

# 2014

## Engaging Communities in Maidstone's Local Plan



Design South East-  
Interim Report

7/31/2014

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# 1: Executive Summary

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## 1.1 Background

Like many places in the South East, Maidstone is set to experience significant population change over the next 15 to 20 years. As a result of this growth, Maidstone is expected to have a higher objectively assessed housing need than previously anticipated. The changes will affect how the borough delivers homes, jobs and transport over the coming years.

In March 2013 the council decided to amalgamate the Maidstone Borough Core Strategy and the Development Delivery DPD into a single Maidstone Borough Local Plan and the plan period was rolled forward from 2006-26 to 2011-31. The cabinet approved the draft local plan, including site allocations for consultation, in February 2014. The consultation ran from 21 March 2014 to 7 May 2014. The revised Local Plan will go out to consultation again in 2015.

As part of the consultation process, Maidstone Borough Council appointed Design South East to engage with the Parish Councils who were designated as 'Rural Service Centres' or 'Larger Villages' where development was proposed. The aim was to find out how much understanding there was of the Local Plan process and to ensure that these Parish Councils felt their views had been listened to constructively. Additionally, DSE would lead workshops with these Parish Councils to help them develop 'Place making' elements of their Neighbourhood Development Plans. Maidstone Borough Council would like this process to lead to an on going positive dialogue with these parishes and the Council on the Local Plan. If successful, this process could be rolled out to other parishes, were development is proposed.

The workshops were divided into two parts, the first section of the workshop dealt with individual Parish Councils concerns about the current Local Plan. The second part of the workshop dealt with housing site allocations and design and place making issues that need to be addressed if the character and integrity of each village were to be maintained. The results of these can be found in Annex 1.

## 1.2 Recommendations

Many of the frustrations experienced by the parish councils result from confusion about how the Local Plan and emerging Neighbourhood Development Plans coalesce. The Local Plan takes a 'top down' site based approach, while the Neighbourhood Plan takes a 'bottom up' place based approach. Moreover, a strategy for an active part in the decision making process by the parishes is not clear.

However, the work done on the Local Plan so far has successfully identified potential housing sites that can be said to form a starting point to a more community/place-based approach.

Many of the parish councils have very articulate and knowledgeable Neighbourhood Plan sub committees and this valuable resource should be harnessed.

Design South East would make the following recommendations for future action:

- There should be a defined and coherent role into the Local Plan process by Parish Councils.
- Emerging Neighbourhood Plans, should be fully supported by Maidstone Borough Council in order that meaningful discussion might take place to ensure that they are in general conformity with national policy and the strategic policies of the Local Plan.
- This process can be started by running a stakeholder workshop in September where an inclusive approach should be adopted.
- This should be seen as the start of a round of community workshops where members of PCs are invited to discuss the issues facing their settlement and the options for any future development.
- These meetings might be held on a regular basis, each might take a different topic or theme for discussion and agreement
- The meeting in September should include infrastructure stakeholders to clarify some key concerns, but its core aim should be to produce an **Action Plan &** timetable for the Local Plan process over the coming months. If seen as successful by the Council, this methodology might be rolled out to other parishes where development is proposed.

This approach will also provide the Council with valuable feedback on proposals emerging within their parishes and may result in innovative alternative approaches as well as a consensus.

**A final version of this report will be produced at the end of September detailing the results of the September workshop and outlining the Action Plan for the future.**

## 2: Area Context

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### 2.1 Background

Maidstone is set to experience significant change over the next 15 to 20 years. The population is forecast to increase by 15.2% by 2026, with the biggest increase being in those aged 85+, and a decrease of 11.5% of those aged 25-44. With more people living longer, Maidstone Borough Council will need to provide additional homes and enough suitable properties for an ageing population.

As a result of this growth, Maidstone is expected to have a higher objectively assessed housing need than previously anticipated. The changes will affect how the borough delivers homes, jobs and transport over the coming years. With a diminishing resident working population, attracting more skilled people to live and work in the borough is vital to sustaining and growing a vibrant economy.

Maidstone also faces issues around the cost of housing, with families and individuals being priced out of the market, particularly in rural areas. Providing a more diverse range of homes to suit different tastes and incomes, including affordable and local needs housing in rural areas, will help relieve the strain on the housing market.

In addition, attracting inward investment and new businesses to the area as well as supporting start-up businesses will be required to help deliver the jobs for Maidstone's growing population.

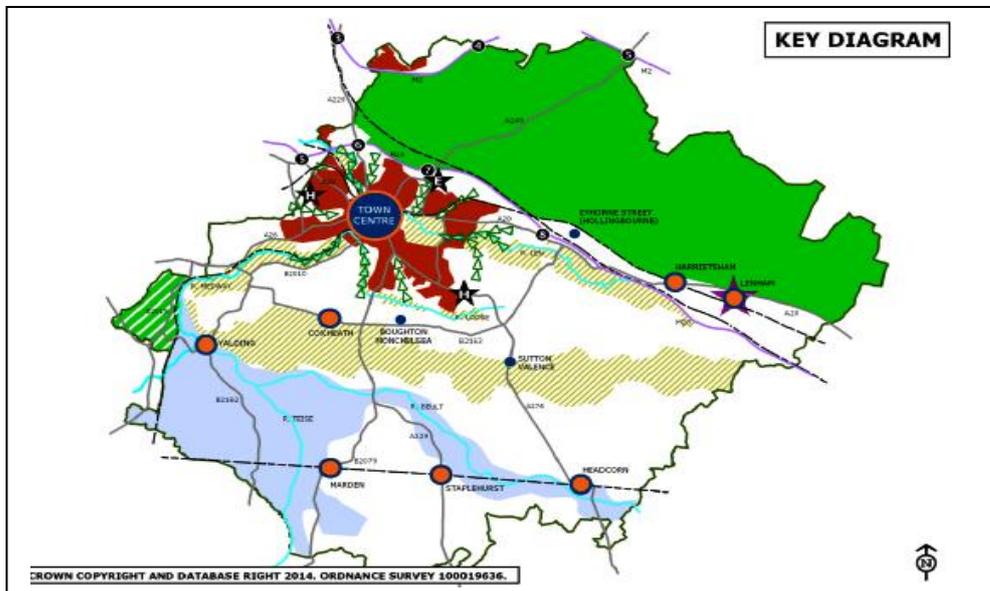
### 2.2 The Local Plan

In September 2011 the council consulted the public on its draft Maidstone Borough Core Strategy, which planned for dispersed development pattern across the borough for the period 2006 to 2026. The draft Core Strategy identified broad strategic locations for housing and employment development rather than allocating specific sites, and detailed development management policies and land allocations were to follow in the form of a Development Delivery Development Plan Document (DPD).

In March 2012 the government published the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at the heart of which is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. So in May 2012 the council advertised a 'call for sites' exercise inviting landowners, developers and their agents to submit information about available sites within the strategic housing and employment locations identified on the key diagram of the Core Strategy. A Core Strategy Site Allocations consultation period followed.

In March 2013 the council decided to amalgamate the Maidstone Borough Core Strategy and the Development Delivery DPD into a single Maidstone Borough Local Plan, an approach supported by the NPPF, and the plan period was rolled forward

from 2006-26 to 2011-31. The cabinet approved the draft Local Plan, including site allocations for consultation, in February 2014. The consultation ran from 21 March 2014 to 7 May 2014. The revised Local Plan will go out to consultation again in 2015.



### 2.3 The Brief to Design South East

As part of the consultation process, Maidstone Borough Council appointed Design South East to engage with the Parish Councils who were designated as ‘Rural Service Centres’ or ‘Larger Villages’ where development was proposed. The aim was to find out how much understanding there was of the Local Plan process and to ensure that these Parish Councils felt their views had been listened to constructively. Additionally, DSE would lead workshops with these Parish Councils to help them develop ‘Place making’ elements of their Neighbourhood Development Plans. Maidstone Borough Council would like this process to lead to an on going positive dialogue with these & other parishes and the Council on the Local Plan. One of the key issues for Maidstone Borough Council is the relationship between the Local Plan & Neighbourhood Plans. In summary, the brief to DSE was as follows:

- To engage Parish Councils who were designated as ‘Rural Service Centres’ or ‘Larger Villages’ in constructive dialogue with Maidstone Borough Council about the Local Plan.
- To work with local communities toward developing a checklist for the physical development of their parish.
- To design & facilitate workshops & meetings with parish representatives and Maidstone Borough Council.
- To document the process throughout and present a final report with lessons learnt & recommendations for the next stage of consultation.

