

Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan

2024 to 2038

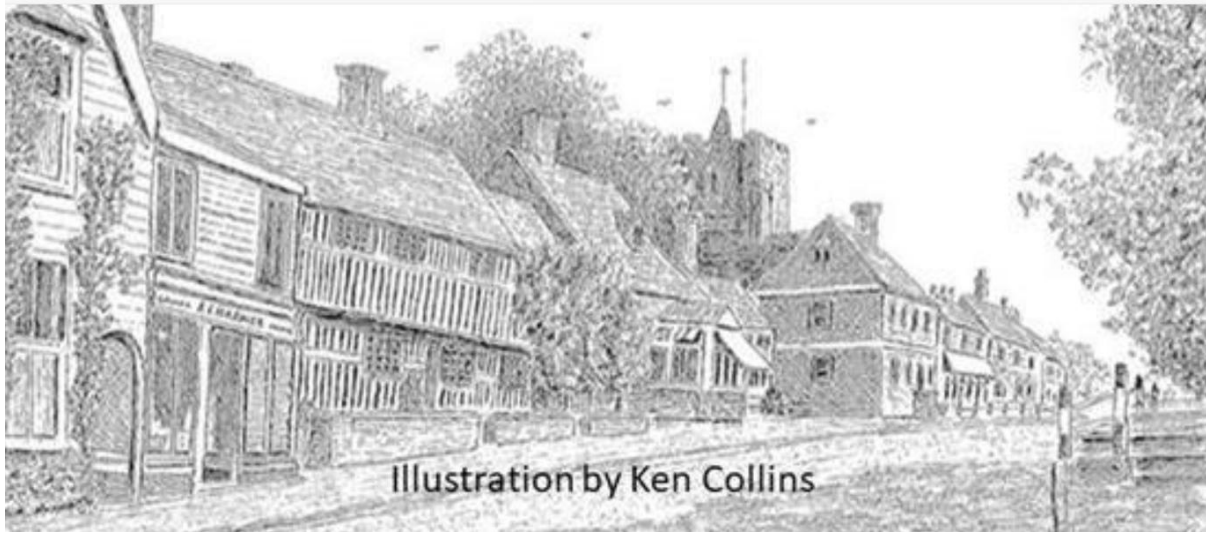


Illustration by Ken Collins

Modifications Statement

August 2025

**Prepared by the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan Steering
Group on behalf of Staplehurst Parish Council**

Contents

1. Introduction 2

2. Background 3

3. The Proposed Modifications..... 3

4. Conclusion on Changing the Nature of the Plan..... 9

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This statement sets out the modifications that have been made to the existing (made) Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2031 (SNP) in developing the SNP Pre-Submission Version 2024 to 2038.
- 1.2. If successfully made, this new document will replace the current Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2031. The SNP sets out planning and land-use policy for the Parish of Staplehurst, over the period 2024 to 2038. Once 'made', it will form part of the Development Plan for the Local Planning Authority, Maidstone Borough Council (MBC). MBC designated the Neighbourhood Area on 14 January 2019, which aligns with the Parish boundary.
- 1.3. Staplehurst Parish Council is the Qualifying Body for the SNP and proposes to modify the existing SNP Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2031.
- 1.4. Regulation 15(v) of the amended 2012 Regulations requires that:

“Before submitting a plan proposal [or a modification proposal] to the local planning authority, a qualifying body must...in relation to a modification proposal, a statement setting out whether or not the qualifying body consider that the modifications contained in the modification proposal are so significant or substantial as to change the nature of the neighbourhood development plan which the modification proposal would modify, giving reasons for why the qualifying body is of this opinion”.
- 1.5. This Statement serves this purpose and notes the following additional requirements in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG):
 - the qualifying body must state whether they believe that the modifications are so significant or substantial as to change the nature of the Plan and give reasons
 - the Local Planning Authority must (when sending the modified Plan to the independent examiner) state whether they believe that the modifications are so significant or substantial as to change the nature of the Plan and give reasons. The Local Planning Authority must also submit a copy of the original Plan to the independent examiner
 - the qualifying body must decide whether to proceed with the examination after the examiner has decided whether the modifications proposed change the nature of the Plan
- 1.6. The Modified Plan is considered by the Qualifying Body to be more than just a minor update and the proposals represent material modifications to the Made Plan.
- 1.7. In accordance with the requirements of the PPG as stated above, this statement therefore sets out the background reason for the modifications, describes the modifications and explains why the Qualifying Body considers the modifications to be significant in nature. Some policies have been largely retained, some have been updated, some have been amalgamated and some new ones have been added.

