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Dear Mr Egerton

**Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan Review: Draft Plan for Submission
(Regulation 19)**

I write on behalf of Medway Council in response to Maidstone Borough Council's Local Plan Review – Draft Plan for Submission (Regulation 19) consultation.

Medway Council recognises the pressures on your authority, shared across many authorities in Kent, to meet the scale of development needs identified, whilst delivering sustainable growth that protects environmental assets and does not compromise infrastructure capacity. We recognise the steps your authority has taken to positively prepare a plan seeking to meet development needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to make comments on your Local Plan documents. Please find our response as follows.

Request for 12-week Consultation Response Time

I note that the consultation runs only for a 6-week period from 29 October to 12 December 2021. Although this is the statutory minimum requirement, Medway Council considers this to be an insufficient length of time for such a complex and controversial Regulation 19 consultation. We therefore request that Maidstone Borough Council extends the consultation time frame to 12 weeks.

Lidsing Garden Community

In its representations dated 22 December 2020, to Maidstone Borough Council's Regulation 18b Preferred Approaches Consultation, Medway Council objected in the strongest terms to the proposals for housing growth at Lidsing on the border of Medway in the Capstone Valley. The proposal now forms part of Maidstone Borough Council's preferred development strategy in the Draft Plan for Submission (Regulation 19).

The proposal as outlined by policy LPRSP4(B): Lidsing Garden Community, includes - 2,000 homes; a new local retail, leisure and services centre of not less than 1,500 sq.m; 14ha of employment space; a new 3FE primary school; a contribution towards creation of a new secondary school in the Capstone Valley area in Medway; community facilities; amenity green space, sports and play space; and natural / semi-natural open space. A new connection to the M2 at Junction 4 will also need to be created. Proposals for new bus services, cycle and pedestrian links also form part of the policy.

Supporting text to policy LPRSP4(B) proposes Lidsing Garden Community will *‘operate as an urban extension to the Medway urban area..... designed to Garden Settlement standards set out in Policy LPRSP4’ (paragraph 6.72)*. Paragraph 6.79 emphasises Lidsing Garden Community will become an *‘exemplar urban extension.....that focuses on improving connectivity in south Medway’*. Paragraph 6.80 highlights *‘the creation of this new Garden Community will change the character of this area, creating a new place within Medway’*.

The Lidsing Garden Community Vision Document and Masterplan Framework (August 2021) also considers that the development will serve as an urban extension to the Medway Urban Area. It identifies the site as being remote from Maidstone (para.2, page 15), with the urban areas of Chatham and Gillingham located to the north, and the sub-urban settlements of Lordswood and Hempstead to the west and east respectively (para.3, page 15). The Vision Document states that the *‘creation of this new Garden Community will change the character of this area, creating a new place within Medway...’*

Policy LPRSP4(B) and Vision Document references to Lidsing operating as an urban extension to the Medway urban area, therefore creates the impression that the proposal forms part of Maidstone’s and Medway’s respective draft local plan development strategies. This implies Medway is being asked to facilitate meeting a significant part of Maidstone Borough Council’s housing need, and questions the extent to which this proposal provides for Maidstone’s housing market and needs.

Medway’s Local Plan Regulation 18 Development Strategy Consultation 2018 considered release of land in the wider suburban areas (including the Capstone Valley, Hempstead, and Lordswood) as being restricted due to concerns over the ability to mitigate transport and environmental impacts. The Council’s emerging Local Plan development strategy, supporting site allocations and evidence base, focusses on urban regeneration, making best use of previously developed land, directing growth to sustainable locations, strengthening the role of centres, complemented by strategic growth on the Hoo Peninsula, and delivering a vision for a waterfront learning city.

Medway Council has clearly discounted the areas bordering Maidstone, as a preferred location for meeting its development needs as part of its local plan process. Housing growth at Lidsing risks creating urban sprawl and settlement coalescence. Medway Council therefore maintains its objections to proposed housing growth at Lidsing for the above and following reasons.

AONB and Landscape Impact

The Lidsing site adjoins and lies within the setting of the Kent Downs AONB to the south. The site’s southern 20 ha parcel of land is contained within the AONB designation. Construction of a 4th arm of the M2 Junction 4 roundabout to enable site access, will also involve an incursion into the AONB. Paragraph 10.4 of the Lidsing

Technical Note on Landscape and Visual Appraisal (June 2021), describes this as *'the most challenging issue'*, in the context of AONB impacts.