The workshops would also endeavour to assist these Parish Councils to:

- To have a clear understanding of how the settlement is organised and how these principles underpin character and can be used to guide future development that reinforces this character
- To be able to assess the locations of housing in the local plan against the core principles of their settlement – is there an opportunity to strengthen character?
- To have the tools to engage constructively with developers and local authorities about the quality of planning applications.

Despite attempts to engage them, Hollingbourne did not take part in this process. Sutton Valence asked to join the process during the two joint meetings held with the Council in April and this was agreed.

The Parish Councils worked with were as follows:

- Harrietsham
- Yalding
- Coxheath
- Staplehurst
- Marden
- Headcorn
- Lenham
- Boughton Monchelsea
- Sutton Valence

# 3: Methodology

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## 3.1 Development of the methodology

DSE started by meeting with representatives of these Parish Councils to gauge their level of engagement and understanding of the Local Plan. It was clear at the outset that the level of understanding of the current document was very good, but there was significant confusion and frustration about process. However, many of the Parish Councils had an articulate and committed Neighbourhood Planning group, and a few parishes had made significant progress toward an adopted Neighbourhood Plan. Moreover, the desire to engage their communities in either a Neighbourhood Plan or a Village Design Statement was compelling.

Very broadly the Parish Councils fall into three groups:

- Parish Councils with a good understanding of process & have a draft Neighbourhood Plan but need to know what the relationship is between the Local Plan & a Neighbourhood Plan – what are the policy ‘hooks’ that connect them.
- Parish Councils whose main issues are site based – why choose this site rather than another.
- Parish Councils who have questions relating to infrastructure/communication or process.

## 3.2 Modification of the methodology

It was clear that there was a level of frustration within the Parish Councils with the Local Plan process. Whilst there had been dialogue with MBC about the local plan, many felt that their views had not been addressed. Common areas of concern were:

- The rationale behind the housing numbers for each parish – how they were arrived at & why.
- What were the criteria for deciding whether a settlement would be a Rural Service Centre or Larger Village?
- Many parishes were keen to get on with a Neighbourhood Plan, but felt that MBC were not actively supporting them in this process.
- Many parishes felt that their role in the local plan process was unclear, they did not seem to have any influence in either the plan making or decision taking. For example, what scope was there for some of the decision taking to be devolved to the Parish Councils such as the distribution of housing numbers, particularly if they are able to distribute the numbers over a range of identified sites through a Neighbourhood Plan.
- Site selection criteria – was there a weighting to the criteria in terms of importance?

- What happens if a development comes forward during the period when the LP is still in draft form and there is no NP or it is still emerging? Parish Councils felt vulnerable to appeals by developers.
- Affordable Housing – can Parish Councils influence this? For example, more affordable housing may mean less money for other community infrastructure.
- Can Parish Councils influence the timescale of development numbers – so that the parish does not become overwhelmed in one go? What is the position on phasing and what can be said in the LP to protect parishes from a large number of houses/site developments in a short time period?
- Infrastructure – many Parish Councils were unclear how new infrastructure would be phased and implemented.

### 3.1 Workshop Approach

This initial consultation influenced the workshop approach. In order to fulfil the brief DSE felt that the workshops should, if possible, be divided into two parts:

The first section of the workshop would deal with individual Parish Councils concerns about the current Local Plan in order that these could be documented and reported to MBC in *full*. These have been sent to the parishes for their approval and can be found in Annex 1.

The second part of the workshop would include a village walkabout (this was dependant on whether it was possible to run a daytime or evening workshop) and deal with housing site allocations and design and place making issues that need to be addressed if the character and integrity of each village were to be maintained.

Additionally, each settlement would be encouraged to hold a further ‘advanced’ design workshop to further their understanding of the place making process, if they were in a position to do so. This second workshop would be specifically tailored to the village its character and design as well as its individual circumstances. Common themes include:

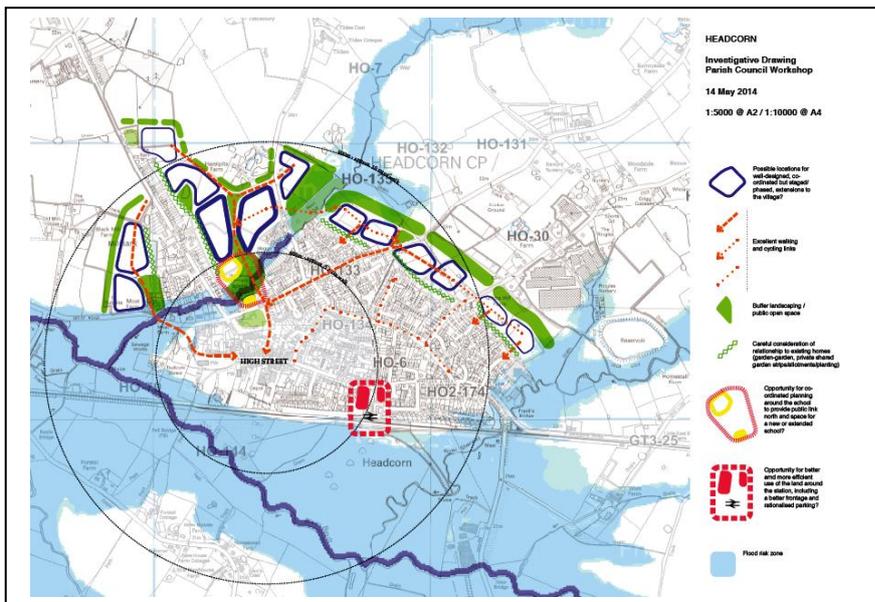
- Village metrics & defining characteristics (heritage, edges, landscape, ground conditions, connections, community, architecture,
- Village assets, settlement patterns & spatial patterns
- Exploring potential policy links/hooks between the Neighbourhood Plan & the Local Plan



Photos from village tour with Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council



Workshop with Headcorn Parish Council – starting the place making process



Headcorn Parish Council – Investigative Drawing produced following second workshop

### 3.4 The programme

2014

ACTIONS	Inception & Development of methodology		Facilitated Workshops with Parish Councils			Final Report & Workshop	
	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept
<b>Step 1</b> - Preliminary discussions with the Parish Councils							
<b>Step 2</b> - Collective facilitated sessions with parishes							
<b>Step 3</b> - Follow up workshops with individual parishes where required to capture final consultation							
<b>Step 4</b> - Final Report & recommendations							
<b>Final workshop with stakeholders – Action Plan</b>							

## 4: Conclusions & Recommendations

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Many of the frustrations experienced by the parish councils worked with result from the need for a coherent community communications strategy, along with confusion about how the Local Plan and emerging Neighbourhood Development Plans coalesce. This is to some extent exacerbated by the fact that tension is created between these two different styles of plan. The Local Plan takes a 'top down' site based approach, while the Neighbourhood Plan takes a 'bottom up' place based approach. The parishes feel that the Local Plan is based on numbers & sites without due consideration of the context of place and setting. Moreover, a strategy for an active part in the decision making process by the parishes is not clear.

Some of the rural areas to the south of this Borough are defined by attractive rolling countryside, which offer an intrinsic character, heritage and beauty with a diverse mix of rich landscape features and characteristics. It plays a key recreational role for residents and visitors alike, whilst supporting an array of wildlife, habitats and natural resources. As a result, many of the parishes are passionate about retaining their rural character and want to see clear policies for how this is to be achieved in the long term. Many of these settlements have historic village centres and are set within what has come to be known internationally as the 'Garden of England' - possibly one of the most well recognised British landscapes. As such a clear vision for the rural areas of the borough is recommended.

However, the work done on the Local Plan so far has successfully identified potential housing sites that can be said to form a starting point to a more community/place-based approach. Many of the parish councils have very articulate and knowledgeable Neighbourhood Plan sub committees and this valuable resource should be harnessed. The parishes themselves are mostly at different stages with their NPs and this could also foster a more coherent understanding of the process. This can be started at the September workshop where an inclusive approach should be adopted. This pilot process might be seen as the start of a round of community workshops where members of PCs are invited to discuss the issues facing their settlement and the options for any future development. This approach will provide the Council with valuable feedback on proposals emerging within their parishes and may result in innovative alternative approaches as well as a consensus.

