

CABINET

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LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: DRAFT CORE STRATEGY

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

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Summary

This report sets out details of the first draft of the Core Strategy, which will be the key part of Medway's Local Development Framework.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 The document has been prepared within existing budgets. When adopted it will become an important part of the Policy Framework. At both its 'submission' stage and subsequent adoption it will be reported to the Council. Intermediate stages are the responsibility of the Cabinet, after consideration by the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2. Background

2.1 The Council is required by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to prepare and subsequently keep under review a Local Development Framework or LDF for Medway.

2.2 The LDF will eventually comprise of a portfolio of documents, of which the most important is a Core Strategy. This has to be founded on firm evidence and set out an overall 'spatial' vision and 'strategic objectives' for the area along with appropriate policies addressing the main issues facing the area. A core strategy does not allocate land or sites, unless these are classified as 'strategic' or include detailed development management policies. These will be covered in a subsequent document.

- 2.3 An Issues and Options report was issued for public consultation in 2009 and responses to that and an increasingly extensive range of evidence studies have informed the first complete draft Core Strategy. The draft has also been informed by considerable engagement with stakeholders and short 'visioning' sessions for Members covering each of the five towns.
- 2.4 The work carried out has been reported regularly to the cross-party Local Development Framework Cabinet Advisory Group and it has also informed and been informed by the preparation of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the third Local Transport Plan.
- 2.5 This first draft Core Strategy has been prepared at what is called the 'Regulation 25 stage'. In practice this is a non-statutory stage and the Council is free to determine the process followed and set its own arrangements for public consultation and engagement. Subsequent stages must however follow procedures set out in the Development Plan Regulations.
- 2.6 Also circulated with the agenda are:
- A schedule of representations on the Issues and Options report published last year. This is in two parts. The first considers responses based on the questions in that document. The second responds to a number of lengthy letters that did not correspond to the format of the report
 - A Sustainability Appraisal of the draft Core Strategy. Such an appraisal has to be carried out at each stage and it informs policy formulation and its potential impact against a number of indicators.
- 2.7 **Please note that copies of the Core Strategy and associated documents have been circulated separately to Cabinet Members, Group Rooms and will be available at the Council's main reception and on the Council's website via <http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=115>**
- Further copies will also be available from the Cabinet Office. Please contact 01634 332509/332008 for further details.**
- 2.8 As Members are aware the Coalition Government abolished regional spatial strategies – the South East Plan in Medway's case – on 6 July 2010. Since then there have been no other significant announcements affecting the process but a Judicial Review has been lodged questioning the legality of the Secretary of State's revocation decision. The outcome of this action is uncertain.

3. Options

- 3.1 Given the uncertainties created by this situation a small number of authorities have apparently suspended work on their LDFs. Others are re-appraising targets imposed on them by their regional spatial strategy. Generally this is where their housing numbers were increased late in the process of preparing the regional spatial strategy. However it would appear that most authorities are taking a 'business as usual' approach and that is recommended for Medway.
- 3.2 Unlike most other authorities Medway has a ready supply of sites to meet the housing requirement that was set out in the South East Plan and other aspects of the plan were supportive of Medway's priorities. A notable example was the explicit support it gave to the development of Chatham as a centre of regional significance.
- 3.3 Although Medway Local Plan policies still apply, they are becoming increasingly out-dated and there are many other benefits in having an up to date planning strategy. Defending planning appeals and supporting Medway's regeneration agenda will be much easier and it gives much needed confidence to the market and our service partners in terms of investment decisions.
- 3.4 Broad 'spatial' options were considered in the Issues and Options report, referred to above and other 'alternatives' are discussed in Chapter 3 of the attached draft.

