

MEDWAY IN 2035 - VISION AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR THE LOCAL PLAN

Context

- 2.1 Medway sits at the mouth of its great river on the north Kent estuarine coast, bordered by the Thames to the north and the Kent Downs to the south. The five historic towns linked by the A2 form a complex urban conurbation, which retains the distinct identities of the individual towns and suburbs. Sitting close to the countryside, the urban area is surrounded by a network of villages on the Hoo Peninsula and the Medway Valley, alongside marshes and mudflats, wooded hills, productive farmland and strategic energy and minerals operations built up around the wharves. Much of the countryside and estuary is of international importance for its environmental qualities, including designated Special Protection Areas, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Beauty. Land to the west of the borough forms part of the London metropolitan Green Belt.
- 2.2 Medway is one of the largest urban areas in the south east, and has been growing rapidly in recent years to a population of 278,542 by 2016¹⁰. The population has a slighter younger age profile than the Kent and England averages, and reflecting national trends has an increasing number of people over 65 years. This has implications for planning services such as health and education, and ensuring ease of access to local services and facilities. The Local Plan must take account of the changes and growth in Medway's population. In common with other areas, particularly in the South East, Medway has seen steady growth in recent years, and this is projected to continue over the life of the local plan, to expand the area's population by circa 18% by 2035. This growth is currently projected to reach a population of 330,200 people in 2035¹¹. In contrast to other areas in Kent, much of Medway's growth is from natural change, with births outnumbering deaths. This shows through in demand for health and education services.
- 2.3 Medway is the second largest urban area in the South East after Brighton & Hove, and similar in size to cities such as Plymouth. However Medway does not enjoy either the recognition, or the range of services and facilities that of a city of this scale warrants. This may reflect the polycentric pattern of Medway's urban area, with the five main towns each providing their own centre, and key destinations and attractions being spread across Medway, rather than clustered in one city centre. Medway's

¹⁰ Office for National Statistics, 'Population estimates for UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: Mid-year Estimate, 2016', Available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/latest>

¹¹ Office for National Statistics, 'National Population Projections: 2014-based Statistical Bulletin', Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/nationalpopulationprojections/2015-10-29>

growth needs to respect the distinctiveness and history of its separate towns and villages. However, as Medway grows, it is essential that the area secures the economic, commercial, community and cultural facilities fitting to its city scale.

- 2.4 Medway benefits from a stunning landscape setting, rich heritage, high speed train links, universities, a strategic location in the Thames Gateway, and a diverse offer of services and businesses. However there are areas which need addressing. Medway's economy and skills levels are weaker than competing areas. There are marked inequalities in health, with life expectancy shorter for our residents. Medway is often unfairly associated with negative perceptions. The town centres are not always seen as attractive destinations and vibrant hubs for community activities, and they have suffered from the structural changes in retail patterns which have been seen across the country. In particular Chatham does not provide the scale of retail and leisure facilities that would be expected for a city of its size, and the centre for wider Medway. Transport networks reflect historic routes, local topography and the geography of a mature river, and there are noted areas of congestion and pressure on highways. Our ambitions should seek to realise the added economic value that a city should provide.
- 2.5 Medway's economy lags behind both the county and national averages. Productivity runs at 70% of the national performance, and at two-thirds of the regional level. Skills levels are notably lower in Medway. Medway's productivity measured by GVA (Gross Value Added) is amongst the lowest in the South East region, but is showing marked signs of strengthening, with the annual rates of growth running above the regional and national averages. Despite being the largest city in Kent and one of the largest in the South East region, Medway has yet to achieve its full economic potential.
- 2.6 The closure of the Dockyard in the 1980s dealt a severe blow to the local area, and Medway has been through much change in the subsequent decades. There is a well-established urban regeneration programme that has brought universities to Medway, with over 10,000 students, infrastructure investments in high speed rail services on HS1, the Medway Tunnel, road schemes and railway stations, and new residential, commercial and leisure areas. Key employment sites, such as London Medway Commercial Park at Kingsnorth on the Hoo Peninsula have benefitted from infrastructure upgrades and have attracted new businesses to the area. The council is committed to the continuation of the regeneration programme and this will be at the core of the strategy for the new Local Plan.
- 2.7 The scale of growth Medway is experiencing is challenging. The population has increased by over 13,500 people in the last 5 years, one of the fastest growing areas in Kent. However, the rate of growth has slowed significantly in the last couple of years. Local people are experiencing the impacts of growth, and are concerned that further increases will result in a deterioration of the quality of life in Medway, placing pressures on infrastructure and services, leading to increasing delays in moving around Medway, longer waits for health services, more competition in getting school places, loss of green spaces and the views that people currently enjoy, and new houses going to people moving into Medway.