The enhancement of the rich and varied landscapes that contribute so much to the character of this part of Kent with the need for rural communities to grow and evolve in ways that will not overwhelm or damage their own, often unique, attributes is a major challenge that must be addressed. Good design must therefore, play a vital part in the development of new residential areas. It will be necessary for applicants to produce designs that are complementary to the local vernacular, although this should not prevent the scope for innovation and contemporary designs where these can be justified in the context of a site and where they may create additional visual interest and richness into an area.

# Annex 1-Documentation of engagement with each village

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## Harrietsham Friday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2014 – Parish Office

**Workshop 1.** *Facilitating a constructive dialogue with Maidstone Borough Council about common issues to do with the Local Plan & helping the Parish Council articulate the identity & character of the village*

### **Present :**

**Design South East** – Annette Hards, Geoff Noble, Irene Seijo

**Harrietsham PC** – Amanda Broadhurst, Dennis Clifton, Tony Taylor

### **Current Position:**

- Neighbourhood Plan (NP) is likely to be submitted in May 2014,
- Six week consultation Period
- Inspector
- Referendum - September
- Adoption

**Consultant on Neighbourhood Plan** - Richard Eastman – Feria Urbanism

### **Harrietsham**

The village of Harrietsham is designated as a Rural Service Centre. They have a well advanced NP (post regulation 15 consultation, but pre-reg16).

HPC has worked with Consultants to produce their NP, this process, along with the work done on the 2004 Parish Plan has given them the skills to really understand the issues that affect the long term development and sustainability of the parish. They are well informed on the strategic growth position and spatial planning. The NP is nearly ready for submission. A central part of the plan is to facilitate a good walking route around the village to encourage sustainable transport and healthy living. They are keen that the village is perceived as a dynamic – growth & change are positive qualities if well planned for.

### **Local Plan Issues**

The draft Maidstone Local Plan (Regulation 18 Consultation 2014) is currently out to consultation until 7 May. The draft plan has been published concurrently with a consultation on the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for the Borough.

HPC feels that MBC is not supporting the NP process. They have spent a lot of money to produce it & have had very little support from MBC given that funding was made available from DCLG for this purpose. They feel they have had support from KCC in developing their NP.

Aspects of the LP process are baffling to the PC particularly to do with the criteria of the site selection process through the SHLAA process. For example, there is a particular site, at Court Lodge Farm which the NP has identified as a possible site for development as it could provide a footpath link to the station and school for residents in the north of the village, this has been excluded by MBC on the grounds that it is adjacent to the AONB. However, the Tongs Meadow site, which is also adjacent to the AONB, has been included. The PC cannot understand why it is not subject to the same criteria. Moreover MBC have also ruled-in a site in the conservation area at the heart of the village.

There is a fear that prospective development (which is imminent) is premature until they have sorted and agreed plan. They also have concern about developments being brought forward in outline (a DHA scheme and sites South of the A20 were cited) as they wish to secure the quality of the development.

They do not have confidence, ahead of MBC adopting CIL (likely late 2015), that they will get any of the infrastructure they feel they require (mainly roads and community space/doctors etc). They are working hard with MBC look at calming traffic on the A20 as it passes through the village. Again they are concerned about issues of prematurity as there is a scheme currently being promoted which might affect their plans for the future shape of the highways in the centre of the village.

**Core Issues to address with Maidstone Borough Council:**

- Numbers - are they evidence based?
- Density - will this be tested against character?
- Housing mix & tenure - % affordable housing
- Will the Local Plan reference Neighbourhood Plan as decision making tool or make more reference to village based policies in the plan?
- Infrastructure anomalies (pp 127) will CIL be available or will it be pooled for infrastructure & not for local needs?
- What is MBC strategy for dealing with this emerging NP – as it is broadly in conformity with the LP - during the adoption process?

From reviewing the NP it appears that a large number of the 'Character Issues' (which we have suggested will be the subject of the second workshop) have already been explored by the Parish and Feria team through the Neighbourhood Planning process. With this in mind, we suggest that it would be more the helpful for all parties if we were to carry out an independent critique of the part of the

Harrietsham Neighbourhood Plan document that deals with the analysis of the settlement pattern and how this then guides development proposals. This could be undertaken as a workshop involving MBC. The results of this review could then be shared with others to further all parties' understanding of these issues, and how they relate to both the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans.

## Yalding Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2014 – Parish Office

**Workshop 1.** *Facilitating a constructive dialogue with Maidstone Borough Council about common issues to do with the Local Plan & helping the Parish Council articulate the identity & character of the village*

**Present :**

**Design South East** – Annette Hards, Geoff Noble, Irene Seijo

**Yalding Parish Council** - Cllr Andy Sanders, Cllr Nick Thomson, Cllr Michael Stewart, Clerk Angela Gent, Chairman Geraldine Brown

**Current Position:**

Yalding do not as yet have a Neighbourhood Plan & have no plans at the moment to do one. They are, however, interested in potential alternatives – a check list for example, that might set out their vision for the village and its future development.

**Yalding**

The historic village of Yalding is set in the confluence of three rivers and has suffered from significant flooding issues in the last few months. The village has a thriving community; there are 96 different organisations in the parish and a very good network. 96% of the common land in Maidstone Borough is set in Yalding, this area is maintained by the PC.

The High Street represents the heart of the village – hosting farmers markets and Christmas Fairs etc. Top & soft fruit production represents the main farming activity in the surrounding landscape. Yalding is one of the most rural of the Maidstone Borough parishes. It has been categorised as a ‘Larger Village’ in the Local Plan. There is confusion about the categorisation of ‘Rural Service Centres’ and ‘Larger Villages’.

There is a good understanding of the Local Plan & its potential impact on the village. The PC would consider growth but is concerned that the approach taken in the Local Plan is not a ‘joined up’ process.

The chair of Yalding PC, Geraldine Brown, is also the chair of KALC. At as recent meeting with MBC members of KALC were able to express their frustration with the Local Plan consultation process so far. Of particular concern is the lack of overall vision in the plan, housing numbers and sites, the lack of an infrastructure model, employment & transport strategies and the lack of cohesiveness between these. The key issues for KALC were:

- The lack of a ‘Vision for the Borough’

- Process & Communication
- Need for an inclusive 'place based' approach

KALC have agreed a further consultation period with MBC.

### **Local Plan Issues**

The PC feel that sites for development (housing & employment) have been allocated to without due consideration of the current infrastructure and flooding issues. Connectivity is a real concern, village roads are connected by three bridges which are all listed structures and severely limit the capacity of traffic to move freely – particularly at key commuter times. There are also three railway crossings. The railway station is 1.5 miles outside the village and there is no pedestrian or disabled friendly route to it. Moreover, there is no direct rail route to London. Most villagers shop outside the area, although there are small retail outlets in the centre. The Post Office is subsidised by the PC. Schools are currently oversubscribed. Social housing in the area is under pressure.

Transport and access is a particular concern throughout the parish.

The PC are very concerned that the current growth strategy in the Local Plan fails to take account of these very real infrastructure issues.

### **Syngenta Site**

The PC feel this is only suitable for employment because of flooding issues. It would require CIL for flood defences.

### **Core Issues to address with Maidstone Borough Council:**

- Consultation has been poor
- Significant infrastructure issues - where is the modelling?
- Consideration of Yalding's limited capacity for major growth
- Housing mix & tenure - % affordable housing?

How will the Local Plan deal with planning applications while it is in draft form?

Having spent time talking with the PC and walking around the village, the DSE facilitators would concur with most of the concerns raised – there is limited capacity for growth but careful 'stitching in' that is in character with the village would add to its vitality. While the PC is not considering a Neighbourhood Plan, a check-list or some other mechanism that might sit within the planning framework would help to articulate their vision for the future of the village & ensure that development is sensitively placed.

DSE would be happy to facilitate a further 'visioning' workshop if it would be useful for the PC.

## Coxheath Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2014 – Parish Office

**Workshop 1.** *Facilitating a constructive dialogue with Maidstone Borough Council about common issues to do with the Local Plan & helping the Parish Council articulate the identity & character of the village*

**Present :**

**Design South East** – Chris Lamb, Geoff Noble, Irene Seijo

**Coxheath Parish Council** - Elizabeth Potts, Rodney Direll, Colin Pain, Val Page, Clive Parker, John Hughes, Terry Ketley, Denise

**Current Position:** Neighbourhood Plan has been submitted ahead of the Local Plan. The NP is well worked out & has been developed through extensive work with the wider community. It has a strong community strategy.

