



Ten things Members of the Policy & Resources Committee need to know before taking the decision to move to the next stage of the Council-led Garden Community (Heathlands)

1. Landownership is complicated with a number of the principal landowners part of complex farming family trusts

- The officer's report paints a far more positive picture than reality. Just because the majority of principal landowners have not said 'no' to the scheme, does not mean they have said 'yes'.
- Five principal landowners own around 56% of the total site.
- Without the M20 junction, land south of M20 will not be accessible leaving less than 46% of principal land capable of being developed. Once you remove the piece of land that has already been identified with archaeological significance you are left with less than 40% of the total site.
- Three of the five principal landowners are part of complicated farming family trusts. They are complex arrangements. We know at least one member of each family is opposed to the plans.
- All landowners have expressed their concerns about the Heads of Terms agreement already provided.

2. The proposal is uneconomic. The numbers do not stack up.

- Have officers shared with members the financial assessment of the scheme by Martin Arnold Consultants? If so, you will see the scheme is uneconomic.
- The Council have yet to prudently include any contingency costs into their plans. The Government's Green Book recommends at least 40% for risk allowance/optimism bias at this stage of a project. This would put the financial appraisal as showing a loss.
- Principal landowners who had sight of the financial appraisal had great concerns about it.
- An Options Agreement would see principal landowners paid c£2,500 per hectare with the full value of their land realised in 20 years' time, if houses sell. Landowners would not accept this.
- The reduction in available land for development will significantly affect the number of houses which can be built and funds gained via land value capture.

3. The A20 will not be able to accommodate the volumes of traffic. A dual carriageway will be required

- Officers mis-calculated the ability to build a motorway junction and High Speed Rail station.
- The A20 issue will not be resolved by simply sorting one junction.
- In the original Barton Willmore document entitled "Potential Location for a new Garden Village" the point is made several times that the existing infrastructure could not cope with the scale of developments being proposed.
- A dual carriageway could cost between £200 and £250 million.
- Following the Heathrow landmark court ruling on climate change, the Government's road building strategy will be challenged on the same grounds meaning new road building will be under further scrutiny.

4. There is no employment in the area. The development will require car-dependent travel to jobs, leisure and services.

- Lenham Heath is remote from larger towns providing a range of employment, retail, medical, educational, and recreational facilities.
- The selection of such an isolated location will inevitably involve longer journeys to access such higher-level facilities.

5. There is no sign of a development partner and it is even less likely now

- Maidstone's taxpayers are currently carrying the cost and the risk for this project.
- We were unaware as to whether a development partner had expressed any interest before the global pandemic, and this is less likely in a post-pandemic economy where we are unfortunately expecting to see a recession and housing market slump.
- Is it right that local taxpayers are expected to continue to carry the cost/risk of this proposal?
- With greater demands on the Council's finances in the coming year and beyond, we do not think that further investment of public monies is a prudent financial decision for the Council.

6. Residents, Parish Councils and local businesses DO NOT support the project

- The officer's report is misleading in its statement about engagement with the community and the Parish Council. Officers have been obstructive, defensive and have treated local community groups and the Parish Council with contempt throughout.
- Lenham PC is strongly opposed the project saying it is the wrong proposal in the wrong place.
- The proposal is not aligned with the draft Lenham Neighbourhood Plan.
- Local residents have supported the protection of green space policy outside of the main Lenham Village settlement boundary through the draft Lenham Neighbourhood Plan.
- Proceeding without this support is contrary to the Localism Act and the Government's emerging planning reforms that make it easier for local people to play a role in decisions that affect them.

7. The Council's submission to the Call for Sites process was non-compliant and invalid

- The Council's own rules require it to have the permission of landowners to submit a site for consideration in the Call for Sites process. Site 289 (Heathlands Garden Community) has over 145 landowners. And yet the Council have only approached 8 landowners.
- Site 289 includes a proposed redline for the whole area shown in the attached map. The Council did not have the permission to submit this.
- The Council is open to legal challenge and judicial review if the scheme is accepted by the Council (Local Planning Authority). It will be challenged if required.

8. The site's rich archaeological value and mineral assets will cause too much problem

- The archaeological site referred to in the officer's report falls centre to the biggest parcels of land. It will disrupt unlocking the greatest opportunity area in the garden community proposed development.
- Landowner 1 has rich mineral assets which form part of KCC's Minerals Local Plan. The officer's report underplays the impact this would have by saying it is a 'constraint to some degree'.
- The sewage treatment works for the local area is also located within Landowner 1's holding. This would require relocation and is not factored into the Council's financial appraisal currently.
- The Brett Aggregates site (Lenham Quarry) is more complicated than currently considered too. Brett's have reached the water table through mineral extraction and have no obligation to backfill this site with inert material. They will likely leave it planted up with trees and grass.

9. Lack of transparency on the Council-led garden community proposal is for a reason

- Have members ever questioned why a report that proves the development is sustainable has never been made available? We think this is because the site is unsustainable.
- Have members been presented with a detailed business case that clearly supports the development? We think this is because the proposal is uneconomic.
- The officer's report already confirms an overspend on the project. Will a further £100,000 of taxpayer's money deliver a material change or continue investment in a "white elephant"?

10. A climate emergency in Maidstone will be further exacerbated by building unsustainable development in the countryside

- The officer's report confirms that this development will have a biodiversity net gain. The Government's Environment Bill will require new developments to deliver at least a 10% net gain in biodiversity. This will be incredibly difficult to deliver in a green space that is so rich in biodiversity.
- Lenham's residents would not expect under any circumstances for this net gain to be offset elsewhere in the borough.
- We see a very real risk that "garden community" becomes synonymous with unpopular, car dependent sprawl on greenfield land, delivered without the necessary infrastructure.
- Scale, location, and connectivity are all crucial to the success of new developments and their environmental credentials. Lenham Heath performs poorly compared to other parts of Maidstone borough.

We urge Members of the Policy & Resources Committee to vote for Option 3.3 – no longer pursue a council-led garden community east of Lenham