

STOCKBURY PARISH COUNCIL

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Rob Jarman
Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House
King Street
Maidstone
Kent

17th December 2018

Dear Mr Jarman

Planning reference 18/504836

Binbury Park Bimbury Lane Detling Maidstone Kent.

Outline application (with all matters reserved apart from Access) for the erection of up to 1,750 dwellings including Affordable housing, 46,000 sq.m of commercial space, a Hotel, a local centre, a new primary school, a park and Ride facility etc.

Stockbury Parish Council has considered the above application and wishes to object to it on the following grounds:

1. Kent Downs AONB

The proposed development lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The revised NPPF (paragraph 172) instructs that AONBs should be conserved and enhanced, and further states that major developments such as this should be refused except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Stockbury Parish Council does not consider that this development is justified as an exceptional circumstance, nor would it be in the public interest.

In addition to the tests above, paragraph 172 of the NPPF requires that major developments within AONBs should be tested against three criteria: the need for the development; the impact on the landscape; and the scope for developing outside the designated area or meeting the need in another way. Maidstone Borough Council has already identified sufficient land for development in order to meet its housing targets within its local plan, negating the need for this development. The impact on the landscape would be extreme, causing irreparable harm to the character and nature of a protected landscape. Even if the development met the first two criteria, the Borough of Maidstone has more than sufficient land outside the AONB (72.7% of the total area) on which it could permit development without compromising an area which enjoys one of the highest protections against development.

It is our understanding that the Kent Downs AONB unit has provided a substantial commentary and comments which Stockbury Parish Council would fully support.

Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan

The site lies outside the area designated for development within the MBC Local Plan adopted in 2017 and development would be contrary to policies contained within it, namely SS1, DM3 and SP17.

Policy SS1 states that an expanded Maidstone urban area would be the principle focus for development whilst the Kent Downs AONB would be conserved and enhanced. The proposed development lies wholly within the AONB and could neither be seen as conservation or enhancement.

Policy DM3 requires that new developments should protect and enhance the natural environment, ensuring that landscape character, hedgerows etc be protected. The loss of some 76ha of mainly agricultural land to buildings cannot be interpreted either as protecting or enhancing the natural environment.

Policy SP17, in line with the NPPF, requires that great weight be given to the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB. Paragraph 107 states that economic development within the AONB should be located in existing traditional buildings of historic or vernacular merit in smaller settlements, farmsteads or within groups of buildings in sustainable locations. In short, it militates against approving developments like "Binbury Park".

2. A249

The A249 is an extremely busy road which currently operates beyond its maximum capacity at peak periods, resulting in severe congestion and the dangerous phenomenon of "rat running" through rural lanes. The road is already under increasing pressure from developments already taking place north of the M2, particularly on the Isle of Sheppey and the effect of the new Lower Thames Crossing has yet fully to be modelled. The proposed development would result in up to 10,000 additional vehicle movements per day in the Parish Council's view; this would represent an increase of some 20%. We note that the developer proposes road alterations which, in their view, would be improvements to the A249, but these would have negligible impact on improving existing traffic flow even if they mitigate some of the effects of the proposed development.

The Parish of Stockbury is rural in nature, consisting of dispersed cottages, farms and small settlements. Its lanes are used extensively by cyclists, horse riders and farm vehicles and their safe operation is critical to the residents of the Parish. A major development which both generates new traffic and increases the likelihood of "rat running" to escape congestion on the A249 would have a massive detrimental impact on Parishioners' lives.

3. Archaeology

The proposed development would be on a site of major discovered and undiscovered archaeological significance. The impact on Binbury Castle, a scheduled ancient monument, evidence of iron age settlement nearby and on the potentially significant undiscovered and recorded WW1 and WW2 archaeology would be significant. Stockbury is proud of its heritage and would not wish it to be threatened by unwarranted urbanisation.

4. Water supply

The proposed development would occupy part of the catchment for the chalk aquifer which serves parts of both Maidstone and Medway. We understand that Southern Water have submitted their concerns about the potential for run-off but would add that water is in relatively short supply and likely to become scarcer with the impact of climate change. To increase demand whilst reducing the capacity of the land to absorb rainfall through development would seem to be folly in the extreme.

5. Local residents

Whilst the proposed development falls mainly within the Parish of Thurnham, the vast majority of existing residents who would be affected live within the Parish of Stockbury. They were either born and raised within the Parish or have moved to Stockbury in the reasonable expectation that they would be living in a rural / semi-rural area which, by virtue of being within an AONB, was safe from urban encroachment. The loss of amenity, should this development proceed, would be considerable, and something which cannot be mitigated by new housing, sports grounds, specialist schools or industrial facilities.

In conclusion, the Parish Council objects to the proposals that seek to develop an AONB and we strongly urge the Borough Council to refuse the application. We also request that this is called in to be heard before the MBC Planning Committee.

Yours sincerely

S Babington

Mrs. S Babington
Clerk to the Parish Council