### **Coxheath**

The 230 acre village of Coxheath is not a typical parish, it was mostly created in the 1960's. The result is a tight built up area with smaller green areas, but it still maintains its 'rural village' character, which it is very keen to maintain. Its proximity to the countryside is highly valued, but it would like more green space within the village. 25% of the current population is retired. It has been designated as a Larger Village.

The community are not adverse to receive housing growth, provided it is planned and delivered well and helps support community and infrastructure improvements.

The PC is keen to do a further workshop in order to develop the design & character elements of their Neighbourhood Plan, provided a member of MBC planning team also attends.

### **Local Plan Issues**

The draft Maidstone Local Plan (Regulation 18 Consultation 2014) is currently out to consultation until 7 May. The draft plan has been published concurrently with a consultation on the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for the Borough.

### **Key Issues raised during the discussion:**

Coxheath feel that dialogue with MBC has been poor, the PC do not feel they have been listened to.

The Local Plan 'Vision for Borough' is not articulated, it is hard to read & is not well presented graphically. It is based on numbers & sites without due consideration of

the context of place and setting. For example, what is the strategy for a 'buffer zone' between the urban edge of Maidstone & rural areas?

There is not an integrated transport strategy for the borough, there are significant traffic issues in and around Coxheath which growth will exasperate.

Rural Service Centre v Larger Villages – the criteria for these is not understood. For example, Coxheath has more growth designated than some of the RSCs. Housing numbers & employment land seem disproportionate.

The planning and delivery of suitable and sufficient infrastructure alongside any housing growth is not understood.

The PC fear that some local landowners see the LOCAL PLAN as a 'way in' for developing their site via the 'call for sites'.

#### **Core Issues to address with Maidstone Borough Council:**

- Coxheath feels that the character & sense of place of the village has been ignored.
- PC would like more dialogue with MBC & would like to understand how they can have a proactive role.
- Housing numbers – 200 in NP 400 in LP
- Site allocations /Density – how can this be made site specific? Will this be tested against character?
- What is MBC's strategy for dealing with emerging NPs during the adoption process?

#### **SECOND WORKSHOP**

The PC are keen to have a 'character & place' workshop, to develop the design dimension of their NP in order to identify the 'village' qualities that they value, so that these can be articulated clearly in their plan. They are particularly keen to have a member of MBC planning team involved in this workshop. MBC have agreed that if a date for the second workshop is set in the consultation period then it would be possible to hold this second workshop slightly beyond that date.

The PC will look at dates & come back to DSE.

## Staplehurst Wednesday 16th April 2014 – Parish Office

**Workshop 1.** *Facilitating a constructive dialogue with Maidstone Borough Council about common issues to do with the Local Plan & helping the Parish Council articulate the identity & character of the village*

**Present :**

**Design South East** – Robert Offord, Clare Wright

**Staplehurst Parish Council** – Mick Westwood, Steve L, Joan Buller, John Perry, Dave, Catherine A, Graham S, Barrett Manning, Robin, Margaret Ashby, Colin, Adele Sharp.

**Current Position:** Neighbourhood Plan is likely to be submitted and approved ahead of the Local Plan. The draft NP has been developed through extensive work with the wider community, the formal consultation period on the plan has not yet started.

**Consultant on NP** - Richard Eastham - Feria Urbanism (not present)

### Staplehurst

The village of Staplehurst is designated as a Rural Service Centre in the Maidstone Draft Local Plan. The community are not averse to receive housing growth, provided it is planned and delivered well and helps support community and infrastructure improvements. A well advanced draft Neighbourhood Plan sets out the community's aspirations regarding further growth of the village including, infrastructure and utilities provision.

The Parish and wider community are well informed on the strategic growth position and spatial planning; but there remains concern relating to key decisions by the Local Planning Authority which have shaped certain policies.

The discussion focused on two areas:

- 1) The planning and delivery of suitable and sufficient infrastructure alongside any housing growth
- 2) The design, layout and character of any future developments, including housing, to ensure they are well connected to the community and the wider rural setting of the village. Including a more detailed understanding of local environmental constraints such as areas at risk of flooding and how the village and new development relates to surrounding rural setting.

The NP is nearly ready for submission and its role, while being in 'general conformity' with the NPPF and draft LP, is to add further consideration to the particular needs of

Staplehurst. Additionally the NP has a role in shaping the nature of new development to ensure it takes on and enhances the character of Staplehurst as the village grows.

A part of the plan is to facilitate a good walking route around the village to encourage sustainable transport and healthy living. They are keen that the village is perceived as dynamic – they feel it is important to plan well for growth & change. There was a joint desire that new homes are planned to integrate with the existing community to support community development and the livelihood of the village's social and economic function, and not to act as isolated estates, e.g. for commuters.

### **Local Plan Issues**

The draft Maidstone Local Plan (Regulation 18 Consultation 2014) is currently out to consultation until 7 May. The draft plan has been published concurrently with a consultation on the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for the Borough.

#### Place making and holistic development:

We understand that the Infrastructure Delivery Plan is in the process of being developed. An Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) seeks to provide a coherent Framework for all the separate existing infrastructure investment plans (by utilities and other infrastructure providers), to show that they are deliverable relative to planned-for development. It should also identify how any gaps in delivery may be bridged.

Concern remains regarding how existing issues in the village (most notably waste water) can be addressed, alongside the impact of new development, on infrastructure which is already at or over capacity. Elements of infrastructure which are of particular concern include schools (both primary and secondary), dealing with drinking water supplies, sewage disposal, highways and traffic management, community facilities.

#### Neighbourhood Planning Support:

SPC and the community feel that MBC is not supporting the NP process. They have invested a lot of time and money to produce it and feel that they have had struggled to access support from MBC.

The PC believes there should be a correlation between housing delivery and infrastructure development, but this is not currently apparent in the LP.

There is little confidence in decision making in the planning system following examples of developments failing to follow approved plans, including seemingly

removing significant trees without consent. The quality of delivered schemes living up to the drawings/aspiration of local people, the role of conditions and enforcement in ensuring new development is commenced and completed in line with approved plans, are all areas which have in the past frustrated the community's engagement in the planning process.

#### **Core Issues to address with Maidstone Borough Council:**

- Numbers - are they evidence based? There is a strong feeling that the numbers are the result of a desk top calculation without taking local conditions in to account. How is support being offered to accommodate this amount of development?
- Affordable housing – there is great concern about the current policy
- Site allocations /Density – how can this be made site specific? Will this be tested against character? Ground conditions of certain major sites may affect deliverability of MBC aspirations
- Housing mix & tenure – especially regarding the % affordable housing and impact on the village and future occupiers
- What is MBC's strategy for dealing with this emerging NP during the adoption process?
- Will the Local Plan reference Neighbourhood Plans as decision making tool or make more reference to village based policies in the plan?
- The PC feels they are affected by proposals outside their immediate area – for example the Linton Park & Ride proposal and its likely impact on traffic from the south into Maidstone.

It was discussed that these could perhaps be explored in a single concise document which brings together each of the on-going consultations (IDP, CIL, LP, NP) and their relation to each other to help holistically plan the future development of Staplehurst.

#### **SECOND WORKSHOP**

From reviewing the NP it appears that a large number of the 'Character Issues' (which we have suggested will be the subject of the second workshop) have already been explored by the Parish, community and FERIA team through the Neighbourhood Planning process. With this in mind, we suggest that it would be more helpful for all parties if we were to carry out a workshop looking into the policy links/hooks between the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan, with particular reference to the identified housing sites within the village. This might be able to explore and describe the defining characteristics of each site (inc. density, edges, landscape, ground conditions/ water management, open space, connections, community), and suggest the best location for this 'guidance' within either the LP or NP.

## Staplehurst Parish Council - 15.05.14 - Parish Office

**Workshop 2.** *Securing Character in new development in Staplehurst through the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Development Plan.*

**Present:**

**Design South East** – Robert Offord, Liz Gibney

**Staplehurst PC** – Mick W, John P, Joan B, Dave, John, Graham S, Margaret, Colin.

**Current Position:**

Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) is likely to be submitted and approved ahead of the Local Plan. The draft NDP has been developed through extensive work with the wider community, the formal consultation period on the plan has not yet started, but is imminent.

**Consultant on NP** - Feria Urbanism – Richard Eastman (not present)

The workshop session with Parish and community representatives was preceded by a tour of the village, with particular emphasis on the two main development areas, north of Marden Road and Headcorn Road.

