we want!

Group acknowledged that Staplehurst would receive some housing – so what do we want out of it.

Pre commencement conditions – such as ensure the water system in Staplehurst has capacity prior to the commencement of house building

Funding for community infrastructure – such as the Village Hall

Funding for services - such as improved bus services

AOB

Group noted several petitions such as “No water No Houses” and engaging the MP (Katie Lam)

Date of next meeting 19th October 2026 – 7:30pm

These minutes are not verbatim but reflect the key actions