

HEALTH AND COMMUNITIES

9.1 The Local Plan aims to improve the quality of life for Medway's residents, meeting their needs for services and providing the opportunities that support people in living healthy and fulfilling lives. The social role of sustainable development is embedded in national planning policy.¹⁰⁸ Responses to earlier rounds of consultation on the emerging Local Plan called for greater recognition to be given to quality of life in planning for Medway's future, and that the impacts of development and change on local people are addressed. The council's objectives for the Local Plan include promoting health and wellbeing, access to services and enhanced opportunities for residents. It recognises that there are marked inequalities in health across the area. Medway's population is changing, such as an increasing proportion of older people and more diverse communities. The range of services and facilities in the area has altered, as seen in the closure of local pubs and shops, and merger of facilities, as lifestyles and organisations have changed. These are key considerations for the new Local Plan.

Health

9.2 Medway Council is committed to reducing health inequalities, increasing life expectancy and improving the quality of life of those who live and work here. People's lifestyles and environment affect their health and wellbeing and each of these lifestyle risk factors is unequally distributed across Medway. Medway performs poorly against key public health outcomes in life expectancy and causes of death as a result of inequalities¹⁰⁹. Average male life expectancy is below the national average, and there are pockets of marked health issues in some neighbourhoods, with reduced life expectancy and health impairments. Lifestyle issues including smoking, obesity and alcohol are key contributors to high mortality rates, particularly circulatory disease, cancer and respiratory disease. With an ageing population, the number of people living with dementia, and other long term limiting illnesses is projected to increase.

9.3 Planning has a role in supporting healthier lifestyles, particularly in:

- Promoting healthy lifestyles by providing a safe, green, attractive and inclusive infrastructure that will encourage people from all sectors of the community to increase their everyday activity through walking and cycling and other physical activity and participation of all sectors of the community in active lifestyles;
- Improving access to healthcare and services;

¹⁰⁸ Department for Communities and Local Government, '*National Planning Policy Framework*', paragraph 8, p.3, 2015 Available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

¹⁰⁹ Medway Council, '*Annual Medway Public Health Report*', Available at:

http://www.medway.gov.uk/search?q=medway%20public%20health%20report&site=All&client=Medway_frontend&output=xml_no_dtd&proxystylesheet=Medway_frontend

- Supporting access to healthy and affordable food, including opportunities for food growing.
- 9.4 One of the council's biggest aspirations is to enable all of Medway's people, both residents and people who work here, to enjoy an outstanding quality of life, including happy, healthy, safe and fulfilled lives. Quality of life is essential to physical and mental health and wellbeing and relates to every facet of life. Challenges to this may include the lack of skills needed to secure productive employment; an unfit and poorly insulated home; poor access to public open space; not having access to affordable healthy food; reduced opportunities to be physically active as part of everyday life; having limited opportunities for food growing; lack of access to health care; fear of crime; or a lack of social interaction and sense of community. Alongside creating and sustaining economic growth, we wish to place residents, workplaces and communities in a position to take advantage of the opportunities growth brings.
- 9.5 Healthy food environments can help address obesity. Areas where there are opportunities for people to buy affordable healthy food can help support healthier lifestyle choices. There are also positive benefits in people having space, such as allotments, where they can grow their own food. Obesity levels in Medway are above average and the council supports an integrated programme to address the problem through healthy eating and physical activity.
- 9.6 In some areas there is a proliferation of hot food takeaways with menu choices high in fat, salt or sugar. In 2014 the Council published a Hot Food Takeaway Guidance Note¹¹⁰ to restrict the number of these facilities within close proximity to a school and avoid over concentrations of takeaways in one location. This document has been used in planning application decisions and is seen as a successful tool as part of a wider strategy to help facilitate a change in the health of Medway's residents.
- 9.7 Medway is projected to see an increase of 31,000 residents aged over 65 by 2035. With this population change, planning for the needs of older people is a key consideration for the Local Plan. Medway seeks to establish the area as 'Dementia Friendly', embedding awareness of the needs of people with dementia and their carers in service design and delivery. This will include how public places and buildings are designed to make it easier for people with dementia to find their way around and be safe. This will also help to deliver on the council's ambitions that Medway's growth should benefit all, and will take consideration of the needs of different groups in the community with physical and learning disabilities. In planning for Medway's future, the council will seek to retain and develop sustainable and accessible neighbourhoods, where people can easily reach a range of services and facilities, and reduce the risk of social isolation through enabling interactions in the wider community. These key principles will be embedded in planning for the design of new neighbourhoods and public places.
- 9.8 The council will encourage new development to promote opportunities to improve health. It supports the use of Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) to identify how

