

Martock Parish Neighbourhood Plan

Answers to the Examiner’s Questions – November 2020

1	<p>The Regulation 16 consultation responses include comments made on Policy Mart 10: Local Green Space concerning the Middle Street Field. Please clarify how the site (in whole or in part) satisfies the criteria for designation as Local Green Space? Does its location within the Conservation Area already provide sufficient protection from any future detrimental development?</p>	<p>The Green Space known as Middle Street Field is one of the last remaining examples in the village of the, once locally characteristic, spaces between buildings typical of former agricultural villages. The village has lost several such to housing in the last half century. For this reason, it is of historical significance as well as amenity value to the community.</p> <p>The Conservation Area designation provides protection for the roadside railings and visible trees but not from development per se. Having regard to the ‘harm to the settings of the neighbouring listed buildings’ provides some protection but does not apply to the whole of the Field; only the land near the road, where the view of the building is compromised.</p> <p>Local consultations have highlighted how significant and well regarded is this green space to the local community.</p>
2	<p>The Regulation 16 responses question whether Policy Mart 13 was clear enough as to how local need for development should be demonstrated, and suggested that it should only apply to developments of 10 or more dwellings? What is the Parish Council’s response to this? I note that paragraph 8.50 also refers to “locally identified need” without giving a definition of local need. Section 5 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF): Delivering a sufficient supply of homes, and the Glossary definition of affordable housing, should help with answering this question.</p>	<p>Para. 8.50 of the NP makes clear, the preferred strategy is to facilitate small-scale residential development. Hence it would be inappropriate for the policy to be restricted to major development proposals only.</p> <p>As regards local need we consider it reasonable that any development proposal on greenfield land beyond the settlement area limits should be fully justified. We have set six criteria, one of which requires the developer to demonstrate there is some form of local need for such development. A seventh criteria requires the development proposal to, in all other ways, comply <i>with policies in the development plan</i>.</p> <p>Para. 8.50 makes clear that we do not preclude developments of 10 or more dwellings, but such a development should be justified primarily by locally identified need.</p> <p>Within the NP we have not sought to define local need. The prevailing policy context remains the Local Plan’s <i>Policy HG5 ‘Achieving a Mix of Market Housing’: A range of market housing types and sizes should be provided across the district on large sites that can reasonably meet the market housing needs of the residents of South Somerset. The mix should contribute to the provision of sustainable and balanced communities.</i></p> <p><i>On small sites, housing types and sizes should be provided that, taken in the context of existing surrounding dwellings, contribute to that provision of sustainable, balanced communities.</i></p> <p>We would be happy if it is considered necessary to make reference to the Local Plan policy in the supporting text.</p>

