

New Garden Communities Guidance

Background & Purpose

Maidstone Borough Council (the “council”) is advancing its Local Plan Review which will look ahead to at least 2037 (and possibly beyond).. Through that process, a number of Garden Community-scale proposals are being promoted for potential inclusion in the plan.

The National Planning Policy Framework (‘the Framework’) identifies that;

“The supply of large numbers of new homes can often be best achieved through the planning of larger scale development, such as new settlements or significant extensions to existing villages and towns..” (paragraph 72)

The Framework sets out attributes for such developments, underlining that they should be identified and progressed through the local plan process.

The delivery of a new garden community is a long-term endeavour and by publishing this document the council is giving developers and landowners a clear and comprehensive statement of its expectations.

The council wants this document to be used to help frame proposals from their earliest stage and ensure that development of the highest quality is delivered.

Whilst based on national requirements, this document also helps to explain what a ‘garden community’ means in a local, borough-specific context.

Importantly, the publication of this document does not signal that the emerging Local Plan Review will include one or more Garden Communities. The decision on the Plan’s overall spatial strategy is a future one for the council , informed by evidence, statute, national guidance, public consultation, consideration of the reasonable alternative strategies including through the Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment process, and any other material considerations.

Also, this document does not change or over-ride the primacy of the Development Plan. Any planning application for a garden community submitted before the Local Plan Review is completed would be assessed against the relevant sections of the Framework and against the policies of the Development Plan, comprising the Maidstone Borough Local Plan (2017), the Kent Minerals & Waste Local Plan (2016) and any made neighbourhood plans for the area and any other material considerations.

Definition of a new garden community

In terms of size, the Government defines ‘garden villages’ as being of between 1,500 and 10,000 homes and ‘garden towns’ as being of 10,000+ homes¹. They can be new, freestanding settlements or a new neighbourhood created through a major extension to an village or town.

Whilst there is no single qualitative definition of what constitutes a new garden community is, there are many consistent themes in the national-level literature on the subject. As an overview, the Government’s Garden Communities Prospectus (August 2018) contains this short description of what a garden community should be like:

“vibrant, mixed use communities where people can live, work and play for generations to come – communities which view themselves as the conservation areas of the future. Each will be holistically planned, self-sustaining and characterful.”²

Format

This document uses the Framework (paragraph 72) as the starting point and supplements it with guidance contained within the Government’s ‘Garden Communities Prospectus’ (August 2018)³ (“the Government’s Prospectus”) and the Town & Country Planning Association’s (“TCPA”) Garden City Principles⁴.

It also adds local interpretation, reaffirming matters raised in the Council’s own New Garden Communities Prospectus (“the Council’s Prospectus”) which was published alongside its Call for Sites in February 2019.

Whilst the intent of this document is to pull together the principles outlined in the Government’s Prospectus, the TCPA’s Garden City Principles and the Council’s Prospectus, it is no substitute (nor is it intended to be a substitute) for those documents.

Qualities

This part of the document provides information on the key qualities for a garden community proposal. The appendix includes supporting information on matters of process.

- 1. Proposals need to be “...well located and designed...”. Strategic policy making authorities “should identify suitable locations for such development where this can help to meet identified needs in a sustainable way”.**

¹ Paragraph 5, Garden Communities Prospectus 2018 MHCLG

² Paragraph 3, Garden Communities Prospectus 2018 MHCLG

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/garden-communities>

⁴ <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/garden-city-principles>

- a. National guidance documents provide little additional information of how ‘well located’ or ‘suitable locations’ should be assessed. Broadly, the suitability of a location can relate to:
 - Accessibility to services and facilities, including employment
 - The extent of environmental constraints and whether these constraints can be successfully overcome or mitigated for.
- b. Design is covered in a specific section below.

2. Proposals need to be “.....supported by the necessary infrastructure and facilities.....”

- a. The Council considers that delivery of the full scope of necessary infrastructure is critical to a successful garden community.
- b. According to the Government’s Prospectus, the term ‘infrastructure’ includes road, rail, utilities (including high speed broadband, flood, water supply, sewerage and waste), health services, education and ‘other core social infrastructure’.⁵ In respect of the latter, the TCPA’s Garden City Principles identifies cultural, recreational and shopping facilities “in walkable, vibrant, sociable neighbourhoods” as a key garden community quality. The full range of infrastructure requirements should be assessed and addressed in a new garden community proposal.
- c. In respect of transport infrastructure specifically, the Government’s Prospectus says that proposals should enable “integrated, forward looking and accessible transport options that support economic prosperity and wellbeing for residents. This should include promotion of public transport, walking, and cycling so that settlements are easy to navigate, and facilitate simple and sustainable access to jobs, education, and services”⁶. This chimes with the TCPA’s Garden City Principle which promotes “integrated and accessible transport systems, with walking, cycling and public transport designed to be the most attractive forms of local transport.”
- d. Locally, the council’s Prospectus additionally emphasises the role of low emission technologies, stating that proposals should provide for “integrated and accessible transport choices, with a particular emphasis on active modes (walking and cycling), public transport and low emission technologies”. Such technologies are seen as locally important as part of the borough’s response to climate change and air quality issues and links back to adopted Local Plan policies.

