

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY 16 DECEMBER 2014

REPORT OF HEAD OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Report prepared by Deanne Cunningham

1. LANDSCAPE CAPACITY STUDY UPDATE

1.1 Issue for Consideration

- 1.1.1 To note the progress of the Landscape Capacity Study which was commissioned to determine the broad comparative sensitivity of landscape character areas within the borough to possible development and to assess individual sites identified through the Local Plan process as potential development sites to identify landscape constraints.

1.2 Recommendation of Head of Planning and Development

- 1.2.1 That the Committee notes the update on the Landscape Capacity Study and agrees to consider the draft document for approval at the 20 January 2015 meeting of this Committee.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 Background

In 2013 the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) was approved for inclusion in the evidence base for the Local Plan. This document was produced by Jacobs, an international company with a local base which provides technical professional landscape services. It provides an understanding of the range and variety of landscape character throughout the Borough and how these landscapes function and relate to each other, providing a robust evidence base for each character area. However, the LCA does not appraise or contain judgements on the landscape's capacity to accommodate change relating to potential development. This current project has been commissioned to provide the additional layer of evidence, which includes qualitative assessments such as landscape character sensitivity and visual sensitivity, undertaken in accordance with current guidance as detailed in 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland: Topic Paper 6 Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity (The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage)'.

The work has been undertaken in accordance with national guidance current at the time of the commission and therefore, once completed, it will form part of a robust evidence base to the Local Plan and will be used to inform the Sustainability Appraisal of any land allocation proposals, assisting the Council in meeting the requirements of the NPPF.

There are two interlinked parts to this project. The first is an assessment of the comparative sensitivity of the Borough's landscapes to development, excluding the general urban area of Maidstone and the nationally designated AONB but including the fringe landscapes of both areas. The second is an assessment of individual sites identified through the Local Plan process to identify site specific landscape constraints, any opportunities and on site or off site mitigation requirements.

This landscape work is just one strand of a number of assessments being undertaken in the context of assessing sites for potential development. An area of landscape with high sensitivity and low capacity for development does not mean a site cannot be developed. It means that landscape constraints should be carefully considered and, in general terms, only appropriate development should be supported. However, where there is an overriding need for a type of development, it should be sensitively designed taking into account landscape and visual impacts, with appropriate mitigation to offset any adverse effects. Any development which does not meet these requirements should be resisted on landscape grounds. This philosophy, along with the need for developers to provide landscape and visual impact assessments for detailed development proposals, is outlined in emerging Local Plan policy DM 10.

1.3.2 Programme

The programme for the work was acknowledged to be on a tight timeframe from the beginning but the brief required completion of the associated reports by 31 October 2014. Unfortunately, this programme has slipped by a number of weeks due to problems with mapping information and officers have only recently received the initial draft reports. Clearly these need checking for quality assurance before the documents can be circulated for comment.

It is anticipated that the quality assurance work will be completed by early January, enabling a full report to be considered by Scrutiny Committee on 20 January 2015. This short time delay will have minimal impact on the current Local Plan programme.

1.3.3 Initial Findings

The comparative landscape sensitivity assessment, which is based on existing landscape character areas, perhaps unsurprisingly, reveals that the borough consists largely of areas of landscape character areas which are sensitive to change.

The site assessment study cannot readily be summarised because the numerous individual sites have been assessed on their own merits. Within the report these have been grouped generally geographically around the urban fringe and around nearby rural service centres and villages so that any

impacts, both individual and cumulative, can most easily be considered by the users of this information.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

- 1.4.1 In view of the need to provide a robust evidence base to support the Local Plan and meet the associated programme, it is considered important that Members are aware of the progress of this study.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

- 1.5.1 The findings of the landscape capacity study will assist in achieving the objective to make Maidstone a decent place to live.

1.6 Other Implications

1.6.1

1. Financial
2. Staffing
3. Legal
4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment
5. Environmental/Sustainable Development
6. Community Safety
7. Human Rights Act
8. Procurement
9. Asset Management

X

- 1.6.2 Environmental/sustainable development impacts are set out in the body of the report.

1.7 Relevant Documents

1.7.1 Appendices

None

1.7.2 Background Documents

None

IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

THIS BOX MUST BE COMPLETED

Yes

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No

X

If yes, this is a Key Decision because:

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Wards/Parishes affected:

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