



EAST FARLEIGH PARISH COUNCIL

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7th October 2020

To:

Maidstone Borough Council Ward councilors representing the village and Mr P Coyne, Interim Director of Local Plan Review

Dear All,

This letter is in response to the MBC LPR and the outputs from the Call for Sites process and expresses our extreme concern about the consequences for our village should the number of proposed housing units proceed in the general SW Maidstone area.

Your help and advice about how to respond to the forthcoming consultation and engage with MBC on the matters raised would be much appreciated.

Summary

1. East Farleigh understands the need to satisfy the targets set through national planning policy through the selection process appropriate to the borough.
2. The extant LP focuses on development outside of the village, but with that comes ever mounting traffic problems adversely affecting the village's residents, ecology and heritage.
3. EFPC is supportive of the objectives of current spatial strategy but is seeking greater recognition of the harm it causes us.
4. The Council has invested a lot of time and money in the trying to combat these issues but, at this point in the LPR process, wants to register the need for assistance in combatting them.

Following the Call for Site notice the Council commissioned ASP Planning and Development Consultancy to prepare a response. Their report (copy attached) was submitted to the MBC Planning Team in February 2019.

The PC recognises the pressures placed on MBC from the housing targets set by Central Government and the various constraints that exist to where those houses are to be built and is thankful that within the borough planning process EF:

- continues to be classified as countryside
- has designated conservation areas, and
- that the Medway Valley is designated an area of LLV

thereby retaining its rural character for the benefit, not only of our residents, but the borough as a whole.

However, despite the very welcome increased focus on sustainable development in the planning policy, the consequences of dispersal of the new houses to the rural service centres and larger villages inevitably will result in increasing traffic volumes on roads, in areas such as ours, that lie in key transport corridors.

Traffic density problems are not a new issue for East Farleigh having been highlighted as a major concern in our Village plan (2009). Even before the Village Plan was compiled, the PC had sought to find ways to address them.

The historic problems have worsened however, as noted in the ASP report with traffic volumes driven by:

1. The traffic feeding from the growth of Tovil and villages to the south and west of EF
2. The congested SW approach to Maidstone causing more traffic to use EF bridge to gain access to the hospital, M20 J5 etc.
3. The use of the B2163 (Heath Road) as a defacto bypass linking the A26 & the A229
4. Wait times of up to 19 minutes queuing to cross East Farleigh bridge in peak periods due to single lane traffic and the level crossing.

Amelioration of these many traffic issues is, in many cases, difficult as, these once rural lanes and minor roads, often lack verges or paths and street lighting. However, in response to the issues, the PC and village groups have been active over a long period to make improvements where possible.

In 2010/11 the PC paid for improvements to some footpaths in the village.

In 2012 the PC asked DHA to undertake a Highways feasibility study which lead to various minor improvements and started the process of developing solutions elsewhere.

In 2016 it built a car park next to the primary school because traffic problems on Vicarage Lane were reaching breaking point and was in danger of spilling into the flow of traffic crossing via the bridge.

In 2018 it became an early adopter of mobile SID's placing them in Highways approved locations on Dean Street, Lower Road and Station Hill.

A year earlier, as part of the follow up to the 2012 DHA study, it published a report commissioned from DHA to look at possible ways to mitigate traffic impacting on the bridge. The study identified the consequences of the problems which are aggravated by the proximity of the level crossing and station layout, as

- traffic congestion
- the lack of protection against damage by HGVs, and
- the lack of traffic management that contribute to confrontations over who has priority on the bridge and compromised pedestrian safety

All these measures and enterprises just to try to manage the problems we already have! Therefore, any significant increase in volume would severely aggravate the situation and need further action.

Whilst some of this was recognized in the evaluation of sites offered in the village, the PC seeks broader recognition in the wider LPR. Reputably the finest Medieval bridge in southern England and considered to be the oldest bridge in Kent, it is famed for being the setting for a battle during the

Civil War. As a Scheduled ancient Monument, set in an area of LLV, in our view it should be afforded better protection through the policy on heritage assets and be safer for those who use it instead of being swamped by the traffic passing over it.

The residents of lower Dean St have already petitioned the MJTB because of damage to property there from the increasing number of HGV's and regularly express their concerns about their safety when exiting their properties, given the growth in traffic volumes along roads not designed for it.

Those at the top end of the Dean Street continually press for more help with traffic problems and with the inexorable growth of Coxheath and residents in Workhouse Lane, are suffering considerable problems as it becomes a 'rat run' from Coxheath to Dean St

There is obvious concern about the proposed additional traffic movements from sites already approved, such as for the old Tovil tip site and various locations already being built in Coxheath and Yalding. If the call for sites green list as it currently stands is adopted, even with the desired improvements in public transport services, yet more traffic movements will be generated, a significant proportion of which will come through EF, either travelling into Maidstone or trying to cross EF bridge.

To conclude, we are very concerned to see that the following applications for development in East Farleigh, that will add additional traffic movements, are considered to be viable and would seek to challenge the basis of these decisions as stated below -

202 Forstal Lane Coxheath

- This site is close to the border of East Farleigh and opposite site 50 Army Hut Stables (below) which, if both were to be progressed, would coalesce the two villages.
- The paper states that public transport is not sustainable going forward - "A new or diverted route is highly desired". We argue that unless this is committed this development should not proceed.
- The landscape is within the Farleigh Greensand fruit belt character area. The paper states that the overall recommendation is to conserve.

050 Army Hut Stables Farm Stockett Lane

- Development on this site would visually expand Coxheath northwards and cause clear harm to the character of the countryside.
- Considerable additional traffic would be generated in Stockett Lane as a result of this development to the detriment of highway safety on this narrow, unsuitable road.
- The paper states that this requires an increased bus service which unless committed this development should not be progressed.
- The paper states that the development is unfeasible in isolation and is dependent on linking site 202 which we have argued is unsuitable.
- The landscape is within the Farleigh Greensand fruit belt character area. The paper states that the overall recommendation is to conserve.

005 Land adjacent to Dingly Dell Heath Rd

- Previous applications were refused due to them constituting harmful development in the countryside
- The paper states that an increased bus service is required. We argue that unless committed this development should not proceed.
- The landscape is within the Greensand orchard and a mixed farmland character area. The paper states that the overall recommendation is to conserve.

084 Land off Heath Rd

- The paper states that an increased bus service is required which we argue that unless committed the development should not proceed.
- The paper states that the development is unfeasible in isolation and is dependent on linking sites 005 and 257, which we argue are unsuitable.
- The landscape is within the Greensand orchard and mixed farmlands character area. The paper states that the overall recommendation is to conserve.

257 Land at junction of Heath Rd/Dean Street

- The paper states that this is unfeasible in isolation due to a poor bus service and dependent on linking sites 005 which we have argued is unsuitable.
- The landscape is within the Farleigh Greensand fruit belt character area. The paper states that the overall recommendation is to conserve.

Additionally, the following 3 sites, although outside of EF are very close to it. These are substantial and they too will inevitably generate significant additional traffic that will directly affect Dean St, Lower Rd, & the bridge

265 – Abbey Gate Farm

262 - Fant Farm & the adjacent

095 - Half Yoke

Our residents are rightly asking how the village of East Farleigh can cope whilst protecting its residents, ecology and heritage and accordingly ask that you represent our concerns to those involved in determining the outcome of these proposed developments.

Kind regards

Desiree Home

Clerk

On behalf of East Farleigh Parish Council