

Informative regarding Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan Regulation 16 Submission SEA and Habitat Regulation Assessment Screening Report

In relation to the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan Regulation 16 Submission, Maidstone Borough Council wishes to make it clear that, as set out in section 4 of the SEA and Habitat Regulation Assessment Screening Report, screening was undertaken as an independent exercise on the basis of government guidance 'A practical guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive'.

The assessment was undertaken in two parts: the first part assessed whether the plan requires SEA (following the process stipulated in the flow chart); and the second part of the assessment considered whether the Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have a significant effect on the environment, using criteria drawn from Schedule 1 of the EU SEA Directive and the UK Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. Whilst there is some cross referencing to the SEA of the emerging Local Plan 2014, the screening report makes independent judgements concerning the need for an SEA and likely significant effects on the environment based on a range of local factors including the scale of housing development and other proposals and policies in the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan; the spatial extent of the effects of the Plan; the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected by the Plan and certainly does not rely on the SEA for the emerging Maidstone Local Plan 2014.

In relation to the Habitat Regulation Assessment Screening, whilst there is reference to the Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report (2007) for the Core Strategy Preferred Options (2007) this certainly is not relied on within this screening. The scale of housing development; the significant additions to recreation and open space provision proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan; the location of the village in relation to the SACs and the visitor survey data from 2012 which identified that visitor numbers to the nearest part of the North Downs Woodlands SAC (Boxley Warren) were fairly low were all assessed in concluding that the Staplehurst NP is not likely to cause a significant effect on a European site will not require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive (Art. 3.2(b)). Natural England concurred with this conclusion.

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