

Health and Wellbeing Board

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Medway Local Plan

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Summary

This report outlines work on the new Medway Local Plan, reflecting on the consultation carried out in Summer 2024 and next steps. It highlights planning for health infrastructure as part of Medway's growth, and aspects of the plan that promote the health and wellbeing of Medway's communities.

1. Recommendation

1.1. The Health and Wellbeing Board is to note the contents of the report.

2. Budget and policy framework

2.1 The Medway Local Plan is an important component of the authority's Development Plan. The Development Plan is part of the Council's Policy Framework. Decisions on consultation stages in the preparation of the Local Plan are matters for Cabinet. The costs of preparing the Local Plan are met within the Planning Service budget. As part of the budget for 2024/25 the Planning Service budget was increased by £320,000 to cover the anticipated cost for the preparation of the Local Plan, any expenditure in excess of this would represent a pressure on the budget for 2024/25.

3. Background

3.1 The Council is preparing a new Local Plan for Medway to manage the area's growth up to 2041. The Council published a 'Regulation 18' consultation document this summer setting out draft policies, potential options for development sites, and a number of supporting evidence base reports. This gave local residents, businesses and organisations the opportunity to input to the development of the new plan. Comments received in this consultation are being considered in the further iteration of the plan's policies and decisions on proposed development areas.

3.2 The new plan has strong links to the Council's One Medway plan in promoting opportunities to strengthen health and wellbeing in our communities. The

Planning Service work closely with the Public Health service to embed these objectives in the plan. Health inequalities in Medway is one of the key issues that the plan needs to address. The consultation document this summer set out the draft vision and strategic objectives for the plan, and strategic and topic based policies. Health and Wellbeing was identified in the vision and strategic objectives, as an integral part of the plan. There was a specific policy T27 on Reducing Health Inequalities and Supporting Health and Wellbeing. The Council worked with the Town and Country Planning Association in developing this policy area, to reflect best practice in planning for health and wellbeing. Many other policy areas in the emerging plan also contribute to healthier environments and living in Medway. These include provision for open space, the design of the public realm and housing, providing for good economic opportunities locally, securing good air quality, access to healthcare and community services, safe and attractive provision for walking and cycling, and strengthening green infrastructure. Generally, there was support for the policy approaches on health and wellbeing, and some comments sought to strengthen and develop the policies, such as more recognition of the contribution of culture to this area.

- 3.3 Around 400 written comments were received on the consultation document and Council officers spoke to over 600 people at specific events organised as part of the consultation programme. Many people raised issues in relation to health. This was particularly prevalent in the community exhibitions and workshops, where local residents voiced concerns about pressures on existing services and the capacity of the health services to meet the needs of an increased population reflecting the scale of growth proposed in the plan. Frequently raised matters included the call for a new hospital and difficulties in accessing GP and wider health services. Issues of poor air quality, noise and amenity impacts associated with congestion and increased traffic were also raised.
- 3.4 The Council received detailed written comments from the NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board and NHS Property Service as part of the consultation. The comments clearly set out the strategic importance of healthcare to supporting housing growth and sustainable development and indicated that health infrastructure should be considered at the forefront of priorities for infrastructure delivery. The housing needs of key workers in health and social care were also highlighted. Reference was also made to the Medway and Swale Interim Estates Strategy and the NHS Medway Foundation Trust Estates and Facilities Strategy in coordinating the proposed growth in the Local Plan with health infrastructure delivery. It was clearly stated that the availability of NHS capital funding for estate development is severely constrained. Opportunities for greater collaboration in the Local Plan and in planning and supporting the delivery of healthcare infrastructure in the context of significant growth in Medway were identified. There is support for further and closer joint working in the preparation of the plan, and particularly the production of the key evidence base document – the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and updated policy requirements on developer contributions. A strategic planning for health services group has been set up by the Council, bringing together officers from Public Health, Planning and Regeneration with

representatives from the health sector, including the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board, the Hospital Trust, Clinical Commissioning Group and Medway Community Healthcare. This group is meeting quarterly to share information and coordinate planning for health infrastructure in the context of the new Medway Local Plan.

