

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Promoting High Quality Design

- 8.1 New development should provide high quality homes, employment and other activities in support of sustainable development for the long term. High quality design and attractive environments are key components of good planning; encouraging investment and economic development in an area, supporting social inclusion and helping to create civic pride and community cohesion, along with providing and protecting an enduring built environment which people are proud of. Good design is therefore essential in achieving sustainable development and the objectives of this Plan.
- 8.2 National planning policy requires good design¹⁰⁰ as a key aspect of sustainable development. It directs local planning authorities to develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the area. In assessing applications, the Council will therefore expect a positive assessment against the 'Building for Life (BfL12) Standards'; a national standard for well-designed housing and neighbourhoods to achieve this objective.
- 8.3 The council's vision is for Medway to be a location of quality development and correspondingly high quality environments. This is key to fostering happier, healthier residents that are proud of their homes, towns and communities where they live. The council will also seek to create a destination of choice to support businesses and employment creation. The attractiveness of the Medway area (its public realm, appearance and offer) is fundamental in supporting and nurturing a stronger local economy. The council will seek to achieve its aims for Medway as a Dementia Friendly Community through consideration of accessible design principles in the public realm and new developments.
- 8.4 The scale and mix of growth proposed in the new Local Plan offers great opportunities to shape Medway's future success through excellent design that invests in place making, benefitting established places and creating attractive new development. The regeneration areas provide the basis for new and revitalised urban quarters, delivering the modern University waterfront city. Strategic allocations and sites in suburban and rural Medway will be required to realise the plan's ambitions for quality, attractive, sustainable development that respects the character of the surrounding landscapes and communities.
- 8.5 Whilst the style of building and its adaptability are important considerations, its setting is just as important. Good design that supports a high quality environment and offer will be promoted, and is a key aim of this Local Plan

¹⁰⁰ Department for Communities and Local Government, '*National Planning Policy Framework*', paragraph 56, p.14, 2015 Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

- 8.6 Medway has a distinct local character that is derived from its rich historic environment. This local character creates a unique sense of place that new development should strive to protect and enhance. In considering the design of new development, regard should be given to heritage assets, their settings, the wider historic environment and the appropriate use of local vernacular materials.
- 8.7 The natural environment and well-designed open spaces play an integral role in creating a successful place. The role of the existing topography and other natural features worthy of retention within the site should be considered alongside landscaping from the outset of the design process.
- 8.8 Additional design guidance such as site specific development briefs and masterplans, Conservation Area Appraisals, Conservation Area Design Guides, and the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan and supporting guidance should be consulted as part of the design process where appropriate.

Policy BE1: Promoting High Quality Design

Development in Medway will be expected to be of high quality design that makes a positive contribution and respond appropriately to the character and appearance of its surroundings.

Proposals that incorporate high quality design and sustainability which demonstrably consider the following criteria will be permitted:

- The scale and form of development is appropriate to its surrounding context and is characteristic of Medway, or where appropriate new high quality character;
- The protection and possible enhancement of the historic environment and heritage assets;
- How the proposal relates to and/or reinforces the local distinctiveness and character through the use of high quality materials and local vernacular materials where appropriate; landscaping and building detailing;
- Working with the topography of the site and the incorporation of existing natural features;
- Responds appropriately to the character of the area, interprets respectfully the prevailing pattern of plot size, plot layout and building siting, roofscapes, mass, bulk and height, and views into and out of the site;
- Makes efficient use of land and ensures appropriate streetscapes;
- Good connectivity permeability that provides a clear user hierarchy for pedestrians, cycles, public transport and cars and that streets and spaces within new residential developments are not overly car dominated;
- Demonstration of provision and/or access to essential services and facilities;
- Respects the amenity of neighbouring uses through consideration of light levels, overshadowing, overlooking, loss of privacy, visual intrusion, appropriately designed car parking and ensuring minimal impact through noise, vibration, fumes or light pollution, and other relevant considerations;
- Creates a safe environment;
- Buildings that are appropriately flexible/adaptable and in appropriate circumstances transformable in the interests of sustainable life-long places;