In its representations to Maidstone Borough Council's Regulation 18b Preferred Approaches Consultation, Medway Council expressed serious concerns over the harmful impact Lidsing proposals will have on the Kent Downs AONB, given the importance of setting as stated in national policy, and the recently updated AONB Management Plan. Further to this, the following issues were raised:

- Local Planning Authorities have a duty as per PPG, to have regard to the purposes of designation when considering *"development proposals that are situated outside National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty boundaries, but which might have an impact on their setting or protection."*
- The 2020 Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment Update (Mid Kent Downs Landscape Character Area 1B) states that this part of the AONB has - *"a strongly rural and peaceful feel, and a sense of isolation from the settlements nearby"*. It goes on to highlight that - *"should development occur its likely to impact on views from within the AONB. Examples of sensitive setting areas on the periphery of settlements include the prominent ridgeline to the north of the M2 at Nashenden scarp, and the Capstone Valley northwest of Bredhurst"*.
- Medway's emerging Local Plan highlights that the *"Connecting countryside close to the Kent Downs AONB, in areas such as Capstone Valley, reflect features of the designated landscape"*, reinforcing the importance of the green gap formed by the area around Lidsing between the distinct settlements of Lordswood and Hempstead.
- The Medway Landscape Character Assessment 2011 assessed the area (Area 28 – Elm Court) adjacent to Lidsing proposals as being of *"high sensitivity"* to incursions. The document also highlights the need to resist new development that does not respect or is likely to harm the rural character of the area.

In response to the Regulation 19 consultation, Medway Council therefore, maintains its objection to the proposals for development within the green gap affecting the AONB. The Council also objects to the impacts that proposals would have on the functions and integrity of the green infrastructure of the wider Capstone Valley, a much-valued landscape in Medway. This is recognised as a key green infrastructure asset in the Medway Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework, which informs the draft local plan.

Areas of National and International Ecological Importance

Medway Council's representation on the 18b consultation, expressed concerns about the impact on protected sites, in close proximity to Lidsing, and the specific considerations within 6km of the Medway Estuary and Marshes SPA and Ramsar site. This is the trigger for requiring a tariff from new housing developments within this area under Birdwise - North Kent SAMMS, to help offset recreational disturbance. The Council notes that policy LPRSP4(B) includes a commitment to making a financial contribution to mitigate recreational impact on the Medway Estuary and Marshes SPA and Ramsar.

The Council also notes the Lidsing site falls within the SSSI Impact Risk Zone of the Medway Estuary and Marshes, Tower Hill to Cockham Wood, Purple Hill, Queendown Warren, and Wouldham to Detling Escarpment.

Given the relationship proposed by Maidstone's draft Local Plan for Lidsing, to serve as an urban extension to the urban area of Medway, the Council is concerned that developments in this location will add further pressure on designated areas of national and international ecological importance, above that which is being assessed within the context of Medway's own proposed development strategy.

Transport

In its Regulation 18b representations, the Council expressed significant concerns regarding the Lidsing development's potential for detrimental impacts on the transport network, the necessary mitigations, and the deliverability and viability of related projects, as well as their impact on the environment and landscape in the area, including the AONB.

Maidstone Borough Council has since the 18b consultation published additional information, including a - Stage 2 Initial Options Forecast Report (Option 1 Scenario May 2021); Mitigation and Sustainability Sensitivity Test (August 2021); Option 2 Results (September 2021); and Lidsing Transport non-technical summary (June 2021).

With regard to the Option 2 Results (September 2021) document it should be noted that:

- The M2 Junction 4 is within Medway's boundary and is proposed as the primary means of access to the motorway, by the Lidsing site.
- The developer's proposed access to Lidsing has been included in Option 2 but may be undeliverable due to Medway Council's position as landowner.
- Section 2.2 sets out updated assumptions, including developments up to 2037. It is unclear however, if they take account of Medway's emerging Local Plan and the potential cumulative impact implications on the transport network.
- Section 2.3.1 indicates that further consideration needs to be given to transport mode shift and internalisation for Lidsing. Medway Council has concerns that the proposed extension of an existing bus route is unlikely to result in significant modal shifts.