⁵ Paragraph 15, Garden Communities Prospectus 2018 MHCLG

⁶ Paragraph 13, Garden Communities Prospectus 2018 MHCLG

The council's Prospectus also emphasises the council's expectation that new residents will have exceptional connectivity through superfast broadband which again is reflected in the adopted Local Plan.

- e. Again, both the Government's Prospectus and the TCPA's Garden City Principles are consistent on the topic of how new garden communities should give residents the best opportunities to lead healthy lifestyles. The council's Prospectus explains that this would include "allowing activity to be built into their daily lives and providing opportunities to buy and grow healthy food along with ensuring that health services are close at hand". Again this consideration has strong linkages with the integration of active travel modes and the planning of open space as well as physical health facilities such as GP surgeries.

3. Consider the opportunities presented by existing or planned investment in infrastructure.....,

- a. National guidance documents provide little additional information of how the opportunities presented by existing or planned development should be assessed. Broadly, this would be linked to the identification of locations with existing or forthcoming infrastructure capacity which could be capitalised on as part of a comprehensively-planned garden community.

4. Consider the opportunities presented by the area's economic potential....

- a. Providing for local employment as part of a mixed-use garden community is a key way that the overall sustainability of a garden community proposal can be improved, enabling people to live and work locally as outlined above. In addition to 'B-class' uses (offices, industry and warehousing), services such as schools, health and care facilities, shops and leisure uses will all be sources of local jobs. Evidence work for the Local Plan Review will provide further intelligence on the overall future need for key employment sectors and there could be the potential for garden community style development to make an important contribution to meeting these future needs. Recognising that realism will be needed about the level of self-containment that can be achieved, linked to the overall scale of the garden community and its connections to other centres of employment, the council is nonetheless keen that proposals should be ambitious in their employment aspirations .

5. Consider the opportunities presented by the scope for net environmental gains

- a. The scope for net environmental gains can be broad ranging. One of the TCPA's's Garden City Principles is for "development that enhances the natural environment,

providing a comprehensive green infrastructure network and net biodiversity gains, and that uses zero-carbon and energy-positive technology to ensure climate resilience”.

- b. MBC would place particular importance on how green and blue infrastructure is provided for in the proposal, recognising the multi-faceted benefits that accessible green space can have. The council’s Prospectus underlines that “generous amounts of green space, landscaping, trees and hedgerows are integrated into the design of the development - with the purposes of achieving biodiversity net gain, an attractive setting for development, informal recreational space, and attractive walking and cycling links”.
- c. The council’s position aligns with the Government’s Prospectus which states that a key quality of garden communities is “generous, accessible, and good quality green and blue infrastructure that promotes health, wellbeing, and quality of life, and considers opportunities to deliver environmental gains such as biodiversity net gain and enhancements to natural capital”⁷.
- d. This also links to what the Government Prospectus says about future-proofing new garden community development which should be “designed to be resilient places that allow for changing demographics, future growth, and the impacts of climate change including flood risk and water availability, with durable landscape and building design planned for generations to come. This should include anticipation of the opportunities presented by technological change such as driverless cars and renewable energy measures.”⁸
- e. Locally, the council is particularly keen to see buildings and places designed with a strong focus on energy efficiency, reduced carbon emissions and climate change mitigation which again is in accordance with adopted Local Plan policies.

6. Ensure that their size and location will support a sustainable community, with sufficient access to services and employment opportunities within the development itself (without expecting an unrealistic level of self-containment), or in larger towns to which there is good access;

- a. The Government’s Prospectus affirms that “all proposals must be of sufficient scale to be largely self-sustaining and genuinely mixed use”⁹. It goes on to elaborate that this would be a scale “which supports the necessary infrastructure to allow the community to

⁷ Paragraph 13, Garden Communities Prospectus 2018 MHCLG

⁸ Paragraph 13, Garden Communities Prospectus 2018 MHCLG

⁹ Paragraph 6, Garden Communities Prospectus 2018 MHCLG

function self-sufficiently on a day to day basis, with the capacity for future growth to meet the evolving housing and economic needs of the local area”¹⁰.

- b. In respect of mix of uses, the council’s expectations have been clearly set out in its own Prospectus as follows “A successful garden community is likely to contain a genuine mix of uses. Making realistic provision for additional employment floorspace will mean that some residents will be able to work locally. A local centre can contain a range of local shops, services and facilities; leisure and community uses; open space; formal recreation space and sports facilities. Supporting facilities and services that the residents will also need should be considered within the development as a whole, including schools, health centres, sports and leisure facilities, community buildings.”
- c. This consideration has strong linkages with (2) and (4) above.

