APPENDIX A

STAPLEHURST NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

REFERENDUM PLAN 2016 — 2031

SEPTEMBER 2016

Staplehurst
Parish
Council

STAPLEHURST NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN
FINAL PLAN
September 2016

This plan has been prepared by:

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www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk
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Staplehurst Parish Council

BUILDING A STAPLEHURST FIT FOR THE FUTURE

PLAN PERIOD 2016 — 2031

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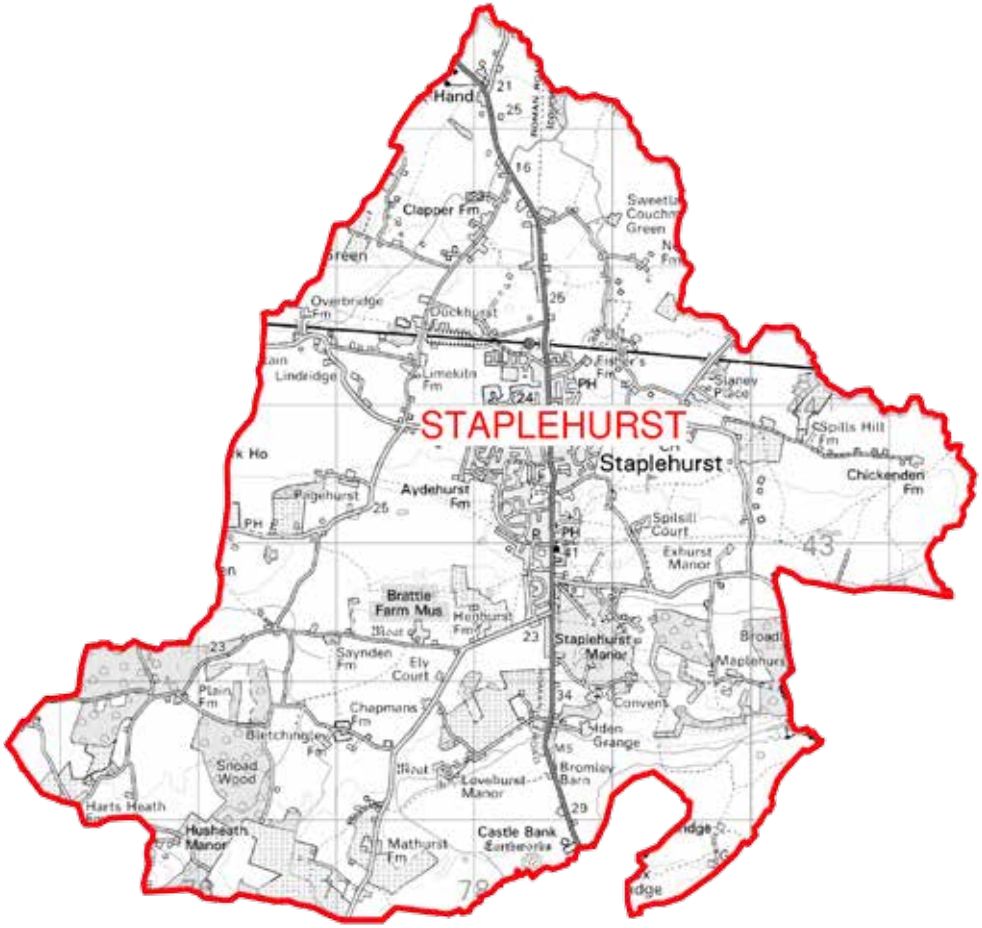
MAINTAINING + ENHANCING THE VILLAGE CHARACTER



Neighbourhood Plan Boundary **This boundary is contiguous with the parish boundary and therefore the plan policies apply to the whole parish. The neighbourhood plan boundary was formally approved by Maidstone Borough Council 14th January 2013.**

1.1 THIS NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN HAS BEEN PREPARED BY STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL ON BEHALF OF THOSE THAT LIVE AND WORK WITHIN THE PARISH OF STAPLEHURST.

1.2 THE PLAN SETS OUT A VISION FOR THE PARISH THROUGH UNTIL 2031 AND IS SUPPORTED BY A SET OF PLANNING POLICIES AND A SERIES OF SPECIFIC PROJECTS. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING REGULATIONS, THIS PLAN HAS BEEN PREPARED THROUGH EXTENSIVE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION.

1.3 The community engagement process has informed the plan's primary aims and ambitions. The plan must therefore:

- **Coordinate all new development proposals**
- **As far as is possible, provide certainty regarding the future of the parish**
- **Describe the necessary additional community infrastructure required to support a growing village**
- **Strengthen and enhance the historic village heart**
- **Improve choice over access and movement**
- **Introduce high quality architecture**
- **Ensure the feel of a village community is retained**
- **Support more retail opportunities**
- **Support continued investment in education**
- **Make walking and cycling easier and safer**
- **Create a happy and fulfilling place.**

1.4 This neighbourhood plan comprises specific planning policies and objectives, all grouped under six policy themes. These are all supported by a strategic village framework, indicating how new development needs to integrate with the existing village. This plan has been informed by a series of distinct public engagement events, each using a wide range of different public consultation techniques.

Residents work together to decide how best to describe their community and their place.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

2.1 Staplehurst Parish Council recognises the need to plan for the future. There is much value in preparing plans and policies that anticipate changes to village life to help ensure an appropriate and coordinated response. Change is inevitable but how the village responds to this change is what matters.

2.2 This neighbourhood plan represents the first opportunity in the history of Staplehurst for the community to create a legally binding, statutory plan that explains how new developments must integrate with the existing village; sets out the expected quality of design for new development and also links housing growth to investment in new village infrastructure, including improved community facilities.

ALL PLACES ARE EITHER GROWING OR DECLINING. NOTHING STAYS THE SAME.

2.3 There has been a settlement near All Saints church, Staplehurst since about 1000 AD and the village lies on the Roman Road from Maidstone to Hastings, now the A229. The road between Marden and Headcorn crosses the A229 in the centre to create a crossroads, known as Cuckold's Corner.

2.4 Most development was confined to areas along this road until a number of residential areas were built, mainly in the 1960s and 1970s and to the east and west of the main A229 road. The parish covers an extensive area of countryside, mostly devoted to farming and industries related to agriculture, and there is a significant rural population in the parish, including traveller communities.

2.5 Although the railway station is next to the A229, it is some distance from the church so that the built up area of the village now extends nearly two kilometres from the station in the north to just south of Pinnock Lane. The station serves a wider catchment than just the parish and much of the vehicle traffic heading to the station brings people that live outside the parish. Although many people travel out of the parish to work (and a smaller number commute in), the community has large areas of dedicated employment land in the north west of the village adjacent to the station and sustains a large number of voluntary organisations providing a diverse range of activities and services. In addition to children growing up in the village, there are also a significant number of retired people, many living in retirement and care homes.

These images of Station Road (left) and Cuckold's Corner (right) reveal the significant changes that the village has undergone in the last century.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

2.6 The community engagement event in September 2013 revealed that a primary concern of the community was regarding the impact of housing growth on the character of the village. This reflected the findings of the Staplehurst Housing Survey 2010 (report by Tessa O'Sullivan, Rural Housing Enabler with support from Staplehurst Parish Council, Staplehurst Rural Settlement Group and Maidstone Borough Council) that highlighted a widespread concern about new developments within the parish. Key findings included:

- 454 (64%) respondents indicated that they could not support more housing development in Staplehurst
- 601 (85%) respondents felt that the current infrastructure would not support more housing, with the most frequent comments relating to access and movement, and retail and the inadequacies of both.

2.7 Of the respondents who said they would support more development, 157 (22%) felt that affordable housing for people with a connection to the parish was needed.

Village Visioning Event September 2013

2.8 Further analysis found that the need for affordable housing was fairly evenly spread between single people, couples and families.

2.9 Given this background research, the neighbourhood plan seeks to directly address the deficiencies in infrastructure (especially foul and surface water drainage, community facilities, retail, access and movement) and the need for some affordable housing to meet specific needs.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN VISION

2.10 In response to this anxiety about new development in the village, combined with a recognition that some new affordable housing is desirable, the neighbourhood plan has been prepared with the express vision of:

1. Maintaining and enhancing the rural character of Staplehurst village, its immediate setting and the wider parish.
2. Coordinating all new development so that it contributes to the creation of safe, sustainable, liveable and mixed communities with good access to jobs and essential services for all members of the community.
3. Creating a robust yet flexible access and movement network appropriate for all modes of travel and for current and future populations.
4. Using land and resources efficiently so that new developments have a reduced demand for energy and move towards carbon neutrality.
5. Protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment, the quality and character of the whole built environment and the wider countryside.
6. Enforcing the quality of new development through use of materials, details and inclusive design that responds to context.
7. Ensuring that land made available for development will be developed in such a way as to improve people's quality of life, for both new and existing residents.
8. Delivering the community infrastructure necessary to support a growing village in the 21st Century.

2.11 Finally, the neighbourhood plan must be in general conformity with Maidstone Borough Council's adopted Local Plan (2000) and its emerging Local Plan, as represented by the Maidstone Borough Local Plan Preparation (Regulation 18) 2014 — without such general conformity the neighbourhood plan cannot be adopted as a statutory planning document.

Effective community consultation is a key part of meeting the basic conditions necessary for a robust neighbourhood plan.

MEETING THE CONDITIONS

3.1 This neighbourhood plan must meet certain basic conditions before they can come into force. It will be checked by the local planning authority and be tested by independent examination before going to referendum. The plan needs to accord with the Neighbourhood Plans (General) Regulations 2012, the National Planning Policy Framework and Maidstone Borough Council planning policies.

3.2 The neighbourhood plan does not simply repeat the local or national planning policies. The Localism Act 2011 enables communities to create a plan that reflects the needs of the local population and future residents. A collaborative approach, led by Staplehurst Parish Council and involving local residents and other interest groups, including developers and neighbouring communities, has created a plan that broadly reflects local aspirations.

GENERAL CONFORMITY

3.3 The planning context for the production of neighbourhood plans is set out in the Localism Act 2011, the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. For a neighbourhood plan to be approved, it must demonstrate that it:

- is in compliance with national planning policy as set out by the NPPF
- contributes to sustainable development
- is in general conformity with the spatial policies of the development plan for the local area
- is compatible with European policies
- reflects best practice in terms of quality urban design and sustainable planning principles.

3.4 The Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan also:

- contains a mix of uses that meets the need of the local community
- has been developed through widespread local consultation
- has general support from the residents of Staplehurst
- has general support of the various land owners/developers on whose land new development is being proposed
- provides development that will add to the village without unnecessarily infringing upon protected countryside
- creates a welcoming environment for residents, tourists and business interests alike
- promotes sustainable development through a holistic approach to development in the village
- enhances pedestrian and cycle routes in the village
- encourages a strong village economy through extra retail and employment opportunities to support the local jobs and reduce the need to travel.

PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

3.5 This neighbourhood plan is in conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which has been taken this into consideration at all stages of the plan's development.

3.6 Paragraphs 1 and 2 of the NPPF make clear that neighbourhood plans need to take the policies in the NPPF into account and that these policies are a material consideration in the determination of planning applications, alongside local documents such as the Local Plan and neighbourhood plans.

3.7 Paragraph 16 of the NPPF states that neighbourhoods should develop plans that support the strategic development needs set out in Local Plans, including policies for housing and economic development and that neighbourhoods plan positively to support local development, shaping and directing development in their area that is outside the strategic elements of the Local Plan.

3.8 Staplehurst Parish Council considers that this neighbourhood plan supports both of these objectives. The range of policies in this neighbourhood plan both addresses the strategic growth agenda in the Maidstone Local Plan and helps shape and support development in response to the local context.

3.9 Paragraph 28 of the NPPF states that neighbourhood plans should include a policy on economic growth in the rural areas. This neighbourhood plan contains such a policy, PW1. Paragraph 58 of the NPPF requires neighbourhood plans to include policies that encourage good design in their areas and this is met through neighbourhood plan policies H1 and H2.

3.10 Paragraphs 150 — 157 of the NPPF set out how development plans should be aspirational but practical and should spatially address the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. This neighbourhood plan has been generated to address all of these aspects while remaining flexible in order to respond to change in the parish.

Three Day Design Forum October 2013

3.11 Paragraphs 183 — 185 of the NPPF provide some general guidance on the production of neighbourhood plans in addition to the requirements of paragraph 16. In particular, paragraph 184 makes it clear that "... neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than is set out in the Local Plan or undermine its strategic policies".

3.12 This neighbourhood plan accepts the principle of development within the housing allocations as set out in the (Regulation 18) draft Local Plan and it is therefore considered to meet the objectives of paragraph 184 of the NPPF. It should also be noted that paragraph 185 of the NPPF states that once approved, the policies in the neighbourhood plan will take precedence over existing non-strategic policies in the Local Plan for that neighbourhood.

3.13 Staplehurst Parish Council acknowledges that there is no up to date and adopted Local Plan in place at Maidstone Borough Council. It therefore wishes to move quickly, but thoroughly, towards the adoption of this neighbourhood plan in order to give the community that lives and works in the parish the certainty and control it needs over its future.

SUSTAINABILITY

3.14 Paragraphs 7 and 14 of the NPPF identify the components of sustainable development, and how planning applications and Local Plans can meet these requirements. It is considered that the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan fills an economic, social and environmental role in planning positively to shape the future development and needs of the parish. In addition, the neighbourhood plan is in general conformity with the policies set out in the emerging Maidstone Local Plan. This neighbourhood plan has been produced with the requirements of paragraph 14 of the NPPF in mind.

3.15 The policies in the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan have been produced in general conformity with the strategic policies of the emerging Maidstone Local Plan. These Local Plan policies have been subject to a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) in line with the relevant European directives. The policies in the neighbourhood plan therefore supplement and help to implement these strategic policies. They are therefore considered sustainable in line with these regulations.

3.16 This neighbourhood plan is a sustainable plan that incorporates employment, key services and new facilities together with a range of access and movement options that help reduce the need to travel.

3.17 As part of the evidence base for the preparation of the neighbourhood plan, the parish council has undertaken a housing needs survey to understand local need to inform an appropriate mix of house types and tenures in Staplehurst. It has also held collaborative design and planning workshops to determine the most appropriate locations for new development that can contribute to the overall sustainability of the village while minimising any negative impact upon attractive areas of countryside.

RURAL SERVICE CENTRE

3.18 This neighbourhood plan positively supports development by accepting the village's strategic role as a designated Rural Service Centre (RSC). The parish council acknowledges that Policy SP3 in the draft Maidstone Borough Council (Regulation 18) Local Plan designates Staplehurst a Rural Service Centre — that is, a larger rural settlement deemed suitable by MBC for additional houses.

3.19 This neighbourhood plan is in general conformity with the policy themes and growth agenda as set out by Maidstone Borough Council. In this respect, the parish council firmly believes it meets the general conformity test for neighbourhood planning with respect to the borough or district level planning policies.

3.20 Staplehurst Parish Council recognises the importance of new development and the significant role the village can play in accommodating this development as a designated Rural Service Centre. This neighbourhood plan gives the community in Staplehurst the control and confidence it needs to help it develop as a prosperous and attractive Kentish village.

SUPPORTING NEW DEVELOPMENT

3.21 This plan supports new development in a sustainable way. Development is located and designed so as to create a compact and balanced settlement that enhances connections across the village. This will help create a sustainable settlement that will connect residential neighbourhoods with services through the increased use of non-car modes of travel. The sites identified for development are informed by their immediate context. This is a direct response to paragraph 47 of the NPPF on delivering high quality homes in a rural environment; this plan identifies key sites in the village that reflect locations suitable for the long term success of the village.

This neighbourhood plan contains an assessment of the qualities that make Staplehurst special.

BEST PRACTICE IN RURAL DESIGN

3.22 To ensure that the design and layouts of new development are appropriate to the village, the plan encourages high quality design and sustainable planning based on an assessment of the positive qualities of the existing village. This plan seeks to integrate new development with the necessary social and physical infrastructure. Paragraphs 47 — 55 in the NPPF expect the delivery of high quality homes to match appropriate housing needs through sensitively designed new places. This plan indicates appropriate housing sites in the context of the wider village. In terms of design, a positive relationship between existing built areas and the new will be critical to the successful assimilation of new development.

3.23 The selection of the indicated development sites has been based on striking the right balance between the need for more housing and the protection of the countryside environment. Paragraph 58 of the NPPF states that new developments "... will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term". The parish council considers this draft plan to be a long-term strategy that will enhance the village through high quality architectural form and layout.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

3.24 The parish council believes that this neighbourhood plan supports the needs of the wider community by addressing the social, economic and environmental aspects of village life. This has been expressed through the identification of new areas of housing, new retail opportunities, together with a sustainable access and movement network across the village. The specific policy themes within the plan will benefit all elements of the community.

EFFECTIVE LOCAL CONSULTATION

3.25 As set out in Section 14 (a) of the 2012 Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations, consultation on the plan and the plan-making process must be brought to the attention of the people who live or work in the village. Staplehurst Parish Council has ensured that this is a plan that reflects local opinions and local needs. To ensure that public engagement and consultation were effective, input from the community has been sought at every stage and has been invaluable to the production of the plan. Throughout the process, members of the community have been able to shape discussions and form dialogues with fellow residents, with land owners and with other interest groups. The result has been that different groups have been able to find shared outcomes.

3.26 There has been a series of consultation and engagement events that have directly influenced the drafting of the plan. All consultation material relating to these events (e.g. slideshows, reports and posters) have been published online during the plan preparation.

