

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Decision Made: 13 August 2010

**MAIDSTONE TOWN CENTRE AND GREEN AND BLUE
INFRASTRUCTURE**

Issue for Decision

To consider specific issues relating to the Town Centre and Green and Blue infrastructure as set out in the (draft) Local Development Document Advisory Group minutes of 28 June 2010.

Decision Made

1. That the preparation of a mini planning brief for the Haynes site as an adjunct to the Town Centre Study be agreed.
2. That the identification of a village quarter covering areas E1, E2 and E3, as shown on Appendix 1 of the report of the Head of Spatial Planning, be agreed.
3. That the inclusion of a further aim under draft policy CS15 of the Green and Blue Infrastructure strategy for Maidstone Borough, as set out below, be agreed:-
 - m) Recognition of the important role played by high quality agricultural land to food production.

Reasons for Decision

Maidstone Town Centre

At the Local Development Document Advisory Group ("LDDAG") meeting on 24th February 2010, the Group unanimously agreed to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration that in response to the quarters shown on the plan appended to the report, consideration should be given to include a village quarter in the area of Albion Place, Union Street and the A20 as an area for regeneration. The area is shown in Appendix 1 of the report of the Head of Spatial Planning and comprises the area to the north of King Street, Albion Place, the area occupied by Haynes and office buildings in the middle of the gyratory.

This matter was raised in the subsequent report to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration dated 1st April 2010. The report highlighted that identification of quarters draws on an analysis of different localities' character and function as well as an assessment of their future potential

role. In respect to the consideration of the proposed village quarter, the relevant part of the officers' report is reproduced below:

"Much of E1 (area north of King Street) is residential and falls within the Holy Trinity Conservation Area. E2 (Albion Place) is an established area of offices with the large number of landowners meaning that comprehensive redevelopment is unlikely. The form of development is of a much lower density within E3 (Haynes garage) and the site may be a longer term development opportunity. The cohesiveness of the area is severed by transport barriers and linear blocks of urban form (E2) at the centre. It is considered that the whole area does not have a sufficiently cohesive character or uniform development potential to merit their definition as a single quarter, indeed, different planning approaches are likely to be appropriate for each of the areas. For these reasons, there is no merit in a comprehensive designation as a 'village quarter' in spatial planning terms."

In his decision, the Cabinet Member did not identify the village quarter. He did resolve to extend the boundary of the town centre to include areas E2 and E3 and that these areas should form part of the 'urban enterprise' quarter where there would be a focus on regeneration of the existing office stock and public realm improvements.

At its meeting on 26th June, LDDAG resolved to recommend that the specific issue of the proposed village quarter be further considered by me, as the portfolio holder for the Local Development Framework (LDF). The Group had highlighted the significant regeneration potential of this locality and that its identification as a single quarter would enable it to be planned in a comprehensive way, enabling the inter-relationship between the three composite areas (E1, 2 and 3) to be recognised and exploited. In particular it is understood that there is a desire for some of the key characteristics of the E1 area to influence the form of any redevelopment proposals in the wider area.

In taking this forward, there are two aspects which have been considered:

Firstly, it is noted that the Town Centre Study is a source of evidence for the future planning of the town centre. Section 11 of this Study includes a series of mini development briefs for those sites in the town centre identified as having redevelopment potential. In the light of the change to the town centre boundary agreed by the Cabinet Member, a mini brief for the Haynes site could usefully be prepared as an adjunct to the Study. This mini brief would be informative at this stage, ahead of specific proposals coming forward as policy in the Area Action Plan. To mirror the Town Centre Study's format the mini brief would cover the following aspects and thereby help to respond to the specific points made by members of LDDAG:-

- Role of the site in wider town centre proposals
- Land use strategy
- Design principles
- Movement and parking
- Delivery and phasing
- Capacity

Secondly, LDDAG has specifically asked me to consider the definition of quarters in this locality.

The village quarter recommended by LDDAG is shown in Appendix 2 of the report of the Head of Spatial Planning.

The alternative approach, agreed by the Cabinet Member, is illustrated in Appendix 3 of the report of the Head of Spatial Planning. Areas E2 and E3 would fall within an extended urban enterprise quarter.

Green and Blue Infrastructure

At the LDDAG meeting on 26th June, the Group resolved to recommend that the Recommendation previously made to the Cabinet Member regarding the development of a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Maidstone Borough, be amended to include the following aim under draft policy CS15:-

“m) Notwithstanding national guidance, the Group stressed the importance of the preservation of high quality agricultural land.”

The classification system used to determine agricultural land quality is known as the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC). It was developed in the 1960s and subsequently revised in 1988. It provides a framework for classifying land according to the extent to which its physical and chemical characteristics impose long-term limitations on agricultural use.

The ALC provides a method for assessing the quality of farmland to enable informed choices to be made about its future use within the planning system. It helps underpin the principles of sustainable development.

ALC gradings do not necessarily reflect the economic value of the land or land uses; ranges of crops; suitability for specific crops; or level of yield. In addition the gradings do not reflect the use of any particular agricultural production technique or technology.

Maidstone Borough has a relatively high proportion of high quality agricultural land when compared to other boroughs, particularly in the vicinity of Maidstone itself. The way in which this land has been farmed and managed has seen some drastic changes and these changes continue apace as technologies evolve and market forces respond to different drivers.

Complete protection of land with high agricultural land quality from any form of development would not necessarily represent the most constructive way to achieve a sustainable future. High quality agricultural land is a valuable finite resource but it represents only one element of a sustainable rural economy. Other elements include a more diverse rural economy, and an efficient and flexible farming industry.

A more positive way of approaching land management is to consider function. The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy considers the potential of land and water to deliver a number of functions (its multi-functionality). A primary function is that of food production. It is therefore suggested the wording put forward by LDDAG for draft policy CS15 is itself amended to read:-

'Recognition of the important role played by high quality agricultural land to food production.'

Alternatives considered and why rejected

The Local Development Document Advisory Group specified that these matters should be reported to me and an alternative approach is therefore not identified.

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 Change and Scrutiny by: 20th August 2010
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