

## **COUNCIL**

**23 JANUARY 2014**

### **ROCHESTER AIRPORT – MASTERPLAN**

Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Alan Jarrett, Deputy Leader and Finance Councillor Jane Chitty, Strategic Development & Economic Growth
Report from:	Robin Cooper, Director, Regeneration, Community & Culture
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#### **Summary**

The Council has prepared and consulted on a draft Masterplan to guide development on land at and bordering Rochester Airport. This report sets out the comments received during the consultation, suggests responses to the issues raised and seeks Full Council approval to adopt the Masterplan.

**Please note that Appendices A-H are included in Supplementary Agenda No.1.**

#### **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. It is the Council's intention to adopt the Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), once it has adopted its new Development Plan. Until this time, it is intended that the council approves the Masterplan as an amendment to the current policy framework. Therefore, final approval of the Masterplan is a matter for Full Council.
- 1.2 The Council has followed the process set out for the production of SPDs, including wide consultation, to afford appropriate weight to the use of this policy framework as a 'material consideration' in decisions on planning applications for Rochester Airport.
- 1.3 The Masterplan has been developed in partnership with BAE Systems, and the costs of doing so are being shared with BAE.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The Council wants to secure the continued operation of the airport facility at Rochester and realise the potential for further economic growth in this key location in Medway. It also recognises the important heritage link that the airport represents to the local area, notably through the work of the Medway Aircraft Preservation Society. The infrastructure at the airport is in need of investment, and the Masterplan seeks a comprehensive approach to improve the facilities alongside freeing up additional land for employment opportunities. The document sets out the key land use planning and urban design principles to achieve the quality of development that the Council seeks for this distinctive site.
- 2.2 Details of the objectives and content of the draft Masterplan have been set out in previous reports between July - October 2013 to Members, specifically, Cabinet on 9 July 2013 and the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committees on 14 August 2013 and 3 October 2013. Links to these reports and records of the meetings are set out in the background papers at the end of this report.
- 2.3 The Cabinet considered a report on 26 November 2013 which set out the outcome of consultation. The Cabinet made the following decisions:
- (i) The Cabinet recommended to Council that the proposed areas of changes to the draft Masterplan set out at section 4.47 of the report be agreed (decision no. 190/2013).
  - (ii) The Cabinet recommended to Council that the Masterplan be adopted as an amendment to the current planning policy framework (decision no. 191/2013).
  - (iii) The Cabinet agreed to authorise the Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Finance and Strategic Development & Economic Growth, to make the revisions to the draft Masterplan as set out in the report and any necessary minor amendments to the document prior to its consideration by Full Council (decision no. 192/2013).

## **3. Options**

- 3.1 It is considered that there are three broad options at this stage:
- to adopt the Masterplan as presented in the Consultation Draft;
  - not progress the Masterplan and the development as proposed; or
  - to amend the Masterplan in consideration of the comments made in the consultation process.
- 3.2 The option to not progress the Masterplan is not favoured as it could result in uncontrolled development on the site, and adversely affect employment targets and the airport's long-term future. A number of concerns were raised during the consultation process and it is considered appropriate to make amendments to the document. Therefore the third option is viewed as the preferred direction. A proposed approach to amend the Masterplan is set out below in Section 4.

- 3.3 In line with the third option and the recommendation of Cabinet, a copy of the revised Masterplan is set out in Appendix G to the report for adoption.

#### 4. Advice and analysis

##### *Responses to the consultation*

- 4.1 The Council received 908 responses to the consultation held from 22 July to 20 September 2013. The majority of the responses (over 80%) were received in association with a campaign set up to object to the Masterplan proposals. These were identified by the use of response forms with pre-printed text setting out common grounds of concern about the Masterplan proposals. These were largely submitted as paper copies of the response form, with pre-printed text in the sections seeking information on comments on the proposed Masterplan and the suggested changes, and hand-written information in the other sections, including respondents' views on support/opposition to the plans.
- 4.2 The remaining 20% of responses were received via the Council's website, email, and forms completed at the exhibition events or returned by post to the Council.

