

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Economic and Commercial Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2014

Present: Councillor Paterson (Chairman), and
Councillors Butler, Fissenden, Harper, Mrs Hinder,
Hogg, Powell and Vizzard

45. THE COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER WHETHER ALL ITEMS ON THE AGENDA SHOULD BE WEBCAST

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be webcast.

46. APOLOGIES

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Cuming.

Councillor Harper had notified the Chairman he was running late.

47. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute members present.

48. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillors Greer and Naghi were in attendance for items 7, 8 and 9.

Councillor Burton was in attendance as Cabinet Member for items 7, 8 and 9.

49. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by members or officers.

50. TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

RESOLVED: That the items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

51. PRESENTATION OF THE ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEMS 8 AND 9

The Chairman opened the meeting and explained it was a co-located simultaneous meeting with the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee (ECD OSC). The meeting took this format because of the overlap of the terms of reference/agenda items. The Chairman went on to explain the structure of the meeting:

- The main part of the meeting were Chaired by Councillor Springett;
- Each committee followed their own agenda for items 1 to 6, Chaired by their own Chairman;
- Both committees heard the same presentations for item 7 and had a joint question and answer session;
- Each committee agreed their own recommendations for items 8 and 9;
- Separate sets of minutes were produced for each committee;
- When voting on recommendations each committee did so separately by standing and raising their hand.

The Chairman welcomed Sarah Anderton, Principal Planning Officer, Spatial Planning to the meeting to present her report, Local Plan: Approach to Employment Land.

Ms Anderton explained the Qualitative Employment Site Assessment had recently been completed as part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan. The assessment built on the first stream of work regarding capacity for growth with respect to the quality of employment land (was it fit for the identified needs), not just quantity. The assessment focussed on office, industrial and warehousing space.

Ms Anderton emphasised the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), (which sets the overarching national planning policy) stated authorities should look at the needs of the borough in terms of space, type, location and quality and should look to meet the needs through the local plan.

Ms Anderton introduced Martyn Saunders, Associate from GVA who carried out the assessment. She went on to explain the methodology used.

It was noted on site surveys of all 46 existing employment sites (for example 20/20 business park, Eclipse Park) had been carried out. Of the 46 sites, 28 had been assessed as fit for purpose and recommended to be protected and kept in employment use for the term of the Local Plan (2011-2031).

The existing supply of employment land included new sites built or granted planning permission since 2011 (the base date of the Local Plan) as well as usable vacant premises. This figure was set against the identified need for employment land for the period of the Local Plan to establish the balance required (illustrated in the table on page 6 of the agenda).

Mr Saunders advised the committees that the assessment highlighted the borough had a qualitative lack of supply of employment land in terms of large mixed use sites that were well connected to the highway network.

Mr Saunders informed the committee the Local Plan that went out to consultation from March until May 2014 included a list of employment sites. These sites did not meet the qualitative gap identified in the latest assessment. This selection of sites also did not meet the quantitative need for additional office floorspace.

The challenge, for the Local Plan, going forward was to consider the need and respond to it.

Mr Saunders explained the qualitative assessment concludes that the demand would be best met by a single, large allocation of land close to the highway network that comprised of small office units, warehousing space and bespoke industrial units. This had to be different to what was already on offer in order to attract new business. Junction 8 of the M20 motorway was considered, by officers, to be the only location suitable to meet the need.

The Chairman welcomed John Foster, Economic Development Manager and Katharine Harvey, Programme Director, Shared Intelligence to the meeting. Mr Foster presented the draft Economic Development Strategy and explained the last strategy had been developed in 2008, when the economy was stronger. The new strategy had been developed with consultants, Shared Intelligence, and sat alongside the Local Plan with an action plan that should help deliver the Local Plan and the Economic Development Strategy.

The main points of Mr Foster's presentation were:

- The views of business community and stakeholders had been taken into consideration;
- 1,900 jobs in Maidstone had been lost since 2009 largely in the public sector;
- Maidstone had a low share of industries such as high tech manufacturing, ICT and creative industries which were higher skilled and higher paid;
- Commuting patterns had changed with more residents working outside of the borough – this was expected to worsen over the next 15 years;
- Less than a third of residents had higher level qualifications;
- Earnings for Maidstone residents had been declining since 2010 and were below the GB and Kent average.

The five priorities for the strategy were:

- Retaining and attracting investment – high value, high wage businesses, create 14,400 new jobs;
- Stimulating entrepreneurship – support local residents, business start-up courses;
- Enhancing the town centre – a new vision for the town centre;
- Meeting the skills needs – work with training providers and colleges;

- Improving the infrastructure – bid for additional funding to ease congestion.