- 2.8 A key task for the Local Plan is to manage growth to achieve a more successful, attractive Medway with healthier communities that share in the benefits of development. Development should be seen to deliver benefits – better housing for local people, higher quality jobs, new services and facilities such as schools and parks. Growth can boost the economy, improve our town centres, turn derelict and underused land into attractive modern places to live, work and visit, and achieve the city scale facilities that Medway warrants.
- 2.9 Growth does not mean losing the character of the area. Medway's history, countryside and the river provide the context for future development. The natural surroundings and built environment defines Medway, and will be at the core of the Local Plan. The development strategy must show how we can provide land for housing, jobs, infrastructure and services, whilst protecting important environmental and heritage assets, retaining and strengthening the green infrastructure links for people and wildlife. Over 250,000 people live in the urban area made up of the five towns and suburbs from Strood to Rainham. The open spaces and countryside in and around the large conurbation are highly valued, and form an important component of Medway's character. The countryside to the south of Medway, and on the Hoo Peninsula has retained a distinct sense of place, strongly distinguished from the nearby towns. Medway also enjoys a rich and diverse historic environment, reflecting its military, industrial, ecclesiastical and cultural past. These characteristics need to be embedded in the emerging strategy for the new Local Plan.

Policy Context

- 2.10 The Local Plan is being prepared in conformity with national planning policy and guidance. The council has also had regard to key government strategies and documents in defining the important issues and approaches to be taken in the Local Plan. The Housing White Paper, 2017¹², the Industrial Strategy, 2017¹³, and the 25 Year Environment Plan, 2018¹⁴ are highlighted as some of the main strategies that provide direction on significant matters for the Medway Local Plan.
- 2.11 The emerging Local Plan forms part of the council's policy context. It provides the spatial direction for Medway's growth that aligns to the overarching ambitions for the area. The council is committed to providing the civic leadership to achieve Medway's potential as a successful vibrant modern city that celebrates its heritage and close links to the river and countryside, and where all residents can share in opportunities

¹² 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

¹³ HM Government, *'Industrial Strategy; Building a Britain fit for the future'*, Available at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664563/industrial-strategy-white-paper-web-ready-version.pdf

¹⁴ 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

to improve their lives, health and wellbeing. A number of key strategies and plans that provide direction for the vision and strategic objectives for the Local Plan are noted below.

*Medway Council Plan, 2016-2021*¹⁵

2.12 The Medway council plan sets out three key priorities for the area:

- A place to be proud of
- Maximising regeneration and economic growth
- Supporting Medway's people to realise their potential

2.13 The council plan promotes Medway as a great place to work, live, learn and visit, supported by strategies for culture, tourism and regeneration. The council priorities provide a strong basis for the Local Plan in planning positively for Medway's needs, boosting the economy, improving access, delivering new homes, improving residents' health and wellbeing, and caring for the environment. The council aims to boost economic performance through supporting local businesses and attracting inward investment, and targeting the creation of high skilled jobs. Allied to this are aims to raise skills levels and open up employment opportunities for young people. The council plan specifically supports the preparation of the Local Plan to progress the delivery of the regeneration programme and providing homes to meet the need of Medway's residents.

*Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Medway, 2012-2017*¹⁶

2.14 The five key themes are working together to:

- Give every child a good start in life;
- Enable our older population to live independently and well;
- Prevent early death and increase years of healthy life;
- Improve physical and mental health and wellbeing;
- Reduce health inequalities.

