

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT DOCUMENT ADVISORY GROUP

28 JUNE 2010

REPORT OF HEAD OF SPATIAL PLANNING

Report prepared by Sue Whiteside

1. Core Strategy Spatial Vision and Objectives

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider a first draft of the spatial vision and objectives of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD) as set out in this report. The spatial vision and objectives will be refined prior to the approval of the DPD for public consultation.

1.2 Recommendation of Head of Spatial Planning

1.2.1 That the Local Development Document Advisory Group considers the first draft of the spatial vision and objectives for the Core Strategy and provides comments to Officers.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 The Council's vision for the borough, set out in its sustainable community strategy and strategic plan, seeks prosperity and vibrancy for Maidstone's urban and rural communities whilst retaining and enhancing the borough's distinctive history, landscape and character. The vision for Maidstone's Economic Development Strategy seeks to create a model 21st century County town as a distinctive place known for, amongst other things, a dynamic service sector based economy.

1.3.2 The core strategy will determine the spatial expression of the Council's vision for the borough. The DPD will set out the "Why? What? Where? When? and How?" for a development strategy to deliver the spatial vision and objectives; the need for planned growth and regeneration together with supporting infrastructure, within the context of protecting the borough's built and environmental assets; the scale of that development, general locations and timing, and necessary delivery mechanisms.

- 1.3.3 The borough has a complex set of characteristics that require distinctive planning strategies to achieve the Council's vision, in order to face the challenges of the 21st century, and specifically the period to 2026.
- 1.3.4 The draft spatial vision takes as a starting point the results of the 2007 consultation on the draft Core Strategy Preferred Option, and has been revised and updated to best reflect the current position. The draft set out below will need to evolve as policies are developed, and will be incorporated into the initial and final draft Core Strategy DPD for Members' approval for public consultation.
- 1.3.5 Members may wish to consider the following strapline for the Core Strategy and its associated publicity along the lines of **"People Making Maidstone"** or **"Places for People at Maidstone"**.
- 1.3.6 At this point, Members' views and comments on the vision and objectives are being sought.

New Government proposed changes to the planning system

- 1.3.7 Members will be aware of the new Coalition Government's intention to radically change the planning system, as signalled in various publications and recent actions of the new Government, including:
- the reissue of PPS3 (redefining brownfield land to exclude residential gardens)
 - Eric Pickles MP's statement of intent to abolish Regional Strategies in part or whole at the discretion of local planning authorities, including the ability to set housing supply targets (including gypsy and traveller sites) at local planning authority level.
- 1.3.8 However, Regional Strategies have not been "revoked" as yet and the new plan making system has yet to be outlined or necessary primary legislation introduced. The housing targets for Maidstone set out below reflect the policies of the South East Plan, but there will be opportunities to carefully consider these further through the Council's decision making processes as the draft core strategy is refined before publishing for public consultation and at subsequent stages before submission for independent examination next year.
- 1.3.9 The situation is evolving rapidly, and further information about future direction will be reported shortly for Members' decision.

Draft Vision

- 1.3.10 Core strategies that have been successfully adopted in recent months tend to include a long vision (1 to 2 pages) and a number of objectives, and this approach has been supported by the Planning Inspectorate. However, given the extent and complexity of Maidstone's characteristics, it would be more useful to include the detail of the vision as text (in italics below) and a shorter, more focused spatial vision (emboldened below) in the core strategy.
- 1.3.11 *By 2026, prosperity will be achieved through sustainable economic growth supported by the creation of high quality employment opportunities, the regeneration of key sites, investment in the town centre, and access improvements.*
- 1.3.12 *There will be a first class "traditional" town centre in Maidstone, maintaining its place as one of the premier town centre "offers" in the region, by creating a distinctive, accessible, safe and high quality environment for the community to live, work and shop. The town centre will be transformed by encouraging a wide range of new development including shops, business, residential development, cultural and tourism facilities, education and enhanced public spaces.*
- 1.3.13 *There will be an emphasis on sustainable transport access improvements to the town centre through an integrated approach to transport strategy to promote Maidstone's role as a transport hub with national and regional links. By 2026, the general location of growth will help bring about a step change in the use of public transport and other sustainable means of travel, coupled with restraints on parking where this will not prejudice economic growth together with the creation of new and improved cycle and pedestrian networks.*
- 1.3.14 *The urban area of Maidstone will be revitalised throughout with the regeneration of key commercial and residential sites and areas of existing social and environmental problems, and by improving links to surrounding areas that will create better access to jobs and other facilities.*
- 1.3.15 *A high quality green and blue infrastructure that forms the setting of the urban area and creates suitable access to the surrounding countryside will be developed. This will protect and enhance the borough's rich natural heritage and wildlife with a special emphasis on rivers and local landscape character.*
- 1.3.16 *For the first part of the delivery of the plan, the focus of development across the borough will be on brownfield land in the urban area, extending in the latter part to greenfield land adjacent to Maidstone's urban area with the prime quantity of development at a sustainably*

