

Decision Referral

To: Paul Riley

The Head of Finance and Resources

Decision making body

Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport Committee

Decision made

At its meeting on 8th September 2015 the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport Committee considered a second report on Landscapes of Local Value in order to approve amendments to draft policy SP5 and supporting text.

One consideration of the report arose from a decision of the committee on 18th August 2015 that was: "That a re-examination of the area of the Low Weald, excluding SSSIs, be carried out to establish if areas within the Low Weald should be included in the Landscapes of Local Value policy"

The decision of the committee on 8th September 2015 included the following statements:

"Paragraph 5.78 to read: 'The Low Weald covers a significant proportion of the countryside, in the rural southern half of the Borough. The Low Weald is recognised as having distinctive landscape features: the field patterns, many of which are medieval in character, hedgerows, stands of trees, ponds and streams and buildings of character should be protected, maintained and enhanced where appropriate. The necessary protection for the area of the Low Weald outside the boundaries of the rural service centres as defined on the policies map is provided under the criteria of policy SP5.' "

and

"Criterion 6 sentence to read: 'The Greensand Ridge, Medway Valley, Len Valley and Loose Valley, as defined on the policies map, will be protected, maintained and enhanced where appropriate as landscapes of local value;"

Reason for referring the decision

It is the view of the undersigned that the evidence available in the re-examination of the Low Weald, in relation to the Landscapes of Local Value criteria, was not given sufficient weight by the report or by the committee in debate.

We consider the Low Weald is at the very least of equal importance to the areas described in Criterion 6 of the decision; but the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee have rejected it. We believe that for the reasons described below this was incorrect and must be rectified.

The Destination Management Plan recently adopted by the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee opens with the statement that the Weald of Kent was something that defined Kentishness. The Low Weald is an integral part of this landscape with its own distinctive topology. It is a very special and distinctive area with its own character highlighted by its buildings, medieval field patterns and small ancient woodlands. It also has Kent's main East to West river, the River Buelc, which unlike other rivers highlighted, has SSSI status. The meandering flow of this river can be observed from medieval bridges such as Hertsfield, Hawkenbury and Stephens, the latter being built at the bequest and named after the Archbishop Stephen Langton, provide some of the most beautiful views in the County; and yet all this has been rejected.

It appears from the interpretation of the Jacob's report that in the case of the Low Weald unless the landscape character is scored "high" in both landscape character sensitivity and visual sensitivity it did not warrant being included as a LLV. If this criterion is being applied to the Low Weald why is it not being applied to other areas such as the Harrietsham Vale, Thurnham Vale or Broomfield Undulating Farmlands all of which are either included or part included as a LLV.

It has been suggested that the Low Weald is too large an area to be considered. But, size is not one of the seven categories that make up the criteria for consideration. The Low Weald may be a significant part of Maidstone Borough but, unlike its neighbours to the South and West, Maidstone Borough does not have large areas of protected green belt to fall back on.

Desired outcome (*please give full details*)

We consider that the Low Weald not only meets the majority of the criteria specified but, scores better than some areas selected for classification as an LLV if all the criteria are fully taken into account. Nevertheless we are not asking for any of the areas currently proposed to be taken out; all we are asking is that proper recognition is given to one of Kent's most important and historic areas. We note that Policy SP5 has been strengthened and this is argued as a reason for not including the Low Weald as a LLV. However, this begs the question as to why LLV status is needed at all is Policy SP5 is so all embracing.

The Low Weald was included in the last Local Plan as a Special Landscape Area and this has been endorsed at public inquiry. So why is it now deemed necessary to remove it. In our view the only possible alternative would be to do away with the designation of LLV altogether.

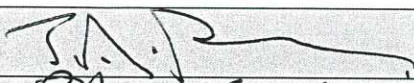
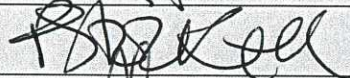

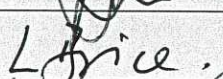
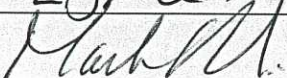
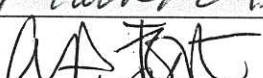

Our desired outcome is to see the elements of the decision of the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport Committee that we have highlighted above amended as follows:

"Paragraph 5.78 to read: 'The Low Weald covers a significant proportion of the countryside, in the rural southern half of the Borough. The Low Weald is recognised as having distinctive landscape features: the field patterns, many of which are medieval in character, hedgerows, stands of trees, ponds and streams and buildings of character should be protected, maintained and enhanced where appropriate. The necessary protection for the area of the Low Weald outside the boundaries of the rural service centres as defined on the policies map is provided under the criteria of policy SP5.' "

and

"Criterion 6 sentence to read: 'The Greensand Ridge, Medway Valley, Len Valley, and Loose Valley and Low Weald, as defined on the policies map, will be protected, maintained and enhanced where appropriate as landscapes of local value';"

Members calling in decision**Signed:**

1.	John Perry	
2.	Mrs Paulina Stockell	
3.	John Wilson	
4.	Mrs Louise Brice	
5.	Martin Round	
6.	Gill Fort	
7.	Richard Thick	

(3 signatories are required to refer a decision of a Service Committee to the Policy and Resources Committee. A decision of the Policy and Resources Committee for referral to Council requires 5 signatories in accordance with the Constitution's rules of procedure).

Please note that should new and relevant information come to light, or a more acceptable course of action be proposed which may resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the Committee, then a Committee Chairman, at the request of any three Councillors in writing, may choose whether to call another meeting of the original Committee to re-consider the decision within five working days of receipt of a referral. The referral to Policy and Resources or the Council would then fall away and the matter would be treated as having been dealt with by the original Service Committee. No further referral of the matter would be permitted.

Committee (or Council) responsible for examining this decision

Policy & Resources Committee

