



mapping out the future

Kent and Medway Structure Plan

Frequently Asked Questions

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September 2003

Kent & Medway Structure Plan: Deposit Plan

What is a Structure Plan?

A Structure Plan provides a strategic policy framework for land use and development to guide the production of local plans and inform planning decisions. It looks forward 15 to 20 years and is needed to provide for new homes and jobs and other types of development whilst protecting the environment.

Why do we need a new one?

There have been structure plans for Kent since 1977. The last Kent Structure Plan was adopted in 1996 by Kent County Council. It needs to be updated to reflect changes which have occurred and to take account of the latest information and current policies. Since 1996 Medway Council has been established as a unitary authority and the two councils are now working together to produce the new joint structure plan.

Who is responsible for planning in Kent and Medway?

As the strategic planning authority, Kent County Council is responsible for producing and reviewing the structure plan for Kent (the administrative county i.e. excluding Medway). In its area it is also responsible for local plans and development control for minerals and waste. The 12 Kent district councils are responsible for local plans and determining most planning applications in their areas.

As a unitary authority Medway Council is responsible for all planning matters in its area

Where can I obtain further information about the new Structure Plan?

Contact either:

Land Use & Transport Policy Unit (Ref: KMSP)
Kent County Council, Invicta House
County Hall, Maidstone ME14 1XX
Tel: 01622 221732 Fax: 01622 221635
e-mail: kmsp@kent.gov.uk

or

Development and Environment Directorate (Ref: KMSP)
Medway Council, Compass Centre
Chatham Maritime, Chatham ME4 4YH
Tel: 01634 331163 or Fax: 01634 331125
e-mail: kmsp@medway.gov.uk

or visit our web site at www.kmsp.org.uk

Has there been previous consultation on the development of the new Structure Plan?

Yes. Between March and May 2002 Kent and Medway Councils consulted widely on *'Mapping out the future': Future Policy Directions for the Kent and Medway Structure Plan*. This was not a draft plan with fully detailed policies but focused on key areas of policy change and choice to provide a basis for discussion and debate. This was the pre-deposit consultation stage .

What is the Deposit Structure Plan?

The Deposit Plan is the full set of Kent and Medway Councils' proposed policies for the Structure Plan. They are placed 'on deposit' i.e. made

publicly available to provide individuals and organisations with the opportunity to support or object to the proposals or make other representations.

How do I support or object to the policies of the Structure Plan?

By using the response form and returning it through the post or by e-mail by **November 10th**. The official response form is available with the Plan itself or can be obtained via the Structure Plan web site (www.kmsp.org.uk) or direct from the Councils at the addresses listed on page 2.

What happens next?

Kent and Medway Councils will consider all the representations received during the deposit period and any changes that they might wish to propose. An Examination in Public (EIP) will be held in 2004 for invited interested parties and local planning authorities to debate important issues raised by the Plan. The independent panel of inspectors at the EIP will make its report and the two authorities will then consider the panel's recommendations and publish modifications to the draft Plan as appropriate. It is anticipated that the Plan will be ready to adopt by early 2005.

Who makes the final decision on the Plan?

Kent County Council and Medway Council. They have to consider all of the recommendations of the EIP panel and this may require modifications to the plan. Where they do not accept one or more of the recommendations and/or modifications are needed to the plan, there will be an advertised six-week deposit period for objections to the proposed modifications. If the two councils are satisfied that there are no issues which require either further modifications or a re-opening of the EIP, they will proceed with adoption of the Plan.

The First Secretary of State (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) can direct changes to be made if there are unresolved conflicts with national and regional policies.

'Mapping out the future' - the Deposit Kent and Medway Structure Plan

VISION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

What are the main principles underlying the Plan?

The Structure Plan identifies a number of core principles underlying the policies of the Plan. These include:

- Improving quality of life.
- Promoting urban regeneration.
- Concentrating development at our main towns and on previously developed land.
- Safeguarding the countryside and coast and maintaining the Metropolitan Green Belt in West and North Kent.
- Promoting high quality development and design.
- Promoting attractive new communities which encourage a sense of place and local distinctiveness.
- Increasing economic opportunity and reducing economic disparities within Kent.
- Enhancing the health and vitality of Kent rural communities and the rural economy.

- Bringing homes, jobs and services closer together.
- Providing sufficient housing of a suitable range, quality and diversity.
- Ensuring development brings with it improvements in services and infrastructure.
- Improving town centres for shopping leisure and other facilities.
- Placing greater emphasis on public transport, walking and cycling.
- Safeguarding natural resources.
- Giving stronger protection to areas of flood risk.
- Conserving and enhancing Kent's natural environment and rich cultural heritage.

SPATIAL STRATEGY

Will the Plan indicate exactly where new development will go?

The Plan gives a broad indication of the location and scale of development required in different areas but it will be for local plans (and in the future 'Local Development Documents'), prepared by Medway and Kent District Councils to identify specific sites.

