

**Report on the Local Plan Review Evidence Base**

|                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Final Decision-Maker</b>           | Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee   |
| <b>Lead Head of Service</b>           | Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development  |
| <b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b> | Helen Garnett – Senior Planning Officer,<br>Strategic Planning<br>Helen Smith – Principal Planning officer,<br>Strategic Planning |
| <b>Classification</b>                 | Public  |
| <b>Wards affected</b>                 | <i>All</i>  |

**Executive Summary**

National policy requires that Local Plans be supported by relevant and up-to-date evidence. In undertaking a review of its Local Plan, Maidstone Borough Council is under obligation to commission a series of works that will ultimately inform the plan and policies contained within it.

This report is for the committee's information and provides critical background evidence, and brings together the various specialist documents that have been produced, both internally and through external consultants. These offer a range of background information to inform this stage of the Local Plan review.

The appendices to this report contain the range of evidence base documents which are summarised in the main report.

**Purpose of Report**

For noting

**This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:**

1. That the content of this report is noted.

**Timetable**

| <b>Meeting</b>                                  | <b>Date</b>       |
|---|-------------------|
| Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee | 22 September 2020 |

# Report on the Local Plan Review Evidence Base

## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

| Issue                                 | Implications   | Sign-off  |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b> | <p><i>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure</i></li> <li>• <i>Safe, Clean and Green</i></li> <li>• <i>Homes and Communities</i></li> <li>• <i>A Thriving Place</i></li> </ul> <p>The Local Plan Review (LPR), can contribute to all four objectives. The Scoping Themes and Issues consultation document previously agreed by this Committee explains this interrelationship between the Strategic Plan objectives and the LPR.</p> | Rob Jarman,<br>Head of<br>Planning &<br>Development |
| <b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>       | <p><i>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Heritage is Respected</i></li> <li>• <i>Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced</i></li> <li>• <i>Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved</i></li> <li>• <i>Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Similarly, the relationship between these objectives and the LPR is explained in the Scoping, Themes and Issues consultation document.</i></p>                                  | Rob Jarman,<br>Head of<br>Planning &<br>Development |
| <b>Risk Management</b>                | <p><i>Please refer to Section 3 of this report.</i></p>  | Rob Jarman,<br>Head of<br>Planning &<br>Development |
| <b>Financial</b>                      | <p><i>Provision has been made for the costs of delivering the local plan review within the Council's agreed budget and medium-term financial plan.</i></p>   | Ellie Dunnet,<br>Head of<br>Finance                 |
| <b>Staffing</b>                       | <p><i>There are no significant staffing implications resulting from this update report</i></p>   | Rob Jarman,   |

|                                    |   |   |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
|                                    |   | Head of Planning & Development  |
| <b>Legal</b>                       | <i>This report does not raise any specific legal implications. More widely, the preparation of the LPR is governed by specific legislation and regulations and informed by national planning policy and guidance. Where required, legal advice on specific matters will be obtained from MKLS and/or counsel as the LPR is progressed and this is incorporated.</i>   | Russell Fitzpatrick<br>Mid Kent Legal Services (Planning) Team Leader |
| <b>Privacy and Data Protection</b> | <i>This report does not raise any specific privacy/data protection issues at this stage.</i>  | Policy and Information Manager  |
| <b>Equalities</b>                  | <i>No implications identified as part of this report and recommendations. An impact assessment has been undertaken. This is a live document that is revisited as the review progresses</i>  | Policy and Information Manager  |
| <b>Public Health</b>               | <i>The National Planning Policy Framework (para 91c) requires that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and wellbeing needs. It is not clear from this report how these needs have been or will be identified through the LPR using relevant and up to date evidence. It is important to have an understanding of the health needs of the local population through local data and intelligence particularly when aiming to reduce health inequalities.</i> | [Public Health Officer]   |
| <b>Crime and Disorder</b>          | <i>The LPR can potentially have a positive impact on crime and disorder.</i>  | Rob Jarman, Head of Planning & Development                            |
| <b>Procurement</b>                 | <i>This report does not raise any specific procurement issues at this stage.</i>  | Rob Jarman, Head of Planning & Development & Section 151 Officer      |

## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework requires that plans and policies should be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence. This should be adequate and proportionate, focused tightly on supporting and justifying the policies concerned, and take into account relevant market signals. As part of the Local Plan Review, Maidstone Borough Council have undertaken a series of studies that collectively form the evidence base for the Plan.
- 2.2 This report provides Members with a summary of the key specialist evidence used to support the Local Plan review, setting out a brief outline of methodologies and conclusions/outputs to date. The studies detailed in this report are largely technical in nature and make up the relevant evidence base for Part 1 of the plan which covers strategic planning matters. However, they will also feed into the later stages of the plan making process and some documents will be subject to ongoing review as the plan making process progresses.
- 2.3 The appendices to this document contain the full suite of supporting evidence documents which will aid Members in their determination of the strategic approaches when these are considered by Members.
- 2.4 The following documents comprise the supporting evidence compiled to date:

|    | <b>Document title</b>  | <b>Prepared by</b>        | <b>Dated</b>   | <b>Appendix</b> |
|----|--|---------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. | Strategic Housing Market Assessment  | ICENI Projects Ltd        | October 2019   | 1               |
| 2  | Economic Development Needs Study (Stages 1 and 2)                                | Lichfields                | April/May 2020 | 2 & 3           |
| 3  | Settlement Hierarchy Review  | Maidstone Borough Council | 2016/2018      | 4               |
| 4  | Infrastructure Capacity (Initial Infrastructure Feedback - LPR Growth Locations) | Maidstone Borough Council | July 2020      | 5               |
| 5  | Draft Strategic Land Availability Assessment                                     | Maidstone Borough Council | August 2020    | 6               |
| 6  | Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (Stage 1 update)                                 | JBA Consulting            | August 2020    | 7 & 8           |

|      |   |  |                               |    |
|------|---|--|-------------------------------|----|
|      | and 2)<br>For appendix 8 please see link in main report.  |  |                               |    |
| 7    | Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) Indications   | KCC  | August 2020                   | 9  |
| 8    | Transport Modelling (early findings)  | Jacobs   | July 2020                     | 10 |
| 9    | Garden Communities -<br>• Parts 1 (Sustainability Assessment) and<br>• Part 2 (Deliverability & Viability Assessment) | Stantec  | • April 2020<br>• August 2020 | 11 |
| 10   | Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment – Topic Paper Options                                     | LUC  | August 2020                   | 12 |
| 11   | Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Scoping Report  | LUC  | July 2020                     | 13 |
| 12   | The following Spatial Topic Papers:   |  |                               |    |
| 12.1 | Economic Strategy Topic Paper   | Maidstone Borough Council                              | June 2020                     | 14 |
| 12.2 | Environment Topic Paper   | Maidstone Borough Council                              | June 2020                     | 15 |
| 12.3 | Housing Strategy Topic Paper  | Maidstone Borough Council<br>Maidstone Borough Council | June 2020                     | 16 |
| 12.4 | Social Infrastructure Topic Paper   | Maidstone Borough Council                              | June 2020                     | 17 |
| 12.5 | Retail and Leisure Strategy Topic Paper   | Maidstone Borough Council                              | June 2020                     | 18 |

|      |                                       |                           |           |    |
|------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|----|
| 12.6 | Transport and Air Quality Topic Paper | Maidstone Borough Council | June 2020 | 19 |
|------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|----|

- 2.5 Work remains ongoing across a number of these evidence base studies to help inform the spatial strategy. Owing to the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated limited access to sites, the Gypsy & Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment we anticipate being able to bring this to Committee in February 2021.
- 2.6 The evidence that will help inform non-spatial preferred approaches will be presented in February 2021. This includes: Heritage; Agricultural Land Classification; Sports Facilities and Playing Pitch Strategy; Climate Change and Biodiversity.

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### 3. EVIDENCE BASE STUDIES

#### Strategic Housing Market Assessment (“SHMA”) (Appendix 1)

- 3.1 The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) establishes the levels of need for different types of housing across the borough. It does this by investigating data around house prices, incomes, demographic change, immigration, and travel to work patterns. It establishes that the Maidstone Housing Market Area is influenced by London and surrounding boroughs including Medway, Tunbridge Wells and Ashford. The only part of Maidstone’s housing market area which extends outside of the borough is around the Aylesford to Malling part of Tonbridge & Malling. Overall there is not considered to be any need to meet the housing need of surrounding authorities.
- 3.2 The SHMA tests the housing market data against the Government’s Standard Methodology. It recommends that the local housing target for the period should be set at 1,214 net additional units per annum.
- 3.3 The SHMA also provides an evidence base for the housing needs of specific groups. This includes needs for family housing, affordable housing including social and affordable rental and intermediate products such as shared ownership, private rental housing, and housing for groups with different needs such as the elderly and those with care needs. These are quite significant when added up as a whole, and there would be overlap between the types. The Government’s planning guidance is clear that the overall need target takes precedence, and it is for the LPA to determine how much of the overall amount should be provided to meet the above list of needs.
- 3.4 There is a considerable amount of time for this data to change before the Plan’s anticipated adoption in 2022. A review of this report to inform the Council’s preferred approach is scheduled for 2021.