- Provides for discreet waste and recycling bin storage and collection in accordance with the 'Medway Waste Management Requirements for New Developments' or other superseding guidance;
- High quality landscaping and areas of public realm that make use of or retaining features considered relevant/important by the Council and demonstrating linkages/contribution toward green infrastructure assets and networks;
- Achieves a transition from urban to rural where appropriate;
- Includes measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- For development to demonstrate sustainability criteria, such as at least meeting a BREEAM standard of 'Very Good' for both energy efficiency and water efficiency.

The Council would expect compliance with the principles of nationally recognised standards, such as the Lifetime Homes and Building for Life (BfL12) Standards, so far as practicable, across all proposed new housing.

Proposals that fail to take the opportunity to incorporate high quality design will be resisted.

Question BE1:

Does the proposed policy for high quality design represent the most appropriate approach for the Medway Local Plan?

What do you consider would represent a sound alternative approach towards planning for high quality design in the Medway Local Plan?

Sustainable Design

- 8.9 The impacts of climate change and the contributing factors must be considered through the design process. Wherever possible, new developments should incorporate mitigating measures as part of their design, construction and occupation.
- 8.10 New homes currently must meet a national Building Regulations standard for water efficiency of 125 litres/person/day. The National Planning Practice Guidance aims to exceed this standard through the imposition of locally adopted standards in order to promote additional water efficiency. New residential development in Medway therefore should meet the higher national water efficiency standard of 110 litres/person/day.
- 8.11 The Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology (BREEAM) provides a nationally-recognised standard for the sustainable design of non-residential development. Non-residential development should meet a 'Very Good' BREEAM standard in terms of both energy efficiency and water efficiency.
- 8.12 Should the BREEAM standards be replaced, or any other national standards increased, the equivalent standards of the replacement scheme should be used. The voluntary use of sustainability assessment tools for residential development will also be encouraged.

Policy BE2: Sustainable Design

All new development should aim for high standards of sustainable design and construction where feasible.

For residential development this will include meeting the higher national water efficiency standard of 110 litres/person/day. Where possible on large developments, a water efficiency standard of 90 litres/person/day will be sought.

Question BE2:

Does the proposed policy for sustainable design represent the most appropriate approach for the Medway Local Plan?

What do you consider would represent a sound alternative approach towards sustainable design in the Medway Local Plan?

Housing Design

8.13 Through the introduction of the Nationally Described Space Standard (2015)¹⁰¹ which lays down minimum internal floor areas for dwellings, the Government has established that residential amenity and adequate space within homes is a planning concern. It is important that space standards in homes are sufficient for people's needs.

8.14 Planning Practice Guidance issued by the Government alongside the Nationally Described Space Standard nevertheless requires local planning authorities to provide justification for requiring internal space standards by:

- The identification of a need for such policies;
- The effect of the policy on viability, particularly land supply; and
- The establishment of transitional arrangements to enable developers to factor in the cost of space standards.

8.15 Achieving adequate residential standards remains a key planning objective for the Council, especially given the scale of growth envisaged for Medway. It is important that new development is designed to ensure long-term social and economic sustainability, continuing the quest for lifetime homes and to reduce future obsolescence in the face of changing economic, demographic and social trends.

8.16 The Impact Statement carried out with regard to introduction of the Medway Housing Design Standards (MHDS) in 2011 provided evidence of the need for space standards. It also established that meeting the standards would not have an undue effect on viability. This has proved to be the case since their introduction as the vast

¹⁰¹ Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 'Technical housing standards-nationally described space standard', 2015, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/technical-housing-standards-nationally-described-space-standard>

majority of new dwellings constructed since the introduction of the Medway local standards have been compliant.

