

# REGENERATION STATEMENT

## 1. Background

1.1 In 2001 Maidstone's approach to regeneration was rated by the Audit Commission as poor, but with promising prospects for improvement. The Council has since then successfully delivered significant transformational regeneration projects including the Millennium Park and Fremlin's Walk. Regeneration policy and activity has been developed in a range of work streams but remains somewhat fragmented. The creation of the Prosperity and Regeneration Department in February 2009 signalled the Council's intention to place greater emphasis on regeneration. This new focus, together with the economic downturn, has prompted the drafting of a Regeneration Statement for the Borough.

1.2 The purpose of this statement is to:

- Define what is meant by regeneration
- Set out the existing Strategies and Policies that promote regeneration
- Put forward a structured approach to regeneration which aims to tackle the development of publicly owned land first.
- Identify an organisational structure to bring forward regeneration.

1.3 For the purposes of clarity in general terms economic regeneration is a process of increasing employment, encouraging business growth and investment, and tackling economic disadvantage and is an important activity for local authorities and their partners. It contributes to the Sustainable Community Strategy in advancing an area's economic wellbeing, and underpins cross-cutting approaches to tackle deprivation as a result of decline. The aim of 'regeneration' in general is to enable communities that have suffered from economic, social and environmental decline to 'work' again. Although all local authorities have a duty to produce a sustainable community strategy that addresses economic, environmental and social well-being, contexts vary enormously across the country. Therefore, councils take very different approaches to their role in regeneration: some may focus on physical regeneration while others may prioritise economic regeneration. In May 2009 the Department for Communities and Local Government published an update to its approach to Regeneration at a national level "Transforming Places Changing Lives – Taking Forward the Regeneration Framework". This forms context for local authorities developing and refreshing their local approach and policies.

## 2. What is Regeneration?

National Framework for Regeneration:

2.1 Regeneration is a term that means different things to different people, ranging from large scale activities that promote economic growth to neighbourhood interventions that improve quality of life. The Government's view is that regeneration is a set of

activities that reverse economic, social and physical decline in areas where market forces will not do this without support from government.

In doing so, regeneration should:

- secure long-term change, by tackling barriers to growth and reducing worklessness – moving communities and individuals from dependence to independence;
- improve places and make them more attractive to residents and investors, enabling new and existing businesses to prosper;
- foster ambition and unlock potential in the most deprived areas by breaking cycles of poverty; enabling everyone in society to gain more power in decisions made which affect them, and to take advantage of the economic opportunities that regeneration brings;
- supplement (not replace) and help to improve the flexibility and targeting of mainstream government services in underperforming areas;
- deliver sustainable development which contributes to people's satisfaction with where they live as well as wider Government goals; and
- open up opportunities to create more equal communities.

2.2 Local government has a central role in regeneration through engaging with the communities it represents. There are also key roles for the private and third sectors in regenerating local communities.

2.3 The current economic environment means that the amount of investment available through both the public and private sectors is reduced and that the old model of rising land values driving investment for the latter has faltered. Developers and financial institutions will take a much more cautious attitude to new regeneration schemes probably for a period of several years. Hence investors in regeneration – public, private and third sector – will need to make difficult decisions about priorities.

How are regeneration and economic development related?

2.4 Regeneration and economic development have always been closely related and are often confused. We want to end that confusion. Not all activity that promotes economic development is regeneration – and evidence from the last 30 years shows that economic inclusion does not necessarily follow from wider economic growth

2.5 By contrast, regeneration should also deliver increased economic inclusion – ensuring that economic development improves the lives of people in the most deprived areas.

2.6 Regeneration is a sub-set of economic development. Successful regeneration will be dependent on improved economic performance. But, the relationship is not one-way. The economic performance of rural areas, towns, cities, regions and even the nation can be held back or promoted by the extent to which all individuals have the opportunity to contribute.

What is economic development?

2.7 For the purposes of this statement, economic development covers a wide range of development including:

- Retail, leisure and offices, both in town centres and elsewhere;
- Light, general and heavy industry;
- Storage and distribution;
- Housing
- High technology premises including research, business and science parks;
- Agriculture;
- Minerals extraction;
- Telecommunications;
- Transport uses related to ports, airports and other inter-modal freight terminals;
- Specialist waste facilities;
- Energy production;
- The creative industries; and
- Tourism development.

