

Valley Conservation Society



doing nothing is not an option

Members' newsletter No 184

We are a non-political organisation

October 2023

Another chance to comment on Abbey Gate



Members will recall the disturbing allocation for 250 homes at Abbey Gate Farm off Stockett Lane, which Maidstone council has included in its draft Local Plan Review.

The proposed new homes would wrap around the historic Grade II* Listed Abbey Gate Place and the outlined allocation area included the entire Walnut Tree Meadow Nature Reserve and the large field to the east of Stockett Lane.

MBC did acknowledge that Stockett Lane/Straw Mill Hill was unsuitable to take any more traffic, and for that reason the council proposed that the access road for the new homes should be forged across the Walnut Tree Meadow Nature Reserve to come out at Dean Street.

The council owns the freehold of the land, although it has leased it to the Hayle Park Nature Reserve Trust for 50 years, sadly with a break point in the lease after 10 years.

In May, Valley Conservation members Alan Smith and Eileen Lewis gave evidence to the public inquiry at the Town Hall, as did a solicitor representing VCS member John Talbot, the owner of Abbey Gate Place.

We tried to persuade the Government inspector to drop the allocation from the plan altogether. In that regard we were unsuccessful. However, we did win some concessions.

The inspector has just published what is known as the Main Modifications to the plan.

These are the changes which the inspector thinks are necessary to the draft Local Plan, before he can agree it. You can find the modifications online at <https://localplan.maidstone.gov.uk/home/local-plan-review-examination>

You need to click on the third button down – Main Modifications Consultation – and then click on [ED121 Maidstone Local Plan Review Schedule of Main Modifications](#)

Paper copies can viewed at any library within the borough.

It's a long document - 175 pages – but you will find the details relating to Abbey Gate Farm, which is known as allocation No **LPRSA265**, on page 84.

The inspector has added in the words:

With the exception of a possible site access road and associated infrastructure, there shall be no built development on that part of the site that comprises the Walnut Tree Meadows Nature Reserve.

There will be no built development east of Straw Mill Hill or south of the public right of way.

Development should preserve and enhance the setting of adjacent built heritage assets with specific regard to the setting of the Grade II listed Abbey Gate Place and the Loose Conservation Area.*

To respond positively to and minimise harm to heritage assets, development must be designed to include a landscaped buffer to maintain a degree of rural outlook and reduce intervisibility with new residential development.

There is also an important change of wording in relation to the access road.

The original MBC policy just said: *Vehicular access shall be direct from Dean Street*

The inspector's wording is:

Vehicular access shall be from Dean Street and/or via adjacent residential development sites onto Dean Street. The precise route and construction method of the access route will minimise land-take within the Nature Reserve. Any route must avoid harmful division of the reserve that would undermine its function.

This is an acknowledgement that there is an alternative to building a road across the nature reserve.

There are two building sites to the north-east of the reserve that already have planning permission, but have not yet been built. They are the large site that most people will know as Burke's Land, (which is now actually owned by a company called L&G Affordable Homes) and a smaller site owned by Bishops.

They too will need to have an access onto Dean Street and clearly the sensible thing to do would be to have the Abbey Gate Farm development share their access.

The Society is now concentrating our efforts on achieving this.



The Walnut Tree Meadow Nature Reserve

We believe it may be possible because the Walnut Tree Meadow Nature Reserve is a former household waste landfill, which is still emitting methane gas.

The rubbish is capped, but the creation of a road across it could well damage the capping, leading to unwelcome pollution.

It is for this reason that we think KCC, which is still responsible for controlling any pollution from the site, might oppose any road across the reserve.

The inspector's Main Modifications are now subject to a period of public consultation. It would help us if Members responded to the consultation, stressing that the access road for the Abbey Gate Farm allocation should NOT run over the Nature Reserve, but must be via the adjacent housing developments, in order both to preserve the ecology of the nature reserve and to avoid the risk of pollution from disturbing the landfill.

You should be able to make your response online via this link <https://maidstone.objective.co.uk/kse/>

But some people are having trouble making that link work.

An alternative is to email your comments to ldf@maidstone.gov.uk

Or write to: **Strategic Planning, Maidstone Borough Council, Maidstone House, King Street, Maidstone, ME15 6JQ**