Format of response	Number (Percentage) of responses
Pre-printed forms	732 (80.6%)
Online	123 (13.5%)
Other (postal, handed in)	53 (5.8%)

- 4.3 Just under 80% of the responses were strongly opposed to the Masterplan. This reflected the high proportion of replies submitted in support of the campaign against the Masterplan. 89% of the responses made on the pre-printed forms were strongly opposed to the proposals. In considering the responses received independently, more mixed views are seen, with a small majority in support of the Masterplan.

Format of response	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Support	Strongly support
Pre-printed forms	89%	8%	3%	0	0
Other responses	35.8%	3.4%	6.8%	12.5%	41.5%
Total	79%	6.9%	3.6%	2.4%	8%

- 4.4 90% of the responses received were from local residents. 3% were submitted by businesses, and 7% from others, including statutory organisations invited to make comments on the consultation. Many of the local residents lived in locations directly under the flight path connected to the runway 02/20, which would see an increase in use following the closure of runway 16/34.
- 4.5 The Council has analysed the comments made in response to the consultation. A summary of the main issues and points raised is set out below. All responses submitted are set out in detail in Appendix A.

4.6 The Council had carried out an initial consultation in Spring 2013, to inform the development of the consultation draft Masterplan. A report of this consultation has been published and is listed in the background papers at the end of this report. It is noted that the responses received to the formal consultation on the Masterplan from July to September showed a stronger objection to the proposals than the views expressed at the earlier stage. A number of people who had engaged in the Spring consultation chose not to participate again in the formal consultation process. Scattermaps showing the responses received from residents in the vicinity of the airport, from both the initial consultation and the formal stage are shown in Appendix B.

#### *Concerns raised*

4.7 The large number of responses made using the pre-printed forms stating the same issues in the Comments section has meant that these concerns are predominant in the consultation analysis. The pre-printed text is set out in full in Appendix C. The issues centred on the impact of increased air activity on residential amenity and the environment, safety concerns, consideration of alternative options, and financial issues.

4.8 Nearly 80% of people who responded through the use of the pre-printed questionnaire, chose not to add any additional comments. However, it is noted that 158 people did make further comments, and these have been recorded in the table at Appendix A.

4.9 Assessment of all the responses that raised concerns with the Masterplan has identified a number of commonly recurrent matters:

- Increase in air traffic activity, associated with a commercialisation of the airport
- Noise, particularly in association with increased activity
- Increased risks to safety, particularly in relation to increased activity
- Road traffic impacts
- Specific aspects of the design components of the Masterplan
- Limited consideration of options for the site
- Negative impact on property values
- Use of public funding

4.10 These issues are considered in more detail below. In proposing changes to the Masterplan, respondents frequently asked for the Masterplan to be abandoned and for a new consultation to be carried out. With regard to the airport, some sought its closure, and relocation of the facility or operations to another site. Others wished it to remain operating on its present arrangements.

#### *Grounds of support*

4.11 In reviewing the comments made in support of the Masterplan, there were also a number of common themes. These were:

- Securing the role of the airport as an important asset for Medway, supporting community services, recreational users and businesses.
- Much needed improvements to the infrastructure and facilities at the airport, including the benefits arising from a paved runway

