

Cllr Jane Martin Comment ID: MCLP 1172/1173/1174/1175

Examination of the Ashford Local Plan to 2030

Inspectors issue 16

Representation on behalf of Saxon Shore Ward- the villages of Aldington, Bonnington, Bilsington, Brook, Hastingsleigh, Ruckinge, Brabourne and Smeeth for a rural Landscape and Village Protection Policy.

- 1.1.1 Following representations made in July 2017, the support within the Borough, for a Borough wide rural Landscape and Village Protection Policy have swelled. What was originally a representation for 3 villages, now sees strength from the entire ward and from many neighbouring rural areas.
- 1.1.2 The Policy now has the support of Parish Councils (PC'S) in Aldington, Bonnington, Brook, Ruckinge both lower and upper ,Orlestone and Ham Street, Boughton Aluph, Eastwell and Warehorne.
- 1.1.3 Since November 2017, residents of the ward have formed Rural Means Rural-(RMR) a community organization, aimed at supporting my representations for such a policy and this is now supported by more than 1150 residents of the area and the Borough in Chilham, Naccolt, Stelling Minis, Smeeth, Kingsnorth, Shadoxhurst, South Willesborough, Warehorne, Ham St, Aldington, Bonnington, Bilsington, Brook, Ruckinge Orlestone. The aim of this organization, is to support the inclusion of the LPP in planning policy.

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- 1.1.4 Peter Brett Associates have been engaged to make most of the technical arguments for the adoption of the LPP into ABC planning policy. As Ward member, I will address a few technical issues, but wish to focus my attention on the political needs of those I represent and why there is a need for this policy in delivering on those needs for local people.
- 1.1.5 The EIP opening statement from ABC recognizes the need to strike a balance between the drive for new development and to ensuring that the important elements that contribute towards the wider character of the Borough and the individual settlements and countryside within it, are suitably protected. The huge sway of support that this policy has attracted, clearly demonstrates, the need to listen to residents and to reflect on the effect small pockets of development has on the setting on a rural area, and indeed the detrimental effects that constant development is having. Currently and in the proposed plan, there is no topic based policy that adequately supports villages in this regard.

- 1.1.6 In discussions with ABC, myself and Peter Brett associates, representing the villages and Rural Means Rural at this EIP, have been advised that some of the wording used in the LPP, has been incorporated into other policies. Given that these are largely broad and topic based, we consider that this approach fails to address entirely the issue of the impact of cumulative effects of development on the environment and amenity of a rural settlement. We suggest therefore that Policy ENV3 be further supported by the inclusion of an additional policy ENV3c. This would provide additional support for cumulative assessment when considering new proposed development.
- 1.1.7 The Policy is aimed at supporting the ALP, making development in the rural areas more sustainable, by requiring greater credence to the appropriateness of development, its scale and the pace at which development is absorbed into existing settlements, ensuring villages grow at an appropriate pace that matches the rural way of life. The NPPF addresses this in paragraph 15: "Policies in local plans should follow the approach of the presumption in favour of sustainable development so that it is clear that development which is sustainable can be approved without further delay. All plans should be based upon and reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development, with clear policies that will guide how the presumption should be applied locally."
- 1.1.8 Paragraph 17 of the NPPF encourages "empowering local people to shape their surroundings" The LPP does this – the policy acts as an umbrella with local communities joining together to decide and collate the evidence base to give the policy credence and weighting. This differentiates between a Neighbourhood Plan in as much as this is addressing the cumulative effects of development and how it can be managed on an area, rather than determining where development can take place. In line with the NPPF and the Localism act, this empowers local people and entrusts local people to make and take the decisions that affect their futures. Having been a Councillor now for 5 years, I consider that local people often know what's best for their area, and in particular, how to go about implementing that- this policy places the future of rural areas, firmly in the hands of local people. By placing the responsibility on local community, the Policy only becomes effective if action is taken, and so resoundingly supports the Council and the Government in truly letting people "have their say"
- 1.1.9 Saxon Shore residents have been consistent over the past 5 years in welcoming development that is appropriate for the area and at a pace that is fitting for the rural setting. The LPP came into being because current local policy, together with the new local plan policies have failed to provide adequate checks and balances as mentioned in the ABC opening statement. Aldington, currently a tier 3 settlement has seen more growth in its population in real terms, than Tenterden, a tier two settlement: see attached Fact Sheet Appendix 1.
- 1.1.10 There have been no fewer than 6 Public meetings since 2015, 5 door to door leaflets and now a petition signed by in excess of 1000 residents, not seeking no future development, rather a policy which can offer tangible tools with which to ensure that their rural areas remain just that – rural and have an opportunity to absorb development before the next swathe comes along.
- 1.1.11 The creation of the initial policies was supported by a huge section of the community – school children, families, retirees all pitched up and volunteered to collate traffic data, photograph ancient hedgerows, wildlife and historical buildings – with more than 100 people across the

villages working to supply Peter Brett with the information that they consider is important to evidence the policy. In doing so, residents consider they are doing the best to ensure that their villages are there for generations to come. This kind of bespoke approach, also means that the broad policy framework, enables villages to tailor their policy to suit their needs and concerns, meaning now one policy, would be exactly the same.

- 1.1.12 The LPP raises the bar for development – requiring developers to be more respectful and creative in their approach to the future of rural areas. Policy in Aldington includes as an example the wording “Be designed and laid out in such a way as to conserve the mature hedgerow along the road frontage if possible, retain gaps in the built frontage of the to preserve views and vistas through the site to the heritage assets and also consider the wider landscape settings, the topography of the site and Greensand Ridge location” In a Landscape Protection policy, a developer would need to conserve mature hedgerow period, thus meaning there would need to be greater thought and respect afforded any plans, so that this mature hedgerow, as an example, was maintained, as in this case, it is considered fundamental to wildlife and part of the rural setting.
- 1.1.13 We are seeking a Borough wide Policy, that can be applied by villages across the whole area and not just limited to Saxon Shore.