2.8 Economic development can also comprise other uses which are major employment generators, or which attract other employers into the locality, such as hospitals and higher and further education establishments.

3.0 What is the current policy framework?

Draft PPS4

3.1 In seeking to achieve positive planning for economic development, the Government's desired objectives are:

- A good range of sites identified for economic development and mixed-use development;
- A good supply of land and buildings which offers a range of opportunities for creating new jobs in large and small businesses as well as start-up firms and which is responsive to changing needs and demands;
- High quality development and inclusive design for all forms of economic development;
- Avoiding adverse impacts on the environment, but where these are unavoidable, providing mitigation; and
- Shaping travel demand by promoting sustainable travel choices wherever possible.

## Sustainable Community Strategy

### 3.2 The Sustainable Community Strategy identifies in the Vision that the Council and Partners:

“want Maidstone Borough to be a vibrant prosperous 21<sup>st</sup> century urban and rural community.”

It has the objectives amongst others of:

- developing a vibrant economy and creating prosperity,
- building safer and stronger communities,
- developing Maidstone Borough’s urban and rural communities.

Additionally, it identifies key actions to:

- regenerate the town centre and make more of the river,
- pursue the construction of more affordable homes to meet local need,
- create a task force to tackle health, education and employment inequalities in areas of disadvantage.

## The Maidstone Economic Development Strategy: Creating a 21<sup>st</sup> Century County Town

### 3.3 This strategy was adopted in November 2008, and the Vision for the Borough states:

*“In 2028, Maidstone is a model ‘21<sup>st</sup> century county town’, a distinctive place, known for its blend of sustainable rural and urban living, excellence in public services, vibrant service sector-based economy, and above all, quality of life.*

*Highly skilled, wealthy people continue to be attracted to the borough to live; while many commute out to work in London or elsewhere in Kent, more and more work in the town centre, in the surrounding rural centres, or from home. In the evenings and at weekends, residents choose to spend their money in Maidstone because of its unique, high quality retail and leisure offer.*

*The centre of town truly is ‘a great place to visit, a great place to shop’; people come to Maidstone for its mix of high street and independent shopping outlets. Maidstone could never be called a clone town with its boutiques, high fashion outlets, and choice of organic retailers. Maidstone has moved even higher up the retail rankings. In the evenings the town centre comes alive; a safe place for families out for an evening at the theatre, the new concert hall, or the many restaurants; young people from all over Kent come to Maidstone because of the famous nightlife.*

*A culture of lifelong learning has been embedded in Maidstone in recognition of the importance of education and skills. Young people leave school with the qualifications they need to succeed in life. The further and higher education sectors have expanded; the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) now has its largest campus in Maidstone and is actively involved in day-to-day life. Vocational and community-based learning opportunities are aligned with the needs of local employers.*

*Environmental sustainability underpins everything we do in Maidstone – the local authority is leading by example as it has done for many years and is the first carbon neutral council in the country. Our local businesses are exploiting the challenges and opportunities of global climate change. Continual investment in the road network over the last 20 years means traffic now flows freely in and out of Maidstone; but more and more people are choosing to leave their cars at home or at the Park and Ride car parks, and instead take the bus, walk or cycle. Express rail services now run to London, providing an important economic stimulus.*

*Maidstone is a by-word for excellence in public services, home to the highly respected borough and county councils, leading schools, further and higher education providers, and first class health services. New residential development in the town centre and in the urban extension brought yet more highly skilled people to the borough and provided the impetus for new investment in public services.*

*SEEDA has identified Maidstone as a diamond of growth in recognition of the fact that the borough is now a major driver of growth in the Greater South East. The Maidstone Economic Partnership was highly influential in this decision. Like any county town, a large proportion of employment is still in the public sector, and as a booming shopping destination, the retail sector is also a key employer. However, alongside this, more knowledge-intensive businesses are visible in Maidstone - a thriving business and professional services sector has emerged, including many firms serving markets beyond the boundaries of Maidstone.*

*The creative and media sector has grown rapidly in the last 20 years - the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) and Mid-Kent College are nationally renowned centres of excellence. The Media Studios produce even more nationally acclaimed programmes. Graduates are leaving university and setting up their own businesses in the new Maidstone Enterprise Centre, taking advantage of incubation space, virtual offices, and other high tech facilities. Our rural communities are important community and commercial centres in their own right. They are a major part of our tourism offer, which also includes Leeds Castle and the riverside in Maidstone town centre.*

*Maidstone has a clear and distinctive offer to investors; they know that for the cachet of being in a county town, good connectivity, a ready supply of high quality affordable office space, a pool of creative skilled labour, and good work-life balance, then Maidstone is the place to be.”*

The objectives related to that Vision include:

- strengthening the town centre
- creating a distinctive local economy
- improving the transport network
- enabling rural towns and villages to develop as economic centres, and
- improve business engagement.

