

STAPLEHURST NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REVIEW GROUP

Minutes of virtual meeting held on 16th August, 2022 at 7.45pm

- 1. Present,** Margaret Arger (MA) Chairman, Tom Burnham (TB), Cllr. Joan Buller (JB), Robin Oakley, (RO), Secretary, Colin Love (CL), Dr. Richard Smith (RS), Robin Kenworthy (RK) Richard Griffiths, Parish Clerk (RG) attended as an observer on sound only.
- 2. Apologies for absence:** Cllr. Adele Sharp (AS), Cllr. John Perry (JP), Cllr. Paddy Riordan (PR). Cllr. Louise Brice (LB), Colin Bowden & Gill Smith, although still nominally on the SNPRG did not attend and did not offer apologies.
- 3. Minutes of Meeting held on 27th July, 2022:** Agreed.
- 4. Matters arising.** None.
- 5. Consideration of Policies revised by Group Members and circulated prior to the meeting.**
Housing Theme (Policy Code H) including Policy Theme Background revised by RS & JB. Agreed*
New Clause H5 Responsive Housing revised by CL Agreed*

JB is still working on H4 Cul-de-sacs and this will be issued to members in due course.

The Chairman pointed out that we are nearing the end of our task in reviewing the Neighbourhood Plan and it was agreed that consideration must now be given as to how the revised plan is to be published, who will do it and how the parish council will meet the cost. It is suggested that the council approach Feria, the planning consultants who authored the present plan, as it is believed that they may hold the intellectual property rights for the plan, and ask them if they are prepared to do the revision and give some idea of the likely cost. JB said that it is important that the council make provision for financing the revision in next year's budget. The Group therefore suggests that this be placed high on the agenda for the full council meeting in September.

- 6. Inclusion of the River Beult in the Neighbourhood Plan.** Some discussion took place on the document which RK had prepared and circulated on the River Beult. It was agreed that the Beult is important as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and that it drained a large area of the Low Weald, and therefore it should be mentioned in the NP. 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.
- 7. Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring.** Clause 14.1 of the NP calls for monitoring of the plan. It is considered that this is being done by Maidstone Borough Council as they monitor their own Local Plan for 5 years. The Parish Council's Responsible Finance Officer normally keeps a record of all planning applications and approvals although this is not currently up-to-date as she has been absent from the office during recent months. The Group agreed to ask the Parish Clerk to request confirmation from MBC that they are monitoring our NP. MA pointed out that with the PC currently short of 4 members it is important that replacements be recruited and some of the new members be asked to join the Planning Committee.
- 8. S.106 and CIL monies.** RO reported that there is no further information on the S.106 money for improvements to the No. 5 bus service as Arriva failed to appear at a meeting with Cllr. Brice and Cllr. Parfitt-Reid with KCC, due to be held earlier this month. There is no further information on the S.106 money for work at the railway station but after some discussion it was agreed that two things are very desirable, firstly an information notice board to be located outside the station exit, giving a map of the area and showing such places as care homes, public buildings, the adolescent hospital etc., and that a hedge be planted between the back edge of the footway and the metal railing which runs beside the

north edge of Station Approach. This would improve the appearance of the Station Approach and the car park. It was agreed that this Group recommend to the Parish Council that they ask Cllr .Brice to investigate if and when these suggestions can be met.

9. **FOI Requests.** The Parish Clerk has obtained a helpful reply to his FOI request to UK Power Networks in which they confirm that their infrastructure is adequate to accept solar power which would be generated from 94 new houses which are currently the subject of a planning application from Ilke Homes. The Clerk has also sent an FOI Request to Southern Water regarding their discharge from the Staplehurst Water Treatment Works into the River Beult and their reply is awaited.
10. **Housing Needs Survey.** MA reported that the Parish Clerk is obtaining costings for the preparation of a new Housing Needs Survey as the current one is out of date.
11. **Election of Chairman.** An election took place for the role of Chairman of the Group. Margaret Arger was proposed by Tom Burnham and seconded by Joan Buller. There were no other nominations and MA was elected without dissent.
12. **Work Objective for next meeting.** Review Policy H6 Employment Facilities and Objective 12 Support for the local economy. Members are asked to consider these items for discussion at the next meeting,
13. **Any other business.**

Regulations, Homeworking etc. RK raised concerns about homeworking, safety risks of those working from home and provision of various facilities and equipment In new homes. RO pointed out that much of this is already the subject of legislation and is shown in the Building Regulations. MA said that these are not matters for the Neighbourhood Plan.

