

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN REVIEW

DRAFT PLAN FOR SUBMISSION (REGULATION 19)

OBJECTION TO SOUNDNESS ON BEHALF OF LENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

HEATHLANDS GARDEN SETTLEMENT

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

LPC SIXTEEN

1. Paragraph 16 C of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that plans should be shaped by early, proportionate and effective engagement between plan makers and communities.
2. Paragraph 25 in the Framework states that strategic policy making authorities should engage with their local communities.
3. Paragraph 73 of the Framework urges strategic policy making authorities to work with the support of their communities especially when planning for larger scale development.
4. Paragraph 133 of the Framework refers to the use of workshops to include the local community in assessing and improving the design of development. The policy is that such workshops are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes. This is said to be particularly important for significant projects such as large-scale housing and mixed-use developments.
5. A vision document for the Heathlands Garden community has been published by Maidstone Borough Council. The document is dated May 2019. Under the heading community involvement at page 41 of the vision document reads as follows:

“We believe that Heathlands Garden community should be designed with the local and wider community. We propose to produce site-specific involvement strategy which will include collaborate (sic) design workshops. In these workshops local people from across the borough can genuinely shape the proposed development from the concept stage through to detailed design.

We believe that the creation of Heathlands presents the perfect opportunity to demonstrate a responsible and transparent approach to community involvement by setting out a coherent and incremental strategy from the early consultation stages

right through to the implementation stages and beyond; indeed, the very nature of the concept will make it necessary to do so.”

6. One meeting was held between Maidstone Borough Council including representatives of Lenham Parish Council and local residents, crucially this meeting was not arranged by the borough council but by the Save Our Heathlands (SOHL) group. At that meeting it was explained to the promoter that the question “why here” would need to be addressed at the outset to secure effective public consultation.
7. Under the heading “why is the council considering this location?” The Borough Council in its website makes the following statement:

“The Council undertook a borough wide analysis of possible locations for a garden community, considering the various opportunities and constraints of each to include environmental, landscape, infrastructure, heritage and topography considerations. The land to the east of Lenham was not the only possible suitable location but simply the one favoured by the Council to explore further in terms of a Council led proposition.”

8. It seems to Lenham Parish Council that the above statement, which remains on the Borough Council website, refers to a fairly traditional planning sieve analysis of the constraints borough-wide which would lead to the identification of potential locations to be explored further for a garden community. As early as 2020 the parish council asked, on more than one occasion, for access to the material referred to by the borough council in its website but access to this material has consistently been refused.
9. It seems to the parish council that this lack of engagement is both contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as set out above and also contrary to the aims and objectives for community involvement set out on behalf of the promoter in May 2019.
10. If that material could be published it would go some way to explaining to the parish council how it was that Lenham Heath was selected for a garden community in preference to all the other potential locations within the borough.

11. In fact, Lenham Parish Council was advised by Maidstone Borough Council that Heathlands was to be promoted as a council led proposition at a meeting in September 2019. The Kent Messenger, which was published on the morning of that meeting, led with the announcement of the council-led proposal at Heathlands. That was how the parish council was first informed of the proposal.
12. At the time of this submission (December 2021) the borough council has not organised any exhibition or local consultation event in relation to Heathlands or the local plan review.