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Medway Council Local Plan 2012-2035

Executive summary



January 2017

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Introduction

Medway Council is preparing a new Local Plan to provide direction on the future growth of the area. The aim of the Local Plan is to ensure Medway grows sustainably, to provide land for the homes, jobs and services that people need, whilst protecting and enhancing the area's environment and heritage. The Local Plan covers the period up to 2035. Once adopted it will replace the 'saved' policies in the 2003 Medway Local Plan and the Kent Waste and Minerals Local Plans.

The timetable for preparing the Local Plan is set out in the Local Development Scheme 2016. The council aims to submit a draft Local Plan for independent examination in Spring 2018, for adoption (subject to the examination's outcome) in 2019.

The council consulted on 'Issues and Options' in 2016. The Development Options consultation document responds to the information gathered then, including over 200 written responses from a wide range of residents, statutory organisations, businesses, interest and community groups, landowners and developers.

The decision on which locations are most suitable for development is critical for the Local Plan. This stage of the plan making process must consider options for how development could be allocated across Medway.

You can help shape the future of Medway and be involved with the Local Plan

The council welcomes comments on the draft vision and strategic objectives, the development options and the policy approaches. These consultation responses will be taken into account in the next stages of preparation of the Local Plan 2035.

The consultation will run from **Monday, 16 January until 5pm on Monday, 6 March 2017**. All comments must be submitted by this time in order to be considered. More information about consultation events and exhibitions will be available on the Council's website at www.medway.gov.uk/futuremedway

You can submit comments by email: futuremedway@medway.gov.uk

Alternatively you can write to us at:

**Planning Policy, Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation
Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent ME4 4TR**

Copies of the consultation document are available to view at public libraries across Medway, at the reception desk of the council offices at Gun Wharf, during opening hours, and online at: www.medway.gov.uk/futuremedway

This information can be made available in other formats by telephoning 01634 333 333
For this information in a different language telephone 01634 335 577



Medway Local Plan 2035 – vision and strategic objectives

Context

Medway is one of the largest urban areas in the south east, similar in size to cities like Brighton & Hove and Plymouth. The population of 276,492 (in 2015) has a slightly younger age profile than Kent and England averages, and an increasing number of people over 65 years. The population is expected to reach 330,220 in 2035. Much of this growth is from natural change i.e. births outnumbering deaths.

Medway benefits from a stunning landscape setting, including significant areas that are internationally important for wildlife. It has rich heritage, high speed train links, universities, a strategic location in the Thames Gateway and a diverse selection of services and businesses.

However, it also has a weaker economy and lower skills levels than competing areas, and marked inequalities in health. It does not enjoy the recognition, or the range of services and facilities, that might be expected for a city of this size. This is particularly apparent when considering the retail and leisure offer of Chatham town centre.

The scale of growth Medway is experiencing is challenging. The established regeneration programme has brought benefits such as the universities at Medway and infrastructure investments. However, there is concern amongst local people that further growth will result in negative impacts, such as longer waits for health services, competition for school places, loss of green spaces and increasing delays in moving around Medway.

The Local Plan seeks to manage growth to achieve a more successful, attractive Medway with healthier communities that share in the benefits of development. Growth does not mean losing the character of the area. The natural and built environment defines Medway, and will be at the core of the Local Plan. The development strategy must show how we can provide land for housing, jobs, infrastructure and services, whilst protecting important environmental and heritage assets.

Strategic Issues

A successful plan for Medway's future must include consideration of cross-boundary issues. Medway is part of the Thames Gateway regeneration programme, there are commuting links to surrounding areas, including London, and although two-thirds of house moves in Medway come from existing residents there are also moves into and out of the area. Bluewater has a major impact on retail patterns in Medway and surrounding areas, and Medway is of regional and national importance in the import of aggregates and the energy industry.

The natural environment of Medway is also linked with surrounding areas. For example, the internationally important wetlands of the north Kent coast and the Kent Downs AONB both cross borough boundaries.

