Please contact: Catherine Smith

Our ref: CS/High Halstow Neighbourhood Plan

Your ref:

Date: 21 August 2023

Mr Christopher Lockhart-Mummery KC

Neighbourhood Plan Examiner

BY EMAIL ONLY

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Dear Mr Lockhart-Mummery

**Examination of High Halstow Neighbourhood Plan**

Thank you for your Examiner’s Note 1 of 2 August 2023 regarding your initial observations on the High Halstow Neighbourhood Plan. The Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the matters raised in your correspondence.

The current Medway Local Plan continues to provide a basis for determining planning applications and providing guidance on development in Medway. However, in the absence of a five year housing land supply the Council does not rely on those policies or parts of policies that may constrain development, and assesses if a planning application can provide for sustainable development. In particular, the development boundaries and village envelopes are not relied on in determining planning applications.

The current Local Plan Policy S1: Development Strategy continues to reflect the authority's commitment to the regeneration of brownfield sites as a key component of Medway’s growth strategy. Similarly, the references to integrated transport, strategic economic development and conservation of the area’s natural and historic environments are relevant to decision making. However, the Council considers that the final paragraph of the policy does not have the same weight in current decision making:

*‘Outward peripheral expansion onto fresh land, particularly to the north and east of Gillingham, will be severely restricted. The open heartland of Medway at Capstone and Darland will be given long-term protection from significant development’.*

The Council has approved a number of housing developments to the north and east of Gillingham and Rainham in the last ten years and development has also been allowed on appeal in the wider area around Capstone. These decisions have reflected the need to provide for the supply of housing, and the ‘tilted balance’ in the lack of a five year land supply.

The Council recognises that the new Local Plan will need to provide for development allocations in suburban and rural areas, and although Medway will continue to promote opportunities for urban regeneration, a wider supply of sites will be required to meet the scale and mix of housing needed over the plan period.

The lack of certainty on the updated development strategy in the new Medway Local Plan complicates the preparation of the High Halstow Neighbourhood Plan, particularly in relation to policies relating to potential development sites. The Council considers that Policy HHPQ4 in the Neighbourhood Plan should be informed by further certainty on the development strategy in the new Medway Local Plan.

There is a current planning application (MC/23/0855) for residential led development to the east of High Halstow. The Council notes your comments in relation to the sustainability of the site in the absence of improved public transport services and the absence of essential infrastructure. These are critical matters for the determination of the planning application. The Council will require the applicant to demonstrate how the proposed scheme can mitigate these deficiencies and provide for sustainable development.

The Council welcomes your proposal for an exploratory meeting with the Parish Council and promoters of the planning application for land to the east of High Halstow. We would be happy to help in setting up the meeting.

Yours sincerely



Catherine Smith

Head of Planning Policy