¹¹⁰ Medway Council, 'Planning Policy', Available at: www.medway.gov.uk/planningpolicy

proposed development might have positive or negative effects on health through use of a Rapid Health Impact Assessment Tool (2017).¹¹¹ This assessment helps to ensure that health and wellbeing are properly considered in development proposals. HIAs are best done at the earliest stage possible to look at the positive and negative impacts of a development as well as assessing the indirect implications for the wider community. The aim is to identify the main impacts and provide the basis for review to maximise the benefits and avoid any potential adverse impacts.

Healthcare facilities

- 9.9 Access to healthcare is one of the greatest concerns raised by local people in consultation on the emerging Local Plan. Residents already experience difficulties in registering with GPs, and getting appointments at local surgeries and the hospital. People fear that these services will be placed yet further strain with the increased population projected for the area. The council's work on infrastructure planning, as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan, has identified several issues of capacity. There are high numbers of GP practices where the number of patients per GP is above the national average. There is also a challenge in succession planning as many GPs approach retirement age, and difficulties in recruiting replacement staff. Medway Maritime Hospital is also under increasing pressure, and many local people have asked that the Local Plan look at identifying a site for a new hospital.
- 9.10 Since the Health and Social Care Act was implemented in 2012, provision has undergone major change, and will continue to do so. Responsibility for public health was passed to Local Government, meaning the council now has this responsibility within its area. Clinical Commissioning Groups are responsible for commissioning of healthcare at a local level.
- 9.11 The Local Plan must put effective and timely delivery of services and infrastructure for health at the forefront of its ambitions for sustainable growth. However, Planning provides only part of the solution to meeting healthcare needs. Through the Local Plan, and planning applications for development, the council can identify and secure land needed for new or expanded health care facilities, such as surgeries or health centres. The council collects funding from developers of housing schemes over 10 homes that is passed to the Clinical Commissioning Group to invest in local GP services. Wider structural and personnel issues in the NHS are often the cause of pressures on local health services and lack of capacity, such as difficulty in recruiting staff.
- 9.12 The NHS, Medway Council and Kent County Council as the major healthcare, social care and public health providers in the area have drafted a Sustainability and Transformation Plan, 2016¹¹². This highlights the need to evolve the model of care provision to develop larger multi-modal practices that provide a range of services.

¹¹¹ NHS London Healthy Urban Development Unit, *'HUDU Planning for Health: Rapid Health Impact Assessment Tool'*, 2017, available at: <https://www.healthyurbandevelopment.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/HUDU-Rapid-HIA-Tool-3rd-edition-April-2017.pdf>

¹¹² NHS Medway, *'Sustainability and Transformation Plan- NHS and social care leaders make 'case for change' in Kent and Medway'*, available at: <https://www.medway.nhs.uk/about-us/sustainability-and-transformation-plan.htm>

These could be based on the present healthy living centre model within Medway. The outcomes of this review process will inform the policy provision for healthcare facilities in the new Local Plan.