		<p>A statement of local need can be obtained from SSDC and supplemented with 'evidence' the Parish Council and village estate agents. The main 'dispute' tends to be over the housing mix rather than overall numbers (where we work to SSDC targets). Developers prefer to build large houses because, in Martock, these can always be sold, whereas all the evidence we have suggests the local demand, by far, is for smaller ones, market and affordable. We expect the local planning authority to exert influence on this matter and ensure the evidence is up to date.</p>
3a	<p>The consultation responses include some important observations about Policy Mart 17, beginning with "It is not clear how this policy refers to the Settlement Area Boundary or any future allocations which will be made in the Local Plan Review to deliver the minimum housing requirement". Policy Mart 13 refers to the Settlement Area Boundary, as shown on Map 6. It would be helpful if a key were added to this map.</p>	<p>Policy Mart17 applies to all residential development proposals irrespective of whether the land in question is within the defined settlement area boundary (map 6) or not.</p> <p>Regarding Map 6, the map title states what the Map shows, but a revised map, which includes a key, can be produced.</p>
3b	<p>The supporting text in paragraph 8.42 onwards provides some information about the Local Plan Review's expectations for new housing development. However, there is no mention of specific sites. SSDC's Five Year Housing Land Supply Paper, August 2018, by contrast, gives useful information about sites considered to be suitable, available and deliverable for future development within the Parish. Is there a case for providing similar information for readers and users of the MNP?</p>	<p>To identify individual sites in the NP could be interpreted as giving them recognition or a status, which we have sought to avoid.</p> <p>After much discussion and consultation, all of which is documented, it was decided to avoid favouring specific sites and take a criteria-based approach to future development sites. This was heavily influenced by community opinion on individual sites, which for most sites, consultations have shown to be very divided. Recent consultations have demonstrated it has not been possible to reach a local consensus on future development sites.</p> <p>As an alternative to allocating sites or expressing favour to certain locations, the community has agreed to a set of criteria that are set out in policy Mart13 against which any site proposal can be considered.</p> <p>We believe that these criteria will lead to high-quality residential development, of an appropriate scale in suitable locations that will more than satisfy the strategic housing requirements and meet local housing needs over the whole of the plan period.</p>
4	<p>The South Somerset Local Plan Review identifies three sites on the western edge of Martock which could deliver around 210 dwellings in the lifetime of the new Local Plan. They are shown in Policies MB1, MB2 and MB3 as land to the north of Coat Road, south of Coat Road, and south of Hills Lane. Is there inconsistency between the proposed Settlement Area Boundary and the provision of appropriate new housing development for Martock/Bower Hinton on the sites identified in the Five Year Housing Land Supply Paper and the emerging Local Plan Review? How can this be resolved? Should the land that forms MB1 be allocated for housing development in the MNP, in order to minimise any conflicts between policies in the</p>	<p>We have chosen not to allocate sites because of the local difficulty in doing so. Rather we have set policies and criteria that enable development outside of the defined settlement area boundary if it is of high-quality residential development and of an appropriate scale in suitable locations. In this way we intend to ensure the NP policies are robust enough to prevail for the length of the plan period and accommodate additional growth if it is deemed necessary.</p> <p>Our approach is based on defining the limits of the settlement area, within which there is a general assumption in favour of development. But, in recognition that more land for development will be needed over the plan period than is available within the settlement area boundary, to provide locally agreed and acceptable criteria on which such land use and development proposals can be considered.</p>

	neighbourhood plan and those in the emerging Local Plan Review, boosting housing supply and securing additional financial support for local infrastructure and community facilities in Martock as suggested in Regulation 16 responses? However, I do note that paragraph 9.9 of the MNP states that the Plan “supports high-quality residential development, of an appropriate scale in suitable locations as determined by other policies in the development plan”.	
5a	The Settlement Area shown on Map 6 does not include part of the land owned by William Sparrow Ltd and previously allocated for industrial use. Are there sufficient grounds to exclude the land and is there conflict between the Settlement Area Boundary and Policy Mart 23, which supports development of the Sparrows Works including proportionate outward expansion?	<p>The definition of the settlement area boundary was done in accordance with a set of criteria that was agreed by the Steering Group and made public during the consultation period. The site in question was excluded from within the settlement area because it did not meet the agreed criteria i.e. it did not have a current planning permission. To have made an exception for this site would have likely brought forward similar demands from other owners of land on the periphery of the defined settlement area boundary.</p> <p>A site outside the settlement area boundary is not precluded from development if the proposal meets the criteria of policy Mart13 or, in this case, policy Mart 23. You have identified that Policy Mart 23 includes the land in question within the defined area of Sparrow Works. The policy supports its development for business purposes subject to the criteria of the policy.</p>
5b	Also, is it correct that Map 8 - Business Areas confuses the locations of Sparrows Works with Stoke Road (sites C & D)?	<p>Map is annotated wrongly.</p> <p>We suggest it may be simplest to change C and D round in policy 23 - C Stoke Road, D Sparrows Works.</p>
5c	In addition, should land at Ringwell Hill controlled by Summerfield and partly within Sparrows Works site be identified so that a scheme for 25 dwellings might be taken forward there?	<p>No. This land is not in the latest SSDC land supply document because the local planning authority concluded that locational factors such as the footpath access and distance from the village centre made this area non-sustainable for residential development. These were also cited as being significant when the Planning Inspector dismissed an Appeal¹ against the local planning authority’s decision to refuse a “proposed residential development of 49 dwellings, public open space and associated infrastructure”.</p>
6	The basis for Map 2 of the MNP - Landscape Sensitivity Assessment is explained in paragraph 7.3. However, the Map lacks a clear legend and does not easily distinguish (i) character areas and (ii) areas of differing “visual sensitivity”. Figure 2 of the Martock Neighbourhood Local Plan Local Evidence Report June 2017 is titled Landscape Sensitivity, and it also shows local landscape character areas. Significantly, it identifies some areas of low landscape sensitivity, which are omitted from the map in the MNP. Should this Figure 2 be substituted for Map 2 of the MNP, and the source of the map be stated in the Plan?	<p>Map 2 is intended to show the areas of the Parish that are regarded as being of significant landscape sensitivity. The omission of areas deemed as being of low sensitivity was done to make the interpretation of the map easier and not to imply, in the context of the ‘natural environment’, that areas of lower sensitivity have little or no value worth protecting.</p> <p>The map legend seems to be clear in identifying what the different coloured zones and line means. However, we can try to improve its clarity if required.</p>

