

Medway Council Local Development Framework Core Strategy Examination

HEARINGSWritten Summary of case supporting Oral Representations by the Medway
Countryside Forum

Our Forum's main concern in responding to the consultations on the Local Development Framework and previous Local Plans has been the growing threat to Medway's remaining countryside and open spaces in the face of the huge pressures for development experienced in recent years. Since contributing to the preparation of a Development Plan for the area in 1997, and subsequent reviews of the local plan, we have been aware of the growing regional and local pressure for greatly increased totals of residential building, and the aspiration within our Council to become recognised as a major growth centre within the Thames Gateway. While we support these aspirations to a degree, we believe that far too often their achievement means the compromising of policies for protecting the countryside.

We would quote the following extract from the 1997 Medway Local Plan draft:

"The countryside and natural environment of the Local Plan area has changed considerably over the last few decades, including significant and permanent loss to built development and urbanising influences. The extent of recent urban encroachment is exemplified by the large-scale housing development at Parkwood, Heampstead, Walderslade, Lords Wood and Princes Park. These developments have resulted in great loss of woodland, agricultural land and open countryside. The historic losses emphasise the need to conserve and manage those resources which remain. It is government policy that the countryside should be safeguarded for its own sake and that non-renewable resources should be afforded protection"

We are convinced that the best defence of our valued countryside and open space has been the designation of Areas of Local Landscape Importance, and the criteria for their protection set out in the Local Plan. The case for protecting our dwindling countryside and retaining its essentially rural character enjoys wide public support in Medway. It has been argued that landscape character assessments could provide this protection, but we believe that these assessments should be used to supplement area-based land use designations clearly identified on the appropriate proposals maps.