2.15 This Strategy seeks to improve the health of Medway's communities, particularly as many residents experience poorer standards of health than national, regional and Kent averages. Promoting healthy eating and physical activity are central to improving health. Planning can help contribute to healthier food environments, such as managing the availability of fast food outlets, and can support increased access to opportunities for physical activity, including formal provision of sports facilities and parks, and making it easier and more enjoyable to walk and cycle as part of daily routines. The natural environment plays an important role in promoting physical and mental health and wellbeing. In the Strategy, Medway aims to be a dementia-friendly community. Planning has a role to play in making it easier for people to move around

¹⁵ Medway Council, 'Council Plan 2016/17 to 2020/21, 2017/18 update', Available at: <http://www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/Council%20Plan%202017-18%20v4.pdf>

¹⁶ Medway Council, 'Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Medway 2012-2017', Nov 2012, Available at: <http://www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/Joint-Health-and-Well-being-Strategy-for-Medway-2012-2017.pdf>

and to access local services and facilities. Actions to address disadvantage across Medway, through better housing, raising education and skills levels, and employment will contribute to reduction of health inequalities. The Health and Wellbeing strategy is at the early stages of being reviewed.

- 2.16 A draft Kent and Medway Health and Social Care Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP)¹⁷ has been prepared that set outs the framework for the integration and planning of health and social care services and facilities. This has implications for the delivery of health care, and the facilities needed across Medway.
- 2.17 Medway sits within the Thames Gateway regeneration area, and over past decades has secured investment to realise ambitions for growth and redevelopment of underused land. This is a key component of wider regional development and investment planning through the Thames Estuary Growth Commission, South East Local Enterprise Partnership, and supporting partnerships.
- 2.18 The SE Local Enterprise Partnership has secured three rounds of Local Growth Funding from Government, based on its 2014 Strategic Economic Plan. It is currently updating its plan, and the evidence base¹⁸ collated to date confirms the importance of the region in driving growth across the whole of the UK. Medway as part of the North Kent Innovation Zone has benefitted from Local Growth Fund investments in boosting infrastructure and strengthening the economy. More locally Medway Council participates in the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership, and plays a key role in meeting the ambitions for successful growth.

*Thames Gateway Kent Plan for Growth, 2014-2020*¹⁹

- 2.19 This establishes a vision for North Kent as:
- An area of exciting towns and cities complemented by an outstanding natural environment, providing an exemplar of urban regeneration.
 - A thriving business centre attracting leading investors and businesses through its diverse and skilled workforce, high-quality commercial sites and local services, and accessibility to transport links and strategic routes to UK and continental markets.
 - An area of strong, integrated communities with harmony between new and existing businesses and residents – where the benefits of development and investment are shared by the whole community.

¹⁷ MTW.NHS, 'Transforming health and social care in Kent and Medway: Sustainability and Transformation Plan', Oct 2016, Available at: <https://www.mtw.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/20161021-Kent-and-Medway-STP-draft-as-submitted-ii.pdf>

¹⁸ South East Local Enterprise Partnership, 'South East LEP (SELEP) Strategic Economic Plan Evidence Base', Sept 2017, Available at: http://www.southeastlep.com/images/uploads/resources/South_East_LEP_Strategic_Economic_Plan_Evidence_Base_FINAL.pdf

¹⁹ Thames Gateway Kent Partnership, 'Plan for Growth 2014-2020', Available at: <http://www.tgkp.org/content/documents/TGKP%20Growth%20Plan%20May%202014%20Final.pdf>

- A vibrant cultural hub with a thriving social scene and civic pride – attracting a growing student population, bringing youth and vigour to the community.

Medway 2035: University Waterfront City, connecting innovation, people and place

2.20 Medway has a long standing commitment to regeneration, and a number of strategies, development briefs and masterplans have informed the transformation of the waterfront and urban areas over recent decades. As the regeneration programme continues, strategies and plans need to be refreshed. A new Regeneration Strategy, Medway 2035, has been drafted and is published for comments alongside this Development Strategy consultation document. There is strong alignment between the Local Plan and Medway 2035, promoting regeneration and sustainable growth. Medway 2035 complements the Local Plan by developing a structured routemap in support of the policies which will frame expected growth, and setting out a vision of the future Medway which these policies will help secure. If the Local Plan exists to manage growth, Medway 2035 exists to deliver it. The strategy is built around 8 priorities:

- Destination and place making – including promotion of key regeneration and development areas and strengthening the role of town centres
- High value jobs and productivity
- Inward investment
- Local employment
- Innovation
- Business accommodation
- Sector growth
- Improving employability

Medway's Cultural Strategy 2014-2019

2.21 Culture is an important facet of Medway's community life and its economy. It provides key regeneration and growth opportunities, through new businesses, facilities and in planning for public places.