The key findings of the workshop included:

- Understanding the impact of the new development in terms of quality rather than solely in terms of numbers
- The discussion of character in the NDP needs to consider a wide range of issues including hierarchy of streets (not just architecture)
- Development sites must be viewed as areas where new identity can be created (while responding to existing trees etc.)
- Response to the character of the area around the station needs to be considered alongside the changing nature of the adjoining routes and sites.

The wider discussion focused on three areas:

**PLACEMAKING** – The content of the NDP as it relates to Character of new development

**SPATIAL POLICY** – How we can best and most clearly communicate the communities aspiration around placemaking and urban design with particular regard to the two identified site.

**PROCESS** – How best the aspirations of the NDP can be achieved

## **1. PLACEMAKING**

It was agreed that the focus of the NDP should be on the quality of the future development and how they will reinforce the success of Staplehurst as a place. As such the discussion focused not on housing numbers but rather on the particular qualities that new development should possess to ensure that they are successful. This place-based approach could then be used to test the appropriateness of the numbers suggested in the plan.

It is equally important to ensure that the more detailed consideration of sites is used to test the policies in the NDP. The proposed sites can be used as case studies to see how NDP policies would be applied to control inappropriate new development. For example we discussed how character could be established through control of street hierarchy, landscape and density; however these aspects are not discussed in the draft policies that we had the opportunity to review (which appeared to place greatest/sole emphasis on architectural style).

*Character – is as much, if not more, to do with streets hierarchy (including their width and planting), landscape, views, car parking and connectivity as it is to do with architectural style.*

## **2. SPATIAL POLICY**

Applying village wide policy to particular sites could help Plan ensure their positive interpretation and therefore application by applicant teams (rather than misinterpretation). To achieve this, each key area of the village might be supported by a spatial statement drawing out key moves and exploring how the village wide statements/policy could be successfully delivered on each site. The particular areas which would benefit from this approach are undoubtedly the two largest housing development sites and the station arrival area.

The indicative plans produced so far represent one way in which the sites could be developed. While it would be unrealistic for development to come forward on these sites which directly mirrors those drawn out in the plans produced so far, we need to ensure that any proposed development respects the underlying intention of the diagrams. These key intentions could be described as principles, each of which will need to be explained and evidenced. By drawing out which of the village wide policies are relevant (or are not relevant) to the site, and how they might be successfully applied will assist in focusing attention on key issues. If there are particular aspects which are not defined by the existing policies, then these may need to be extended/expanded to ensure these elements are discussed and defined in policy.

The indicative plans need to develop it to a greater degree, and then distilled into a series of principles, which can be evidenced. Each principle needs to be reasoned so that it can be defended, and should not constitute a 'wish list'. These principles can be drawn out particularly with reference to critical areas within the new development sites. These might be the proposed avenue (Lodge Avenue?), the new village edge and the arrival space adjoining the station. The consequences of certain of these decisions might benefit from greater exploration; for example what will the impact of turning Lodge Road into a through route (and the consequential increase in footfall) be on the commercial and industrial uses in the short-medium term?

The discussion of particular sites (spatial policy) within the NDP has two different roles:

- To assist the controlling authority in making decisions about the acceptability of proposed development, but equally importantly
- To assist developers and design teams, to lead them to produce a development which can be supported by the community.

As such, the NDP should not focus on any scheme proposed by a developer but rather on leading the developer/design team's response.

### **3. PROCESS**

The NDP can discuss process as well as product.

The team may wish to consider how do we foresee developers working with the community. This might include recommendations with regard to:

- The implications of positively integrating SuDS should be explored upfront of any development work being undertaken,
- Community engagement or masterplanning workshops,
- The use of Design Review and/or Building for Life to ensure the quality of the proposed development (NPPF para 62)

Precedent images (especially those of existing environments in Staplehurst or nearby) can be used to communicate particular points, and used to backup evidence.

Making direct reference to MBC Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) will help to strengthen and evidence the justification of the NDP and particular policies.

## Headcorn Tuesday 22nd April 2014 – Parish Hall

**Workshop 1.** *Facilitating a constructive dialogue with Maidstone Borough Council about common issues to do with the Local Plan & helping the Parish Council articulate the identity & character of the village.*

**Present :**

**Design South East** – Kieran Perkins, Geoff Noble, Irene Seijo

**Headcorn PC & Headcorn Matters (NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN) –**

Lyn Selby (Chair) Dave Andrews (Chair of Planning) Tim Thomas (Headcorn History Society) Michael Jefferys (Business Survey, Headcorn Matters) , Rebecca Driver (Research & Evidence Headcorn Matters )

**Current Position:** Neighbourhood Plan emerging (Headcorn Matters) There is an excellent NP team who have very sophisticated skills. It has a very good evidence base. There have been a number of village surveys which have been very well responded to, there is a great desire to conserve the village character. These surveys are being turned into coherent draft policies which they intend to present to residents on 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> June.

### Headcorn

Headcorn is a compact village situated in the Low Weald of Kent. The village is a thriving community with an attractive and distinctive High Street, £1.4m Village Hall and an enviable array of services, clubs and local business for its 3700 residents. Headcorn is one of the largest villages in the area, but which retains its culture and heritage through its history and architecture. The ancient village can best be appreciated by a stroll along Church Walk. This quiet footpath with its medieval cottages was once the main road out of Headcorn. 78% of the village are owner occupiers.

### Key Issues with Local Plan:

- Evidence – scale of development is an issue, the PC is not against development but is very concerned about the numbers & the potential phasing and associated infrastructure – particularly sewage, roads & schools
- Location – they would prefer smaller, scattered sites – more sustainable & more likely to retain the character of the village & its rural setting
- LP/NP – site based & place based – tension between types of plan
- It is perceived that developers are being allowed to lead the process
- Affordable/Social housing – eligibility is an issue, overstates the need (40% in rural areas in LP)
- CIL – consultation has focused on peripheral issues such as signage & bus stops rather than sewage which is a reoccurring problem.

- Employment site on Maidstone Road is OK but is in a traffic black spot – traffic calming would be needed & PC has already discussed with KCC. Safe pedestrian and cycle access from the village would also be necessary.
- Grigg Lane employment site. NP would like some control over its future .
- The Parish Council believes that the evidence base for the draft Local Plan is poor and accordingly there is a risk of over-development

## SECOND HALF OF WORKSHOP – WALKABOUT/CHARACTER/DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

The PC wishes to the village retain the metrics of a village rather than a town – that is small, scattered sites rather than large neighbourhoods, numbers built out at any one time would be important in this respect. Architecture and sizes would also need to be considered. Would be useful to map the historical growth of village.

Access to the countryside – the village is compact, has a rural feel & very good access, network of paths etc – this needs to be retained.

Movement & walking distances to the High Street are important. Quality of area around Church Lane & High Street is unique to the village

The High Street is thriving and highly valued. Headcorn works because towns are at least 8 miles away. Varied retail plus two pubs and restaurants. To maintain village feel important to focus on the High Street, rather than multiple/dispersed ‘local centres’.

Network of roads to the village are small scale. Roads and traffic solutions need to be tested with residents. Commuter traffic & parking can be a problem. Rail link & buses take a few people off the road.

Are there opportunities for solving some of the traffic issues. For example if development came forward- between Grigg Lane & Lenham Rd and was co-ordinated this, might help distribute traffic and direct it away from difficult/constrained existing junctions.

School – If the Ulcombe Rd site came forward could school be made bigger or could the evolution of school site – as a key location between the site and the centre of the village - be co-ordinated with any wider plans? How could access be resolved? Communal gardens around Mill Bank as buffer to existing properties?

General acceptance that village needs to evolve carefully along with associated infrastructure.

High Street beside the station feels out of town so traffic tends to speed up. Think about car parking at station & its frontage – can it work harder, it is a big site, could it be a mixed development here? Particularly backland behind High Street. Need to have similar thought process about similar sites around the village.

Think about moving library through CIL payments

**Think about village as a whole NP needs to assemble precedents:**

Network & settlement character , show principles, relationship of streets, how buildings relate to the landscape, are they in proportion to their setting, density of development. Types and styles of roads (For instance the enjoyable contrast being the busy, enclosed, High St & the informal, countryside quality of Oak Tree Lane)

Architectural & landscape features to be conserved – oaks/hedgerows / open space/ frontages / gardens . Landscape character analysis – surrounding rural – green links etc

How would any new development link to the village – pedestrian connections, landscape connections – village green areas, tree planting, play areas

Edges of village – eg. park like character of area around church, relates well to surrounding countryside.