Where will development be encouraged or constrained?

Development and investment will be focused on North Kent, Ashford and East Kent. The regional growth areas of Thames Gateway and Ashford have a major role to play.

How are the different development needs and circumstances across the county reflected in the Plan's policies?

Policy guidance on housing provision and economic development is presented on a district basis and there are individual policies identifying the strategic planning considerations applicable to each District.

How will development be accommodated in individual areas?

Development will be concentrated at the 17 major and principal urban areas identified by the Plan. These will be considered first in identifying land for development.

In rural areas 14 'rural service centres' identified by the Plan will have a role where there is a need to look beyond the urban areas. In all cases priority will be given to using previously developed ('brownfield') land.

Will any development be allowed in the countryside?

The policy will be to generally restrict development outside of rural settlements in the interests of conservation of the countryside and natural resources. There are however exceptions such as development necessary for agriculture, forestry, mineral extraction and other land uses requiring a rural location, re-use and redevelopment of existing buildings and other minor development where it is environmentally acceptable. Development may be permitted where there is special local justification (e.g. 'affordable' housing for local needs) or to allow for appropriate diversification of a farm business or the expansion of an established business.

Will any development be allowed in the Metropolitan Green Belt?

No major revisions are proposed to the boundaries of the Green Belt and the general presumption against development in the Metropolitan Green Belt will continue. Possible exceptions to this are developments such as agriculture and forestry or outdoor sports and recreation which preserve the openness of the area.

How else will growth be managed and restrained?

The Plan continues to provide for a 'Strategic Gap' separating Maidstone, the Medway Towns and the Medway Gap urban areas. It also proposes the designation of an additional 'gap' between the Medway Towns and Sittingbourne.

PROTECTING OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

How does the Plan provide for the protection of the Kent countryside?

The Plan has strong policies for protection of the Kent countryside and its distinctive environmental features. Key elements of coast and countryside protection policies are retained from the 1996 Kent Structure Plan.

Maintaining and enhancing the biodiversity of Kent's wildlife and its habitats feature prominently and there is an emphasis on conserving the character of Kent's varied landscapes taking into account their cultural and wildlife value as well as their natural beauty.

PROMOTING QUALITY OF LIFE IN TOWN AND COUNTRY

Will community services be provided as part of new development?

The Plan places strong emphasis on the co-ordinated and timely provision of community facilities and services e.g. schools. These may need to be funded by particular developments when the facilities are needed as part of, or as a direct consequence of, the development itself.

What about the character of development?

Necessary development must be a positive force for change. The Plan's policies advocate making the best use of land whilst providing for a high quality of design and for the community's needs. The design of development should enhance the quality of our public spaces and contribute to the conservation of resources such as water and energy. More mixed use development can improve accessibility to services and jobs and reduce the need for travel, particularly by car.

FOSTERING PROSPERITY

What types of employment will be encouraged and where?

The aim is to build on Kent's economic strengths and at the same time encourage developments which support economic regeneration particularly in North and East Kent. The focus will be on industry, office and business activities but also tourism and agriculture.

What are "innovation hubs" and "business clusters"? Why are they being encouraged?

To make the best use of our strengths we need to develop innovation centres where, for example, electronics and pharmaceuticals enterprises, can link closely with each other and/or with higher education and research centres for their mutual benefit. This is likely to

include quite small starter units. A new site of this kind is to be promoted at Canterbury. Other 'hubs' and 'clusters' will be encouraged in the Sandwich (A256) corridor, and at Kings Hill/East Malling, Sittingbourne Research Centre, the Medway Towns and Fort Halstead near Sevenoaks.

Will enough development land be provided to meet the need for jobs?

Through current local plans and sites with planning permission very substantial amounts of land for employment are already available for development, particularly in North and East Kent. In the main this is sufficient for the new Plan period. However this will not meet the needs of all businesses in all areas and limited amounts of new land for employment will be needed e.g. for:

- the expansion needs of some existing businesses;
- to replace existing sites which are unsuitable;
- to make up losses to other uses in some areas; and
- to maintain/promote innovative sectors of the economy and business clusters.

PROVIDING HOMES

Why must new housing be provided?

Everyone has the right to a decent home but not everyone's current needs are being met - in the high cost market areas, for example, the supply of available housing is not always appropriate to the nature of local needs and demand. Not only is the population itself growing but the number of households within the existing population, each requiring a house of their own, is also expanding. Demographic and social changes such as more people living alone rather than as part of a family household, are an important influence on this. The need for housing also arises as a result of more people moving into Kent each year than the number that leave to live elsewhere.

How much housing land does Kent have to provide?