¹ <http://www.martockplan.org.uk/Documents/Martock/Inspectorate%20appeals/Ringwell%20Hill.pdf>

7	<p>Policy Mart 14 Local Green Gap was opposed by local landowners. Land north of Stapleton Close was put forward by Bath and Wells Diocese as suitable for housing development. The need for farm diversification at Blossom Barn, Stapleton may require changed use of land and buildings in future, it was argued. Land north of Coat Road is included in emerging Policy MB1 of the Local Plan Review as an allocation for new housing. Is Policy Mart 14 therefore necessary, or is existing planning policy for countryside protection and the definition of a Settlement Area Boundary sufficient to prevent the coalescence of Martock with Coat or Stapleton? Could the Parish Council provide additional clarification to support the proposed Policy?</p>	<p>Policy Mart14 is a very important policy for the community. It was drafted in response to a clear community desire, expressed during consultations, to maintain and protect the rural green gap between Martock and the villages to the north and west. The community does not believe that the existing policies of the Local Plan, or the fact that the area in question is 'rated' as either high or moderate landscape sensitivity, are sufficient to prevent settlement coalescence incrementally, or by stealth. Policy Mart14 makes it clear that this gap is important to the people of the Parish and places strict development criteria on the land in question and provides definition to the area that is protected. The wish to preserve for posterity the gap between the recent industrial and suburban north end of Martock and the rural agricultural character of the much older settlements of Coat and Stapleton to the north was a key reasons why SSDC and the Parish Council successfully opposed, at a Planning Enquiry, building within the gap in 2015. It was argued that building in this gap would cause 'substantial' harm to an important landscape contrary to Local Plan policy. The clear and eloquent reasoning by the Inspector's report is appendicised for the benefit of the Examiner. This policy along with policy Mart13, we hope, will be influential on the outcome of the Local Plan Review.</p>
8a	<p>SSDC commented on a number of matters as summarised below. Should revisions be made in response to these comments, given the requirement for general conformity with strategic policies in SSDC's Local Plan and the fact that planning applications for development in Martock will be determined by SSDC? The main matters are: Paragraph 5.8 - should the status of companion documents to the MNP, notably the Flood Guide, Village Design Statement and Environment Manual be clarified?</p>	<p>The three documents referred to have been 'approved' by the Parish Council and are therefore regarded as essential guides for developers and companion documents to the Neighbourhood Plan once made.</p>
8b	<p>Paragraph 6.2 - there is an issue as to whether the Vision is, firstly, satisfactorily described and, secondly, needs to be accompanied by some expected physical outcomes;</p>	<p>The vision statement transcends the physical and is intended to provide an overarching context for the NP and other community-based strategies. The aims and objectives provide the agreed physical outcomes we seek.</p>
8c	<p>Policy Mart 8 - Views and Vistas - what is their scope and extent and principal features?</p>	<p>The scope, extent and principal features are all detailed in the Martock Environment Manual (page 24ff), a companion document to the NP. Para. 7.38 directs developers to a detailed assessment of the quality and value of the important views and vistas in the Martock Environment Manual. It states that the Parish Council will use this assessment to help evaluate the visual impact of a development proposal. A weblink to the Manual from para. 7.38 could be included in the NP.</p>
8d	<p>Paragraph 8.6 – Conservation Area Appraisal – given that no such review has taken place to date can the Parish Council confirm that they still intend for a review to occur in the future?</p>	<p>The Conservation Area Appraisal remains 'in progress', as far as the Parish Council is concerned. The Appraisal reached the stage of a revised area being agreed between the team working on behalf of the Parish Council and the Conservation</p>