The council has a duty to cooperate with other Local Planning Authorities, county councils and prescribed bodies when producing the Local Plan. Further details on the range of strategic matters that we must consider are set out in a Duty to Cooperate Scoping Report available on the council's website. The Duty will be met through a range of existing partnerships with relevant bodies as well as through events and work undertaken specifically to support the production of the Local Plan 2035.

Vision and Strategic Objectives

The Local Plan 2035 is an opportunity to establish a positive strategy to guide Medway's development over the next 18 years. The Development Options consultation document sets out a vision of how we could make the most of this opportunity. In summary:

By 2035 Medway will be a leading waterfront University city of 330,200 people, noted for its revitalised urban centres, its stunning natural and historic assets and countryside.

Regeneration is at the core of the council's growth plans and the vision. Investment in high quality development along the waterfront and in town centres will bring homes, jobs, services and new links for all of Medway's communities. The regeneration of Chatham is central to the success of this approach. In line with wider retail trends, it should evolve to broaden its offer, particularly in the leisure, culture and community sectors, and become a focus for community life.

Development and growth at each of the five distinct towns and their wider neighbourhoods will respond to their specific characteristics and requirements. The Local Plan will seek to direct growth to the most sustainable locations, where there is potential to expand, to secure investment in infrastructure and services, and to respect the character of the environment. It is likely that most areas of the borough will experience some degree of change and growth. The challenge is to ensure this strengthens the area.

Development and regeneration to help establish Medway as an attractive city and counteract the unfair negative perceptions of the area can also help to boost the economy by making it more attractive to businesses.



The natural and historic environment, including the river and estuary, will continue to be central to the vision for Medway's future. The urban areas should benefit from functional and attractive links to the countryside and open spaces. A riverside path would be a draw for residents and visitors alike, linking regeneration to the wider area, providing a focus for public, community and cultural activities, and supporting healthier lifestyles.

In order to deliver the vision there are a series of strategic objectives, based around four key themes:

- A place that works well
- A riverside city connected to its natural surroundings
- Medway recognised for its quality of life
- Ambitious in attracting investment and successful in place-making

Options for delivering sustainable development

Government policy requires Local Plans to plan positively to meet the development and infrastructure needs of the area. The council, jointly with Gravesham Borough Council, commissioned a Strategic Housing and Economic Needs Assessment. This identified a need over the plan period for:

- 29,463 homes
- 49,943m² of B1 office space, 155,748m² of B2 industrial land, and 164,263m² of B8 warehousing land
- 34,900m² of comparison retail space and 10,500m² of convenience (groceries etc.) retail space up to 2031

The starting point for the development strategy in the Medway Local Plan is making the most effective use of land to deliver the strategic objectives for Medway's growth. The residential pipeline of sites and regeneration programme is a key strand of this, but there is limited capacity to realise additional development from these areas without taking a more radical approach. It is unlikely that the full range of development needs could be met solely in these areas or on brownfield land.

However, there are significant constraints on much of the potential supply of greenfield land. Developing on urban parks and open spaces would damage the quality of life in urban areas. A large proportion of the open countryside is covered by environmental designations, for ecology reasons on the Hoo Peninsula, but also including the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Metropolitan Green Belt to the west of Strood and in the Medway Valley. Many areas of undesignated land are an important resource for agriculture including large areas of the highest grades of best and most versatile land.

Given the scale of growth projected, the council also has to look carefully at the form of development, and whether larger planned settlements may be a more suitable method of ensuring all the needs of Medway's present and future communities are met than a strategy of incremental growth at the edges of villages and towns.

The Development Options consultation document presents four alternative scenarios for potential development strategies. The regeneration programme remains a central plank of all four scenarios. The scenarios are summarised on the following pages.