There are four strategic priorities:

- Stewardship – preserve, interpret and enhance Medway's heritage, green spaces and public realm for the enjoyment and benefit of current and future generations
- Engagement – increase active engagement and satisfaction with cultural activities to improve quality of life, providing the essential place-making for the significant regeneration that is taking place in Medway
- Prosperity – harness and foster the creative talent within Medway and maximise the opportunities the universities and further education, tourism, creative sector and cultural offer create for Medway's economy.
- Wellbeing – increase active participation to address obesity, mental and spiritual health, promoting active minds, bodies and lifestyles and seeking to address social isolation.

- 2.22 The Cultural Strategy highlights that cultural activities in Medway can offer economic opportunities, contribute to transforming perceptions of the area, and promote healthy and cohesive communities. It recognises the value of celebrating the best of Medway's past and natural heritage whilst nurturing new activities and outlooks.

Strategic Issues

- 2.23 Medway occupies an important strategic position in north Kent. Historically this importance has been seen in its military and industrial roles. Today, there are close links to London through road and rail, strategic wharves for the importation of aggregates and other materials on the Medway and Thames estuary, energy installations, internationally important habitats along the north Kent coast, and business, learning, civic, and community services provided in one of the largest urban areas in the south east. Medway is of regional and national importance in the importation of aggregates and the energy industry. The Medway Maritime hospital trust serves residents in parts of Swale.
- 2.24 There are significant cross boundary strategic considerations. Medway is part of the Thames Gateway regeneration programme that seeks to raise economic success and boost the delivery of infrastructure and housing. There is an ambitious agenda for growth, underpinned by nationally significant infrastructure, such as the Lower Thames Crossing. The Government is proposing a route that connects Kent and Essex to the east of Gravesham. The route would sit close to the Medway boundary and is an important consideration in assessing travel patterns and setting the direction of the Local Plan. The development of Ebbsfleet Garden City is underway and proposals for the London entertainment resort on the Swanscombe peninsula are being advanced. Such strategic scale developments could have implications for Medway.
- 2.25 Although two-thirds of house moves in Medway come from existing residents, there are also moves in and out of Medway. Apart from the influence of the London housing market, people moving into the area generally come from places close by, such as parts of Gravesham, Swale and Maidstone. Similarly people moving out of Medway tend to look to neighbouring areas, such as Swale, Maidstone and Tonbridge and Malling. Monitoring has shown that migration patterns have been very variable in recent years. There are commuting links to surrounding areas, such as Maidstone and Tonbridge and Malling, and to London.
- 2.26 Bluewater has a sub-regional shopping role, and has a major impact on retail patterns across the area, drawing over a quarter of all comparison spend from Medway. The expansion of the leisure offer at Bluewater will have further implications for Medway's town centres.
- 2.27 The council works in partnership to secure the natural environmental features of the estuarine landscapes of the north Kent coast, and the natural beauty of the Kent Downs. Coordinated working at a landscape scale is essential to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment. Medway Council has played a leading role in the establishment of the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring

Scheme that addresses the risk of recreational disturbance on the designated Special Protection Areas and Ramsar sites along the Thames, Medway and Swale estuaries.

Duty to Cooperate

2.28 Medway Council has been preparing its new Local Plan with regard to the Duty to Cooperate on cross boundary strategic issues. The Duty to Cooperate, introduced in the Localism Act 2011, places a legal duty on local planning authorities to co-operate with one another and with county councils and other prescribed bodies. This is to maximise the effectiveness within which 'activities, such as preparation of development plans, are undertaken as far as they relate to strategic matters. Government policy as set out in the NPPF directs 'local planning authorities to work collaboratively with other bodies to ensure that strategic priorities across local boundaries are properly coordinated and clearly reflected in individual Local Plans'. These strategic priorities are wide ranging and include:

- the homes and jobs needed in the area;
- the provision of retail, leisure and other commercial development;
- the provision of infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);
- the provision of health, security, community and cultural infrastructure and other local facilities; and
- climate change mitigation and adaptation, conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape.