Traffic calming – use of bollards to stop through routes – consider other devices. Ensure any measures to mitigate existing or potential traffic impacts relate to a village character e.g. remove white lines as roads go through town.

*DSE recommend a further workshop to consolidate the above precedents so that they can be fully articulated in the NP.*

## Headcorn 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014 – Parish Hall

**Workshop 2.** *Securing Character in new development in Headcorn through the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Development Plan.*

### **Present:**

**Headcorn PC and Headcorn Matters (NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN)** – Cllr Lynn Selby (Chair), Cllr Dave Andrews (Chair of Planning), Rebecca Driver (Headcorn Matters, Research and Evidence), Michael Jeffreys (Headcorn Matters, Business Survey), Tim Thomas

**Design South East** – Kieran Perkins, Geoff Noble

### PURPOSE

The meeting had been arranged as a follow-up to the workshop and walkabout held at Headcorn on 22 April, with the same participants.

It was agreed that this second workshop should have a practical emphasis, looking at the shape and content of a possible Village Design Statement that could in turn assist the Neighbourhood Plan. The PC would like it noted that their vision for Headcorn is over the long term - 100 to 150 years.

The session was conducted in two parts:

- HEADCORN TODAY an analysis of the characteristics and qualities of Headcorn, including its setting
- HEADCORN'S FUTURE - needs, opportunities, constraints and challenges

The session began with an update on the Maidstone Local Plan.

### LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

Lyn Selby and Geoff Noble reported on the meeting held on 28 April with Parish Councils (representing the Rural Service Centres) and Maidstone Council officers on 28 April, The tenor of the meeting, chaired by DSE Director Chris Lamb, had been constructive overall. Council officers had been concerned to hear that the travelling exhibition had been received poorly, most visitors finding it too generic and lacking substance on the specific proposals for Headcorn. Much was made of the need for the plan to have a robust evidence base, both at a strategic and a local level.

Dave Andrews and Rebecca Driver had also had a useful meeting with the Leader of the Council Cllr Chris Garland in which the rationale for favouring large sites was challenged.

Headcorn PC submitted its response to Maidstone Borough Council on 6 May.

<http://www.headcornNeighbourhood>

[Planc.kentparishes.gov.uk/default.cfm?pid=news&newsid=10899](http://Planc.kentparishes.gov.uk/default.cfm?pid=news&newsid=10899)

Headcorn Matters was arranging residents meetings on 13 and 14 June, when the emerging policies and proposals for the Neighbourhood Plan would be discussed.

#### HEADCORN TODAY

Through a series of overlay diagrams on maps of different scales, the group worked through a series of themes:

- Anatomy of Headcorn – compact (almost all of the village within an 800m radius of the post office, or a 10min walk). Very little employment in the centre.
- Landscape Flood plain to south of the railway line, good hedgerow survival, mature trees, rare and cherished green spaces in the village centre. Mixed farming, hops traditionally and no large areas of woodland. Ponds are remains of old quarries for the extraction of Paludina stone (a fossiliferous limestone from the Weald Clay Formation) used in old buildings including the Parish Church.
- Connections - Good footpaths, including well used rural paths to Brook Wood, Tong Farm and elsewhere but a culture of car use means that villagers sometimes drive surprisingly short distances. Traffic manageable but growing and speeds too high on Millbank and Maidstone Road. Feeder to M20. 90 degree bend by church acts as a brake. All facilities very central except the new health centre, which is out on a limb.
- Historic growth - Tim Thomas (Headcorn History Society) sketched out the growth of the village, showing how it had evolved after the coming of the railway and grown most rapidly after electrification of the railway c 1960. It was noted that no single development had been greater than 80 houses.
- Assets – what’s great about Headcorn.

#### HEADCORN’S FUTURE

In the second part of the workshop, the group drew on the analysis to consider what the village needed and where it might go: a new or enlarged school, (which should be as central as possible) and housing development through self-supporting phases and sequential release.

Other discussions were held around using the flood plain as a green wedge; finding ways to calm traffic on Lenham Road, and improving first impressions when arriving by train.

The group considered how design quality could be achieved:

- Using published guidance eg Kent design guide
- Encouraging developers and Maidstone BC to use design review panels, especially for large or sensitive sites,
- On all sensitive sites - especially those where principle of development has been established through policy - only accepting full and not outline planning applications.

## **Boughton Monchelea Parish Council - 23.4.14 – BMC Social Club,**

**Workshop 1.** *Facilitating a constructive dialogue with Maidstone Borough Council about common issues to do with the Local Plan & helping the Parish Council articulate the identity & character of the village*

**Present :**

**Design South East** – Liz Gibney, Steve Smith, Irene Seijo

### **Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council**

**Consultant NP** - Clare Wright (present)

**Current Position:** Emerging Neighbourhood Plan

### **Boughton Monchelsea**

Boughton Monchelsea parish is made up of a number of hamlets spread over 2700 acres, of which the PC own & manage c300 acres through an Amenity Trust, started 25 years ago. This innovative mechanism is a Registered Charity wholly run by the Parish Council. The aims of the Trust are to provide amenity land for the preservation and improvement for the benefit of the inhabitants of the village and neighbouring communities. It also provides a landscape 'buffer zone' between sensitive areas of countryside & the urban edge of Maidstone, providing valuable recreation & leisure facilities for both urban & rural communities.

As the parish is spread out & would be very difficult to view as a 'walkabout' the PC provided a tractor & trailer site visit, which as well as being very enjoyable was also highly informative. Without this, it would have been impossible to appreciate the unique landscape, architectural & historic character of the parish. Views of the Weald are particularly impressive, it is an outstanding example of the 'Garden of England' in this part of Kent. As such, any future development requires particularly careful & detailed analysis. Fortunately there is an excellent NP team who have very sophisticated skills to achieve this.

The PC is not anti development, but wants to conserve the unique character of the parish by being 'in the driving seat' where this is proposed.

### **Issues that emerged during the site visit:**

The primary School is 4.5 times oversubscribed.

It has a social club but very little leisure facilities within the parish.

There is one 'general store' in the village.

There is no doctor in the parish.

The PC would have liked to secure s106 funds to help Plan to integrate new & existing communities (bridleways and pathways in particular).

### **Key Issues with Local Plan raised during the discussion:**

- Its status as a 'Larger Village' designated within the draft LP. The Parish have seen the criteria but consider it so weak and inadequate in its assessment with no proper weight associated with services and facilities.
- LP/NP – site based & place based – tension between types of plan. The PC would like more control over the process. Particularly the PC want to conserve the rural character of the parish
- The timeline for proposed development
- Affordable/Social housing – eligibility is an issue, overstates the need (40% in rural areas in LP)

## **SECOND HALF OF WORKSHOP –CHARACTER/DEVELOPMENT ISSUES**

The PC wishes the parish to retain the metrics of a group of hamlets or dispersed village. 'A collection of hamlets set within a distinctive landscape, a lot of which is publically accessible. A walkable parish. A network of hamlet hubs in a strong landscape framework'

The PC would prefer connected nodes of granular development, 5 character 'strips or bands' defined by the topography were identified, during the workshop (see illustrations) different strategies would be applied in each zone. Starting from the north:

- Suburban Edge
- Countryside buffer
- Quarry Landscape – buffer/transition zone, with publically accessible pedestrian routes
- Central Village Zone/ Heath Road (No development beyond this point)
- Greensand Ridge
- Wealden Landscape

Roads and other infrastructure would need to be carefully considered, particularly in relation to development in adjacent parishes funnelling through main roads in BM to Maidstone. Phasing of development is particularly important.

Changing employment patterns need to be considered – home working v commuters.

The hamlet hubs should have different characters/density/social organisations. Multi functional village facilities might be located in the main village of BMC.

*DSE recommend a further workshop to consolidate the above so that they can be fully articulated in the NP*

## Marden 1<sup>st</sup> May 2014 – Parish Hall

**Workshop 1.** *Facilitating a constructive dialogue with Maidstone Borough Council about common issues to do with the Local Plan & helping the Parish Council articulate the identity & character of the village*

**Present:**

Design South East – Robert Offord, Clare Wright

**Marden PC/NP reps** – Andy T, Maria, Steve M, Pam, Kate, Catherine.

**Current Position:** The Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) has been in development for a long while. The Parish and NDP representatives are considering if the NDP can be adopted ahead of the Local Plan.

