

LOCAL PLAN REVIEW

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

SCOPING THEMES & ISSUES
JULY 2019



LOCAL PLAN SUMMARY

This document provides a bitesize introduction to the Local Plan Review. If you want more detail, please refer to the 'Scoping, Themes & Issues' technical document which provides more background on the key issues and the detailed consultation questions.

Maidstone Borough Council's (MBC's) work impacts on the lives of people living and working in the borough. From collecting waste from homes and businesses and keeping our public spaces clean and tidy to finding safe places to live for those in greatest need, our activities are diverse.

Our work is reflected in MBC's brand-new Strategic Plan which highlights our responsibility to make every effort to deliver "our services and produce cohesive plans for" – economic, environmental, social and cultural prosperity. We have stewardship for our future and it is important that we get it right."

We are also a 'local planning authority.' This means the council makes the decisions on planning applications and is responsible for preparing a 'Local Plan' for the borough.

What is a Local Plan and what does it do?

A Local Plan guides the way new development will happen, including on planning applications. It explains what supporting infrastructure such as roads, schools and health centres will be needed, and it also guides the quality of development and helps the council take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change. Like the Strategic Plan, the Local Plan looks to the future. The Local Plan also helps to protect and enhance what is most valued in the borough – landscapes, historic buildings, wildlife habitats.

There is already a Local Plan in place: the Maidstone Borough Local Plan was 'adopted' (finished) in October 2017 and it looks ahead up to 2031.

What is the Maidstone Local Plan Review?

Whilst it might seem early to start a review of the adopted Local Plan, there are some key reasons why it needs to be done:

1. The new Strategic Plan sets the aspiration for the borough through to 2045 and the Local Plan Review will have an important role in achieving it.
2. The independent Planning Inspector who examined Maidstone's adopted Local Plan decided that an early review of the plan would be needed
3. The Government requirements for Local Plans have been updated, including requiring plans to be reviewed every five years.

What are some other considerations for the Local Plan Review?

The Local Plan Review will look ahead, as a minimum to 2037 and may look even further ahead. We will also need to work effectively with neighbouring councils and KCC on key, 'strategic' matters. Neighbourhood planning is very active in Maidstone and we will take into account the policies of 'made' neighbourhood plans.

What is the purpose of this stage?

This document is the first stage of public consultation on the Local Plan Review; its purpose is to set out – and get views on – the key issues that the Local Plan Review will need to address.



How you can respond to this consultation

We are seeking your views. Questions have been included throughout the technical document or there is a separate response form with all the questions. You do not need to answer all the consultation questions, just focus on the ones of most interest to you.

We are particularly interested in your views on how we can best embrace growth so we have also produced a series of overarching questions. These are set out below:

- Q** **QQ1** – What can the Local Plan Review do to make the growth we need ‘good growth’?
- Q** **QQ2** – What could the Local Plan Review do to help make our town and village centres fit for the future?
- Q** **QQ3** – How can the Local Plan Review ensure community facilities and services are brought forward in the right place and at the right time to support communities?
- Q** **QQ4** – What overall benefits would you want to see as a result of growth?
- Q** **QQ5** - What infrastructure and services, including community services and facilities, do you think are the most important for a successful new development?
- Q** **QQ6** – How can the Local Plan Review help support a thriving local economy, including the rural economy?
- Q** **QQ7** – How can the Local Plan Review ensure we have an environmentally attractive and sustainable borough that takes a pro-active approach to climate change?
- Q** **QQ8** – Are there any other themes, issues and considerations that you believe we should address as part of this Local Plan Review?

Please submit your responses online here [\[https://maidstone-consult.objective.co.uk/portal/\]](https://maidstone-consult.objective.co.uk/portal/) or use the dedicated response form available on our website.

The deadline for your response is **5pm on Monday 30th September 2019**.



Next steps:

The Local Plan Review is at an early stage and subsequent stages will become more detailed. Options and choices will narrow down and become more specific; the next consultation stage will be on a 'preferred approaches' style document.

Maidstone Strategic Plan:

MBC deliberately prepared its Strategic Plan before starting the Local Plan Review and the Local Plan Review will have an important role in delivering it. As the Strategic Plan states: "the choices we make today will impact on the state of our environment and the quality of life enjoyed by our residents decades from now."

The Strategic Plan has a number of priorities which emphasise MBC's role in directing and delivering positive growth with its partners.

Each of the priorities in the Strategic Plan has a specific reference colour and this same colour coding has been used in this document and in the technical document to show how the Strategic Plan and the Local Plan Review inter-relate.



A STRATEGY FOR GROWTH

Housing Growth

The Strategic Plan is clear that embracing growth includes ensuring that housing needs are met. So, how many homes must we plan for? The Government requires us to have **1,236 homes** built in the borough each year. This working figure may change and will apply from 2022 onwards.

Because we have an adopted Local Plan, we will only need to 'top up' our housing supply from 883 dwellings/year to approximately 1,236 dwellings/year for the period between 2022 to 2031. However, we will need achieve the full 1,236 figure from 2031 onwards and we will need to identify sufficient new sites and locations to achieve this. We will need to consider various locations and types of sites in the borough.

