

Supplementary Statement to Session 13A. Land at The Grange, George Street, Staplehurst.( Ref: 1998.)

Qn13.1 Does the site have any relevant planning history ?

An outline application for 33 dwellings (ref: 16/504201) was refused by the Borough Council in September 2016. However, a full application for the conversion of the Grange House and stables, which form part of the site, was approved by the Council (ref: 16/505263.)

More detailed information on this is set out in response to Qn 13.5 below.

Qn13.2 What is the site's policy status in the submitted Local Plan ?

It is outside the defined built-up area of Staplehurst and not subject to any policy constraints. The defined built up area of Staplehurst is considered by the Council to cease at the railway line. However, there are over 100 dwellings north of it. The plan therefore does not reflect what the reality of the situation.

Qn13.3 What is the site's policy status in any made or emerging neighbourhood plan

The site was identified in the October 2013 and the June 2014 drafts of the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan for residential development. Its allocation was supported by 66.5 % of the residents .Nevertheless, it was removed at the behest of the Borough Council and not included in the subsequent version of that plan.

Qn13.4 Is the site greenfield or previously developed (brownfield)land according to the definition in the glossary of the National Planning Policy Framework ?

It is mainly greenfield, but with a small element of brownfield. The brownfield element includes The Grange, its garages the stables the builders yard and the buildings used for storage.

Qn13.5 What previous consideration by the Council has been given to the site's development (eg inclusion in a Strategic Housing and Economic Development Land Availability Assessment (SHEDLAA) and does the representor have any comments on its conclusions ?

The site has been promoted through the local plan process and via a planning application.

The site is referenced HO-160 in the 2014 SHEDLAA. That assessment states that :  
"Site is located in the open countryside and removed from an established settlement

and associated services. Development would cause harm to the open character of the countryside.”

In response to this it must be stated that the assessment fails to take account of the fact that the site is just north of the railway station and is adjacent to substantial linear development along the A229. Furthermore, land immediately south of the railway (The Lodge) has recently been allocated for residential development.

The argument that development would harm the open character of the countryside could be applied to any greenfield site proposed for housing. Indeed, the Council has allocated numerous sites for housing that are subject to landscape and other restraint policies as shown in the Adopted local Plan.

An outline planning application ( ref: 16/504201) for 33 dwellings and a building for employment use was refused permission by the Borough Council in September 2016.

The reasons for refusal were that it was outside any defined settlement boundary, which would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area through an urbanising development that would be at odds with the prevailing pattern of development and policies ENV28 of the adopted Local Plan and SP17 of the Submitted Draft Local Plan.

This is a standard response to applications outside defined built up areas. It is based on the stance that, by having ( in their own assessment ) a five year supply of housing, the Council can refuse any greenfield application outside a settlement boundary.

Such a stance goes against the basic ethos of the National Planning Policy Framework. It also ignores the fact that the Council’s housing requirement for the period of the local plan, together with its five year housing land requirement, have yet to be determined.

It must be said that the applicants have paid particular attention to landscaping, ecology and the visual impact of the proposed development in order to ensure that the scheme would be acceptable. Their work was reflected in the fact that consultees did not object to the planning application on these matters.

Qn13.6 What is the site area and has a site plan been submitted which identifies the site ?

The application site was for an area of 2.11ha. The Masterplan of the site is attached.

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Qn13.7 What type and amount of development could be expected and at what density.

The outline application sought permission for 33 dwellings and a building for employment use. As stated above, permission has already been granted for the conversion of The Grange to B1 use.

The proposed dwellings, of which 40% were to be affordable, ranged from two bedroom bungalows to five bed family properties.

Qn13.8 When could development be delivered and at what rate ?

Development could begin as soon as reasonably possible after permission has been granted. The dwellings should be completed within 1-2 years.

Qn13.9 What evidence is there of the viability of the proposed development ?

The site is owned by a development company (Pickhill Developments), which has extensive experience in both residential and commercial development. No constraints have been identified by any of its consultants.

Qn13.10 Has the site been the subject of sustainability appraisal and does the Representer have any comments on its conclusion ?

The site was one of several considered in the URS 2014 Sustainability Appraisal. That document included the following statements:

The rejected sites are either located within open countryside, or adjacent to the settlement boundary but would cause significant harm to the open character of the countryside. These sites are generally divorced from Staplehurst village and development at these locations is considered unacceptable and do not conform to the spatial strategy.(para.12.13.4)

There are no employment sites proposed for allocation in Staplehurst. The employment and mixed use sites submitted are considered to be too far removed from the village. However, employment sites proposed at the other rural service centres and in Maidstone Urban Area provide local employment opportunities.(para. 12.13.5)

The SA findings show that access to a secondary school is not ideal in Staplehurst. Access to other basic services such as a primary school, GP/medical services and public transport differ at the various site options, although not to a major extent. In the main, the sites that are adjacent to the settlement boundary are most suitably located. (para.12.13.6)

In the 2016 Sustainability Appraisal, the site was considered to be a long way from a doctor's surgery and from a primary school. However, it scored highly in respect of access to a whole range of other services -which is not surprising since it is located on the edge of a Rural Service Centre.

Qn13.11 What constraints are there on the site's development and how could any adverse impacts be mitigated ?

The site is owned by a development company (Pickhill) who intend to develop it themselves. Moreover, they have secured the requisite finance for the proposals.