



Strategic Planning,
Maidstone Borough Council,
Maidstone House,
King Street,
Maidstone,
Kent ME15 6JQ

Sent via email: LDF@maidstone.gov.uk
Cc: saveourheathlands@gmail.com

4th December 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Response to Maidstone Local Plan Review Regulation 18b Preferred
Approaches Public Consultation**

Please find below my considered response to Maidstone Council's Local Plan Review Regulation 18b preferred approaches public consultation. I especially would like to share comments on Policy SP4 Garden Settlements. More specifically these relate to Policy SP4(a) Heathlands Garden Settlement.

Please note my objection to Policy SP4(a). I particularly disagree with the claim made in the draft spatial strategy's that the Council's garden community proposal at Lenham Heath (Heathlands) is a major opportunity for sustainable growth as a stand-alone garden settlement. My objection is made on the basis that I believe this Policy does not meet the suitability and deliverability tests it claims to have through the Garden Communities Assessment.

I would like to further expand on my reasons for this objection below.

Firstly, my wife and I moved to Harrietsham from the Medway Towns specifically to live in a rural setting. The Lenham Heath proposal will further urbanise the countryside between Harrietsham and Charing and expand the urban reach of Maidstone. Many of us live in these villages because we want to lead a rural, village lifestyle. Building 5000 new homes in the middle of the countryside, plus associated traffic, noise and services will fundamentally change the character of this area at the foot of the North Downs and the AONB.

Despite living in rural villages, Harrietsham, Lenham and Charing residents already face a highly used A20. Adding another 5000 homes in a rural location will substantially

increase A20 user demand on top of an already high base, adding to noise, congestion and reducing quality of life for all in these settlements that it passes through.

Creating a new garden community expected to house over 12,000 people in a rural location with one main road access (A20) and no real public transport is completely out of kilter with approaches employed elsewhere in the UK. For example in London new housing / employment / facilities are being delivered around local borough centres and stations where public transport is most dense and the need to travel reduced. Maidstone has large quantities of under-used retail eg Chequers centre that also has good bus / rail access – this is where new housing should be focused, not the rural countryside. Almost all residents of the garden community, given its rural location would drive along the A20 to access jobs / services / leisure; this reliance on car use is very much at odds with national policies to reduce car use and increase public transport, walking and cycling.

This reliance on car will add to local carbon emissions which are contrary to national and local policies on climate change. Given the climate emergency that many councils across the UK have called out, building 5000 new homes in a rural area on green field land is totally at odds with the need to reduce our climate impact and protect our green space environment, as well as ensuring national food supply.

The proposed new Heathlands railway station will have little effect on increasing A20 use generated by the garden community; the Ashford-Maidstone-London rail line is infrequent off peak and slow, serving to reduce its popularity as a commuter route. The Local Plan contains no detail on the proposed new station which is a glaring omission. Even if a new station is delivered, it could not come at the expense of existing stations; a Maidstone Borough committee reports mentioned closing the existing Lenham station to deliver a new Heathlands station. This is a ridiculous proposal – Lenham itself is growing and needs more public transport, not less!

I note the proposal that the garden community could realise up to 5000 jobs. This claim is undocumented. Any jobs created are unlikely to be fully resourced from within the new garden community, far more likely they will come from the surrounding area, meaning more A20 traffic, associated noise, congestion and emissions. Commuting distances of 10 miles or more, eg from Maidstone or Ashford to the new community can be expected to generate excessive carbon emissions which are contrary to government policy on climate change

Last but not least, this proposal has to date been developed in secret. Maidstone Council has withheld important information about the garden community proposal from public view. Local residents in the sphere of this proposal have not been consulted about any of the plans and on this basis, plus the reasons outlined above, it should be withdrawn from the local plan.

Through his response My wife and I call for the council remove policy SP4(a) Heathlands Garden Settlement from their preferred approaches.

Regards,

S Clark