

Bredhurst Parish Council - Response to Maidstone Borough Council, Local Plan Review Regulation 18b Policy SP4 (b) Development North M2/Lidsing

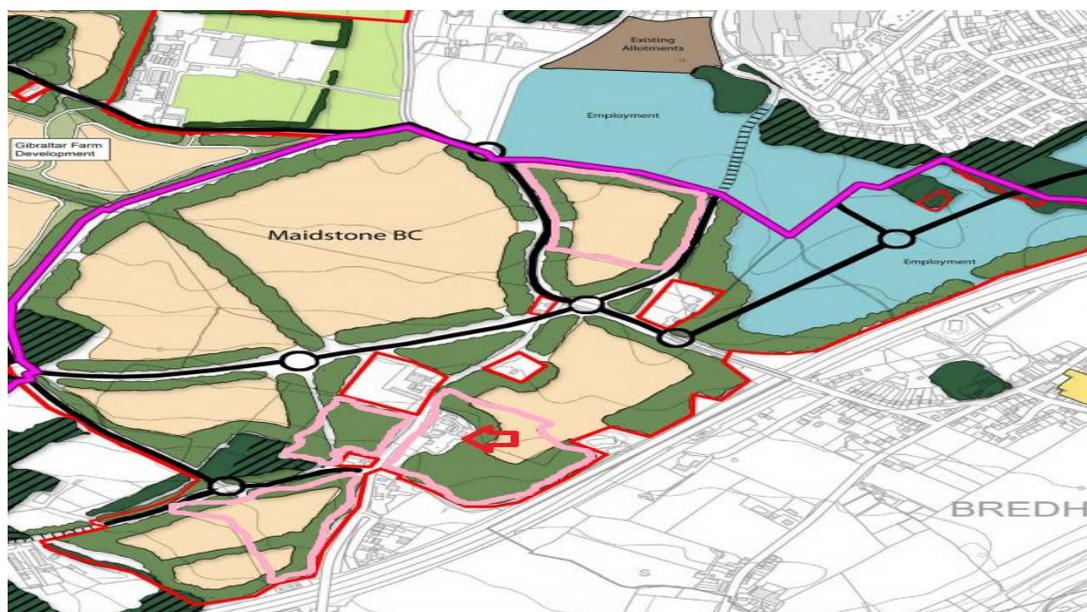
Bredhurst Parish Council strongly oppose the inclusion of the above proposed development as detailed in Maidstone Borough Council's Local Plan Regulation 18b Review.

1. Land Ownership

1.1 In various documents compiled by Hume Planning Consultancy, acting on behalf of the site promoter Kevin Attwood, and the Stantec Report (Part 1), Commissioned by Maidstone Borough Council, it is claimed that the land is in single ownership. The land ownership statements are not correct.

1.2 Bredhurst Parish Council has been contacted by the owner of several fields within the site. He has informed us that there is a 20 year old agreement in place which gives Mr Attwood 'first refusal' should the owner wish to sell. The land owner is opposed to the development and is adamant he will not sell his land. This agreement is due to expire in May 2021 and the land owner has confirmed it will not be renewed.

1.3 The map below, produced by Hume Planning Consultancy, shows land which they state is solely owned by their client (outlined in red). Their map has been amended to show fields outside of the promoter's ownership (outlined in pink).



1.4 We are aware that the owner of the land outside of Mr Attwood's ownership has contacted Cllr Martin Cox, Leader of MBC, on several occasions to highlight the discrepancy but, as yet, he has not received an acknowledgment. These proposals have caused extreme stress and upset to the family involved.

1.5 In addition, we have been informed by Cllr Alan Jarrett, Leader of Medway Council, that some of the land identified for 'EMPLOYMENT' actually belongs to Medway Council.

1.6 Bredhurst Parish Council suggests that the proposed development cannot be included in MBC's Local Plan Review as it is not deliverable. Should you decide to proceed, please consider the following:

2. Detrimental Impact on the AONB

- 2.1 Bredhurst and Boxley are within the Kent Downs AONB. The majority of the proposed development site is immediately adjacent to the AONB and shares similar characteristics which form the wider setting of the AONB. The wide expanse of agricultural land allows a gradual transition from the urban areas of Gillingham and Lordswood when entering or leaving the AONB.
- 2.2 The close proximity of the development will have a huge detrimental impact on the AONB. It will be clearly visible from Bredhurst and will generate excessive noise, air and light pollution. Such a large development will put additional pressure on the AONB by increased visitor numbers as more will try to escape their urban environment.
- 2.3 The Stantec Report (Part 1) acknowledges that Purple Hill, a SSSI, is within 1k of the development. It does not mention Bredhurst Woods, a SNCI, which is in very close proximity to the proposed new M2 junction and will be clearly visible from Bredhurst Woods and the surrounding chalk grassland.
- 2.4 At 3.6.5 the report states 'the most challenging issue is the incursion into the AONB in the construction of the 4th arm of the motorway junction to the south and provision of a new road and bridge across the motorway'.