Scenario 1: Maximising the potential of urban regeneration

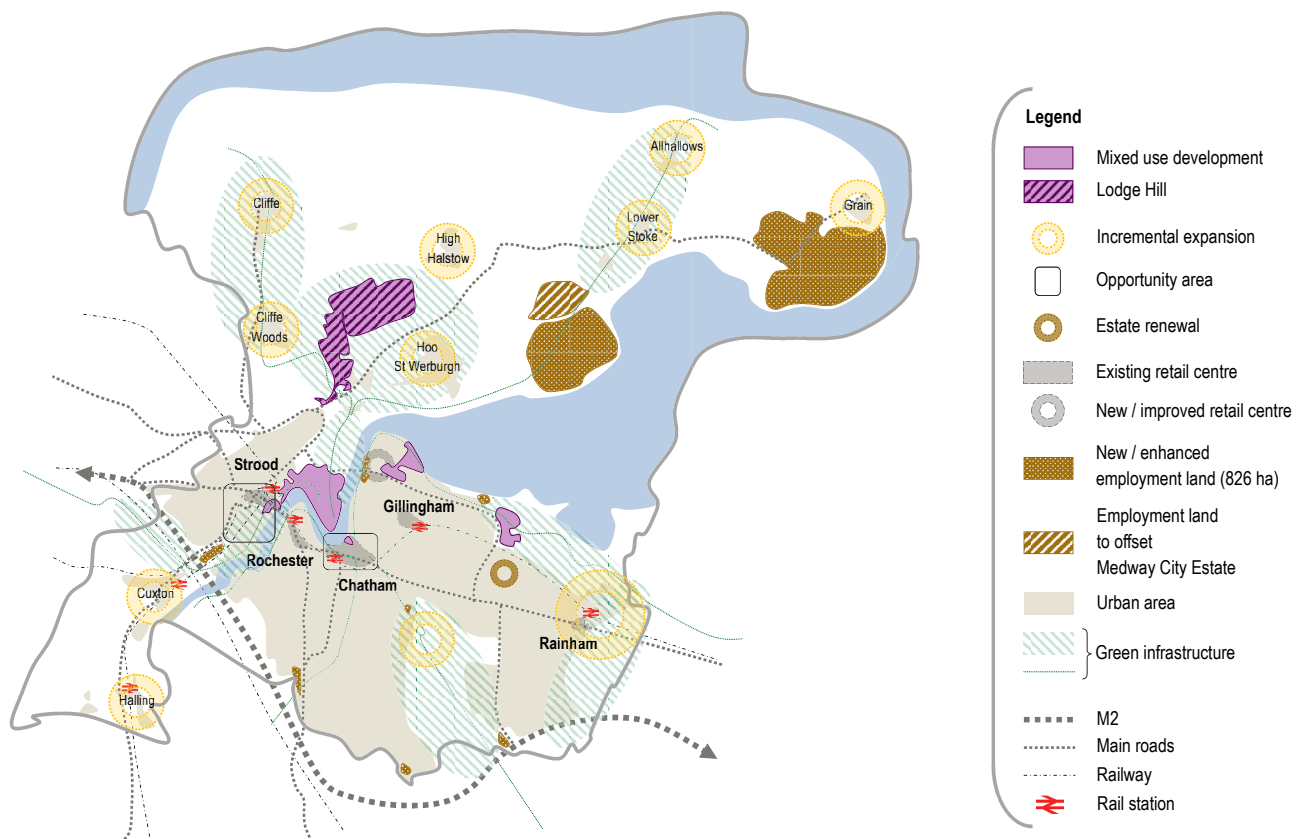
This option would continue regeneration of waterfront sites but would also bring in new areas and a major transformation in the approach to the urban centre. It includes building at higher densities, bringing mixed development into retail and employment areas and extending regeneration into more peripheral areas, especially where opportunities exist in Chatham and Strood. It would make more intensive use of land, with retail hubs concentrated in town centres surrounded by housing, mainly in the form of apartments, and a wider range of jobs.

This form of development would define a new character for the town centres and an increase in housing in these areas would boost the catchment for services and facilities to help address the challenges of competition from other areas and online shopping.