- 8.17 The Council will not be in a position to adopt the National Standard¹⁰² until it has produced and adopted its new Local Plan. However, given that the criteria of need and viability have been covered by the present MHDS, the Council will continue to expect that the internal floor areas of dwellings submitted for planning permission are adequate, and will use the National Standard as guidance on this matter, supporting existing policy relating to amenity. Schemes that comply with the internal floor areas laid down in the National Standard will be deemed to have adequate internal space by the Council.
- 8.18 In addition to the internal space standards that are the subject of the National Standard, the MHDS has specific standards on the following topics, which developers should continue to adhere to:
- Shared outdoor amenity space
 - Shared access and circulation
 - Cycle storage, refuse and recycling
 - Management
 - Visual Privacy and Private Outdoor space
 - Environmental comfort
- 8.19 Housing choice, flexibility and attractiveness are key considerations for people wishing to live in the area. The creation of functional spaces and the adaptability of a home will provide a better opportunity to secure long term occupation, i.e. lifelong homes. In a changing environment with greater emphasis on climate change and supporting people to be able to carry out their day-to-day activities, the adaptability of a dwelling is also important.

Policy BE3: Housing Design

New housing developments should provide good living conditions for future occupants with high quality, robust, adaptable housing and functional spaces that respond to changing resident needs throughout their lives and support the undertaking of necessary day to day activities. All new accommodation must, in addition to the general design policy above:

- As a minimum meet the relevant nationally described internal space standard for each individual unit;
- As a minimum meet the Medway Housing Design Standard (MHDS) for external spaces including shared outdoor amenity space, shared access and circulation, cycle storage, refuse and recycling, management, visual privacy and private outdoor space, environmental comfort;

¹⁰² Medway Council, 'Medway Housing Design Standards (interim)', Nov 2011, Available at: <http://www.medway.gov.uk/PDF/Medway%20Housing%20Design%20Standards%20Nov11.pdf>

- Be arranged to ensure primary habitable rooms have an acceptable outlook and where possible receive direct sunlight;
- Be designed to minimise the disturbance to occupants from other land uses nearby and/or other sources of noise, vibration and pollution;
- Provide a convenient and efficient layout, including sufficient circulation space and avoiding awkwardly or impractically shaped rooms, unless there is justification for doing so on the basis of a significant design quality gain;
- Incorporate sufficient space for storage and clothes drying;
- Encourage the extensive use of trees as a positive contribution to air/environmental quality within housing developments;
- Be designed with a clear and particular attitude to place-making and distinctiveness within their context.

Question BE3:

Does the proposed policy for housing design represent the most appropriate approach for the Medway Local Plan?

What do you consider would represent a sound alternative approach for housing design in the Medway Local Plan?

Housing Density

8.20 There is a great variation in housing densities across urban and rural Medway. The higher density Victorian terraces in central urban areas contrast to lower density post war suburban development. More recently higher density apartment blocks have emerged along the frontage to the River Medway around Gillingham and Chatham.

8.21 National policy, as outlined in the NPPF, encourages locally set density requirements¹⁰³. This is in order to help authorities boost the supply of housing within their areas and make the most efficient use of land, where this does not compromise the quality of development. In considering options for Medway's development over the plan period, the council will explore opportunities to achieve higher densities in appropriate locations with the benefit of excellent public transport links. Such an approach has the potential to make a positive contribution to place-making. However development must respect the character and amenity of the surrounding area. Given the significance of Medway's heritage assets, this will be an important matter in determining the acceptability of development proposals.

8.22 Regeneration is a key element of the vision and strategic objectives for Medway's growth to 2035. The new Local Plan will have an important role in challenging longstanding negative perceptions by establishing a city centred on Chatham. In response to wider changes in retailing, central Chatham and its waterfront will be a

¹⁰³ Department for Communities and Local Government, '*National Planning Policy Framework*', paragraph 47, p.12-13, 2015 Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

hub for community life, with more homes and mixed uses generating footfall throughout the day, evening and night. This will support services and businesses, increase opportunities for social and cultural activity and bring about vibrancy and investment. Crucially, central areas will provide an accessible, convenient and safe environment for walking and cycling. This will help to promote a low carbon future and address poor air quality, obesity and inequality.