3. Proposed New Road Junction

- 3.1 The proposed new road and M2 Junction cuts through a field in Bredhurst that is within the AONB. The visual impact on Bredhurst residents will be detrimental and will change the landscape of the village forever.
- 3.2 Overlooking the field where the new M2 junction is planned is Abbots Court Farm, a Grade II listed property. This currently enjoys a view of open farmland which will be destroyed if the development goes ahead and will adversely affect their setting. As detailed in the NPPF any harm to an asset needs to be offset by the 'public benefits' of the proposal, of which there is no evidence.

4. Traffic / Travel

- 4.1 Although much emphasis is placed on improved east/west road improvements, there are no proposed improvements to north/south routes. The existing country lanes cannot cope with the additional traffic the development would bring. Boxley village is already at a standstill during rush hour periods and Dunn Street / Lidsing Road junction is notoriously dangerous.
- 4.2 It will bring further congestion to local roads in Hempstead, Wigmore and Rainham.
- 4.3 The nearest train station is Rainham. Traffic will access this via Bredhurst and Maidstone Road. The station is not on a bus route so, therefore, more car journeys will be generated.
- 4.4 There is a large Kings Ferry commuter coach park on the outskirts of Bredhurst which will also generate additional traffic through Bredhurst.

5 Loss of the Strategic Gap

5.1 The proposal impacts land designated by Medway Council as an Area of Local Landscape Importance (ALLI) and forms a 'strategic gap' between Lordswood, Hempstead and Bredhurst/the AONB. Its function is to prevent urban sprawl and separate communities allowing them to retain their own identity. The loss of the strategic gap will see all settlements merge into one.

5.2 The loss of valuable agricultural land and taking it out of productive use is not acceptable.

6 Facilities and Services

6.1 The Stantec Report (Part 1) at 3.1.2 states 'for this assessment we assume that Medway are willing to help deliver the proposal'. Letters of objection from local MPs and Medway Cllrs suggest otherwise.

6.2 Whilst the development will generate council tax for Maidstone Borough Council and will help it meet its housing targets, locating 2000+ houses on the border with Medway is unacceptable to Medway residents. The new occupants will be accessing Medway schools, GPs, hospitals etc. and Medway residents quite rightly feel aggrieved that their already over-stretched services could soon be accessed by possibly 4000+ Maidstone residents. Lidsing is not suitable or sustainable if residents were to rely solely on Maidstone services.

6.3 Medway Maritime is the nearest hospital which is over-stretched during normal times and at breaking point in the current pandemic.

7 Bredhurst School

7.1 The Stantec Report (Part 1) at 3.5.4 suggest the 'preferred option of the promoter' is an extension to Bredhurst School, currently an existing 0.5 FE to 1FE. It states 'the school is approximately 430m from the boundary of the settlement where Forge Lane crosses the M2 and would require comprehensive pedestrian and cycle provision to be provided'. Forge Lane is a country lane without pavements or lighting and, in places, is only wide enough for one car. Without compulsory purchase of front gardens, how does the promoter envisage providing 'comprehensive pedestrian and cycle provision'?

7.2 Whilst the promoter may deem our village school fit for expansion, this would be opposed by many residents who would not want the school to lose its 'village' identity. There is also no parking facilities and school drop off and collection times sees the centre of the village severely congested.

8 Site of Archaeological Importance

8.1 The field opposite The Harrow Public House Lidsing is the site of the balloon pit where Captain Templar of the Royal Engineers made early military balloon flights in the 1880's. Here he perfected the art of military aerial observations. The balloon pit was filled in during the 1960's but is very visible on post WW2 aerial photographs. It could be argued that this site was actually the 'cradle of military aviation' and is of national significance.

To conclude, Bredhurst Parish Council wholeheartedly opposes the proposed development at Lidsing.

Cllr Vanessa Jones BEM
Chair, Bredhurst Parish Council