The actions that stem from that Vision and the objectives include:

- engaging with local agents / landowners,
- to undertake site by site appraisals of secondary office accommodation and test the feasibility for conversion,
- demolition or refurbishment as a part of a comprehensive approach to office development,
- prepare a prioritised phased programme of office development, identifying sites for prime high quality office space in the town centre and for complementary edge of town development
- identify the scale and type of retail and leisure space required
- attract high quality cultural facilities befitting a County Town and improve the public realm in the Town Centre,
- identifying and promoting opportunities for new high quality public services to support regeneration in the Borough,
- identifying a portfolio of premises to support investment in key sectors and ensuring a long term pipeline of sites,
- improving the skill level of the population, and
- expanding higher education provision.

South East Plan May 2009

3.4 Policy AOSR7, Maidstone Hub, states:

The Local Development Framework at Maidstone will:

- i. make new provision for housing consistent with its growth role, including associated transport infrastructure
- ii. make new provision for employment of sub-regional significance, with an emphasis on higher quality jobs to enhance its role as the County Town and a centre for business. The concentration of retail, leisure and service uses at the centre will allow close integration between employment, housing and public transport
- iii. confirm the broad scale of new business and related development already identified and give priority to completion of the major employment sites in the town
- iv. make Maidstone the focus for expansion and investment in new further or higher education facilities
- v. support high quality proposals for intensifying or expanding the technology and knowledge sectors at established and suitable new locations
- vi. ensure that development at Maidstone complements rather than competes with the Kent Thames Gateway towns and does not add to travel pressures between them
- vii. avoid coalescence between Maidstone and the Medway towns' conurbation.

### The Kent Structure Plan

- 3.5 The Kent Structure Plan fell away on the 6<sup>th</sup> July. However, Kent County Council is developing a number of Strategies including Regeneration and Housing to establish its Strategy following the demise of the Regional Assembly and Structure Plan. The Council will need to ensure that issues facing the Borough are addressed in these Strategies.
- 3.6 The old structure plan identified the need for regeneration in Maidstone town centre in Policy MA1 the pre-ambles to the policy states:

‘Urban regeneration within central Maidstone also has an important contribution to make in meeting housing requirements. The priority will be to make best use of urban capacity and use opportunities for regeneration within central Maidstone for redevelopment, re-use and more intensive use of land near to town centre services and public transport.’

Policy MA1 stated:

‘Proposals for new office and residential uses should focus on the centre of Maidstone to provide close integration between employment, housing and public transport facilities.

Proposals to enhance and broaden the town centre’s retail, leisure, tourism and cultural draw will be supported. Transport improvements to support these initiatives will include the A229 Upper Stone Street improvements and All Saints Link.’

### Maidstone Borough Wide Local Plan

- 3.6 The Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan saved policies enable the regeneration of the town centre and sites within the rural area. Strategic Objective 4 of the Plan encourages redevelopment in the urban area. Additionally, housing and employment policies point development to the urban area or its edge in order to protect the countryside.
- 3.7 The Local Development Framework is at a formative stage; research has been conducted with respect to the office market and housing land availability and evidence gathering for policy in the form of an Area Action Plan for the town centre is underway. Summary
- 3.7 The Sustainable Community Strategy, which is the overarching plan for the Borough, identifies the need to create a prosperous and vibrant community and it has detailed actions in relation to the improvement of the town centre and areas of deprivation. This is reflected in the Economic Development Strategy which identifies the need for the redevelopment of sites in the town centre to provide for offices and to regenerate the public realm. There is policy support for regeneration in the town centre in both the South East Plan and the Kent Structure Plan. The Sustainable Community Strategy however, identifies that there is also the need to regenerate areas that suffer from

social inequality. The saved policies of the existing Local Plan enable regeneration in particularly the urban areas.