- Promoting local heritage assets, particularly supporting the work of the Medway Aircraft Preservation Society
  - Economic development and regeneration
- 4.12 The scheme was seen to contribute to the regeneration and economic development of Medway. The airport offered business and career opportunities, both directly in aviation, eg pilot training, and in the wider economy. The ‘smaller but better’ model was supported as a compromise between improved infrastructure and facilities and realising funding for investment through release of land for development.
- 4.13 It was pointed out that a number of public services, such as the air ambulance used the airport, as part of their role in serving local communities. The airport was seen to be a vital local asset, with both recreational and business benefits.
- 4.14 There was strong support for the role of MAPS in promoting the area’s heritage, and specifically Medway’s links to the aviation industry. A higher profile for MAPS was supported, with better public access, providing a more prominent location for MAPS at the entrance to the site, linked to a café/visitor facility.
- 4.15 The introduction of a paved runway was seen to be an advantage, supporting all weather flying, particularly addressing issues of waterlogging experienced in the winter months. It was viewed that the hard runway increased safety by allowing aircraft to gain height more quickly. This height gain also has a benefit in reducing noise in the surrounding area.
- 4.16 It was pointed out that much of the infrastructure and buildings at the airport were in need of refurbishment and the investment in new facilities was seen as necessary and welcomed. This was viewed to help attract further business to the airport. The new buildings could improve the environmental conditions of the area, through the removal of dangerous materials and improving efficiency of buildings.
- 4.17 There was support for the access points and public transport options. The location of the new employment area to the west of the site was supported to balance traffic across access points. The road traffic impact resulting from the proposals was felt to be less than what would be associated with other forms of development in the area.

*Consideration of response to concerns raised*

- 4.18 The main matters raised as concerns are considered below, together with the council’s proposed response.

**Increase in air traffic movements**

- 4.19 The Masterplan considers the capacity of the airport to expand operations, and indicates that a cap on annual movements be introduced at 50,000 per year. This is a rise from the recent average of 35,000 annual movements. Many respondents were concerned about the increase in flights, and the consequent escalation of noise and pollution that would be associated with

the increased numbers. They also associated increase in aircraft movements with increases in risks of accidents, linked to air safety.

- 4.20 The Council has sought information on annual air traffic movements recorded at Rochester Airport over recent years to provide a clearer understanding of operations. It is noted that there has been a significant drop in the number of flight movements at the airport since 2005.

<b>Rochester Airport – annual flight movements reported to the CAA since 2000</b>	
2002	32130
2003	46633
2004	40836
2005	45311
2006	35398
2007	30601
2008	27010
2009	24840
2010	21688
2011	24289
2012	18747
2013	11608 ((Jan-Jun inclusive))

- 4.21 A number of respondents requested a reduced cap on the annual number of movements. 40,000 was suggested as appropriate.
- 4.22 There were concerns raised over the commercialisation of the airport, resulting from the installation of the paved runway. People considered that this could lead to more commercial air operations at Rochester, and attract larger and heavier aircraft which could have a negative impact on local amenity.

*Council consideration of comments*

- 4.23 In response to the issues raised in the consultation, it is proposed to reduce the cap on annual movements, and review operating hours at weekends to manage anticipated levels of increased activity. This is set out in paragraph 4.47 below.
- 4.24 The Masterplan will be revised to clarify the nature of the airport's operations. There are no plans to transform the facility into a commercial airport, with scheduled passenger flights. The runway will not be extended, and its length prohibits the landing and take-off of larger aircraft. This is regulated through the CAA licensing regime of the airport. Currently the airport operations consist of a mix of leisure, training, public service and commercial flights. This pattern of use is not anticipated to change significantly following the improvements at the airport.

**Noise**

- 4.25 This was the most commonly raised concern to the consultation. A number of respondents referred to noise from existing aircraft levels causing disturbance. This was particularly related to enjoyment of garden space in

summer months and at weekends. There were concerns raised that noise disturbance would increase as a result of the increased levels of activity anticipated at the airport, and by larger aircraft being attracted to Rochester by the concrete runway. Associated with this environmental concern, a number of people raised the issue of the smell of fuel. There were concerns about low flying aircraft and night flying being of especial disturbance.

- 4.26 The Council commissioned an independent noise assessment to inform the development proposals, to understand the existing ambient noise climate. This research concluded that the predicted noise levels from the airfield did not present constraints to development.

