

PLANNING COMMITTEE

19 FEBRUARY 2014

ROCHESTER AIRPORT MASTERPLAN

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jane Chitty, Strategic Development and Economic Growth

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community & Culture

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Summary

This report informs members of Planning Committee of the planning policy and design guidance produced for Rochester Airport. The Masterplan provides guidance for development on land at and bordering the airport, and will be a material consideration in determining planning applications at the site.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The Masterplan was adopted by Full Council on 23 January 2014 as an amendment to the current policy framework. It is the Council's intention to adopt the Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), once it has its new Development Plan in place.
- 1.2 The Council has followed the process set out for the production of SPDs, meeting the consultation requirements of its Statement of Community Involvement, 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 was developed in partnership with BAE Systems, and the costs of doing so were shared with BAE.

2. Background

- 2.1 Rochester Airport has been operating at this site since 1933, and is owned by Medway Council. 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 gateway location for 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.

- 2.2 The Council commissioned specialist consultants to assess the site and produce a Masterplan to guide future development. Alongside this work, the council widely publicised the proposals and carried out consultation with residents, businesses and other stakeholders. There were mixed responses to the proposals, with concerns raised by many residents about the impacts of increased air operations on safety and environmental amenity. Other responses welcomed the safeguarding of the airport facility and the economic development opportunities with additional employment space in the area and the potential for new jobs locally.
- 2.3 As a result of the concerns raised about the potential increase in aircraft operations, the Council amended the Masterplan to reduce the cap on the level of annual movements from 50,000 set out in the consultation draft to 38,000, and clarified that there were no plans to turn Rochester into a commercial airport.

Key proposals

- 2.4 The Masterplan proposes the safeguarding of the airport operations through investment in a paved runway on the alignment of the existing 02/20 grass runway and improvements to supporting airport facilities and buildings. This promotes the development of a 'smaller but better' airport. Land freed up from the closure of the 16/34 runway is to be used as additional employment space to support local jobs.
- 2.5 The Masterplan sets out broad principles for the development of the airport and adjoining land, involving:
 - Major improvements to existing airport facilities on their current location on the airfield
 - Better public access to the site for heritage, leisure and tourism.
 - A new permanent home for the nationally recognised Medway Aircraft Preservation Society (MAPS)
 - Creation of new parallel paved and grass runways to replace the existing 02/20 grass runway, as well as improvements to navigation aids and outdated facilities,
 - Closure of the old 16/34 grass runway, and through this releasing new land for job creation.
- 2.6 The purpose of the masterplan is to provide clear guidance on the Council's aspirations for the future of the area, setting out parameters

for the type of development that will be encouraged and supported, and providing flexibility to respond to market changes in coming years. The document identifies different land uses across the site, and 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.

Site analysis

- 2.7 The Masterplan has considered the character and access arrangements for six sub areas making up the wider site. This analysis has informed the proposed land uses and design guidance.
- 2.8 An illustrative masterplan has been drawn up showing key land use locations, following the closure of the 16/34 runway, with land designated for airport uses, wider employment and heritage. The plan considers land ownership, urban design, access and landscaping. It seeks opportunities to enhance the existing employment area, as well as providing guidance on the development of the new sites.

Design framework and guidance

- 2.9 Land Use – this identifies what land uses would be permitted within each parcel of the masterplan. This shows land for new B1/B2 employment uses and airport related activities and wider mixed use development that supports the employment function, particularly at the gateway to the site. A more prominent location for MAPS is anticipated.
- 2.10 Access – the plan sets out the main access points to the site, with access to the northern employment area from the B2097. Details of junction improvements will be considered in the Transport Assessment to accompany planning applications for the site. Provision and encouragement of non-car based transport is considered.
- 2.11 Building heights are to be determined in line with safeguarding requirements and urban design principles.
- 2.12 Urban design – the Masterplan seeks opportunities to create a new development to improve the character of the area, through a distinctive high quality employment based ‘quarter’. It considers the treatment of boundaries and landscaping, and the need for a consistent and coherent approach to building frontages, height, materials and signage to achieve this quality. Guidance is also set out on landscaping and street hierarchy, parking and servicing.

Next steps

- 2.13 Rochester Airport Limited, the operators of the airport, will be preparing a series of technical reports and detailed design proposals to submit with a planning application for works at the site.

2.14 Any planning application for the site will be considered against the guidance set out in the Rochester Airport Masterplan, as well as any other relevant material considerations.

3. Options

3.1 The masterplan has been adopted by Full Council to provide planning guidance on the development of the site. Consideration was given to not progressing the masterplan beyond the consultation draft. It was agreed that an amended version of the masterplan would be the most appropriate option, responding to issues raised during consultation, and providing a framework for development and design guidance.

4. Advice and Analysis

4.1 The masterplan sets out parameters for land uses, design guidance and access arrangements for development at Rochester Airport and land adjoining the site. The plan has been produced following a site analysis and contains advice that will be a material consideration in the determination of any future applications for development in this area.

4.2 The masterplan seeks to promote development to deliver a quality and sustainable employment area. It incorporates landscaping into the proposed designs and promotes provision for access to the site through walking, cycling and public transport.

4.3 A Diversity Impact Assessment screening has been carried out for this policy. This considered that the masterplan is a land use and design framework that promotes opportunities for improved airport operations, aviation heritage facilities, and new employment. These opportunities are open to all, and therefore differential impacts on community sectors were not viewed as significant.

5. Risk Management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Poor quality development	Development on employment site is of poor quality and does not meet expectations to create high quality jobs	Masterplan sets 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
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6. Consultation

- 6.1 The Council widely publicised the proposals for the Rochester Airport masterplan and carried out two rounds of consultation in Spring and Summer/early Autumn 2013. Full details of the consultation are available on the council's website at:
<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=20665>
<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=22335>
- 6.2 As a result of the responses received, the draft masterplan was revised, and in particular, a cap on annual aircraft movements was reduced from 50,000 to 38,000.
- 6.3 The consultation work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

7. Financial and legal implications

- 7.1 The cost of the masterplan consultancy work and the public consultation costs were met from the Rochester Airport capital scheme agreed by the Council.
- 7.2 Preparation of the masterplan, 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.
- 7.3 The council intends to adopt the Rochester Airport Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document, once it has adopted its new Local Plan. Until this time, the council has approved the Masterplan as an amendment to its policy framework. This affords the document weight as a 'material consideration' in decisions on planning applications for Rochester Airport.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 Members are requested to note the content of the Rochester Airport Masterplan.

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Background papers

Rochester Airport Masterplan – available at:
www.medway.gov.uk/rochesterairport