2.29 Government has published²⁰ proposed details of further requirements on local planning authorities for a joined up approach to cross border issues. The council will be expected to produce a 'statement of common ground' over the housing market area, or other agreed geographical area where appropriate. It is proposed that the statement will set out the strategic cross-boundary matters, including the housing need for the area, distribution and proposals for meeting any shortfalls. Medway Council will respond to the further guidance to be published in the update to the National Planning Policy Framework, and use the new statement of common ground to support its plan making process.

2.30 To effectively coordinate actions on strategic matters in the new Local Plan, the council has made use of established partnerships and collaborative working structures to share information, raise issues and where appropriate develop joint evidence base documents, plans and actions. This includes work on regeneration,

²⁰ Department for Communities and Local Government, '*Planning for the right homes in the right places: consultation proposals*', Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/652888/Planning_for_Homes_Consultation_Document.pdf

economic development, infrastructure planning, waste, minerals, and environmental management. The authorities share concerns about the ability to deliver sustainable growth, through securing significant infrastructure improvements and mitigating pressures on the environment, such as air quality. There is strong commitment to joint working on strategic approaches.

- 2.31 The council has also undertaken specific work in connection with the preparation of the Local Plan to ensure that the Duty to Cooperate is met. This has included Duty to Cooperate stakeholder events held during consultation on the emerging plan, 1:1 meetings with local planning authorities, statutory organisations and other Duty to Cooperate bodies. The council reports on these activities in the annual Authority Monitoring Report²¹, and has recorded discussions as part of the plan making process.
- 2.32 The council has taken account of the plans and programmes that influence the future of the area. These include the adopted and emerging Local Plans for neighbouring local planning authorities and the London Plan. The cumulative impacts of proposed development and policies are explicitly considered in the Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulation Assessment processes informing the Medway Local Plan. Proposed changes to the strategic transport networks, particularly roads and rail, are of critical importance to Medway. There is close working with the relevant bodies to assess the impacts of new infrastructure, such as the Lower Thames Crossing, and wider developments. The council seeks to influence the design and service delivery of the strategic networks to meet the economic, social and environmental needs of Medway.

Neighbourhood Plans

- 2.33 Communities are encouraged to prepare neighbourhood plans for their local areas. Once formally 'made', the neighbourhood plan forms part of the Development Plan and therefore provides a policy basis for planning decisions. In Medway, there is currently one area designated for preparing a neighbourhood plan. The parish of Cliffe and Cliffe Woods is working on drafting its neighbourhood plan. Further areas in rural and urban Medway have expressed interest in developing neighbourhood plans, but have not yet started the formal designation process.
- 2.34 Medway Council has worked with the Cliffe and Cliffe Woods neighbourhood planning groups to share information, support joint events and coordinate policy approaches between the Local Plan and neighbourhood plan. The council will similarly engage with other Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Forums that may come forward in Medway to produce a neighbourhood plan.

²¹Medway Council, 'Authority Monitoring Report 2016-2017', Vol. 1, Available at: <http://www.medway.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planningpolicy/authoritymonitoringreport.aspx>

Developing a vision for 2035

By 2035 Medway will be a leading University waterfront city of 330,000 people, noted for its revitalised urban centres, its stunning natural and historic assets and countryside.

Medway will have secured the best of its intrinsic heritage and landscapes alongside high quality development to strengthen the area's distinctive character. The urban waterfront and traditional centres will have been transformed into attractive locations for homes, jobs, leisure and cultural activities. The river will be celebrated as the defining feature linking historic and new development, and extended riverside access will connect communities and destinations.

Medway will have established a regional profile for successful and ambitious growth and accrued benefits from wider strategic developments. New development in Medway's towns and villages will have responded positively to the character of the surrounding environment and needs of existing communities.

Planned growth will have delivered a city that its residents have pride in, providing homes for all sectors of the community, supported by infrastructure to deliver education, transport, health and community services. Vibrant and complementary town, local and village centres will provide a focus for community life.

The distinct towns and villages that make up Medway will be connected through effective transport networks, with green infrastructure links supporting nature and healthy communities, and defining separation between settlements. The quality of design and public realm will have delivered an accessible city where all can move around safely, and which sets a new character for urban centres.

Inequalities in health, education, economic and social opportunities will be reduced.