		<p>Team at SSDC, including detailed maps. The appraisal process was then interrupted by a staffing review at SSDC, which resulted in the conservation staff taking retirement. It is intended that it will be resumed with the new team when normal service resumes.</p> <p>In the meantime, the Parish Council and the community has focussed its efforts on preparing the Design Guide and embracing many of the matters that were being considered by the Conservation Area appraisal.</p> <p>The Appraisal has to be led by the local planning authority. We are keen that this Appraisal should recommence, and the Parish Council will be a willing participant.</p>
8e	<p>Policy Mart 9 - status of heritage assets - should there be an appropriate reference to a schedule of "locally listed buildings" and regard for paragraph 184 of the NPPF, which seeks conservation "in a manner appropriate to [their] significance"?</p>	<p>It is the local planning authority that 'recognises' locally listed buildings. For this reason, we did not make a reference to such a schedule in the policy. However, we would be prepared to extend para 8.11 to state: <i>The Parish Council intends to nominate, from time to time, local heritage assets that should be included on the local planning authority's list of local heritage assets.</i></p> <p>We believe the policy and its supporting statement are consistent with the NPPF. Para 18.4 of the NP emphasises that, in accordance with the NPPF (paras. 195-197), <i>consideration of a development proposal should take account of the significance of the heritage asset and apply a balanced judgment regarding the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset and the value placed on it by the community.</i></p> <p>Clause 3 of Policy Mart9 states that "<i>any renovations or alterations... should be designed sensitively, and with careful regard to the heritage asset's historical and architectural interest and setting</i>". Clause 4 of the same policy requires a clear assessment of the significance and impact of the proposal on the asset and its setting and justify the design approach taken.</p> <p>We would not object to an addition to clause 2 of the policy so it states: <i>Development proposals should demonstrate how they take into account the significance of the asset in protecting or enhancing the said building or structure for the appreciation of existing and future generations.</i></p> <p>Nb. There is a schedule of 20 important buildings on the village website (https://www.martockonline.co.uk/Pages/75/History.html). Some, but not all are nationally listed. It is the intention of those interested in village history to widen this list and work is in progress.</p>
8f	<p>Policy Mart 10 - whether Local Green Space designation should be made in the case of spaces B, E, F, H, M and N, as these are already protected by their Conservation Area position</p>	<p>It is our experience that being in a Conservation Area per se does not protect land from development; it (hopefully) ensures that the development is appropriate. Designation as a local green space is intended to protect the 'greenness' of these spaces.</p> <p>The PPG Paragraph: 011 (Reference ID: 37-011-20140306) <i>Advises that different types of designations are intended to achieve different purposes. If land is already protected by designation, then consideration should be given to whether any additional local benefit would be gained by designation as Local Green Space.</i></p>