*Council consideration of comments*

- 4.27 The Council proposes to restrict the number of movements at the airport, to within levels already experienced. Similarly restrictions on weekend operating hours will address concerns raised by residents. The benefits of the paved runway in allowing height to be gained more quickly, will reduce noise in the surrounding area. The airport operator will be encouraged to work to the principles set out in the Aviation Policy Framework<sup>1</sup>, in engaging with the local community in relation to noise levels. Any planning applications submitted for works at the airport will be required to meet the policies set for the mitigation and reduction of the impacts of noise in the National Planning Policy Framework<sup>2</sup>. Further information regarding noise will be provided at the planning application stage. Statutory advisers will be consulted on any development proposals at the airport, together with local residents.

**Safety**

- 4.28 A consistent area of response to the consultation was with local concern about air safety and with some references to the airport's alleged 'poor' record on safety. Some people suggested that the removal of the 16/34 runway would increase safety risks, particularly in strong winds by removing an alternative for pilots.

*Council consideration of comments*

- 4.29 Many of the concerns raised about safety were in relation to increased operations at the airport. The council is proposing that the Masterplan restricts the total number of annual movements, to respond to this point.
- 4.30 The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is responsible for the licensing of the airport and safety matters are a critical matter, subject to full annual inspections and re-assessments. The works to the airport will be subject to the CAA licensing review, in addition to the assessments made through planning application process.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/153776/aviation-policy-framework.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/153776/aviation-policy-framework.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Available at:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf)

- 4.31 Civil Aviation Authority guidance confirms that a hard runway increases safety. AIC (127/2006) issued by the Civil Aviation Authority discusses aircraft performance. The document<sup>3</sup> shows a comparison between grass and hard surfaced take offs, with planes on the latter needing 20-30% less runway and landing aircraft 15-35% less. By definition, if a departing aircraft needs less runway it will be higher at the boundary. Not only is there noise reduction, but there is also a positive safety message.
- 4.32 The airport's safety record shows 11 incidents since 2000. None of these incidents has led to fatalities or serious injury, and all have occurred on the ground. Safety issues are paramount at the airport, and if conditions are unsafe, then the airport will be closed for operations until weather conditions improve.

### **Road traffic and design issues in Masterplan**

- 4.33 There were concerns raised about the impact of traffic generated from the development, in association with increases in background traffic growth.
- 4.34 A number of comments referred to the wider environment and residential context of the Masterplan, and particularly the importance of safeguarding valued views across open space and the landscape in the background, particularly the Kent Downs.

#### *Council consideration of comments*

- 4.35 The Masterplan recognises the importance of careful planning for transport movements, in the context of the wider area. A traffic impact assessment will be carried out at the planning application stage, and further details for management schemes proposed. This approach has been supported in the response made by the Highways Agency.
- 4.36 The Masterplan will be amended to give greater prominence to the importance of these key aspects of the site's characteristics, environment and views and its wider context.

### **Limited options in consultation**

- 4.37 Respondents were concerned that the consultation draft Masterplan did not provide a wider consideration of uses of the site. Some viewed that the site could be better used as open space, and sought the relocation of the airport and/or new employment opportunities to other areas.

#### *Council consideration of comments*

- 4.38 The Council has given careful consideration to the distinctive characteristics of this site, and how it could be best used to offer value to Medway's economic success. The site analysis work confirmed the continued operation

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<sup>3</sup> Available at: [http://www.ead.eurocontrol.int/eadbasic/pamslight-99C8F306659FD98CBB9D7F03EC0C2A7A/7FE5QZZF3FXUS/EN/AIC/P/127-2006/EG\\_Circ\\_2006\\_P\\_127\\_en\\_2006-12-07.pdf](http://www.ead.eurocontrol.int/eadbasic/pamslight-99C8F306659FD98CBB9D7F03EC0C2A7A/7FE5QZZF3FXUS/EN/AIC/P/127-2006/EG_Circ_2006_P_127_en_2006-12-07.pdf)



of the airport, together with realising the opportunities for a quality employment offer, based on the advantageous location.