Economic Growth

It is vital that we provide jobs for our current and future residents as well as homes. Maidstone has a strong economy which can capitalise on its location in the heart of Kent. The Local Plan can do much to support the health of the economy and in particular provide for new premises and sites that businesses need. As with housing growth, the adopted Local Plan provides a firm foundation for meeting our future employment needs for the period up to 2031. To ensure the local economy grows successfully, we will develop a greater understanding of different areas of the economy and also consider the different types of employment locations.

We will also consider the connections between employment and housing sites. We are clear that sufficient infrastructure should be in place - or planned - to meet the future demands of the economy.

Retail & Leisure Growth

The Local Plan Review is an opportunity to embrace retail and leisure growth. The country's retail market is in a highly dynamic phase and we will undertake work to understand the implications of these changes locally.

We will also investigate which future sites can help the town centre's retail and leisure offer. As with employment and housing, the adopted Local Plan provides a firm footing.



Locating Growth - Initial Options

A key issue for the Local Plan Review is deciding where new development will be located. There are a number of things to consider, including making sure infrastructure is planned to match the growth and compliance with Government requirements.

As part of our pro-active approach to embracing growth, we have identified some initial options. These options are presented in no order of importance and each option on its own may not be sufficient to meet the full housing need.

- A. Maidstone focus:** The ways which this could be achieved include building at higher densities in the town, renewing existing housing areas, reusing commercial and other brownfield sites in the town and allocating greenfield sites at the edge of Maidstone.
- B. Dispersal:** This approach would spread growth and its benefits into key locations across the borough (Bi could also further disperse to a fourth tier of villages). It is worth noting that the adopted Local Plan's approach has seen the majority of growth directed towards Maidstone (67%) with a lesser amount (24%) to the borough's main villages and the balance (8%) on sites in the countryside.
- C. New settlements and major extensions to existing settlements ('garden suburbs'):** Maidstone is committed to embracing all forms of future growth. This option would place emphasis on new settlements and major extensions to achieve the right types of growth for the borough.

Quality of New Development

The quality of future development is crucial to us. We will seek to take a lead role in the master-planning of, and investment in future growth. Quality in this respect can be judged in various ways, including:

- a neighbourhood's character and heritage;
- the creation of a mixture of communities;
- the provision of a mixture of facilities and infrastructure including transport;
- the protection and enhancement of significant biodiversity and landscape assets;
- taking a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change



OTHER KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES

We have identified fifteen other key issues for the Local Plan Review:

ISSUE 1 - Meeting the borough's local housing need and helping to meet needs across the relevant Housing Market Area/s

ISSUE 2 - Ensuring a sufficient supply of affordable housing

Affordable housing is provided at a reduced cost to help those who cannot afford to buy or rent a property at market rates. On average, house prices in the borough are more than 11 times the annual income of the borough's workers.

As well as affordable housing, we will also gather evidence and plan for homes needed by specific groups including housing for the elderly, custom and self-build housing and travellers' accommodation.

ISSUE 3 - Ensuring sufficient land and floorspace is provided to support economic growth in the borough and to contribute to the needs for the wider economic market area

Home to more than 7,295 businesses, Maidstone borough is asserting itself as the powerhouse for growth and innovation – the heart of Kent. We recognise that changes in employment bring changes to the type of workplace required, the location and amount of floorspace needed, and supporting infrastructure.

The MBC Strategic Plan takes a positive approach to ensuring key employment sites are delivered with the council intervening where necessary in the market. Ensuring that the borough's established business parks, estates and sites is suitably protected will also be a crucial consideration for the Local Plan Review.

ISSUE 4 - Ensuring that Maidstone has a vital and vibrant town centre which maintains its role in the sub-region and that a network of local centres continue to serve local retail and service needs.

The Strategic Plan includes an outcome that 'our town and village centres are fit for the future.' Given the changes in retailing, Maidstone Town Centre is likely to need to become home to a greater diversity of uses – shopping, leisure, food and drink, cultural and community uses, workplaces and homes.

We are actively involved in managing the Town Centre and improving its environment, working with partners to enhance its offer.

The Local Plan Review will also consider the borough's comprehensive network of district and local centres which complement the County Town and have an important future role in serving the day-to-day needs.

INFRASTRUCTURE – AN INTRODUCTION

MBC's Strategic Plan makes it clear that as part of embracing growth we will enable infrastructure matching the demands of growth. Most infrastructure is not the direct responsibility of the Council and we will work proactively with partners to bring forward the new infrastructure which is needed. We will also make clear our expectations of developers.

ISSUE 5 – Ensuring sufficient transport infrastructure is provided to serve the new development that is planned

We recognise that better transport is a high priority in the borough. The proactive stance which the Council intends to take is supported by Government guidance which underlines that development should be planned in a way which limits people's overall need to travel and gives people a genuine choice of transport.

