

DCLG Neighbourhood Planning and Local Planning Service Redesign and Capacity Building Fund

Report from Medway Council

June 2016

Summary

This report outlines the work that was supported by DCLG's funding programme to help build engagement in producing a new Local Plan for Medway, and to help the council progress this work to get its plan in place as effectively and promptly as process allows.

The council worked on three elements to progress its Local Plan; investing in the evidence base to support policy development; embedding a collaborative approach in the plan making process; and defining the strategic options for Medway's growth.

This involved working with elected members, developers and land owners, service providers and wider community stakeholders to gather information, and build momentum for setting out the vision and spatial development options for Medway's new Local Plan. This was a new approach to working with members, developers, and wider stakeholders at this stage of the plan making process.

This collaborative approach was seen to be particularly successful in engaging developers and land owners in helping to define spatial options, and in advancing work with members setting their ambitions for Medway's growth in the new Local Plan.

The work delivered is being used to inform the content and direction of the next key stage of the plan making process – a Regulation 18 consultation document to be published in December 2016.

Background

Medway Council is at an early stage of the plan making process, following the withdrawal of a draft Core Strategy from Examination, as a result of the designation of a potential strategic development site at Lodge Hill as a SSSI. The council has started on a new Local Plan to cover the period up to 2035. A Strategic Housing and Economic Needs Assessment has concluded that the objectively assessed need for housing in Medway over this period is over 29,000 homes in line with the projected growth in Medway's population of c 50,000 people. This scale of growth presents challenges to the local planning authority in identifying suitable sites for sustainable development, and delivering the infrastructure that such growth would require.

An initial Regulation 18 consultation on Issues and Options for the new Local Plan was carried out in January and February 2016. This set out the challenges and opportunities for Medway's development, and is to be followed up by further consultation on the spatial options that could form part of Medway's growth strategy, and policy approaches to be taken in the new Local Plan.

The council is aware that it is not in a position to meet the government's expectations of having a Local Plan in place by early 2017. Medway has been working with DCLG officers and the Planning Advisory Service to ensure that there is a robust process and timetable in place to achieve an adopted plan as quickly as due process allows. The current focus is on adhering to the Medway Local Development Scheme 2015, in publishing the next consultation stage in December 2016. A

core component of this stage will be the consideration and assessment of the different options that are feasible in delivering the vision and strategy for Medway's growth.

It is understood that this will be a contentious stage, and critical to advancing a clear direction for Medway's future. Work supported by the DCLG funding programme has concentrated on collating the evidence and content for the spatial options, and building engagement in the process. This specifically involved a new approach to working with members and the development sector.

Service Redesign and Capacity Building

The bid made to DCLG in December 2015 aimed to help speed up the plan making process and embed new engagement techniques in the Local Plan work. There were three key strands to the project:

- Investing in expert technical advice to support progress of the Local Plan
- Establishing civic leadership and community support for a vision of Medway's growth
- Defining development options to meet growth

Robust evidence base through technical advice

The council has commissioned a Strategic Transport Assessment to inform the assessment of spatial options for development, and define infrastructure needs, as intrinsic components of the new Local Plan. Fore Consultants have been appointed to build a transport network model for Medway, to understand current capacity and issues, and to identify where investments may be needed to support additional development, or where transport presents constraints to further growth. Initial work will form part of the Sustainability Appraisal on the next Local Plan consultation document stage. More detailed modelling will be carried out to assess the implications and requirements arising from strategic development options.

The council received technical support from the Planning Advisory Service on the Sustainability Appraisal process, specifically on the Scoping stage. Officers have used this training and advice to draft a SA scoping report that will be published for consultation in summer 2016.

Through its direct liaison with DCLG on the timetable for the production of the new Medway Local Plan, the council has been advised on potential approaches that could be taken to advancing the plan in the context of continuing uncertainty and delay in establishing the planning status of the proposed development site at Lodge Hill.

Establishing leadership and shared vision for Medway's growth

The Regulation 18 Issues and Options report introduced the ambitions for Medway's growth over the next 20 years. Elected members understood that accommodating the projected scale of Medway's growth demands an objective and fresh consideration of the options that would deliver successful sustainable development. Such development could reshape the current town centres and waterfront areas, as well as bringing significant potential change in suburban and rural areas. Members asked for more information on how development could be delivered at higher densities and what major large scale development could look like and how it would function, should it be allocated in suburban or rural areas. Members identified the important function of the new Local

Plan in establishing a clear vision for Medway's growth, promoting opportunities for improvements, and safeguarding the area's distinctiveness.