Medway will have successfully grown its economy, capitalising on its learning quarter of higher and further education providers to raise skills levels; gaining competitiveness from its strategic location, delivering high speed broadband services to businesses and communities; securing and developing its diverse business base and attracting inward investment in a range of quality employment sites.

Medway will be defined by development that respects the character, functions and qualities of the natural and historic environments, in order to reduce the risk of flooding, to manage finite natural resources, and to ensure that important wildlife and heritage assets are protected and opportunities are realised to enhance their condition and connectivity. Medway's growth will promote a low carbon economy, seeking to address, mitigate and adapt to climate change. Development will be managed to facilitate the sustainable supply of minerals and management of waste. The area's strategic importance in the energy sector will be secured, and new technologies supported in helping to achieve a low carbon economy.

- 2.35 The Local Plan is an opportunity to establish a positive strategy to guide Medway's development over the next 17 years. Regeneration is at the core of Medway's growth plans and its vision for how the area should look and function by 2035. The council is committed to promoting and realising the opportunities for investing in a renewed urban area with high quality development along the waterfront and in town centres that brings homes, jobs, services and new riverside and city links for Medway's communities. This is reflected in the emerging development strategy for the Local Plan.
- 2.36 The regeneration of Chatham is central to the success of Medway's development. The town centre and adjacent waterfront will be a focus for community life. In line with wider trends seen in retail, the role of the town centre is anticipated to evolve in response to changes in shopping habits, and strengthen as a revitalised hub for community and leisure activities. This will be achieved through investing in quality, extending access, and broadening the offer, particularly in leisure, culture and community activities. Chatham can develop a distinct role in offering city scale facilities, such as arts and music venues that realise some of the key opportunities for Medway's future. It will complement the urban centres across Medway. There is potential to bring more homes into the central area, boosting potential footfall for local services and businesses, and increasing vibrancy. This accords with government ambitions to make the best use of land in accessible locations, with good connections to public transport services. Analysis carried out by the Planning Service has confirmed that central Chatham is a highly accessible location, and that there are opportunities for redevelopment that could strengthen its function. This is identified as an 'opportunity area' in the proposed development strategy presented for consultation.
- 2.37 Medway has a complex urban conurbation made up of five distinct towns with their wider neighbourhoods. The Local Plan will promote opportunities to secure the functions of the individual towns, responding to their specific characteristics, local environment, heritage and offers. Rochester Riverside will provide a quality waterfront location for homes, leisure, jobs and services, complementing, and respecting, the unique historic High Street. The Local Plan will support the regeneration of Strood to capitalise on its stunning location overlooking Rochester Castle and Cathedral, its accessibility to high speed rail and motorway links and the availability of redevelopment sites. Gillingham will consolidate its links with the Universities at Medway and its student populations, as well as the wider community. Particular attention will be given to strengthening the links with new development around Gillingham waterfront. Rainham will retain its attractiveness as a popular place to live, and strengthen its role as a service centre. Opportunity areas for redevelopment have been identified in Chatham, Gillingham and Strood, and the council will actively seek to bring forward appropriate development that can enhance these areas, and contribute positively to the vision and strategic objectives set for Medway's growth.
- 2.38 Medway's growth over the next 17 years will take place across the borough, and some areas will see significant change. The Local Plan will seek to direct growth to the most sustainable locations that have potential to expand, to secure investment in infrastructure and services, and to respect the character of the local environment and

heritage. This will help to deliver development that strengthens, rather than detracts from, Medway. Regeneration of underused brownfield sites will form a core element of the growth strategy. Wider growth will be directed to locations where infrastructure can be delivered to support development, and where impacts on the environment can best be avoided, and opportunities realised to achieve net gains for nature.