In this scenario, regeneration would extend beyond the edge of Gillingham to include a modern football stadium and mixed development at Mill Hill. Consideration is also given to redevelopment of Medway City Estate and Chatham Docks to create new urban quarters, with a modern employment park around Kingsnorth to provide land for relocated businesses.

As housing in apartments in high density areas would not meet the needs of all sectors of the population, there would still need to be consideration of suburban and rural areas for development to achieve a balanced and sustainable strategy.

Risks associated with this scenario include the ability to deliver within the plan period, potential loss of employment supply, how to secure infrastructure and growth, viability issues, impact on heritage assets around the river and town centres, and difficulties in providing the full range of housing required.

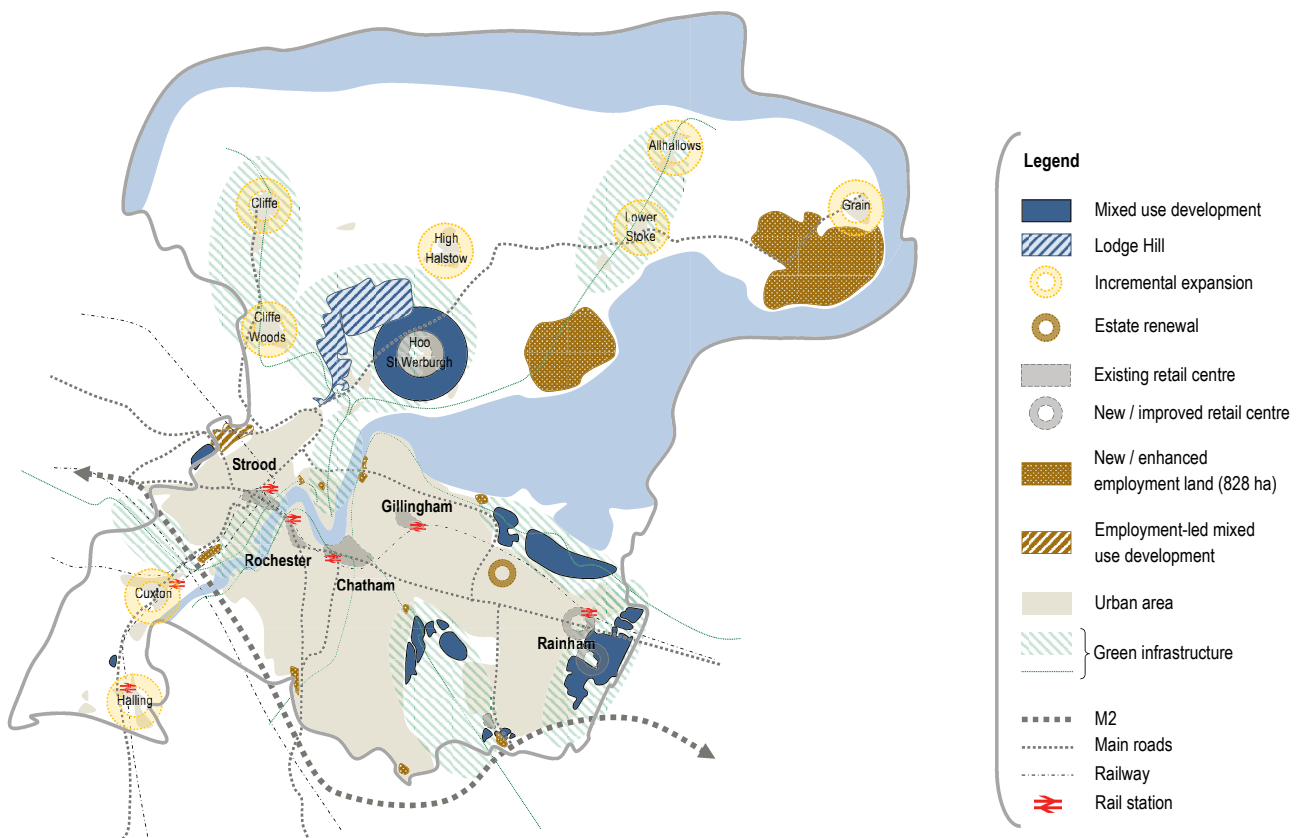


Scenario 2: Suburban expansion

Many sites bordering the urban area and villages have been identified as potentially available for development. Some are subject to environmental constraints and others lack infrastructure and access to services. However, planned growth at a suitably large scale could deliver mixed used development to support housing with new services, shops, infrastructure and jobs, and could incorporate green spaces and linkages to ensure high quality new suburban neighbourhoods that promote healthy lifestyles and offer real alternatives to car-based travel.

