
LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

To: **Extraordinary Cabinet 29th May 2013**

Main Portfolio Area: Housing and Planning

By: **Simon Thomas, Planning Manager**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary: This report relates to a proposed issues and options consultation for Thanet's new Local Plan. The report explains what the new Local Plan is, and the process for its production, as well as setting out the purpose of the proposed consultation. A summary of the proposed consultation document is provided, as well as the proposed methods of consultation. It is recommended that the consultation document be agreed for consultation to take place on the issues and options for Thanet's Local Plan.

For Decision

1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 National planning policy stresses the central importance of a Local Plan. It is key to delivering sustainable development that reflects the vision and aspirations of local communities and providing the framework for guiding the determination of planning applications in order to manage development effectively.
- 1.2 There have been significant changes to the planning system over the last two years, which has resulted in the need to review our previous approach to the production of planning policy documents. The Localism Act 2011 proposed the abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategies (South East Plan 2009) which set Thanet's targets for growth. The Council now has to determine its own targets for growth through the Local Plan. In addition, new national planning policy, the National Planning Policy Framework, has been published, replacing all previous government planning policy statements and guidance notes. These changes have resulted in the need for new evidence to be gathered regarding the economic potential of the District, and likely future population growth and housing requirements.
- 1.3 It is now proposed that a single Local Plan for Thanet will be prepared, rather than separate Core Strategy and Site Allocations Documents. This was agreed by Cabinet in January 2013 with the adoption of a revised Local Development Scheme.
- 1.4 This report relates to the proposed Stage 1 Public Consultation – Thanet Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation, as set out in the Local Development Scheme.

2.0 The new Local Plan

- 2.1 The new Thanet Local Plan will be the Council's single and overarching planning policy document, which will cover the whole of the District, for a minimum 15 year period to 2031.

- 2.2 The document will include a district wide vision and strategic objectives. The Plan will set out policies and proposals that will be used to guide decisions and investment on development and regeneration over the period to 2031. It will set out how and where the homes, jobs, community facilities, shops and infrastructure will be delivered and the type of places and environments we want to create. It will also identify land to be protected from development, such as open space.
- 2.3 The Plan will form the statutory planning framework for determining planning applications and replace the current 'saved'¹ policies from the Thanet Local Plan 2006.
- 2.4 National policy requires the Plan to be 'sound'. This means:
- **Positively prepared** – the plan should be prepared based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements, including unmet requirements from neighbouring authorities where it is reasonable to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development;
 - **Justified** – the plan should be the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence;
 - **Effective** – the plan should be deliverable over its period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities; and
 - **Consistent with national policy** – the plan should enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 2.5 The Local Plan must be based upon adequate, up-to-date and relevant evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area, and evidence collection is on-going.
- 2.6 The background work and evidence has informed the identification of strategic options and detailed policy options, which are subject to the proposed consultation. The issues and options process is required to ensure that the Local Plan is justified when considered against reasonable alternatives.

Sustainability Appraisal

- 2.7 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires us, in preparing a Local Plan, to carry out an appraisal of the sustainability of the proposals and prepare a report of the findings of the appraisal. The purpose of Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is to promote sustainable development through the better integration of sustainability considerations into preparation and adoption of plans. In response to a European Directive (the SEA directive) national regulations also require that certain planning documents are subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans. The requirements for the SEA are incorporated into the SA process.
- 2.8 An interim SA has been carried out, assessing all of the options against the SA objectives. The sustainability appraisal process will continue to be applied in

¹ These are policies from the Thanet Local Plan 2006 that were saved by the Secretary of State's direction (under paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 8 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004), and continue to be part of the Development Plan, until specifically replaced.

subsequent stages of preparing the Local Plan and will be an integral part of assessing and identifying the preferred options following this proposed consultation.

3.0 The proposed consultation

3.1 The purpose of this consultation is to seek the views of the public and other stakeholders in relation to the issues and options that the Local Plan will address. This consultation is vital in achieving early and meaningful community and stakeholder engagement to inform the development of the Local Plan.

The other stakeholders include:

- specific consultation bodies comprising the statutory consultees, including town and parish councils and neighbouring authorities;
- general consultation bodies including interest groups and voluntary groups;
- other agencies, including for example the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England;
- businesses, business organisations and representatives;
- service providers, for example education establishments and health services; and
- developers and landowners.

The consultation document

3.2 This report includes a summary of the main content of the consultation document, which is provided in full at Annex 1.

3.3 The introductory parts to the consultation document explain the purpose and context of the consultation. This includes an explanation of the process, including a timeline, for producing the Local Plan, the work that has already been done, why we have had to re-assess the approach we have taken previously and what will happen next. The document explains how people can respond to the consultation. It also explains what we have to take into account in developing the Local Plan, including national planning policy.

3.4 A portrait of Thanet is set out which identifies specific issues and opportunities for Thanet. This is followed by a proposed Vision for Thanet in 2031, and the proposed Strategic Priorities and Objectives for the Local Plan.

3.5 The main body of the consultation document outlines the issues and options that are being considered in our approach to planning for the future of Thanet; including the levels of growth that should be planned for and how the growth should be accommodated. The document is structured in four topic areas; economy; housing; environment and quality of life; and transport.