3.27 Please see the accompanying Consultation Statement for full details on the consultation process undertaken as part of the preparation of this neighbourhood plan. Please see the accompanying Conditions Statements for more details on how the neighbourhood plan meets the required conditions.

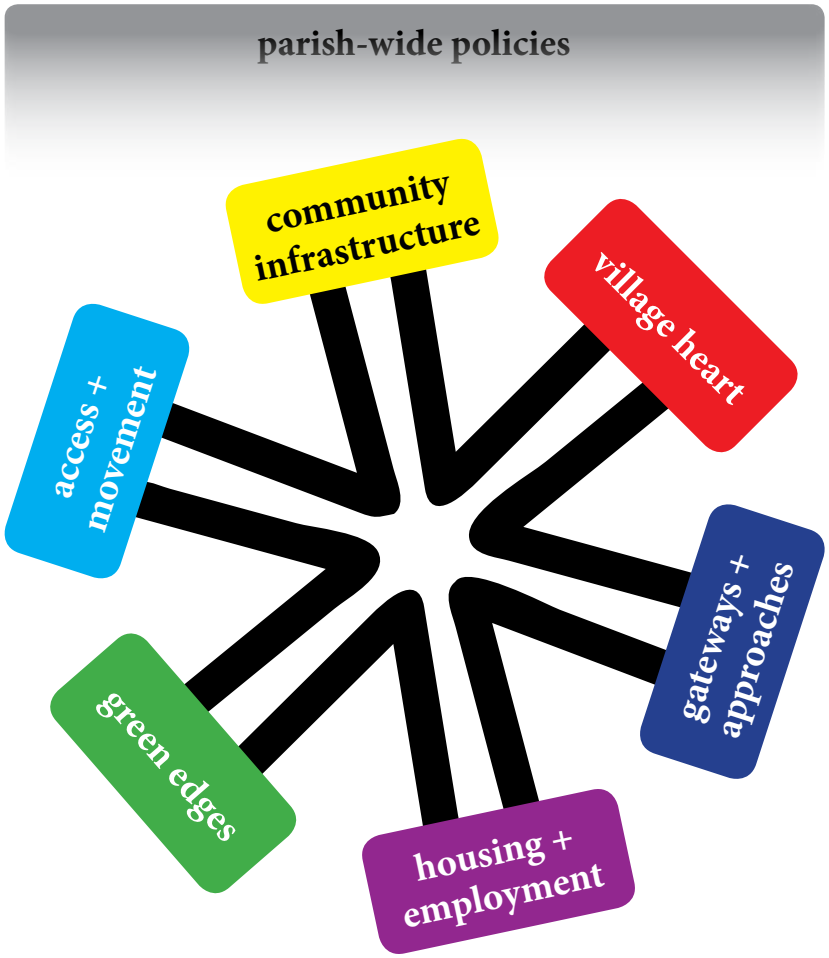
BROAD LOCAL SUPPORT

3.28 From the outset, Staplehurst Parish Council has tried to ensure that a broad cross-section of the local community has been involved in the plan-making process. The consultation and engagement process has been open and transparent and interest groups such as land owners, local developers and school representatives have all been included in the process. All these groups are considered appropriate consultation bodies to include, as defined in the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations Schedule 1.

3.29 This approach towards finding shared solutions to resolve issues in the village has the support from the various interest groups and from those on whose land development is being proposed. It is hoped that this support for the process will also translate into support for this neighbourhood plan.

ESTABLISHING THE OVERALL VISION

3.30 The results of the local consultation and the parallel work to ensure the plan meets the basic conditions have been combined to establish a shared vision, bringing the plan in line with paragraph 183 of the NPPF. This vision is expressed in the form of eight key vision points. These points have structured the neighbourhood plan and informed the development of the individual policies and objectives.



These are the six policy themes that sit below a set of parish-wide planning policies. Together, they all ensure the plan can meet the vision and objectives.

HOW HAVE THE PLANNING POLICIES + OBJECTIVES BEEN INFORMED BY THE VISION?

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN VISION POINTS	PRINCIPAL POLICY THEMES DEVELOPED TO MEET THE OBJECTIVE
1 Maintaining and enhancing the rural character of Staplehurst village, its immediate setting and the wider parish.	PW, C, AM, VH, E, GW, H
2 Coordinating all new development so that it contributes to the creation of safe, sustainable, liveable and mixed communities with good access to jobs and essential services for the whole community.	PW, C, AM, VH, E, GW, H
3 Creating a robust yet flexible access and movement network appropriate for all modes of travel and for current and future populations.	PW, AM, GW, H
4 Using land and resources efficiently so that new developments have a reduced demand for energy and move towards carbon neutrality	PW, C, AM, GW, H
5 Protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment, the quality and character of the whole built environment and the wider countryside.	PW, C, VH, GW, H
6 Enforcing the quality of new development through use of materials, details and inclusive design that responds to context.	PW, C, AM, VH, E, GW, H
7 Ensuring that land made available for development will be developed in such a way as to improve people's quality of life, for both new and existing residents.	PW, C, AM, VH, E, GW, H
8 Delivering the community infrastructure necessary to support a growing village in the 21st Century.	PW, C, AM, VH, GW, H

Policies + Objectives Table This table sets out how the planning policy themes of the neighbourhood plan link back to the eight vision points established through the consultation and engagement work. See pages 24 to 61 for a full description of each policy theme and the individual policies and objectives contained within.

Even historic places have been planned through deliberate decisions taken over the years, contributing to what is often seen as organic growth. This neighbourhood plan aims to continue this proven tradition of creating a planned settlement.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

4.1 A critical role of the neighbourhood plan is to provide a coordinated vision for the future of the village. This will make sure that individual development sites contribute in an effective and appropriate way to an overall vision. Without such coordination there is a risk of fragmented or piecemeal development.

4.2 To better understand how new development should respond to the local context, an assessment of the village's activities, uses, street patterns, character and form has been undertaken, together with an appreciation of the landscape setting. This assessment is set out in a series of diagrams that help inform a strategic framework plan that will guide Staplehurst over the coming years.

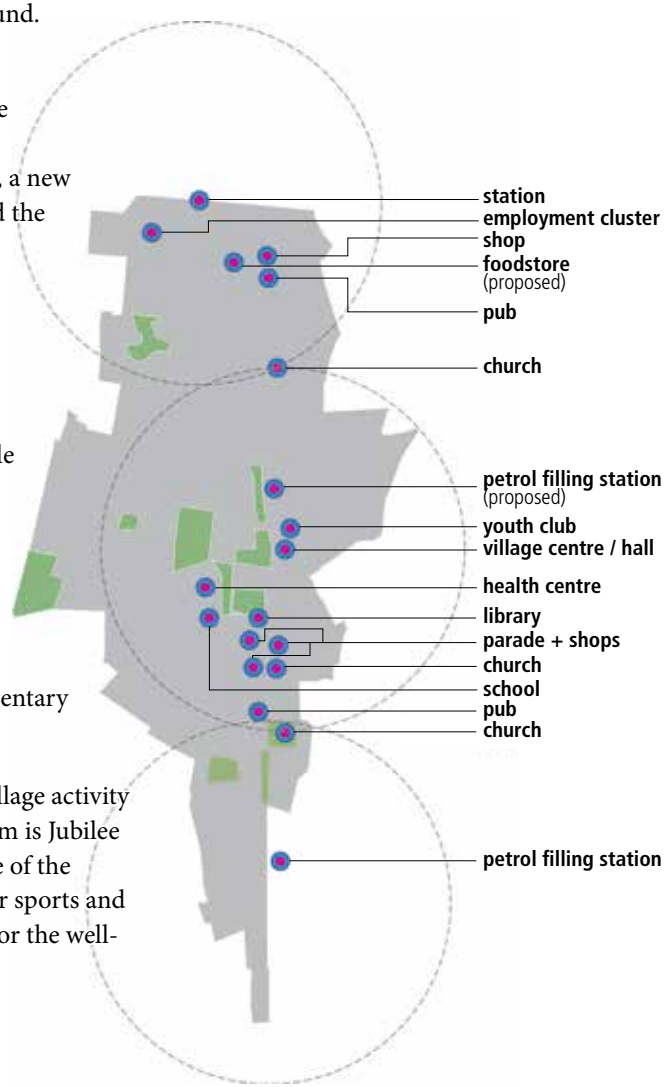
LIFE + ACTIVITY
The essential village services and facilities

4.3 The distribution of the village's essential services and facilities is very much skewed towards the village heart, reflecting the historic origins of Staplehurst. This is where the Village Centre, youth club, health centre, parade of shops, school and three churches can be found.

4.4 Other services can be found to the north, where there is another pub, a local convenience shop, a new foodstore (proposed) and the railway station. To the south, there is a petrol filling station.

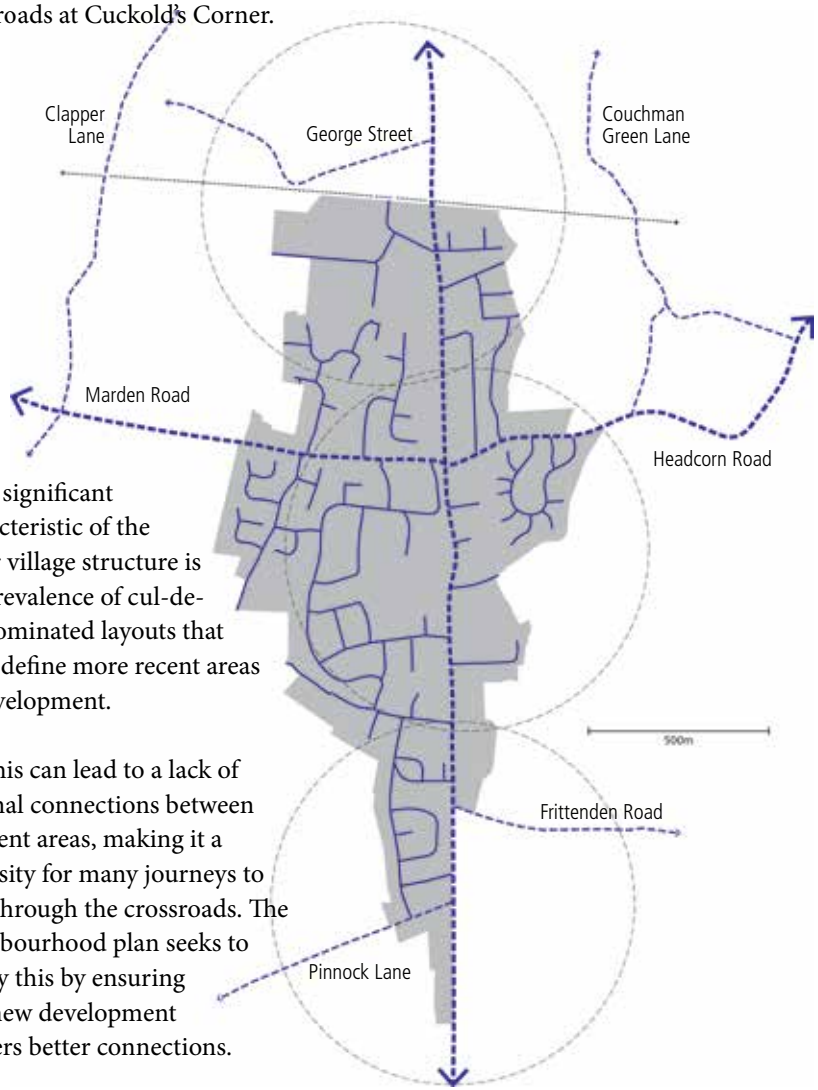
4.5 The village can therefore be described as comprising three walkable "neighbourhoods" (i.e. north, central and south), each of around one kilometre across. The plan seeks to further define these and ensure they are complementary with one another.

4.6 A vital location for village activity not shown on this diagram is Jubilee Field, on the eastern edge of the village. This is a centre for sports and recreation and essential for the well-being of village residents.



STREET STRUCTURE
The historic street pattern informs movement choices

4.7 The structure of the village is very much defined by its historic street pattern, formed around a crossroads at Cuckold's Corner.



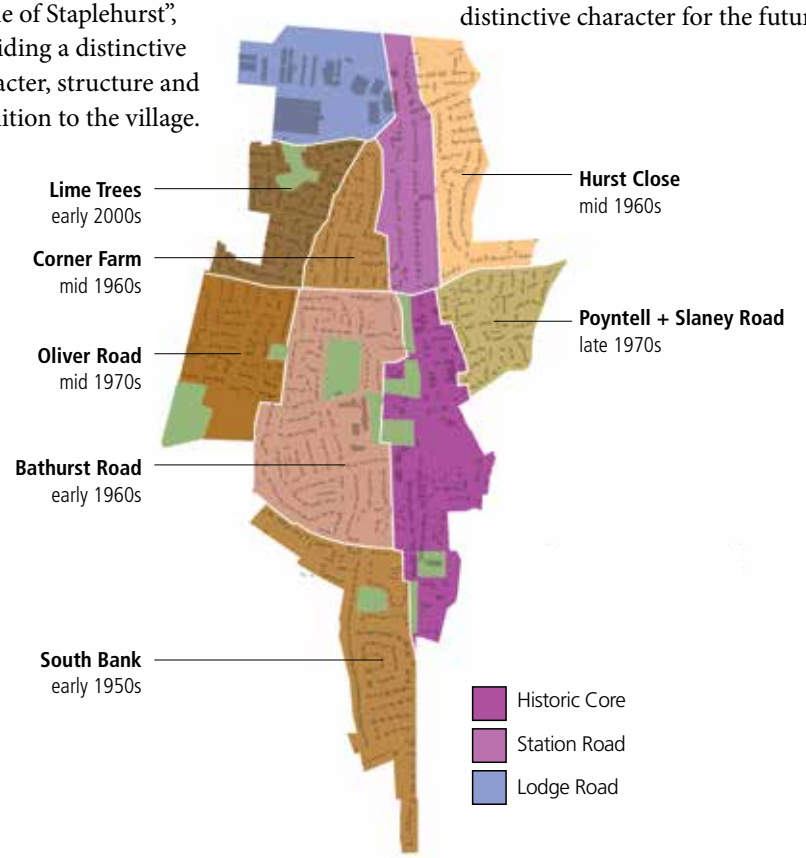
4.8 A significant characteristic of the wider village structure is the prevalence of cul-de-sac dominated layouts that often define more recent areas of development.

4.9 This can lead to a lack of internal connections between different areas, making it a necessity for many journeys to pass through the crossroads. The neighbourhood plan seeks to rectify this by ensuring that new development delivers better connections.

CHARACTER AREAS
The different land uses and building layouts

4.10 The historic heart of the village is located between the crossroads and the All Saints Church on top of the hill. To the north, lies the Station Road character area of brick villas fronting the road. These two areas contain most of the village's essential services and facilities and can be described as the "spine of Staplehurst", providing a distinctive character, structure and definition to the village.

4.11 Attached to this spine, are various areas of predominantly residential development. These are the neighbourhoods that provide good homes for the residents of Staplehurst. New developments need to be of a high quality design that will also add new residential and mixed-use areas of distinctive character for the future.

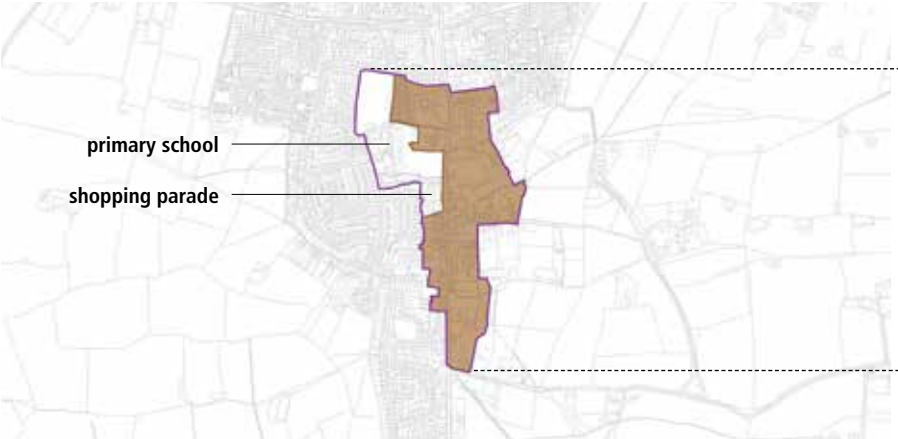


CONSERVATION AREA + VILLAGE HEART
The village core

4.12 There is widespread support from within the community for creating a stronger village heart. The cluster of uses in and around the High Street that support the social and community life of Staplehurst is vital for a growing village.

4.13 All ages and all activities can be found in this one part of Staplehurst. Primary school children and their parents, the elderly and teenagers. Football games, book reading, grocery shopping, pub meals and local Kentish beer. Taken together, these "people, places and activities" are what makes village life special. This village heart is defined by the purple boundary line shown below.

