

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**RECORD OF RECOMMENDATION OF THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT  
DOCUMENT ADVISORY GROUP**

**TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION**

**Recommendation Made: 24 February 2010**

**DESIGNATION OF RURAL SERVICE CENTRES FOR MAIDSTONE  
BOROUGH**

**Issue for Decision**

To consider the designation of villages as rural service centres (RSC) within a Rural Settlement Hierarchy for the forthcoming draft Core Strategy.

**Recommendation Made**

That the designation of Staplehurst, Marden, Headcorn, Lenham and Harrietsham villages as Rural Service Centres as part of the settlement hierarchy and spatial distribution strategy contained within the next public consultation draft of the Core Strategy be approved.

**Reasons for Recommendation**

The Group considered the report of the Assistant Director of Development and Community Strategy regarding the Designation of Rural Service Centres for Maidstone Borough at their meeting on 24 February 2010.

Members congratulated officers for the rigorous research that had been undertaken and the evidence that had been produced within the report.

Maidstone Borough is substantially a rural Borough, outside of the main urban area it is broadly characterised by having many smaller settlements with limited access to services and facilities, and relatively little in the way of public transport provision. These are not generally features of sustainable settlements, as the smaller settlements will of necessity be highly dependent on other (often larger) settlements for jobs and services, and will be highly dependent on private cars for travel.

National policy and guidance (particularly PPS3 & PPS4) and Regional Strategy seek to direct growth to more sustainable locations by encouraging that development in rural areas be directed to settlements that can best act as service centres for their surrounding areas. The logic behind this approach

is that the concentration of public transport networks, employment opportunities, community facilities and services is far more sustainable in the long term than indiscriminate growth of smaller rural areas.

#### Characteristic Data: Updating and Amending Rural Settlements Audit

With reference to the minutes from the Advisory Group meeting on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2009, and based on advice received from Members and those who attended the Parish Liaison meetings on September 27<sup>th</sup> 2009, a number of amendments have been made to the rural services and facilities audit. This process involved changing the format of the audit and undertaking further consultation with Parish Councils. The final audit results are attached as Appendix A.

#### Functional Data: Rural Service Centre Workshop

The Rural Workshop was devised as a means to gather functional information on selected settlements. The Council's initial plan was to hold the Workshop for the four larger RSC's (Lenham, Marden, Staplehurst and Headcorn) indicated in the initial quantitative audit analysis. However, based on results in the amended facilities audit and the fact that Harrietsham was previously designated RSC status in the Core Strategy Preferred Options DPD and Maidstone Borough Wide Local Plan, the Council decided to invite representatives from Harrietsham to the Workshop. Representatives from Coxheath were also invited because the village featured strongly in the amended audit and has experienced substantial growth in recent years.

Based on the information gathered during the Workshop, and audit results, it is recommended that Harrietsham is designated as a Rural Service Centre. This decision was supported during discussions with Harrietsham Parish Council, and is grounded in the knowledge that Harrietsham, despite not featuring as strongly in the facilities audit as Coxheath, has the potential capacity to accommodate more development and has excellent transport linkages to employment and retail centres.

Coxheath is considered unsuitable for RSC status because current infrastructure in the village is near capacity, and public transport linkages to other employment and retail centres are limited. These issues were discussed in detail during the Workshop and the resulting decision has the support of the Parish Council.

It is therefore recommended that the spatial strategy of the draft Core Strategy identify five Rural Service Centres: Harrietsham, Headcorn, Lenham, Marden and Staplehurst. Dependant on the spatial distribution strategy adopted by the Council in the Core Strategy, that part of new growth in the Borough to take place in the rural area remote from the Maidstone urban area, will principally be distributed between these centres.

The format of the Rural Workshop and the information gathered on the day is explained in more detail in the RSC Workshop for Core Strategy Report, which is included as Appendix B. The Workshop and audit have both yielded useful quantitative and qualitative on these settlements that will be used in future work.

### **Alternatives Considered and why not Recommended**

Members have agreed to designate Rural Service Centres as part of the Borough's settlement hierarchy in accordance with government advice (particularly PPS3 & PPS4). It is considered that the methodology explained in this report and attached appendices are sound. Therefore, no alternative action is considered to be appropriate.

### **Background Documents**

None