2. Background

- 2.1. The designated Neighbourhood Area shares its boundary with the Parish of Staplehurst. The Made Plan covers the period 2016 to 2031 and contains 19 policies.
- 2.2. In 2024, Parish Council agreed to review the Made Plan. This was due to the fact that there had been a number of changes to national planning policy as well as a new Local Plan Review. In addition, issues and opportunities have arisen locally that need to be reflected in the document. Finally, there are some areas where new policies have been introduced that were not included in the Made Plan.
- 2.3. A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Opinion has been carried out, which is enclosed within the Pre-submission bundle. This has concluded that the Modified Plan is unlikely to have any significant environmental effects and therefore will not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment. It has also been determined that a Habitats Regulations Assessment is not required.

3. The Proposed Modifications

- 3.1. The Modified Plan has followed a similar format to the previous Plan in terms of sections to focus on. The vision was reviewed and has been updated to reflect key issues locally. The objectives have also been reviewed and amended accordingly.
- 3.2. Additional community engagement and evidence gathering has revealed that whilst some issues have not changed dramatically since the current SNP was made, new opportunities have arisen that could be considered through the planning system. This has led to a series of new policies being added and existing ones updated accordingly.
- 3.3. The [current plan](#) contains 19 policies couched under the following themes:
 - Parish-wide Policies (PW1 to PW4)
 - Community Policies (C1 to C6)
 - Village Heart Policies (VH1)
 - Gateways Policies (GW1)
 - Edges Policy
 - Housing Policies
- 3.4. There are also a series of objectives and projects expressed in the Plan.
- 3.5. The proposed modifications to the Made Plan policies are summarised in *Table 1*. The table sets out the new policy name (with new numbering) as set out in the modified plan and how it relates to existing policies.

Table 1: Overview of the modifications

Modified Plan - Policy Title	Relationship to 'Made' Plan	Commentary
POLICY S1: PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	This is a new policy that amalgamates parts of PW2 within a wider spatial context.	<p>This is a new policy in the Plan which, in the absence of site allocations in the SNP itself, sets out an overarching spatial strategy for the Parish in terms of where development is most sustainable and should be directed to.</p> <p>It is an important policy in the context of the Plan. It seeks to ensure that any development is directed to the most appropriate, sustainable locations, where there is easy, ideally non-car reliant, access to the main services and facilities. This will help to protect the wider landscape of the Parish and safeguard against the coalescence of the individual settlements.</p> <p>The policy supports the re-use of previously developed brownfield sites in preference to greenfield. It also supports the concept of compact and walkable neighbourhoods to address the potential additional strains of development in the Parish on road systems, particularly for developments that are furthest away from the main facilities. The policy is based around defined Settlement Boundary and embellishes existing Policy PW2.</p>
POLICY S2: MEETING LOCAL HOUSING NEEDS	This policy updates Policy H3.	The policy sets out a more comprehensive approach to the mix of housing that should be supported in the Parish to meet identified local housing needs. It is underpinned by the Staplehurst Housing Needs

Modified Plan - Policy Title	Relationship to 'Made' Plan	Commentary
		Survey and provides additional detail on matters such as specialist housing and housing suited to older people.
POLICY S3: CHARACTER AND DESIGN OF DEVELOPMENT	Replaces Policy H1.	The policy provides additional local detail to existing Policy H1. In particular, the Conservation Area for Staplehurst has been extended and the content updated to reflect this. Policy H1 also links to broader design principles as set out in the Appendix of the SNP.
POLICY S4: ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND DESIGN	Replaces H2.	In the absence of the Future Homes Standard being brought in (anticipated Autumn 2025), this policy has been retained, albeit updated and enhanced to comply to amended national policy.
POLICY S5: RENEWABLE AND COMMUNITY ENERGY	Replaces PW3.	The policy replaces the existing policy and adds additional criteria against which schemes should be considered.
POLICY S6: CONSERVING HERITAGE ASSETS	Replaces PW4.	The policy adds to existing Policy PW4. The Steering Group considered that identifying non-designated heritage assets (NDHAs) would be helpful in safeguarding the character of the area. To that end, a series of NDHAs have been identified and justified and are included within the policy.
POLICY S7: VIBRANT VILLAGE CORE	Replaces Policy VH1.	This policy replaces and modifies the existing policy relating to the Village heart adding additional clauses to assist in delivering a vibrant core. As such the scope of the policy remains similar, but with additional detail.

