

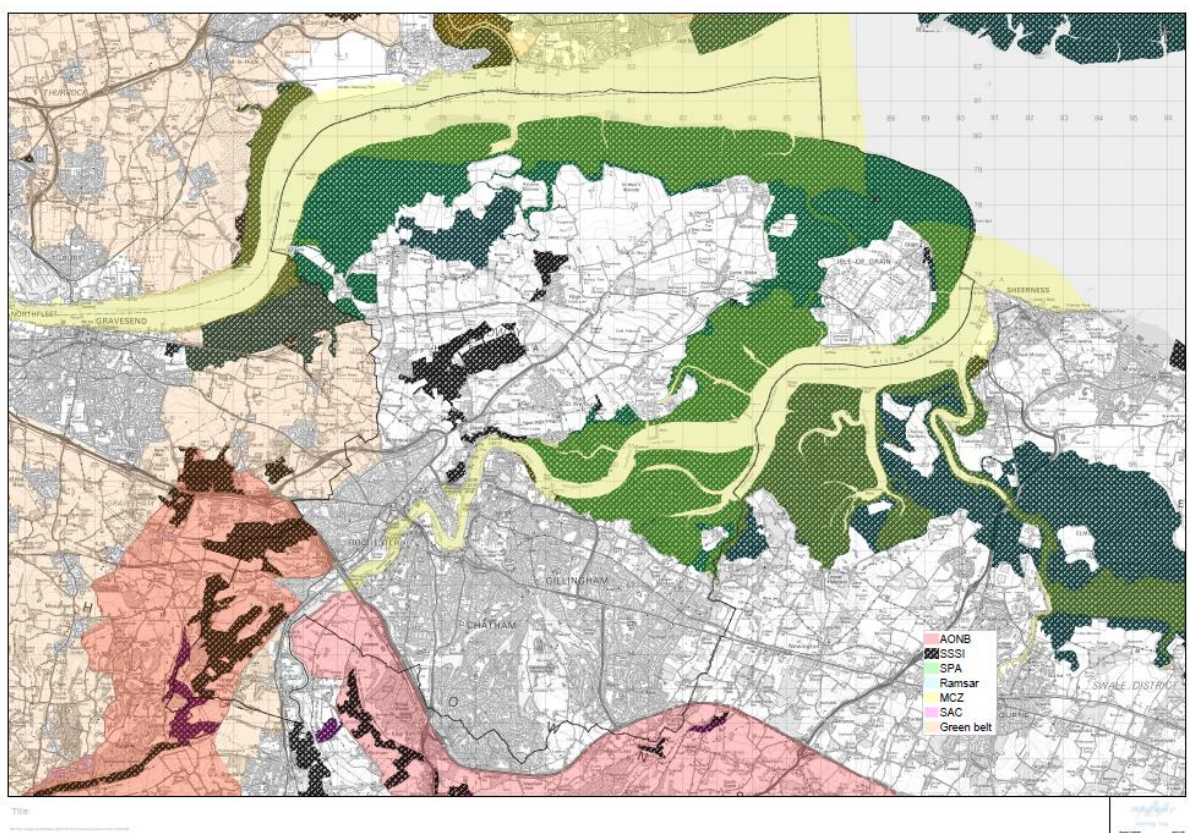
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND GREEN BELT

- 7.1 Government policy⁷⁶ recognises that a key purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the natural and local environment. The council's vision and strategic objectives for the Local Plan place a healthy and attractive environment at the heart of its ambitions for Medway in 2035.
- 7.2 Although known by many as an urban conurbation, Medway has a distinctive and diverse rural area and coast, including expansive estuarine and marshland landscapes, the wooded slopes of the Kent Downs, and productive farmland. In a number of locations, the developed area abuts land designated for its environmental importance. This proximity can sometimes create issues for sustainable land management, and result in development pressures. Congestion around key transport corridors has resulted in raised levels of pollution and four Air Quality Management Areas have been designated to address the problem. Medway's industrial past has left many sites contaminated from previous uses. A number of these brownfield sites now represent regeneration opportunities promoted in Medway's development strategy approach. The area's relationship with the rivers and estuaries that define Medway's character and history gives rise to specific consideration for sustainable water management and addressing the risk of flooding.
- 7.3 The area's environmental quality is of international and national importance with 28% designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) or Ramsar site, and a third of the land area is designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Most of the designated land is in favourable condition, but some areas are in unfavourable condition, largely resulting from land management practices. There have been noted declines in the birdlife of the estuaries. Although there may be various contributing factors, particular concerns have been raised about the impacts of recreational disturbance on the special features of these areas. There are designations of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) of international importance, both within Medway, and in close proximity to its borders. There is potential of damage to the features of designated SACs from air pollution generated in association with development proposed in the Medway Local Plan. There are further sites recognised as Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites, Local Nature Reserves and Sites of Nature Conservation Interest.
- 7.4 Medway's environment also includes land in the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The RSPB has its oldest heronry/nature reserve at Northward Hill, and Plantlife has its largest reserve at Ranscombe Farm. The natural features of the river and the Downs are reflected in the city's character and form. These include the Capstone and Horsted Valleys and Darland Banks. The urban area benefits from a diverse and attractive mix of parks, including district scale facilities at Riverside, Capstone and the Great Lines. The council's approach to the

