

**STRATEGIC PLANNING
SUSTAINABILITY &
TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**

10th January 2017

Maidstone Borough Local Plan: Examination update

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| Final Decision-Maker | Strategic Planning, Sustainability & Transport Committee |
| Lead Head of Service | Rob Jarman, Head of Planning & Development |
| Lead Officer and Report Author | Sarah Anderton, Principal Planning Officer (Spatial Policy) |
| Classification | Public |
| Wards affected | All |

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

- 1 That the progress of the Local Plan Examination be noted.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all – the Local Plan aims to plan positively for future growth in a sustainable way and protect the borough’s environmental assets
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough – the Local Plan also aims to plan positively for growth of the local economy whilst also protecting the environmental assets which make the borough such an attractive place to work.

Timetable

| Meeting | Date |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Strategic Planning, Sustainability & Transport Committee | 10 th January 2017 |

Maidstone Borough Local Plan: Examination update

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This is an information-only report to update the Committee on the progress with the Local Plan Examination and to provide an indication of the next steps. The Government's latest position regarding the Housing White Paper is also set out for the Committee's information.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Examination

- 2.1 The Committee last received an update on the Local Plan Examination at its meeting on 8th November 2016. Since that report was published, the Examination has sat for a further 12 days between 8th November and 13th December inclusive. The aspects of the Local Plan which have been discussed at these hearings are;

- Rural Services Centres
- Employment policies and allocations
- Retail and mixed use development
- Yalding (the other 'Larger Villages' were debated at an earlier hearing)
- Gypsies & Travellers
- Development Management policies
- Transport and infrastructure
- Housing land supply (additional session)
- Alternative sites i.e. sites not allocated in the Local Plan which developers/landowners are promoting for inclusion
- Air quality: the Inspector held an additional session to consider whether the Local Plan includes suitable policies and monitoring arrangements to support air quality improvement. The need for the session was prompted by the High Court decision on 2nd November which determined that the national Air Quality Plan does not comply with the relevant European directive.
- Modifications: session to discuss the proposed changes to the Plan that have been put forward during the Examination process in response to the Inspector's questions and instructions.
- Monitoring indicators

Next steps

- 2.2 The Inspector has stated that he will issue 'Interim Findings' which will set out his position on key aspects of the Plan. In the Interim Findings the Inspector is likely to determine that specific 'Main Modifications' to the Plan are needed in order for him to be able to find the Plan sound. The detailed nature of the Inspector's challenges during the hearings indicate that such changes to the Plan are highly likely to be needed. In particular the Inspector has indicated that a prompt Local Plan Review will be needed to

address risks to delivery in the longer term. The Inspector is directing that this Review would need to be adopted by April 2021.

- 2.3 As part of his Interim Findings, the Inspector is also likely to request that the Council undertakes some further work prior to him reaching his final conclusions on the Plan. The Inspector has indicated that a further hearing will be held in late January/early February and it is expected that he will issue an agenda for this hearing and/or clarify its scope beforehand. Officers will prepare a report for 7th February meeting of this Committee setting out the content of the Interim Findings.
- 2.4 A further meeting will be arranged for late February focusing on the proposed Main Modifications (as known at the time) to enable the Committee to decide whether to proceed with public consultation on these Modifications. Other 'minor changes' will also be proposed which, whilst not required for soundness, are needed to update, clarify or correct the Plan. The consultation will be limited to the Main Modifications and minor changes only; it will not be an opportunity for respondents to object to other, unchanged aspects of the Plan with which they disagree.
- 2.5 The issues raised in the consultation responses will be reported back to this Committee. The Inspector will review the consultation responses and determine whether additional hearings will be required prior to him issuing his final report. Whilst the overall timetable is primarily in the Inspector's hands, it is hoped that these processes can be completed in time for the Local Plan to be adopted by May 2017.

Housing White Paper

- 2.6 The government intends to issue a Housing White Paper which will unveil its response to the Local Plans Expert Group's recommendations on speeding up and simplifying the Local Plan process, revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework, its position on Starter Homes and its proposals for a review of the Community Infrastructure Levy. Whilst the government had intended to issue the paper before the end of the 2016, it has now indicated that it will be published 'in due course', hopefully in January.
- 2.7 The Committee will be kept informed of the relevant implications.

3. AVAILABLE/PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to note the progress with the Local Plan Examination.

4. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

| Issue | Implications | Sign-off |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Impact on Corporate Priorities | The Local Plan is one of the key strategies that will promote delivery of the Council's Vision, Mission, Priorities and Objectives as set out in the Strategic Plan. | Rob Jarman, Head of 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 Council will incur significant expenditure in the current financial year on the Local Plan examination and funds have been set aside to cover the likely costs. 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. Some additional, unplanned, expenditure will be incurred to facilitate the webcasting of all hearing sessions. | 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 | There are no legal implications arising from this report. | Kate Jardine, Team Leader (Planning) Mid Kent |

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| | | Legal Services |
| Equality Impact Needs Assessment | An EQIA was undertaken to support the Publication of the Local Plan. The webcasting of the sessions assists in reaching out to those unable to attend the Examination in person. | Anna Collier, Policy & Information Manager |
| Environmental/Sustainable Development | The Local Plan is founded on the principles of 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 |

5. REPORT APPENDICES

None.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.