

Maidstone Borough Council

Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee: 18th August 2015

Item: 15 - Landscapes of Local Value (supplementary report)

Urgent Update

Correspondence as attached has been received regarding the above item from:

11.08.15	Ms Peta Grant, Weald of Kent Protection Society
17.08.15	Mrs Amanda Broadhurst, Harrietsham Parish Council
17.08.15	Ms Henny Shotter
17.08.15	Ms Margot McFarlane, Lenham Parish Council (part).
17.07.15	Mr Sandy McKenzie

The substantive issues raised in the above correspondence will be responded to in the oral presentation of the supplementary report.

From: Peta Grant [mailto:petagrants@me.com]
Sent: 11 August 2015 14:17
To: Rob Jarman
Cc: Rosemary Taylor
Subject: Landscapes of Local Value

Dear Rob,

Landscapes of Local Value

WKPS understand that Maidstone Borough Council's Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee has, on its agenda for the meeting on 18 August, a proposal to remove all parts of the Low Weald from being designated Landscapes of Local Value, or SSSI as in the case of the Beult River Valley. This is an area of open countryside which we believe needs the full and continued protection of the local authority.

We are seriously concerned about the possibility that any consideration of landscape values and its contribution to the enjoyment of the countryside will be removed from the planning process. Such a broad sweep approach of rejecting landscape values is too extreme. At the very least an appreciation of landscape, especially river valleys and farmland such as are prevalent in the Low Weald, should continue to be considered as an integral element to any planning application.

Please register our objection at the meeting on 18 August.

Yours sincerely,

Peta

Peta Grant
Secretary to the Planning Committee
Weald of Kent Protection Society

NB: This email has been forwarded to all councillors of the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee, and copied to Rosemary Taylor; Chair of WKPS Planning Committee.

Harrietsham Parish Council

Chairman: Cllr Trevor Allwood
Clerk: Mrs Amanda Broadhurst

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17th August 2015

Mr Rob Jarman
Head of Planning
Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House
King Street
Maidstone
ME15 6JQ

Dear Mr Jarman

Re: Landscapes of Local Value

We are very pleased to learn that 'the setting' of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is proposed as a designated Landscape of Local Value, with the additional protection that this designation will afford. The proposed protection of 'the setting' is entirely consistent with the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan, which Maidstone Borough Council has endorsed and adopted.

We are, however, mystified as to why the area you propose to designate as 'the setting' stops at the western edge of Harrietsham and does not continue through Harrietsham and Lenham to the Maidstone borough boundary. Areas immediately south of the AONB that clearly form its setting are excluded from your map. An example is land at Court Lodge Road. This land was recently refused planning permission by MBC, twice, citing the substantial harm that development on this site would cause to the adjoining AONB, yet this land is not included in the designated area.

The views of the Kent Downs AONB from the valley as you travel from Hollingbourne to Charing are some of the most stunning landscapes in our borough. Omitting these areas immediately south of the AONB from the designation simply does not make sense. We urge you, therefore, to address this apparent anomaly and amend the designated area to include all of 'the setting'.

Yours sincerely

Planning Committee
Harrietsham Parish Council

From: Henny & Peter Shotter [mailto:henny.and.peter@gmail.com]
Sent: 17 August 2015 10:42
To: Fran Wilson (Cllr)
Cc: Steve Clarke; Rob Jarman
Subject: Evidence base of Draft Local Plan

Dear Mrs Wilson,

I remember you saying that you want to make the MBC's decision-making rigorously evidence-based under your leadership.

The Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee will meet tomorrow. A new policy suggests that the setting of the AONB should be designated as a Landscape of local value. This is good and inline with your Landscape Capacity Study and recent rulings by the inspector.

According to MBC's presented map and policy, the the AONB and its sensitive setting will however stop just before Harrietsham.

On 16th July 2015, MBC published the **Maidstone Landscape Capacity Study** on the sensitivity of landscape to possible development. In relation to Lenham, this recent study concluded

- o "... partly situated within the Kent AONB ... which offers a high level of development mitigation"
- o Landscape Character Sensitivity : Moderate and High and Visual Sensitivity: High
- o The area is sensitive to change. Development should be restricted to infill within the village boundaries
- o Consider the impact of development on views from and the setting of the Kent AONB
- o Conserve the undeveloped foreground and the rural setting of the Kent Downs AONB
- o Conserve the crisp boundary between Lenham's compact settlement and the surrounding rural area.

The fact

-that your planners have chosen to ignore the evidence of the Landscape Capacity Study which the council itself commissioned,
-that they decided (against physical evidence) AONB and the sensitive landscape should stop just before Harrietsham,
will not only astonish me but also the inspector, when this plan is called in, as it surely will be.

I just want to mention

that there is one of the 15 National Trails providing open views across the countryside to the Lenham vale,

that there is another long distance path which starts in Lenham and benefits from the unspoilt view to the North Downs AONB

and then there is, of course, the Len Valley Walk in addition.

As it has been nowhere else recorded I would like to draw your attention that there are some omissions in other evidence material re Lenham: one H1 (29) site which is directly in front of

the AONB and currently in agricultural use has been left as a blank space on your Council's Agricultural Land classification map. On a map by Natural England it is identified as grade 2.

The traffic count which MBC carried out for Ham Lane was timed in such a way that the traffic coming in and out Lenham Storage (depending on working hours and shift patterns) was not recorded. The numbers recorded are not representative for a road which leads to an Industrial estate.

Yours sincerely,
Henny Shotter

Sent from my iPad

LENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

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Kent ME17 1AY
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hello@lenhamparish.org.uk

17th August 2015

Dear Cllr. Burton and fellow Cllrs. of the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee.

