

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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

**TUESDAY 16 DECEMBER 2014**

**REPORT OF HEAD OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

**Report prepared by Jillian Barr**

**1. LOCAL PLAN; AGRICULTURAL LAND CLASSIFICATION SURVEY**

**1.1 Issue for Consideration**

- 1.1.1 To note the '*Agricultural Land Classification Survey of Potential Development Sites in Maidstone Borough*'. The outcomes of this work are an important part of the evidence base for the Local Plan. It has particular relevance to the consideration of sites proposed by landowners and developers for inclusion as development allocations in the Local Plan.

**1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Planning and Development**

That the contents of the report are noted.

**1.3 Reasons for Recommendation**

- 1.3.1 Land Research Associates ("LRA") were appointed in October 2014 to undertake field studies to identify and assess the presence of best and most versatile land on specific sites within the Borough. This was considered necessary to ensure that the Council had a definitive view of the quality and value for food production of land proposed to the Local Plan for development. This research was carried out in accordance with the recognised classification guidance prepared by the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food ("MAFF")<sup>[1]</sup>, the Natural England Technical Information Note on agricultural land classification and current best practice.
- 1.3.2 It is not a stand-alone piece of evidence. Instead it supplements existing Agricultural Land Classification Assessment work and seeks to fill any significant gaps in information. In particular, Agricultural Land Classification reports prepared by ADAS in 1994 are still considered

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<sup>[1]</sup> Agricultural Land Classification for England and Wales: Guidelines and Criteria for Grading the Quality of Agricultural Land. MAFF, 1988.

relevant since the reports were prepared using MAFF guidance published in 1988. Work prepared since the guidance was published can still be considered definitive and it was not considered helpful to repeat these surveys again. New sites in agricultural use (or with agricultural potential) were surveyed in this current tranche of agricultural land survey where:

- a) They are new sites that have not previously been surveyed;
- b) The new site is larger than that previously surveyed.

1.3.3 This new survey work included a review of existing information, including the following:

- a) Provisional (1970s) ALC mapping;
- b) Post 1988 (i.e. after the last revision of the ALC system) agricultural land quality information available on the MAGIC website which provides geographic information on the natural environment;
- c) Published and unpublished soil surveys – primarily the 1:250,000 regional soil maps;
- d) 1:50,000 drift and solid British Geological Survey geological information digitally accessed within LRA's MapInfo Geographic Information System (GIS);
- e) Google Earth satellite imagery.

1.3.4 The results of this work will form part of the evidence base to assist the making of recommendations on site allocations for inclusion in the Maidstone Borough Local Plan which it is planned will go to Regulation 19 consultation in summer 2015, and which will set the planning framework for the borough to 2031. Paragraph 112 of the National Planning Policy Framework states:

*"Local planning authorities should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality."*

1.3.5 It is important to note that agricultural land quality is one of a number of issues and points of evidence that must be considered in balance when determining the most appropriate sites for development.

1.3.6 A report to the 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015 Overview and Scrutiny Committee will set out any proposed changes to the allocations included in the

draft Maidstone Borough Local Plan (Regulation 18) and any suggested additional sites arising from the latest call for sites. The information contained within this ALC report will then be used (together with other relevant issues and evidence) as part of the balanced consideration of issues and evidence when recommending sites for inclusion / amendment in the January report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

1.3.7 It is noted that site HO3-246 South of The Parsonage in Marden has not yet been surveyed. It does not have planning permission contrary to the statement in the report. This is being rectified and Members will be updated verbally at the meeting.

1.3.8 The table attached at Appendix 1 sets out the sites that were considered as part of this study. The general covering report (which discusses the methodology in more detail), and the site summaries, are attached to this report at Appendix 2.

#### 1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 Up to date information on ALC was considered a vital part of the evidence base necessary to help secure the soundness of the Local Plan. Not undertaking this study could have risks for the Council in defending its position at examination.

#### 1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 The Maidstone Borough Local Plan supports the delivery of the spatial objectives of the Maidstone Community Strategy and the Strategic Plan. The local plan particularly supports the Council's priorities for Maidstone to have a growing economy and to be a decent place to live.

#### 1.6 Other Implications

##### 1.6.1

1.	Financial	x
2.	Staffing	
3.	Legal	
4.	Equality Impact Needs Assessment	
5.	Environmental/Sustainable Development	x
6.	Community Safety	

7. Human Rights Act
8. Procurement
9. Asset Management


1.6.2 Financial; this study has been funded within existing budgets.

1.6.3 Environmental/ Sustainable Development; Provides up to date evidence for the local plan which has a key role in securing sustainable development.

#### 1.7 Relevant Documents

##### 1.7.1 Appendices

Appendix 1 Table: List of Study Sites

Appendix 2 Report: Agricultural Land Classification Survey of Potential Development Sites in Maidstone Borough.

##### 1.7.2 Background Documents

Nil

<b><u>IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?</u></b>		<b><u>THIS BOX MUST BE COMPLETED</u></b>	
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If yes, this is a Key Decision because: .....			
.....			
Wards/Parishes affected: .....			
.....			