4. Options

- 4.1 At this stage of the plan making process, the Council is considering the responses to the Regulation 18 consultation, its further work on the evidence base supporting the plan, including the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, and assessment of sites. The current work considers amendments to the policy wording consulted upon in Summer 2024 and the selection of development sites to meet Medway's growth needs over the plan period.
- 4.2 The outcomes of this work will be presented in the next stage of the plan preparation – the publication of the Draft plan at 'Regulation 19'. This will represent the Council's preferred spatial strategy and policies to manage the delivery of sustainable development.

5. Advice and analysis

- 5.1 The Planning Service is considering all the responses submitted to the recent consultation on the emerging Local Plan. There was general support for the policies promoting health and wellbeing. Some opportunities were identified to strengthen the references to health in the vision and objectives, so ambitions for healthier communities are clearly embedded in the plan. These comments will feed into the further iteration of the content of the plan. The next stage is the publication of the Draft Local Plan for representations before submitting the plan for independent examination.
- 5.2 Planning for health services infrastructure was a frequently raised matter in the recent consultation. Local residents voiced concerns about existing pressures on health services and their capacity to meet the needs of a growing population in Medway as indicated in the proposals for significant development over the plan period. Health service providers also made strong representations to the consultation on the need for the coordination of residential and commercial development with investment in uplifts to services and facilities. There were specific requests to consider the funding from developer contributions towards health services.
- 5.3 Planning officers are liaising with health service providers to produce the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) as part of the Local Plan evidence base. The IDP will set out the current provision of services and the upgrades needed to support the planned growth in Medway to 2041. The IDP will inform the policy for developer contributions in the Local Plan, which will be the basis on which the Council will collect funding and other contributions to infrastructure upgrades on consented development. The Local Plan is subject to a Viability Assessment, to demonstrate that the proposals in the plan are deliverable. The level of developer contributions in policy needs to reflect the

findings of the Viability Assessment. It is anticipated that the level of developer contributions will not meet the full expectations of service providers, including health, education, affordable housing, open spaces, sports and community facilities. The updated Developer Contribution policy will be subject to robust review and governance processes to demonstrate transparency and priorities where appropriate. This work will be published with the Draft Local Plan next year.

5.4 The role of the Plan is to provide for sustainable development. Sustainability Appraisal is intrinsic to the plan making process. An interim Sustainability Appraisal was prepared for the Regulation 18 consultation document. This considered the potential impacts of proposed policies and growth options and sites on a matrix of economic, environmental and social objectives. This provides an evidence base to inform decision making and transparency of information for interested parties. The aim of the plan is to provide for sustainable growth, and this is reflected in the selection of potential development sites and locations, and the content of policies. However, the scale of growth needed in Medway over the plan period will involve significant change and potential impacts are noted in the SA report.

5.5 A Diversity Impact Assessment screening was prepared for the Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation, but as this report to the Health and Wellbeing Board is for information, an assessment has not been prepared.

6. Risk management

6.1 The preparation of the Local Plan is subject to a large number of risks, including the impacts of external policies and developments, and internal resourcing issues. These are considered in the table below. The additional round of Regulation 18 consultation in Summer 2024 was a key mitigation to secure a successful outcome from the Examination of the plan. It provided an opportunity for further engagement in the preparation of the plan, and more information on the direction of Medway's growth over the plan period.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Delays to plan adoption	Lack of certainty in managing Medway's growth and area open to speculative development.	Need robust and effective management of plan programme, and early identification of additional risks and seek mitigation. Publication of evidence base and details on preferred spatial strategy.	CII
Government intervention	The former Secretary of State indicated that he could further intervene in the Medway Local Plan, which could undermine local control of the	Submission of updated LDS that provides confidence in delivery. Ongoing engagement with MHCLG officers and Planning Advisory Service	CII