Our partners include Highways England, KCC and bus and rail operators. Transport improvements could include finding engineering solutions to improve 'pinch point' junctions; facilitating and promoting walking and cycling; smart city' technology; and the use of public transport. These and other measures could also help to reduce the significant carbon emissions from petrol and diesel engines which contribute to climate change.

We are also working positively with KCC as it explores the potential for a Leeds-Langley Relief Road.

ISSUE 6 – Ensuring sufficient utilities infrastructure is provided to serve the new development that is planned

Utility providers - water, electricity, gas and telecommunications companies - play a key role in helping support growth and MBC's Strategic Plan also seeks to ensure that all services, including broadband, are in place at the right time to support communities.

As part of the Local Plan Review, we will continue to collaborate with these providers to confirm what improvements will be needed.

ISSUE 7 – Ensuring sufficient provision is made for health and education

The Local Plan Review will play an important role in terms of good health. This may include helping people make active travel choices such as walking and cycling (which can also contribute to climate change and air quality objectives) as well as new health services. We work with health service providers such as the West Kent Clinical Commissioning Group to get infrastructure planned, funded and delivered.

KCC is responsible for ensuring that every child in the borough has a school place at primary and secondary level. We continue to work with KCC to ensure that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet future growth. There could also be a wider aspiration to expand further and higher education provision in the borough.

Again, KCC is responsible for the provision of public libraries. Throughout the Local Plan Review process, MBC will engage with KCC to ensure that access to library services is well-integrated into planned development.

ISSUE 8 - Managing the risk of flooding from all sources.

Flooding and flood risk are key issues for new development in parts of our borough. The Environment Agency will be updating their flood modelling later in 2019 which will take account of future climate change. Working with the agency, we will use the information to locate future growth, taking account of the vulnerability of the proposed use and the flood risk.

ISSUE 9 – Ensuring that the borough's environmental assets such as the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Landscapes of Local Value, the countryside and Green Belt are suitably protected and enhanced

A key issue for the Local Plan Review will be how best to embrace growth in a way which respects and enhances the borough's important landscapes and countryside. Protecting and enhancing key national designations such as the Metropolitan Green Belt and the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be crucial. Landscapes of Local Value is a local landscape designation that will require special consideration when new development is planned.

The Plan will also recognise that some forms of development will support the rural economy, including tourism, leisure and culture.

ISSUE 10 – Ensuring that the borough's historic assets are conserved and enhanced

Maidstone borough benefits from a rich heritage, much of which has been formally recognised by listing or

scheduling and through the designation of conservation areas.

The Local Plan Review will set a positive strategy for the conservation, enjoyment and enhancement of the historic environment, recognising that heritage is irreplaceable.

ISSUE 11 – Ensuring that the borough’s biodiversity and wildlife habitats are suitably protected and enhanced

The Local Plan Review can play a key role in helping ecology, including through climate change adaptation and mitigation. This could be by creating new open spaces and/or improving the quality of existing areas. It will also seek to respect and enhance the various important nature conservation designations in the borough including the North Downs Woodland Special Area of Conservation, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Nature Reserves and designated ancient woodland.

ISSUE 12 – Contributing to an overall improvement in air quality, in particular in the Maidstone Air Quality Management Area.

New development does not have to be inherently negative for air quality, including for the Maidstone Air Quality Management Area. MBC is taking a proactive approach to dealing with air quality. We have already put planning guidance in place, so developers know how to measure and mitigate the air quality impacts of their developments.

As part of the work for the Local Plan Review, we will commission specialist modelling which will predict the air quality effects of future growth. Actions we could institute include measures to encourage a reduction private car use and design measures in new development such as landscaping.

ISSUE 13 – Taking a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change

There is scientific consensus that our climate is changing due to the sustained emission of greenhouse gases and transport is now the largest emitter of carbon in the UK.

The council has recognised the global climate and biodiversity emergencies and is seeking to address these threats locally. The Local Plan Review can help by taking a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change. This could include requiring electric vehicle charging points to be incorporated into new development, increasing walking, cycling, shared vehicle use and improving public transport. Renewable energy generation schemes such as solar farms may also play a part.

ISSUE 14 – Ensuring a sufficiency of parks and open spaces

MBC’s Strategic Plan seeks to ensure that everyone has access to high quality parks and green spaces and the Local Plan Review can help, including through the recently completed Sports Facilities Strategy and a Playing Pitch Strategy. These strategies assess the current supply and future demand for sports facilities in the borough.

The Local Plan Review can also influence the way we calculate future open space that is required with new housing developments. We could investigate whether the current approach is the most effective.

ISSUE 15 – Ensuring that sufficient provision is made for community infrastructure

The borough’s community centres, churches and village halls play an important role as venues for community events and activities. Embracing growth is a way we can help maintain and improve these meeting places to sustain a sense of community within a neighbourhood, village or parish. Conversely the unnecessary loss of such facilities should be avoided.

Well planned places can help bring about more informal social contact. They can help to make places feel safer as the presence of other people both deters crime and suppresses the fear of crime.