

INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE PLANNING SYSTEM

- 1.1.1 The basis of the town and country planning system in Britain was established in 1947, and in essence the pattern and intent of the system is the same today as when it was first established. Development is regulated and controlled in the public interest, with those wishing to undertake all but minor development required to first seek permission. This permission is sought from local authorities charged with the responsibility of managing planning legislation.
- 1.1.2 To ensure that decisions about the granting of planning permission are seen to be fair, open and reasonable, local authorities are required to prepare publicly available plans containing policies and proposals to guide the shape and nature of development in their areas. These plans are collectively given the name “the Development Plan”. The Development Plan is usually composed of four different types of plans: Structure Plans; Local Plans; Minerals Plans and Waste Plans.
- 1.1.3 The Structure Plan provides a framework for more detailed policies and proposals at a local level. These local policies are set out in Local Plans. In particular Local Plans identify specific sites for different forms of development and indicate how local issues are to be addressed over the life of the plan. Proposals for development relating to minerals and waste disposal are determined in the context of specialist Minerals Local Plans and Waste Local Plans.
- 1.1.4 Local Plans have assumed a greater importance since the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, which makes the preparation of Local Plans a statutory requirement. It also makes it clear that where plans are up to date, proposals for development will generally be permitted only if they accord with the Development Plan. Therefore Local Plans, as the most detailed layer in the plan-making system, have a crucial role in directing and controlling development. This “plan-led” system means that there is an increased need to keep Plans up to date.
- 1.1.5 In the past, Local Planning Authorities were able to prepare Local Plans which covered only a part of their areas but they are now required to prepare plans for the whole of their areas.
- 1.1.6 Medway Council came into existence as a Unitary Authority in April 1998. It is charged with the responsibility of preparing all types of Plan for its administrative area and has extensive planning powers. It has resolved to:
- prepare a single Local Plan for the whole of its area.
 - prepare a Structure Plan, to replace the current one, jointly with Kent County Council, covering the whole of Medway and Kent in order to retain the same geographic basis as the current plan.
 - prepare Waste and Minerals Local Plans to replace the current ones produced by and inherited from Kent County Council.

1.2 LOCAL PLANS IN MEDWAY

- 1.2.1 The first Local Plan to cover Medway was the Medway Towns Local Plan, which was formally adopted in 1992. The geographical area of that Plan covered the whole of two districts and a part of two others. The four district authorities concerned took the view that there would be significant benefits from having one comprehensive Local Plan for the whole of the Medway area. Accordingly, the Plan was prepared jointly by Gillingham Borough Council, the City Council of Rochester Upon Medway, Maidstone Borough Council and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council. This allowed those small parts of Tonbridge & Malling and Maidstone Boroughs north of the M2 motorway to be included in the Plan.
- 1.2.2 The changed statutory framework now means that the Medway Local Plan cannot cover those parts of the boroughs of Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling. Instead they are covered by new district-wide plans prepared by those two authorities : the adopted 1998 Tonbridge and Malling Local Plan and the 1997 Deposit Version (as subsequently modified) of the Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan. This Plan covers the whole of the administrative area of the Medway Council.

1.3 THE NEED FOR A REVIEW

- 1.3.1 In addition to the legislative changes there are a variety of other reasons for this comprehensive review of the adopted 1992 Local Plan:
- A new direction for town planning coming from a national level, with the intent of bringing about an urban renaissance through an emphasis on regeneration of derelict and previously used land (brownfield sites) before developing fresh land in the countryside or on the edge of urban areas (greenfield sites).
 - Updated national Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs), including the introduction of the principles of sustainable development, particularly concerning transport policy and the use of natural resources, and the “sequential test” for the location of major people and traffic attracting developments.
 - Revised Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9) was published in March 1994. This rolls forward regional guidance to 2011 and provides a new framework for the preparation of structure and local plans. A revision to RPG9, with an end-date of 2016, is now in the course of preparation and is likely to be published in autumn 1999.
 - The Thames Gateway Planning Framework (RPG9a) was published in 1995 as a supplement to Regional Planning Guidance and provides a new stimulus for development and environmental improvement in the Gateway area.
 - The Kent Structure Plan 1990 which guided the original Plan has now been replaced by a new Structure Plan which was adopted in December 1996. The new Structure Plan provides an up-to-date context for this Review. It covers the period 1991-2011.
- 1.3.2 There are many local issues which are not covered in the 1992 Plan and which need to be addressed. These include a new protective regime for much of the Medway Estuary and Marshes; regeneration-based Action Areas in Strood and Rochester upon Medway; Phase I of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link; an increased emphasis on the role and importance of high

quality urban design and landscape; the development of Chatham as Medway's own "city" centre as a focus for urban life and many others.

- 1.3.3 There are a large number of policies in this Local Plan. The Council recognises that a balance needs to be struck between undue prescription and a lack of certainty in decision making. On the one hand, an overly detailed Plan with unnecessary policies may generate objections that delay progress towards adoption. On the other hand, there is a need to ensure that there are enough policies to establish a clear and consistent basis for decision-making that provides certainty to the development and investment sector and the local community.

1.4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

- 1.4.1 A Consultation version of this Plan was published under the title "*First Review of the Medway Towns Local Plan*", by Rochester Upon Medway City Council and Gillingham Borough Council prior to the creation of the Medway Council as a Unitary Authority in April 1998. The new Council took over that Plan as though it had prepared it itself, renamed it the Medway Local Plan, and made some significant changes.