⁷⁶ Department for Communities and Local Government, 'National Planning Policy Framework', Section 11, paragraph 109-125, pg.17, 2015 Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

conservation and enhancement of the natural environment will embed green infrastructure planning in both rural and urban areas and promote improved connectivity and functionality, following a 'natural capital' approach as promoted by government. Understanding and embracing Green Infrastructure functionality will assist Medway in delivering improvements in urban air quality, sustainable drainage, biodiversity, rich open spaces and safer access routes, and in securing sustainable developments both within its spatial options and urban areas. The new Local Plan will seek to strengthen the condition of the local environment, and respect the need to live within the earth's environmental limits.

- 7.5 Consultation on the emerging Medway Local Plan has confirmed how green spaces and countryside are valued by local people. There is much support for their protection and enhancing their functions for access and wildlife, with particular interest in extending access to the riverside that is appropriate to the sensitivities of the natural environment. The consultation on the Development Options stage of the emerging Local Plan in 2017, received over 11,000 representations objecting to the consideration of development taking place on land designated as a SSSI at Lodge Hill.
- 7.6 A key feature of Medway is the extent of areas that are designated of international or national importance for their biodiversity and landscape value. These indicate areas where development should be restricted in order to protect their special characteristics as outlined above.



Environmental and Green Belt Designations in Medway

7.7 National planning policy⁷⁷ sets the requirements for the planning system to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. It recognises the importance of natural assets, including air, water and soils, landscapes, biodiversity and the connectivity between them. The government published its 25 Year Environment Plan⁷⁸ in early 2018 to provide guidance on its new approach to managing the environment. The plan promotes a ‘natural capital’ approach that recognises the wider value of the environment and its contribution, such as food, clean water and air, wildlife, energy, wood, recreation and protection from hazards. In using land sustainably, the Local Plan commits to embedding an environmental net gain principle for development and infrastructure. It supports locally-led strategies to enhance the natural environment. The council will embed these principles in the Local Plan as it develops.

Rivers and Estuaries

7.8 The lower reaches of the river Medway flow alongside the villages and towns of the borough, opening up into the estuary which separates the Hoo Peninsula from the largely urban area to the south. The Thames forms Medway’s northern boundary. The rivers and estuaries and associated habitats are intrinsic to Medway’s character, and have influenced the area’s history and development. The use of the water for trade continues with wharves, docks and associated infrastructure supporting the supply of minerals, energy and wider goods and services. The urban waterfront is a focus for Medway’s regeneration ambitions, with key development sites from the south of Strood to the north of Gillingham. Strategic employment sites are located on the coast of the Hoo Peninsula, notably at Kingsnorth and Grain. The Marine Conservation Zone, SPA and SSSI designations adjoin many of these key regeneration and employment sites. Policies for managing these important water resources have been developed through the Thames River Basin Management Plan and the emerging Medway Estuary and Swale Strategy⁷⁹. Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) have emerged from the Kent Biodiversity Strategy to indicate where targets should be focused in order to secure the maximum benefits for biodiversity. The North Kent Marshes are a key opportunity area.

7.9 The routes around the Medway and Thames form part of Natural England’s England coastal path that will be in place by 2020. Further details of the route along Medway’s coast will be published by summer 2018. The Saxon Shore Way long distance path enables walkers to explore the area’s historic shoreline. The North Downs Way national trail runs through Medway, and is a focus of development work

⁷⁷ Department for Communities and Local Government, ‘National Planning Policy Framework’, Section 11, paragraph 109, pg.17, 2015 Available at:

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

⁷⁸ HM Government, ‘A Green future: Our 25 year plan to Improve the Environment’, Available at :

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/673203/25-year-environment-plan.pdf

⁷⁹ Environment agency, ‘Medway Estuary and Swale flood and coastal risk management strategy’, Available at, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/medway-estuary-and-swale-flood-and-coastal-risk-management-strategy/medway-estuary-and-swale-flood-and-coastal-risk-management-strategy>

supported by the Kent Downs AONB unit. There are wider opportunities to open up access through the urban area, through a waterside path or boardwalk, which will be promoted through detailed plans for Medway's regeneration and development. This will be an iconic project that could transform the area's urban waterfront and connections. Similarly ambitions to provide a riverside link for walking and cycling between Medway and Maidstone will be supported. The new river crossing south of Halling has opened up opportunities for walking and cycling routes embracing both sides of the Medway valley. The council is updating the Medway Rights of Way Improvement Plan for publication in late 2018.