- 8.23 Linking sustainable transport and development is promoted as an approach to joint land use and transport planning by directing new, mixed use development to areas in close proximity to high-quality public transport. A renewed focus on the pedestrian and public space will enhance the attractiveness of the centre itself and the overall offer. In Medway, there are opportunities to raise densities in appropriate sites in close proximity to the rail stations in Strood, Rochester, Chatham (including the modern bus interchange), Gillingham and Rainham, all located at the heart of urban areas. This is consistent with the principles of 'smart growth', a sustainable approach to planning.¹⁰⁴
- 8.24 The 2017 Housing White Paper noted common misconceptions about high density¹⁰⁵, however research¹⁰⁶¹⁰⁷ has demonstrated how high density can be also be achieved in a suburban setting through combinations of house types and layouts and this is of particular relevance beyond Medway's central areas. 'Sustainable Suburbia' provides a blueprint for a walkable garden suburb by reconciling the aspirations and qualities of suburban housing with the communal benefits of high density, such as viable public transport.
- 8.25 In assessing the potential of sites to contribute towards Medway's development needs, the council has considered levels of accessibility and the principles of sustainable suburbia to make best use of land. Chatham will need to achieve the highest density as the city centre, while a restrained approach has been applied to other locations to respect their existing built form and heritage. Further details are set out in the Transport section and Housing Delivery background paper supporting this consultation document.
- 8.26 In line with meeting the differing needs for types of housing in Medway, the council recognises the need to plan for a range of densities in new developments to achieve sustainable development and deliver successful and attractive places with a distinctive sense of place.

¹⁰⁴ Smart Growth UK, 'A National Coalition pursuing sustainable communities planning and transportation- What is Smart Growth', Available at: <http://www.smartgrowthuk.org/>

¹⁰⁵ Department for Communities and Local Government, 'Fixing our broken housing market', February 2017, Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/590464/Fixing_our_broken_housing_market_-_print_ready_version.pdf

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.sustainable suburbia.co.uk/>

¹⁰⁷ Savillis, 'Solving London's housing crisis, London needs to capitalise on infrastructure improvements to deliver the necessary housing', 2015 (SAVILLS.CO.UK), available at: http://www.savills.co.uk/research_articles/186866/187152-0

Policy BE4: Housing Density Approach

The council will seek the efficient use of land and secure positive contributions to place-making through supporting developments at higher densities in appropriate locations, where it can be demonstrated that it does not create an unacceptable impact on the surrounding amenity and environment, and has the potential to boost the vibrancy and vitality of town centres.

Density should be reflective of the particularity in its surroundings and make the most effective and efficient use of land.

The council will consider varying attitudes to density on a case by case basis in developing masterplans and development briefs for regeneration sites.

Densities surrounding transport interchanges (railway stations and bus stations) will be expected to be higher to reflect the nature of these areas as transport hubs providing sustainable travel choices.

A range of house types should be considered regarding housing mix.

Question BE4:

Does the proposed policy for housing density represent the most appropriate approach for the Medway Local Plan?

Is there an alternative way to express optimum net residential density, e.g. habitable rooms per hectare?

What do you consider would represent a sound alternative approach for housing density in the Medway Local Plan?

Historic Environment

8.27 The historic environment in Medway is an irreplaceable asset that lies at the heart of the local character, contributing to the local distinctiveness and helping to create a unique sense of place. Through the Medway Heritage Asset Review a range of themes were identified that are considered to be key factors contributing to the local character, including:

- Medway's location on the River Medway and the southern bank of the River Thames;
- The high quality agricultural land;
- The establishment of the Roman road *Watling Street*, and the associated river crossing at Rochester Bridge;
- The geological makeup of the area; and
- The range of religious and ritual funerary structures.