### INTRODUCTION

The workshop session with Parish and community representatives was preceded by a self-guided tour of the village, with particular emphasis on the main development areas, at Stanley Farm and the Hockey Club. An informal discussion about the village, the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Development Plan, including proposed growth, followed. We are grateful to all participants for their input to the conversation.

### THE LOCAL PLAN AND THE NDP

The NDP group have taken the opportunity to reflect on the MBC draft LP and its implications for the draft NDP and, as well as making their direct representations to the Borough, have considered how the Local Plan policies will impact on the content of the NDP itself. The role of the NDP is to extend the application of LP policies to the local context, and not just repeat policies in the Local Plan; the community has the opportunity to define particular areas which are of local importance through defining how policy applies to particular sites in the village. It was suggested that, while there should not be a need for the NDP to repeat policies within the LOCAL PLAN, there is little harm in the NDP reinforcing areas which are particularly critical to Marden (and ensuring and being aware that while these remain in-draft there is a possibility that they may be subject to change).

Making direct reference to MBC Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) will help to strengthen and evidence the justification of the NDP and particular policies.

The critical issues relate to infrastructure delivery, especially with regard to transport and dealing with water. These issues should be seen as a web or network with the impact of growth in each village in the area feeding into, and directly connected, to impacts elsewhere. Additionally, the cumulative impact of developments need to be considered and tested.

The Parish are keen to hear more about the work going towards the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP); and would welcome the opportunity to hear more. (post-meeting note: *DSE are working with MBC to facilitate a workshop, which will look at these infrastructure issues in more depth with adjoining villages and NDP areas*).

Additionally there is a related concern that with the rapid growth of the village that social infrastructure will not be able to keep up, meaning that new residents will not benefit from the ability to integrate into the life of the village. The community spirit of the village is consistently highlighted as one of Marden's strongest attributes. There is a concern that the sequencing of development has not been able to take this into account.

The majority of identified sites in the village are well advanced; many have outline or detailed planning permission, or are currently under consideration. The community do not have confidence that development being promoted in the village will be of the high quality, reflecting the village's context. They are eager that MBC support them in their demands for higher quality development. Additionally there is concern that investment associated with developments is followed through; in terms of infrastructure delivery and investment in facilities.

### **THE ROLE OF THE NDP**

As noted the majority of identified sites in the village are well advanced; many have outline or detailed planning permission, or are currently under consideration. It was suggested that the NDP group should not lose focus or energy simply because many sites are so well advanced, but rather should continue to promote desired practice within the NDP. There is always the possibility that proposed developments might change in the future and the NDP will then be a valuable resource to call upon to ensure they meet community aspirations. Additionally, sites with outline planning will still need to be considered at a detailed level, where a NDP can offer both advice and control. The NDP could include;

- Commentary on design as a process, and the means of attaining and assessing good design can be incorporated in the NDP – including the assumption that developers should engage in Community Design Workshops, Design Review, and the use of Building for Life.

- Continued consideration of design and place-making with relation to the identified sites, particularly how policies in the LOCAL PLAN might be successfully applied within the Marden context
- The NDP has a role as advice and help developers and designers create places which are acceptable, rather than solely being a controlling tool for helping reject inappropriate schemes.

### **TESTING THE NDP**

The current application at the Hockey Field provides a test case for how the draft LP and draft NDP would be used in dealing with, and supporting the design of new development in the village.

This site could be used as a case study to:

1. Assess the clarity and application of the NDP policies on a 'live' site,
2. Test the quality of the scheme, and see how it measures up against the aspirations of the NDP.

This process will allow us to refine the NDP to ensure its policies are clear and help us achieve our aims.

### **ADDITIONAL COMMENTARY**

- There was particular feedback regarding the Park and Ride initiative and how it could be used to support the wider transport network in South Maidstone, which is currently very poor. Greater consideration of the wider network of villages would again extend the understanding of the context in which any new investment in infrastructure would be made helping to fulfil multiple objectives.
- Greater clarity in the presentation of the Local Plan at community workshops would have helped communicate with local residents, rather than raise potential confusion.

## Sutton Valence Parish Council - 29.5.14 – Cheyne House

**Workshop 1.** *Facilitating a constructive dialogue with Maidstone Borough Council about common issues to do with the Local Plan & helping the Parish Council articulate the identity & character of the village*

**Present :**

**Design South East** – Clare Wright, Geoff Noble, Irene Seijo

**Sutton Valence PC & Residents** – Peter Coleman, Eileen Riden, Janet Burnet, Barry Armstrong, Chris Smith

**Summary:** Sutton Valence is a very attractive village some five miles SE of Maidstone, Kent on the Greensand Ridge overlooking the Vale of Kent and Weald. One of the main landmarks in the village is Sutton Valence Castle, of which only the ruins of the 12th century keep remain, under the ownership of English Heritage. Sutton Valence lies on the main A274 road from Maidstone to Tenterden and is linked by bus to both towns, as well as Headcorn. The village has no railway station.

The village of Sutton Valence can be said to be split into two. The principal and older part occupies the upper slope of the Greensand Ridge and is a conservation area, while the remainder is located at the bottom of the hill. The village has a post office (soon to close) and three pubs and two doctors surgeries. There is also a recreation ground next to the village hall. There is a public school and a primary school, which is nearby.

**Current Position:** Sutton Valence Parish Council applied for permission to Maidstone Borough Council to designate the whole of Sutton Valence Parish as a “Neighbourhood Area” for the purposes of the plan in November 2013. Consultation commenced in late November & will take place throughout 2014. It was approved as a Neighbourhood Plan Area by MBC in February 2014. The Parish have developed a provisional vision statement as follows:

“Our vision for Sutton Valence is one of a strong and thriving community where our history and heritage are celebrated and sustained and where our rural setting and character are preserved and enhanced for both residents and visitors. In order to meet the needs of the Parish in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we aspire to:

- Maintain and enhance the built and natural environment for present and future generations.
- Support well designed small scale housing and business developments that meet local needs and are in keeping with the character scale and demands of a small rural Parish.
- Encourage opportunities for parishioners across the generations to find enjoyment and fulfilment through a range of educational, sporting and leisure activities.
- Foster partnership working between Parish organisations and institutions for the mutual benefit of all.

- Support local businesses and services that contribute to the quality of life for residents and visitors, including support for suitable diversification and use of new technology.
- Ensure the Parish is a welcoming setting for visitors by improving facilities within the context of a safe and rural environment.

The PC are extremely well informed about planning matters. They produced an excellent Parish Plan in 200(?) and will test the evidence collected in this to develop their NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN. They aim to develop the NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN on place-making principles. As with other parishes developing Neighbourhood Plans, there is tension between this 'place based' approach as opposed to the Borough's 'site based' approach. The PC perceive that the sensitivity of their geographic position and location (North Downs & Greensand Ridge) is not given due consideration in the draft Local Plan.

#### **Key Issues with Local Plan raised during the discussion:**

The first call for sites identified 7 sites, all of which were excluded. The second call for sites has identified 14 sites (some of which also came up in the first call)

- The PC feel there has been a marked lack of consultation during the process of developing the LOCAL PLAN, and is particularly concerned about its designation as a 'Larger Village', the criteria for which are not apparent. For example, the playing pitches owned by the public school have been classed as available recreational open space which is not the case.
- Scale of development is an issue, the PC is not against development but is very concerned about the numbers & the potential phasing and associated infrastructure.
- Pace of development. 500 houses are proposed which doubles the size of the village
- Location & design – they would prefer smaller, dispersed sites more likely to retain the character of the village & its rural setting - like the Haven Close development - rather than large numbers of four & five bedroom properties.
- Infrastructure – The PC has major concerns regarding the lack of a properly funded and agreed infrastructure programme to support the draft Local Plan, particularly in regard to pressure on roads and proposed development in neighbouring parishes. Two thirds of the village is not on mains sewerage. The majority of secondary school children already travel to school outside the parish.
- The PC feels that the latest housing need assessment represents an unrealistic assessment of the Borough's future housing needs and will have a negative effect on the overall quality of life, particularly in rural locations. They support the submission put forward to Maidstone by KCC.
- It is perceived that developers are being allowed to lead the process, the PC believe that developers have been 'signposted' to look at sites within Sutton Valence.
- The PC would like to see a robust 'landscape strategy' which retains the rural, agricultural character of the parishes in the south of the Borough from the growth of the urban town centre.