- 2.39 A quality environment can help boost the economy. Businesses are attracted to places that present a good image. In order to achieve the economic ambitions set out in our vision for Medway by 2035, there is a need to address the unfair perception of the area as an uninspiring post-industrial urban conglomeration. The Local Plan has a role in challenging these perceptions, establishing Medway as an attractive city, with an excellent public realm supporting a vibrant cultural life; new development designed to help people walk and cycle to local services safely and easily; and the surrounding rural and water landscapes recognised as part of Medway's character and offer.
- 2.40 The natural and historic environment will continue to inform how Medway looks and functions. The council has a custodial duty to conserve and enhance the natural environment, in particular the designated habitats and landscapes of the estuaries, marshes and downs. The wider importance of nature is recognised in the greenspaces and countryside that make up Medway's character, and which are strongly valued by local people. A green infrastructure strategy will inform the Local Plan, to provide confidence that the environment is fundamental to the shape of future development in Medway and how growth is managed. The council also recognises the importance of the area's heritage. It has produced a Heritage Asset Review to identify the scope and significance of this aspect of Medway's character, and is preparing a Heritage Strategy to inform the draft plan. It will provide direction on approaches to growth and local distinctiveness, noting the diverse influences across Medway.
- 2.41 The river and estuary of the Medway have defined the history of its urban and rural areas. They are also central to the vision for Medway's future growth. The waterfront regeneration sites have the potential to provide much needed homes, jobs, community and cultural facilities, and turn around negative perceptions of the area. A riverside path or boardwalk linking the towns and out to the villages in the Medway Valley and the Hoo Peninsula would be a conduit for community and commercial activities, and establish new infrastructure that inspires place-making and how people move around the area. A defined riverside route would be a draw for residents and visitors, linking key heritage sites, stations with town centres, the Universities and work places, supporting healthier lifestyles and cultural activities. It would be a focus for the public realm in shaping the modern waterfront city, associated with vibrant urban life within easy reach of the countryside. This would raise the profile of Medway's links with its countryside and open spaces, and complement the wide network of protected and community green spaces.
- 2.42 Development will deliver investment and open up opportunities for Medway's residents for better homes, jobs and services, and to lead healthier lives.

Strategic Objectives

2.43 The role of the Medway Local Plan is to plan positively for the development and infrastructure that the area needs, whilst conserving and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment. The objectives for the plan are:

A place that works well

- To boost the performance of the local economy by supporting local businesses to grow and attracting inward investment through the provision of good quality employment land that meets the needs of businesses, and to secure and extend higher value employment opportunities;
- To significantly improve the skills of the local workforce and capitalise upon the benefits to local businesses;
- To ensure Medway's recognition as a University city and realise economic and place-making opportunities associated with the learning cluster of higher and further education providers in Medway;
- To deliver the infrastructure needed for business growth, to provide accessible employment locations, and excellent high speed broadband services;
- To strengthen and develop the transport network providing safe and effective choices for travel, including management of the highways network, enhanced public transport systems, and improved opportunities for walking and cycling, with associated improvements in air quality.

A riverside city connected to its natural surroundings

- To secure a strong green infrastructure network that protects the assets of the natural and historic environments in urban and rural Medway, and informs the design and sustainability of new development.
- To address the challenges of climate change, seeking adaptations and opportunities to promote carbon reduction and mitigation measures, and reduce the risk of flooding;
- To ensure the effective management of natural resources, including water, air and soil, and the sustainable supply of minerals and appropriate management of waste.

Medway recognised for its quality of life

- To reduce inequalities in health by promoting opportunities for increasing physical activity and mental wellbeing, through green infrastructure and public realm design for walking, cycling, parks and other recreation facilities, and improving access to healthy food choices; and to reduce social isolation by supporting retention and development of local services and dementia friendly environments;
- To provide for the housing needs of Medway's communities, that meets the range of size, type and affordability the area needs;
- To strengthen the role of Medway's town, neighbourhood and village centres, securing a range of accessible services and facilities for local communities, and opportunities for homes and jobs, with Chatham providing the focus for new retail and community facilities.

Ambitious in attracting investment and successful in place-making

- To deliver sustainable development, meeting the needs of Medway's communities, respecting the natural and historic environment, and directing growth to the most suitable locations that can enhance Medway's economic, social and environmental characteristics;
- To secure the ongoing benefits of Medway's regeneration, making the best use of brownfield land, and bringing forward the transformation of the waterfront and town centre sites for quality mixed use development, a focus for cultural activities;
- To establish quality design in all new development, respecting the character of the local environment and seeking opportunities to boost quality and improve the accessibility and design of the public realm;
- To ensure that development is supported by the timely provision of good quality effective infrastructure, so that the needs of Medway's growing and changing communities are well served.