- 4.39 The strategic importance of BAE Systems at the northern edge of the site provides a distinct opportunity to provide a sector cluster of business activity. In partnership with other local stakeholders, such as the University of Greenwich, this opportunity is being discussed in order to realise the high value development that the Masterplan's vision has set out.
- 4.40 In accordance with the strategic priorities identified in Medway Council's Economic Development Strategy 2009-12, sector development, skills development, and the provision of employment land are all directly applicable to the Rochester Airport Masterplan area, and this site is arguably in the best position possible to deliver outputs against all of these priorities in the short to medium term.
- 4.41 There was a majority in support of the retention and promotion of the heritage facilities at the airport. The Medway Aircraft Preservation Society's (MAPS) work can add value to the site as a whole, in terms of an enhanced aircraft restoration facility, direct public access facilities to view this important work, and as a means to enhance Medway's image and visitor attractiveness at the gateway to the site.
- 4.42 The draft Masterplan has not clearly communicated these facets of the site, and it is recommended that this background be included in the proposals, to aid understanding of the value of the site, and the returns that the airport improvements and economic development can offer.

#### **Use of Council funding**

- 4.43 Concerns were raised on the use of public funding to support the infrastructure improvements proposed. Issues raised questioned how the expenditure would benefit the wider community. Respondents felt that the money could be spent on other Council services, and expressed particular concerns in the face of cuts in other areas.

#### *Council consideration of comments*

- 4.44 This is not a matter for land use planning, and therefore it is not appropriate to address this in the Masterplan. However consideration of the economic returns to Medway resulting from this investment and benefits to the wider economy have been previously set out in a report to Council on 25 July 2013. This referred to advice that the value of the Council's land for disposal will exceed the £4.4m contribution towards airport improvements.

#### **Impact on property values**

- 4.45 A number of people considered that the Masterplan proposals, and in particular, anticipated significant levels of increased activity at the airport would impact negatively on property values in the surrounding area.

*Council consideration of comments*

- 4.46 There is no evidence given to support this claim. Any further consideration of this potential impact would need to be processed through formal means, together with appropriate evidence.

**Proposed changes to Rochester Airport Masterplan**

- 4.47 In line with the consideration of the comments above and Cabinet's recommendations set out in paragraph 2.3 above, a number of amendments have been made to the Masterplan. These encompass:

- a reduction to the annual cap on aircraft movements and operating hours for flying at weekends
- further information on the anticipated markets from leisure, public service, training and commercial uses, including the restrictions on the type of aircraft that would be able to land at Rochester.
- additional information to clarify the distinctive characteristics and offer of the site for employment and aviation purposes
- higher promotion of the heritage value of the site, and its reflection in the marketing of the site for high quality employment
- greater consideration of the site's environmental and wider context, the need to protect key views, and residential amenity
- outline of the process for seeking planning permission, and other consents for development at the airport and employment land, including the areas in which detailed information will be provided, the consultation and assessment requirements
- updating planning policy context to remove references to draft policies in the withdrawn draft Medway Core Strategy
- correction of minor spelling and formatting errors.

**5. Risk management**

<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	Masterplan will set out expectations for high quality development	D4
Residents opposition to development at Rochester Airport	Airport becomes unviable and has to close	Address concerns of significant increase in airport operations and resultant impact, through management measures on aircraft movements.	C2

