

22 May 2010

To:

Cabinet Member for Planning
Maidstone Borough Council

**** DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION ****

Dear x

Polytunnels

Linton Parish Council discussed polytunnels at its last meeting on Monday, 17 May 2010. A short extract from the minutes of that meeting is attached, from which you will see that one of the actions agreed upon was to write to you expressing our concerns.

You will no doubt appreciate that this is an important, albeit in some ways a difficult issue for Linton. We are a rural parish, which has farming as an important and valued commercial activity, but is also heavily dependent on income from walkers and other tourists. Linton is mainly situated within a Special Landscape Area, includes sites of historical interest and a Conservation Area, and has extensive views across the Weald of Kent. It is widely used as a centre for walking, riding and similar outdoor pursuits, and the Parish includes a significant stretch of the Greensand Way long distance footpath.

We are aware that applications have been submitted for large areas of polytunnel coverage in the Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling borough areas. A significant part of some neighbouring parishes has been affected by polytunnel construction, notably Yalding, Coxheath & East Farleigh. At present, only a relatively small part of Linton has been affected by such constructions, but overall they are spreading. Coverage in this general area is increasing, and we are concerned that in the future it will become ever more widespread.

We therefore request that Maidstone Borough Council should formulate and supply parishes with a specific policy on polytunnel development, as a matter of urgency. We also wish to understand what specific level of density you would regard as unacceptable, and how you intend to manage the issue. It would appear that a piecemeal, case by case approach is likely to prove insufficient, in particular since few polytunnels go through a formal individual planning process in any event.

Also, we request that protection of visual amenity in sensitive landscape areas such as ours should be accorded a high priority within that policy, to set against and if appropriate override purely commercial or technical criteria.

We are aware that several other parishes in the Maidstone Borough area have expressed similar concerns and we trust that as a result, you will treat this issue as a high priority one requiring urgent review.

We look forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely