

## **REGENERATION, COMMUNITY & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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### **ROCHESTER AIRPORT MASTERPLAN CONSULTATION**

Report from: Robin Cooper, Regeneration, Community and Culture  
Author: Brian McCutcheon, Planning Policy & Design  
Manager

#### **Summary**

This report considers a draft Masterplan for development at Rochester Airport. The committee's views on the draft Masterplan are sought as part of a current public consultation process. Following consultation, the intention is to adopt a final version of the Masterplan as planning policy guidance to shape future development at the site.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

- 1.1 The proposed Masterplan provides guidance on the development principles for investment and growth opportunities on land in and around Rochester Airport. This responds to the policy framework set out in the emerging Medway Core Strategy. The Core Strategy establishes the Council's planning policy for retention of the airport facility and supporting opportunities for further economic development activities in the area. The emerging Core Strategy will form part of the statutory Development Plan and which in turn forms part of the Council's policy framework.
- 1.2 The Masterplan is being developed in partnership with BAE Systems, and the costs of doing so are being shared with BAE.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 A report regarding proposals for Rochester Airport was submitted to Cabinet on 18 December 2012. Further reports were presented to Cabinet on 9 July 2013 seeking approval to consult on a draft masterplan, and authority to allocate funding to improvements at the airport, declare surplus land for disposal and enter into contracts in respect of the improvement works and agreements in respect of any disposal land. Proposals have been communicated through press and promotional coverage over the last few months advising residents and businesses that work is underway to negotiate

a new lease for the operation of Rochester Airport and to invest in the airport's improvement to secure its future and create jobs. As part of the site lies within the Tonbridge and Malling administrative area, Medway Council officers have been working closely with Planning officers at Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council in developing plans for Rochester Airport.

- 2.2 Policy CS17: Economic Development of the Submission Draft Local Development Framework Medway Core Strategy (2012) relates to the development of the Medway economy, including the *“provision of 935,998 sq m of employment floorspace and premises...to provide a range and choice of sites in terms of quality, accessibility, type and size, to meet Medway’s requirements up to 2028”*. The policy references Rochester Airport as a site that has the ability to develop a technology and knowledge based business cluster.
- 2.3 Policy CS24: Transport and Movement sets out the Council’s commitment to *“continue to work with the operator of Rochester Airport to objectively consider the future of the general aviation facility, bearing in mind its co-location with a strategic employment facility”*. The proposed Masterplan responds to these policy drivers.
- 2.4 Rochester Airport is a strategically important site for regeneration and growth in Medway and has the potential to meet a significant proportion of the area’s future employment creation for higher-value employment uses that will contribute to meeting the aims of the Council’s Economic Development Strategy.
- 2.5 The Council appointed Tibbalds, a specialist Planning and Urban Design consultancy, in February 2013 to develop the Masterplan. The purpose of the Masterplan is to provide guidance on the design and development principles to achieve effective planning for the site. The draft Masterplan is set out at Appendix 2. This provides a context for development at the site, land ownership, engineering and environmental issues and safeguarding of land. The plan presents a design framework for the site and provides guidance on land uses, access, height of buildings, urban design and other principles of design guidance. The Masterplan seeks to set the framework for future planning applications for the site.
- 2.6 It is recognised that it will take some years for the proposed developments to be delivered, as the proposals will be subject to detailed consideration through the processes of applying for planning permission and other necessary consents. An indicative timetable is set out below:

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Indicative date</b>
Masterplan adopted by Full Council	January 2014
Grant of new airport leases after adoption of the Masterplan	January 2014
Airport operator applies for planning consent for improvements	January 2014
Airport operator obtains consent for the improvements	By October 2015
Council markets 16/34 land and land south of the	June 2016

Innovation Centre	
Subject to planning approval, airport operator carries out runway improvements	By October 2016
Council can take back runway 16/34 land for development and land south of the Innovation Centre can be developed	On or after October 2016
Subject to planning approval, airport operator carries out other improvements	By July 2017
Council selects developers of 16/34 land and land south of the Innovation Centre.	By October 2016
Developers of 16/34 land and land south of the Innovation Centre apply for and obtain planning consent	By October 2017
Development of 16/34 land and land south of the Innovation Centre starts.	Post October 2017

### 3. Options

3.1 Options for progressing development of the Rochester Airport site include:

- a. Develop and adopt the Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document or other form of planning guidance, taking account of consultation responses received to date.
- b. Do nothing and let the market lead the development
- c. Rely on planning applications and planning permissions to guide development

3.2 Uncontrolled development could have negative consequences to the type and scale of employment provision at the site. There is potential for uncontrolled development to antagonise local residents and business operators that might be affected by the development. The Masterplan process provides the opportunity to seek the views of local people and businesses and to take account of their points of view, and for residents and businesses to see the detailed, appropriate level of Masterplan information via a statutory consultation process.

3.3 Not proceeding with the Masterplan and proposals for development could adversely affect the realisation of employment targets set for Medway. It could also jeopardise the operational airport's long-term future, notably with its ability to meet CAA safety regulations.

