

**Strategic Planning,
Sustainability and
Transportation Committee**

**13 September
2016**

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Yes

Local Plan Examination Update

Final Decision-Maker	Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee
Lead Head of Service	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Cheryl Parks, Project Manager- Local Plan
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the Committee notes the update provided in relation to the forthcoming Local Plan examination hearings.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all -
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough – The Local Plan, once adopted, will provide a strategic planning framework for all types of development in the borough to 2031, as well as securing employment opportunities and improvements to supporting infrastructure, including public transport.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee	13 September 2016

Local Plan Examination Update

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This is an informative report designed to update the Committee on arrangements made since the submission of the draft Local Plan to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on 20 May 2016.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Committee will be aware that the draft Local Plan was agreed for Publication and thereafter Submission at the meeting of Council on 25 January 2016. A successful 'Publication' consultation was held between 5 February and 18 March 2016 with nearly 600 individual comments made.
- 2.2 On 18 April 2016, this Committee considered a report summarising the key issues and approved a schedule of minor proposed changes to be submitted alongside the draft Local Plan and evidence base.
- 2.3 The draft Local Plan was duly submitted, as scheduled, early on the morning of 20 May 2016.

Programme Officer

- 2.4 Prior to submission of the draft Local Plan, officers sought expressions of interest and subsequently interviewed candidates for the position of Programme Officer from a list of suitably qualified persons provided by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS). After a successful selection process, Louise St. John Howe was appointed.
- 2.5 The role of the Programme Officer is to work on behalf of the Secretary of State's Inspector, organising and managing the administrative and procedural matters of the Examination process. The Programme Officer is independent and whilst being employed by the Council, should have played no part in the production of the draft Local Plan to be examined.
- 2.6 Since her appointment, Mrs. St. John Howe has been working closely with the Local Plan Project Manager to collate information relating to respondents to the consultation, their comments and their wish to be present at the hearings. She has also been the main point of contact for the public in relation to the forthcoming Examination.

The Inspector

- 2.7 Shortly after the submission of the draft Local Plan, Mr. Robert Mellor BSC DIPTRP DIPDBE DMS MRICS MRTPI from the Planning Inspectorate was appointed by the Secretary of State. His task is to consider the soundness of the draft Local Plan, based on the criteria set out in paragraph 182 of the

National Planning Policy Framework. Mr. Mellor has most recently been the appointed Inspector for the Eastbourne Employment Land Local Plan.

Examination Hearings

- 2.8 The Council has now been notified by the Inspector of his intended timetable for the Examination hearings and the topic areas that will be discussed at each session. The hearings schedule is included in Appendix 1 of this report. Thanks to the generous flexibility of Officers from other teams, Spatial Policy Officers have been able to secure the use of the Town Hall Chamber for all of the hearings, which provides a central, easily accessible venue which will be familiar to the majority of attendees.
- 2.9 Hearings are scheduled to commence on Tuesday 4 October at 10:00am and conclude on Thursday 1 December. There are fifteen scheduled hearing days with two additional full days and two additional half-days held as reserve dates.
- 2.10 The Inspector has given detailed consideration to the representations made during the Publication consultation in February and March 2016, as well as reviewing the evidence base, and has used these to produce a list of attendees for each session. Anyone the Inspector wishes to hear from will be contacted by the Programme Officer and invited to take part.

Publicity

- 2.11 To facilitate understanding of the processes by the public and to ensure that all interested parties are kept up-to-date, the Local Plan web pages on the Council's website have been updated to reflect the forthcoming Examination, with dedicated pages for the Examination, the evidence, and other updates. The pages are kept under regular review by both the Programme Officer and the Local Plan Project Manager and updated with any information or correspondence between the Council and the Inspector.
- 2.12 In addition, information relating to the hearing sessions has been placed in a Public Notice in the Kent Messenger (print edition 5 August 2016) as well as in the Borough Update segment of the Downs Mail. All those on the Local Plan Consultee Database who have requested to be kept updated have also been notified by newsletter of the latest information.

Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions

- 2.13 Matters, Issues and Questions for the first six hearing sessions were received from the Inspector in the week commencing 8 August. The Inspector has set out a number of questions relating to matters raised by representors across different topic areas of the draft Local Plan.
- 2.14 The questions will require written responses to be provided by 15 September and will be published on the Council website alongside information relating to the hearings. Officers have begun looking at the questions and putting together responses.
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2.15 All those invited to attend the hearing sessions have also been provided a copy of the Matters, Issues and Questions by the Programme Officer so that they can prepare any responses they wish to make available to the Inspector.

2.16 Also provided to all representors is a Procedural Guidance Note which sets out information for the public on how the Examination will proceed, and what will be the mechanisms for hearing representors' views during the hearings.

2.17 The remaining Matters, Issues and Questions (relating to the later scheduled hearings) will be completed by the Inspector and provided to the Council in the next couple of weeks for responses to be completed.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 This report is intended as an update only and is not seeking any decision; as such, the only option proposed is to note the content of the report.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 As set out in 3.1, above, the Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report.

5. NEXT STEPS

5.1 Officers will continue to liaise with the Programme Officer in regard to detailed planning of the hearing sessions and will work to address the Matters, Issues and Questions raised by the Inspector.

5.2 Officers are actively progressing discussions with a number of statutory consultees following their Publication representations with the aim of agreeing Statements of Common Ground in advance of the Examination hearings.

5.3 Further update reports relating to the draft Local Plan Examination are scheduled in the work programme for the Committee at its November 2016 and January 2017 meetings, at which time progress with the hearings and other relevant issues will be presented.

6. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate	The Local Plan is one of the key strategies that will promote	Rob Jarman, Head of

Priorities	delivery of the Council's Vision, Mission, Priorities and Objectives as set out in the Strategic Plan.	Planning and Development
Risk Management	There is a small risk relating to the outcome of the Local Plan examination, however officers are confident that the supporting evidence for the Local Plan justifies the approach. The mandate of Council was sought prior to submission.	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development
Financial	The Local Plan examination will be a big item of expenditure this financial year. A detailed profile of projected costs has been drawn up and will be closely scrutinised and monitored. Securing the use of the Town Hall as opposed to an external venue has been helpful in keeping estimated expenditure lower than initial budget forecasts.	Mark Green, Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	The Spatial Policy Team is sufficiently staffed to manage the examination. A detailed plan has been prepared in relation to presenting topics at the examination, making use of officers from Development Management, and also limited use of specialist consultants to defend key pieces of work.	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development
Legal	The services of specialist planning counsel have been retained to support the Examination. There has been regular input from both MKLS and counsel during the production of the draft Local Plan.	Kate Jardine, Team Leader (Planning), Mid-Kent Legal Services
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	An EQIA was undertaken to support the Publication of the Local Plan, and this will be reviewed prior to the commencement of the examination. Any specific needs of those wishing to take	Anna Collier, Policy & Information Manager

	part in the process will be accommodated wherever possible.	
Environmental/Sustainable Development	The Local Plan is founded on the principles of sustainability and sustainable development, and this is a golden thread that runs through the plan and supporting evidence. Specific evidence relating to environmental matters supports the Local Plan and is available as part of the evidence library.	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development
Community Safety	There are no specific impacts or issues.	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development
Human Rights Act	There are no specific impacts or issues.	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development
Procurement	All procurement regulations have been met and the Council's Contract Procedure Rules followed in the preparatory work for the Local Plan and its evidence.	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development & Mark Green, Section 151 Officer
Asset Management	There are no specific impacts or issues.	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development

7. REPORT APPENDICES

There are none

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none.