The economy section considers future levels of employment growth, including the role of the airport and how much employment land is needed and where. The role of Thanet's town centres, as well as issues in relation to the visitor economy and rural economy, are also considered.

The housing section looks at the number of homes that need to be provided to 2031, as well as where the new homes should be located and also the type of new homes that should be provided.

The environment and quality of life section considers issues in relation to Thanet's Green Wedges, the countryside, important landscapes as well as Thanet's green

infrastructure. Other issues that are covered include climate change, providing a healthy environment, creating high quality environments, including design and heritage, as well as planning for community facilities.

The final section looks at how we can enable an efficient and effective transport system.

- 3.6 The document explains why we need to address each issue; what evidence we have and the key facts and information relating to the issue, followed by a discussion of the issue.
- 3.7 A set of consultation questions are proposed, relating to each issue. The questions are set out in separate document, annexed to this report (Annex 2). However, on the online consultation portal (outlined in 3.9) the questions will directly follow the commentary on each issue.

Consultation Methods

- 3.8 It is proposed to seek consultation responses through a variety of methods.
- 3.9 The consultation questions will form the framework for written responses. The Local Plan online consultation portal allows people to read and respond to the consultation in a quick and easy way. This is proposed to be our preferred method of response and we will be encouraging responses to be provided this way. The document and questionnaire will also be available to download, and paper copies can be provided where necessary.
- 3.10 As well as newspaper and website promotion, leaflets and mail-outs, and in order to publicise, encourage and assist with responses to the consultation, we are proposing to hold a number of consultation events at venues across Thanet. These will include drop-in sessions and presentations to Parish and Town Councils.
- 3.11 We are also proposing to obtain views by holding a stakeholder conference, targeted workshops and focus groups.
- 3.12 It is proposed that the formal consultation period will commence in June. The statutory time period required for this consultation is 6 weeks. However, to ensure that people have sufficient time to consider the issues fully, be able to attend consultation events and provide responses, it is recommended that the consultation should be for 10 weeks.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 (i) To approve the consultation document and agree public consultation takes place for 10 weeks.
- (ii) Not to approve the consultation in the form set out in this report.

5.0 Corporate Implications

5.1 Financial and VAT

- 5.1.1 It is envisaged that any costs associated with the consultation can be absorbed within current budgeting procedures for preparation of the Local Plan and this report does not give rise to specific additional financial implications.

5.2 Legal

- 5.2.1 The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 set out the requirements of a local planning authority when preparing a Local Plan. The Regulations require local planning authorities to notify specific bodies and persons of the subject of a local plan which the local planning authority proposes to prepare and invite each of them to make representations to the local planning authority about what the local plan with that subject ought to contain.
- 5.2.2 The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 set out the requirements in relation to the Sustainability Appraisal (SA), and requires that the SA considers all reasonable alternatives.
- 5.2.3 Legal advice has been sought in relation to the consultation process that should be carried out in order to meet the statutory requirements. It advised that it is important that the consultation process should inform the process of option selection i.e. that consultees have a genuine opportunity to influence the decision made. This requires consultation on all reasonable alternative options not just in relation to sites but also in terms levels of development, how that development should be distributed and how it should ultimately be managed. The legal advice confirmed that a two stage consultation is the only reasonable option for the consultation process.

5.3 Corporate

- 5.3.1 The Local Plan will represent the Council's overarching plan for shaping future development of the District over the period up to 2031. It contains a vision and sets out the issues and opportunities facing the district and takes account of the plans and resources of a wide range of agencies and organisations who will participate in its delivery.
- 5.3.2 The production of the Local Plan will help to deliver the majority of the Council's priorities in the Corporate Plan. In particular the Local Plan will play a key role in supporting the growth of our economy and the number of people in work, planning for the right type and number of homes in the right place to create sustainable communities, working to improve parking and transportation and protecting and preserving our public open spaces.

5.4 Equity and Equalities

- 5.4.1 The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out the way in which all sectors of the community will be given the opportunity to become involved in the planning process. The SCI was subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment, and this consultation is proposed to take place in accordance with the SCI.
- 5.4.2 An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out at the next stages of the production of the Local Plan, when a draft plan is produced.

6.0 Recommendation

- 6.1 That the consultation document is approved and it is agreed that public consultation takes place for 10 weeks.

7.0 Decision Making Process

- 7.1 This is a key decision, affecting Thanet's communities and appears in the Forward Plan. At this stage a public consultation is being proposed and can be agreed by

Cabinet. The Local Plan final document for submission to the Secretary of State will need to be agreed by Full Council, and will subsequently, following independent examination, become Council policy.

In order to meet the timetable set out in the Local Development Scheme, this decision is exempt from call-in, as outlined in the Chairman's consent dated 14th May 2013 (Background Paper 1).

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Annex List

Annex 1	Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation Document
Annex 2	Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation Questionnaire

Background Papers

Title	Where to Access Document
Background Paper 1	Chairman's consent under rule 15(j) of the overview of Scrutiny Procedure Rules dated 14 th May 2013

Corporate Consultation Undertaken

Finance	Sarah Martin, Financial Services Manager
Legal	Harvey Patterson, Corporate and Regulatory Services Manager