designed urban extension to the south east of the town. Growth will be supported by strategic and local infrastructure, including quality green spaces, sustainable transportation and utilities, as well as a full range of social and leisure facilities. By 2026 the Maidstone urban extension will be laid out in a manner that reduces the need to travel and is designed as an exemplar of low energy consumption and minimal carbon and other emissions.

- 1.3.17 To protect the special character of the countryside and to provide for needs in rural areas, the role of the rural service centres of Harrietsham, Headcorn, Lenham, Marden and Staplehurst will be reinforced as the focus of additional limited housing development, supported by necessary infrastructure and enabling local choice. New development will be mixed and well integrated with the existing settlements and will maintain the character and identity of villages.*
- 1.3.18 Development in smaller rural settlements and the countryside will be tightly restricted to local needs housing, rural economic diversification and meeting community needs. The separate identity and unique character of individually distinct villages and the town will be maintained. The Kent Downs AONB and its setting will be safeguarded as a national asset, through policies that restrict development.*
- 1.3.19 Prosperity will be created by strengthening the borough's employment, retail and leisure offers, which should exceed the growth in population with the creation of additional jobs so that more and better jobs are provided locally. New jobs will be located where existing infrastructure and new investment in transport and other infrastructure underpins growth.*
- 1.3.20 There will be a better mix and balance of housing in the borough, achieved through the provision of an adequate number, range and mix of housing, including affordable housing, accommodation for the elderly, local needs housing at rural settlements, and sites for gypsy and traveller communities.*
- 1.3.21 The phasing, density and location of development will ensure the best use of previously developed land and buildings to help regenerate urban areas, and minimise the necessary release of greenfield land in total, and will make best use of a finite resource in a manner that protects and enhances the borough's best built and natural heritage, including its rivers.*
- 1.3.22. Development throughout the borough will be of a high quality, utilising designs that respond to the distinctive local character of areas. The design of new development will incorporate sustainability principles, and will take into account the impact of climate change.*

1.3.23 Sustained development growth throughout the period will be maintained by ensuring an appropriate supply of suitable development sites, and demanding but realistic expectations of development to contribute to the provision of the type of accommodation required to meet needs (including affordable housing) carefully balanced with a tariff for development contributions to fund necessary strategic and local infrastructure, and good design quality and sustainable construction standards of at least national standards.

“By 2026 Maidstone will be a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable community benefiting from an exceptional and unique urban and rural environment.

The core strategy will help in delivering sustainable growth and regeneration while protecting and enhancing the borough’s built and natural assets. Regeneration will be prioritised and delivered at the urban area of the County town first to make best use of brownfield land, so the release of greenfield sites to accommodate growth principally at an extension to the south east of Maidstone’s urban area will be phased after 2016. Development will be supported by a sustainable and integrated transport strategy, together with necessary strategic and local infrastructure.

The establishment of a multi-functional green and blue network of open spaces, rivers and water courses will safeguard biodiversity and define the urban character of Maidstone while offering access to the countryside, which will be valued in its own right. The character and identity of villages will be maintained by directing development and supporting infrastructure to the rural service centres of Harrietsham, Headcorn, Lenham, Marden and Staplehurst.

Employment skills will be expanded to meet an improved and varied range of local jobs, and there will be a better balanced housing market to meet the community’s needs. Development will be of high quality design, and constructed in a sustainable manner to respond to climate change and protect the environment and biodiversity.”