- 7.10 Much of the Thames and Medway estuaries and bordering mudflats and marshes are designated as Special Protection Areas and Ramsar sites for their international importance for wintering birds, and also have status as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The collaborative Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS) scheme has been developed by environmental groups and local planning authorities to ensure residential developments can come forward without increasing further the disturbance of over wintering wetland bird populations. The Medway Estuary from Rochester to the Isle of Grain was designated as a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) in the first round of designations in 2013. This protects a nationally scarce species of tentacled lagoon-worm and a number of habitats and their associated wildlife. The health of the MCZ will largely be achieved through the licensing regimes that manage activities taking place on the river or seabed, but the council as local planning authority must consider the potential impact of developments proposed along the coast. The Marine Management Organisation is preparing a marine plan for the south east that will provide guidance on managing development and activities.
- 7.11 The council recognises tensions between opening up access to the coast and the needs of wildlife. Research⁸⁰ has shown that the internationally important birdlife of the Thames, Medway and Swale Estuaries Special Protection Areas and Ramsar sites can be damaged by the impact of people visiting the estuary. Dogs exercising off the lead, cycling and watersports are among the activities shown to cause disturbance to birds, and so a potential contributing factor to the decline of birds in the estuary. Medway Council is working at a landscape level, leading a North Kent SAMMS Project Board, to coordinate the delivery of a strategic package of measures to address the potential of damage to the special features of the designated habitats. The strategic approach is funded through a contribution from new developments which would increase the population within 6km of the protected areas, which the research found to be the distance within which most visits to the estuarine coast originated. Monitoring is embedded in the SAMMS scheme, so that measures can be adapted to take account of changing conditions.
- 7.12 Medway Council adopted an interim Policy Statement⁸¹ in November 2015 to provide a basis for its implementation of the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring

⁸⁰ Foot print-Ecology, *'Bird Disturbance Study North Kent'*, 2010/2011, (FOOTPRINT-ECOLOGY.CO.UK), Available at: <http://www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/Final%20North%20Kent%20Bird%20Report.pdf>

⁸¹ Footprint- Ecology, *'Thames, Medway & Swale Estuaries- Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy'*, 2014, (FOOTPRINT-ECOLOGY.CO.UK), Available at:

programme⁸². It is the council's intention that the new Local Plan will include a policy on this matter to seek to avoid damage to the protected characteristics of the Thames, Medway and Swale SPA and Ramsar sites.

Policy NE 1: Sites of international importance for nature conservation

The estuaries and marshes of the Thames, Medway and Swale are designated Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar sites in recognition of their international importance as wetland habitats. There is a Special Area of Conservation in the North Downs woodland near north Halling. These sites require the highest level of protection from development that could damage the features of the designated areas. No development will be permitted which may have an adverse effect on the integrity of an SAC, SPA or Ramsar site, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, as it would not be in accordance with the Habitat Regulations 2010 (as amended) and the aims and objectives of this emerging Local Plan.

The council will work in collaboration with local planning authorities in north Kent to contribute to the delivery of a strategic access management and monitoring scheme to address potential damage from population increases on the designated SPA and Ramsar habitats of the Thames, Medway and Swale Estuaries and Marshes.

Development within 6km of these areas designated as the Special Protection Areas and Ramsar sites that has the potential to generate additional visits to these coastal areas will be required to make a defined tariff contribution to a strategic package of measures agreed by the North Kent Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS) Project Board.

The council will consider the potential for adverse impacts on the Special Areas of Conservation arising from development, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects. If the assessment shows that there is a potential for adverse impacts, steps will be taken to restrict or mitigate development.

Consideration of Alternatives

7.13 In preparing the interim policy position on SAMMS, the council considered alternative approaches⁸³, involving review of the extent of the buffer zone, the package of measures that could address the potential impact on the SPA/Ramsar sites, and the option to assess impacts through producing an Appropriate Assessment at individual planning application level. The proposed approach was supported as it best responded to the evidence base and technical advice from Natural England.

<http://www.medway.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/localplansandpolicies/developmentplanpolicies/developmentbriefguidance/birddisturbanceinnorthkent.aspx>

⁸² *ibid* 81

⁸³ Strategic Access Management Scheme, Section 3.6-3.8,
<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=28914>

Question NE1:

Do you consider that this is an effective approach to managing the internationally important habitats in the designated SPA and SAC habitats? What alternative approaches would you recommend to secure the favourable condition of these areas?

7.14 The environment is central to the ambitions for Medway's sustainable growth. The council recognises the challenges of accommodating the needs of the area's growing population alongside safeguarding the special characteristics of the local environment. The Local Plan will set out the council's commitment to protecting biodiversity, valued landscapes and geological conservation interests. The council will prepare detailed policies to secure the area's network of ecological and landscape features in producing the draft Local Plan.

Policy NE2: Conservation and Enhancement of the Natural Environment

The council recognises the hierarchy of sites designated for their importance for nature conservation. In addition to the sites of international importance set out in Policy NE1, Medway includes Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites and a Marine Conservation Zone.

The council will promote the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Medway, by restricting development that could result in damage to designated wildlife areas, and pursuing opportunities to strengthen biodiversity networks.

Question NE2:

Do you consider that this is an effective approach to conserving and enhancing Medway's natural environment?

What alternative approaches would you recommend to secure the favourable condition of these areas?

Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

7.15 The Kent Downs to the south of Medway are part of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designation that runs across the county from Downe to Dover, and celebrate their 50th year of designation in 2018. This is an exceptional landscape and the area is afforded the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. Medway Council is a member of the Kent Downs Joint Advisory Committee that coordinates actions to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB. The council has adopted the Kent Downs AONB management plan, 2014-2019⁸⁴ in line with statutory requirements, with the purpose of securing and

⁸⁴ Kent Downs, 'Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Management Plan 2014-2019', Available at: http://www.kentdowns.org.uk/uploads/documents/KD_AONB_final_plan_09.09.14.compressed.pdf

strengthening the distinctive qualities and features of the AONB, within the context of development and wider changes across Kent and Medway. Medway's only Special Area of Conservation (SAC) falls within the ancient woodland in the Kent Downs near Upper Halling, as a small part of the North Downs Woodland SAC.

- 7.16 Medway's part of the Kent Downs AONB is dissected by the river. The area is characterised by the lower valley sides and scarp of the Medway Valley, and provides an important rural buffer between the urban areas of Medway and Maidstone and Malling to the south. There are rich layers of history, and the area includes pre-historical sites and is marked by its industrial past. The M2 and CTRL rail bridges sit high at the northern end of the valley. The open views and dominant landform of the area make it a highly sensitive landscape, and therefore stressing the importance of its setting. Its sensitivity is increased by its role in the setting of the Medway Valley; its function as a gap between large settlements; the inherent value of its cultural and biodiversity sites, and its remarkable survival as a peaceful, rural landscape despite its proximity to settlements, industry and transport infrastructure. Connecting countryside close to the Kent Downs AONB, in areas such as Capstone Valley, reflect features of the designated landscape.
- 7.17 The area experiences some pressures from changing patterns of development in the wider area and infrastructure. The Lower Thames Crossing may impact on the AONB. The area has been subject to some anti-social behaviour, including illegal access, and poor land management regimes. The Valley of Visions partnership invested in a programme to celebrate and enhance the landscape, which has had ongoing benefits, such as tackling illegal use of off-road vehicles.
- 7.18 In considering proposals for development affecting the Kent Downs AONB, both within the designated area and its setting, regard will be given to the components of natural beauty, including tranquillity and cumulative impacts. The setting of the AONB is particularly significant.

Policy NE3: Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Development proposals in the Kent Downs AONB and in the setting of the downs will be required to contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of this designated landscape.

Development must demonstrate that it has have regard to the Kent Downs Management Plan and associated policy guidance.

Question NE3:

Do you consider that this is an effective approach to conserving and enhancing the special features of the Kent Downs AONB?

What alternative approaches would you recommend to secure the components of natural beauty?

Landscape

7.19 Medway benefits from a diverse range of landscapes. Areas such as the Kent Downs and North Kent marshes are protected by environmental designations. However the council recognises the importance of wider landscapes in providing local character, retaining links to the historic environment and defining distinct settlements. The council is updating the Medway Landscape Character Assessment produced in 2011, to provide a robust basis for landscape planning in rural and peri-urban locations. This will provide guidance to inform the preferred development strategy for the new Local Plan. It will also inform requirements for areas to be designated for their strategic landscape importance, including preventing coalescence and securing the quality and functions of the local landscape. Further guidance will be established in the Green Infrastructure Framework.

Policy NE4: Landscape

The council attaches great importance to the distinctiveness and quality of landscape in defining Medway's character, containing urban sprawl and separation of settlements.

An updated Medway Landscape Character Assessment and Green Infrastructure Framework will provide a basis for determining the acceptability of development proposals and areas and features that need to be protected and enhanced.

Development proposals will be required to demonstrate that they protect, strengthen and connect features of local landscapes.

Question NE4:

Do you consider that this is an effective approach to landscape policy in Medway?

What alternative approaches would you recommend?

Medway's green infrastructure network

7.20 The large urban conurbation made up of the distinct Medway towns is surrounded and interspersed by countryside and water. The parks, paths and open spaces across urban Medway are important to residents for relaxation, health, socialising, and contribute to the quality of towns and suburbs. These can be the most direct way for people to engage with their local environment and can contribute to tackling social isolation, inactivity and wider health issues. In contrast to the city landscapes, the rural parts of Medway are noted for expansive marshes, stretches of undeveloped coast, woodland, chalk downland, orchards and shelterbelts, and a range of other farming activities. Capstone and Horsted Valleys bring an accessible rural landscape into the heart of Gillingham and Chatham. The orchards running along the northern bank of the estuary provide an attractive and productive belt separating Rainham from Gillingham. Orchards to the east of Rainham provide a rural character and sympathetic setting for the Conservation Area at Meresborough

and a strategic gap between urban Medway and settlements in neighbouring Swale. Together these urban and rural assets make up Medway's green infrastructure network that provides a number of landscape services, and multiple benefits for nature and people. These include:

- Habitats for wildlife;
- Food production;
- Water storage and filtration;
- Air quality
- Setting for heritage
- Woodland for timber, fuel and as a carbon sink;
- Access to open space to relax, exercise and learn;
- Defining a local sense of place; and
- A focus for community activities.