We are aware that the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee that is to meet on Tuesday 18th August 2015. You and your committee will have a recommendation before you from your officers to approve amendments to policy SP5 Countryside to include Landscapes of Local Value (LLVs). We note that the setting of the Kent AONB is proposed as an LLV but curiously the setting of the Kent AONB (page 86 of the meeting pack) is not intended to include Lenham despite it being immediately adjacent.

We would strongly urge you to seek to correct this situation. We draw your attention to two directly related recent actions of the Council:

- As recently as 23rd July 2015, the same committee concluded that **“Ham Lane, Lenham not be approved for inclusion in the draft local plan on the grounds of an unacceptable adverse impact on the AONB”**.
- On 16th July 2015, MBC published the Maidstone Landscape Capacity Study conducted by Jacobs on the sensitivity of landscape to possible development. In relation to Lenham, this recent study concluded:
 - **“....partly situated within the Kent AONB...which offers a high level of development mitigation”**.
 - **Landscape Character Sensitivity: Moderate/High and Visual Sensitivity: High**
 - **The area is sensitive to change. Development should be restricted to infill within the village boundaries.**
 - **Consider the impact of development on views from the setting of the Kent AONB.**
 - **Conserve the undeveloped foreground and the rural setting of the Kent Downs AONB.**
 - **Conserve the crisp boundary between Lenham’s compact settlement and the surrounding rural area.**

Consequently, it is felt that the area south of the AONB between the A20 Ashford Road and at least the railway line should all be included as being within the setting of the AONB and, thus should be colour coded accordingly on the map that forms part of your papers, incorporating the Harrietsham to Lenham Vale and East Lenham Vale.

Based on the convincing evidence already prepared by MBC we are completely at a loss to understand how the officers of MBC managed to define an area covering the setting of the Kent AONB (to be proposed as a Landscape of Local Value) that did not include Lenham. As a first issue, we ask for your support in ensuring that this error is corrected and that Lenham be treated accordingly.

On a second issue, we note that recommendations are before you regarding Policy H3 and specifically H3 (3) which still indicates Lenham as a broad location for an additional 1,500 dwellings during the period 2026-2031, despite the fact that a large portion of the land covered by the "Call for Sites" referred to have been withdrawn thus reducing the area quite considerably. It should also be noted that any areas considered for development within this policy for Lenham would fall within the setting of the AONB, as referred to above, and thus would need to be seriously careful and of rural design. There are many other issues that Lenham Parish Council could take issue over within the schedule of responses, which largely seem only to be countered with a "don't worry about it, it will be alright on the day" cavalier attitude. Consequently, we encourage the committee's support to exclude Lenham as a broad location from this policy even though statements appear within it that such policy would be re-visited in 2021. It is clear that such a number is totally unacceptable to Lenham and its people, evidence of which has been constantly shown since its first intimation during the 2014 consultation and by the failure of MBC to openly discuss it despite many requests to do so.

Finally, we believe that the Officers of MBC have pressed forward with their planning operations without the full diligence and scrutiny that should be afforded to the rural medieval village of Lenham, an essential part and centre of Kent's culture and heritage. We are, as has been expressed in the past, very happy to discuss the part that Lenham should play in the demands placed upon Maidstone in regard to housing. However, this has to be reasonable and in keeping with maintaining the village identity and the surrounding AONB to which our Neighbourhood Plan is rapidly moving forward.

We look forward to your support of the above at your meeting on the 18th August for which we thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely

Margo McFarlane

Parish Clerk on behalf of Lenham Parish Council

Great Pivington Farm
Hubbards Hill
Lenham
ME17 2EJ

17th August 2015

Dear Cllrs. of the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee,

I sympathise greatly with you in the unenviable task that faces you and your officers in seeking to deliver the perceived housing need for Maidstone Borough. It is clear that a valid and sound Local Plan is urgently required to provide an appropriate framework for future development and I encourage you to continue to progress in developing a Plan that will be satisfy the requirements of an inspector and not be open to challenge.

The Committee will meet on Tuesday, 18th August, and will consider a recommendation from your officers to include Landscapes of Local Value (LLVs) within policy SP5 Countryside. Specifically, I note that the setting of the Kent AONB is proposed as an LLV. This is a particularly welcome and understandable recommendation given the national significance of the AONB. However, I confess to being bemused by the recommended boundary definition of the proposed setting of the Kent AONB which ends to the west of Harrietsham.

It is clear and beyond doubt that the work of Jacobs on behalf of Maidstone Borough (*Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment, March 2012, amended July 2013; Maidstone Landscape Capacity Study, January 2015*) repeatedly and consistently acknowledges the presence of both the Harrietsham to Lenham Vale and the East Lenham Vale as being within the setting of the Kent Downs AONB.

Furthermore, the recent decision by your own Committee not to approve development at Ham Lane, Lenham made specific reference to the unacceptable adverse impact on the AONB.

I appreciate that your officers are under great pressure to deliver a framework that will support housing development across the Borough. However there is no excuse for ignoring the work and conclusions of your own consultants. One cannot be seen to cherry-pick the evidence that suits and ignore the evidence that does not while still expecting to be treated seriously by an inspector. It is thus all the more important that our elected officials independently consider the evidence and recent precedent, and make decisions appropriately.

The exclusion of the areas around Lenham from within the setting of the Kent AONB is clearly an omission that will not stand up to serious challenge and I ask for your support in ensuring that this error is corrected.

Kind regards

Sandy MacKenzie