- Concern about overall quality of approach of MBC officers and members to parishes about both the Draft Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans
- The PC would like more dialogue with MBC as they want to be able to support a Local Plan for the area, but this Draft Plan requires amendments
- NDPs can help MBC achieve their goals if MBC understand the potential and opportunities within NDPs where provision is properly included within Local Plans.

***Discussion & recommendations on way forward:***

- In short term – PC should develop a succinct check list which articulates the main points and potential solutions for the long term future of the village.
- Set out the characteristics of each area of the village & appropriate design. Develop criteria & identity of the place. For example the village is the heart of the parish and a significant part of its identity. Different areas require different strategies.
- Develop a list of ‘must haves’ and ‘wants’ in relation to CIL
- Check MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL’s appraisal of the conservation area – is it up to date?
- Look at view points & views that should be retained, particularly up towards the village from the south
- Check the current list of sites against the above and which might be appropriate and which are not and why.
- Consider an overall strategy for managing the landscape between Maidstone urban area and rural parishes

*DSE would be happy to assist with the above, if the time scale allows and the PC feels it is useful at this point.*

## Lenham Parish Council - 21.7.14 – Lenham Community Centre.

**Workshop 1.** *Facilitating a constructive dialogue with Maidstone Borough Council about common issues to do with the Local Plan & helping the Parish Council articulate the identity & character of the village*

**Present:**

**Design South East** – Annette Hards, Robert Offord, Irene Seijo

**Lenham Parish Council** – Margo McFarlane (Clerk) Nigel Godfrey, Nigel Willis, Martin Jackson, Richard Greenwood, Colin Gillett, Jerry Osborn, L Porter, S Knowles.

**Summary:** Records show that Lenham Village is an ancient settlement. Earliest records date back to 804AD and it is also recorded in the Domesday survey. The village is located in mid Kent beneath the scarp of the North Downs and is surrounded by mainly arable farmland. Lenham is built around the original medieval square where the shops and services ensure that this is a lively, working village.

**Current Position:** Lenham Parish Council produced an excellent Parish Plan in 2007 and this is being used as a basis for their emerging Neighbourhood Plan. The PC has produced a project report detailing the timetable for the NP, they managed to achieve a great deal during 2013 and had many good ideas for the development of the parish. Then housing numbers increased, potentially doubling the size of the village. The timetable has now slipped somewhat, due to changes in personnel, but the PC is now keen to reinvigorate the process and intend to produce a brief for consultants to help with this process.

The PC are keen to be proactive – they are not against development, but want to retain the village character and they feel it is important to manage expectations. They are very keen to take a ‘place based approach’, particularly as developers are already approaching them with plans for some of the sites. They would like to test their assumptions against a clear vision for the village.

The PC also intend to have a public meeting this coming weekend to expand engagement and involvement and to recruit new members to help with the NP. As a result it was felt that it was important to produce a Parish Council Position Statement to take to the Saturday meeting, which was discussed and drafted during the rest of the workshop:

Draft Position Statement:

“Lenham Parish Council recognise that some growth in this area is inevitable, we intend to proactively lead that process, so that we can retain the character of the village and that control of our future.

We need to ensure that any development is supported by adequate and timely improvements in infrastructure.

We believe that it is necessary to continue with our Neighbourhood Plan process, with the help of parishioners and supported by professionals.

Now that Maidstone Borough Council has indicated significant growth in Lenham we need to ensure that our voice is heard – please join our Neighbourhood Planning Forum to help us with this very important work”.

**Design South East – July 2014**

# Annex 2- Design South East

## Facilitators

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### **Richard Eastman**

Richard is director of Feria Urbanism, a design studio with specialisms in urban design, urban planning and neighbourhood strategies. Based in Bournemouth, the studio was established in 2007 and has since worked across the UK on many place-shaping projects, visioning studies and strategic frameworks for urban and rural areas. Richard is an urban designer with extensive experience in the preparation of design strategies and development frameworks. He has particular expertise in engaging with stakeholders and local communities to plan shape and influence emerging spatial strategies. He has delivered urban design frameworks for Liverpool, Bournemouth, Preston, Weymouth and Bexleyheath; provided Neighbourhood Planning advice for community groups; delivered an urban quarter study in Liverpool; and created a strategic vision for several Kent villages. Richard has been appointed to the East of England Design Review Panel, a recognition of his design skills and experience. He is a visiting tutor on the architecture course at the Arts University Bournemouth alongside his work at Feria Urbanism. He has also recently worked part-time in the City Design Team at Southampton City Council. Prior to establishing Feria Urbanism, Richard was an associate director at Terence O'Rourke Ltd in Bournemouth before becoming a director at NEW Masterplanning Ltd in Poole. He was born in Preston, Lancashire and trained at the University of Sheffield, the University of Manchester and Oxford Brookes University.

### **Annette Hards**

Annette is a Chartered Architect and Urban Designer with over 25 years of experience as a practitioner, and a passion for more sustainable, people focussed approaches to development. She is an enthusiastic and skilful facilitator of community and stakeholder engagement in the design process, across a wide range of settings, including schools, community and cultural facilities, and public realm projects. Annette worked at the Kent Architecture Centre for eleven years, developing innovative and successful engagement of young people in 'place-making', and led on the development and facilitation of successful design-led initiatives, including Urban Design learning programmes, the Spaceshaper 9-14 initiative, publications, study trips and workshops for a range of audiences, including local authorities and housing associations. She is currently a part-time lecturer on the MSc course for Town Planners at the University of Brighton, and runs Sussex:PLACenet, a cross-professional, knowledge sharing network and events programme for 'place-based' practitioners, decision-makers and enthusiasts across Sussex. She is an Associate of Rethinking Cities.

## **Geoff Noble**

Geoff Noble is a chartered town planner with wide experience in urban and rural planning, design and conservation. After stints with local authorities in Staffordshire and Hampshire Geoff joined English Heritage in 1985 as one of their first recruits. He spent ten years assigned to the north of England before moving to English Heritage's London team, becoming Deputy Director in 2000.

In 2005 Geoff joined the architecture and urban design practice Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners where he continues to work on a freelance basis. Since 2006 he has also worked with the Kent Architecture Centre (now Design South East), where he was appointed to run the South East Regional Design Panel and to provide training on design and heritage management. In 2010 he was elected as a trustee to the Environment Trust for Richmond upon Thames, a well established and active charity.

## **Robert Offord**

Robert is a planner and urban designer and leads the DSE Design Support programme. Robert's core role is helping clients diagnose and overcome design and planning concerns by providing tailored support. He has particular expertise in setting up local design support initiatives and leading workshop facilitation as well as delivering design training. Robert is also responsible for managing the South East Panel, as well as, working on the centre's design and regeneration projects.

## **Clare B. Wright MRTPI MILM**

Clare is an independent planning consultant, providing advice to landowners and communities on development proposals, applications and appeals. Her partnership work on encouraging good design in historic areas for English Heritage and CABE is recommended in National Planning Policy Guidance.

Clare is one of the Founding Directors of Community Spirit Partnership CIC that work in partnership with parish councils, groups and Forums to prepare Neighbourhood Development Plans and other community-led plans. She is an Independent Examiner for Neighbourhood Development Plans, panel member of Neighbourhood Planners.

Clare has over 25 years experience in planning, design and engagement within the public, private and non-profit sectors.

## **Kieran Perkins**

Kieran is an experienced designer working across the fields of building, town- and landscape, as well as holding a professional qualification as an Architect.

In practice at 5th Studio he has worked on a wide spectrum of projects from built interventions in sensitive historic locations, through housing and public building schemes, to large-scale masterplanning and landscape-scale propositions. Kieran is particularly experienced at intelligently combining a sensitivity to, and enjoyment of, the physical, experiential and practical qualities of buildings and places, with high level strategic thinking.

Kieran has served in a number of design review and enabling roles, including the Cambridge Design & Conservation Panel, The Shape East Panel and now for D:SE. He has also been a tutor and supervisor at Cambridge and Nottingham Universities, and has undertaken a number of voluntary teaching, mentoring and outreach roles in a variety of contexts.

### **Steven Smith**

Steven Smith BA (Hons) Dip Arch RIBA Director urban narrative

Steven Smith is an architect with over 30 years' professional experience of practising as an architect and urbanist working on a diverse, international portfolio of projects. His career has developed through his work on projects across Europe, Asia and Australia, and includes some of the most challenging, large-scale development projects in the world.

Steven founded urban narrative in 2010 after a successful career at DEGW, an international research-based design consultancy, and before that with Terry Farrell and Partners in the UK and Asia.