8.28 Providing a basis for the Heritage Strategy (to be published in 2018), the Medway Heritage Asset Review provides an in-depth analysis of these themes, their legacy,

how they can be interpreted today through heritage assets, and the importance of their future role in delivering sustainable growth that contributes positively to Medway's unique character and local distinctiveness.

- 8.29 Medway benefits from some of the region's most celebrated heritage assets, many of which are recognised through national designation by Historic England; such as Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings and Registered Parks and Gardens. Furthermore, there are those identified at a more local level, such as Conservation Areas, Locally Listed Buildings, historic landscapes, development patterns, important views and vistas, and the archaeology.
- 8.30 The NPPF recognises 'heritage assets' as both 'designated' assets and any 'non-designated' assets identified by the Local Planning Authority.
- 8.31 A number of historic assets in Medway are considered to be 'at risk' through neglect, decay or other threat. Assets considered 'at risk' will be monitored by the council, who will seek to bring them back into use and/or into a good state of repair. Through the delivery of its Local Plan and its wider activities, the council will act to conserve and enhance Medway's heritage assets.

Policy BE5: Historic Environment

To ensure the continued contribution that the historic environment has on Medway, the council will support the conservation and, where possible, the enhancement of the historic environment; including the heritage assets and their distinctiveness and characteristics. This will be achieved through:

- Restricting development that could have an unacceptable impact on a designated heritage asset and its setting;
- Ensuring that all new development contributes to local distinctiveness and character;
- Encouraging development that makes sensitive use of historic assets, particularly where they are under-used or redundant;
- Promoting the preservation of historic buildings considered to be 'at risk';
- Resisting demolition or destruction of heritage assets without substantial justification that clearly demonstrates that public benefit outweighs the harm or loss resulting from the demolition or destruction;
- Working with stakeholders on heritage initiatives, including bids for funding.

- 8.32 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 provides specific protection for buildings and areas of special architectural or historic interest. In making decisions regarding a Listed Building, the council must have particular regard to the importance of preserving the buildings character or features that are of special architectural or historic interest. The Act also requires the council to have particular regard to the importance of preserving the character, appearance or setting of conservation areas.

- 8.33 Any alteration, extension, conversion or change of use of a heritage asset must be sympathetic and, where possible enhance the asset; ensuring that it does not lead to any unacceptable adverse impact on the asset or its setting.
- 8.34 In instances where proposed development may impact upon a heritage asset or its setting, an appropriate heritage assessment will need to be submitted that assesses the level of impact.
- 8.35 As part of determining a planning application that may impact upon a heritage asset, an assessment of any potential harm will be weighed against any wider benefits of the development.
- 8.36 Further information on the historic environment and heritage assets in Medway are available in published Conservation Area Assessments, the Medway Heritage Asset Review, Landscape Character Assessment and from the Medway Council Design and Conservation Team.

Policy BE6: Managing development in the historic environment

Development that impacts a heritage asset, or its setting, should achieve a high quality of design which will preserve or enhance the asset's historic or architectural character, appearance and setting.

Where a development impacts upon a heritage asset, or its setting, a proportionate heritage assessment must be submitted that assesses the level of impact.

The demolition or other loss of a heritage asset will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that there are exceptional and overriding reasons; and that all possible methods of preserving the asset have been investigated. In the circumstances where the loss of a heritage asset can be fully and robustly justified, the developer must make information about the heritage asset and its significance available to the council, along with making it possible for any materials and features to be salvaged.

Where a development involves, or has the potential to involve heritage assets with archaeological interest, applicants must submit a desk-based assessment, or where appropriate, a field evaluation.

Question BE5:

Do the proposed policies for the historic environment represent the most appropriate approach for the Medway Local Plan?

What do you consider would represent a sound alternative approach towards planning for the historic environment in the Medway Local Plan?