

REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 OCTOBER 2013

ROCHESTER AIRPORT MASTERPLAN CONSULTATION - UPDATE

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Summary

This report responds to the Committee's request for preliminary information on the responses received to the consultation on the draft Rochester Airport masterplan.

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.
- 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 on the consultation draft Rochester Airport masterplan was presented to the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14 August 2013. This was during the consultation period arranged to seek comments on the proposals. At the meeting, Members asked for a report to be presented to the next Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny committee to provide feedback on the findings of the consultation.
- 2.2 The consultation period closed on 20 September 2013. There has been limited time available to officers to collate and analyse the responses to the consultation before the date for publication of the agenda and papers for this meeting. Therefore this is a short report, providing members with headline information on the findings. A full report setting out all the comments received to the consultation and the council's proposed response will be presented to the Cabinet in due course.

2.3 Details of the objectives and content of the draft masterplan have been set out in previous reports in July and August 2013 to Members, and are not repeated here.

3. Options

3.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information on the responses received to the consultation on the draft Rochester Airport masterplan. It is not considered appropriate to set out options at this stage.

4. Advice and analysis

4.1 Officers have collated the responses received to the consultation on the masterplan and broad findings are outlined below.

4.2 There were around 900 responses received by the close of the consultation. These were largely submitted using the questionnaire template designed for the consultation. Respondents were able to fill in questionnaires on-line via the Medway Council website, or submit forms by post, in person at Council Offices, or the Medway Innovation Centre.

4.3 A large number of returns (746) were on forms that had been distributed to residents in the local area, with pre-printed text setting out objections to the airport on amenity, safety, environmental and financial grounds, and requesting the Council to scrap the masterplan and explore a range of options for the future use of the airport site. Of these returns, 92% expressed strong disagreement to the proposals.

4.4 Of the 17% of responses that were submitted independently, a broader range of comments and views were expressed. These showed 29% in strong disagreement, 3.5% in disagreement, 15% in support, and 51% in strong support.

4.5 Issues raised as concerns to the proposals included heightened safety risks; amenity and environmental matters, particularly noise, traffic and pollution; objections to the council's investment plans; and loss of residential property values.

4.6 Issues raised in support of the proposals included the opportunities for job creation and economic growth; investment in the airport operations and upgrading of infrastructure, particularly the paved runway; and heritage enhancements.

5. Consultation

5.1 The council organised extensive publicity and communications measures to ensure that local residents and businesses were aware of the proposals. This included the distribution of over 7,300 flyers to homes and businesses around the airport, together with items in local media and details on the council's website.

5.2 The Council arranged consultation on the draft Masterplan over 8 weeks from 22 July to 20 September 2013. This followed on from earlier engagement work held in the Spring to inform the development of the draft masterplan.

5.3 The Council 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 were 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. Rochester Airport Limited staff worked alongside Council officers at these exhibitions. This was in response to questions raised on airport operational issues at the consultation events held in the Spring. Over 200 people attended the Exhibition events. A business focus group was held in September to discuss the economic development interests associated with the masterplan proposals.

6. Financial and legal implications

6.1 The cost of the Masterplan consultancy work and the public consultation costs have been met from the Rochester Airport capital scheme, as agreed by Council on 25 July 2013.

6.2 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.

6.3 Once adopted, the Rochester Airport Masterplan would be a 'material consideration' in decisions on planning applications for Rochester Airport.

7. Recommendations

7.1 That the Committee note the information provided on the responses to the consultation on the draft Rochester Airport masterplan.

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Background papers

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