Policy HC1: Promoting Health and Wellbeing

The council is committed to reducing health inequalities, increasing life expectancy and improving quality of life. It will support work to improve economic and social opportunities to tackle disadvantage across Medway by:

- Seeking opportunities to improve access to healthcare facilities and activities that promote physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Requiring planning applications for major new residential developments where Environmental Impact Assessments are required, or developments identified by the council with the potential for negative health impacts, to be accompanied by a health impact assessment in line with the HUDU Rapid Health Impact Assessment Tool. The results of this assessment will be a material consideration in determining applications.
- Helping to tackle obesity, encourage physical activity and support mental wellbeing, through the provision of greenspaces, public realm and sports facilities accessible to all, creating and enhancing environments conducive to walking and cycling.
- Ensuring new development is sustainably located with access to local health facilities, and contributes to increasing capacity in line with the scale of proposed growth, and the council's policy for infrastructure contributions from developers.
- Increasing access to healthy food choices through extending opportunities for growing food such as allotments & community gardens; securing a range of local services; and a reduction in the proliferation of uses promoting unhealthy food options, including controls on A5 uses, in line with the council's Hot Food Takeaway Guidance Note.
- Promoting health and wellbeing through the design and layout of development in order to mitigate health conditions, such as dementia, and improve the accessibility of public places.
- Working alongside healthcare commissioners to plan for the future of acute care the council will seek to investigate the redevelopment of the present Medway Maritime Hospital site and if deemed necessary the relocation, or partial relocation of some services, to a new site within Medway.

Question HC1:

Does the proposed policy for Health and Wellbeing represent the most appropriate approach to planning for health improvements in Medway?

Question HC2:

Do you agree with the proposed threshold for HIAs?

Question HC3:

Do you agree with the council's proposed approach to managing Hot Food Takeaways?

Question HC4:

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

Community Facilities

- 9.13 Community facilities including local shops, meeting places, such as village halls and community centres, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship form part of social infrastructure. They bring people together, tackle loneliness, build cohesive and healthy communities, and help to create attractive places to live. They provide a focus for community life, and are integral to sustainable development, as endorsed in national planning policy.
- 9.14 The council recognises the importance of community facilities in towns, neighbourhoods and villages. These facilities, especially halls, were identified in earlier rounds of consultation on the emerging Local Plan as vitally important to local communities. People valued the distinct sense of community in their local areas, and raised concerns that new development could damage these intrinsic qualities.
- 9.15 As Medway's population grows and changes, it is essential there is a strong network of community facilities to support social activities and interactions. For many residents, including older people and young families, having local facilities that are easy to reach is particularly important to retain a good quality of life, and health and wellbeing. New and growing communities within Medway, such as students and people from minority and ethnic backgrounds may have specific interests that need to be addressed in planning the provision of community facilities, including places of worship.
- 9.16 Some of the existing facilities, such as halls, are ageing and community groups can struggle to maintain and improve quality standards.
- 9.17 Around 12% of Medway's population lives in the rural area. The council recognises that rural communities are particularly vulnerable to the loss of community facilities. Trends in recent years have seen the closure of rural pubs, post offices and shops. Villages without a shop or a place for people to meet can become unsustainable. The council has undertaken a village infrastructure audit¹¹³ in conjunction with parish councils to identify the range and condition of services, such as village shops, halls, and parks in Medway's rural area, and how these met the needs of local communities. This work found that poor public transport and broadband connectivity were key problems for the area, increasing the importance of local facilities. The report also identified that there was a good coverage of community facilities across the villages, but some were in need of improvement.

¹¹³ Medway Council, 'Planning Policy', available at: www.medway.gov.uk/planningpolicy

- 9.18 The council has also gathered evidence¹¹⁴ on how well urban communities are served by local facilities. Many of these facilities are located in the town centres, but there is a wider network of social infrastructure in neighbourhoods across the urban and suburban areas, often located in district and local centres. The survey found that facilities were generally well used, were well located and most were in sufficient condition for the activities undertaken. However many had plans to expand to keep pace with demand from users.
- 9.19 In planning for town, village and local centres across Medway, the Local Plan will consider the need to secure a range of community facilities. Much of the growth planned for Medway over the plan period is likely to be located in large developments that extend or establish neighbourhoods, towns or villages. The council will expect the provision of community facilities to be integral to the planning of large developments, so that residents can easily access a range of services, supporting community life. Large scale housing development without adequate provision of community facilities will not be acceptable.

