



Maidstone Borough Council's 'Call for Sites'

Frequently Asked Questions – November 2019

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Following questions raised at the parish council's Open Days held on 15 and 16 November 2019, this briefing note for residents and businesses sets out the latest position regarding the 'Call for Sites' launched by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) in March 2019.

What is the Call for Sites?

The Call for Sites was an early step in the review of MBC's Local Plan, with a closing date of 24 May 2019. This process is widely used by local planning authorities to establish what land might be available in their area for various different uses. In MBC's case, land potentially suitable for six uses was requested:

- Housing, including specialist housing such as housing for the elderly
- Employment including offices, research and development, industrial, storage and distribution
- Retail
- Leisure including hotels, gyms and cinemas
- Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Show-people
- Nursing and care homes

The results of this exercise were published by MBC on 4 November 2019, and these are available here: www.maidstone.gov.uk/home/primary-services/planning-and-building/primary-areas/local-planreview/call-for-sites.

What happens now?

MBC is now reviewing the suitability of each proposal, and it has been reported in the local press that land for about 60,000 houses has been put forward by landowners.

A great deal of public concern about the implications of the Call for Sites has been expressed in communities across the borough, including Marden, but it is important to note that MBC is looking for 10,500 additional plots so less than 20% of the land suggested for housing use will actually be required. The results of MBC's review are currently expected to be put out to public consultation in February 2020.

What is the parish council doing in the meantime?

Although the public consultation will take place early next year, the parish council has the opportunity to submit its initial comments to MBC beforehand.

The verbal and questionnaire feedback from the recent open days will be helpful to the parish council, and its response will be agreed at an extraordinary full council meeting to be held in the Marden Memorial Hall at 19:30 on Tuesday the 3rd of December 2019.

This meeting will be open to the public and residents will be able to speak before any recommendations are agreed by the parish council for submission to MBC.

What kind of comments can the parish council make?

MBC will be looking for comments referencing 'material planning considerations', based on planning policy and evidence. In particular, any comments need to relate to the following:

- The 'Information Pack' documents made available to landowners (including its 'New Garden Communities Prospectus'), available using the web link above
- The Maidstone Borough Local Plan adopted in October 2017: services.maidstone.gov.uk/docs/October%202017%20Adopted%20Local%20Plan.pdf
- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF): www.gov.uk/government/publications/nationalplanning-policy-framework--2
- Evidence about the suitability (or otherwise) about the individual sites put forward in the Call for Sites

If adopted following the forthcoming referendum (see below), the Marden Neighbourhood Plan would also become local planning policy.

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Can the parish council just say “no more houses, Marden has had enough”?

Comments based on opinion, rather than planning policy or evidence, are almost certain to be disregarded by MBC because of the risk of legal challenges from unsuccessful landowners if used for decision making.

However, comments can be made about each site based on material planning considerations (see above). Therefore, in order for MBC to take the parish council's comments seriously, this means that they need to be phrased along the following lines:

- Site 'X' is potentially suitable / unsuitable for use [*as proposed in the Call for Sites*] for the planning policy reason(s) 'Y' and/or because of the evidence 'Z'

Other parish councils will no doubt be doing the same, so the better the case made by Marden, the more notice MBC will take of our comments.

Can MBC choose to allocate land for less than 10,500 extra houses?

Very unlikely, because the figure of 10,500 extra houses is based on a change in the government formula previously used to allocate land for about 17,500 houses in the adopted Maidstone Borough Local Plan. This means that a revised total of around 28,000 needs to be built over the plan period ending in 2031.

What about the proposal for 5,000 new homes at Lenham Heath?

It has been reported in the local press that MBC is promoting a new 'garden village' of some 5,000 houses in the Lenham Heath area. If that scheme proceeds, this means that a reduced total of about 5,500 houses would be required elsewhere in the borough.

What is the status of the Marden Neighbourhood Plan?

An update about the Marden Neighbourhood Plan was given in the 'Frequently Asked Questions – May 2019', available at: www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk/community/marden-parish-council-13394/mpcs-faqs/. Since then, MBC has confirmed that the draft neighbourhood plan complies with all the relevant statutory requirements and was found 'sound' by an independent inspector (subject to a few minor modifications).

The next step is for MBC to arrange a local referendum, and a date is due to be announced shortly.

All residents are encouraged to support the finalised Marden Neighbourhood Plan at the referendum as that is the most powerful way to get the Marden voice heard when MBC takes planning decisions.

All the key documents are available at: www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk/community/marden-parish-council-13394/draft-np-documents/.

Does the Marden Neighbourhood Plan allocate any land for future housing development?

No, because it was written in the context of the recent housing developments that MBC had already allocated in the existing Maidstone Borough Local Plan.

However, the Marden Neighbourhood Plan needs to foresee the Local Plan review started by MBC (of which the Call for Sites is a part).

One of the issues considered by the independent inspector was possible future development of land north of the railway, and his report contains the following statement:

I have taken account of the many representations expressing concern at some of the possible future issues that are identified, notably any potential future allocations of land for housing to the north of the railway line. However, in due course, any review of the Plan which might lead to such allocations will involve further public consultation, at which time appropriate representations can be made and considered.

This means that the Marden Neighbourhood Plan does not pre-judge any response to the Call for Sites. A vote for the neighbourhood plan in the referendum DOES NOT mean accepting development north of the railway (or anywhere else). Instead, it means a greater level of parish influence IN THE EVENT that any new development proposals come forward (whether through the Call for Sites or otherwise). Please support it.