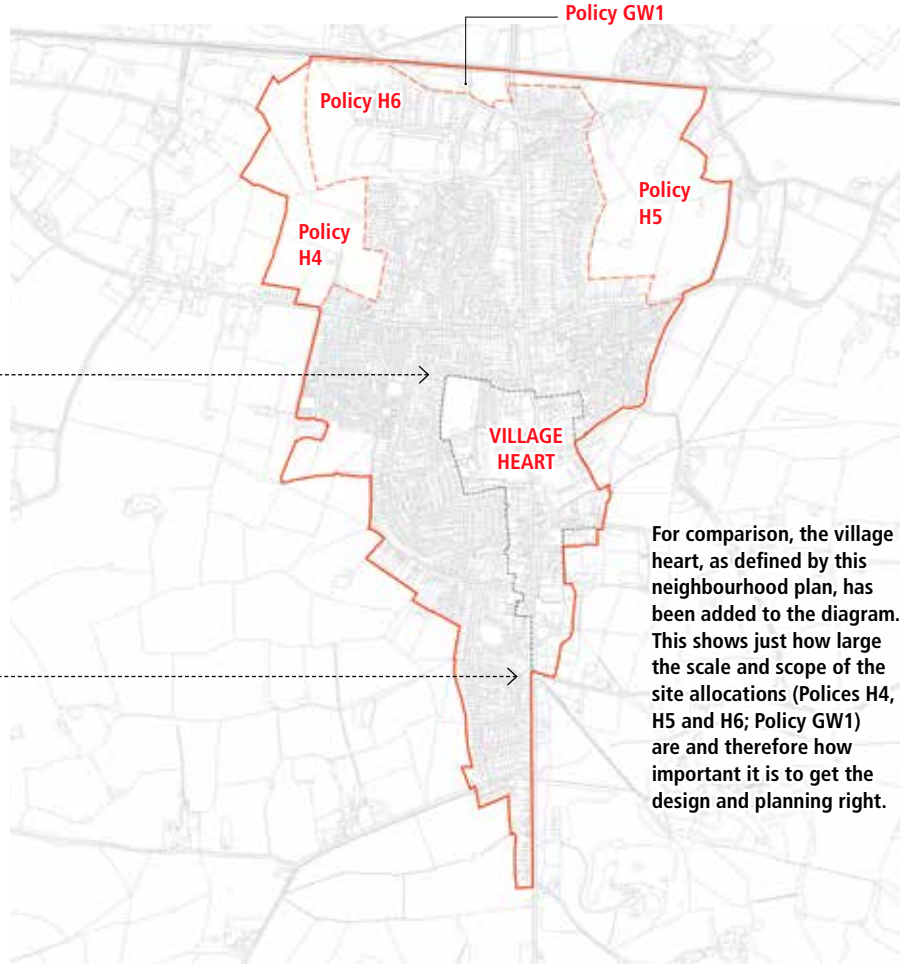
4.14 Maidstone Borough Council has 41 conservation areas that cover areas of special architectural or historic interest. One of these is in Staplehurst, shown by the brown shaded area below. Of the features in the village heart, only the school and shopping parade are not in the Conservation Area.



4.15 There is no "Article 4 Direction" for the Staplehurst Conservation Area. Under this direction, any work that changes the external appearance of a building, or affects its grounds may require planning permission from the Borough Council.

LIMITS OF BUILT FORM
The new village envelope

4.16 The inclusion of two housing allocations on the east and west of the village means the village envelope will increase. The diagram below shows a new village envelope for the neighbourhood plan period to 2031, indicated by the solid red line. The previous boundary is shown by the dotted red lines for the locations only where it was not contiguous with the new envelope line.



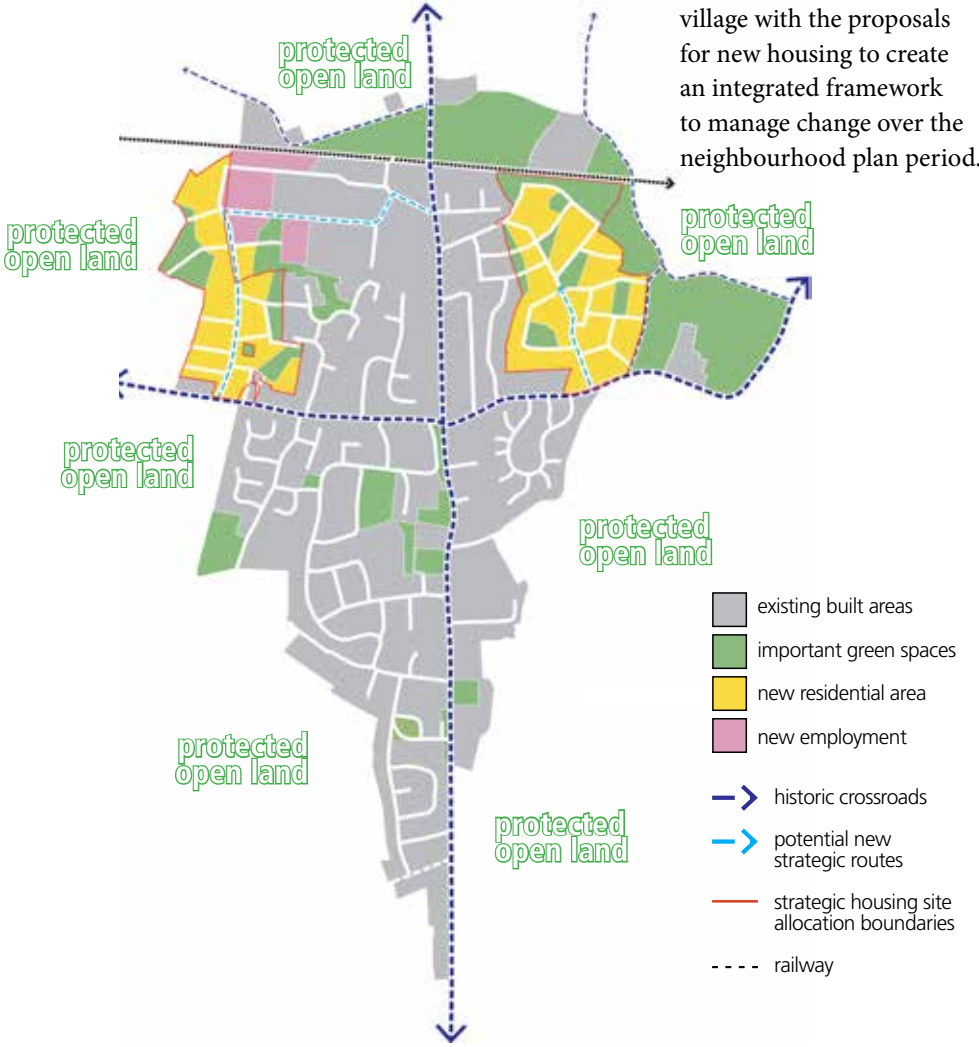
For comparison, the village heart, as defined by this neighbourhood plan, has been added to the diagram. This shows just how large the scale and scope of the site allocations (Polices H4, H5 and H6; Policy GW1) are and therefore how important it is to get the design and planning right.

RURAL CHARACTER
How the countryside informs the village setting

4.17 The immediate rural area comprises different areas of character. Their relationship with the built form of the village gives a particular sense of place.

FRAMEWORK DIAGRAM
Bringing It All Together

4.18 This plan brings together the analysis of the existing village with the proposals for new housing to create an integrated framework to manage change over the neighbourhood plan period.



CONCEPT DRAWING + FRAMEWORK DIAGRAM

4.19 A principal aim of the plan-making process, in particular the consultation and engagement events, has been to ensure a strategic approach is taken at all times. Individual development sites have been assessed within the context of the whole village and wider parish to test how they can contribute to the bigger picture.

4.20 The concept drawing that emerged from the three day design forum has provided a sound basis for moving forward with the neighbourhood plan preparation. This drawing was tested at consultation events in January, February and March 2014, and through a questionnaire, and a majority of respondents (57% of respondents) supported it as a basis for future work.

4.21 The framework diagram (page 19) is based on refinements to the three day concept drawing and brings together the existing built areas with the potential areas for new homes and new employment. The framework diagram shows how the two housing allocations need to be sensitively but effectively integrated with the existing fabric of the village. This requires the landowners and developers to think strategically by looking beyond their red line allocation boundaries. This is necessary to ensure that the early phases of development do not prejudice the longer term objectives of the overall vision for a connected and integrated village.

THE MAIDSTONE BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN

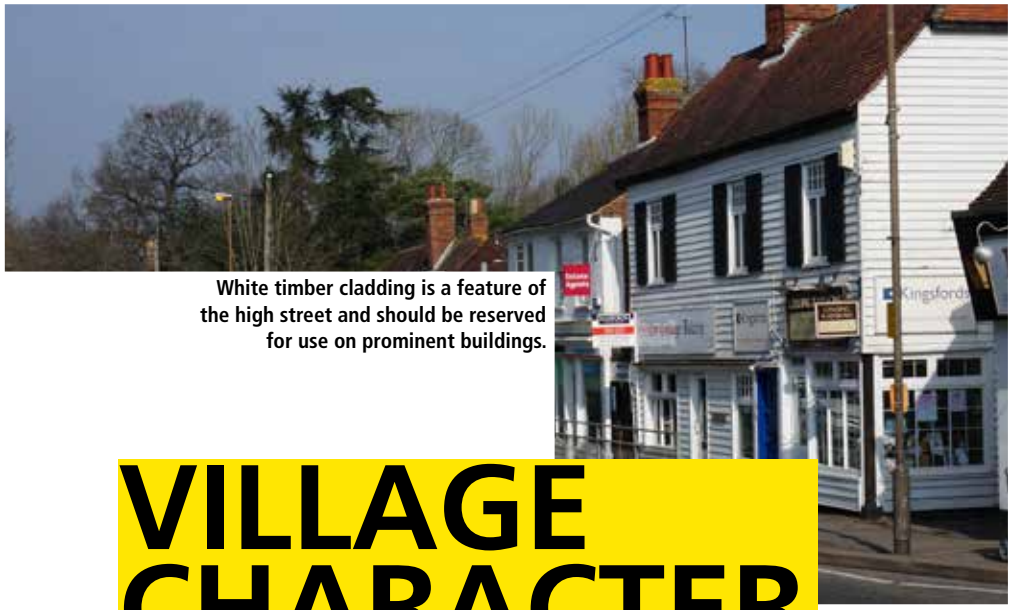
4.22 Policy SP3 in the Maidstone Borough Local Plan Preparation (Regulation 18) 2014 designates Staplehurst a Rural Service Centre — that is, a larger rural settlement with a range of existing facilities and transport links making it suitable for additional houses.

4.23 These new homes are allocated in the Maidstone Borough Local Plan Preparation (Regulation 18) 2014 Appendix A Housing Allocations to the east and west of the A229. Policy H1(36) is the housing allocation shown by the red line to the west of the village. According to Maidstone Borough Council calculations, this can accommodate up to 250 new homes. Policy H1(37) is the housing allocation shown by the red line to the east of the village and, according to Maidstone Borough Council calculations, this can accommodate up to 400 new homes. This is a total of up to 650 new homes over the plan period, based on Maidstone Borough Council housing number calculations for the capacity of each site.

4.24 The neighbourhood plan framework diagram looks beyond these two red lines to test how these two allocations will need to be integrated with the rest of the village. This is something this neighbourhood plan must do as the Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan does not address this integration issue.

PLANNING POLICIES + KEY AREAS OF CHANGE

This diagram shows the main areas of change within the village and which policies have been drafted to address them.



White timber cladding is a feature of the high street and should be reserved for use on prominent buildings.

VILLAGE CHARACTER

5.1 What makes the historic heart of Staplehurst distinctive? The way the buildings frame and enclose space contributes significantly to the sense of place. Special buildings, such as the pub, are located on corners to create small but memorable landmarks. New developments in Staplehurst can and should take inspiration from the village heart.

5.2 New housing should be influenced by the traditional character and style of the village, referencing the local context through high quality materials and styles appropriate to the place. The aim for all new developments should be to leave a positive architectural legacy and to add to the character of the village. This does not exclude innovative modern or contemporary architecture and this will be encouraged where appropriate.

High Street, Staplehurst Buildings linked together in a terraced row help enclose the space and define the street's form. The roof line has a distinct rhythm created by chimneys, towers and visible gable ends. Most building lines are on the back of footway with no private front garden spaces.

The King's Head Pub This taller building located on a corner plot on higher ground helps create a distinctive local landmark. The pub rises to three storeys with a steeply pitched roof. The built form comprises several different blocks with a modulated building line, stepping back from the footway on occasions to define doorways and entrances.

ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS FROM STAPLEHURST

5.3 These particular architectural details have been selected as they represent some of the more effective building and design techniques that help add to the character and quality of the parish. The fact these examples have primarily been drawn from the older parts of the village does not mean more recent developments in Staplehurst are poor quality. Rather that the distinctive sense of place evident in the historic heart is what the community admire most about where they live. New development proposals must learn from this and look to incorporate techniques such as this, where appropriate. See also the Staplehurst Village Design Statement (April 2005) that remains a valid document and a source of useful guidance for all new development.

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01 Simple but traditional Palladian-style housing provides the sense of importance and quality to some of the properties in Staplehurst.
02 Careful and deliberate use of colour helps to identify and pronounce the characteristics of the building. In this example brick, coloured window frames, traditional tall roofing all contrast with the white rendered walls.
03 The use of double bays on the ground creates flexible spaces that help allow a building to change use from residential to retail/cafe.
04 Careful use of brick, timber and tile cladding on buildings creates a Kentish village aesthetic and creates a sense of a strong and robust buildings.
05 Structural elements standing proud and on show (e.g. external timber trusses and joists) can accentuate a building's longevity.
06 Buildings positioned side-on to main streets can help mitigate traffic impacts and also allow for deliberate orientation in relation to the sun.
07 Traditional lapped-timber cladding can be accurately reproduced using modern materials for a longer lifespan.
08 Low rise mature hedging provides clear and defensible boundaries but does not obstruct the view of the fine architecture behind it.
09 Medieval stonework of the All Saints church needs to be celebrated and welcoming to not only visitors but villagers too.
10 Traditional fencing and shrub-planted borders used to separate private gardens from public streets or roads.
11 Maintaining the traditional look of the village pubs is important; there must be resistance against any modern or corporate identities being applied to their external appearances through branding or signage.
12 Half-timbered elevations on an arts and crafts style house, with a distinctive tall chimney feature.
13 Mature planting vegetation within private gardens softens the street scene and adds distinctive rural qualities to some buildings in the village.
14 The terraced row of houses at Cross-At-Hand represents a high density form of development appropriate to a village or rural setting.

Throughout the process, residents have been encouraged to share their ideas through facilitated discussions.

PLANNING POLICIES

6.1 In order to achieve the ambitions of the neighbourhood plan, a robust set of planning policies has been written. These set out what development can and cannot do, where it should be located and how the existing parts of the parish will benefit from new investment related to the new development.

6.2 The neighbourhood plan polices must be in "general conformity" with the Maidstone local plan and with national and European planning policy. General conformity means they do not have to be exactly the same and it is encouraged that they add more detail and more local knowledge to make the plan as responsive as possible to local people.

7.1 PARISH-WIDE THEME (Policy Code PW)

"Create an integrated set of neighbourhood planning policies that support sustainable development objectives across the whole of Staplehurst parish"

Policy Theme Background

7.2 While many of the planning policies deal with issues in and around the village of Staplehurst, this neighbourhood plan needs to deal with the whole parish. The neighbourhood plan therefore contains four overarching parish-wide policies that apply to all six of the policy themes that sit beneath them.

7.3 These four parish-wide policies are considered to be relevant to the whole parish and apply equally to all developments, be these community infrastructure (such as a new community hall or new shops), new homes, a new school site or new footpaths and countryside access.

7.4 The parish-wide policies deal with the need to achieve the right level of investment in utilities and infrastructure for a growing village; the need to protect the countryside and biodiversity; the need to support a strong local economy with access to jobs and employment opportunities and the need to support renewable energy technologies in the right locations.

POLICY PW1

PROPOSALS FOR NEW AND IMPROVED COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE AND UTILITIES IN THE PLAN AREA, INCLUDING THE PROJECTS LISTED AT PARAGRAPHS 7.10-7.16, WILL BE SUPPORTED SUBJECT TO THOSE PROPOSALS MEETING THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS PLAN AND BEING COMPATIBLE WITH OTHER PLANNING POLICIES IN THE PLAN.

Policy Supporting Text

7.5 Staplehurst will inevitably experience growth over the next decade or more. This can only happen if the right level of investment is made in improvements to the infrastructure at the right time. Delivery of infrastructure need not all be 'up-front' but current and forecasted infrastructure shortfalls must be independently evaluated and a full mitigation plan must be supplied by the developer before large-scale housing applications can be approved. Investment in the necessary infrastructure to improve the streets and roads network and to address drainage issues, applies to all new development sites, be they residential, community or employment focused.

Flooding on Chapel Lane (far left) and open countryside north of the village (left).

7.6 Access + Movement Future changes to the street and road network need to acknowledge the rural character of the village; encourage more choice of routes throughout the village to help reduce traffic congestion at peak times on the A229 and Marden and Headcorn Roads. Changes to the streets and roads improvements must encourage greater use of other modes of transport, including walking and cycling throughout the village, to make them a safer and more viable option. Better links between the east and west and the north and south of the village will help reduce congestion and promote healthier lifestyles through active travel modes.

7.7 Drainage Infrastructure Staplehurst has experienced a number of incidents of surface water flooding, both from public foul water sewers and rainwater drains, in recent years. Further development must incorporate robust measures to avoid making the situation worse, and if possible, ameliorate the problems that exist at present time. The integration of proven and effective techniques, including the selective use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) where shown to be appropriate, will be essential through a number of interventions to prevent further flooding. Best practice guidance indicates a number of means to positively reduce the risk of flooding in Staplehurst, including use of permeable surfaces, on-site attenuation systems and the inclusion of specially designed landscape into all new development.

7.8 Policy PW1 is linked to a set of specific projects identified through the neighbourhood plan process. Policy PW1 will act as "hook" or a starting point for these projects to be developed further. The projects may require further feasibility work, perhaps outside the scope of the neighbourhood plan, to establish how they can be funded and delivered.