4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1 The document is arranged as follows:
 - A short introductory chapter explains the context and stage reached in the process. This has been substantially revised to explain the process in the light of revocation of the South East Plan
 - Chapter 2 sets out the issues addressed in various ways in the rest of the document. Chapter 3 discusses 'alternatives' considered but not progressed for the reasons given
 - Chapter 4 reproduces the vision underpinning the Sustainable Community Plan and then sets out a corresponding spatial vision for the LDF as a whole and a series of strategic objectives. These are then reflected in a 'key diagram'
 - Chapter 5 considers a range of 'cross-cutting' themes, each with an associated policy or policies
 - Chapters 6 – 10 then deal with housing, economic strategy and skills, energy, waste and minerals, transport and movement and the River Medway.
 - Chapter 11 breaks the area down into the five towns, the Hoo Peninsula and Isle of Grain, Lodge Hill and the Medway Valley to give a more local expression to the effects of the policies set out in earlier chapters. This chapter in particular was informed by the visioning work done with members
 - Finally Chapter 12 sets out how the Core Strategy is to be implemented, monitored and reviewed.

- 4.2 Medway's well-established regeneration agenda and its position within the Thames Gateway have created a situation whereby the spatial strategy is already well developed and understood. This also means that, other than formalising the release of land at Lodge Hill, Medway's future development requirements can be met from already identified sites and generally from within the established urban boundaries.
- 4.3 This should assist in achieving broad community support for the Core Strategy and prevent strong challenges to the strategy as set out.
- 4.4 Notwithstanding this situation the document has a number of key features:
- It positively promotes Medway's economic development aspirations
 - It encourages the development of more sustainable neighbourhoods and provides the basis for local neighbourhood plans (encouraged as part of the Localism agenda)
 - The importance of high quality design and regeneration is emphasised
 - It seeks to apply new sustainability standards and respond to the threats from climate change, including flood risk
 - It makes provision for minerals extraction and handling Medway's waste
 - It provides strong protection for our natural and heritage assets and landscape
 - It promotes the Green Grid and other access initiatives
 - It makes provision for new housing at a scale that balances local needs with our position within the Thames Gateway and which, at the same time, protects greenfield land
 - A requirement for 25% affordable housing is maintained in urban Medway but a rate of 30% is proposed in the rural areas and at Lodge Hill. This reflects the findings of a comprehensive housing market assessment
 - It provides for major new retail development in line with the Retail Needs Study, giving explicit priority to the town centres and Chatham in particular
 - It seeks to capitalise on the growth in university provision and encourage higher value economic activity
 - The approach to transport closely follows that set out in the third Local Transport Plan
 - It advocates a balanced approach to the management of the river given its sometimes competing leisure, commercial and nature conservation roles
 - It sets out the key principles that will guide the development of the new settlement at Lodge Hill; and
 - It lays out a structured monitoring framework for all policies so that progress can be accurately reported through the Annual Monitoring Report.
- 4.5 A number of companion documents are being prepared alongside the Core Strategy and these include both sustainability and diversity impact assessments. The Sustainability Appraisal is attached and the Diversity Impact Assessment will gradually evolve over the period leading up to the submission of the Core Strategy for its independent examination.

4.6 There will be further opportunities to refine or amend the Core Strategy. Subject to approval by Cabinet, it will be published for public consultation for a six week period beginning on 1 November and ending on 10 December. Responses received will then be considered and incorporated into a 'Publication Draft' version. This must be followed by a statutory six week consultation. Again responses will be considered before the Council is asked to approve a final document for submission to the Secretary of State next year.

5. Risk Management

5.1 As indicated above there is some uncertainty over the future of the development plans system but there are considered to be good reasons for progressing the Core Strategy as described. The primary risk associated with the process is as set out below.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Core Strategy is found 'unsound' following an independent examination	A finding of 'unsoundness' would require the council to repeat certain stages of the plan preparation process with associated cost and time implications	Assembly of a comprehensive 'evidence base' and close adherence to all published guidance and the relevant regulations

6. Consultation

6.1 The Core Strategy preparation process has already been the subject of one round of formal consultation and there has been substantial and ongoing engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. Two further rounds of public consultation will be required before the document is submitted for Examination. The results will be reported to Members at each stage.

7. Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee

7.1 The Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered this report on 29 September (pre-decision scrutiny).

7.2 Details of the comments and questions raised by Members at the meeting, together with the responses from officers is set out below:

- (a) Affordable housing – some Members commented that the levels remained too low;

Officers responded that the figures were based on a Strategic Housing Market Assessment and the recommendations reflected that study.

- (b) Additional jobs target by 2028 - how would the success of this be measured?

Officers agreed that a clear baseline should be included in the strategy. (A figure of 94,500 at 2008 has now been added)

- (c) New coal power station at Kingsnorth - how robust was the strategy on waste heat?

Officers confirmed that they would consider whether the reference to the re-use of waste heat could be strengthened.

- (d) Canterbury Street, Gillingham as a secondary shopping centre.

Officers advised that the Local Plan proposals showed four local centres in Canterbury Street. They had all been assessed and it was proposed that one area around Byron Road, stronger than the others and relatively distant from the town centre, should be designated as a neighbourhood centre. This served a significant residential area away from the town centre.

- (e) Strood station nearer to some parts of Rochester? How will we improve links from Strood across the river?

The importance of links across Rochester Bridge is recognised and would be taken into account when detailed proposals come forward.

- (f) Bryant Road – should this be designated as a neighbourhood centre given its proximity to the High Street?

Is doing well in comparison to other local centres but is close to the High Street. On balance it is considered that it should be designated subject to views being received as part of the public consultation on the Core Strategy.

- (g) Housing type and tenure – (paragraph 6.26) small amount of executive-style accommodation. Members considered that this required further detail, as it could be very important in the future. There was too little suitable housing for executives in Medway and by choosing to live in other areas, this also took away their money from being spent in Medway;

Officers replied that this could not be addressed in terms of specific sites through the Core Strategy but sites could be designated in the forthcoming Allocations and Development Management Policies development plan document.

- (h) Development sites in River ward totalled 6,300 new units but what of the road infrastructure to cope with this large number of extra vehicle movements?

Officers responded that the figures did include the un-developed parts of St. Mary's Island and Rochester Riverside, which already

had planning permission. Other sites in Central Chatham were close to the retail area and rail station and could be expected to have lower than average car ownership rates.

- 7.3 The committee endorsed the Local Development Framework: draft core strategy and recommended it to Cabinet for approval to go out for public consultation, together with the committee's comments set out above.

8. Director's Comments

- 8.1 The positive response to the draft Core Strategy is welcome and the various matters listed in paragraph 7.2 have either already been incorporated in the attached draft or will be reflected at subsequent stages of LDF preparation.

9. Financial and legal implications

- 9.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
- 9.2 The Council is legally required to prepare and keep under review a Local development Framework for its area. It must be compiled in 'conformity' with Government policies set out in Planning Policy Statements (PPSs and PPGs) and comply with all relevant regulations.
- 9.3 Although there have been Government announcements indicating possible changes to the development plan system no specific legislative changes have yet been put in place. Accordingly, for the present, the Core Strategy must be progressed in accordance with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and associated Regulations.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1 That the 'pre-publication' draft Core Strategy be published for public consultation purposes under Regulation 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004 as amended, subject to any necessary changes of a minor typographical nature being agreed by the Director for Regeneration, Community and Culture in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Development and Economic Growth.
- 10.2 That the Schedule of Responses to the Issues and Options report be approved for publication alongside the draft Core Strategy.
- 10.3 That the Sustainability Appraisal of the pre-publication draft Core Strategy be approved for publication.

11. Suggested Reasons for Decisions

- 11.1 To comply with the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and ensure that there is an up to date spatial planning framework for the area.

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Background papers

Issues and Options report
Evidence studies as referred to in the Pre-Publication Draft Core Strategy