7.21 A well planned and managed GI network can and should perform multiple functions and provide multiple benefits and services for communities such as,

- managing surface water and flood risk (flood storage, swales, surfaces for infiltration and storage)
- improving water quality
- helping communities to address and adapt to climate change
- providing opportunities for recreation and improved wellbeing
- enhancing biodiversity (Habitat creation, river corridors)
- promoting community interaction (recreation, boating, angling)

7.22 GI is an interconnected network of green and blue spaces such as: green roofs, parks and gardens, playing fields and allotments, beaches, watercourses and wetlands, river corridors, woodlands, grasslands, trees, hedgerows. GI should perform multiple functions and provide multiple benefits and services to communities, as detailed above. GI can include both private (such as home gardens) and public (such as local parks), managed (such as playing fields) and natural (such as woodland) spaces and is important in both urban and rural areas.

7.23 GI can be described as being a part of the wider network of services that form Environmental Infrastructure. These networks of services are essential to supporting and safeguarding our homes and communities: managing our water supply, waste water, waste services and providing flood risk management.

7.24 Green spaces and countryside help in regulating the resilience of the environment at a local and global scale. The council will work at a landscape scale to conserve biodiversity and secure the wider benefits of a coordinated approach to planning for the protection and enhancement of Medway's natural and local environment. Green infrastructure planning will inform the development strategy and principles promoted in the new Local Plan. This accords with the ambitions and approaches in planning for the natural environment set out in the government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

7.25 The principles underpinning green infrastructure planning in Medway are:

- Positively reinforcing a sense of place
- Separating places but joining communities
- Delivering clear benefits for the environment through development to ensure all communities benefit from change
- Providing richer experiences
- Creating more accessible urban and rural places
- Getting closer to nature
- Ability to move through productive landscapes
- Embedding sustainable thinking from the global to the local scale

7.26 Working at a landscape scale, a green infrastructure network of parks and paths, watercourses, and farmed, forested and natural environments will seek to embed connectivity for people and wildlife. These will form a Green Grid for Medway, which will be detailed in a Green Infrastructure Framework to be published in support of the draft Local Plan, informed by preferred sites and broad locations for development. Key components of green infrastructure planning will include strategic green infrastructure zones in areas facing development to provide for sustainable development and provide robust landscape features to enhance planned growth. Planning at this strategic scale provides an opportunity to deliver these multi-functional green infrastructure zones.

Policy NE5: Securing strong Green Infrastructure

The council will protect the network of green infrastructure across rural and urban Medway. The highest protection will be given to securing the ecological and landscape interests of sites designated of international importance as a Special Protection Area, Ramsar site and/or Special Area of Conservation. A high level of protection from damaging impacts of development will be given to Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Ancient Woodland. The council will consider the need to protect the special features of Regionally Important Geological Sites, Local Wildlife Sites and Local Nature Reserves

Wider components of the green infrastructure network will be protected in line with the analysis and strategy set out in the emerging Green Infrastructure Framework. This will include open space assets, landscape buffers and green infrastructure zones.

New development should provide for green infrastructure that supports the successful integration of development into the landscape, and contributes to improved connectivity and public access, biodiversity, landscape conservation, design, management of heritage features, recreation and seeks opportunities to strengthen the resilience of the natural environment.

The council will expect development proposals to demonstrate that they are designed to be resilient to, and can adapt to the future impacts of climate change, in strengthening ecological networks.

The council will promote the extension of the green infrastructure network through setting criteria for the establishment and maintenance of Local Green Spaces.

Opportunities will be sought to promote and enhance the public rights of way network, including footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes, in particular to address existing gaps in connectivity and extend appropriate access along the riverside.

Question NE5:

Do you consider that this is an effective approach to securing effective and healthy green infrastructure in Medway?

What alternative approaches would you recommend to secure effective and healthy green infrastructure in Medway?

Green Belt

7.27 Green Belt is not a formal environmental designation, as its primary purpose is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The council attaches great importance to the function provided by the Metropolitan Green Belt that covers areas to the west of Medway. The designation has retained a strategic gap between Strood and Gravesend and prevented the coalescence of Strood and Higham. As part of the preparation of the Local Plan the council has reviewed the Green Belt to assess if land is meeting the purposes established in national policy. Given the scale of growth projected in Medway's population, the council is giving broad consideration to all realistic options at this stage of the plan preparation. This includes testing if the exceptional circumstances exist that would justify a revision to the Green Belt boundary in Medway.

7.28 Should the council determine that there are no such exceptional circumstances to support the release of Green Belt land, it will adhere to its policy that development will be restricted in this location, in line with national policy to ensure that the land remains permanently open.

Policy NE6: Green Belt

The council recognises the important function of Green Belt at a local and strategic scale, in managing the urban sprawl and coalescence of settlements and maintaining the openness and permanence of the countryside.