7.9 While community consultation confirmed a new Village Centre building as the main project, this order of priority should not been seen as fixed or definitive but more as an overall indication of preference. The list needs to be treated as flexible if it is to be responsive to different funding opportunities.

Specific projects linked to Policy PW1 in a general order of preference and the further work required

7.10 Improved Village Centre
Feasibility study to understand the cost/benefit of redeveloping the site through demolition, rebuild, conversion or refurbishment with the aim of creating a community hall fit for purpose. An improved village hall and/or village centre is a priority for the village and so will also be a priority for any s106 and/or CIL contributions; and the present Village Centre site should be protected as being in community use.

7.11 Improved drainage infrastructure
All new developments to use best practice techniques in mitigating against further drainage problems.

7.12 Investment in the school
Continued investment in the primary school. Land search required for a suitable site to be safeguarded for another education site, subject to land ownership and support from Kent County Council.

7.13 Better retail opportunities
Development of two retail clusters, one in the village heart, another at the railway station. Feasibility study, to including land owner agreements, needed at the station.

7.14 Investment in the medical centre, sports facilities + the library
Continued investment in medical facilities and the library in the village heart. Focus new sports investment at facilities in Jubilee Field subject to funding applications.

7.15 Buses, parking + traffic
Rationalisation of parking provision in the village heart, better crossing points and better bus services. Landowner agreements needed.

7.16 Better broadband communications
Use the expected growth of the village, to be managed through the neighbourhood plan, to argue for better telecommunications and broadband technology in Staplehurst. Cooperation of utility companies needed.

POLICY PW2

PROPOSALS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE BEYOND THE EXTENDED VILLAGE ENVELOPE WILL BE ASSESSED IN TERMS OF THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT UPON THE VISUAL SETTING AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES OF THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS, THE POTENTIAL IMPACT UPON THE BIODIVERSITY OF THE AREA AND OTHER RELEVANT PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS, SUCH AS THE IMPACT OF TRAFFIC AND NOISE. PROPOSALS WHICH FAIL TO DEMONSTRATE THESE IMPACTS CAN BE SATISFACTORILY ADDRESSED WILL NOT BE SUPPORTED.

Policy Supporting Text

7.17 The neighbourhood plan strongly supports the protection of the wider countryside outside the areas identified for new development. See page 18 for map showing the village envelope. There is, therefore, a presumption against the development of any land other than those sites identified as suitable for development within this neighbourhood plan. The proximity of Staplehurst to the countryside is an important part of the identity of the village. Greater access to this countryside through improvements to the rights of way network will be sought from the developers of the new built areas of the village.

7.18 The countryside is well-loved by the local community and is often cited as a key reason why recent incomers to the village moved here from elsewhere. It is also an important attraction for tourism, an increasingly important part of an active rural economy. Maintaining and enhancing the biodiversity of the countryside is an integral part of this protection. The introduction of green corridors, both between and within new and existing areas of development, will be encouraged in the design of new development areas. These green corridors must link to the wider countryside. The introduction of easy-to-access recreational routes to help demarcate the interface between the built areas of the village and the wider countryside beyond will also be actively encouraged.

POLICY PW3

RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS WILL BE SUPPORTED SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

1) Installations should be sensitive to the existing communities and the impact they may have upon the landscape and views.

2) Productive agricultural land of the highest quality (e.g. Grades 1, 2 and 3a) should be protected.

3) Schemes on previously developed land and on the roofs of industrial or employment buildings will be given priority consideration over those in other locations.

Policy Supporting Text

7.19 Integral to the protection of countryside (see Policy PW2) is the need to sensitively promote sustainable forms of energy production in appropriate locations. The parish council acknowledges the role that renewable energy schemes will play in safeguarding the nation's energy security and the increasing role they will need to play to combat the harmful effects of climate change by helping to decarbonise energy generation.

Wind power can be visually obtrusive but can also play an important role in power generation. Solar farms should be kept off prime agricultural land.

7.20 However, the scale and size of certain renewable technologies, especially wind and solar, can have significant visual impacts upon the existing countryside scene. Developers will need to demonstrate the impact of their schemes clearly through the planning application process, a process which the parish council will be involved in as a statutory consultee.

POLICY PW4

NEW DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN STAPLEHURST MUST HAVE REGARD TO THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT AND THE HERITAGE THAT IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE LANDSCAPE. LARGE DEVELOPMENTS (i.e. OVER 0.5 HECTARE) SHOULD BE SUITABLY INFORMED AND MAY NEED AN APPROPRIATE ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK BASED ASSESSMENT AND HISTORIC LANDSCAPE SURVEY.

Policy Supporting Text

7.21 Staplehurst has a rich and diverse heritage and has been an area favored for occupation and farming since the prehistoric period. There are some major route-ways traversing Staplehurst parish, some of which date back to the Roman period and possibly before, relating to the Iron Age and later use of the Weald's rich resources. Staplehurst itself is one of Kent's post medieval market towns, serving the medieval and post medieval farm and horticultural holdings in the surrounding area. Some of this heritage is identified in the Kent Historic Environment Record (held at Kent County Council) as designated and un-designated heritage assets. However, heritage is an integral part of the landscape. It is reflected as sites and the surrounds of sites but it is also the pattern of fields, route-ways and clusters of houses and farms. Understanding the heritage of an area includes understanding the landscape as a whole.

7.22 New developments within Staplehurst need to have regard to the historic environment and consultation with the Heritage Team at Kent County Council is advisable. There should also be regard to NPPF Section 12 on the historic environment and to Local Plans policies. Large developments (i.e. over 0.5 hectare) should be suitably informed and may need an appropriate archaeological desk based assessment and historic landscape survey. NPPF encourages "the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring" and that wherever possible, opportunities should be identified "to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place."

COMMUNITY THEME (Policy Code C)

"Ensure that housing development brings an appropriate level of investment into community infrastructure"

Policy Theme Background

8.1 New housing development in Staplehurst over the coming years should seek to bring with it financial investment in community infrastructure. This includes the village hall, the school, the library, the shops and services, the railway station, children's play areas, footpaths, bus and rail services, countryside access and all the other services and facilities that make working and living in Staplehurst the positive experience it is. A growing village needs the level and quality of the associated community infrastructure to be expanded and improved to meet the needs of its residents and workers.

8.2 Planning permission for new housing will come with conditions attached that require the developer concerned to make an appropriate financial contribution to the village. This is known as "planning gain" and is an established planning procedure in the UK.

8.3 The difference in areas with an adopted neighbourhood plan is that the community, through the plan, can directly influence and prioritise the areas of village infrastructure it feels are in most need of investment. Early ideas include investment in the "Village Heart" area and also around the station in the north, including a possible new bridge over the tracks. The neighbourhood plan can also set out a long term plan to link housing growth to levels of community investment. Furthermore, a parish with an adopted neighbourhood plan will receive 25% of the revenues from the forthcoming Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to be charged by Maidstone Borough Council arising from the development that a parish chooses to accept in its plan area. Parishes without a neighbourhood plan, but where CIL is charged, will receive just 15%.

POLICY C1

MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE THE PUBLIC LIBRARY BUILDING, INCLUDING ITS EXTENSION IF NECESSARY, TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY.

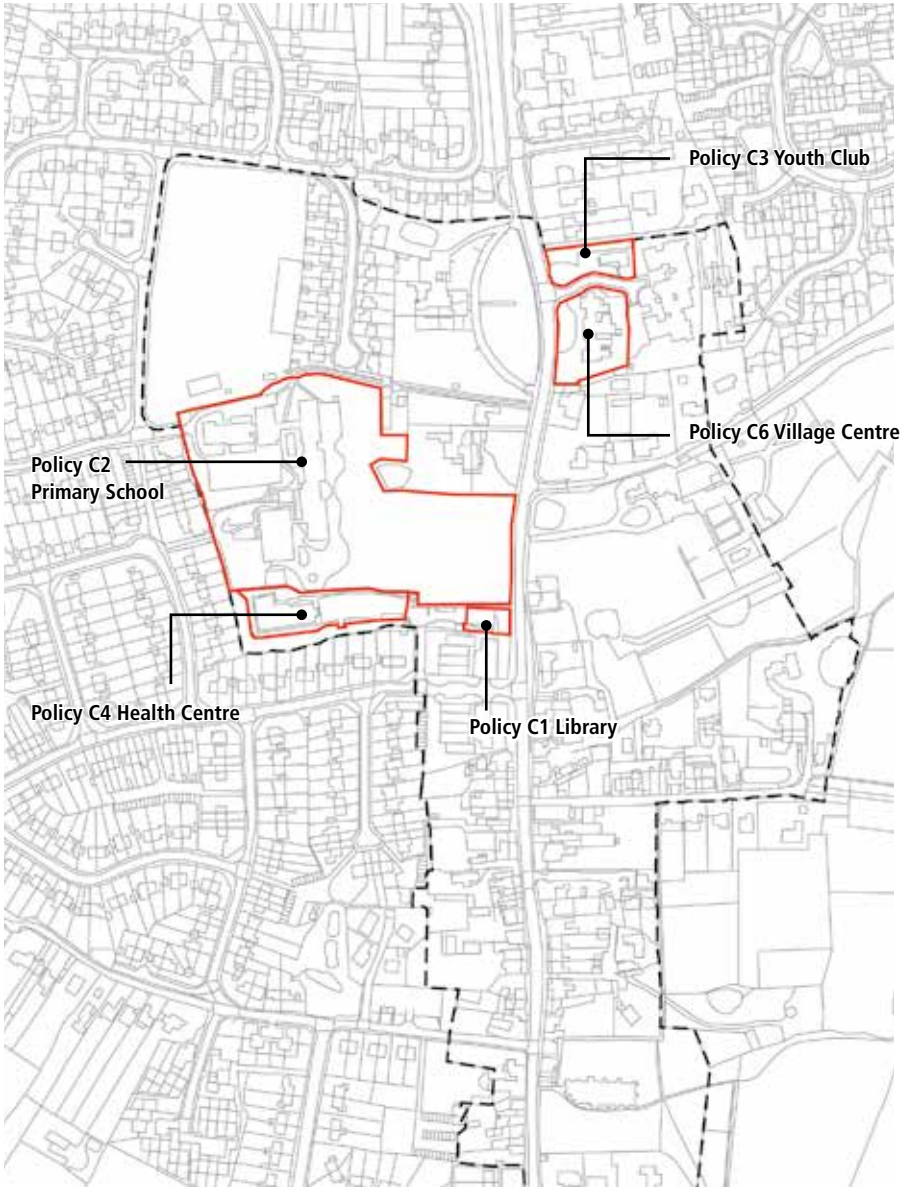
Policy Supporting Text

8.4 The Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan supports the continued investment in the local library site. The library is located at the heart of the village in proximity to other local services that are equally important to the community. The library provides a vital service to village life and the surrounding rural areas.

8.5 The library supports the local community cohesion and supports education and learning for all age groups. Investment here must aim to maintain and enhance the library as a modern, flexible space offering the right range of services, including internet connections and an appropriate range of up-to-date books, that will allow the library to continue to connect communities within Staplehurst village and the wider parish.

8.6 The neighbourhood plan identifies this as a key service to be protected, maintained and enhanced. Through the planning obligations linked to future development in Staplehurst, an appropriate level of funding will be directed towards the library service to ensure it will meet the needs of a growing village.

The library is a vital resource in the heart of the village.



Policies C1, C2, C3, C4 and C6 Location of community facilities to be maintained and enhanced shown by the red lines. The "village heart" (see page 41) is shown by the black dotted line.

POLICY C2

MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE THE PRIMARY SCHOOL AND ITS FACILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR EXTENSION, TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY.

Policy Supporting Text

8.7 The primary school is a vital asset to Staplehurst village, the wider parish and beyond. The relatively central location of the school ensures direct access for much of the local community. It also lies in close proximity to the other services and facilities in the heart of the village. The planned future growth of Staplehurst will put the primary school under increased pressure to provide additional school places to children living in Staplehurst. Therefore, investment in the primary school to help it meet this demand is vital to ensure that it can continue to provide an excellent start in life for those growing up in the village.

8.8 Continued engagement will be required between Staplehurst Parish Council, Maidstone Borough Council, the school governors and Kent County Council to ensure this investment is delivered in a timely manner and at the appropriate level.

The primary school is a vital village service and will be under increasing pressure as the village grows.

POLICY C3

MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE THE YOUTH CLUB BUILDING AND ITS FACILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR EXTENSION IF NECESSARY, TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY.

Policy Supporting Text

8.9 Investment in youth facilities (including the youth club building and youth services delivered by the voluntary sector) in Staplehurst is necessary and required to ensure a balanced and happy community. The neighbourhood plan aims to maintain and enhance all local services that are used by its young residents.

8.10 A range of youth facilities is needed for different demographics within the under-18 population in Staplehurst, from pre-school children to independent teenagers. The current youth groups are popular and well-attended; the planned growth of the village means funding must be secured to ensure these services continue to meet the needs of the growing young population. Better youth facilities could be incorporated into a new Village Centre and this needs to be considered as part of any feasibility study.

Youth club facilities are currently in the heart of the village, adjacent to the Village Centre.

POLICY C4

MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE THE HEALTH CENTRE BUILDING AND ITS FACILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR EXTENSION IF NECESSARY, TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY.

Policy Supporting Text

8.11 Demand placed on the excellent health facilities in the centre of the village is certain to increase following village expansion. Residents of all ages need access to high quality, local care. In order to ensure that the health care provision is maintained and enhanced for the current and future residents, a higher level of investment is needed. The current health centre is located in the heart of the village, in proximity to other vital village services.

8.12 The neighbourhood plan supports further investment into this single site, rather than into new satellite centres, to ensure the best quality service for its residents. The relatively central location makes it accessible to the majority of local residents and allows for "linked trips" as those attending the health centre can also perhaps drop children off at school or attend events in the Village Centre as part of the same journey.

The health centre provides excellent care for current residents but it will need more investment as the village expands.

POLICY C5

MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE THE JUBILEE FIELD SPORTS AND RECREATION SITE, INCLUDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW AND IMPROVED FACILITIES AT THE SITE.

Policy Supporting Text

8.13 The process of engagement developing the Staplehurst neighbourhood plan has highlighted the need for enhanced sports and recreational facilities in the village. The Jubilee Field site, on the eastern edge of the village with access to wide open sports pitches, is considered to be the best location for further investment. There is currently a lack of indoor sports facilities within the parish (e.g. a high ceiling sports hall, performance space or similar) with most residents having to travel outside of the village to use such a space.

8.14 The Jubilee Field site has the capacity to accommodate new indoor and outdoor sports facilities for the current and future populations of Staplehurst. Through the planning obligations linked to future development in Staplehurst, an appropriate level of funding will be directed towards the sports and recreation facilities to ensure it will meet the needs of a growing village. These funds may be matched with grants from national agencies, sports federations and national governing bodies.

8.15 Investment in facilities at Jubilee Field must be complementary to investment within the "village heart" and not place both sites and their respective facilities in a competitive situation with one another.

Jubilee Field will remain the focus for outdoor recreational facilities.

Policy C5 Location of the Jubilee Field where facilities to be maintained and enhanced.

POLICY C6

SUPPORT THE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE VILLAGE CENTRE SITE, RETAINING IMPORTANT ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF THE EXISTING BUILDING IF APPROPRIATE, TO PROVIDE NEW AND IMPROVED COMMUNITY CENTRE FACILITIES.

Policy Supporting Text

8.16 The current Village Centre building was the village school from 1873 to 1987 and now serves the parish in a variety of ways. It provides space for clubs, societies and groups across the parish, as well as hosting the parish office. However, demand in the area is greater than the supply that can be provided by the current building. Moreover, the building is in need of repair and has significant running costs due to its inefficient heating and lighting systems. The building needs to be made fit for the current and future residents of the village. The engagement events as part of the neighbourhood planning process highlighted this as a critical issue for the village.

8.17 The majority feeling amongst residents was that the existing location of the Village Centre must be retained. This location is also within walking distance of the existing parade of shops in the centre of the village, allowing further linked trips between existing community facilities. The facility forms a key component of the cluster of facilities that comprise the village heart and it has relatively easy access directly off the high street. This location also gives it a prominence to "passing trade" and a new building here will have the opportunity to become a "shop window" or showcase for the range of village activities, subject to the right building configuration and design.

The current building might survive in a renovated or modified state but the location of the new Village Centre should be on the same site, right in the heart of the village.

8.18 Discussions were held as part of the neighbourhood planning process about whether or not to demolish, refurbish or rebuild. There was a general feeling that it would be a shame to demolish the entire building. The handsome stonework of the facade, the articulation of the main elevation and main structural elements could all be worth retaining. A creative architectural brief, that requires the skillful blending of the old and the new together to form a more modern building fit for the future, could be prepared. A more modern building, but with retained heritage elements, could generate a revenue stream for the village through function hire (e.g. weddings).

8.19 However, a cleared site could offer more flexibility to the design, and perhaps be more economically viable as it will not have the added restoration costs associated with the retention of heritage elements already on site. A cleared site may also allow fresh thinking as regards site layout and access arrangements, to create more useable outdoor spaces and allow for striking, modern design that is nevertheless sympathetic to the village context.

8.20 A decision on exactly how to proceed with this project — that is, retain, refurbish, convert, modify or demolish and rebuild — can only be taken following more thorough cost-benefit analysis outside the scope of this plan. Whatever the preferred approach will be, it must deliver a multi-purpose building of special architectural merit right in the heart of the village.

8.21 Investment in facilities at the Village Centre must be complementary to investment within the Jubilee Field and not place both sites in a competitive situation with one another.