		<p>It is our conclusion that Policy Mart10 should apply a consistent approach to identifying and protecting local green space that meets the NPPF criteria throughout the Parish, so as not to infer that the 'green space' value was less important for such sites in the conservation area.</p> <p>By designating a site as a 'local green space' we are recognising its own special qualities and characteristics, it's significance as a green area to the community, and an expectation that the site will be suitably managed and protected.</p> <p>All sites designated by the NP have the support of the community.</p> <p>Over time, other areas such as those planned in and near new developments, can similarly designated and added to the list.</p>
8g	Policy Mart 12 - Infrastructure - should revisions be made to recognise the role of the Community Infrastructure Levy?	<p>We consider it inappropriate to prescribe the use of the CIL within the policy. The Parish Council prefers to maintain a dialogue with the local planning authority regarding CIL and may choose to prepare its own community investment plan regarding the use of CIL.</p>
9	Paragraphs 2.3 and 12.1 give conflicting figures for the Parish population. Is it "approximately 4,200" or "4,766"?	<p>The population figure has been a moving target over recent years, according to which estimate is referred to.</p> <p>We suggest the figure of approximately 4,200 should be regarded as the latest figure. It is based on a figure of 4,188 used by SSDC in the most recent South Somerset Local Plan Review 2016-2036 'Preferred Options Consultation (Regulation 18)' (page 116), which is a 2018 estimate according to the footnote.</p>
10	Policy Mart 2 seeks to protect established Landscape and Wildlife Corridors. In order to assist development management decisions, I consider that the location of established corridors should be set out on a map in the MNP, having been agreed with the SSDC. Could this be provided please?	<p>Identifying and mapping wildlife corridors is work in progress and is being spearheaded county-wide by the Somerset Wildlife Trust, with whom we are working. We have undertaken initial surveys using JNCC phase 1 classification and initial data are in the Environment Manual. There is, as yet, it appears, no mechanism for giving any corridors or nature areas any kind of official designation other than those that qualify as national or local reserves of importance such as the neighbouring Levels Ramsar site and Ham Hill Nature reserve; and we have none of these.</p> <p>The purpose of the Martock Environment Manual is to provide the up-to-date data on significant corridors to assist developers in assuring net biodiversity gain as set out in 7.10.</p> <p>We can provide a map and data of corridors we have identified as significant so far, but this does not have SSDC's recognition. Furthermore, it will not remain up to date if it is included in the NP. A map in the NP would be illustrative only, of a situation of recent years.</p>
11	Policies Mart 3 and Mart 4 concern flood management and flood risk; described as a matter of great concern to local parishioners. Having regard to national policy (paragraphs 155 onwards of the NPPF), and the fact that a substantial area of land in the Parish falls within flood zones 3 and 2 (as shown on the adopted Local Plan Policies Map for	<p>A good deal of discussion took place within the NP Flood Steering Group members regarding the flood maps provided by the Environment Agency. It was decided not to include one for the reasons outlined below.</p> <p>There are four EA flood maps which assess an area's long-term risk from flooding, bearing in mind that any development site is intended to have 100 years life</p>