## **Economic Development Needs Study (“EDNS”) (Appendix 2 & 3)**

- 3.5 An update to the EDNS was presented to this Committee in July 2020. The purpose of the EDNS is to provide the evidence base for employment, retail & leisure and town centre needs within the Borough.

### Employment

- 3.6 For the plan period 2022-2037, the EDNS identifies a need for 101,555sqm (gross) B-use floorspace. Approximately two thirds of this (67%) relates to industrial and distribution/warehousing. Lower job densities are associated with these types of operations (compared with office uses which tend to operate at higher densities).
- 3.7 The study concluded that current Economic Development Areas as designated in the Local Plan are generally performing well, with limited scope for redevelopment or intensification. In purely quantitative terms, the current employment allocations, plus pipeline supply (i.e. sites with planning permission), are likely to meet our identified need. This provides us with significant flexibility in choosing to allocate additional land from the call-for-sites exercise (including any potential garden settlements).
- 3.8 Should we chose to bring forward new sites, there is a need to identify a realistic delivery trajectory for the employment sites and to evidence how our portfolio of allocations and other development opportunities will support delivery of new space over the short, medium and long term. Garden Settlements offer the opportunity for additional employment floorspace over the medium to long term, with a combination of existing allocations and call-for-sites sites having the potential to contribute to the required floorspace in the short and medium term.

### Retail & Leisure

- 3.9 For the plan period 2022-2037, the EDNS identified a need for 16,146sqm (gross) A-use floorspace. Just over half of this (56%) relates to food and beverage floorspace provision, something previously not identified nor allocated for in the current Local Plan. This aligns with the evolving nature of traditional ‘shopping’ as people increasingly look for an experiential destination – combining shopping with wider leisure activities. It provides significant opportunity to rethink the offering of Maidstone Town Centre, as the county town of Kent.
- 3.10 The study concludes that other smaller centres in the borough are performing well and meet the daily needs of the local communities. It also recommends that any potential Garden Settlements provide retail floorspace locally, relative to the size of the settlement proposed.
- 3.11 In purely quantitative terms, the current allocations provide in excess of our total floorspace requirement. However, the current allocations are based on A1-use, as opposed to all ‘A’ (“Shop”) uses. The sites put forward as part of the ‘call-for-sites’ exercise plus potential garden settlements offer flexibility in choosing to allocate additional land for a wider array of ‘A’-uses should we so choose.

## **Settlement Hierarchy Review (Appendix 4)**

- 3.12 A Settlement Hierarchy Review is undertaken every two years. Its purpose is to identify which Rural Service Centres and Larger Villages offer the most sustainable settlements by determining the facilities available.
- 3.13 The methodology has been updated for the 2018 review and includes a desk top survey followed by area surveys to determine what facilities are found in each settlement. The survey also consults with each of the settlements' Parish Council.
- 3.14 The assessment of provision of services is grouped under the following themes: Education, Community, Health, Leisure, Convenience shopping, Comparison shopping, Eating out, Transport, and Local employment providers. The results of the surveys (set out in Appendix 4) help to determine the settlements status. The facilities are also considered against previous review findings to establish what degree of change, if any, has occurred.
- 3.15 The 2018 survey determined that whilst there has been some degree of deterioration in the level of facilities in some locations, there is sufficient services across all Rural Service Centres and Larger Villages. The settlement hierarchy classification remains as follows:

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Rural Service centres: | Harrietsham<br>Headcorn<br>Lenham<br>Marden<br>Staplehurst                    |
| Larger Villages:       | Boughton Monchelsea<br>Coxheath<br>Hollingbourne<br>Sutton Valence<br>Yalding |

- 3.16 The next review was scheduled for summer 2020, however this has been put on hold in light of ongoing events in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic, and will instead take place in 2021.