Policy HC2: Community Facilities

The council recognises the importance of community facilities and the need for an appropriate range of facilities as a key component of sustainable development. The council will seek to protect and enhance existing facilities, services and amenities that contribute to the quality of life of residents and visitors.

The council will support appropriate development that seeks to enhance community facilities, that does not have a negative impact on the surrounding amenity, historic and natural environment and transport networks.

The council will require provision to be made for community facilities in planning for new development. Large scale residential developments will be required to provide community facilities to meet the needs of new residents and seek opportunities to support integration with existing communities.

New community facilities should be located within or near the community they are intended to serve and should be appropriately located to limit the need to travel, being accessible to users by walking, cycling and public transport.

If the development is smaller scale and community facilities cannot be accommodated on site, a contribution will be sought to upgrade appropriate facilities off site, where it can be demonstrated that they are accessible to residents of the new development and that there is capacity for the increased population. All developments for over 10 homes will be required to contribute to upgrading community facilities in line with the council's policy on infrastructure contributions from developers.

¹¹⁴ Urban Facilities Report at:
<http://www.medway.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planningpolicy/localplanevidencebase.aspx>

There is a presumption against the loss of community facilities in rural and urban areas. Any proposal which would result in the loss of a community facility¹¹⁵ will not be permitted unless:

- an alternative community facility which meets similar local needs to at least the same extent is already available; and
- it can be shown that the proposal does not constitute the loss of a service of particular value to the local community nor detrimentally affect the character and vitality of the area; and
- in the case of commercial community facilities, it has been demonstrated that it is no longer economically viable and cannot be made so.

Question HC5:

Does the proposed policy for Community Facilities represent the most appropriate approach to planning for this aspect of social needs in Medway?

Do you agree with the proposed approach to addressing the presumption against loss of community facilities?

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

9.20 In considering proposals that involve the loss of community facilities, the council will require evidence not only that an alternative facility or facilities can be found within easy walking distance but that there is at least one such facility which offers services and an environment comparable to that of the facility subject to the proposal.

9.21 Regarding local needs, the council will require evidence that there has been public consultation to ascertain the value of the facility to the local community. If the facility is registered as an Asset of Community Value then the council will regard this as a material consideration in the determination of any planning application affecting the facility..

9.22 On viability, the council will require evidence demonstrating that:

- the existing or recent business is not financially viable, as evidenced by trading accounts for the last three years in which the business was operating as a full-time business;
- a range of measures were tried during this time to increase trade and diversify use; the potential for the property to extend the range of facilities offered at the site has been fully explored;

¹¹⁵ Department for Communities and Local Government, '*National Planning Policy Framework*', paragraph 70, p.17, 2015 Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

- for public houses, the CAMRA Public House Viability Test, or a similar objective evaluation method, has been employed to assess the viability of the business and the outcomes show that the public house is no longer economically viable.

9.23 Also on viability, the council will require evidence that all reasonable measures have been taken to market the facility to other potential operators. The facility must have been marketed for at least 12 months either as the current type of facility or as an alternative community facility, at a price agreed with the council following an independent professional valuation (paid for by the developer). In turn there must have been no interest in purchasing either the freehold or leasehold as a community facility. The business must have been offered for sale locally, and in the region, in appropriate publications and through relevant specialised agents.

Neighbourhood Planning

9.24 The council will continue to work with parish councils and community organisations in identifying and planning for the needs of communities across Medway. This includes support for the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans. The government encourages local communities to prepare Neighbourhood Plans to help shape their areas. Once formally 'made', that is adopted, the Neighbourhood Plan forms part of the Development Plan. This means that it is planning policy that must be taken into account when determining planning applications.

9.25 Currently there is one designated Neighbourhood Planning area in Medway, in the parish of Cliffe and Cliffe Woods. The steering group is liaising with the council in progressing its plan, to coordinate with work on the new Medway Local Plan. Based on the uptake of neighbourhood planning across the country, it is anticipated that further communities will come forward in rural and urban Medway to develop their own neighbourhood plans. The council will continue to provide support to forums and parish councils preparing neighbourhood plans in Medway.