	<p>Martock), I appreciate the importance of robust policies for flooding. The NPPF states that strategic policies should take account of advice from the Environment Agency and other relevant flood risk management authorities. All plans should apply a sequential, risk-based approach to the location of development. Should a map showing the flood risk zones in Martock be added to the MNP, even if accompanied by a warning that the information may be slightly dated?</p> <p>Should references to management authorities be added to the MNP (paragraph 7.23) to assist users of the Plan, notably to the Environment Agency and to other authorities eg. Parrett Internal Drainage Board (mentioned in the Joint Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment July 2019 – Somerset West & Taunton and South Somerset District Councils)?</p>	<p>expectancy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rivers and the sea • surface water • reservoirs • some groundwater <p>Then there is a further EA Flood map for Planners, which does not include all the information contained in the previously listed four EA Flood maps. Each EA Flood map acknowledges in small print that the map does not include a complete picture of flooding. In the Parish reliability is placed on practical experience of locations which flood.</p> <p>Moreover, any map(s) containing all the above information would require constant updating if they were to remain relevant.</p> <p>The Flood Guide at Para 12.7 directs the reader to links for flood maps. The author of any competently produced FRA, (Flood Risk Assessment), would include all the current EA Flood maps listed above, rendering any flood maps in the NP obsolete.</p> <p>As regard to including a reference to the management authorities, this is made in the Flood Guide at Section 16 ‘Contacts’ and throughout the Guide. We consider that the Flood Guide is an important point of reference for developers. It will be kept up to date by the Parish Council. As references are made in the Flood Guide to the various authorities (see paras 6.1, 8.11, 8.13, 8.17, 8.18, 8.19, 8.22, 12.6, 12.7), it was thought unnecessary to pad out the NP document itself with such detail. We could do so if required.</p>
12	<p>Policy Mart 7 - Farm Diversification expects converted business space to be actively marketed for 2 years before a change of use will be permitted. What is the basis for the 2-year requirement, and could it be too onerous? Also, what is meant by “In such cases...” in the final sentence of the policy?</p>	<p>The two-year requirement is aimed at ensuring that conversion to business space is not used as a temporary device that could lead to applications for change of use to residential and or inappropriate uses. Furthermore, given the uncertainties of the short- to medium- term economic situation, a two-year marketing strategy will allow for any short-term inertia in the market and maximise the chance that empty business space in the Parish will be used again to the benefit of the local economy.</p>
13	<p>Policy Mart 11 and paragraph 8.35 states that the Martock Design Statement has been prepared by a task group of parishioners. Following from Q.8 above, did the task group include architects, town or landscape planners, or others with relevant professional expertise? If so, it would be helpful to refer to this.</p>	<p>None of the working group had the specific professional qualifications you mention. However, one of the participants heads the county-wide Somerset Vernacular Buildings Research Group. All the members have been active in civic and community affairs for many years.</p> <p>The working group consulted unofficially with suitably qualified people as and when advice was needed even though they are not involved actively in the work. We worked to a template provided by our planning consultant, who oversaw the preparation of the draft Guide. We considered the scope and content of many design guides from other parishes and towns.</p> <p>The Group also followed the guidance on preparing a Design Statement that has been published by local authorities and can easily be found on the internet. And, of course, the local planning authority was consulted.</p>

14	Policy Mart 29 - Traffic Management. It is unclear how the second criterion, demonstrated to have the backing of the community, could be met? Should the criterion be omitted?	<p>Traffic management measures often attract strong views from the community. We consider it important that a permanent scheme has community support/approval. A statement of community consultation and its 'result' should be provided by the developer in support of the application. If this requirement is deemed too stringent, we could accept Policy Mart29 to be re-worded as follows:</p> <p><i>...providing the measures:</i></p> <p><i>i. are of a design that is in keeping with the character and appearance of the area with regards to scale, layout and materials; and</i></p> <p><i>ii. have been subject to consultation with the local community.</i></p> <p>If this change is to be made, we would expect the last sentence to para. 11.16 to be extended as follows: <i>We expect any development proposal that affects a long-term change in traffic behaviour to be the subject of a full consultation with the community and that the proposed scheme is supported by the Parish Council.</i></p>
15	Policy Mart 31 - Existing community facilities. Should this policy be modified to reflect recent Government changes to the Use Classes Order (notably new Class E – commercial, business and service uses)?	<p>We recognise that it may be necessary to add the codicil “where planning permission is required”. However, the principle behind the policy is still important to us i.e. that we should protect all our community assets and facilities as long as they are still wanted.</p>
Additional question from Examiner received 12th November 2020		
16	<p>I have received a document from South Somerset District Council, which is a briefing to Town and Parish Councils providing an update on a key planning issue regarding Phosphates.</p> <p>I would like to enquire of Martock Parish Council whether they wish to provide any comments on its relevance to the Neighbourhood Plan?</p>	<p>Response proposed for the Neighbourhood Plan by the NP Steering Group, 23rd October 2020:</p> <p>That, as part of the actions following the report of the independent adviser, we add a clause to the elaboration of Mart1 to the effect that as Martock lies within the catchment area of the Somerset Moors and Levels, a Ramsar Site, we expect that all development proposals should indicate that attention has been paid to any current guidelines concerning the building in site catchment area from either Natural England or the Environment Agency. If such guidelines advise a Habitat Protection Assessment, or similar, is required, the development will not be supported unless one is undertaken, and any mitigation proposals are acceptable to the competent authorities.</p> <p>Response proposed for an addition to the Flood Guide, para 12.6:</p> <p><i>In the light of the new guidance from Natural England, regarding the concern of the phosphate effluent levels generated by each development affecting the Somerset Levels, which is a RAMSAR site, each development should now include a Habitats Regulation Assessment, (Habitats Regulations 2017), undertaken by competent authorities (e.g. the local planning authority), proceeding to an appropriate assessment. It will not be acceptable to impose a condition on a planning permission; this has to be addressed prior to determination.</i></p>