Draft Objectives

1.3.24 A number of spatial objectives (emboldened below) have been identified to ensure the Core Strategy vision is achieved. The effectiveness of these objectives will be monitored, and performance indicators will be set out in the Core Strategy.

1.3.25 The objectives start with the spatial elements of the core strategy, followed by core policies. This format conforms to government advice and direction on the content of core strategies, and reflects the document structure that was agreed by Members of this Group on 24th February 2010.

- a) To provide for 11,080¹ new homes and 10,000² new jobs, primarily in skilled employment uses, in the borough alongside developing learning opportunities.**
- b) To focus new development at Maidstone town with:**
 - **90% of new housing built within and adjacent to the urban area of Maidstone town; greenfield development primarily located at an urban extension to the south east of the town**
 - **the aim of providing 60%³ of new housing across the plan period on previously developed land and through the conversion of existing buildings**
 - **new employment allocations in Maidstone town centre and serving the new urban extension strictly coordinated and targeted with opportunities on the most suitable greenfield sites only.**
- c) To transform the “offer”, vitality and viability of Maidstone town centre, including office, retail, further and higher education, leisure and tourism functions, together with a significant enhancement to the built and natural environment.**
- d) To create an exemplar sustainable and innovative new neighbourhood to the south east of Maidstone town, of sufficient scale and design to achieve good levels of local services, green space, mixed development and strategic infrastructure in a timely manner, and local power generation.**
- e) To consolidate the roles of Harrietsham, Headcorn, Lenham, Marden and Staplehurst as rural service centres with successful village centres, as the focus of the network of rural settlements, with retained services and regenerated employment sites.**
- f) To support new housing in the borough’s smaller villages that is of a design, scale, character and tenure appropriate**

¹ Note paragraph 1.3.9 of this report which could affect these targets

² Note paragraph 1.3.9 of this report which could affect these targets

³ New PPS3: Housing now excludes residential gardens from the brownfield definition which could impact on the Council’s ability to meet a 60% target

to the settlement, and support the retention of services and facilities that meet a local need.

- g) To safeguard and maintain the distinctive character of the district's landscapes, particularly the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting, whilst facilitating the economic and social well-being of these areas including the diversification of the rural economy.**
- h) To respect and enhance the character, extent and biodiversity of green spaces and the aquatic environment within and around built areas, together with the linkages between the spaces.**
- i) To ensure that new development takes account of the need to mitigate and adapt to climate change and improve air quality by locating development to minimise energy use; promoting travel patterns that reduce the need to travel by car; developing a greater choice of sustainable transport measures, particularly in Maidstone town; and supporting water and energy efficiency measures in existing development, and encouraging renewable energy sources and sustainable drainage solutions in new development.**
- j) To ensure that a new development is designed to a high quality and makes a positive contribution to the distinctive character of the area in which it is situated, including the protection of the built and natural heritage and its biodiversity.**
- k) To provide for the type of future housing that meets the changing needs of the borough's population, including provision for an ageing population and family housing, affordable housing at x%⁴, and accommodation that meets the needs of the gypsy and traveller community.**
- l) To ensure that key infrastructure and service improvements needed to support delivery of Core Strategy objectives and policies are brought forward in a co-ordinated and timely manner and that new development makes an appropriate contribution towards any improvements required as a result of new development.**

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 The Core Strategy must contain a locally distinctive strategic vision and supporting objectives that are delivered through the policies of the

⁴ To be confirmed in subsequent report

DPD. The exclusion of either would not support a sound document at Independent Examination.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 The Core Strategy's spatial vision and objective reflect the spatial elements of the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy, the Strategic Plan and the Economic Development Strategy.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 There are no risks directly arising from this report. Members' comments are requested to inform future reports.

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

- 1. Financial
- 2. Staffing
- 3. Legal
- 4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment
- 5. Environmental/Sustainable Development
- 6. Community Safety
- 7. Human Rights Act
- 8. Procurement
- 9. Asset Management

1.7.2 There are no specific implications directly arising from this report, although future reports containing Core Strategy policies will impact on a number of issues.

1.8 Relevant Documents

None

1.8.1 Appendices

None

1.8.2 Background Documents

None

IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

No

If yes, when did it first appear in the Forward Plan?

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This is a Key Decision because:

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Wards/Parishes affected:

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