Development proposals will be permitted only where they are in accordance with national planning policy for the Green Belt⁸⁵ and can demonstrate that it would not undermine the functioning of the Green Belt.

The council will seek opportunities to enhance land for beneficial uses in the Green Belt to strengthen its function.

⁸⁵ Department for Communities and Local Government, 'National Planning Policy Framework', Section 9, paragraph 89, pg.17, 2015 Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

Question NE6:

Do you agree with the proposed policy for Green Belt?

Do you consider that the exceptional circumstances exist to justify the review of the Green Belt boundary?

Do you have suggestions for alternative approaches to Green Belt policy?

Flood and Water Management

7.29 National Planning Policy expects Local Plans to account for water management via the consideration of flood risk, coastal change and water supply. This section will focus on the management of those aspects. Water supply is referenced in Section 10: Infrastructure.

7.30 'Flood risk' is defined in national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) as "a combination of the probability and the potential consequences of flooding from all sources – including from rivers and the sea, directly from rainfall on the ground surface and rising groundwater, overwhelmed sewers and drainage systems, and from reservoirs, canals and lakes and other artificial sources."⁸⁶ National planning policy seeks to minimise increased vulnerability to flood risk through the promotion of sites away from areas of higher flood risk via a Sequential Test.⁸⁷ Where this is not possible then the Exception Test should be applied.

Flood risk in Medway

7.31 The Thames and Medway estuaries to the north and the River Medway bisecting the administrative area give rise to the risk of river and sea flooding. There is also substantial risk of surface water flooding throughout the administrative area. During the Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment process of 2011, urban areas within Medway were identified to be one of ten national Flood Risk Areas considered to be of significant risk of surface water flooding. This area is expected to have increased as part of the 2017 iteration of this assessment (outputs unavailable at this time). The Environment Agency's (EA) Long Term Flood Risk Map shows areas at risk of all sources of flooding, including from the rivers and sea, surface water, and reservoirs <https://flood-warning-information.service.gov.uk/long-term-flood-risk/map>

Flood risk governance

7.32 The Environment Agency is responsible for taking a strategic overview of the management of all sources of flooding and coastal erosion. Lead Local Flood

⁸⁶ Department for Communities and Local Government, 'National Planning Policy Framework', Section 11, paragraph 109-125, pg.17, 2015 Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

⁸⁷ Department for Communities and Local Government, 'National Planning Policy Framework', Section 10, paragraph 99, pg.17, 2015 Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

Authorities have a lead role in managing the risk of flooding from surface water, groundwater, and ditches and streams. Medway Council, as a Unitary Authority, is considered a LLFA under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. Internal Drainage Boards are independent public bodies for water level management in low lying areas. They work in partnership with other authorities to actively manage and reduce the risk of flooding. There are two IDB's within the Medway administrative area; the Lower Medway IDB, and the North Kent Marshes IDB. The Medway Estuary and Swale Strategy is being developed by the Environment Agency that will recommend sites for realigning the flood defences to provide inter-tidal habitat that will support SPA and SSSI features (as compensation for loss through predicted 'coastal squeeze'), as well as delivering habitat that might be useful for the delivery of River Basin Management Plan mitigation measures. The council recognises the potential for habitat creation, particularly if there are multiple benefits from these opportunities such as improved water management, flood risk management, public access and landscape enhancement in addition to the wildlife benefits.

Climate change

- 7.33 Due to climate change over the coming years the frequency of flooding events may change. It is expected that there will be milder and wetter winters and hotter and drier summers. This combined with increased demand from development requires a proactive approach to the management of these risks via the planning system.
- 7.34 National planning guidance on Flood and Coastal Change⁸⁸ references Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) as a study to be carried out by local planning authorities to assess the risk to an area from flooding from all sources, now and in the future and to assess the impact that land use changes and development in the area will have on flood risk. This study was initially undertaken for Medway in 2006 and is currently being updated (due for completion later in 2018) to reflect changes in planning policy, governance, and use of the most up to date flood risk data.
- 7.35 Government guidance⁸⁹ states that LPA's should work with LLFA's to secure Local Plan policies compatible with the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS). The Medway LFRMS was adopted in 2015.
- 7.36 It is important to apply this policy in the context of both of these strategic documents to ensure that all links are made to the aims and objectives of these plans.

Water supply

- 7.37 Water supply is managed by Southern Water and Southeast Water in Medway. Southern Water is the main supplier

providing water to most of authority and South East Water supplying just Halling.⁹⁰ Medway is an area of water stress as identified by the Environment Agency.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Department for Communities and Local Government, 'National Planning Policy Framework', 2015 Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

⁸⁹ *ibid* 88

Groundwater protection

- 7.38 The protection of groundwater sources is also vital in order to maintain water supply. In Medway there are several groundwater sources that are predominantly in the urban area and Medway Valley.⁹² These are highlighted via the Environment Agency Ground Water Source Protection Zones that aim to protect the water quality of groundwater sources.
- 7.39 Reference should be made to the Environment Agency's Groundwater Protection guidance documents to ensure that any impact of development on groundwater quality in the area is managed appropriately.⁹³

Policy NE7: Flood and Water Management

The Local Plan will seek to reduce flood risk, promote water efficiency measures, and protect and enhance water quality through the following mechanisms:

Flood Risk Management

- Ensuring that development has a positive or nil impact on flood risk management interests
- Development that would harm the effectiveness of existing flood defences or prejudice their maintenance or management will not be permitted.
- Where development benefits from an existing or proposed flood infrastructure, the development should contribute towards the capital costs and/or maintenance of these defences over the lifetime of the development.