In this scenario, consideration would be given to the development of sustainable urban extensions around Rainham, Capstone and Strood, complementing the urban regeneration programme. These areas are already attractive to residents and being predominantly greenfield may be quicker to develop. However, capacity in these areas is limited by the borough boundaries and important landscape features, and some development around villages on the Hoo Peninsula would also be required, including incremental growth in a number of villages and significant mixed-use expansion around Hoo St Werburgh. Release of Green Belt land to the west of Strood is also included, to consider whether such a significant policy change may be necessary or justified.

Stress on the highway network at a number of key junctions and routes have been highlighted by initial assessments and would have to be addressed to accommodate growth in these areas. If resolving this requires major new transport schemes that cannot be supported on environmental or viability grounds, it would undermine the deliverability of this scenario. Potential cross-boundary effects would also need to be considered through discussions with adjacent authorities.



Scenario 3: A rural focus

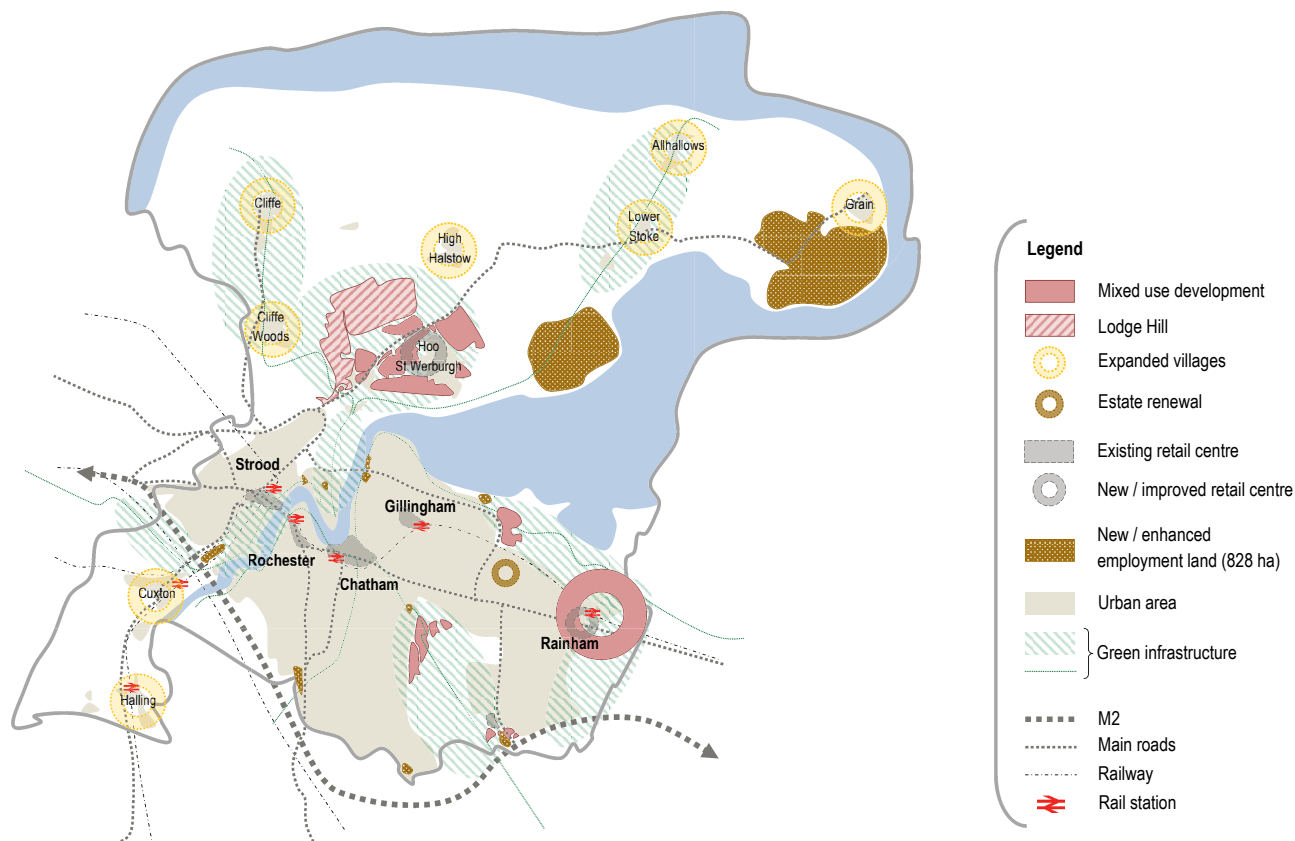
This scenario considers the potential of Hoo St Werburgh as a focus for growth, expanding the existing large village into a small rural town. This would include developments around neighbouring areas such as Chattenden, Deangate and Lodge Hill, and the provision of services and infrastructure to support the expanded town and its rural surrounds. Other villages with the facilities to support an increased population would also be expanded.