Medway Council issued a licence during the summer 2021, for Maidstone Borough Council's consultants, to use the Medway Traffic Model. It is unclear as to whether this model has been used to inform Maidstone's transport modelling work, or if this further analysis is pending.

Further clarification would also be welcomed on Maidstone Borough Council's assumptions for the total number of future trips in Medway based on its emerging Local Plan and development strategy. This should reflect the Government's assessment of Local Housing Need and Medway's objective assessment of employment land need. It should also not be constrained to the National Trip End Model (NTEM).

Medway Council continues to have major concerns with regard to the adverse transport impacts within its boundary, generated by proposed developments at Lidsing, with highlighted sustainable transport alternatives offering only limited opportunities for modal shift. The Council is also concerned that Maidstone Borough Council has not clearly demonstrated that it has taken full account of the transport impacts generated by Medway's emerging local plan.

Infrastructure

The Council notes policy LPRSP4(B) requires a bespoke infrastructure funding agreement to be spent locally and in the surrounding areas where suitable. In the early years of development, new residents will however, be reliant on existing services in surrounding areas, with for example, provision of new primary and secondary school (proposed in Medway) capacity unlikely to be delivered until late in the development cycle. In its response to the Regulation 18b consultation, the Council expressed concerns over Lidsing's impact on Medway's social infrastructure, including health, education, green space and other services.

Further to the above, new school capacity in Medway to accommodate the additional demands created by the Lidsing proposals may be undeliverable. There is a considerable lack of certainty on the delivery of key infrastructure outside of the proposed development allocation, and in another administrative area.

Medway Council questions whether it can be adequately demonstrated by Maidstone Borough Council that Lidsing represents sustainable development, without a clear picture of the full scheme costs including demolition and contingencies of the relevant highways mitigation measures that will be necessary to make the Lidsing proposal deliverable and sustainable.

There is a need to ensure that much needed social infrastructure does not miss out where highways costs run over. For example, it is noted that affordable housing, transport and open space contributions benefiting residents of Lidsing will be prioritised over education, health and community facilities such as libraries contributions, which would mitigate impacts on services used by Medway residents, as set out in Policy SP13: Infrastructure Delivery.

The Council does not consider the mitigation strategy to be adequate and to provide the certainty required with regards to necessary health infrastructure to make the site sustainable, particularly in relation to ongoing conversations with the CCG, as no costs relating to health provision have been accounted for in Maidstone's IDP. Therefore, they cannot have been accounted for acceptably within the plan's viability assessment. Medway residents already suffer as a result of one of the lowest rates of healthcare staff – just 39 FTE GPs per 100,000 patients, compared with a national average of 46 per 100,000, ranking in the bottom 6% of local authorities on this measure.^[1] There does not appear to be a firm commitment from either Maidstone Borough Council as facilitator, the promoter/landowner, or the CCG for new health provision to support the new population. In the Council's view this threatens the sustainability of the proposals and prevents them from meeting garden community principles for sustainable access to services.

Duty to Cooperate and Statements of Common Ground

Medway Council welcomes further discussions to progress Duty to Cooperate and Statement of Common Ground matters, to support our respective plan making processes. We look forward to further engagement with Maidstone Borough Council to support the preparation of our Local Plans to deliver sustainable growth in north Kent. Given our concerns on transport impacts, we would welcome joint meetings with National Highways and Kent County Council, as highways authority.

^[1] [NHS Digital, General Practice Workforce](#) June 2021

Conclusions

Medway Council has major concerns that the Lidsing Garden Community is proposed to function as an extension to the Medway urban area, creating a new place within Medway, without due regard having been paid to Medway's emerging Local Plan development strategy. Medway Council does not support this proposed spatial strategy that directs growth towards our area, in conflict with our own development strategy. Housing growth in the area risks creating urban sprawl and settlement coalescence, leading to significant impacts on the Kent Downs AONB, local environments and landscape. Additional pressures will also be placed on local communities and infrastructure in Medway, including strategic and local road networks, schools and services.

Medway Council therefore objects in the strongest terms to the proposed growth at Lidsing.

Yours faithfully

Cllr Alan Jarrett
Leader
Medway Council