



Marden Neighbourhood Plan

Frequently Asked Questions – May 2019

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Following various questions raised at recent parish council meetings, this briefing note for residents and businesses sets out the latest position regarding the Marden Neighbourhood Plan.

What is the Marden Neighbourhood Plan?

A neighbourhood plan is a planning policy document that can be used by communities to supplement the government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for England and the development plan produced at district / borough level (in our case, the Maidstone Borough Local Plan produced by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) in 2017).

In rural areas, neighbourhood plans are usually produced at parish level and this is the case for the Marden Neighbourhood Plan.

Who is responsible for producing the Marden Neighbourhood Plan?

Neighbourhood plans can be produced by parish and town councils, existing local organisations such as amenity / business groups or new groups formed for this specific purpose.

In Marden's case, a number of interested residents expressed an interest in producing a neighbourhood plan and this idea was supported by the parish council.

An independent steering group was formed, and this includes several parish councillors who volunteered to help the process.

At an early stage, the steering group took a conscious decision to have a fully community-developed plan and not to outsource preparation of the document to expensive external consultants.

What can a neighbourhood plan cover?

In the same way that the Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2017 can supplement (but not contradict) the NPPF, a neighbourhood plan can supplement (but not contradict) both the local plan and the NPPF.

For example, the NPPF has a "presumption in favour of sustainable development" and neither MBC's local plan nor a neighbourhood plan can presume otherwise.

Similarly, the Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2017 has designated Marden as a 'rural service centre' and the Marden Neighbourhood Plan cannot change that.

A neighbourhood plan is also required to be a spatial plan, meaning that its planning policies have to cover one or more specific geographic areas. This can be the whole area covered by the plan (e.g. the parish) or a smaller defined boundary such as the village centre, industrial estate or conservation area.

Are there any other benefits of having a neighbourhood plan in place?

MBC now has a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule in place, meaning that certain types of development are required to make payments to support either:

- a) the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure; or
- b) anything else that is concerned with addressing the demands that development places on an area.

A proportion of these CIL payments can be passed to parish councils to spent on projects meeting these criteria: 15% in areas without a neighbourhood plan but 25% where there is a neighbourhood plan in place.

Marden Parish Council is currently developing an Infrastructure Spend Plan which will be a public document setting out local priorities based on feedback from residents and businesses.

How was the Marden Neighbourhood Plan produced?

Preparing a neighbourhood plan has taken much longer than anybody envisaged when the process started in 2012. This was initially caused by a substantial delay to production of the new Maidstone Borough Local Plan with MBC having to deal with the Kent International Gateway, a proposed logistics hub and strategic rail-freight interchange beside the M20 motorway east of Maidstone.

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Since then, the steering group has used a wide range of measures – including open days, workshops, information events, updates at the Annual Parish Meetings and parish council newsletter features – aiming to maximise public interest in, and involvement with, the emerging plan.

A consultation was held into an initial draft version of the plan in 2014, but progress was then slowed by MBC not having an up-to-date local plan in place so it was not known what borough policies it had to be consistent with until the new Maidstone Borough Local Plan was finally adopted in October 2017.

More recently, the draft neighbourhood plan has also had to be amended to align with the revised NPPF published in July 2018 (which was then updated again in February 2019).

What stage has the Marden Neighbourhood Plan reached?

A draft neighbourhood plan was released for public consultation in June 2018. The consultation period ran for six weeks. Comments were invited from statutory consultees such as Natural England, KCC Highways and Southern Water, surrounding parish councils and local residents. The results of this consultation were incorporated into a finalised draft plan.

After many years of hard work by the steering group and other volunteers from the community, this finalised draft Marden Neighbourhood Plan was submitted to MBC in April 2019 and publicised on the parish council website.

So what happens next?

As the local planning authority, MBC must satisfy itself that the finalised draft neighbourhood plan complies with all the relevant statutory requirements.

Whilst the draft plan received a favourable response from statutory consultees, residents and MBC during the 2018 public consultation, it is possible that further changes may be required before the document can be submitted for an independent examination by a planning inspector appointed by the Secretary of State. The purpose of the independent examination is to test whether the draft neighbourhood plan meets the basic conditions set out in legislation.

Can we still get involved?

MBC will publicise the examination process for a minimum of six weeks, when both residents and businesses will again be able to make written representations. The examiner may seek additional information, and in certain circumstances a public hearing might be held.

Provided that: a) the independent examiner is satisfied that the legal tests have been met; and b) MBC is satisfied that the draft neighbourhood plan is sound in terms of planning policy, it will then be subject to a referendum (subject to any necessary final modifications to comply with the legislation).

What is the timescale?

If a majority of those who vote in a referendum are in favour of the draft neighbourhood plan then it will be adopted by MBC as part of the development plan for the borough of Maidstone within eight weeks of the vote.

This process will take a number of months to complete, but it is currently expected that the referendum will be held before the end of 2019.

Throughout this period, the parish council will also use its website, notice boards and newsletter to keep residents and businesses informed.