There would still need to be some development in suburban areas under this scenario, to support the delivery of a range of housing types.

Development of this scale in the rural area would inevitably change the character of Hoo and have an impact on the environment and countryside character bordering the villages. Care would be needed to ensure development is planned in a way to respect key landscape features, respect and enhance the rural setting, and retain separation between urban and rural Medway. Provision of improved green infrastructure links for people and wildlife would be critical.

The council supports the development of Lodge Hill as a planned new settlement, but the planning status of the land is uncertain, dependant on the outcome of a Public Inquiry scheduled for Spring 2018. For the purposes of preparing the new Local Plan, the council is considering Lodge Hill as an option to help meet development needs for the second half of the plan period. This scenario takes it into account in coordination with a wider development around Hoo St Werburgh.

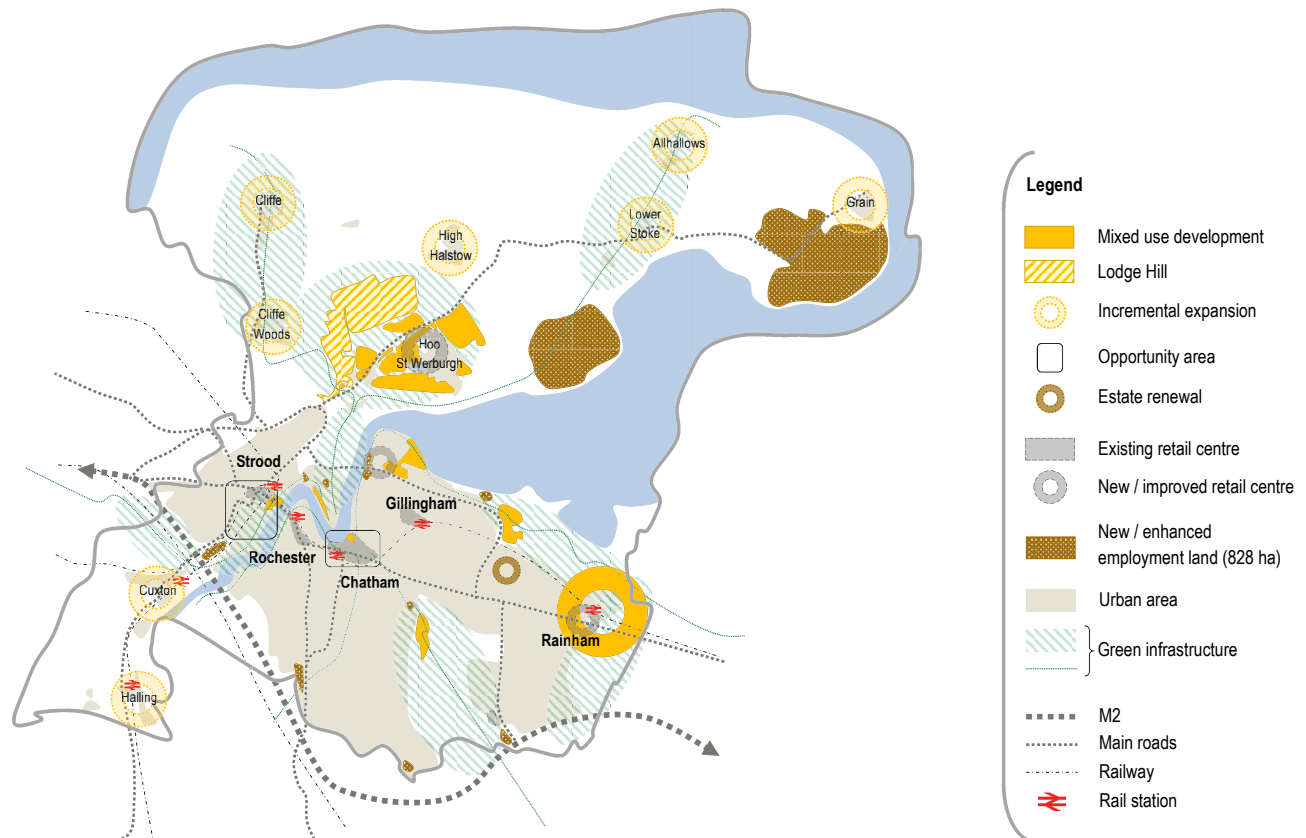
A further key challenge for development under this scenario is the capacity of the local transport network to support increased development. Four Elms Roundabout has been identified as a congestion hotspot and work is progressing to increase capacity in this area, but it is likely a significant increase in planned growth would require further investment. The availability of alternatives to car-based travel for rural residents also needs consideration.



Scenario 4: Urban regeneration and a rural town

This combines elements of the three development scenarios set out above, including some higher density development around the waterfront and town centres and seeking opportunities to consolidate development sites in the urban areas. However limited land is identified for comprehensive redevelopment at Medway City Estate and Chatham Docks, due to their complexity.

