



The Bearsted & Thurnham Society



The Residents' Association for the Civil Parishes of Bearsted and Thurnham

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Richard Timms Esq.
Mid Kent Planning Support
Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House
King Street
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Dear Mr Timms

**APPLICATION NO 17/502331/OUT LAND AT WOODCUT FARM
HOLLINGBOURNE. OUTLINE APPLICATION FOR MIXED COMMERCIAL
DEVELOPMENT WITH A MAXIMUM FLOOR SPACE OF 45,295 SQUARE
METRES (RESUBMISSION OF 15/503288/OUT)**

This letter sets out the Society's objections to the above application in respect of Woodcut Farm.

The case against development at Woodcut Farm is well established and has been supported by the Society since first made. Those arguments remain just as powerful against the current application which is little altered from its predecessor. They include that:

- ▶ Woodcut Farm is a green field site in a totally unsustainable and isolated countryside location at considerable distance from the built up area of Maidstone and far from local services.
- ▶ The absence of effective public transport will mean the workforce would be heavily reliant on private cars which would add substantially to congestion on local roads and add to pollution which is already unacceptably high in many parts of the borough.
- ▶ The scale and nature of this proposal will seriously erode the unspoilt character of the attractive and open countryside between Bearsted and Leeds Castle and harm the setting of the Kent Downs AONB, Leeds Castle, Woodcut farmhouse and other heritage assets.

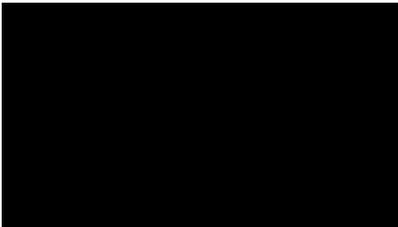
The application, like all those that preceded it, is wholly speculative. No case has been made out that, if permission were allowed, the site would attract the kind of development the applicants propose or the Council believe is needed. Nor that there is an immediate demand for such development or that it would provide jobs for Maidstone residents rather than drawing in people from surrounding authorities.

If there were such demand it would surely have materialised by now at Eclipse Park. Instead vacant sites have been filled by retail development: first NEXT, then by proposals from Waitrose, now Marks & Spencer.

The lack of demand provides the ideal opportunity to take review the need for such development as part of the review of the Local Plan which is due to get under way in the immediate future and to report by 2021. This review will provide the opportunity to examine job demand and employment opportunities across the wider economic, employment and housing areas and for the kind of closer co-operation between neighbouring authorities envisaged in the Government's recent consultation document.

If the Council is to avoid the kind of failings that have beset Eclipse Park, once seen as the great white hope for meeting employment needs in Maidstone, then a thorough analysis of why this site has failed to meet its original objectives and of other opportunities within the wider economic and employment area are necessary. It may well be that this review will demonstrate that the best solution to the supply and demand equation rests with expansion of the existing highly successful Aylesford/Larkfield corridor rather than piecemeal, speculative development in open countryside.

Yours sincerely



Roger Vidler