

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET

Decision Made: 27 January 2014

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN PUBLIC CONSULTATION DRAFT - GROUP 3 POLICIES

Issue for Decision

This final group of local plan policies will comprise the housing target and spatial distribution of development for the borough, and a number of transport based policies.

Decision Made

- a) That Policy SP3 for Rural Service Centres and SP4 for Larger Settlements be deferred and will be considered alongside the Strategic Housing Land Allocations Assessment scheduled to be considered by Overview & Scrutiny and Cabinet in February 2014; and
- b) That the proposed policies listed below and associated plans of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan (as attached at Appendix A to the report of the Head of Planning and Development) be approved for public consultation:-

Development Management Policies (borough wide)	
DM1	Development on Brownfield Land
DM13	Sustainable Transport (<i>previously CS7</i>)
DM14	Public Transport
DM15	Park and Ride
DM16	Air Quality
Park and Ride Land Allocations	
PKR1(1)	Linton Crossroads
PKR1(2)	Old Sittingbourne Road

Reasons for Decision

The Cabinet report of 4 December 2013 explained that development management and spatial policies were being taken to Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in three groups because of the number of policies that comprise the new local plan. The first and second groups of policies were approved by Cabinet on 22 October and 4 December 2013 respectively.

The report of the Head of Planning and Development focused on a third and final group of local plan policies before the local plan as a whole is brought to Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in February 2014. The list of Group 3 policies is included in the table below.

Group 3 Policies	
Spatial Policies	
SP3	Rural Service Centres (<i>previously CS4</i>)
SP4	Larger Settlements
Development Management Policies (borough wide)	
DM1	Development on Brownfield Land
DM13	Sustainable Transport (<i>previously CS7</i>)
DM14	Public Transport
DM15	Park and Ride
DM16	Air Quality
Park and Ride Land Allocations	
PKR1(1)	Linton Crossroads
PKR1(2)	Old Sittingbourne Road

The group of policies above includes a mixture of Core Strategy policies which have been seen by Members before, some of which have since been amended for inclusion in the local plan, and a number of new local plan policies. The following paragraphs add some detail on the amendments made to existing policies, where relevant, and the content of the new policies.

SP3 & SP4 Rural Service Centre and Larger Settlements

The Cabinet decision to withdraw spatial policies SP3 and SP4 from the draft plan followed a recommendation from Scrutiny Committee (2 December 2013) that officers meet with the parish councils and Ward Members for the settlements not previously designated in the settlement hierarchy for the borough, namely; Coxheath, Yalding, Boughton Monchelsea, Eyhorne Street (Hollingbourne) and Sutton Valence. The purpose of the meetings was to discuss the methodology used in making the designations and to hear any concerns that the parish councils may have with the policies going forward.

The settlement hierarchy for Maidstone establishes the most sustainable locations in the borough. The town centre and urban area sit at the top of the hierarchy because this is where the infrastructure is best and where the majority of the borough's population is situated in closest proximity to a wide range of services and facilities. The edge of the urban area is considered the next most sustainable location because any additional population in these areas can easily access services and facilities in the urban area and can make best use of existing infrastructure, e.g. public transport.

Outside of the urban and edge of urban areas, the rural service centres ("RSC") are considered the next most sustainable locations in the borough. The RSCs have more services and facilities, larger populations and better infrastructure than any other settlements in the borough. They serve their local communities and surrounding hinterland and are therefore considered more sustainable than the larger settlements, which are smaller in population and range of services, and tend to provide for the day-to-day needs of their local populations, therefore sitting below the RSCs in the settlement hierarchy.

Meetings have now taken place with the parish councils (and Ward Members) with respect to the Cabinet decision to withdraw policies SP3 and SP4, where officers have had the opportunity to better explain the need for a settlement hierarchy and the reasons why certain settlements are included in the hierarchy. Concerns were expressed by a number of the parish councils, which mainly focused on slight inaccuracies in the audit of services and facilities supporting the policies, and the perceived role the respective settlements play in the hierarchy.

Officers have given further consideration to the policies following the recent meetings and have decided to retain the designations as set out in the Scrutiny report of 2 December 2013. The settlements of Coxheath and Yalding are still considered suitable as rural service centres based on population, range of services and facilities, role of the settlement in serving a wider hinterland and potential to improve the range of services, facilities and infrastructure with respect to any future new development. However, Policy SP3 has been amended with respect to both settlements based on information received at the meetings. The amendments to the supporting text have focused on improving the accuracy of reporting on healthcare provision in Coxheath and highlighting the importance of flood mitigation in Yalding, particularly for the Syngenta site. The policy itself has been strengthened to provide more clarity on the fact that new development will only be approved within the settlement boundaries once they are redrawn in the new local plan. This will ensure that coalescence of settlements cannot occur.