Suburban expansion would be supported to deliver sustainable and healthy urban extensions, but restricted in scale to mitigate the potential for urban sprawl and unsustainable travel patterns. Some aspects of the rural focus scenario would be supported, for their potential to enhance the provision of services and jobs on the Hoo Peninsula, and strengthen the role of Hoo St Werburgh, but not at the scale envisaged by scenario 3.



Approach to policy development

The Development Options consultation document sets out the council's proposed approach to policy development in the following areas:

- Housing (including provision for affordable housing; gypsy and traveller accommodation; and specialist accommodation such as HMOs, mobile homes and houseboats, and student accommodation)
- Employment (including employment land needs, rural economy and tourism)
- Retail and town centres
- Natural environment and Green Belt (including landscape, ecology, green infrastructure, flood risk and air quality)
- Built environment
- Health and communities
- Infrastructure (including implementation and delivery)
- Sustainable transport
- Minerals, waste and energy

These approaches will be developed into policies, which will be used to assess planning applications once the new Local Plan is adopted.

The starting point is that Medway will seek to meet its identified needs for growth and development, as required by government policy. The policy approach sets out how it is envisaged this can be achieved in a sustainable way while protecting the area's communities and other important characteristics. In some cases, the evidence base to support policy production is still ongoing, and the document sets out where additional information is required to inform future policy direction.

Draft policies including detailed wording will be set out at the next stage of the plan making process, when a draft local plan is produced. The council welcomes comments on the proposed direction of the policies to inform the draft plan.

