

STAPLEHURST NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN – SUBMISSION PLAN JULY 2015

Informative re Housing Policies and Related Sites

Working with the Local Plan

The Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan process has always set out to anticipate and work with the emerging site selection work undertaken by MBC and its Local Plan team. The Parish Council believes this to have been a fair and reasonable response by the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan to the emerging Local Plan.

The Approach to Community Consultation

The initial focus of work was to identify key issues for the community, which was undertaken at the Village Visioning Event on 12th September 2013. The work recognised the designation of the village for housing development in the adopted Local Plan and as a Rural Service Centre in the emerging Local Plan.

At the Visioning Event, Task 03 asked the question: 'How should new areas of housing relate to the existing village?' and considered the direction of growth, particularly in the context of the areas submitted in response to MBC's call for sites (Spring/Summer 2013). It considered the likelihood of one or more of the submitted sites becoming real proposals, the likely extent of their impact and the concerns the proposals could arouse. The report 'Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan Results of the Village Visioning Event, 12th September 2013' (pages 18 – 21) summarises the issues raised and conclusions reached about the most likely direction of growth, namely to the west, east and possibly north of the village.

The Focus of the Community's Work

The work of the Visioning Event informed the activity at the Three Day Design Forum (8th, 9th and 10th October 2013). The report 'Results of the Three Day Design Forum', October 2013, page 63 shows the output from the workings of the Areas of Growth Task Group which considered possible phasing, potential capacity and suitability of sites submitted to MBC that were situated in the identified directions of likely growth. This work built on activity throughout the three days of the Forum, such as that documented on pages 45 and 46 of the report.

Due to their size and likely deliverability, the landowners/developers being more advanced in their proposals, the sites to the west and east of the village became the focus of the community's work which began to add layers of important 'neighbourhood level' detail to these sites. By adding details such as better connections, through-routes to avoid cul-de-sac developments, better links to destinations, the need for comprehensive planning, green wedges and green gaps, the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan complemented the Local Plan. The possibility of development north of the railway line was also considered, this being with a view to enabling a new road that would cross the railway potentially to alleviate traffic through the centre of the village.

The focus on neighbourhood-level detail continued into 2014. Poster 06, 'The Right Housing in the Right Place', of the consultation event held over 31st January to 2nd February 2014 commented '... the Three Day Design Forum suggested that much of the new housing will be situated on the eastern and western flanks of the village and almost all of it north of the crossroads. How can housing here be designed that best responds to local factors?' The exhibition material made no claims about formal site allocation or evaluation but set out 'a summary of ideas to date with the purpose of testing ideas and understanding the implications of different development scenarios' (Draft Framework Diagram January 2014) and highlighted the importance of finding the right mix: 'Are the different areas of open green space, new employment land and new homes in balance?'

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MBC's Allocation of Sites

MBC formally allocated for development the sites to the west and east of the village as policies H1(36) Hen and Duckhurst Farm and H1(37) Fishers Farm, including them in the Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation in 2014 although without acknowledgement of the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan.

In March 2014 (13th, 15th & 16th) the Parish Council held a presentation and exhibition event. Poster 01 'About this Exhibition' stated: 'In February 2014 Maidstone Borough Council published the latest draft of the Local Plan. This suggests 905 new homes be built in Staplehurst between now and 2031. ... We want your views on what this might mean for the future of the village and how the neighbourhood plan could help manage this change.' Poster 05 'Draft Framework' referenced the two site-specific (east and west) MBC Local Plan policies and stated: 'This draft framework diagram looks beyond these red lines to test how these two allocations can be integrated with the rest of the village. This is something the neighbourhood plan needs to do as the MBC local plan will not address this issue. ... The neighbourhood plan needs to contain policies that add more detail to those in the Maidstone local plan.' These examples further illustrate how the work on the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan continued to respond to the emerging Local Plan and in this case specifically to the two site allocations made by MBC, highlighting the local value that the Neighbourhood Plan sought to add to those allocations. This is consistent with the direction of NPPF (Para 16) that neighbourhoods should 'plan positively to support local development, shaping and directing development in their area that is outside the strategic elements of the Local Plan'.

In its response to MBC's Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation in 2014 the Parish Council stated that it generally accepted the principle of two major development sites to the west and east in Staplehurst as identified in policies H1(36) Hen and Duckhurst Farm and H1(37) Fishers Farm (letter 7th May 2014, page 4) although not the proposed number of houses for those sites¹.

At Regulation 14 Consultation in June 2014 the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan set out housing policies reflecting the two major development sites. In line with its approach of 'testing ideas and understanding the implications of different development scenarios' the consultation document also discussed the option of some housing development north of the railway line, such development being within the context of enabling a new railway crossing as an alternative route to alleviate pressure on the A229 and Marden Road-Headcorn Road crossroads.

Collaboration between Staplehurst Parish Council and Maidstone Borough Council

Following the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan Regulation 14 Consultation a meeting was held between MBC and Staplehurst Parish Council on 18th September 2014 when the Parish Council confirmed that the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan had strived to conform to the emerging Local Plan and its allocation of housing sites at Fishers Farm and Hen and Duckhurst Farm. It also commented that enabling development north of the railway line may be removed from the next version of the Neighbourhood Plan.

At a further meeting on 10th November 2014 MBC officers commented on the Regulation 14 Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan: 'The emerging Local Plan views the railway line as a defined barrier with no additional development to the north. The NP is in conflict with the emerging Local Plan in relation to development to the north of the railway line'.

In the light of examination of the environmental impacts, more critical consideration of the deliverability of a new road crossing and a collaborative approach to the saved and emerging Local Plans the Parish Council decided to withdraw the possibility of enabling development north of the railway line from the proposals eventually included in the Submission Plan July 2015.

1 - Since submission of the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan, MBC has continued to allocate sites in its Local Plan; in Staplehurst, Local Plan Policy H1 (51) Land north of Henhurst Farm.

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The Parish Council has consistently advocated the benefits of closer links between the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan. The following extract from its response to the Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation (letter 7th May 2014, page 7) illustrates this approach: *'One obvious example of how a more positive relationship between the Local Plan and associated Neighbourhood Plans could be nurtured is through the possible inclusion of "policy hooks" within the wording for allocations H1 (36) and H1 (37). These hooks could actively devolve decisions regarding design, layout and implementation of both sites to the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan. This idea of an active and positive devolution down to Neighbourhood Plan level could be taken throughout the Local Plan on specific issues or particular sites where it is known that a Neighbourhood Plan is in preparation.'* The Neighbourhood Plan does contain such policy links to the Local Plan: for example, housing policy links are referenced in both the submitted Regulation 16 Neighbourhood Plan (policies H4 and H5 on pages 50 and 53 respectively) and in the accompanying Basic Conditions Statement (page 18).

In Conclusion and Summary

In working with the community to develop the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan the Parish Council has not set out to replicate or compete with the formal site allocation process followed by MBC. Instead it has consistently strived, in a spirit of collaboration, to deliver a fair and reasonable response to MBC's site allocations in the emerging Maidstone Local Plan. It believes that the response represented by the Submission Plan July 2015 is both fair and reasonable and that it complements the emerging Local Plan by adding valuable 'neighbourhood level' detail to those sites.

Staplehurst Parish Council July 2016

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