Site at the end of Lodge Road. RS, as a new resident, asked how the Lodge Road site, currently the subject of a planning application for building 94 homes, came to be allocated for new housing. MA explained that the site was owned by a firm called Civils and was in the last MBC call for sites and is now in the draft Maidstone Local Plan for housing and industrial. Civils obviously found that they could get a better price if it sold for housing. RO drew attention to the most recent documents added to the Ilke Homes Planning Application 22/502933 which include comments from Kent Highways and Transport, Network Rail and UMIDB, all of which make interesting reading.

Tarpit at Mathurst Solar Farm site. It was noted that the Parish Clerk is currently investigating whether the tarpit, used for treating hop poles, can be registered as a listed building as it is part of Staplehurst's agricultural history.

14. Dates of future meetings:

Tuesday 20th September, 2022 (Chaired by Tom Burnham)

Wednesday, 26th October, 2022

Wednesday, 30th November, 2022

Robin Oakley 22nd August, 2022

* Refer to two appendices overleaf

HOUSING THEME (Policy Code H)

“Ensure that the mix of new housing responds to local needs and local demands in terms of prices, sizes and tenures; ensure that new housing designs are of high quality and respond appropriately to the Kentish context.”

Policy Theme Background

13.1 Staplehurst has accommodated 700 dwellings over three sites in the current MBC Local Plan. This plan has now been reviewed and Staplehurst will be allocated more housing in the near future as the Government has increased the housing target for MBC. This review is now being examined by the Planning Inspectorate.

13.2 Policy SP5 in the current MBC Local Plan designates Staplehurst as a Rural Service Centre which is defined as a large settlement suitable for additional houses. Housing allocations H1(36) and H1(37) have been completed. The necessary infrastructure must also be addressed and this has been totally lacking to support the large increase in population from these sites. Staplehurst cannot support just housing without the necessary improved facilities.

13.3 Best practice in planning for an expanding village advises that a plan created by “designing to numbers” does not always deliver the right quality of environment. Instead, the plans must be “place-led”; that is, the plan must respond in a positive manner to the local landscape, the local context and the existing village setting.

13.4 New areas of housing need to create special places that are architecturally distinctive and will become cherished by those that live there and the wider village residents. All developers will be required to use the ‘Village Character’ (5.1 – 5.3) and the ‘Staplehurst Village Design Statement’ (attached as an Appendix) to inform the design of all house types and site layouts. It is the role of the Neighbourhood Plan to provide clear guidance on the design principles that must underpin any future proposals.

13.5 All future planning applications must be developed through consultation with the Staplehurst community and specifically with those that live immediately adjacent to the site. A variety of drawings and reports need to be produced that will give confidence that any development can be achieved in the most effective and successful way possible.

13.6 The precise mix of housing must respond to local needs in terms of size of each property, the price, the amount of land around it and the mix of tenure (i.e. whether houses are for sale or for rent). Regard for the findings of the Staplehurst Housing Survey 2010 (report by Tessa O’Sullivan, Rural Housing Enabler with support from Staplehurst Parish Council), the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan Review Group and Maidstone Borough Council), as refreshed in 2016, will be essential. Staplehurst lacks one and two-bedroom dwellings, which must be addressed in any future proposals. Homes suitable for elderly occupants are also needed.

13.7 Maidstone Borough Council has made a commitment to renew efforts to engage with utility providers and other organisations with responsibility for managing water supplies, including surface and foul drainage water. MBC must insist that improved infrastructure is put in place. Water supply issues in the area must be addressed as the situation is worsening due to climate change and the ever-increasing demand from the growing population.

RESPONSIVE HOUSING

Future homes should be designed to acknowledge that the demographics of the population in the village is changing. While there will remain a need for family homes, consideration must be given to an ageing population to provide a good social mix, supporting social cohesion and independent living. While the size of new developments must reflect local needs, optimising use of the existing housing stock is paramount and new developments must include opportunities for older residents to downsize locally, maintaining vital friend and family links through availability of accessible accommodation, e.g. bungalows and supported living. Such an approach will free up larger homes for growing families and avoid unwanted and unnecessary disruption to education and family life. Staplehurst railway station is an important feature of the village and a key factor in attracting working-age adults with families to our community. Therefore, in addition to family sized houses, smaller units and innovative hybrid housing that can respond to modern lifestyles must be included. For example small size private rented apartments, perhaps designed in the form of a courtyard development, sympathetic to the rural context, could be built within walking distance of the station. Such housing types may also be suitable for young people who have grown up in Staplehurst, but now need regular access to London, but wish to live in affordable accommodation within their home village.