As part of the DCLG funding project, the council organised study visits for members to view at first hand successful examples of major residential developments. This involved a range of typologies, including high density schemes in urban settings, urban expansions on greenfield sites, and comprehensive renewal schemes. Sites in South East London and Cambridge were visited in June 2016. The study visits were facilitated by developers and planners working in the areas. The visits involved not only tours of the new development, but an understanding of the work needed to establish and maintain strategic planning for the sites, and delivering new homes, infrastructure and wider services and facilities. Members responded positively to learning about these schemes and appreciated the critical role to be played by the local authority in establishing its longer term ambitions for the developments and working constructively with developers to achieve the potential for the sites. It has stimulated discussion on what are the best choices for Medway's development, and the opportunities to achieve a new profile for the area.



Presentation by Peter Studdert to Medway Council members and planning officers, Trumpington Meadows, Cambridge; June 2016

Members acknowledged the long lead in times to the strategic scale developments, the need to set a clear vision, and to engage throughout planning and delivery with communities and developers. Many of the structures and processes used to develop and support the delivery of quality development are in place in Medway, which helped to build members' confidence in moving ahead with the Local Plan vision and strategy for the area.



Presentation by Berkeley Homes to Medway Council, Kidbrooke, South East London; June 2016

Defining development options

Spatial options for Medway's future development will be a core component of the Regulation 18 consultation document that will be published in December 2016. The Planning Service sought to resource the preparation of this work through a programme of workshops, working in different locations and with diverse representatives of the development sector, service providers and local communities.

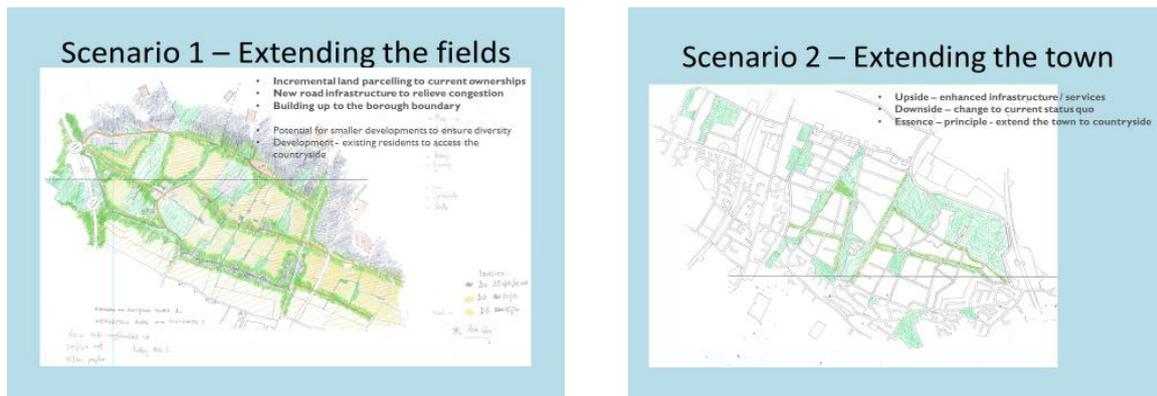
The programme identified four geographical areas to represent potentially different development approaches:

- Cliffe and Cliffe Woods – working directly with the Neighbourhood Planning Group in a village setting
- Hoo St Werburgh – consideration of the potential to grow from a large village to a small market town
- Suburban expansion to the east of Rainham – assessing the potential to deliver a sustainable urban extension
- Strood – exploring the scope and potential impacts of high density development on a key town centre brownfield regeneration site

The workshops in Cliffe and Cliffe Woods were delayed in agreement with the Neighbourhood Planning group. The council had worked with the Neighbourhood Planning group in running consultation events in the parish for the Local Plan Issues and Options report in February 2016. The NHP steering group considered that they wanted to make further progress on their own Neighbourhood Plan before holding more community events. Residents had raised a number of issues at the early consultation stage in February, and it was viewed that it would be more constructive to demonstrate how the NHP was seeking to respond, and share further work on

evidence gathering and the direction being set for the parish. It has been agreed to hold the next stage of joint Local Plan/Neighbourhood Plan workshops in September 2016, using the format that has been developed in the other locations.