## **Infrastructure Capacity Study (Appendix 5)**

- 3.17 This brief report notes the early engagement that has been undertaken between the Council and relevant infrastructure providers. Infrastructure providers were presented with an early version of our Strategic Land Availability Assessment findings to test what potential issues or opportunities may exist with regard the delivery of infrastructure in the borough. The findings are recorded in the document at Appendix 5. It is important to note that most providers have a statutory responsibility to provide infrastructure where it is needed to meet growth, but the purpose of this work was to establish lines of communication, identify any particular problems or opportunities early in the process.



## **Strategic Land Availability Assessment ("SLAA") (Appendix 6)**

- 3.18 National Planning Policy and Guidance requires Local Planning Authorities to identify a sufficient supply of specific deliverable sites to meet the five-year requirements of the borough, as well as land for years 11-15 of the plan. The purpose of the SLAA is to identify this future supply of land for housing, economic, retail and leisure purposes. In producing the SLAA, the LPA must:
- Establish need;
  - Identify the existing pipeline of supply (for example through extant planning permissions and allocations);
  - Identify and review for deliverability remaining sites (in this case those arising through the Call-for-Sites exercise); and
  - Identify a windfall amount.
- 3.19 The housing need has been established in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (Appendix 1) and the employment, retail, leisure and town centre needs in the Economic Development Needs Assessment (Appendix 2 & 3).
- 3.20 The current supply of sites is set out in a separate report, "Review Housing Land Supply Position 2020" which was presented to the SPI committee on the 08 September, as are the assumptions considered appropriate for modelling future windfall.
- 3.21 Stage 1, the identification of new sites, commenced with the Call-for-Sites exercise which was undertaken in March to May 2019. 329 responses were received with most of those being the submission of new sites.
- 3.22 Sites have been assessed to test whether they are available, suitable, and achievable. Only if they meet these three criteria can they be considered to be deliverable, and potentially included in the LPR. All sites received as part of the Call-for-Sites exercise are considered to be available by virtue of their submission during this process.
- 3.23 Suitability and achievability was assessed using the criteria established in the Call-for-Sites proforma. The sites were initially assessed or reviewed against "show-stopping" constraints, that is constraints that prevent any development on the site. If there was a "showstopper" present the site was considered to be unsuitable. A very limited number of sites were considered to be unachievable on the basis that while there wasn't a single showstopping issue, a number of smaller constraints would conspire to mean the site would be unlikely to come forward over the LPR period. These unsuitable and unachievable sites were not taken forward.
- 3.24 The assessment undertaken consisted of site visits by officers alongside GIS analysis against a number of constraints. Sites were split into "Green" (likely potentially suitable), "Red" (unlikely to be suitable), and "Amber" (for further discussion). These "Amber" sites were then re-assessed to "de-amber" the sites and produce potentially suitable "green" sites (Appendix A of the SLAA) and unsuitable "red" sites (Appendix B of the SLAA). Please

note that for the purposes of this report, the Part 1 and 2 Garden Communities Assessment referred to in the SHLAA can be found in appendix 11.

- 3.25 Stage 2 categorised the sites as 'Red' and 'Green', with Green sites considered suitable and deliverable, and Red sites having been ruled out through the process as not being suitable or deliverable during the plan period.
- 3.26 The SLAA is contained in Appendix 6 of this report. The main report sets out the background data and methodology, and the appendices provide the assessment sheets for all "Green" and "Red" sites.
- 3.27 The SLAA identifies a range of geographies into which the sites are grouped. For each of these areas a "Minimum" amount of growth can be shown; this is the accumulation of the capacity of all development 2011-2020, extant planning permissions, and allocated sites. A "Maximum" amount of growth is also shown consisting of the "Minimum" plus the potentially suitable Call-for-Sites offerings in that area.
- 3.28 It is important to note that the list of "Green" sites only constitutes the stock of potentially suitable land across the borough. It remains for the Council to select a suitable pattern of growth to be included in its Preferred Approach consultation document from this long-list of sites. It is wholly appropriate that there is a greater quantum of potentially suitable land/sites than allocations in the Plan. This ensures that the Council is able to select the best sites for inclusion in the Plan. The Preferred Approach consultation is anticipated to be carried out in Autumn 2021.

