

**Agenda Item 16**  
**Page 91****LAND AT GEORGE STREET AND  
STATION APPROACH  
STAPLEHURST  
KENT****Reference number: MA/12/0232**

Further correspondence has been submitted from the applicants raising concern about the recommendation before Members. Their concerns centre on the following matters:

- 1) The tone of the report.
- 2) The visual assessment of the proposal.
- 3) The station car park.

Concern has been raised that the tone of the report appears to be rather negative towards the proposal. As set out within the report, there are a number of benefits to this scheme, but these have to be balanced against the dis-benefits – i.e. the harm. It is my opinion, and an opinion shared by the Council's legal representative, that the report, in its current state represents a balanced appraisal of these factors, through which Members can make a balanced, and informed decision.

With regards to the visual impact of the proposal, this matter has been dealt with, within the main body of the report. Nonetheless I would like to take the opportunity to re-enforce the view that I consider the railway line to be a distinct boundary between the village and the open countryside. A breach of this boundary, with built development of this nature, is considered to be to the detriment of the character and appearance of the area.

Comments have been made with regards to the landscape quality of the site in question. To my mind, this land contributes to the setting of the village, and contributes to the character of George Street. Whilst the applicants have submitted a visual assessment of this land, to my mind, the change proposed would clearly change the character of the area, to its detriment. It is for this reason that I consider that the application should be refused.

For the purposes of clarity, in terms of the parking numbers within the existing station car park, I can confirm that the pay and display car parks, which are set out formally, can accommodate 438 cars. The applicants have indicated that the existing parking provision is for 650 cars, which includes the informal parking area to the west of the station. I visited the site on the 9 January 2013 and counted 198 cars within this informal car park – although it was noted that a number of these cars were parked in tandem, reliant on others to move in order to move their vehicles. The applicants state within their transport assessment that in reality the new car park will see an increase in 10 spaces from the existing provision, although these would all be laid out formally.

It is acknowledged that the provision of an additional 100 car parking spaces at the Station have been identified within the Integrated Transport Strategy. However, this document is in draft form at present, and so no site has been identified for this additional provision. It would be incorrect to therefore speculate at this point in time as to where this would be located.

## APPENDIX

An additional letter of support has been received with regards to this application. The points raised within this letter are as follows:

- The nearest Tesco to Staplehurst is in Tovil – a 20 minute drive;
- There is a preference for Tesco over Sainsbury's as they tend to be cheaper;
- The supporter of the application collects 'clubcard' tokens;
- There is a need for a large supermarket in Staplehurst to cut down on travelling times and cost.

The issue of sustainability has been addressed within the main report. The other issues raised are not considered to be material considerations in the determination of this application.

It should be noted that in the side by side analysis it indicates that Sainsbury's would have a café. This is not the case.

It should also be noted that the report suggests that conditions would be appended, but have not been. It was considered more appropriate to fully consider the debate prior to suggesting such conditions.

**My recommendation remains unchanged.**