

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

14 JANUARY 2015

REFERENCES FROM COUNCIL

1. PETITION - ALLOCATION OF HOUSING SITES - HARRIETSHAM

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Council held on 10 December 2014, a petition in the following terms was presented by Mr Mike Williams:

Harrietsham Against Reckless Development has been formed by villagers concerned about the proposed scale of expansion of our lovely village.

This petition calls for our Parish Council and Maidstone Borough Council to:

Reduce the proposed expansion of Harrietsham to a more proportionate level, similar to other rural villages;

Refuse any development on greenfield sites of special landscape value and to prioritise brownfield sites; and

Refuse any major development off minor village roads.

In presenting the petition, Mr Williams said that Harrietsham was a small rural village with very few facilities. It was not a rural service centre and it was not a suitable or sustainable location for the housing growth proposed. Local residents were concerned about the level and location of the growth proposed and the impact on the character of the village and local infrastructure. The Council should lobby central government to direct growth away from sensitive greenfield sites and small rural villages to more appropriate locations.

- 1.2 During the discussion on the petition, Members made a number of points, including:

- The Council should be doing more to influence national debate and central government policy on planning and other issues.
- It was naive to suggest that there was no connection between the rural service centre/larger village designation and larger housing numbers. There was a connection and it was necessary to consider whether this was the right approach. Consideration

should be given to the adequacy of infrastructure in these areas to support the development proposed.

- The absence of a national strategy for the distribution of population and the implications for planning at district level had been debated at the Town and Country Planning Conference, and concerns were being fed back at the highest level. However, whichever approach was adopted the same number of houses would be required.
- The policy regarding rural service centres/larger village designations was underwritten by hierarchical settlement work based upon an assessment of the infrastructure capacity.
- Harrietsham should not be designated as a rural service centre; it was a small village with few facilities. The housing sites proposed in the draft Local Plan, one of which was a designated receptor site, were not suitable and should not be considered.
- This was not just a rural issue. Significant housing development was proposed in deprived urban areas with limited social infrastructure and green spaces.
- In the NPPF there was a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The trajectory of growth for Maidstone was not sustainable and if the current trajectory of growth continued beyond 2031, there was a risk that the character of the Borough would be destroyed and that it would become a southern outlier of the Medway towns.
- The projected level of housing development was unprecedented in this Borough and had implications for quality of life etc.
- The type of development now coming forward (larger houses on greenfield sites) was being promoted by a strong developer lobby of central government, but with the NPPF the Council had fewer tools to manage this growth. The Council should work with MPs and others to form a lobby group to promote development in areas that can accommodate it.
- There was a national need for housing with demand exceeding supply. Some Parish Councils like Harrietsham had taken the opportunity to promote Neighbourhood Plans to shape new development in their areas. Local residents would be able to vote on the adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan and to submit views to the Borough Council during the next round of consultation on the draft Local Plan.

- The Council should have taken the opportunity in the past to ensure that housing development was supported by appropriate infrastructure. A strategic approach was now required to prevent inappropriate developer-led housing provision in village locations.
- There was a need to build more homes and these should be affordable and accessible. It would be popular to say that there would be no housing growth in Harrietsham, but this was not possible. The Council was seeking to prioritise the development of brownfield sites, but there were very few available.
- Harrietsham, with its railway station and proximity to the M20 motorway, was a sustainable location for development.

1.3 The Council agreed that the petition and the points raised during the debate be referred to the Cabinet for consideration.

1.4 RECOMMENDED:

1.4.1 That the Cabinet consider the petition and the points made by Members during the Council debate.

2. PETITION - SUTTON VALENCE – DESIGNATION AS A LARGER VILLAGE

2.1 At the meeting of the Council held on 10 December 2014, a petition in the following terms was presented by Councillor Mrs Eileen Riden, the Chairman of Sutton Valence Parish Council:

We, the undersigned, object to Maidstone Council's plans for Sutton Valence to be designated a "larger village" leading to increased housing development. This threatens to change the cherished rural nature of our Parish, overwhelm local infrastructure and amenities, threaten greenfield sites, and add to traffic and parking congestion. We further call upon Maidstone Council to recognise the constraints to growth in Sutton Valence and ensure delivery of levels and types of housing which will respond to local population trends and needs.

In presenting the petition, Councillor Mrs Riden said that the Parish Council only became aware of the designation of Sutton Valence as a "larger village" when the Borough Council sent a letter to landowners and developers asking them to submit sites for possible housing development. As a result five applications had been submitted, all for development on greenfield sites. This would increase the size of the Parish by 20% with a consequential detrimental impact on the already limited local infrastructure. Local residents were not against development appropriate to the needs of the Parish (modest, affordable homes for young people and smaller developments for

older people), and work had commenced on a Neighbourhood Plan. Sutton Valence was set in a beautiful rural area on the Greensand Ridge which the Borough Council was seeking to protect in the Local Plan. The designation of the village as a "larger village" should be taken out of the draft Local Plan.

2.2 During the discussion on the petition, Members made a number of points, including:

- Sutton Valence was a historic village with limited infrastructure. The housing numbers proposed were too large and should be reduced. The "larger village" designation was a magnet for developers and should be removed.
- Different circumstances applied to the development of Sutton Valence due to its position on the Greensand Ridge which was more unspoiled than the Kent Downs with traditional farm patterns and important views. With the loss of policies relating to Special Landscape Areas, the Council had fewer tools to manage development on the Greensand Ridge. Priority should have been given to the development of brownfield sites in the draft Local Plan.
- The Council needed to be absolutely certain before the examination in public that it had taken into account the most up to date decisions and guidance from the Planning Inspectorate and that it had re-examined all assumptions to ensure that it was not over providing for housing need.
- The evidence base for the settlement hierarchy should be re-examined to ensure that development is spread at appropriate locations across the Borough. Some Parishes needed managed development to maintain the services they have got.
- The updated "objectively assessed need" for new housing was for 18,600 dwellings during the period 2011-31 (a reduction in the total requirement by some 1,000 dwellings compared with the main Strategic Housing Market Assessment report). The Council could attempt to reduce this figure, but there was a risk that an unrealistically low figure would fail at the Examination in Public and housing will be imposed on the Borough in the wrong places.
- The housing growth proposed in Sutton Valence over the Plan period was relatively modest.
- Parish Councils were the first tier of local government and were asking the Borough Council to listen to their views. They accepted the need for appropriate development and were

preparing Neighbourhood Plans, but they also understood the constraints and their views should be considered.

2.3 The Council agreed that the petition and the points raised during the debate be referred to the Cabinet for consideration.

2.4 RECOMMENDED:

2.4.1 That the Cabinet consider the petition and the points made by Members during the Council debate.

NOTE: A briefing note provided by the Head of Planning and Development to assist the Council in its consideration of these petitions is attached as Appendix A.