

**Local Plan Review Update**

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	<i>Rob Jarman (Head of Planning and Development)</i>
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Mark Egerton (Strategic Planning Manager)
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	<i>All</i>

**Executive Summary**

*At the 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020 meeting of this committee, Members resolved that officers provide a short, written update at each meeting of this committee, concerning any slippage and/or progress on delivering the Local Plan Review on the timetable agreed. This report provides the requested update.*

**Purpose of Report**

*Noting*

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

1. That the report be noted.

**Timetable**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee	12 January 2021

# Local Plan Review Update

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 At the 10th March 2020 meeting of the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure (SPI) Committee, Members resolved that officers should provide a short-written update at each meeting of the committee, concerning any slippage and/or progress on delivering the plan on the timescale agreed. This report provides the requested update.
- 1.2 At its meeting on 9 November 2020, the Committee considered the Local Plan Review (Regulation 18) Preferred Approaches document and this, together with a sustainability appraisal, was approved for consultation. Consultation and pre-consultation arrangements were also agreed, so that public consultation on the plan would be undertaken between 1 and 22 December 2020. The Committee authorised the Head of Planning and Development, in conjunction with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee, to make subsequent minor amendments and factual alterations to the consultation document.
- 1.3 The Council undertook a comprehensive pre-consultation programme, which included briefings with key stakeholders (infrastructure providers & regulatory bodies), Parish Councils, relevant Kent County Council Members with wards in Maidstone Borough, the Kent Association of Local Councils, and a private developers' forum, as well as meetings with officers from Kent County Council and neighbouring local planning authorities.
- 1.4 Following the period of pre-consultation engagement, the consultation commenced as planned on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2020. During the consultation, officers monitored the responses that were submitted and commenced processing. Towards the end of the consultation, it was apparent that the number of responses was very significant, with well over 2,000 representations having been received.
- 1.5 The Council had also received a small number of requests to submit late representations, including due to the direct impacts of Covid 19, where there has been a very significant increase in infection rates both nationally and locally. As a result of the above circumstances, a statement was published, and a press release issued on 23<sup>rd</sup> December alerting the public to the fact that representations received up to and including Friday 8<sup>th</sup> January would still be processed and analysed as a response to the preferred approaches consultation.
- 1.6 Given the very significant level of response, and in order to ensure proper consideration of representations received, officers will now be aiming to

provide a report on the consultation analysis to this committee in March 2021.

- 1.7 A separate report on the duty to co-operate, setting out the framework for taking forward engagement with key statutory bodies and following on from the pre-consultation engagement, is also part of the agenda for this committee meeting.
- 1.8 In a further significant development, on the 16<sup>th</sup> December the government issued its 'new', interim standard methodology for calculating housing need. This followed lobbying from Maidstone Borough Council, as well as other authorities, regarding the previously proposed increase in the need figures. The revisions reverted to a need figure that was based on the original 2017 algorithm for Maidstone and many other rural authorities in England, with increased need being focused on the country's 20 larger urban areas. For Maidstone this has meant a reversion to a need figure of approximately 1,200 units per annum, down from the figure of 1,569 units per annum set out in the government's recent public consultation.
- 1.9 However, as part of the statement announcing the newly published standard methodology, the Secretary of State also stated the government's intention to publish its response to the planning White Paper consultation in spring. Fundamentally, this will set out the decisions on the proposed way forward, including to prepare for legislation in the autumn.
- 1.10 The approach to local housing need was one of the areas that was subject to the White Paper consultation and the currently published housing standard methodology is effectively an interim arrangement. There is still a possibility that a new approach to calculating housing need could therefore be published by the government in spring.
- 1.11 It is unlikely that any new approach to calculating housing need would require primary legislation to be published for it to take effect and so could be in place fairly quickly after any announcement. In summary, there is a possibility that a new approach to housing need could be published by the government in spring and this could decrease or increase the need for Maidstone Borough. Officers are therefore continuing to progress the Local Plan Review in accordance with the published timetable and will report back further announcements from the government to this committee in due course.
- 1.12 Finally, it should be noted that the need figure changes at least annually given that Office for National Statistics affordability ratio (house price – earnings) is recalculated on an annual basis. Population and household growth figures are also fundamental components of the calculation and these are updated every two years. This means that further changes to the need figure before adoption of the Local Plan Review are expected, even if

the current method of calculation remains in place. We will therefore look to publish the Regulation 19 draft Local Plan Review document using the latest available figure at the time.

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## **2 RISK**

- 2.1 This report is presented for information only has no direct risk management implications. Risks associated with the LPR are dealt with through the usual operational framework and have been previously reported.
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## **3. REPORT APPENDICES**

- 3.1 None
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## **4. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Background paper 1: Statement from Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government dated 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020 – <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2020-12-16/hcws660>