### **Late Site Submissions**

- 3.29 The Council has received a number of responses to the Call-for-Site consultation which ended in May 2019. The process that the Local Plan follows is consultative, and there will undoubtedly continue to be "late" sites which come forward up to publication of the Plan.
- 3.30 In order to ensure a fair and consistent approach is taken to all sites, only those received during the Call for Sites window have been assessed through the draft SLAA document. At present there are 21 "late" sites. It is anticipated that more will come forward during the Preferred Approaches consultation in Autumn 2020. All of these will be assessed as "challenger" sites to the Council's preferred approach, to see if they can make a positive contribution to the LPR overall.
- 3.31 The current list of "late" sites will be made available following this meeting. Any additional sites received pursuant to the Preferred Approaches consultation will be included as "late" sites. The full list of "late" sites will be assessed using the SLAA assessment criteria. Where they are found to be deliverable, they will be added to the SLAA's stock of potentially suitable sites.

## **Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Levels 1 and 2 (Appendix 7 & 8)**

- 3.32 The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment sets out all sources of flood risk across the borough and the potential impact it might have on sites that could be included in the Local Plan. Stage 1 seeks to gather together information on all sources of flood risk (including groundwater and drainage) and set the scene for identifying which sites may be susceptible to flood risk. Those sites are then assessed through a "Sequential Test" whereby development is steered away from areas with the highest flood risk. Otherwise potentially suitable sites which are in areas with residual flood risk are then assessed in Stage 2 of the Assessment to identify whether, and how, they can be appropriately designed to minimise flood risk both on the site and in nearby areas.
- 3.33 The Appendices to the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment can be found here:  
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1fK-JpOZwSYzHAzZUxXFrcIzBAR2SXRd5?usp=sharing>

## **Integrated Transport Strategy ("ITS") indications (Appendix 9)**

- 3.34 A new ITS is needed to support the Local Plan Review. Its intent is to ensure that transport development is integral to the development growth anticipated in the Local Plan. The ITS is in the early stages of production. Initial officer and key transport stakeholder engagement workshops were held in February 2020. These were followed up with Member online workshops to further discuss the potential content of the ITS.
- 3.35 Transport mitigation measures will be required to support planned levels of growth during the Local Plan Review period. This will be addressed in more detail as the preferred approach becomes clearer.
- 3.36 A note on early ITS indications is included in Appendix 9.

## **Transport modelling early findings (Appendix 10)**

- 3.37 In association with Kent County Council, Jacobs have been commissioned to provide transport modelling and consultancy support towards the development of an evidence base to support the Local Plan Review. This is a two stage process.
- 3.38 Stage 1 of the Modelling Project involves developing the evidence base to support Regulation 18b proposals. These proposals will set out a number of options for different quantities of development allocation in different sections or "corridors" of the borough and what degree of traffic mitigation may be required to enable them. In other words, Stage 1 provides evidence which can be used to compare the impacts of different patterns of growth.
- 3.39 This initial piece of work forms Stage 1 of a two-stage modelling process that is being progressed in advance of the County Model, to establish a baseline and identify the high-level impacts and opportunities of potential

development sites to refine the process prior to full testing. This has combined a bespoke spreadsheet modelling application with existing transport modelling tools, available data, review of key reports, and stakeholder engagement to undertake initial “soft-testing” and explore potential transport challenges and issues.

3.40 The spreadsheet modelling initially focuses on testing three main spatial options or ‘Reasonable Alternatives’ (RAs):

- RA1 – transport modelling based on the 2017 Local Plan allocation pattern continued (Garden Settlement sites are not included in this RA);
- RA1a – transport modelling based on a scenario where all of the Maidstone urban area is excluded. Garden Settlement sites and Rural Service Centres, and Larger villages and rural sites are integral to this RA); and
- RA2a – transport modelling focuses on the Maidstone urban area and Garden Settlement sites (with a lower proportion of Rural Service Centres, Larger Village and rural sites being considered).

3.41 Scenario variant runs have also been tested, including impacts with baseline mitigation for Garden Settlements & large sites and future year (beyond LP period – full Garden Settlement buildout scenario).

3.42 Early outputs of these assessments have illustrated that all feasible scenarios involve impacts on the network which would require mitigation, though the specific areas effected most, the degree of impact and the viability of mitigation vary between different approaches.

3.43 The Stage 1 Modelling Project provides the evidence base to support regulation 18b proposals and will then feed directly into Stage 2, which will involve detailed site allocation testing using the County Model.

3.44 The transport modelling early findings are at appendix 10. An update to this report is expected before the committee date.