3.4 Accordingly, it is considered appropriate to proceed with the Masterplan process.

### 4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1 The council has organised extensive publicity and communications measures to ensure that local residents and businesses are aware of the proposals. This has included the distribution of over 7300 flyers to homes and businesses around the airport, together with items in local media and details on the council's website. An initial consultation process on early options and issues emerging from the Masterplan work was held in May 2013. A Consultation Feedback Analysis Report on the initial public exhibition held then (Appendix 1) illustrates that a majority are in favour of development at Rochester Airport, in order to secure its future and to create local employment. There is particular support and affection for the work of the Medway Aeronautical Preservation Society (MAPS) and safeguarding of its future, and the creation of employment at the site.
- 4.2 Concerns raised through consultation included the potential for future traffic congestion on the immediate road network, increased volume of air traffic on runway 02/20 and the possibility of noise from larger commercial aircraft and the regulations to control the airport's activities.
- 4.3 The draft Masterplan expands on the parent policy, CS17, in the draft Core Strategy. In particular, it aims to provide both the future local employment required in line with population growth projections to 2028 and a focus for Medway to generate higher value employment that will assist with the retention of more highly skilled local people.
- 4.4 Adoption of the Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), will give it status as a material consideration in the determination of any planning applications for the Rochester Airport site. Development is expected to take approximately 5-8 years and the plan will provide a consistent guide and framework for developers over this time period.
- 4.5 Procedurally the Masterplan cannot achieve formal SPD status until the adoption of the Core Strategy, as it will be subsidiary to Policies CS17 and CS24. The timetable for the adoption of the Core Strategy is currently unclear. An adopted document that has been through the same full consultation and assessment procedures as an SPD would still be given weight in determining planning applications. As soon as the Core Strategy has been adopted, it is the intention to afford the Masterplan full SPD status.
- 4.6 As part of the process of producing the Masterplan, the Council has carried out a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the proposals. This is a strategic level assessment of the environmental, economic and social impacts of the Masterplan proposals. This is available to view at Appendix 3, and is also subject to consultation alongside the draft Masterplan. Overall the SA has found that the Masterplan provides a comprehensive set of policies that will help to guide development in the area, with long term positive effects for the economy and indirect positive effects on SA objectives relating to health, poverty and social exclusion. The negative effects identified primarily relate to potential impacts during the construction period in the short term on air quality, water, health and transport. It is considered that suitable mitigation is available to address the negative effects.
- 4.7 A Diversity Impact Assessment screening form is attached at Appendix 4. This screening assessment considered that the proposed Masterplan does

not have a differential impact on sectors of the community and the proposed developments seek to offer potential benefits to Medway's communities and businesses.

## 5. Risk management

### 5.1

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Action to avoid or mitigate risk</b>	<b>Risk rating</b>
Poor quality development	Development on employment site is of poor quality and does not meet expectations to create high quality jobs	Master plan will set out expectations for high quality development	D4
Residents opposition to development at Rochester Airport	Airport becomes unviable and has to close	Consultation on master plan and taking account of views expressed.  Proposals for 25 year lease and Medway Council investment in airport	C2

## 6. Consultation

- 6.1 This report is being presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the consultation process in developing the Masterplan. The input of the community and the Committee is essential to ensure that the Masterplan is able to achieve the site's development potential. A full programme of public consultation is ongoing. The site is bordered by significant residential communities in both Medway and Tonbridge & Malling, and business communities at Horsted and Laker Road. The Council organised a two-week consultation in May 2013 on the emerging proposals for the airport. The staffed exhibition attracted a high level of interest and a number of responses, both at the exhibition and through the Council's website. The results of the initial consultation are set out comprehensively in Appendix 1.
- 6.2 The Council has arranged a further period of consultation on the draft Masterplan. This will form part of the formal requirements for the adoption of the document. In order to give sufficient time for responses over the summer period, consultation is scheduled over 8 weeks from 22 July to 20 September 2013.
- 6.3 The Council has notified local residents and businesses, including those affected in neighbouring areas in Tonbridge and Malling, of the consultation on the draft Masterplan. Details of the proposals are available to view on the Council's website, at Gun Wharf and public libraries throughout Medway.

Staffed exhibitions were held on 22 and 23 July at the Medway Innovation Centre, located next to Rochester Airport, convenient for local residents and businesses. The Council will collate the results of the proposed formal consultation and set out its response to the views raised. This information will be reported to Cabinet as part of the development work for the final version of the Masterplan.

## **7. Financial and legal implications**

- 7.1 The cost of the Masterplan consultancy work and the public consultation costs will be met from the Rochester Airport capital scheme, as agreed by Council on 25 July 2013.
- 7.2 Preparation of the Masterplan, in line with requirements for Supplementary Planning Documents, including the process of public consultation and consideration of representations, is regulated in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012. Consultation is in line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.
- 7.3 Once adopted, the Rochester Airport Masterplan will be a 'material consideration' in decisions on planning applications for Rochester Airport.

## **8. Recommendations**

- 8.1 That the Committee consider the draft masterplan and whether it wishes to submit views on it for subsequent consideration by the Cabinet.

### **Lead officer contact**

Brian McCutcheon  
Planning Policy and Design Manager  
Gun Wharf  
Telephone: 01634 331149  
Email: [brian.mccutcheon@medway.gov.uk](mailto:brian.mccutcheon@medway.gov.uk)

### **Background papers**

Draft Rochester Airport Masterplan  
Rochester Airport Masterplan – Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating SEA)  
Rochester Airport Consultation Feedback Analysis Report