	appropriate strategy for Medway's growth	on assessment of LDS and monitoring progress.	
Resources - financial	Budget pressures could constrain work on the evidence base and wider input to the local plan, potentially impacting on the quality of work, and opening challenges to the plan.	Planning Service to provide clarity on projected budget needs for timely consideration by senior management and members.	CII
Insufficient resources – Planning Service	This includes the size of the Policy team, skills and experience, and competing commitments outside core Local Plan work. There is the risk of insufficient capacity to effectively carry out the necessary work.	The Policy team is now fully staffed, following a lengthy period of vacant posts. A restructuring of the Planning Service has increased resilience. The Policy team will bring in support from the wider Planning Service and other corporate and external services, and consultants to progress work on the plan.	CII
Evidence base not effective for sound plan	A dated or incomplete evidence base could lead to challenges or failure at Examination.	Refresh of evidence base and independent review that it is fit for purpose. Identify additional work needed and present timely budget proposal to senior managers and members.	CII
Defining the spatial strategy and site allocations	There are challenges to address, including mitigating environmental and infrastructure impacts, and viability.	Develop a robust approach to considering spatial development options and site assessment, clearly integrated with Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and the Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA), and informed by the evidence base, particularly on transport and viability.	CII
Resourcing effective consultation	Formal consultation at Reg 18 has time and resource implications and may raise expectations that cannot be met. Assessment of consultation responses is a significant task.	Communications plan needs to be clear on purpose and scope of consultation. Use of bespoke consultation software, review of assessment processes, and seeking external support on analysis if necessary.	BIII

Successful legal challenges to plan	This could lead to failure at Examination. Key grounds of challenge are on the SA process and Duty to Cooperate.	Further work on SA and proposed additional Regulation 18 consultation will address areas of potential legal challenge. Ongoing work on Duty to Cooperate on cross border issues, and further work with neighbouring LPAs.	CII
Successful challenges to plan at Examination on soundness grounds	This could lead to failure at Examination. The main grounds of challenge are on proposals not being appropriately evidenced.	Critical role of the evidence base to inform decisions and need to use SA process to show how preferred policies and site allocations have been selected.	CII
Uncertainty on Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) and lack of mitigation for potential impacts on Medway and strategic road network.	The LTC is showing a significant impact on Medway and the local strategic road network, but the scheme does not deliver the wider mitigations needed. A different approach to the LTC transport modelling 'under-accounted' for Medway's planned growth needs. This could result in substantially reduced capacity to accommodate development, and a reduced housing allocation in the local plan on transport constraints. The uncertainty on the LTC – outcomes, timing and impacts – has a huge impact on the Local Plan.	In the absence of certainty on the LTC, the Council is testing two options in the STA. This also needs to be recognised as a wider strategic matter with implications for LPAs across north and mid Kent.	BII
Engagement with statutory consultees, prescribed Duty to Cooperate bodies, and infrastructure providers	There are major challenges, particularly on transport infrastructure and the strategic road network, and objections from National Highways to development. The Council continues to liaise with Natural England on	In addition to early and ongoing engagement at officer level and specifying key interventions in work programmes shared with the key consultees, the scale of these matters may need to be addressed at a strategic and political level.	BIII

	potential for impacts on designated sites. Delays in statutory consultees providing advice can impact on the wider plan programme.		
Strategic infrastructure mitigations not secured	There are specific risks identified for transport, but also issues for wider services. Lack of funding/certainty on delivery could be a barrier to demonstrating sustainable development.	Focus on an effective evidence base to inform the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, and production of a Viability Assessment to support the developer contribution policy and provide a basis for securing external funding. If key infrastructure dependencies cannot be delivered, the plan may need to restrict development levels and review phasing.	BII
Cross border impacts of development proposals from neighbouring Councils	Neighbouring LPAs are considering/ proposing development on the borough boundary, which could have implications for Medway's spatial strategy. Requests for Medway to provide for unmet housing needs in neighbouring areas also have major implications.	Need to continue cross border engagement, with specific focus on Green Belt issues and cross border transport and infrastructure impacts, which would require mitigations to be delivered and funded in Medway.	All
Changes in national planning policy	Revisions to national policy could require significant changes to work on the Local Plan, which could delay progress and create further uncertainty.	Ongoing review on policy changes, including consideration of changes to the NPPF. Need to manage LDS to ensure meet deadline for submission under current plan making regime.	BIII