### **Garden Communities Part 1 and 2 (Appendix 11)**

3.45 As Members are aware, in order to ensure as many options as possible were available for the Council to consider, the Council sought the submission of Garden Settlement proposals through its Call-for-Sites exercise in 2019. The Council itself is promoting a Garden Settlement at Lenham Heath.

3.46 The Local Planning Authority has the responsibility to produce a Local Plan. This may, or may not include one or more Garden Settlements. To ensure independence, consultants (Stantec) have been appointed to produce the evidence identifying which of the Garden Settlement proposals are suitable and deliverable.

3.47 During the Call-for-Sites exercise, 7 sites were submitted with the potential to deliver in excess of 1,500 new homes, and which could therefore be considered to be of a garden community scale.

3.48 The Stage 1 Garden Settlement Suitability Assessment uses the suitability criteria used in the SLAA and assessed each candidate site against them.

Information was secured from KCC highways, ecology, archaeology, and MBC specialisms on conservation and landscape, alongside a range of GIS data. Stantec visited each of the candidate sites in February 2020.

3.49 The Stage 1 report concluded that of the 7 potential locations,

3.49.1 3 locations (namely Binbury Park, North of Staplehurst and Pagehurst Farm) were unsuitable;

3.49.2 whilst the Leeds-Langley corridor location was identified as being potentially suitable, after discussion with landowners it became clear that a co-ordinated garden settlement would not come forward before greater certainty around the delivery of a future Leeds-Langley route was established;

3.49.3 the remaining 3 potentially suitable sites (namely North of the M2/Lidsing, Heathlands, and North of Marden) were subjected to a Stage 2 Deliverability Assessment

3.50 The Stage 2 Deliverability Assessment looked in greater detail at the proposals put forward by the site promoters. In addition to the additional information which was sought in November 2019-January 2020 to support the suitability assessment, dialogue was established between the Local Planning Authority, the site promoter and our consultants (Stantec) to enable the promoters to provide further information to Stantec in order for them to undertake their assessment. This is detailed in the methodology statements at Appendix A of the Stage 2 report, and all information received has been put on the Council's Local Plan Review Google Drive.

3.51 In addition to a qualitative assessment of each scheme against the garden settlement principles established in the Council's Garden Settlements Prospectus, a strategic viability appraisal of each scheme was undertaken for Stantec by Aspinal Virdee. This appraisal seeks to establish the viability of each scheme, and what land value may exist to be captured from to provide new infrastructure in each locality.

3.52 The overall conclusion from the report is that all three proposals have the potential to be deliverable Garden Community projects. Each has strengths and weaknesses. It will be important that the Council's Preferred Approached document highlights where further work needs to be done to ensure that deliverability and optimal sustainability is achieved on any of these sites that may potentially be selected.

3.53 The Stage 1 and Stage 2 reports are available as Appendix 11 of this report.

### **Sustainability Assessment/Strategic Environmental Assessment (Appendix 12)**

3.54 Local plans (and spatial development strategies) should be informed throughout their preparation by a sustainability appraisal that meets the relevant legal requirements. This should demonstrate how the plan has addressed relevant economic, social and environmental objectives (including opportunities for net gains). Significant adverse impacts on these

objectives should be avoided and, wherever possible, alternative options which reduce or eliminate such impacts should be pursued. Where significant adverse impacts are unavoidable, suitable mitigation measures should be proposed (or, where this is not possible, compensatory measures should be considered).

3.55 The Sustainability Appraisal (which incorporates a Strategic Environmental Assessment) of the Local Plan Review seeks to inform and support the conclusions in the Local Plan Review at each main stage for the duration of the Local Plan Review process. It is an iterative process, with the emerging strategy and policies being tested against the sustainability objectives set out in the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report of 2019<sup>1</sup>.

3.56 The consultants have produced an assessment of the impacts of four high-level approaches that have been drawn out of the "Reasonable Alternatives" (RA) set out in the topic papers. These are:

- RA1: Continue with the spatial approach in the adopted Local Plan 2017
- RA2: Develop one or more Garden Settlements
- RA3: Maidstone town centre focus
- RA4: Eastern orbital road corridor focus

3.57 This provides an objective assessment to help understand the strengths and weaknesses of different spatial approaches when selecting reasonable alternative spatial scenarios. The outputs will be included in the Interim Sustainability Appraisal to be consulted on in October 2020.