## **6. Consultation**

- 6.1 The consultation process and the responses made are set out in detail in Appendix A. Issues arising from the consultation have been considered in section 4 above.
- 6.2 The Council has sought to carry out broad consultation in the development of the Masterplan for Rochester Airport. This has included wide publicity on the proposals to consider changes at land at and around the airport from late 2012. An initial consultation was held in Spring 2013 to discuss the emerging plan and issues with residents and wider stakeholders. Details of this earlier consultation have been published in a Consultation Feedback Analysis Report (see background documents).
- 6.3 A formal consultation was held from 22 July to 20 September 2013. This was carried out in line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement that sets out the standards by which consultation on planning policy are conducted. The length of the formal consultation made allowance for the summer period, by extending the time in which people could make responses. The Council sent a leaflet to 7300 households and businesses in the local area outlining the Masterplan proposals and encouraging people to respond to the consultation.
- 6.4 The consultation sought to provide a range of options in how people could respond.
- 6.5 Medway Council officers and representatives of Rochester Airport Limited staffed an exhibition held over two days on 22 and 23 July 2013 at Medway Innovation Centre. The venue was selected for its proximity to the airport, and therefore convenience for local people. 222 people attended the exhibition. Consultation feedback forms and copies of the proposals were available for visitors at the exhibitions. The exhibition display panels remained on display at the Innovation Centre for the duration of the consultation period.
- 6.6 Information on the proposals and the draft Masterplan were published on the Council's website. People were able to submit comments on line. Copies of the Masterplan were available to view at each library in Medway, and at the reception desk at the Council's offices at Gun Wharf.
- 6.7 Statutory organisations, neighbouring councils, parish councils, interest groups, and businesses were notified of the consultation on the Masterplan and invited to make their comments. A list of those consulted is set out at Appendix D.
- 6.8 A focus group was organised to seek the views of businesses on the proposals, as part of the consultation process. Notes from this meeting are set out at Appendix E.

## **7. Director's comments**

- 7.1 The Masterplan has been produced in line with the Council's requirements for planning policy documents. Consultants produced the Masterplan based on an analysis of the site and its objectives. The Council carried out a wide

ranging consultation process, from early communications with residents, businesses and wider stakeholders on proposed changes, and two stages of consultation to inform the content of the plan. The draft Masterplan has been amended to address issues raised during consultation and to remove references to the withdrawn draft Core Strategy.

- 7.2 Authority is sought for the Director of Regeneration, Community & Culture in consultation with the appropriate Portfolio Holders to make any final minor amendments to the Masterplan. This is to provide the ability to correct minor mistyping and formatting errors.

## **8. Financial and legal implications**

- 8.1 The cost of the Masterplan consultancy work and the public consultation costs have been met from the Rochester Airport capital scheme previously agreed by the Council.
- 8.2 Preparation of the Council's Supplementary Planning Document, 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 has been carried out in line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.
- 8.3 The council intends to adopt the Rochester Airport Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document, once it has adopted its new Development Plan. Until this time, it is intended that the council approves the Masterplan as an amendment to the current policy framework. This will afford it weight as a 'material consideration' in decisions on planning applications for Rochester Airport.

## **9. Recommendation**

- 9.1 That Council approves the Rochester Airport Masterplan, as set out in Appendix G to the report, and authorises the Director of Regeneration, Community & Culture, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Finance and Strategic Development & Economic Growth, to make any final minor amendments to the Masterplan, on the basis set out in paragraph 7.2 of the report.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix A	Table of Responses
Appendix B	Scattermaps showing responses received from residents in the vicinity of the airport
Appendix C	Text pre-printed in 80% of response forms received
Appendix D	List of consultees
Appendix E	Notes of business consultation focus group
Appendix F	Glossary
Appendix G	Revised Masterplan (January 2014)
Appendix H	Schedule of Amedments

## **Background papers**

Medway Core Strategy (Submission Draft), 2012:

<http://www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/Submission%20CS%20amend%209%20feb%202012.pdf>

Consultation draft Masterplan, June 2013

<http://www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/Rochester%20Airport%20Masterplan%20Consultation%20Draft.pdf>

Cabinet 9 July 2013 – report and decisions:

<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&MId=2758&Ver=4>

Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee 14 August 2013 – report and minutes:

<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=132&MId=2861&Ver=4>

Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 October 2013 – report and minutes:

<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=132&MId=2862&Ver=4>

Consultation Feedback Analysis Report, Rochester Airport Masterplan, June 2013

<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=20665>

Cabinet 26 November 2013 – report and decisions:

<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=11364>