#### 4.0 Maidstone's approach to regeneration in practice

##### 4.1 If the Council accepts the Government's definition of regeneration as a starting point then the next steps are to:-

- identify which are the areas where market forces have not led to regeneration or where there is decline and where intervention could bring about regeneration; the key factors here include
  - the level of deprivation
  - spatial or sectoral variation in the strength of the economy across the whole Maidstone area
  - the dynamics of the area – whether economic conditions are getting better or worse
- how the Council would use its resources to bring about physical, social and environmental change.

##### What are our regeneration objectives?

##### 4.2 It is proposed that the objectives should include to

- address economic, social, physical decay and decline in areas where market forces will not do this without support from the Council and its partners including areas of deprivation and the town centre
- ensure that the needs of local residents and businesses drive regeneration

##### What is the Council's role?

##### 4.3 It is proposed that the Council's role should be to:

- lead collaborative working with the community and key partners including providers of affordable housing, health, education and training and skills services
- specifically seek out experience and expertise from the third sector
- target investment to ensure that resources are not spread too thinly
- lever in funding for example through work with the regional improvement and efficiency partnership on improving economic and neighbourhood renewal leadership capacity and with the Homes and Communities agency in identification and promotion of regeneration areas in Maidstone
- co-ordinate local efforts to mitigate the effects of the economic downturn
- specifically for the council to
  - use its land as a catalyst for regeneration
  - address housing need and achievement of the council's housing targets

- enable the creation of higher quality jobs and access to employment
- improve the value of land and building assets and improve associated income streams for example at Parkwood Industrial Estate
- ensure that design and sustainability are taken into account

Where should regeneration resources and effort be focussed?

4.4 Bearing in mind the proposed definition of regeneration above there is the opportunity to identify areas where regeneration could take place within the context of existing policy and without the need to develop new policies. It is suggested that there are two key themes:

- Neighbourhood regeneration in areas of deprivation; there is a specific work stream already initiated on this as a consequence of the Sustainable Communities Strategy. A multi-agency neighbourhood planning projects board has been established, chaired by Cabinet Member for Community Services, to tackle a cross cutting objective identified in the Sustainable Community Strategy to 'Tackle health, education and employment inequalities in areas of disadvantage'. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) published by the government in 2007 identifies the relative deprivation of neighbourhoods (super output areas or SOAs) across England. A number of SOAs in Maidstone, notably Parkwood West, fall within some of the most deprived communities in the country. A focussed neighbourhood planning programme is being established incorporating "Planning for Real" community engagement action will be delivered over the course of this year to identify resident's needs and barriers to social and economic inclusion.
- Areas and sites for regeneration
  - (a) Local Authority and other public body land such as:
    - Tonbridge Road
    - Medway Street car park
    - King Street Car Park
    - land adjacent to Upper Stone Street (Wren's Cross, George Street/Brunswick Street)
    - redundant school sites
  - (b) Privately owned sites where market forces have not brought about change. These include:
    - Land at Ashford Road / Sittingbourne Road
    - 27 Mote Road and other existing office locations
    - Areas of housing in the control of Maidstone Housing Trust such as Parkwood
    - Areas of housing in the control of other Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)

(c) Sites where market forces may bring about change in the future “right” economic climate but where intervention now may be appropriate which include:-

- Springfield
- Maidstone East
- St Peter Street/sites along the river Medway
- Palace Avenue
- Zeneca at Yalding

#### The How?

4.4 There is in place Strategy and Policy which supports regeneration particularly in the urban area but also in other areas as well. Policy on some sites is therefore not an impediment. Other sites will require the development of Policy through the Local Development Framework.

4.5 The Council, in order to bring about regeneration could take a staged approach:-

- Bring forward public land first
- Work with willing partners to bring forward private land
- Negotiate with land owners to bring forward the more difficult sites

4.6 In order to take this approach forward, an organisational structure which is outlined in Appendix A, could begin to actively implement this approach. The structure would be funded from the existing base budgets supplemented by the growth point revenue budget. The capital programme includes a modest provision for pump priming.

#### Conclusion

4.7 The Council clearly has the aspiration to regenerate appropriate areas of the Borough and that is set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy and other documents. There is additionally policy support for that type of approach and there are numerous sites where that approach could take place. There are identified methods and structures for bringing forward this approach. Those structures could in the short term be small, but would evolve as regeneration accelerates.