Sustainable Urban Drainage

Development should enable or replicate natural ground and surface water flows and decreased surface water runoff , via the use of Sustainable urban Drainage systems (SUDS), utilising green infrastructure where possible and as guided by relevant national (and/or local standards) and guidance.

⁹⁰ 'Medway Infrastructure Position Statement (2017)', Available at: <https://www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/IPS%20Jan%202017.pdf>

⁹¹ Department for Environment, Food & Rural affairs, 'Environment Agency, Water Stressed Areas (2013)', Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/244333/water-stressed-classification-2013.pdf

⁹² Environment Agency, 'Groundwater Source Protection Zones', Available at: <http://maps.environment-agency.gov.uk/wiyby/wiybyController?x=531500.0&y=181500.0&topic=groundwater&ep=map&scale=5&location=London,%20City%20of%20London&lang=e&layerGroups=default&distance=&textonly=off#x=574986&y=167313&lg=1,10,&scale=6>

⁹³ Environment Agency, 'Groundwater source protection zones', 2005, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/groundwater-source-protection-zones>

Where SuDs are provided, arrangements must be put in place for their management and maintenance over their full lifetime.

Water Supply

Development within Groundwater Source Protection Zones and Principal Aquifers will only be permitted provided that it has no adverse impact on the quality of the groundwater resource and it does not put at risk the ability to maintain a public water supply.

Water Quality

All new development should have regard to the actions and objectives of appropriate River Basin Management Plans (in Medway, this is the Thames River Basin District) in striving to protect and improve the quality of water bodies in and adjacent to the district, as well as ecology, geomorphology, and water quantity. Developers shall undertake thorough risk assessments of the impact of proposals on surface and groundwater systems and incorporate appropriate mitigation measures where necessary.

Adaptation to Climate Change

Development will be required to be designed to be resilient to, and adapt to the future impacts of, climate change through the inclusion of adaptation measures. These include:

- Incorporating water efficiency measures, such as the use of grey water and rainwater recycling, low water use sanitary equipment.
- Minimising vulnerability to flood risk by locating development in areas of low flood risk and including mitigation measures including SuDs in accordance with (SuDs policy above).
- Optimising the use of multi-functional green infrastructure, including tree planting for urban cooling, local flood risk management and shading.
- Seeking opportunities to make space for water and develop new blue infrastructure to accommodate climate change.
- Where possible watercourses and wetland features will be adequately buffered from development commensurate with the designation and/or ecological value of those features so that they can be safeguarded and managed sustainably in perpetuity.
- Provision for buffering, mitigating and extending habitats and green corridors to ensure that wildlife populations are more resilient for a changing climate.

Question NE7:

Do you agree with the proposed policy for flood and water management?

Do you have suggestions for alternative approaches for this policy area?

Land Contamination and Hazards

- 7.40 National planning policy⁹⁴ seeks to avoid unacceptable risks from pollution and land instability. Land contamination is a key consideration as it causes harm to the environment, has the potential to adversely affect human health, and unless dealt with appropriately, can inhibit the re-use of otherwise suitable brownfield sites.
- 7.41 Medway has a number of brownfield sites that were previously in industrial and/or military use, particularly in waterfront locations. These previously developed sites provide opportunities for regeneration, making the best use of land, boosting the supply of housing and contributing to the area's economic success. However the council recognises that some of these sites may be subject to contamination from previous uses.
- 7.42 The council expects that all potentially contaminated land⁹⁵ should be remediated prior to development and/or during construction to an appropriate level to its proposed use. Investigations and assessments of all sites situated on or in close proximity to potentially contaminated land will be required in conjunction with relevant development proposals. This will identify potential risks to human health and the environment and where relevant, inform remedial measures and future monitoring to mitigate and monitor the risk. All investigations should be carried out in accordance with established procedural guidelines.⁹⁶ Where a site is affected by contamination or land stability issues, responsibility for securing a safe development will rest with the developer and/or landowner⁹⁷.
- 7.43 The council will set out further policy details in the development management policies in the draft Local Plan to ensure that land contamination is dealt with appropriately and where necessary remediated to ensure that there are no negative impacts on human health, controlled waters or other relevant receptors.