1.5 THE LOCAL PLAN AREA

- 1.5.1 This Local Plan covers an area of approximately 250 square kilometres. It takes in the whole of the built-up area of Medway except parts of Lordswood and Walderslade in the administrative areas of Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling Boroughs. The main built up area lies between the River Medway and the recently completed Wainscott by-pass in the north and the M2 motorway in the south. The historically separate towns of Chatham, Strood, Rochester, Gillingham and Rainham have now coalesced into a single conurbation with a population of approximately 250,000: making it one of the largest in the South East of England.
- 1.5.2 There are also several rural settlements on the Hoo Peninsula and on the west bank of the Medway Valley. The area's attractive countryside ranges from the North Downs through the Medway Valley to the marshes around the river estuary. The westernmost part of the Local Plan area lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt, thus keeping the built up areas of outer London and Kent Thameside separate from the urban area of Medway. There are good communication links with London and the Continent via the M25, M2 and M20 and the North Kent rail line.
- 1.5.3 The area has a wide range of historic and natural assets including Rochester Castle, Cathedral and city centre, Chatham Historic Dockyard, Fort Amherst and a variety of urban and rural Conservation Areas. It is also the largest industrial centre in Kent. Since the closure of the Royal Naval Dockyard, the area has broadened its employment base, particularly with the development of high quality business parks at Chatham Maritime and Gillingham. The University of Greenwich has established a new campus at Chatham Maritime.
- 1.5.4 Chatham town centre is an important sub-regional shopping centre and the Council intends to develop it further as a vibrant focus for the whole of the community. The opening of the Medway Towns Northern Relief Road in 1999 has helped to reduce the congestion and

pollution experienced in some parts of the urban area, and it has also greatly improved accessibility to a number of major employment areas.

1.6 THE PLAN PERIOD

- 1.6.1 Government guidance indicates that policies and proposals in a local plan should normally cover a period of ten years. It would be the Council's preference to extend the Local Plan to 2011. However, clarity about the future of the extensive Defence Estate at Chattenden is needed to inform a proper consideration of the development options for the post-2006 period. Continued uncertainty about if, and when, the Defence Estate will be made available for redevelopment (which is identified as being of strategic development importance in the "*Thames Gateway Planning Framework*") means that it would be prejudicial to proper planning to extend the plan period to 2011. Consequently, the Council has reluctantly decided that this Local Plan can only cover the period 1996-2006.
- 1.6.2 However, this need not be problematic as policies in the Structure Plan allow development requirements to be dis-aggregated to the year 2006 and housing quantities in the Structure Plan for the 2006-2011 period are subject to review.

1.7 TIMETABLE AND PROCEDURE

- 1.7.1 There are a number of quite distinct steps to be followed before a Local Plan can be adopted. Some fall within the discretion of the Authority preparing the Plan but most are set out in Regulations approved by Parliament.
- 1.7.2 The various stages to be followed, together with the anticipated timetable leading to the adoption of this Local Plan, are set out below. The timings below are indicative only and are likely to change depending upon the number and the nature of the representations received and the consequent length of a public inquiry.

Public consultation on Deposit version (Statutory 6 week period for representations)	Summer 1999
Consideration of objections and Representations	Autumn 1999
Local Plan Inquiry opens	Spring 2000
Receipt of Inspectors Report	Summer 2001
Publication of proposed modifications (statutory 6 week period for objections)	Early 2002
Plan adopted	Mid 2002

- 1.7.3 In any event the Council is determined to progress the adoption of the Plan as quickly as possible.

1.8 FORMAT OF THE PLAN

- 1.8.1 The Local Plan consists of:

- a) **The Written Statement:** This sets out the policies and proposals for the control and regulation of development, both general and site specific, and the reasons for them.

The strategy chapter sets out the over-arching themes of the Local Plan and also includes a number of policies that are concerned with particular large-scale strategic proposals. The remaining seven chapters address specific land use topics: the built and natural environment; economic development; housing; town centres and retailing; transportation; leisure and community facilities.

Each chapter sets out the current situation and the issues to be addressed before summarising Central Government guidance, regional planning policy and Structure Plan policies. The objectives underlining the policies in the chapter are then stated, followed by the policies and proposals that are distinguished by emboldened text. The text that precedes each policy gives the “*reasoned justification*” for that policy.

At the end of each chapter is a short summary of the environmental appraisal of the policies and proposals in the chapter (a full assessment is separately published). The final section in each chapter is a list of the key monitoring measures that the Council proposes to use in identifying the performance of the Plan in meeting its objectives. The monitoring measures are not designed to provide a comprehensive list of criteria set against each policy and proposal, rather they identify the key measures of success.

- b) **The Proposals Map:** This identifies the areas to which particular policies apply and the location of specific proposals. Some policies are general in nature, applying across the whole Plan area, and consequently are not shown on the Proposals Map. The Map for this Plan consists of :

- Four 1:12,500 scale plans which cover the whole of the Plan area with the exception of the town centres which are covered by;
- A sheet of five 1:2,500 scale inset plans showing in greater detail the proposals for the central areas of Chatham, Strood, Rochester, Gillingham and Rainham.

- 1.8.2 In addition, the Written Statement contains a number of appendices providing supporting information.

- 1.8.3 Several policies may apply to a particular site or area. Some policies are site specific, whilst others are general and apply across the Plan area. Accordingly, **all** of the relevant policies in the Plan should be considered together in assessing how the Plan would affect a parcel of land or proposals for development.