ACCESS + MOVEMENT THEME

"Reduce pressure on the crossroads by ensuring alternative access routes; develop a better connected series of village streets"

Policy Theme Background

9.1 The work undertaken so far on the neighbourhood plan has revealed a weakness in the current design and layout of Staplehurst in that "all roads lead to the crossroads". This means that many journeys through and around the village will pass through the Cuckcold's Corner simply because other route options do not exist. See street structure diagram, page 17.

9.2 Therefore, new developments must seek to create alternative routes between:

1) different areas within the village; and,
2) outlying areas of the parish and the village.

9.3 This will allow people access to their homes and other destinations in Staplehurst without necessarily passing through the crossroads. Creating alternative routes will give people a greater choice of movement and reduce the pressure on the crossroads.

9.4 At the three day design forum in October 2013, minor modifications were suggested to ease traffic flows through the crossroads. These modifications are likely to be affordable, environmentally sensitive and reduce queuing times (see drawings on pages 49, 50, 60 and 61 in the Three-Day Design Forum report for more details).

9.5 Any design intervention at the crossroads must be combined with improvements to the street network across the village to encourage greater levels of walking and cycling, helping to reduce dependence on the car for short trips.

Neighbourhood Plan Objective 01

There is a need to safeguard access points for new railway bridge crossings to the west of the current high street bridge link.

This can be achieved by ensuring that the layout of all new developments does not prevent the delivery of a new bridge link in future, either in this plan period or future plan periods.

9.6 New and enhanced access points over the railway to the west of the current A229 road bridge will provide an alternative to the current limited number of routes. A new bridge crossing will be important if the growing village is to have the better connectivity it requires for the future.

9.7 The primary function of this link will be to provide attractive, safe and convenient access for existing and new residents that live and work in the area to the west of the village. The secondary function will be to alleviate traffic levels along the main road (A229) by providing an alternative route for local traffic, reducing the impact of new development on the A229 crossroads.

9.8 The safeguarding of these access points, and routes to them, is therefore vital to the formation of more sustainable access and movement links across the village. The layout of future development adjacent to these access points must acknowledge this requirement by delivering residential and employment layouts that provide clear and direct connections to the safeguarded sites.

9.9 The precise location and scale of the crossing will be determined through further design and feasibility work. However, it is envisaged that the bridge will be a low impact, small-scale bridge or crossing suitable for local traffic only. Not only will a bridge of this type be more affordable to deliver but it will also deter or even prevent larger vehicles (e.g. HGVs) and high speed or high volumes of traffic. Instead, the bridge will provide local access for local residents using private cars, helping to reduce the impact of new traffic movements on the A229. Bridges should also be accessible for pedestrians and cyclists.

9.10 The financing of a new railway crossing could be through a combination of funding from Kent County Council and Network Rail. There may also be a role for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 agreements to help finance the new crossing. The delivery of the new railway crossing could be triggered by specific phasing of the adjacent development.

9.11 However, the precise nature of the funding and timing will be determined through a specific project agreement. In the first instance, the neighbourhood plan seeks to ensure that development plans and proposals secure the ability to deliver a new link through responsive and flexible housing layouts that do not prejudice the ability to deliver the link at a later date.

Further detailed design work is required to understand exactly how and where a new rail bridge crossing could be delivered.

Neighbourhood Plan Objective 02

Ensure the network of footpaths and footways throughout the village is safe, convenient and comfortable, with wider footways where necessary.

9.12 The network of the existing footpaths and footways throughout Staplehurst does not always allow for safe and convenient access. In many places, they are too narrow to be used comfortably. In other places, there are historical features of merit, such as the listed steps by Vine House, that add special character to the village but further frustrate easy movement.

9.13 To encourage more people to walk, the existing and future footpaths around the village need to be generous, well-surfaced, safe and well-connected. In the centre of the village, particularly around the crossroads, many existing footpaths could be widened to make walking more comfortable. The dominance of the through road is further emphasised by narrow footpaths that do not allow convenient access around the village and these can be widened to give greater priority to pedestrians. In heritage areas where features such as steps cannot be moved, alternative measures must be introduced, such as ramps or pavement build-outs, to help overcome the barriers to movement that steps can present.

9.14 With space for car parking limited within the historic part of the village, especially around the parade of shops, the school, health centre, library and Village Centre, an increase in the numbers of people walking will go some way to ease the pressure on giving over more land to car parking.

Pavement widths adjacent to Cuckold's Corner are inadequate and must be made wider through highways improvements.

Neighbourhood Plan Objective 03

The proposed layout for new development sites must deliver a series of connected streets and lanes that will ensure a choice of routes for new and existing residents.

9.15 Future development proposals for residential sites must be based on a series of well-connected streets and lanes that provide genuine movement choices for new and existing residents. The design and nature of these new streets and lanes must be informed by the existing positive characteristics of the village.

9.16 Residential development sites must avoid layouts dominated by wide, fast roads and many cul-de-sac streets as these frustrate movement choices and lead to additional car traffic. Instead, a well-designed hierarchy of street types must be used to create flexible layouts that respond to wide variety of activities, including car parking, children's play, walking and cycling and help foster a sense of community and well-being amongst the people that live there.

9.17 New streets and lanes must also be effectively "plugged into" the edges of the existing village so as to integrate new and existing communities with minimal disturbance and disruption. Feelings or perceptions of a series of disconnected neighbourhoods must be minimised through sensitive integration of new and existing areas.

Unwelcoming pedestrian "cut-throughs" need to be avoided in new developments in favour of a well-connected street network.

Neighbourhood Plan Objective 04

Create a series of on-street and off-street cycling routes that are safe, convenient and comfortable and will encourage people to cycle for short trips in and around the village.

9.18 The creation of new connected layouts comprising safe streets and lanes will also need to create streets safe for cycling. In certain areas, segregated or dedicated cycling infrastructure may be required, for example, at key junctions or around the school. These measures will help raise the level of utility cycling (e.g. riding to work, the shops or to school). Good quality cycle infrastructure will give cyclists the space they need to ride safely on the roads and keep the pavement space for pedestrians. Facilities that are to be shared between pedestrians and cyclists must be avoided if at all possible within the built-up part of the village.

9.19 Meanwhile, Staplehurst is surrounded by attractive open green space and areas. The creation of off-street recreational cycling routes will enhance existing access and connections between the built-up village and the green spaces beyond. These routes need to be convenient, accessible and enjoyable if they are to help encourage cycling as a recreational activity which in turn, may help raise levels of utility cycling. Such off-road routes through the countryside can often be safely and successfully shared between walkers and cyclists. Regular access to green open space has a significant positive impact upon an individual's mental health and access to the countryside setting of Staplehurst must be promoted by well-connected accessible cycle routes.

Quality provision for cycling needs to be incorporated into all new developments.

Neighbourhood Plan Objective 05

Create better and more frequent pedestrian crossings, including along the A229 as the road passes through the village.

9.20 The A229 carries a combination of through-traffic and local traffic. It is also a vital walking route between the heart of the village and residential areas. Better and more frequent pedestrian crossings at specific points (i.e. Railway Tavern, Village Centre and Pinnock Lane) will be required to provide safer and more convenient access between where people live and where people want to get to.

9.21 In line with the aims of other policies in the plan, these interventions will help encourage more local trips to be made on foot. With limited space for car parking within the historic part of the village, especially around the parade of shops, the school, health centre, library and Village Centre, an increase in the numbers of people walking will go some way to ease the pressure on giving more land over to car parking. Being able to cross the main road safely and more conveniently will support this.

9.22 There is also a need for new dedicated crossing points along the Marden Road and the Headcorn Road, the precise sites to be identified.

There is a generously wide pedestrian crossing point adjacent to the parade of shops but similar provision is lacking elsewhere.

Neighbourhood Plan Objective 06

Improvements to the Marden Road – Headcorn Road – Station Road – High Street crossroads, to ease traffic flow and improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists while retaining the village character that is special to Staplehurst.

9.23 The crossroads marks a historic location within the village and provides a distinct rural identity to Staplehurst. The magnificent row of horse chestnut trees, the small green space, the Martyr's Monument, the right angled turns in the street and the handsome residences all combine to provide an attractive village scene.

9.24 However, the levels of traffic currently using the crossroads, combined with the relative narrowness of the carriageway and the turning lanes can lead to congestion and tailbacks during peak hours. Relatively minor and affordable interventions are therefore sought at the crossroads area to help ease traffic flows and remove the likelihood of tailbacks and long waiting queues during peak hours.

9.25 These interventions could include widening and or realignment of the footpaths and footways; realignment and/or remarking of the right turn lanes to provide more generous passing room for through traffic; a better setting for the monument (that is currently on the north west corner of the crossroads and can remain there); thinning of hedge rows to make more of the village green open space on the south west corner of the junction; tree maintenance to lift the crowns and provide a more visible location for village welcome signs and directional arrows.

9.26 The crossroads is about more than just moving cars across and through the village; it marks an historic place and is part of the rural fabric of Staplehurst. This special character will be maintained. Careful and considerate design must deliver both a better village scene, an enhanced sense of place and also help ease movement and travel patterns.

Could a new footway to the west of the chestnut trees release land to help deliver a more generous right turn lane to help avoid tailbacks?

Neighbourhood Plan Objective 07

Improvements to bus services and bus waiting facilities.

9.27 With more people living and working in the village, investment in the bus services and bus waiting facilities (e.g. shelters, stops, real time information systems, a dedicated bus stop for the railway station etc.) will be required. Existing shelters must to be upgraded where appropriate, new stops and shelters installed along new routes and support for more frequent services to the most popular destinations will be sought.

9.28 The design and layout of new areas of housing must be able to accommodate new bus routes so that future residents will not be too far away from a bus stop. If the bus service is to offer a viable alternative to the private car, then it needs to be accessible, reliable and affordable to all that live and work in Staplehurst.

Better bus shelters should be installed across the village.

VILLAGE HEART THEME (Policy Code VH)

"Strengthen the focal heart of the village around the Village Centre, Library, Health Centre, Primary School and Parade of Shops"

Policy Theme Background

10.1 The historic heart of Staplehurst contains the cluster of uses and activities that make the village a special place to live and work. There are the community activities at the Village Centre (that includes the parish office) the library and the churches. There is also the commercial activity at the parade of shops, a variety of shops on the opposite side of the road, a cafe and the pub. Together, all these uses give life and vitality to the village. The central area of the village also has Conservation Area status, awarded by Maidstone Borough Council and contains many high quality buildings

10.2 The three day design forum revealed a widespread desire to strengthen and enhance this cluster of uses rather than locate new community facilities elsewhere. Investment must aim to expand the facilities where necessary and deliver better connections between each of the uses to make them easier to access. Several of the buildings can also be made more attractive and visible to passers-by especially the Village Centre and the Parade. Options for the redevelopment or demolition and rebuild of the Village Centre remain under consideration.

10.3 The cluster of facilities at Jubilee Field, on the eastern edge of the village, will also be maintained and enhanced. This location is considered less accessible than the village heart and so will have a greater emphasis on outdoor recreation, sports facilities and uses that need large areas of open space. The result will be an area that complements the uses in the village heart.

POLICY VH1

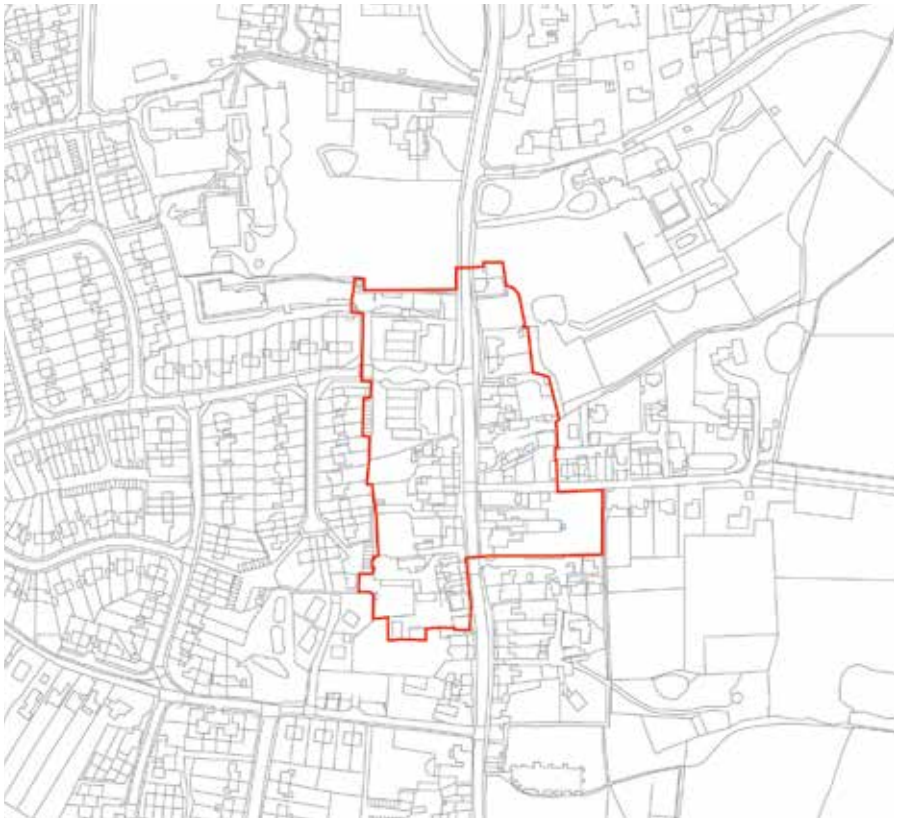
SUPPORT THE RETENTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE EXISTING RETAIL AND ANCILLARY FACILITIES IN THE VILLAGE HEART, INCLUDING IMPROVEMENTS WHERE NECESSARY TO MEET THE NEEDS OF USERS OF THOSE FACILITIES.

Policy Supporting Text

10.4 With a growing village and with new housing sites identified on the outer edges of the current village, some distance from the existing retail offer, it will be necessary to provide a greater range of shops and services in closer proximity to its resident population if the village is to have a sustainable future. Without this, many residents will choose to leave the village, often by car, in order to obtain groceries and other regular items of shopping.

10.5 Existing parade of shops on the High Street, and other retail facilities in the village heart, are to be protected and enhanced. As the historic heart of the village, this area has been identified by residents as an important commercial area for both now and into the future. This plan supports continued investment in local retail and associated services in this location. As this site is well-connected to existing residential areas, it must provide high quality and convenient shops and services to a local catchment that can arrive on foot and by bicycle, as well as to a wider catchment from further afield.

The existing retail cluster around the parade of shops needs to be retained and enhanced.



Policy VH1 Location of the existing retail and ancillary facilities to be maintained and enhanced.

Parking in and around the parade of shops needs to be rationalised with a better management regime and more appropriate waiting times.

Neighbourhood Plan Objective 08

Ensure better and more connected routes between the library, primary school, health centre, village centre, youth club and church through safe, comfortable and convenient walking routes.

10.6 The library, primary school, Village Centre, youth club, health centre and churches provide many of the essential services integral to the quality of life in Staplehurst. The close proximity of these services can be further enhanced through better connections between them. There is potential to be sought for an increased number of "linked trips" in which the car is parked once followed by a series of different short journeys on foot between the different areas of activity.

10.7 The existing footpaths between these focal areas are not always suitable for all residents in the village, in particular for those that use wheelchairs or those that find walking on uneven surfaces difficult. Footpaths must be widened where possible and more pedestrian crossings at particular points will allow greater movement in an east-west direction across the village, connecting up the cluster of facilities in the village heart. See also Objective 05.

Neighbourhood Plan Objective 09

Rationalisation of parking provision at the health centre, parade of shops and library area to ensure convenient and appropriate levels of car parking.