During lengthy discussion the committees raised the following points:

Draft Economic Development Strategy

- I. The Economic Development Strategy would address a lot of the issues regarding declining jobs and businesses in the borough. Maidstone would be able to compete for new businesses and was fundamentally a good location for businesses to grow. The constraint was not the geography of the borough but the economy. Delivery of 14,400 new jobs would rely partly on the expansion of the Maidstone Medical Campus.
- II. Concern was raised about the focus on motorway links and not rural businesses. It was agreed rural industries were equally important and the draft Local Plan included plans to expand successful rural trading estates such as Barrowdale Farm, Lodge Wood, Staplehurst and Marden. The rural economy was also picked up in the draft Economic Development Strategy by emphasising the need for broadband connection and bidding for grant funding for rural business development.
- III. Incentives to attract businesses to the borough – work had been carried out with Kent County Council (KCC) to bid for Growing Places funding for West Kent. The Escalate Fund was available to businesses in Maidstone and the west Kent area and some local businesses had already benefited from it.
- IV. An enterprise hub was being developed to provide small flexible business space with support.
- V. The method to reduce the number of residents commuting to other areas to work was to allocate more employment land to encourage more businesses into the borough.
- VI. The draft Economic Development Strategy did emphasise the importance of tourism to the economy. A Destination Management Plan would be developed to promote what was great about the borough and attract new investment, workers and visitors. This document would be ready by summer 2015.
- VII. Clusters of new businesses would include health care, life sciences with the development of the Maidstone Medical Campus and businesses that would benefit from the Green Economy. Small micro IT based businesses, were already in existence but were not clustered in any particular part of the borough.
- VIII. The rural economy was acknowledged as making a large contribution to the economy of the borough. The priorities of the Economic Development Strategy; retaining, attracting investment; stimulating

enterprise; meeting skills needs, applied as much to the rural economy as the urban economy.

- IX. It was noted, on page 38 of the draft Economic Development Strategy point 6.9, that the Bluebell Railway was not in Tenterden and Tenterden was not part of the Maidstone Borough.
- X. Investment in Maidstone Medical Campus was dependent on the completion of the on-site and off-site infrastructure, for example Bearsted Road improvements. A funding bid for Single Local Growth Fund money, with the South East Enterprise Partnership, to support this work had been submitted to central Government for consideration. Officers were confident this funding would be granted.
- XI. All investment decisions would always go through a due diligence process to identify the return on investment and ensure it was viable and delivered financial benefits to the council.
- XII. Some concern was raised regarding the wording and strength of the delivery mechanisms for the action plan for the draft Economic Development Strategy. It was agreed there was a need for a higher priority and profile for tourism, leisure and the visitor economy and renewable and green energy in the strategy and it was felt the action plan needed to be written in more positive language.

Local Plan: approach to employment land

- I. The Local Plan would have a policy safeguarding employment sites in the borough.
- II. The list of employment sites identified as sites to retain and protect for employment use, in Appendix B on page 95 of the agenda, should include Pattenden Lane, Marden.
- III. The draft Local Plan allowed for poor quality business premises to be put to other uses, for example housing or redevelopment into a combination of housing and business premises. Sites in the town centre where this could happen would mean some businesses relocating to alternative sites. Alternative sites were needed and the Local Plan was the mechanism to deliver them. Mote Road was one site identified in the Local Plan for this purpose.
- IV. There was no viable alternative to Junction 8 of the M20. The call for sites at the beginning of 2013, revealed the availability of sites at Junction 8 was the only site location with the best connections to the highway network.
- V. Past applications for development of land at Junction 8 had been developer led. It was agreed, to achieve the ambitions of the council, Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) needed to take control of how the land was developed by setting out a clear policy of physical constraints

with parameters that provided a balance between protecting the area and providing development land.

- VI. There was a duty to co-operate with neighbouring local authorities. A number of meetings had taken place with Tonbridge and Malling, Ashford and Swale Borough Councils and Medway Council.
- VII. It was confirmed that 14,400 jobs created in the borough would not inflate the housing need figure and still fell short of the projected increase in the working age population of the borough.
- VIII. The NPPF guidelines allowed for boroughs, such as Maidstone, to develop in a way that was suitable for the area, provided Maidstone specific evidence was included in the Local Plan.
- IX. 19% of existing office floor space was vacant, the majority of which was of poor quality. Some of this poorer quality stock could be redeveloped as housing.
- X. It was confirmed that the town centre vision would minimise organic conversion of poor quality office blocks into housing in favour of redevelopment of these sites.
- XI. It was suggested there was a need for a fundamental vision for the borough with broad principles for its development and the highways to support it. When a change was proposed this would be reference with the principles to establish it if fitted with the overall vision.
- XII. Transport modelling was integral to the successful delivery of the Local Plan and the Economic Development Strategy delivering a town centre that is fit for purpose.
- XIII. The James Whatman site was not included as a protected employment site because it was identified in the draft Local Plan for housing development.

52. LONG MEETING

Prior to 10:30pm, during consideration of Local Plan; approach to employment land, the Committee considered whether to adjourn the meeting at 10:30pm or continue until 11:00pm if necessary.

RESOLVED: That the meeting continue until 11:00pm, if necessary.

53. LOCAL PLAN: APPROACH TO EMPLOYMENT LAND

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1) The committee supports development for employment use at Junction 8 of the M20 subject to the development of a planning policy by the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development to mitigate damage and to ensure appropriate constraints. This policy should be considered by the Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2015.
- 2) The Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development be recommended to acknowledge the importance of retaining the employment sites outside of the town centre detailed in Appendix B of the report (list of existing industrial sites/estates for inclusion in Policy DM18).

Councillor Paterson requested that her dissent be noted in relation to recommendation 1.

54. DRAFT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2014

That subject to point XII regarding the Draft Economic Development Strategy, under minute number 51, being considered by the Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development, the Committee recommend the Draft Economic Development Strategy be approved by Cabinet for consultation.

55. DURATION OF MEETING

18:30 to 22:55