Appendix

Regarding Question 7:

The heart of the issue is how wide the Gap should be. At the eastern side of the village this is decided for us by the brook, Furbers Rhyne which forms a natural village boundary. At the western end, the similar gap is two fields wide; one field here would seem more like an engineered green space than a natural gap.

That the existing national policy was challenged by the applicants (a national developer) in 2015 indicated to us that while settlement gaps were supported by national policies and is an implied rather than a specific feature of the Local Plan, the clear purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan is to provide an unambiguous interpretation of what this Green Gap policy means in the context of our parish and its villages.

We were also influenced by the strong and unanimous view of those parishioners from Coat who helped us with the Plan development.

Appeal Ref: APP/R3325/W/15/3131336 and North of Lavers Oak, Stapleton Road, Martock, Somerset (page 12ff)

The linear pattern [of development in Martock] is a notable local characteristic, and this is essentially a manifestation of the historic geography of the area of the area, intimately related to its agricultural traditions and historic transport routes. Whilst Martock has grown northwards by accretion of estates behind the original road frontage, a pattern that diminishes at Stapleton Close and Lavers Oak, where estate development is more directly related to the B3165, this more recent pattern nevertheless stops sharply and distinctly at the watercourse, beyond which the scene changes markedly to the distinctive rural pattern I have described. Consequently, the very perceptible rural gap between Martock and the physically very distinct and separate settlement of Stapleton does assume an importance as part of the locally distinctive rural landscape belied by its lack of any special protection in the Local Plan, albeit paragraph 5.5 of the Peripheral Landscape Study for Martock specifically refers to the fields which separate the settlements.

Protection of local gaps is not a feature of the Local Plan. However, that does not negate the importance of such gaps within the rural scene where they contribute to the local distinctiveness, context and character which its policy EQ2 seeks to protect, inter alia through conservation of local landscape character, which in this instance would be harmfully intruded upon by the insertion of an estate of houses, even though set back behind the protected trees and open space proposed within the appeal site. It seems to me that creation of quality places must necessarily encompass these subtle concepts in addition to protecting the most obvious features and implementing mitigation through landscaping measures, bearing in mind the permanence and irreversibility of built development of the type proposed.

For these reasons I consider the existing separation between Martock and Stapleton to be important to the basic intentions and individual aims of policy EQ2 as the Council maintains.

I prefer, for the reasons given above, the effective conclusion of the Council's witness that, in terms of the objects of Local Plan policy EQ2, and also the more generalised policies of the Framework in relevant respects, the proposed development would be significantly harmful. This is a planning harm to which I accord substantial weight.