Work was therefore concentrated on the other three locations. The council appointed an independent facilitator to lead the workshops, and used an urban designer to produce an initial assessment of how development could be accommodated in these areas. The draft design approaches and high level masterplans were used as a basis to promote discussion of the areas' key assets, constraints and important principles that would need to be addressed to secure successful and sustainable development.



The Approach

With the support of DCLG, a new approach to consultation with community, business and public sector stakeholders was tested as part of the early-phase development of the new Medway Local Plan. The aim of the project was to ensure that options to be proposed for subsequent consultation phases reflect the initial views of interested people.

The intention was that this approach would yield benefits in terms of:

- The eventual initial options better reflecting issues of concern to a range of interested groups and individuals, giving Council officers better intelligence when they develop the initial options.
- Enabling different parties to articulate and discuss *broad* issues and ideas, before assessment of specific development locations was considered. It was hoped that this would reduce conflict that can arise when, for example developers or landowners discuss competing schemes.
- Including community and other interests in the options development process at an earlier stage of the options development process, making it more inclusive and harnessing the knowledge, expertise and ideas of a wide range of people early on in the process.

It was decided to run two sorts of workshop:

- Technical, bringing together developers, land owners and officers and agencies with an interest in a range of public services of relevance to the Local Plan, and
- Community, allowing a wide range of local community and voluntary sector groups and individuals to contribute their diverse and detailed knowledge and opinion.



Engagement in Medway Local Plan spatial options workshops for Rainham and Hoo, June

Medway is a unitary authority made up of small towns, villages and rural areas, each with their own particular characteristics. As a result, it was interesting to consider issues relevant to the Local Plan from both a unitary authority and locality perspective, exploring the links between the two: for example, what is the vision for Medway as a whole; within that, what is the role of a given locality; what are the broader infrastructure and ‘cross-border’ issues?

Format

The workshops were run by the Council with the support of an experienced, external facilitator (see Appendix 1 for a sample Workshop Plan). Key aspects of the approach were:

- Attendance managed by Medway Council with the aim that a wide range of interests be engaged.
- A varied format in terms of individual, small group and plenary sessions, with a focus on working together constructively to inform future, more detailed proposals.
- Ensuring that all voices heard in the way the event was run, and documenting outcomes clearly.

Timing and location of events reflected the needs of the target audience. Outcomes Notes were prepared for each event and shared with participants.

Outcomes

Key outcomes from the training and learning work with members were seen to be:

- Recognition of the scale of potential growth in Medway over the plan period and the opportunities to be ambitious for securing quality development
- Stimulating discussion on the most appropriate forms of development in Medway, particularly the extent to which the town centres and waterfront regeneration sites should be the location of high density development, and how suburban or rural settlement extensions might function, and what could be achieved from major new development.
- Role of the council in leading on the vision for the area’s future, and getting buy in from developers and local communities
- Eagerness to be involved in working with Planning officers in setting the vision and strategic direction for the new Local Plan.

Feedback on the approach to the spatial options workshops was positive from external participants and Council officers. The key strengths of the approach were considered to be that the workshops:

- Enabled constructive and productive discussions, without undue conflict, given that the discussions were general in nature and not to discuss competing proposals or options.
- Created a productive and engaged working process, which was not too burdensome in terms of time, but produced a lot of useful detail in terms of outcomes.
- Generated useful ideas and intelligence that officers can use when developing options as part of the next stage of the Local Plan process.
- Made people feel they were involved from an early, formative stage of the process, rather than being 'surprised' by more worked up ideas later on, and building engagement with key stakeholders in the plan preparation.

Moving forward

Officers are using the information collated to work up draft proposals for the development options. The council is disseminating the outcomes of the spatial options workshops to members to determine the content of the Local Plan consultation document to be published in December 2016. Given the successful response to this new format, the Planning Service will be replicating the process in other areas that could form part of the options for development locations in the new Local Plan. This process will also include the planned work with the Neighbourhood Planning group in Cliffe and Cliffe Woods.

The outputs from the Strategic Transport Assessment will feed into the Sustainability Appraisal to accompany the consultation document in December, and inform policy approaches and infrastructure needs in the emerging plan.