Noise and light pollution

- 7.34 National planning policy⁹⁸ recognises that development can adversely affect health and quality of life, through unacceptable levels of noise and inappropriate lighting. There are potential wider impacts on wildlife and landscapes, particularly areas

⁹⁴ Department for Communities and Local Government, 'National Planning Policy Framework', Section 11, paragraph 120-122, pg.17, 2015 Available at:

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

⁹⁵ Environmental protection act 1990 c.43, Section 11(a)

⁹⁶ BSI Standards Publication, 'Investigation of Potentially Contaminated Land – Code of Practice', BS 10175:2001, Available at: <http://bailey.persona-pi.com/Public-Inquiries/M4-Newport/C%20-%20Core%20Documents/12.%20Geology%20and%20Soils/12.2.13%20-%20BS10175%20Code%20of%20Practice%20for%20Investigation%20of%20Potentially%20Contaminated%20Sites%20%28inc.%202013%20Amendment%29.pdf>

⁹⁷ Department for Communities and Local Government, 'National Planning Policy Framework', Section 11, paragraph 120, pg.17, 2015 Available at:

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

⁹⁸ Department for Communities and Local Government, 'National Planning Policy Framework', Section 11, paragraph 123-125, pg.17, 2015 Available at:

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

valued for their tranquillity. Noise can significantly affect the quality of life of local people, and has associated health related impacts where there is exposure to elevated levels of environmental noise. Noise may come from a variety of sources, including road, rail and air traffic, industrial processes and recreational activities. Certain forms of development, for example residential development, can be particularly sensitive to noise and there are strict noise criteria which should be achieved if negative effects of exposure are to be avoided. The council advocates that noise management is considered as early as possible in the planning process as an integral part of development proposals.

- 7.35 The council will assess areas of tranquillity across Medway, as part of its evidence base on landscape and green infrastructure to support the draft Local Plan, and develop an appropriate policy response. The council recognises the contribution of tranquillity to conserving the qualities of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the special character of the marshland landscapes of the Hoo Peninsula.

Air Quality

- 7.36 As well as a detrimental impact upon the natural environment, air pollution if unchecked will have an increasing impact on human health and quality of life. The new Local Plan will recognise that air quality is an important consideration when making decisions with regards to future developments, transport and pollution control issues.
- 7.37 Where an air quality objective is deemed to be breached, the local planning authority must declare an Air Quality Management Area and put in place an action plan in order to bring pollutant levels below the objective.
- 7.38 Medway has four AQMAs: Central Medway; Pier Road Gillingham; High Street, Rainham; and Four Elms, near Chattenden. The pollutant of significance is nitrogen dioxide, and is almost entirely due to traffic and traffic congestion. The council has a statutory duty to have an Air Quality Action Plan, which aims to improve air quality within these designated areas, as well as the borough in general.
- 7.39 The Medway Council Air Quality Action Plan 2015 (AQAP) was formally adopted in December 2015. Kent and Medway Air Quality Planning Guidance, 2016⁹⁹ has been prepared to set out the measures which will be taken to help reduce emissions which occur as a result of development proposals. It provides advice for the design and layout of schemes and potential mitigation measures. The guidance will apply across the whole borough in order to improve air quality and avoid worsening air quality in existing AQMAs, or resulting in the designation of further AQMAs.
- 7.40 Large, potentially polluting developments include those that generate a significant amount of vehicle movements (such as large out of town industrial, leisure, retail or office developments), industrial processing plants, power stations and incinerators. The impact of any proposals on ambient air quality will also be important where the

⁹⁹ Medway Council 'Kent and Medway Air Quality Planning Guidance 2016', Available at: <http://www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/Medway%27s%20Air%20Quality%20Planning%20Guidance.pdf>

development could in itself result in the designation of Air Quality Management Areas or conflict any Air Quality Action Plans declared by the Council. In appropriate circumstances, air quality impact studies through air dispersions modelling and appropriate modelling will be made legally binding through the use of planning conditions or planning obligations (S.106 agreements).

- 7.41 The use of renewable and alternative energy sources; and integrated transport strategies, will all help to improve air quality and also contributing to reducing CO2 emissions. However biomass burning can pose challenges to air quality. A shift towards more biomass burning in urban areas of Medway could have significant impacts on air quality and public health if only the potential climate change benefits are considered. There could be conflict with policies relating to energy, and therefore very careful consideration of the air quality impacts relating to proposed development of biomass burning will be required.

Policy NE 8: Air Quality

The council seeks to reduce exposure to areas of poor air quality, maintain areas of good air quality, and where possible improve air quality through restricting development or requiring acceptable and effective mitigation measures.

Proposed developments which have the potential to impact on air quality will be expected to be accompanied by air pollution impact assessments and mitigation measures, in accordance with local air quality guidance.

All proposals should take account of the Medway Council Air Quality Planning Guidance that sets out a screening checklist for major size development and proposed development within, or close to an AQMA. Depending on the scale of development, the council may require the submission of an Air Quality Assessment and/or an Emissions Mitigation Assessment.

The guidance also advocates mitigation measures for all development. Where mitigation is not integrated into a scheme, the council will require this through a planning condition(s). If on site mitigation is not possible, then the council may seek contribution to wider air quality mitigation measures through a planning obligation.

Question NE8:

Do you agree with the proposed policy for air quality?

Do you have suggestions for alternative approaches for this policy area?