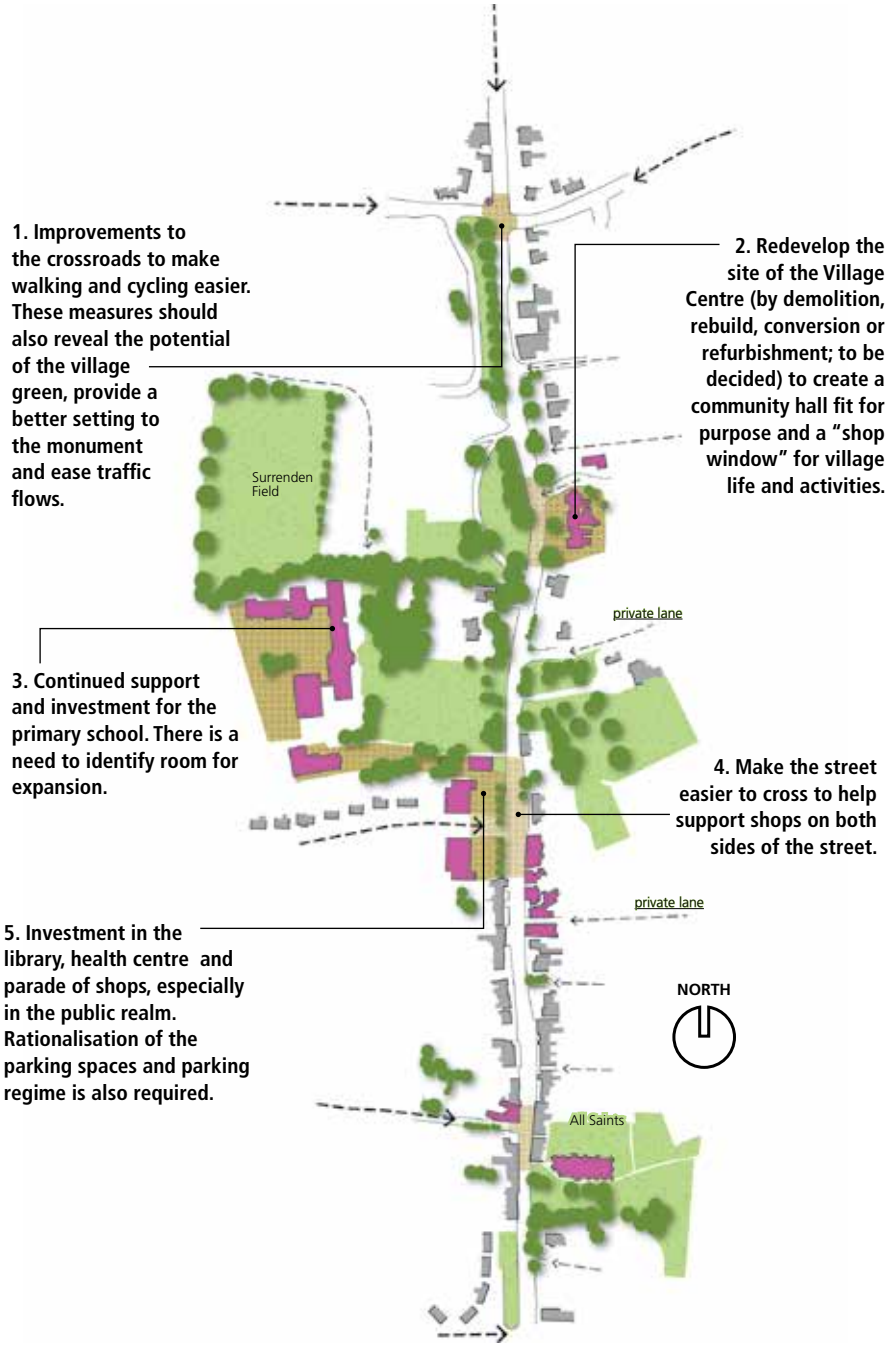
10.8 The library, primary school, Village Centre, parade of shops, health centre, youth club and church all have their own car parking and drop-off arrangements to different degrees. Space is at a premium in this part of the village and it is unlikely that any significant amount of new land will come forward for additional car parking, if indeed that is desirable. Instead, a review of the waiting time restrictions, the opportunity for shared spaces, joint management and for the realignment of existing car parks to make them more efficient must be explored.

The Village Heart Policy VH1

10.9 There is widespread support from within the community for creating a stronger village heart. The cluster of uses in and around the High Street that support the social and community life of Staplehurst is vital for a growing village.

10.10 Policy DM20.1(vii) of the Maidstone local plan seeks to retain and enhance these facilities but the neighbourhood plan policies need to go further by explaining how these facilities work together and what is needed to support them into the future.

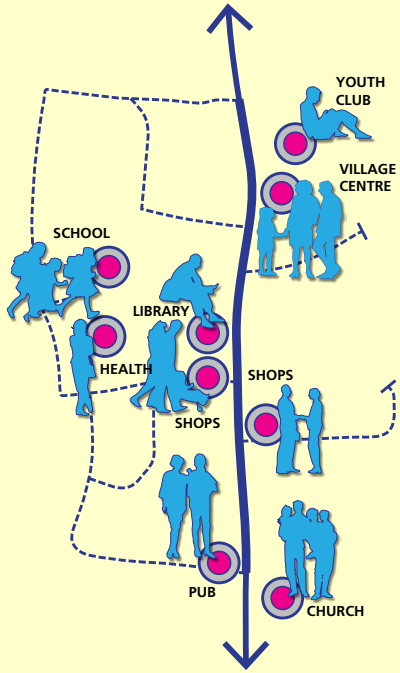
10.11 Policy VH1 required a series of actions and individual projects, each linked to other polices within the neighbourhood plan. Fragile and delicate parts of a village, such the historic heart of Staplehurst, need to be nurtured and cared for. They have survived for many years and are very flexible but need to be looked after.



WHY IS THE VILLAGE HEART SO SPECIAL?

10.12 All ages and all activities can be found in this one part of Staplehurst. Primary school children and their parents, the elderly and teenagers. Football games, book reading, grocery shopping, pub meals and local Kentish beer.

10.13 Taken together, these "people, places and activities" are what makes village life special. This diagram (below) tries to capture all these activities and the physical links that bind them. How can these links be made stronger for the future? And what new activities for the 21st Century can be added to the village heart mix?



GATEWAYS THEME (Policy Code GW)

"Improve the function and visual qualities of the land around the station; ensure other approaches to the village are visually appealing"

Policy Theme Background

11.1 There are many parts of Staplehurst that have a strong visual identity and are attractive places to be. For example, in the southern half of the village, there is a positive relationship between the buildings and the wider countryside, with strong visual connections between the two. Also, there is an attractive cluster of heritage buildings around the Conservation Area. However, the approach from the railway station is dominated by surface car parks and areas of scrappy under-utilised land. The area lacks a positive identity and fails to create a welcoming gateway to Staplehurst for those arriving by train.

11.2 As first impressions go, it could be much better, yet the station is a prize asset and one of the criteria required for Staplehurst being given Rural Service Centre status by the Maidstone Borough Council.

11.3 Yet the area has great potential. The railway station is a daily destination for regular commuters and this to and fro movement can add life to the area if utilised in the right way. Rationalisation of the car parking, from all being surface level to a multi-deck arrangement, can maintain car parking availability but free up land for more productive uses.

11.4 New commercial activity around the station, like small business units, shops or services and cafés all focused around a new market square could provide the positive new welcome that Staplehurst deserves. The scale of development here will be constrained to ensure the protection and on-going viability of the existing retail centre in the village heart (see Policy VH1).

POLICY GW1

THE REDEVELOPMENT OF SITES IN THE RAILWAY STATION AREA WILL BE SUPPORTED, WHERE SUCH PROPOSALS CAN DEMONSTRATE THAT THEY WOULD LEAD TO IMPROVEMENTS TO THE PUBLIC REALM IN THE AREA AND ENHANCE THE VISUAL APPROACH TO THE VILLAGE FROM THE NORTH. PROPOSALS FOR NEW COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT INCLUDING ANY RETAIL FLOOR SPACE, WILL BE ASSESSED IN TERMS OF ANY POTENTIAL IMPACT UPON EXISTING RETAIL PROVISION IN THE HIGH STREET LOCAL CENTRE.

Policy Supporting Text

11.5 The plan-making process identified a clear need to improve the space around the station area. As a whole, the under-utilised nature of the area, dominated by surface car parking, leaves a poor impression on both first time visitors and regular users of this part of the village. However, the presence of the station and the recently constructed new factory for DK Holdings shows the area has good commercial and economic opportunities and these can be leveraged to deliver a better public realm.

Better Public Realm

11.6 The existing entrance area around the station building is currently in a neglected condition and required improvements to the layout, including a rationalisation of the surface car parking, landscape works, materials, lighting and seating could deliver significant enhancements in the form of a civic space (a high quality "market square") marking a key gateway to the village. A well-designed civic space of this type could provide better car parking facilities, as well as a shared space that on weekends could accommodate social activities for the community, such as markets or festival events.

11.7 To deliver the new civic space, a certain proportion of the existing surface car parking could be decked on a new multi-level car park structure. This decked car

park will release land adjacent to the station to allow for more creative uses that will socially and culturally enrich the village experience. This decked structure could maintain a net neutral level of car parking (if desired) but could also allow for extra car parking spaces to be delivered on site.

Retail Investment

11.8 Economic activity could be enhanced through the creation of small-scale retail and commercial units around the edge of the new civic space that could trade off the regular footfall in the area. The station area is close to the two large areas of land to the east and the west of the village identified as being able to accommodate the majority of the new housing growth. This makes it an accessible location by walking and cycling to new residents and therefore a sustainable location for new retail and associated services.

11.9 The southern part of the site is already has planning permission for a new food store and other parts of the station environs could provide further retail units or associated services. The site's proximity to the railway station means there are excellent opportunities for retail and business spaces to trade off the footfall generated by the station.

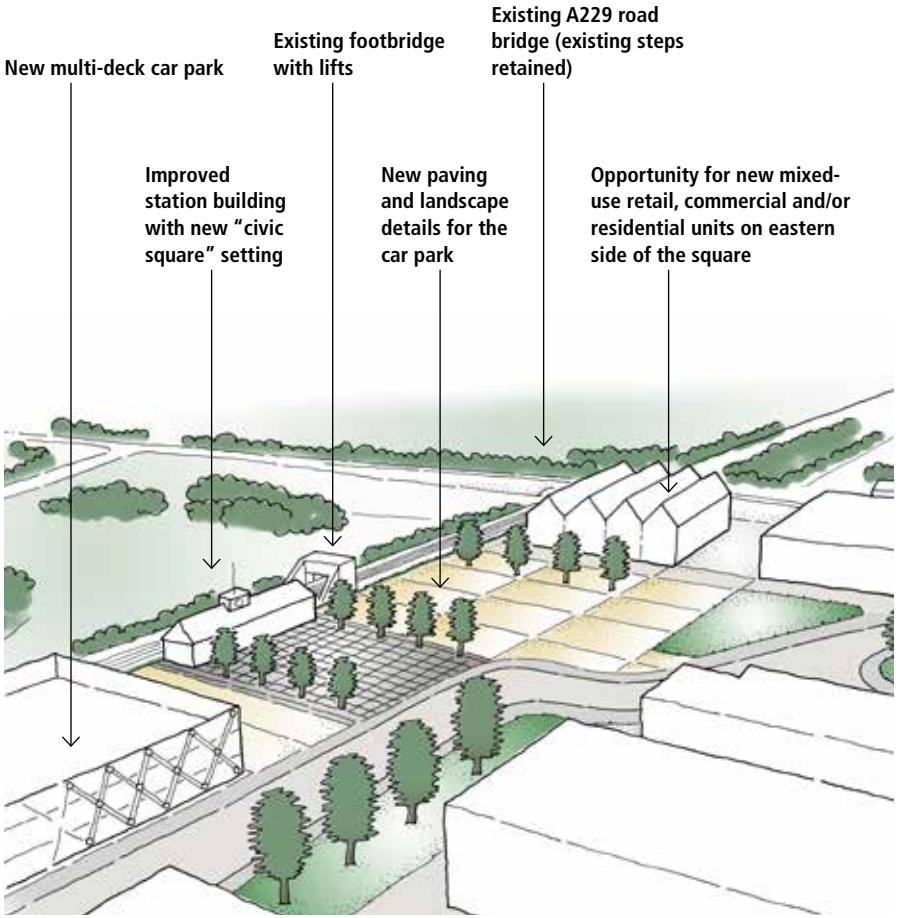
11.10 Maidstone Borough Council granted planning permission for the food store in March 2013 and therefore this neighbourhood plan has been prepared on the basis that additional retail provision in the area identified around the station will be in conformity with Maidstone Borough Local Plan policies designed to protect existing retail areas.

Conclusions

11.11 This area has the potential to provide a new civic space (e.g. a village "market square") together with small-scale retail and other commercial opportunities. The station area is an important gateway entrance to the village through which a large number of people pass every day. This plan policy has a very high level of support from the local community and implementation will be a key part of the delivery of the Rural Service Centre concept.

Illustrative Sketch
Policy GW1

11.12 The area around the railway station has the potential to provide a new civic space (e.g. a village "market square"). Small-scale retail and commercial units could locate around the edge of the space, trading off the regular footfall in the area. To deliver the new civic space, a certain proportion of the existing surface car parking could be decked on a new multi-level car park structure. This decked car park will release land adjacent to the station to allow for more creative uses, such as markets or festivals, to enrich the village experience.



Illustrative Layout
Policy GW1

11.13 Policy DM13 of the draft Maidstone local plan sets out a strategy for sustainable transport that includes rail travel. Furthermore, one of the criteria for Staplehurst being designated a RSC was the presence of a mainline railway station so it does not seem unreasonable to seek greater investment in the station in return for the housing numbers being allocated in Staplehurst.

11.14 Policy GW1 of this neighbourhood plan expands on the relevant Local Plan policies by requiring a redevelopment that creates a positive new approach to the village; including a new landscaped civic space and small-scale retail and commercial opportunities around the station.

11.15 Set out here is a concept for the station area based on the sketch scheme generated at the three day design forum in October 2013. Relocating a proportion of the existing surface car park into a decked structure will release land that can be landscaped into a small-scale, attractive market square.

11.16 This space will still be able to accommodate parked cars but will also be able to host events and other activities, especially at weekends when demand for parking spaces at the station is often lower than during the working week.

11.17 While the village has excellent green open spaces, such as Surrenden Field and Jubilee Field, it currently lacks a purpose built market square or other similar dedicated hard space that can be used for markets or other small temporary events. Such places can go a long way to giving a village a positive sense of identity as well as being a venue for functions and events that can bring the community together.

11.18 For the formal red line boundary drawing of this site, please see the diagram on page 45.

This diagram has been prepared to provide guidance to potential developers. It represents many of the comments received through the consultation process. It is a preliminary design sketch only and is subject to information available at the time. It is not subject to measured survey, legal, structural, soil investigation, utilities survey, daylight/sunlight, topographical, mechanical and electrical, highways and access rights surveys, or planning permissions.

Location of the station area to be redeveloped (Policy GW1).

Neighbourhood Plan Objective 10

Safeguard the green and rural feel to the approach to Staplehurst from the south.

11.19 The approach to the village from the south is important as it helps to define and identify Staplehurst as a village set within countryside. The close proximity of the village's built elements with the surrounding countryside gives this approach a distinctive rural feel.

11.20 This neighbourhood plan aims to protect this by supporting the larger development allocations in the northern part of the village; any small-scale infill development in the southern part of Staplehurst must be sensitive to its environment. The density, size and design of any small-scale infill development must be appropriate to the context and help safeguard the rural nature of the southerly approach.

The approach to the village from the south is characterised by strong green edges. This needs to be maintained and enhanced.

Neighbourhood Plan Objective 11

Create defined and welcoming gateways to the village when approached from the west, via the Marden Road and from the east, via the Headcorn Road.

11.21 The gateways in and out of the village along the Marden Road and Headcorn Road are very important in helping to define the extent of the village. They require distinctive features to mark the entrance to the village and to define the village as separate from the surrounding countryside. New junctions along these east and west routes to allow access to new areas of housing must be sensitive and small-scale in keeping with the village qualities and characteristics.

11.22 Large traffic-engineering solutions (e.g. roundabouts with visually intrusive traffic management paraphernalia such as chevron boards and white paint) must be avoided and more sensitive junction designs introduced instead. This approach does not necessarily exclude roundabouts, but their design needs to be responsive to the needs of pedestrians and cyclists and also be aesthetically appropriate to a village setting.

Positive new gateways to the village need to be introduced as part of new developments to the east and the west.

EDGES THEME (Policy Code E)

"Identify and strengthen specific green edges to deliver a long-term edge to the village; and improve public access to the countryside beyond"

Policy Theme Background

12.1 An understandable concern of many residents in Staplehurst is where and when will expansion stop? What will prevent the village growing even more than already planned? In response to this, the neighbourhood plan is looking to define new edges to Staplehurst that will become permanent boundaries to the village.

12.2 The village edges need to be designed in a way that will provide a sense of enclosure to the village, prevent unchecked sprawl and ensure that new areas of homes can positively respond to the landscape. New housing clusters also need to be the right scale and in the right location and not be large anonymous housing estates.

12.3 The new village edges must also encourage public access to the countryside beyond. Many residents value living close to some of the most attractive countryside in England, but easy access can be frustrated through blocked footpaths or private ownerships. Opening up more land around the new edges of Staplehurst to create highly-valued recreational routes will be one way to ensure the new village edges have a sense of permanence and will reassure village residents that growth will not continue ever outwards.

POLICY E1

ALL NEW DEVELOPMENT SITES ON THE EDGE SHOULD INTEGRATE POSITIVE PLANTING AND RECREATIONAL ROUTES ALONG THEIR BOUNDARIES AND WITHIN THEIR LAYOUTS TO HELP DEFINE A LONG TERM EDGE TO THE VILLAGE AND RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF RESIDENTS ON THE EXISTING VILLAGE EDGE.

Policy Supporting Text

12.4 In order to prevent planned housing developments from unchecked further expansion, the integration of green spaces and recreational routes along the boundaries of development sites should seek to provide clearly defined edges. The integration of green spaces immediately to the east and west of the new developments, using new public rights of way and recreational spaces, must be incorporated into any new designs. These will help connect the new housing layouts to the countryside beyond and connected layouts will allow existing residents better access too. The formation of clearly defined edges will provide natural boundaries to help fix housing growth over the long term. The questionnaires returned as part of the consultation events suggested what could be incorporated into the village edges and these include:

- agriculture
- circular footpaths
- woodland
- cycleways
- allotments
- fitness trails
- wetlands
- sports
- low density villas

12.5 Developers working up more detailed designs for housing allocations are directed to this list of ideas to help inform the edge conditions of new areas of housing. Furthermore, new developments must be designed in a sensitive way to respond to the needs and requirements of existing village residents who live on what is currently the outer edge of Staplehurst.

12.6 On pages 48 — 49 there are a series of illustrative sketches that help demonstrate some of the different ways of appropriately implementing Policy E1. These illustrative examples have been included to help developers and landowners understand the type of positive edge conditions that are sought by the neighbourhood plan.

12.7 The inclusion of these edge examples was recommended by the examiner. Each example is supported by an illustrative sketch and design principle diagram together with some supporting text. These examples help to make clear the ideas discussed in relation to new housing development, how green edges can be identified and ways in which they can be strengthened.