### **Habitats Regulations Assessment ("HRA") Scoping (Appendix 13)**

3.58 Where a Local Plan may impact on a Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and/or Ramsar site, the competent authority, in this case Maidstone Borough Council, is required to undertake an Appropriate Assessment in the form of a Habitats Regulations Assessment. This assessment will determine whether the Plan may affect the protected features of such habitats.

3.59 A number of such sites lie within (or within close proximity) to the borough and have the potential to be affected by the Local Plan Review. The first stage of the Council's HRA process is the 'scoping' exercise to establish if these protected sites would be affected. The scoping report (at Appendix 13) has recently been completed by consultants LUC. This has identified a number of sites, including the Stodmarsh SAC/Ramsar site in Canterbury, which need to be assessed at the Screening stage to test the Likely Significant Effects the Local Plan Review may have on these sensitive habitats.

3.60 Following the screening process, a full Appropriate Assessment will be undertaken to determine the effects of the Local Plan Review in respect to the conservation objectives of the protected sites. LUC have been

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<sup>1</sup> <https://localplan.maidstone.gov.uk/home/documents/local-plan-review-documents/lpr-progress/Maidstone-SA-Scoping-Report-for-consultation-web-version.pdf>

appointed to undertake these follow up assessments, which will be carried out at the relevant stages as the Local Plan Review progresses.

### **Spatial Topic Papers**

3.61 To inform the spatial approaches element of the Local Plan Review, 6 strategic Topic Papers have been produced which set out the reasonable alternative approaches to development from which a "Preferred Approach" can be identified. These topic papers cover the following themes:

- Economic Development (Appendix 14)
- Environment (Appendix 15)
- Housing (Appendix 16)
- Social Infrastructure (Appendix 17)
- Retail and Leisure (Appendix 18)
- Transport and Air Quality (Appendix 19)

3.62 The purpose of these papers is to inform MBC's decision-making process. First, they set out the policy and legislative requirements, and provide a summary of the supporting evidence, consultation responses and any other matters that are relevant in the determination of a preferred strategy. This determines the criteria upon which each approach will be assessed. The topic papers then go on to set out the key options and approaches available for the Council and these are assessed against the criteria in the matrices in the appendix of each paper.

3.63 This is an iterative process and work on the topic papers is ongoing in conjunction with the Sustainability Appraisal. The topic papers do not draw any conclusions at this stage, and further evidence from the Sustainability Appraisal assists in the refinement and final decision in respect to which of the approaches should be adopted in the reviewed Local Plan.

3.64 The papers will be updated as new information is received and these updates will continue to until the submission of the Local Plan Review for Examination. Collectively, these Topic Papers will provide an important suite of evidence to support and justify the Council's decision-making process and the soundness of the Local Plan.

#### *Economic Strategy Topic Paper (Appendix 14)*

3.65 Economic development within the borough is a vital component of growth and supports the development of communities and broader sustainable development goals.

3.66 The Economic Strategy Topic Paper (Appendix 14) outlines the supporting evidence and needs within the borough, along with a summary of the nature of economic development in terms of employment and location types. More details in respect of needs is set out in the Economic Development Needs Study (Appendix 2 & 3) summarised elsewhere in this report. Four preferred approaches are tested against the scoring matrix and these are further explored in the Sustainability Appraisal to the Topic papers.

#### *Environment Topic Paper (Appendix 15)*

- 3.67 Environmental matters lie at the heart of planning and they link the various work streams being undertaken in preparation of the Local Plan. The Environment Topic Paper (Appendix 15) does not restate matters dealt with elsewhere in the evidence base or that will be addressed through the non-spatial policies, rather it synthesises environmental related evidence from a strategic perspective.
- 3.68 The reasonable alternative approaches set out in the Topic Paper are thematically grouped as follows: Climate Change and biodiversity; Landscape Heritage and Conservation; and Flood Risk. These approaches have then been tested against the criteria as prescribed by legislation, policy, consultation and other relevant matters.
- 3.69 Whilst some approaches demonstrate a stronger performance against the established criteria at this stage, the Sustainability Appraisal further refines issues.