Modified Plan - Policy Title	Relationship to 'Made' Plan	Commentary
POLICY S8: RAILWAY STATION GATEWAY AREA	Replaces GW1.	The policy replaces and updates Policy GW1, based on renewed information about how this area of the village might evolve going forward.
POLICY S9: LOCAL GREEN SPACE	This is a new policy.	This new policy seeks to designate a series of local green spaces, each of which has been carefully reviewed to demonstrate that it meets the NPPF criteria for local green spaces.
POLICY S10: LANDSCAPE, ENVIRONMENT AND BIODIVERSITY	This is a new policy.	This new policy maps out the network of habitats that exist in the area in order to ensure that they are retained and, where possible extended or better connected. This will assist in ensuring movement routes for wildlife as well as the provision of rural spaces for residents, continuing the rural feel throughout the village.
POLICY S11: PROTECTION OF LOCALLY SIGNIFICANT VIEWS	This is a new policy.	The policy identifies a number of important views within the village and wider Parish, each of which contributes to the sense of place and identity. Some views take in natural features typical of the rural character of the area. Others include heritage assets/ notable built features. The policy seeks to ensure that any development proposals impacting the views are carefully designed to mitigate their impacts.
POLICY S12: DARK SKIES	This is a new policy.	This is a new policy that recognises the range of benefits that dark skies can bring, impacting and enjoyment the wellbeing of residents and the welfare of particular wildlife species. The policy seeks to embed this

Modified Plan - Policy Title	Relationship to 'Made' Plan	Commentary
		principle for all new development, notwithstanding the parallel need to ensure safe places and routes for residents.
POLICY S13: IMPROVING WALKING, WHEELING, CYCLING AND EQUESTRIAN OPPORTUNITIES	This is a new policy.	This is a new policy that seeks to embed the principles of “walkable neighbourhoods” into the SNP. The promotion of active travel has become a national priority and is being progressed at the strategic level, for instance through the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan prepared by Kent County Council. The policy is an important addition to the SNP setting out guidance to enable this at the neighbourhood level. The policy picks up elements of existing Policy E1 and also the objectives expressed within the Access and Movement Theme (which previously had not policy attached)
POLICY S14: PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE PARKING	This is a new policy.	Car parking availability in the village is limited, beyond the railway station car park and some parking near to the village core. The policy seeks to retain existing such space but also would support the inclusion of additional publicly accessible parking space, particularly where it can be closely connected to the village core. The need to ensure adequate residential car parking (off-road) is covered within Policy S3.
POLICY S15: IMPORTANT COMMUNITY, CULTURAL, SPORT AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES	Replaces and amalgamates Policies C1 to C6	The modified policy has reassessed existing and needed community facilities and effectively replaces the Community section of the existing plan, bringing together the thrust of the current policies under one umbrella.

Modified Plan - Policy Title	Relationship to 'Made' Plan	Commentary
POLICY S16: ALLOTMENTS AND COMMUNITY GROWING SPACES	This is a new policy.	This is a new policy that seeks to safeguard allotment space in the Parish and also supports the provision of new such space. There are currently only limited allotments spaces to serve the community at present. These are proposed for designation as local green space.

- 3.6. In addition to the above, Policy PW1 has not been replaced rather the Parish Council holds a list of infrastructure priorities and wider projects towards which developer contributions and other funding sources should be directed.
- 3.7. The sites allocated at Policies H4 and H5 has now been delivered so has been removed. Previous Policy H6, which sought to safeguard against the loss of employment land, including at Lodge Road, has not been retained as this is now adequately addressed in MLPR Policy LPRSP11 (A), including support for mixed use developments.
- 3.8. The majority of the policies in the modified SNP replace existing policies, ensuring that they comply to the most recently adopted national and borough-wide policies and adding additional local detail to enhance the way in which they will be applied locally. In this way, they do not amend the scope of the Plan itself.
- 3.9. However, there are eight new policies that relate to planning issues not previously considered in the existing Plan. This includes a policy seeking to designate land as local green space.
- 3.10. As such, the Parish Council considers that the scope of the SNP has changed significantly, which would lead to the need to progress through the examination and referendum.

4. Conclusion on Changing the Nature of the Plan

- 4.1. The Modified Plan builds on the structure, vision and objectives of the Made Plan. It has reviewed the existing suite of policies and sought to streamline these into a set of new policies that conform to national and Local Planning Authority policy, while addressing the issues and opportunities identified through the community engagement. This has led to a number of policies being redrafted to amalgamate elements of existing ones and add to these. Some policies which are no longer relevant have been removed.
- 4.2. Notably, a series of new policies have been added that were not in the existing Plan.
- 4.3. In light of this, whilst the overall scope of the Plan remains similar, it is considered that the nature of the Plan has changed significantly, most notably because of the new policies, some of which designate land for particular purposes, that have been added.