

REGENERATION COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 OCTOBER 2011

LODGE HILL DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

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Summary

This report seeks to inform the committee about the proposals for a Development Brief for the Ministry of Defence (MOD) site at Lodge Hill. Cabinet approved the draft Development Brief for public consultation on 2 August 2011 and this is currently underway. The report provides an update on the consultation results to date.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 The Lodge Hill Development Brief expands on Policy CS33 of the draft Core Strategy. The Local Development Framework (including the Core Strategy) forms part of the Council's policy framework. Once the Core Strategy is adopted the Development Brief will therefore be in conformity with it. In the interim it cannot be adopted as an SPD but can be approved as a material consideration pending formal adoption once the Core Strategy is in place.

1.2 The costs of producing the Development Brief and the public consultation can be met from the Planning Policy and Design budget and are being recharged to the prospective developer of the site under an existing agreement.

2. Background

2.1 Policy CS33 of the Draft Core Strategy makes a strategic allocation of an area of land at Lodge Hill. This land is allocated for a new settlement to include:

- Around 5,000 dwellings
- At least 43,000m² employment floorspace
- At least 5,000m² retail floorspace
- Supporting infrastructure, community facilities and open space.

- 2.2 This is a strategically important site for regeneration and growth in Medway. It will meet a significant portion of the area's housing need, including family housing, and has significant potential for higher-value employment uses that will contribute to meeting the aims of the Council's Economic Development Strategy. It can also create a step-change in the delivery of sustainable development in Medway and the wider Kent Thames Gateway.
- 2.3 Because of the importance of this site it is necessary to provide a more detailed planning policy framework than is possible in the Core Strategy. This draft Development Brief expands on Policy CS33 to provide further detail on the strategic principles set out in that document. It sets out the Council's expectations for the development and also addresses the relationship of Lodge Hill with the surrounding rural areas and smaller villages.
- 2.4 Once adopted, the Development Brief will become a material consideration in the determination of any planning applications for the Lodge Hill site. The development of Lodge Hill is expected to take at least 15 years and the Development Brief will provide a consistent guide and framework for developers over this time period.
- 2.5 The draft Development Brief and its appendices have been circulated separately to Cabinet Members, Group Rooms and Ward Members (Strood Rural and Peninsula). It can be accessed online via www.medway.gov.uk/ldf. Alternatively, additional hard copies are available upon request from Democratic Services (telephone: 01634 332509/332008 or email: democratic.services@medway.gov.uk).

3. Options

- 3.1 The draft Development Brief is currently out to public consultation. However, the Council could choose not to proceed with the adoption of a final version. This is not recommended as it would significantly reduce the amount of guidance and control that the Council can exercise in relation to this strategic site, could undermine confidence from developers, investors and the local community, and would weaken the Council's position in the event of an early planning application.

4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1 Lodge Hill is a complex site and there are a number of issues that have to be resolved to enable it to be developed successfully. The draft Development Brief brings all of those issues together in one place. It has been produced with the input of the prospective developers of Lodge Hill and the assistance of a considerable evidence base produced in support of the Publication Draft Core Strategy.
- 4.2 Statutory agencies, particularly Natural England, have also provided advice on the relevant parts of the draft Development Brief. It is therefore considered that it represents a comprehensive document that will assist in the delivery of a high-quality development that meets the Council's and local community's aspirations.

- 4.3 The draft Development Brief takes the vision of Lodge Hill from the parent policy, CS33, in the Publication Draft Core Strategy and expands on this. In particular, the aim for the development to be an exemplar of sustainability is fully considered in the Brief and standards are set that define what this should mean on the ground.
- 4.4 The input of the community is essential to ensure that the Development Brief is able to achieve its objectives. A full programme of consultation is therefore in progress to enable community input to influence the final form of the Development Brief. This is running from 30 August to 14 October 2011. It involves:
- Public exhibitions at the nearby villages of High Halstow, Chattenden, Cliffe Woods, Hoo St Werburgh and Wainscott;
 - A Facebook page for the development where people can leave comments and keep up-to-date with progress on the consultation and development generally;
 - Webchats every Thursday via Facebook;
 - Visits to existing local groups (such as the youth group at Chattenden) to seek views from those who can be hard to reach through traditional methods;
 - Presentation at Rural Liaison Committee; and
 - A focus group of interested local people.
- 4.5 At the time of writing this report, limited feedback has been received. The first three exhibitions (an afternoon and evening session at each of High Halstow, Chattenden and Cliffe Woods) have had a very low turnout, but useful feedback has been received from those members of the community that attended. Thus far this has mainly been in the form of conversations with the officers at the exhibition rather than formal written responses.
- 4.6 There has been a mixture of views received so far. Those attending the Chattenden exhibitions were generally in favour of the development, while those at High Halstow were more negative, and at Cliffe Woods there was no consensus view. Transport issues continue to be the main concern of many of those attending, together with concern that sufficient social infrastructure to support the development should be made available in good time. Potential impact on the protected woodlands has also been raised by a number of attendees.
- 4.7 Procedurally, the draft Development Brief cannot become a full Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) at this stage because there is no adopted parent policy for it to hang from. However, an adopted document that has been through the same full consultation and assessment procedures as an SPD would still be given weight in determining planning applications. When the Core Strategy has been adopted, it is the intention to upgrade the Development Brief to a full SPD status.
- 4.8 The developer is keen to progress to an outline planning application for the whole site. Adopting the Development Brief will provide the Council with an up-to-date policy framework against which such an application can be assessed, ahead of the timescale for adoption of the Core Strategy.

5. Risk management

- 5.1 There are considered to be limited risks associated with this work. The main risks are associated with failure to proceed or with legislative change. These are considered below:

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Failure to proceed	Failure to proceed with the Development Brief would lead to a lack of control over future development and could lead to a loss of community confidence.	Strong support from Members and officers will enable ongoing community involvement and create certainty for future developers
Legislative and/or national policy changes	Resulting in revisions to the process or new legal requirements	Careful monitoring of national policy and its implications for Medway. Ensure that evidence base and policies are robust so they can be adapted to alternative procedures if necessary.

6. Financial and legal implications

- 6.1 Because the Development Brief cannot become a full SPD at this stage, it will have slightly less weight in the planning system. However, its approval by Cabinet will enable it to be a significant 'material consideration'. Government guidance in PPS12 stresses the importance of full public engagement in the production of planning policy and by applying the same principles to this document its status can be maximised.
- 6.2 The prospective developer is meeting all costs associated with the production of the Development Brief.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 That the Committee consider the report and forward any observations it may wish to make to the Cabinet on the draft Lodge Hill Development Brief, having regard to the consultation responses received.

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Background papers

Publication Draft Core Strategy (see separate item on this agenda)

Statement of Community Involvement (available at <http://www.medway.gov.uk/environmentandplanning/developmentplan/localdevelopmentframework/sci.aspx>)

Core Strategy and Lodge Hill evidence base: this is extensive and is available at <http://www.medway.gov.uk/environmentandplanning/developmentplan/localdevelopmentframework/ldfevidencebase.aspx>)