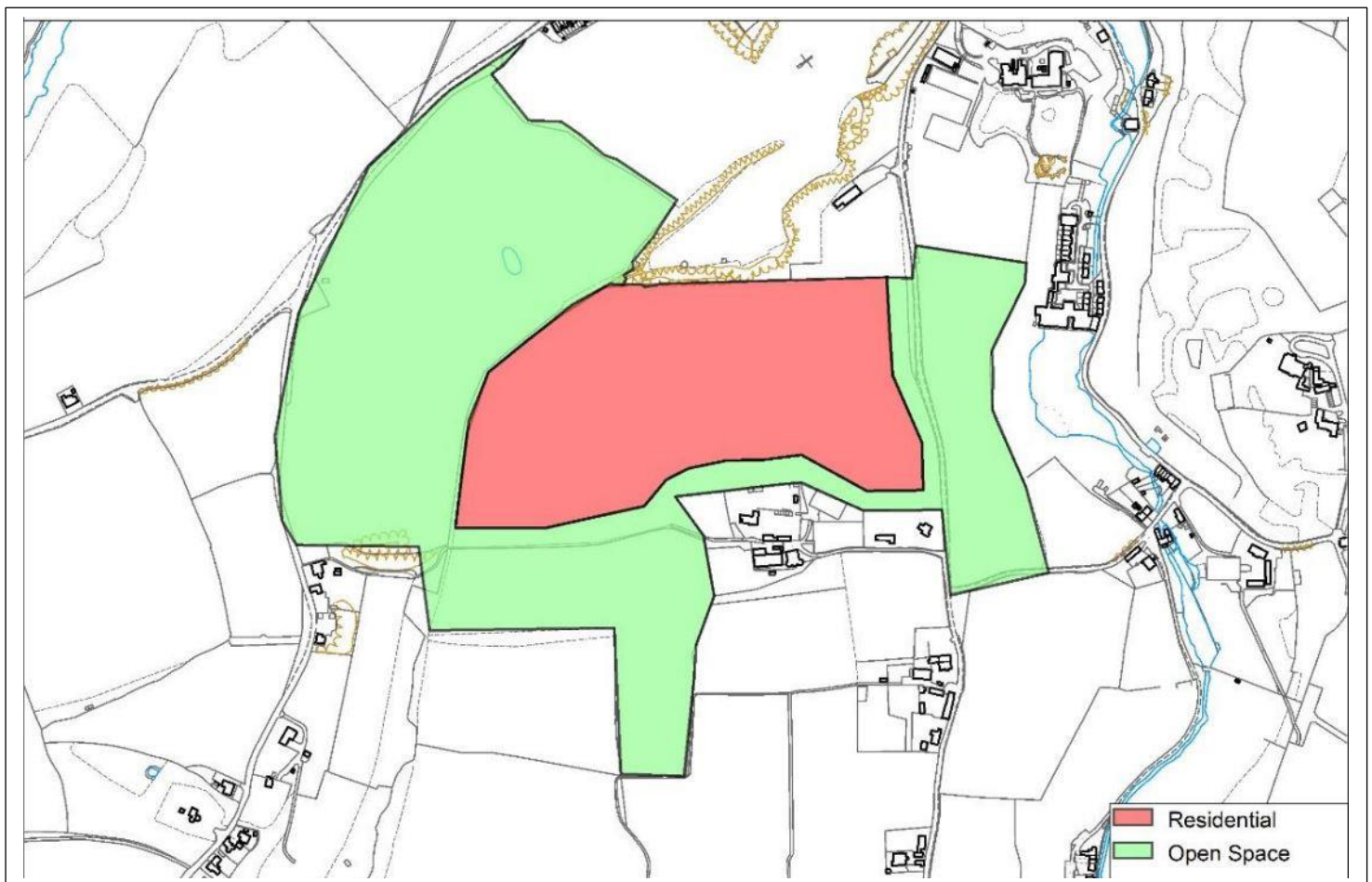
In both cases, make sure you make it clear that you are responding to the Main Modifications Consultation and in particular to allocation **LPRSA265**.

You must also include your full name and address or else your submission will be ignored.

The consultation closes at **5pm on Monday, November 13**.



Gas is still being flared off from the landfill



The inspector's revised map showing the green buffer around Abbey Gate Place, and the land east of Stocket Lane secured as open space. The rectangle of land to the west of the residential site is already green – the Walnut Tree Meadow Nature Reserve

Make a date with your Calendar

The images for our 2024 calendar have been selected and the calendars will be ready shortly. This year the theme is flora and fauna of the Loose Valley. All the photos have been taken by members.

You can place your order now by emailing the secretary, Alan Smith, on a128smith@btinternet.com

The cost is £6. And please start snapping for next year's calendar! We need 12 month-appropriate images please. They can be emailed to a128smith@btinternet.com, with your name, and the date and place the picture was taken.

New members and Autumn Walk

We are delighted to have welcomed 80 new – or rejoining - members to the Society in the past month. A very warm welcome to you all.

We will shortly be holding an Autumn Walk when you can join us for a guided tour around the land in the Valley that the Society cares for, with a chance to pose questions to members of the work party.

The walk leaves the Conservation Cabin in Cave Hill (opposite Reeds Mill Pond) at 10.15am on **Sunday, October 22.**

The walk will conclude about an hour later in the garden of The Manor at Hayle Place where free tea and cakes will be provided.

Whether you are new to the Society, or an old hand, why not come along?

Members on a previous walk



Leaflet drop

The Society is currently carrying out a leaflet drop to encourage new members.

We are trying to avoid posting a leaflet through the letterbox of any existing members, but if we do inadvertently deliver a leaflet and membership form to you, and you are already a member, don't worry. There is no need to re-register until the New Year.

Barbecue

It seems a long time ago already, but we haven't yet reported on our summer barbecue, held in the grounds of The Manor at Hayle Place.

We easily sold our self-imposed maximum of 100 tickets, and we think people enjoyed the event, although it rained for much of the time.

We had a new butcher this year, and most guests thought the meat was even better than before.



Left, chefs Dennis Usmar, Jonathan Leeson and Bryn Cornwell.

Right, the salad team, Jane Holman and Jill Lee



There was music from the Soundwave Disco and before the end of the night, the DJ, Nick Jackson, had people up and dancing – in the rain!

Prizes for the free games of Heads and Tails were supplied by members of the committee. The event raised a small profit of just over £100.

Our thanks to our chefs, to all those who helped with food, or with the putting up and taking down of gazebos, and especially to our hostess, Jane Holman.



Left, guests tuck in

Right, dancing the Macarena in the rain



Scout Fete

At the start of September, the Tovil Scouts held summer fete at their grounds off Straw Mill Hill,

VCS supported the Scouts by running a book stall and an information tent. We have books left over, so anyone who knows of a similar local event where a book stall might be appropriate, please let Alan know on 07860 909903.

Work Party

The work party continues to meet every Tuesday at the Conservation Cabin, starting at 10am.

All welcome, whether you want to come for an hour or all day.

Further details from Bryn, on 01622 746514.