#### Housing Strategy Topic Paper (Appendix 16)

- 3.70 The Housing Strategy Topic Paper (Appendix 16) sets out the overall housing need across the borough which is devised through the application of the standard method formula as set out in the NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance. National policy and guidance requires Local Planning Authorities to identify the overall need as well as the needs for different types of housing. Further details of the local needs assessment is provided in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment section of this report (and in Appendix 1).
- 3.71 The Topic Paper sets out the reasonable alternative approaches to: the location of housing development within the Borough; affordable housing; and housing typologies.
- 3.72 These options are then assessed in the matrix against the criteria defined by legislation, national and local policy, consultation, and soundness, amongst others, and further considered in the Topic Paper Sustainability Appraisal.

#### Social Infrastructure Topic Paper (Appendix 17)

- 3.73 The Social Infrastructure Topic Paper (Appendix 17) outlines the requirements, opportunities and constraints for growth in Maidstone from a social infrastructure perspective. The paper specifically covers: health provision; Education; Social Services; Community spaces; Open space; leisure Infrastructure; utilities; and digital Infrastructure. Highway infrastructure is dealt with in the Transport and air Quality Topic Paper (Appendix 19).
- 3.74 The paper outlines the role that Local Planning Authorities play in the delivery of infrastructure and how development can impact on provision. It sets out the requirements for and the Council's obligations in respect of the above infrastructure areas, and how these impact on the potential growth of areas.



- 3.75 Three potential alternative approaches are set out in the Topic Paper: utilities infrastructure; social and community services; social and community spaces. These are scored in the matrices against criteria guided by legislation, policy, consultation and guidance. Further consideration is given through the Sustainability Appraisal to the Topic Papers.
- 3.76 Input from infrastructure providers will be key to effectively determining the impact development patterns will have on provision, and ongoing engagement continues with providers. More detailed information on this is provided in the Infrastructure Capacity section of this report (and in Appendix 5).

#### Retail and Leisure Topic Paper (Appendix 18)

- 3.77 The Retail and Leisure Strategy Topic Paper (Appendix 18) considers the objectively assessed need for main town centre uses in both quantitative and qualitative terms, and review how this need might be accommodated spatially.
- 3.78 The Economic Development Needs Study, which is outlined in more detail elsewhere in this report (and in Appendix 2 & 3), sets out the key retail and leisure requirements over the plan period. The Topic paper frames this need against the identified legislative, technical, consultative and policy landscapes.
- 3.79 The four reasonable alternative approaches set out in the Topic Paper are: Continue with LP17 approach; allocate retail to garden settlements; allocate out of town; and town centre intensification and diversification. These alternative approaches are assessed against the scoring criteria set out in the matrix towards the end of the paper and are synthesised in the Sustainability Appraisal.

#### Transport and Air Quality Topic Paper (Appendix 19)

- 3.80 Whilst the Transport Modelling (Appendix 10) and Integrated Transport Strategy (Appendix 9) sections cover transport and air quality in more detail, the Transport and Air Quality Topic Paper (Appendix 19) provides an overview of our current understanding of transport and air quality issues, and frames these against the legislative and policy background, guidance, consultation and other relevant matters.
- 3.81 The topic paper outlines the evidence base that informed the strategic approach of the reviewed Local Plan and sets out the preferred approaches which are subsequently tested against the criteria defined in the matrix.

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## **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 This report is for noting only.
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## **5. RISK**

5.1 This report is presented for information only and has no risk management implications.

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## **6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

6.1 Consultation on the Local Plan Review was undertaken at the Regulation 18a (Scoping Themes and Issues) stage during 2019. Details of relevant responses are provided in the Topic Papers attached to this report.

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## **7. REPORT APPENDICES**

*The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:*

- Appendix 1: Maidstone Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- Appendix 2: Maidstone Economic Development Needs Study – Stage 1
- Appendix 3: Maidstone Economic Development Needs Study – Stage 2
- Appendix 4: Settlement Hierarchy Review
- Appendix 5: Infrastructure Capacity
- Appendix 6: Draft Strategic Land Availability Assessment
- Appendix 7: Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Stage 1
- Appendix 8: Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Stage 2
- Appendix 9: Integrated Transport Strategy indications
- Appendix 10: Transport modelling early findings
- Appendix 11: Garden Communities part 1 and 2
- Appendix 12: Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment
- Appendix 13: HRA Scoping
- Appendix 14: Economic Spatial Topic Paper
- Appendix 15: Environment Spatial Topic Paper
- Appendix 16: Housing Spatial Topic Paper
- Appendix 17: Infrastructure Spatial Topic Paper
- Appendix 18: Retail and Leisure Spatial Topic Paper
- Appendix 19: Transport and Air Quality Spatial Topic Paper