Work is planned with elected members to develop the vision and development strategy for the next stage of the Local Plan and to discuss the approaches to setting the direction for Medway's successful growth, delivering homes, jobs, infrastructure and facilities whilst securing the valued natural and historic environment.

The DCLG programme funding has allowed the council to progress work on key elements of the evidence base for the Local Plan, maintain momentum in defining the development strategy and options, and building collaboration and confidence in the process, with members, the development sector and wider stakeholders.

Contact for further information

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Sample Spatial Option Workshop Content

Facilitator Agenda & Notes: Hoo Services & Developers Session, Mon 13 June 2016, Medway Innovation Centre 10:00 to 1:00 (arrive 9:00)

Agenda	Facilitator Notes
9:45 Coffee	
<p><u>10:00 Introduction</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Facilitator</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and introductions • Purpose of workshop and format of event 	<p>Welcome</p> <p>Round table: name, role, interest in this process</p> <p>Housekeeping:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No fire alarm expected, so please leave via [exits] and assemble [place], if the alarm goes off • Loos are [place] • Water, tea, coffee, etc [say where] <p>State purpose of event:</p> <p>To explore opportunities for development for Hoo. What scale and approach to development would be most successful, and how would growth link to existing areas?</p> <p><i>Please note, we're not here to debate the merits of one particular project over another. It's more to discuss the overall approach to sustainable development in the area.</i></p> <p>Format of event:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation on Local Plan - Exercise on the broader vision for Medway - Workshop (4 groups) to explore the detail & issues raised by possible approaches to the east of Rainham - Share feedback - Set out next steps - Lunch! <p><i>Handover to Catherine.</i></p>
<p><u>10:10 Presentation - Medway Local Plan – overview</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Catherine S</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context of growth and key issues • Stage in plan making process • Working to next Reg 18 consultation document and SA 	<p><i>Keep to time, but open to any initial Qs and comments at end.</i></p>

<p><u>10:30</u> <i>Exercise - Developing a vision for Medway & specific locality</i> All</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-it note exercise 1: key ambitions and opportunities for Medway • Post-it note exercise 2: what can the locality contribute to aims for wider Medway? 	<p>Aim is to capture ideas on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What you feel the key ambitions and opportunities for Medway should be, and - What Rainham can contribute to the aims for wider Medway – what its role should be within the broader picture? <p>Use [colour] post-its for the first question and put them here – <i>show where</i></p> <p>Use [colour] post-its for the second question and put them here – <i>show where</i></p> <p>I'll look at all of them and try to give a flavor of what's coming out after coffee at 11:00.</p> <p>Please write clearly and keep it brief!</p>
<p><u>11:00</u> Coffee break</p>	<p>Group post-its for broad, thematic feedback after coffee</p>
<p><u>11:15</u> <i>Introduction to scenario workshop</i> Facilitator & MC Lead</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of potential scenario(s) – approaches to place, design, growth • Explanation of issues and tasks for workshop 	<p>Quick thematic feedback on post-its</p> <p>Go round the whole group: comments from different perspectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developers Health Education Green spaces / GI Transport Anyone else? <p>Presentation:</p> <p>Introduce the kind of issues that need to be considered (Catherine)</p> <p>Introduce the potential scenarios (Catherine)</p> <p>Set up the workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ID facilitators, set up groups, check each has a note taker. - Together answer the 3 key questions¹ (final slide) for the scenarios. - There'll be feedback in of 3 or 4 minutes each when we all come back together - Use the maps and other resources we have around the room

¹ What will be the implications of each scenario in terms of 1) infrastructure, services and facilities; 2) character and context, inc density and green infrastructure, and 3) the relationship with existing settlements, and countryside and estuary?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Please do email the team individually with further thoughts after the event
<u>11:30</u> Scenario workshop	<p>Circulate and listen – offer help / clarification</p> <p>Let people know when half way through</p> <p>Let people know when 10 minutes to go (to agree feedback)</p>
<u>12:30</u> Feedback from workshop groups <i>Facilitator</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short plenary session to highlight key issues • Next steps and how information to be used in informing local plan 	<p>Feedback – round the tables:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5-min feedback from each - Note on flip chart - Summarise & check key points <p>Next steps: handover to Catherine</p>
<u>13:00</u> Close and lunch <i>Facilitator</i>	<p>Thank everyone for a very productive discussion, and for finding the time to come along.</p> <p>Close</p>