

Staplehurst Parish Council

Committee, Group or Sub Group

Rural Settlement Group (RSG) - Minutes

Meeting Date & Venue

7th December 2016 – 8 pm at Village Centre

Report Author - **John Kelly**

1. Introductions

Attending were Margaret Arger (MA,) Tom Burnham (TB), John Kelly (JK), John Perry (JP) and Robin Oakley (RO)

2. Apologies - received from Joan Buller (JB), Robin Kenworthy (RK), Colin Love (CL), John Perry (JP), Adelle Sharpe (AS) and Gill Smith (GS).

3. Minutes of the last meeting

It was noted that Gill Smith had been co-opted onto the Parish Council and would be designated as Parish Councillor with the RSG, rather than Resident.

Action - JK had emailed the SPC with the following recommendations:-

- a) The NP be at the centre of all parish council business
- b) Hard copies of the NP to all Parish Councillors and RSG members

However it was not clear as to where the SPC were in taking these on board.

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

4. Membership of Group

It was noted that Gill Smith had been co-opted onto the Parish Council and would be designated as Parish Councillor with the RSG, rather than Resident.

5. MBC Draft Local Plan

- General Update

It was apparent from the recent publicity surrounding the Local Plan Inspection that numerous parties were still concerned about the Objectively Assessed Housing Need number and whether MBC had the infrastructure to address. Helen Grant (MP) had appeared before the Planning Inspector and was highly vocal in her criticism. The RSG awaited the Planning Inspectors report with some anticipation, especially around the aspect of Rural Service Centres.

- Additional allocation site - Lodge Road

The Planning Inspector had subsequently favoured the mixed use proposal contained in the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan (policy H6), finding that MBC's proposal did not properly reflect the NP policy.

This could be seen as a 'victory' for the NP and we wondered whether without it, another housing-only site would have been allocated to Staplehurst.

6. Staplehurst Neighbourhood Development Plan:-

- MBC Adoption - 7th December 2016

The NP was due to be made this very evening by MBC. JB was attending as an observer. JP was attending as a speaker along with Louise Brice. Although the NP had been along time in the making it was seen as a landmark in the history of Staplehurst. Admiring parties were queuing up to ask questions on the process and learning we had all been through.

- Additional allocation site - Lodge Road inclusion?

See note above at Pt.5 regarding Planning Inspectors decision.

- Land south of Marden Road

This site had been considered by SPC Planning Committee for Outline Planning Permission on the 5th December 2016.

JK stated that in his opinion the application was poor and full of inaccuracies and was a blatant attempt to rubbish the NP by being critical of the draft Local Plan.

The RSG were dismayed to learn that SPC Planning Committee, despite rejecting the site on the grounds that it was not within the draft Local Plan or the Staplehurst NP, had then gone onto indulge in further discussions regarding the transfer of adjoining land.

RSG expressed even greater concern when Councillors voted by a majority that if consideration were ever given to approval of the application they would wish to see a transfer of adjoining land for community purposes.

There was no rationale for this decision, which might give a clear signal to landowners and developers that Staplehurst was 'open for business' as long as a land deal was in the mix.

JK stated that he had been unable to attend on the 5th December but honestly believed that all parish Councillors had a good understanding of the NP.

However following this decision it was clear there was a shortfall in certain individuals understanding. The RSG noted that:-

1. TB had not taken part in this part of the Planning Committee deliberations
2. JB had expressed grave concerns and voted against the proposal
3. JP had voiced his concerns from the floor

- Railway Tavern Site

TB stated that SPC's previous decisions regarding this site had not changed. JP stated that part of the building was listed and it was not that easy to convert the space for the production and service of food. JK stated that there was evidence of

interest from various parties but that the rents being asked for, were overpriced. MA stated that the adjacent Newsagents had expressed concern about the water source.

7. Solar Farm Appeal

JB had attended on behalf of SPC, with JP along as observer. JB had mixed feelings about what stance the Planning Inspector would subsequently take regarding the Appeal.

We all awaited the outcome in the New Year if approved, there could be huge ramifications for rural areas in Kent.

JP hoped there would be no need to consider a formal complaint in the future.

8. Housing Survey 2016 - update

JK stated it was still not clear whether Housing Survey 2016 had actually been signed off by SPC.

However it was hoped that a digital version would be on the SPC website asap and that hard copies would be made available.

9. Future of Village Centre – update

Architects had delivered three concepts and these were to be discussed by the Development Group next week.

A **Viewing Event** would take place at the Village Centre on the **21st January 2017** for residents to attend and give comment/feedback.

10. Gypsy and Traveller Sites – update

JP stated he was in contact with Helen Grant, MP re the latest position, the final MBC target and the definition of Gypsy/Traveller or the interpretation thereof.

RO stated that the mobile home at Cross at Hand had gone. RO also commented on the state of land at HUnstman Stables with regard to fridges lying around, albeit on private land.

11. Supermarket Update:-

There was no major news to report. The hoardings at the potential garage site were to be changed and the site tidied up. RSG welcomed this move.

However the continued absence of a Supermarket which would provide competition for Spar whilst offering choice, was a huge concern for the RSG and to some degree undermined the NP and its vision for the future.

12. Future of Rural Settlement Group

The RSG felt that considering the decision regarding the Land south of Marden Road, there was a greater need than ever to have such a group in place.

The terms of reference for the RSG would need to be updated alongside any name change and focus for this group.

The dates for meeting in 2017 had yet to be set but it was felt that the first meeting would be the 11th January 2017 and thereafter the 8th February 2017.

13. Any other business

The closure of the Nat West Bank was considered a major blow to the future of Staplehurst. SPC were making enquiries as to how Nat West services might still be delivered within the Village.

Enquires were taking place as to whether SPAR would have an ATM within the store.

Some work had been conducted on the additional Railway Station Car Park but it was still not open to the public. There was still some questions concerning landscaping and whether the work was in compliance with MBC conditions.

There being no further business the meeting finished at 10.00pm