12.8 When done in a positive and thoughtful way, such designs can help address the need for Staplehurst to develop a sense of enclosure, help prevent unchecked sprawl, help ensure that new housing development complements the rural surroundings and will encourage public access to the countryside beyond.

EDGE EXAMPLE 01

12.9 The sketch above demonstrates how new development can promote the recreational use of the adjacent landscapes through layout and orientation. These houses face outwards across an open playing field and provide natural surveillance by overlooking the space. This encourages new and existing residents to enjoy the green space, promoting social integration. The supporting diagram below shows how this creates a defensible edge to the development over the longer term, with built form on one side and open countryside on the other, mutually supportive of one another.

Furthermore, such outward-facing homes are likely to encourage high quality design, due to their relatively high profile visibility.

Design principle 01
Development edge formed from outward-looking homes overlooking open space.

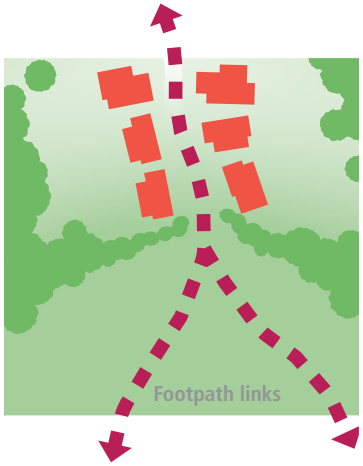
EDGE EXAMPLE 02

12.10 The sketch above highlights a street on the edge lined with new tree-planting. The new planting can help further define a single-sided street. Introducing a shared access route, primarily for use by pedestrians and cyclists, will create an appealing place and therefore help encourage access into the adjacent countryside. Routes like these could become part of a wider cycling and walking scheme for Staplehurst, with this path connecting to a network across the parish. The supporting diagram below shows the countryside edge further defined by new tree planting. This helps maintains a strong rural feel to the new built edges where they meet the countryside beyond.

Design principle 02
Countryside edge strengthened with new tree planting.

EDGE EXAMPLE 03

12.11 This third sketch above visualises a "gateway" development that helps to frame access between the built areas and the wider landscape. This type of development form could be introduced at certain points along the edge, helping to define clear and legible routes. The well-designed development edges overlook the footpath, providing a sense of natural surveillance that will enhance the experience of using the route, in particular after dark.
The supporting diagram below shows how specific access and movement points between new development and the open countryside can be better emphasised through gateway forms of this type, with the housing providing a sense of arrival from the rural to the residential.



Design principle 03
Gateway development forms help frame specific access points.

HOUSING THEME (Policy Code H)

"Ensure 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 high quality and respond appropriately to the Kentish context"

Policy Theme Background

13.1 It is inevitable that Staplehurst will be required to accommodate new homes over the coming years. Therefore, the neighbourhood plan is being prepared on the basis that a substantial number of new houses will be built. The Maidstone Borough Council (Regulation 18) Local Plan suggests 650 new homes could built in Staplehurst between now and 2031.

13.2 Policy SP3 in the draft Maidstone Borough Council local plan designates Staplehurst a Rural Service Centre — that is a large settlement suitable for additional houses. Policy H1(36) is a housing allocation to the west of the village. This is for 250 new homes on land known as Hen and Duckhurst Farm. Policy H1(37) is a housing allocation to the east of the village and this is for 400 new homes on land known as Fishers Farm. Although the draft housing numbers have now been published, 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.

13.3 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. Although no final decisions have been taken about the sites, the results of the three day design forum in October 2013 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. The Maidstone Borough Council housing allocations reflect these broad locations.

13.4 How can housing in these locations be designed in a way that best responds to local factors? 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 assessment (page 22) and the Staplehurst Village Design Statement (2005) to inform the design of all house types and site layouts. It is not the role of the neighbourhood plan to provide detailed design guidance for how sites should be developed but it does provide clear advice on the design principles that must underpin any future proposals.

13.5 All future planning applications must be developed through consultation with the communities that live immediately adjacent to the site and with the wider community too. A variety of drawings and reports need to be produced that will give confidence that 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, Staplehurst Rural Settlement Group and Maidstone Borough Council) will be essential.

13.7 Finally, Maidstone Borough Council has made a commitment to renew efforts to engage with foul water utility providers and other organisations with responsibility for managing water, including surface water, in the borough concerning future infrastructure provision both to respond to the current concerns and issues arising from consideration of the housing needs in the future, particularly for Headcorn and Staplehurst.

POLICY H1

THE DESIGN OF NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS SHOULD BE PRINCIPALLY INFORMED BY THE TRADITIONAL FORM, LAYOUT, CHARACTER AND STYLE OF THE VILLAGE'S VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE.

Policy Supporting Text

13.8 Any new housing development must be shaped and influenced by the traditional character and style of the village. The Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan requires all new developments to reference the local context and demonstrate the use of high quality materials and styles appropriate to the place. See village character assessment on pages 22 — 23.

13.9 For example, any small-scale in-fill developments that may come forward in the south of the village must be sensitive to the rural and more historic nature of the village, by reflecting the character of housing in proximity to countryside. New housing within the larger allocations to the east and west of the village may be required to develop their own distinctive characters, to add to the overall variety and mix to be found within the village. The aim for all new developments must be for them to leave a positive architectural legacy, to be sensitive to their local context and environment and add to the positive character of the village.

13.10 Policy H1 does not exclude innovation or modern and contemporary architecture. Such designs are encouraged across the parish. Where appropriate, architects and designers are encouraged to create new designs that reflect both the local context and the current technology and materials of the era within which they will be built.

The variety and quality of architecture in the village, both the modern and the more established, are to be celebrated and new development should leave a positive legacy.

POLICY H2

NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS SHOULD INCORPORATE, WHERE POSSIBLE, DESIGN FEATURES TO PROMOTE ENERGY AND WATER EFFICIENCY, ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE ELDERLY AND THOSE WITH RESTRICTED MOBILITY AND FLEXIBLE SPACES THAT WOULD SUPPORT WORKING FROM HOME.

Policy Supporting Text

13.11 The neighbourhood plan encourages future housing development to support modern lifestyles through innovative design. These will include reducing energy costs through meeting high design standards as well as internal space standards and layouts that will encourage working from home. Design details, such as the ability to receive parcels securely when not at home, storage of several bicycles, flexible use of garage and garden spaces and the effective storage of waste and recycling bins will be encouraged.

13.12 New housing should seek to promote the efficient use of water and energy, as well as accessibility for the elderly and those with restricted mobility. Other features, including flexible internal space to support working from home, will be encouraged.

Are the house types most recently constructed in Staplehurst still suitable for modern lifestyles? What innovations should be included for the future?

POLICY H3

A RANGE OF APPROPRIATE TENURES AND SIZES OF NEW PROPERTIES TO MEET LOCAL NEEDS AND DEMANDS WILL BE DELIVERED.

Policy Supporting Text

13.13 The type, tenure and size of future housing must reflect the local needs and demands of Staplehurst.

13.14 Affordable Housing Staplehurst Parish Council has carried out a housing needs survey (2010) which identifies a modest local demand for affordable housing. This plan therefore supports some key worker and shared ownership housing to allow children of local families to remain in the area. Developers and local housing associations must therefore provide affordable housing that prioritises local residents' needs and ensures a distribution of units across both individual developments and the whole village and parish. Affordable housing delivery during the plan period needs to be in conformity with the adopted Affordable Housing Development Plan Document (2006) prepared by Maidstone Borough Council.

13.15 Responsive Housing Future homes should be designed for a changing population. This may involve family homes and homes for an ageing population to provide a good social mix, supporting social cohesion and independent living. The size of new developments should also be reflective of local needs. The station in Staplehurst is an important feature of the village, which already attracts working-age adults with families to the village. Therefore an adequate amount of family-sized houses must be built as well as providing for smaller units and innovative hybrid housing that can respond to modern lifestyles. 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 be suitable for young professionals who have grown up in Staplehurst, now need regular access to London but wish to live in affordable accommodation within their home village.

POLICY H4*

DEVELOP LAND AT HEN AND DUCKHURST FARM FOR UP TO 250 HOUSING UNITS SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING PLANNING AND DESIGN CRITERIA:

1) Developers must provide an overall site master plan that shows a robust long term plan demonstrating how the land within the red line allocation can eventually be linked to the Lodge Road employment land to the north and east of the site.

2) Design details of a through-route, or "spine street", that will be capable of safely taking two-way traffic between the Marden Road and Lodge Road are required. This street needs to be fronted by high quality architecture and be planted with appropriate tree species to create a beautiful and verdant boulevard street that helps establish a distinctive sense of place. The street needs to be accessible and safe for all modes of travel.

3) The overall site master plan must also safeguard access point(s) to a future railway bridge crossing. The precise design and location of the new crossing to be determined through further design and feasibility work.

4) Proposals must demonstrate how new developments can be successfully integrated with the existing village while respecting the privacy, well-being and quality of life of residents currently living on the western edge of Staplehurst. Specific attention is needed with regard to points of access and existing views of open countryside.

5) The masterplan should incorporate a green infrastructure strategy, which designates sufficient space within the site to meet obligations linked to ecological requirements, such as the retention of mature hedgerows and trees and the creation of wetland habitats, linked to a SuDS implementation plan.

6) The site master plan needs to integrate positive planting and recreational routes along the boundaries to help define a long term edge to the village.

7) The inclusion of high quality play spaces and recreational areas to be integrated into the development.

8) The development makes provision for an adequate sewerage connection and for the protection of existing sewers on the site or their diversion, in accordance with the requirements of Southern Water.

** Link to Maidstone Borough Local Plan Preparation (Regulation 18) 2014 Appendix A Housing Allocations H1(36) - Hen and Duckhurst Farm.*

Policy Supporting Text

13.16 Future development to the west of the village must be complementary to the adjacent existing housing. It needs to be sensitive of the current situation while also successfully integrating with the wider village. New housing layouts should sensitively include the provision for a street network that will provide a choice of movements, both from the Marden Road to the south and from Lodge Road from the north. Which of these two connections is opened up first needs to be subject to a detailed phasing plan but both access points will be needed over the longer term. A new street capable of successfully accommodating through traffic needs to link the northern and southern access points.

13.17 The new layout should also successfully connect with the adjacent area of housing, with details of the nature of these links (e.g. vehicular, pedestrian, cyclist etc) to be the subject of detailed studies to be undertaken by the developer in cooperation with the local community and the parish council.

13.18 A feasible overall concept plan for the entire housing and employment areas will be required from developers prior to any implementation of early phases. Proposed housing and employment layouts must also ensure a new street to the north can be achieved over the longer term, connecting to a new railway bridge crossing. The timing and funding of this bridge link is still to be decided but in the first instance, the layout must not prejudice its future delivery.

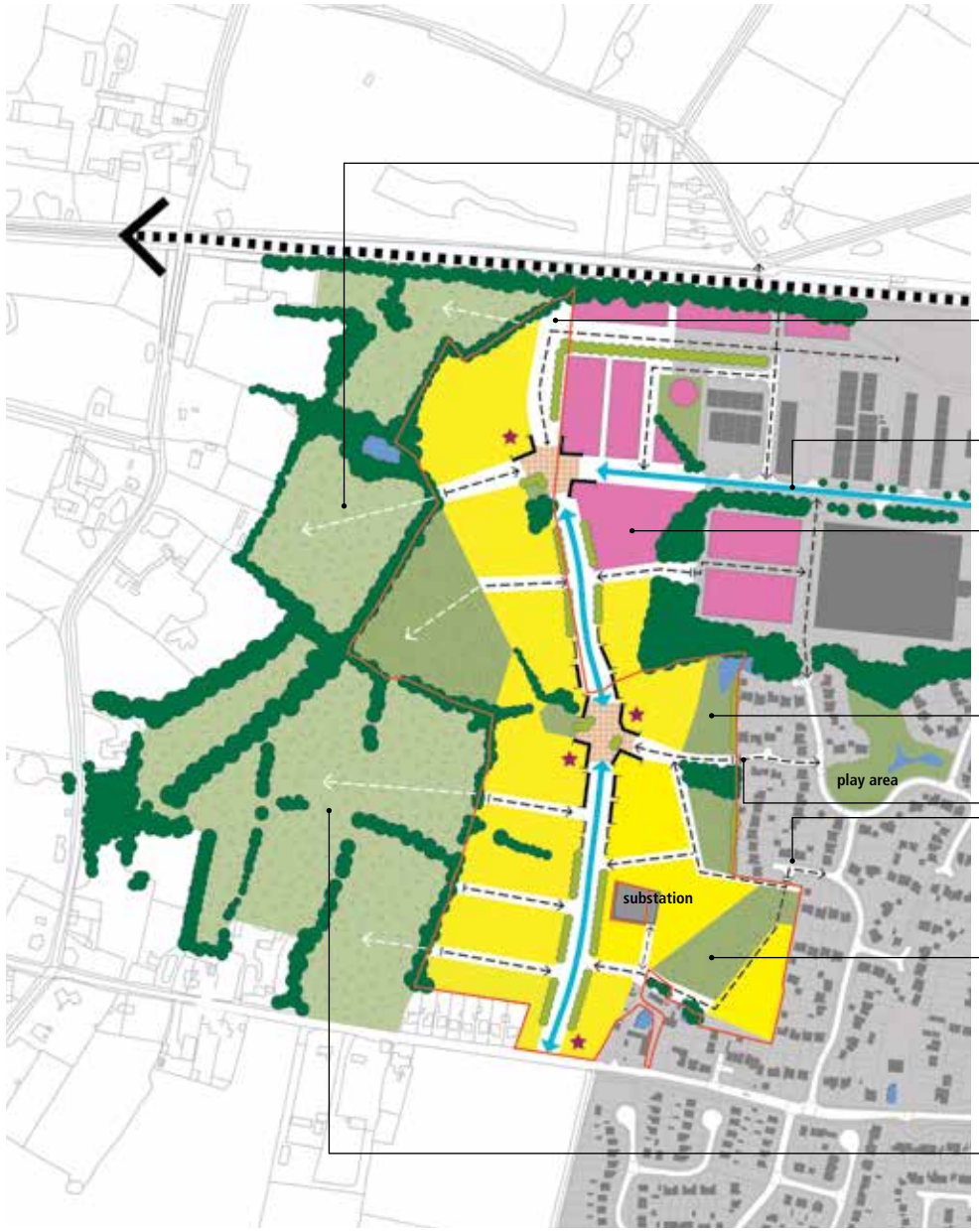
13.19 New housing in this area should include strong, green landscape features along the future street network. Developers will be required to use the village character assessment (page 22) and the Staplehurst Village Design Statement (2005) to inform the design of all house types and site layouts.

13.20 Dwellings on the western edge should be afforded views across open countryside. The integration of existing public rights of way and the planting of a green edge will add a strong and natural edge to the village. See Policy E1. To mitigate the impacts of flooding in the village, a further investigation is needed into how an attenuation pond system could be established. This could be integrated into an attractive green space for community use with an essential role in flood mitigation.

13.21 It is not the role of the neighbourhood plan to provide detailed design guidance for how this site should be developed but Policy H4 provides clear advice on the design principles that must underpin any future proposals. Future planning applications must be developed through consultation with the communities that live immediately adjacent to the site and with the wider community too. A variety of drawings and reports need to be produced that will give confidence that development can be achieved in the most effective and successful way possible.

13.22 There is a need for a historic landscape survey and historic landscape character assessment to inform the layout and master plan design and ensure important historic landscape features and heritage assets are suitably preserved and integrated into the new development. Prior to detailed designs, an appropriate archaeological assessment should be undertaken to identify any archaeological constraints or enhancements and to ensure suitable archaeological mitigation.

Some existing residents have views of the Oast Houses near to the Marden Road (far left) Can these views be retained? The site needs to be connected to Lodge Road (left).



Illustrative Layout Policy H4

Ensure good access to open countryside beyond the development site to the west.

Safeguard opportunity for new bridge crossing of the railway. Precise location and nature of the bridge to be determined.

Link between new development and Lodge Road required to provide access to the station and the wider network.

Integrate new employment land effectively through the creation of a transition zone

Edge design to respond to the needs and requirements of existing village residents

Pedestrian and cycle links needed here between existing development and new areas of housing to integrate communities. Width of links to be suitable for emergency vehicles.

Opportunity to keep land open to maintain existing view from existing development to Oast Houses at farm complex.

Ensure good access to open countryside beyond the development site to the west.

KEY

- Potential new residential areas
- Potential new employment areas
- Open green space
- New proposed planting
- Existing planting to be maintained and strengthened
- Accessible countryside beyond the site development
- Existing development
- Potential new civic spaces to provide positive character at street junctions
- Strong built edges to define the street
- Opportunity to introduce a new landmark architectural feature
- Local links
- Strategic links

NORTH

This diagram has been prepared to provide guidance to potential developers. It represents many of the comments received through the consultation process. It is a preliminary design sketch only and is subject to information available at the time. It is not subject to measured survey, legal, structural, soil investigation, utilities survey, daylight/sunlight, topographical, mechanical and electrical, highways and access rights surveys, or planning permissions.

Policy H4 Illustrative design and planning principles for development of land west of the village.

Policy H4 **Location of the land for housing at Hen and Duckhurst Farm.**

POLICY H5*

DEVELOP LAND AT FISHERS FARM FOR UP TO 400 HOUSING UNITS SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING PLANNING AND DESIGN CRITERIA:

1) Developers must provide an overall site master plan that shows a robust long term plan demonstrating how the land within the red line allocation can be linked to Sweetlands/Pile Lane and the wider countryside to the east of Staplehurst.