7. Set clear expectations for the quality of the development and how this can be maintained (such as by following Garden City principles), and ensure that a variety of homes to meet the needs of different groups in the community will be provided;

- a. The Government’s Prospectus promotes “well-designed places with vibrant mixed-use communities that support a range of local employment types and premises, retail opportunities, recreational and community facilities”¹¹.
- b. Both the Government’s Prospectus and the TCPA’s Garden City Principles advocate high quality, mixed tenure homes (including affordable housing). The Government also highlights the importance of providing housing for all stages of life.
- c. Local emphasis is provided in the council’s Prospectus as follows; “An important aspect to achieving a mixed and balanced community will be ensuring that the new homes match the diversity of local needs and offer variety and choice, including in terms of affordability and tenure. This will likely include specialist provision in response to evidenced needs, such as housing for the elderly, serviced plots for custom and self-build and Gypsy & Traveller pitches.” The council will be publishing a new Strategic Housing Market Assessment and a new Gypsy & Traveller Needs Assessment as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan Review and these studies will provide valuable information on the nature of local needs. The council is also preparing an Affordable and Local Needs Housing SPD (elaborating on housing policies¹² in the adopted Local Plan) which provides additional detail on the council’s current affordable housing expectations.
- d. The significance of establishing a clear identity for the new garden community is signaled in the Government’s Prospectus. Locally, importance will be given to “creating a distinctive place to live at a sustainable scale which responds to local character in the

¹⁰ Paragraph 13, Garden Communities Prospectus 2018 MHCLG

¹¹ Paragraph 13, Garden Communities Prospectus 2018 MHCLG

¹² Policies SP19, SP20, DM13, DM14

heart of Kent”. It will also be critically important for the natural and historic environment of the local area to be both reflected and respected in the development of proposals which is also advocated by the Government in its own Prospectus.

8. NPPF - make a realistic assessment of likely rates of delivery, given the lead-in times for large scale sites, and identify opportunities for supporting rapid implementation (such as through joint ventures or locally-led development corporations)

- a. The council’s Prospectus addresses this topic. It urges particular consideration to be given to how barriers can be overcome and delivery can be accelerated, as well as sustained, over longer time periods. Measures which may be utilised are;
- A clear role for a master developer
 - Opportunities for multiple suppliers including SME builders to accelerate and sustain delivery rates.
 - Setting out roles, responsibilities, timeframes and commitments of key parties through, for example, a Memorandum of Understanding with the council and/or other key parties. This should progress to a Planning Performance Agreement in due course
 - Collaboration between landowners/developers and the council on bids for funding (including forward funding)

9. Consider whether it is appropriate to establish Green Belt around or adjoining new developments of significant size

- a. In this context, promoters of new garden communities should particularly plan their proposals to avoid the coalescence of separate settlements and thereby maintain their distinctiveness.

Appendix

Vision, leadership and engagement

The Framework notes the value of working with the local community when a new garden community is being advanced¹³. Both the Government's Prospectus and TCPA's Garden City Principles emphasise the need for a strong vision for the development, advanced through strong leadership and designed and delivered with the involvement of current and future residents and businesses.

The council's prospectus confirms "Local community engagement, involvement and support is also likely to be instrumental to delivering a successful proposal. Those people who are most closely impacted by the new garden community proposal will need an understanding of the benefits that the development will bring and will likely welcome opportunities for meaningful influence on the specific details of the proposal."

In respect of leadership, roles for the council could include;

- Local planning authority - establishing the planning policy framework for the new community, directing its detailed masterplanning and delivering consents through the development management process
- Partner (possibly a lead partner) to secure funding from Governmental agencies
- Advocate for the new garden community, including with other public sector bodies and neighbouring authorities
- Active role in land assembly
- Investor, including as a possible landowner
- Role as an overarching 'master-developer'

Legacy and stewardship

The Government's Prospectus indicates that "legacy and stewardship arrangements should be in place for the care of community assets, infrastructure and public realm, for the benefit of the whole community."¹⁴ Having such arrangements in place, including the community ownership of land, is one of the TCPA's Garden City Principles.

The council understands that such arrangements can be important in sustaining their benefits for the whole community in the longer term.

Land value capture

One of the TCPA's Garden City Principles is that land value uplift is captured for the benefit of the local community. In overview this means that the uplifts in land value is used to fund the infrastructure the development demands. The council will expect arrangements to be in place to secure the required infrastructure through land value uplift capture. Its starting point would be that, through this process, we would seek infrastructure to be fully funded by the development.

¹³ Paragraph 72 NPPF

¹⁴ Add ref

References

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/garden-communities>

<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/garden-city-principles>

http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/171149/Local-Plan-v2-November-2017.pdf