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely	I Catastrophic
B Likely	II Major
C Unlikely	III Moderate
D Rare	IV Minor

7. Consultation

- 7.1. The Council published the 'Regulation 18' consultation document, plus supporting materials for comments from 15 July to 8 September. The consultation was widely publicised and online materials and social media were effective in reaching a range of people. The Planning Service ran ten public exhibitions in different parts of urban and rural Medway, attracting over 600 people who were able to speak directly to officers about the plans and share their thoughts. Officers also presented the report to the Council's four Overview and Scrutiny Committees in August. There were specific engagement events with young people, developers, and representatives of voluntary sector and BAME communities.
- 7.2. Online resources were well used during the consultation, with over 20,000 visits to the Local Plan webpages. There were 11,000 views of a podcast where the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration and the Chief Planning Officer outlined the work on the Local Plan, and how people could make their comments. The Council commissioned two bespoke videos with key stakeholders in Medway who brought different perspectives on the Local Plan. The videos attracted over 50,000 views. There were weekly e-bulletins during the consultation to over 3500 subscribers, as well as over 50 social media posts by the Council on the Local Plan. Printed copies of the consultation documents and maps were available in view in all public libraries across Medway. There was a high level of awareness about the plan.
- 7.3. Around 400 written responses were submitted on the consultation. These came from a range of organisations and communities, including local residents, developers, neighbouring councils and statutory organisations, community and voluntary groups, and businesses. The Planning Service is now reviewing all the responses received to consider in further work on the policies and site allocations in the next stage of the plan. As reported above, many comments were made, especially by residents, about health care services in Medway and healthy environments, such as addressing areas of poor air quality.
- 7.4. All the written responses will be published, and the Planning Service will set out how the issues and suggestions raised have been considered in preparing the next stage of the plan.

8. Climate change implications

- 8.1. The purpose of the Local Plan is to secure sustainable development across Medway. The Council must ensure that the Plan makes effective provision to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. This is a requirement of national planning policy. It is recognised that significant growth in Medway up to 2041 will have implications for the natural environment and the Local Plan will need to set out an effective strategy and policy framework to address the climate emergency. The Local Plan has an important role in contributing to the Council's aims for a net zero carbon Medway by 2050.

- 8.2. The need to address climate change is intrinsic to the plan. The commitment to provide for sustainable growth that adapts to and mitigates the impacts of climate change are stated in the vision and strategic objectives of the plan. There is a strategic Planning for Climate Change policy that will apply to all development. Many wider policies also reflect the aspirations to reduce carbon emissions and provide mitigations and adaptations. These include policies for transport, green infrastructure, water management, and design. The consultation document published in July 2024 was accompanied by an interim SA, and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). The interim SA report considered the potential impacts of proposed policies and site allocations and growth options on a range of economic, social and environmental measures. The report detailed the potential impacts of each proposed policy, growth option and site against the SA framework. The SA framework includes objectives for:
- climate change mitigation (minimise Medway's contribution to climate change);
 - climate change adaptation (plan for the anticipated impacts of climate change);
 - pollution and waste;
 - natural resources; and
 - transport and accessibility (improving the choice of sustainable transport and reducing the need to travel).

9. Financial implications

- 9.1 The costs of preparing the Local Plan are met within the Planning Service budget. As part of the budget for 2024/25 the Planning Service budget was increased by £320,000 to cover the anticipated cost for the preparation of the Local Plan, any expenditure in excess of this would represent a pressure on the budget for 2024/25.

10. Legal implications

- 10.1 The Local Plan forms part of the Council's policy framework and must be prepared in accordance with statutory processes. These include conformity with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).

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Appendices

None.

Background papers

Medway Local Plan Regulation 18 Consultation Document, July 2024 -
<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=74811>