Policy SP4 remains unchanged. Boughton Monchelsea, Eyhorne Street (Hollingbourne) and Sutton Valence are considered suitable to include in the settlement hierarchy for the borough because each settlement has enough key services and facilities to support the day-to-day needs of its local population, and the population of these settlements is greater than a number of others with a similar level of services.

However, following points raised at the meeting by Visiting Members and Cabinet Members, it was proposed that Policies SP3 and SP4 be deferred until consideration of the Strategic Housing Land Allocations Assessment ("SHLAA") sites so that Cabinet can gain clarity as to the SHLAA implications of allocating these sites.

DM13 – Sustainable Transport (*previously CS7 (2013)*)

Policy DM13 was approved as an interim local plan development management policy by Cabinet in March 2013. The policy is linked to the Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS), which supports the local plan with the aim of improving accessibility across the borough and to the town centre, in order to promote Maidstone as a regionally important transport hub. The supporting text and the policy have been further improved since Cabinet in March to add greater detail on air quality mitigation measures and adding a commitment to an enhanced public transport system which focuses on linkages to and from the town centre and to the rural service centres.

DM15 – Park and Ride Sites

Policy DM15 was approved by Cabinet for public consultation in August 2013 and sets the range of criteria that must be met if a new or replacement park and ride site is proposed. The only amendment to this policy is the inclusion of Linton Crossroads (to serve the A229 corridor) as a designated bus park and ride site along with the existing sites at Old Sittingbourne Road, Willington Street and London Road.

Linton Crossroads has been included in this policy based on transport modelling undertaken in 2011 and 2012, which has been used to support the ITS, part of the local plan evidence base. The evidence base shows that a site near Linton Crossroads is the most suitable location for park and ride to the south of the borough because it is at an appropriate distance from the town centre to intercept traffic movements early enough along the A229 corridor, and because the site would provide easy access to the identified catchment area, and particularly long stay commuters travelling to the town centre from the south of the borough. The ITS is the subject of a separate report on this Committee agenda.

The park and ride sites policy DM15 is supported by two park and ride site allocation policies, namely; the new site allocation at Linton Crossroads and an improved policy for the existing park and ride site at Old Sittingbourne Road (Eclipse Business Park) near the M20 junction 7. The "Eclipse" site is still considered the most appropriate site for park and ride to the north of the town based on the transport modelling and the fact that the site is already established and well integrated into the landscape in this location near the North Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The policies include detailed criteria to mitigate for any adverse impacts the sites may have on the landscape or the surrounding highways network and to ensure that any proposals for these sites are designed to a high standard to make them as attractive as possible for commuters. Both park and ride site allocation policies are included as in Appendix A to this report.

Policy DM16 - Air Quality

This is a new policy that has been developed to address growing air quality issues in the borough and to complement the National Planning Policy Framework requirement for councils to sustain compliance with EU limit values and national objectives for pollutants. The council has a responsibility to work towards achieving these targets and does this through the Local Air Quality Management regime. Through this function the council has identified 6 areas currently exceeding EU guideline values and has an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) in place in order to identify measures aimed at reducing air pollution at these locations.

The supporting text to the Air Quality policy gives examples of appropriate mitigation measures for proposals that will affect air quality, and links the evaluation of air quality impacts to the principles set out in the AQAP. This is taken forward into the policy where mitigation measures are required which are locationally specific and proportionate to the likely impacts of any new development proposals.

Policy DM1 – Development on Brownfield Land

The council has been very successful in recent years in delivering development on brownfield land. A large proportion of brownfield sites in the urban area have been developed at high densities for housing, particularly in and adjacent to the town centre along the River Medway. This new policy sets to build on this success and responds to one of the core principles of the National Planning Policy Framework, which encourages the effective use of land by re-using land that has been previously developed, provided it is not of high environmental value.

Policies in the new Maidstone Borough Local Plan have been designed to avoid repetition, so the local plan should be read as a whole when determining planning applications. A table of all local plan policies is included at Appendix B. The draft local plan (including site allocations) will be presented to Cabinet, via Scrutiny Committee, in February 2014. This will give Members the opportunity to see the draft local plan as a single document and to see how a number of the policies are interconnected. It is hoped that the document will be approved by Cabinet to go forward for Regulation 18 public consultation, which is currently scheduled to commence in March 2014.

Alternatives considered and why rejected

The policies could have been presented to Cabinet for approval as part of the new Maidstone Borough Local Plan as a whole. However, deliberation of these policies, some of which have not been seen by Members since October 2011, at this point offers the opportunity for early debate, and the chance to identify new local issues that have not been addressed through these and/or other policies that will be carried forward to the local plan. This is the final batch of policies that will be brought to Cabinet in advance of the whole local plan being brought for consideration and approval in February 2014.

Background Papers

None

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Head of Policy and Communications by: 5 February 2014
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