

Representation

Councillor Daphne Parvin:

Councillor Parvin is unable to attend the Committee Meeting but had intended to speak in support of the application. The following statement, taken from a letter from the Chairman of the CPRE Maidstone, would have been read by, and is fully supported by Councillor Parvin.

"It is recognized that Stockbury village is in the environmentally sensitive area of the countryside that is within the North Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Special Landscape Area and so is protected from inappropriate built development by Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000 saved policies ENV28, ENV33 and ENV34 and by Central Government's PPS7 paragraph 9 (ii). Generally additional dwellings in such a highly protected area would be deemed inappropriate development.

However there is provision for additional dwellings in such an area as long as any development scheme is part of a Rural Exception Site Policy designed to provide affordable housing in rural communities for local people as promulgated in PPS3 paragraph 30. "This enables small sites to be used specifically for affordable housing in small rural communities that would not normally be used for housing because, for example, they are subject to policies of restraint." The paragraph also states that such housing should be 'in perpetuity' and should seek to address the needs of the local community by accommodating households who have a local connection, "whilst ensuring that rural areas continue to develop as sustainable, mixed, inclusive communities." Such rural affordable housing is also accommodated in the North Downs AONB Management Plan.

It appears that this application satisfies most of the criteria for affordable local rural housing on exception sites.

- *Need has been established by several surveys which have sought to determine local affordable housing requirements;*
- *The involvement of a housing association has been established – the English Rural – to ensure funding and that the dwellings will remain affordable in perpetuity;*
- *The proposal is for a small number of dwellings which will be built to a relatively high standard, Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes and with attractive exteriors and so will not be seen as 'council housing' and English Rural has devised a landscape management and maintenance plan to ensure the attractiveness of the site remain over time;*
- *The site is just outside the Stockbury village settlement area but sufficiently close to the local facilities to be within walking distance for most of the likely occupants.*
- *There have been surveys to establish that any serious contamination of the site is very unlikely, and that the underlying chalk aquifer is unlikely to be*

damaged by the proposed built development providing the disposal of effluent scheme is agreed with the Environment Agency;

- *Most importantly there has been the involvement of Stockbury Parish Council with the proposal for additional local affordable housing. It is very important that this involvement continues and it has now been established that the Parish Council will be involved in the vetting of potential occupants identified by Rural Housing as seemingly suitable for the new rural affordable housing on the land east of South Street Road in Stockbury.*

Given the apparent suitability of the application site for the proposed 8 local needs housing unit the attitude of MBC Planning to the development proposals seem contrary to policies and to the situation of Stockbury village, which is a thriving local community with a large shop cum post office, a pub and a village hall which accommodates a considerable number of activities with a local following, the essence of a sustainable rural community within the very attractive landscape of the North Downs AONB. Therefore CPRE Maidstone strongly refutes the opinion apparently held by MBC Planners that Stockbury is not a sustainable community, and fully supports the views of Stockbury Parish Council which indeed has shown that it wishes to continue to support the community of Stockbury."

Officer Comment

I wish to confirm that Councillor Parvin was notified of this application initially on 26th April and again on 5th May with amended plans. Notification of the Committee Meeting was carried out on 14th July.

As outlined in the main report, it is acknowledged that there is national policy support for affordable rural housing, the general view being that such development can help to maintain a mix and a balance in a rural community and help to support local infrastructure and services. However, due to the lack of basic key services within the village or nearby, it is considered that Stockbury is not a sustainable village and therefore not a suitable location for additional housing. The provision of more housing at Stockbury would basically increase and exacerbate unsustainable car usage to essential services, which goes against the aims of delivering sustainable development.

In this case, it is considered that the significant visual damage to the nationally protected AONB caused by the development and fundamental unsustainable nature of the location and thus the development is so great that it outweighs other considerations.

Refuse & Emergency Vehicles

Tracking diagrams for refuse and emergency vehicles have been provided which demonstrate that there is sufficient space for a fire engine to enter the site and turn. However, it is apparent that a refuse vehicle would not be able to turn adequately into the site. As such, refuse vehicles would either have to wait on South Street Road outside the site for collection, or potentially reverse on or off the site using the farmer's access at the south end of the site.

The Kent Highways Engineer has inspected the tracking diagrams and has stated that, *"as the traffic flows along South Street Road are low and speeds are not*

high, the vehicle could collect from South Street Road or reverse into the access without causing a safety problem.”

Officer Comment

I agree that due to the limited speeds and traffic along South Street Road, its relative straightness and good visibility at the access to the site, any refuse vehicle waiting on the road, which would happen at present for other properties, or reversing into or out of the site, would not be unsafe or warrant grounds for refusal.

RECOMMENDATION

My recommendation is unchanged:

REFUSE PLANNING PERMISSION