2) Design details of a connected series of streets across the development will be required, showing how the whole site can be successfully connected to the existing network at Headcorn Road and Sweetlands/Pile Lane.

3) Proposals must demonstrate how new developments can be successfully integrated with the existing village while respecting the privacy, well-being and quality of life of residents currently living on the eastern edge of Staplehurst. Specific attention is needed with regard to points of access and existing views of open countryside.

** Link to Maidstone Borough Local Plan Preparation (Regulation 18) 2014 Appendix A Housing Allocations H1(37) - Fishers Farm, Fishers Road, Staplehurst.*

4) The masterplan should include a green infrastructure strategy, which designates sufficient space within the site to meet obligations linked to ecological requirements, such as retention of mature hedgerows and trees and the creation of wetland habitats, linked to a SuDS implementation plan. Space should also be designated for informal recreation and children's play as part of the green infrastructure strategy.

5) The site master plan needs to integrate positive planting and recreational routes along the boundaries to help define a long term edge to the village.

6) The inclusion of high quality play spaces and recreational areas to be integrated into the development.

7) The development makes provision for an adequate sewerage connection and for the protection of existing sewers on the site or their diversion, in accordance with the requirements of Southern Water.

8) The layout of the proposed development should be designated to take into account the proximity of the Staplehurst Wastewater Treatment works to the north of the site, in order to safeguard residential amenities from potential smell and pollution.

Policy Supporting Text

13.23 This is the larger of the two housing allocations. As with the smaller allocation to the west, development here must be complementary to the adjacent existing housing. It needs to be sensitive of the current situation while also successfully integrating with the wider village.

13.24 Access from the south via the Headcorn Road is likely to be a main entry and exit point but due to the very restricted access opportunities via Fishers Road and Newlyn Drive/Hurst Close, a link is required to the east to connect with Sweetlands/Pile Lane. Without such a link, there is a risk that the site will be developed as a cul-de-sac, with a single point of access from the Headcorn Road, placing unnecessary pressure on the Headcorn Road and the Cuckold's Corner crossroads. A feasible and tested overall concept plan for the entire housing allocation is required from the developers prior to any planning permission for the implementation of early phases.

13.25 Given the relatively large size of this allocation, an overall concept plan will be required showing how different areas of character could be developed, using different densities and building types. For example, higher density developments could be located along the strategic routes while lower density forms could be located towards the outer edges. Higher density areas within the centre of the site can be offset by careful integration of green open spaces to create greens, play spaces and important social and community spaces for new and existing residents. The relatively close proximity to nearby facilities, including Jubilee Field to the south east and the railway station to the west, should be capitalised on with good walking and cycling routes to encourage easy and safe access by non-car modes.

How can potential negative impacts on existing adjacent residents (far left) be designed out? The edge locations mark the transition between the village and open countryside (left) and development proposals needs to acknowledge this.

13.26 The design must creatively incorporate much of the existing ecology and landscape and should maintain well-developed green edge adjacent to Pile Lane, the dog track and the Jubilee Field.

13.27 Development in the southern part of the allocation, adjacent to the Headcorn Road should have a strong edge built, set back behind a landscape belt. This will provide a positive new edge to the village approach, combining built form with natural features. The design of this southern edge needs to create a welcoming edge to Staplehurst to those arriving from the east. Development of the northern part of the allocation should look to integrate existing farm buildings and built structures at Fishers Farm. The incorporation of older building into a new development can add character and value if delivered in an appropriate way.

13.28 It is not the role of the neighbourhood plan to provide detailed design guidance for how this site should be developed but Policy H5 provides clear advice on the design principles that must underpin any future proposals. Future planning applications must be developed through consultation with the communities that live immediately adjacent to the site and with the wider community too. A variety of drawings and reports needs to be produced that will give confidence that development can be achieved in the most effective and successful way possible.

13.29 There is a need for a historic landscape survey and historic landscape character assessment to inform the layout and master plan design and ensure important historic landscape features and heritage assets are suitably preserved and integrated into the new development. Prior to detailed designs, an appropriate archaeological assessment should be undertaken to identify any archaeological constraints or enhancements and to ensure suitable archaeological mitigation.

The development sites to both the east and west of the village should use good architecture and design to positively mark the transition between the built-up area of Staplehurst and open countryside beyond.

KEY

- Potential new residential areas
- Potential new employment areas
- Open green space
- New proposed planting
- Existing planting to be maintained and strengthened
- Accessible countryside beyond the site development
- Existing development
- Potential new civic spaces to provide positive character at street junctions
- Strong built edges to define the street
- Opportunity to introduce a new landmark architectural feature
- Local links
- Strategic links

NORTH

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Illustrative Layout Policy H5

Access to east via Couchman Green Lane to allow movement to and from the site without travelling through the village

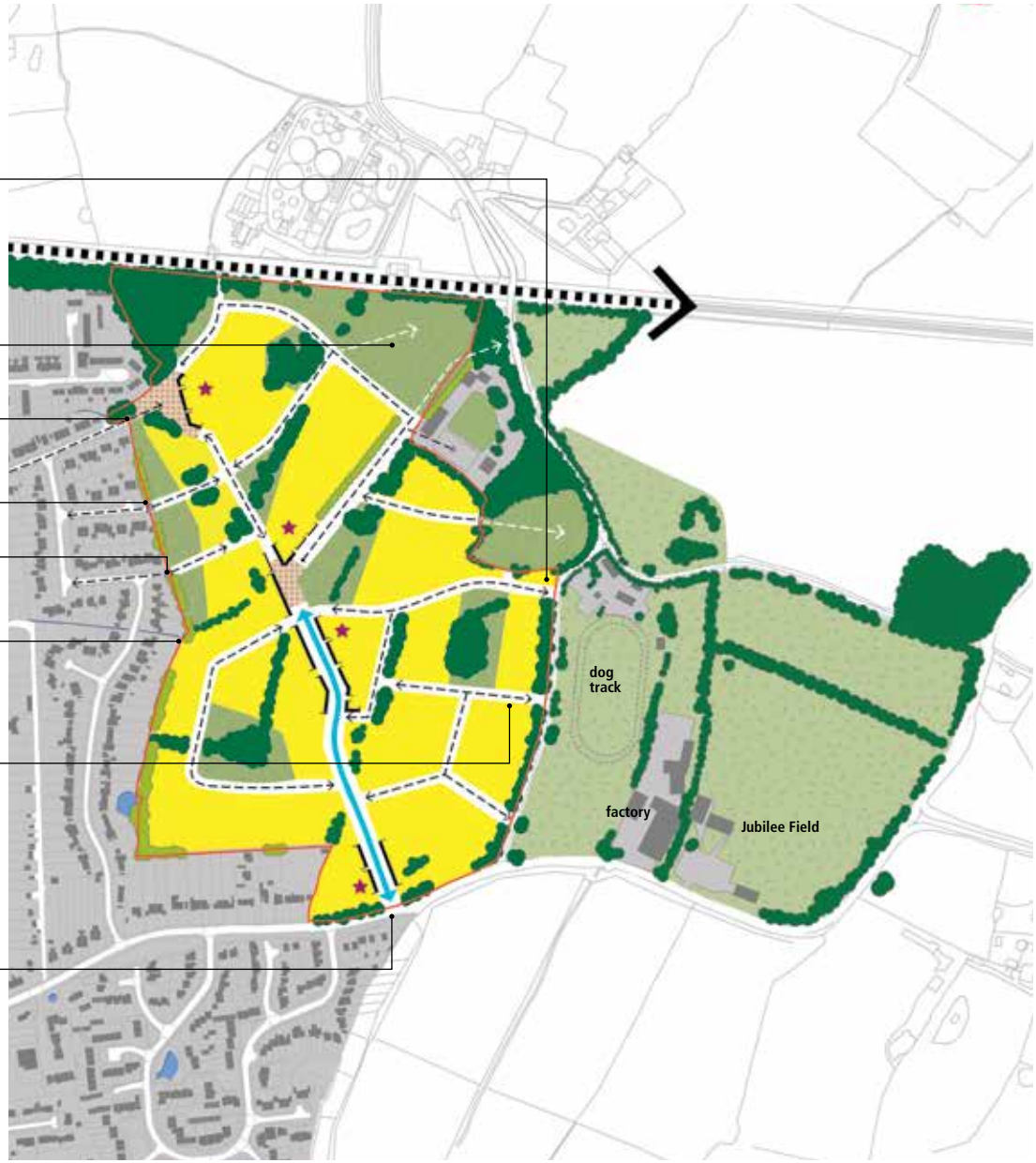
Ensure good access to open countryside beyond the development site to the east.

Pedestrian and cycle links needed here between existing development and new areas of housing to integrate communities. Width of links to be suitable for emergency vehicles.

Edge design to respond to the needs and requirements of existing village residents

Links needed to land beyond the village via Pile Lane and out towards the east

Access from south via Headcorn Road, with welcoming gateway feature



Policy H5 Illustrative design and planning principles for development of land east of the village.

Policy H5 **Location of the land for housing at Fishers Farm.**

POLICY H6

PROTECT THE EXISTING EMPLOYMENT FACILITIES AT LODGE ROAD AND ENHANCE AND EXPAND THE AREA AS A MIXED-USE RESIDENTIAL AND EMPLOYMENT AREA SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

1) Protection of existing businesses and operations.

2) No net loss of employment floor space site.

3) Developers must provide an overall site master plan to demonstrate how mixed-use residential and employment land within the red line allocation can be linked to residential land to the west and south west of the site allocation.

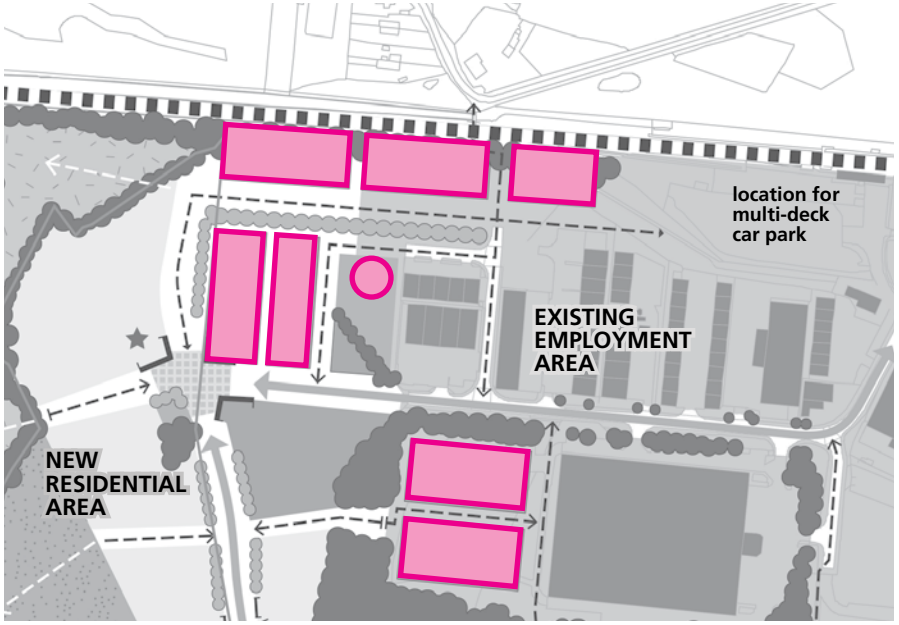
Policy Supporting Text

13.30 There is an opportunity to expand the existing employment cluster at Lodge Road through new development immediately to the west and north of the existing industrial and employment units. New buildings here need not necessarily reflect the current building typologies but instead could be smaller-scale and more rural in their design (e.g. two or three storey courtyard schemes). These new units could also include a significant amount of residential use, such as small apartments in the upper floors. Development of this type could help form a "transition zone" between the existing employment buildings to the east and the new residential area to the west at Hen and Duckhurst Farm.

The Lodge Road employment area is a vital asset to the parish.

Policy H6 Location of the land for employment and housing.

Illustrative Layout
Policy H6



This plan shows an illustrative layout for the land that lies between the existing employment area and the new allocated residential area. The blocks shown in pink could be developed as rural courtyard employment areas, similar to those shown in the photographs (page 61).

This diagram has been prepared to provide guidance to potential developers. It represents many of the comments received through the consultation process. It is a preliminary design sketch only and is subject to information available at the time. It is not subject to measured survey, legal, structural, soil investigation, utilities survey, daylight/sunlight, topographical, mechanical and electrical, highways and access rights surveys, or planning permissions.

Clockwise from top left:

- **Ashford, Kent**
- **Moulton St Mary, Norfolk**
- **Parkway Farm, Dorset**
- **Poundbury, Dorset**
- **Hallastson, Herefordshire**
- **Cuckfield, Sussex**
- **Priston, Somerset**
- **Parkway Farm, Dorset**

Neighbourhood Plan Objective 12

Support for a strong local economy with good access to jobs and employment opportunities.

13.31 While it is recognised that Staplehurst is an important village for rail commuters travelling to London there is also a need to strengthen and support a local economy that is not reliant on people leaving the village to work. The village already accommodates many local firms and employers in the Lodge Road industrial area and this is of great value to the local economy.

13.32 Other employment opportunities can be found in the village heart, comprising the library, primary school, Village Centre, parade of shops, youth club, health centre and church. Further investment in the parade could create more workshop or small office spaces, either above the shops or immediately behind in new courtyard-style developments. The neighbourhood plan will also support farm diversification in outlying areas of the parish, such as small-scale sensitive employment developments (e.g. courtyard schemes) and tourist accommodation.

13.33 Further new employment uses could be generated adjacent to the station as part of the investment in new public realm. It is encouraged that land to the east of the station is safeguarded for small workshop, small-scale retail or office uses. These spaces could be flexible units to help support small and emerging business, as well as existing home-workers in the parish.

The station and its immediate surroundings have been identified for future investment.

PLAN MONITORING

14.1 Monitoring is an essential and continuous part of the plan-making process. The Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan will be monitored by Maidstone Borough Council to assess whether it is supporting and delivering the aims of the Local Plan strategy.

14.2 The monitoring indicators identified are a mix of relevant indicators drawn from a number of sources including the National Planning Policy Framework, indicators identified in the Sustainability Appraisal of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan and local indicators identified in respect of key policies of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan.

14.3 The key indicators for the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan will be on delivery of community infrastructure, employment, housing and positive environmental change.

14.4 General Delivery Indicators

- Development on allocated land and sites with planning permission.
- Percentage of completions on previously developed land, including planning permissions implemented involving planning condition(s) for remediation.

14.5 Employment Indicators

- Changes (up or down) in the number of companies/businesses (no. of VAT registered) located in the area
- Employment land lost or gained compared to other uses

14.6 Housing Indicators

- The number of dwelling completions that are provided relative to the Council's estimated provision
- Change in the total number of households
- Average densities on permitted housing sites
- Affordable housing completions

14.7 Environmental Indicators

- Levels of new open space provided, especially natural/semi-natural green space.
- Change to number of buildings on national and local lists of buildings at risk.
- The amount of open space/facility established by type relative to the standard.
- The number of permissions granted and implemented for renewable and low-carbon schemes and their expected levels of generation.
- The number of planning permissions granted for residential development in flood risk areas contrary to the advice of the Environment Agency.
- The number of developments which use sustainable drainage systems.
- The number of applications which do not receive approval for water supply and wastewater connection from the appropriate water company.
- Waste water treatment capacity.
- The amount of new habitat created, especially natural/semi-natural green space.
- Any monitoring undertaken of Kent Biodiversity Action Plan, including habitats created.

NEXT STEPS

15.1 This referendum version of the neighbourhood plan will be subject to referendum on 3rd November 2016, to be voted upon by the registered electors living within the Staplehurst Parish boundary.

15.2 An earlier version of this neighbourhood plan was submitted to Maidstone Borough Council in August 2015 and was subsequently approved by an independent examiner on 2nd August 2016, subject to various modifications. These modifications have since been enabled in this version of the plan.

15.3 Parish contacts for further information:

- **Mr. Mick Westwood, Clerk to the Parish Council**
- **Mr. Rory Silkin, Chairman of Staplehurst Parish Council**

The Parish Office, Village Centre, High Street, Staplehurst, Kent, TN12 0BJ.

SUPPORTING REPORTS

Submission Plan
July 2015

Basic Conditions Statement
July 2015

Consultation Statement
July 2015

Exhibition Posters
November 2014

Regulation 14 Plan
June 2014

Exhibition Posters
June 2014

Exhibition Slide Show
June 2014

Results of the Questionnaire
March 2014

Exhibition Posters
January 2014

Results of the Three Day Design Forum
October 2013

Results of the Village Visioning Event
September 2013

RELEVANT WEBLINKS

Staplehurst Parish Council
http://www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk/default.aspx

The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012
http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/637/contents/made

Maidstone Strategic Policy Framework 2015
http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/60907/Strategic-Policy-Framework.pdf.

Maidstone Strategic Housing Market Assessment Final Report January 2014
http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/44656/Strategic-Housing-Market-Assessment-2014.pdf

Maidstone Borough Local Plan (Regulation 18) Consultation 2014
http://dynamic.maidstone.gov.uk/pdf/Local%20Plan%20Regulation%2018.pdf

Maidstone Borough Conservation Areas
http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/business/planning/landscape,-heritage-and-design/conservation-areas

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STAPLEHURST NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN
REFERENDUM PLAN
September 2016

This plan has been prepared by:

Staplehurst Parish Council, The Parish Office, Village Centre, High Street, Staplehurst, Kent, TN12 0BJ.

Digital copies of this document can be downloaded from:

www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk
www.maidstone.gov.uk

Staplehurst Parish Council