



Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan Review

Frequently Asked Questions – October 2020

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This briefing note for residents and businesses sets out the latest position regarding the Maidstone Borough Local Plan Review, including the ‘Call for Sites’ launched by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) in March 2019.

What was the Call for Sites?

The Call for Sites was an early step in the review of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan where landowners could put forward sites for possible future development for a range of uses (including housing and employment). Background information can be found here: localplan.maidstone.gov.uk/home/local-plan-review/call-for-sites.

How did the parish council respond?

Initial details were published by MBC in November 2019 and the parish council immediately started looking carefully at each site to assess to the potential implications.

Although MBC was not consulting the public at that stage, the parish council was fully aware of the need to make the planners in Maidstone aware of local views about the suitability (or otherwise) of each site, based on evidence and planning policy considerations.

This was done for the three largest housing proposals in January 2020 and for the remaining proposals for housing and other land uses in March/April 2020. The parish council’s responses were published its website along with numerous responses from residents (see links under ‘Local Plan/Call for Sites’ on the www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk home page).

2000 houses?

Understandably, the most controversial site was 309 (then referred to by MBC as ‘Strategic expansion of Marden’) with about 2000 houses being proposed by the developer.

This prompted formation of the Marden Planning Opposition Group (MPOG) which continues to be very active in lobbying MBC, the parish council and other local representatives. MPOG has its own website here: www.savemarden.com.

The parish council’s initial response to MBC about site 309 was summarised as follows:

This site is being promoted as a new ‘garden community’ but its nature and location fails to meet the requirements in MBC’s prospectus for “urban extensions” or “new settlements”. It is demonstrably neither an extension to the urban area (which in the local plan means the town of Maidstone) or a new settlement separate from an existing village.

Instead, it would rapidly become a ‘cuckoo’s nest’ development, overpowering and fundamentally altering the character of Marden in a way wholly incompatible with the ‘Garden City’ principles it purports to adopt and being the complete opposite of the clear intention of the Marden Neighbourhood Plan...

The site is of a size and location that would not allow for suitable mitigation schemes to be physically or financially implemented which would adequately mitigate the impacts... The site is therefore neither sustainable development nor deliverable within the timescale of the revised Maidstone Local Plan and should not therefore be included.

This, together with the supporting information, aligned with the views expressed publicly by MPOG and the vast majority of individuals who had spoken at parish council meetings or made written submissions.

What happened next?

MBC then conducted an extended review of the potential suitability of each proposal, with detailed information only being made public a few days before the meeting of its Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee held on 22 September 2020.

This was not a decision-making meeting, so Maidstone councillors noted the report from MBC’s Head of Planning & Development and the 18 supporting documents.

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However, the two reports on ‘Maidstone Garden Communities’ prepared by MBC’s consultants included news for Marden, both good and bad.

The first concluded that sites 226 (‘North of Staplehurst’) and 318 (‘Pagehurst Farm’), both partly in the parish, were unsuitable for housing development. This matched the parish council’s own conclusions.

Unfortunately, the second states that three sites across the borough – including 309 (now referred to by MBC as ‘North of Marden’) – “have the potential to be deliverable Garden Community projects” and this conclusion is fundamentally at odds with the conclusions reached by the parish council, MPOG and many individuals.

NOTE – This doesn’t mean that site 309 has been selected by MBC as a ‘garden community, but it does mean that it is on a shortlist until it finalises its ‘preferred approach’ to meeting the government’s housing targets.

The MBC reports also rate two other sites in Marden as potentially suitable for housing development: 295 (‘Land north of Copper Lane’ – 74 units) and 314 (‘Land east of Albion Road (rear of the Howlands)’ – 39 units). This does not match the conclusions reached by the parish council and members of the public.

What is happening now?

The parish council immediately started work to review the additional details put into the public domain by MBC in September 2020 with a view to strengthen its previous responses about the ‘garden community’ site 309 and smaller housing sites 295 and 314 since the recommendations in each case went against the evidence and policy issues identified by the parish council (and others).

This work is ongoing, but so far, no new information has been seen that might suggest that any of these sites has suddenly become ‘suitable’ for housing development. Indeed, quite the opposite.

The next important meeting of MBC’s Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee is due to be held on the 9th November when its draft ‘Preferred Approaches’ document is due to be agreed for public consultation in December 2020 as part of the Local Plan Review.

The parish council will be making a full written response to MBC before this meeting and will ask to speak to the committee on behalf of our community which has made its views very clear.

What about other types of development?

Site 289 ‘Land at Underlyn Lane’ has been rated by MBC as being potentially suitable for commercial development so parish councillors are currently taking a second look at this because it could offer some important local employment opportunities.

Some myths...

The parish council is aware that various fabricated, misleading and inflammatory claims are in circulation on social media and people are urged to treat these with the utmost caution and avoid spreading bogus ‘news’.

... and what the parish council is actually doing

While it is tempting to respond to such ‘noise’, parish councillors will instead continue to devote their efforts to working in the best interests of residents and business in Marden and to vigorously oppose any proposals for future development that would damage our village and wider parish that is valued by so many.