Most towns in Kent have expanded so that they are hard up against countryside which is of high intrinsic quality. The challenge is to provide enough land for new housing whilst protecting the quality of the county's environment. The Government's regional planning guidance requires Kent and Medway to provide for some 5,700 new homes per year and there are additional requirements associated with further growth that Government intends for the regional growth areas in the South East which include Thames Gateway (of which most of North Kent is part) and Ashford. The new Structure Plan provides for 89,600 additional homes in Kent and Medway over 15 years (2001-2016) and 116,100 over 20 years (2001-2021).

Where will the new houses be built?

It is the job of the Structure Plan to distribute the total housing provision for the Plan period (2001-2021) between the 12 district council areas and Medway. The Plan concentrates housing provision in the Kent part of the Thames Gateway (Dartford, Gravesham and Medway and much of Swale) and at Ashford. To safeguard the countryside and achieve a more sustainable pattern of development challenging targets are set for the use of brownfield land to meet housing requirements in each District although the proportions do vary according to local circumstances and needs. Overall the aim is that at least 70% of the

total housing provision by 2016 is accommodated on previously developed or damaged land.

Will the new housing be accessible to all sectors of the community?

The Plan will continue the existing policy of requiring that local plans and development control decisions on larger housing sites ensure an appropriate range of housing types and size to meet the diversity of needs within communities. Its policies ensure that local plans look at how much of the overall housing allocation in an area should be for “affordable” housing and the contribution that should be made by different elements of affordable housing e.g. shared equity housing, housing directed at the needs of key workers etc.

PROMOTING QUALITY, CHOICE AND ACCESSIBILITY IN OUR TRANSPORT NETWORK

How will the Plan deal with the growing demands on our transport systems?

By recognising that whilst the economic development aims of the Plan require appropriate investment in transport, the needs must be met by a balanced transport strategy. The location and form of development has a major role to play in reducing the need to travel. The Plan establishes a number of assessment criteria for major transport proposals taking account of their social, economic, environmental and transport effects.

What major transport improvements are planned?

The Plan sets out a number of key transport schemes which are fundamental to the economy and well being of Kent and Medway and the accommodation of regionally important growth in the county. These include the current firm programme of strategic road and rail schemes and schemes to be promoted by the local authorities through their Local Transport Plans.

As the number of new road schemes planned is limited by financial resources and environmental considerations how will the transport needs of local communities be met?

By promoting public transport schemes (such as ‘Fastrack’ in Kent Thameside), walking and cycling and by bringing homes, jobs and other facilities closer together in order to reduce the need to travel.

What does the Plan propose for Kent’s ports?

It promotes improved access for freight and passengers to the ports through a combination of selective road and rail improvements.

MANAGING OUR NATURAL RESOURCES

Will there be enough water supply to meet future demand?

Water transfers and other investment will be required in the medium term to address local capacity and water quality concerns. Development of new water resources such as reservoir enhancement at Bewl and/or Darwell reservoirs after 2010 is likely to be required. In the long term (beyond 2025) the need for a new reservoir remains a possibility. Progress with demand management and leakage reduction will be critical influences on this. Facilities to increase water supply to Ashford to support major growth there will be required.

How will the risk of flooding to existing and future development be dealt with?

The policies for control of development in flood risk areas in the current Structure Plan are strengthened to preclude new development where there would be an unacceptable risk from river or tidal flooding and, where new development is essential in high risk areas, to require adequate defences and flood resistant design solutions.

Will the Plan encourage energy conservation?

Yes, through requiring the adoption of higher standards in new developments, supporting schemes for renewable energy production and reduced CO₂ emissions.

How will air quality be protected?

By seeking to reduce pollution from industry and traffic growth by realising a more sustainable mix and pattern of development.

MANAGING OUR WASTE AND MINERAL RESOURCES

How does the Plan intend that waste be dealt with in future?

Through increased emphasis on waste minimisation and recycling and provision of integrated waste management facilities, including composting and waste from energy facilities, to reduce dependence on landfill.

Why is minerals extraction important in Kent and Medway and how does the Plan deal with it?

Minerals can only be worked where they are found and are a finite resource. Kent and Medway are geologically rich. Their mineral reserves include sands, gravels, ragstone, chalk, clay and brickearth and are valuable raw materials for a wide range of end uses.

The Plan gives greater prominence to (i) secondary and recycled mineral sources in meeting needs especially for aggregates; (ii) safeguarding of mineral resources and the wharves and rail depots that handle mineral imports. It also sets policy on 'landbanks' (the stock of planning permissions for mineral extraction over time) to be maintained for individual types of mineral.

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF THE PLAN

What is a sustainability appraisal?

Government guidance requires that preparation of Development Plans such as the Structure Plan is accompanied by an Appraisal that assesses the content of the Plan in the light of the agenda for sustainable development – that is economic growth, environmental protection, social progress and effective management of resources.

Have the economic, social, environmental and resource impacts of the plan been assessed?

A Sustainability Appraisal has been carried out at a number of stages in the preparation of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan to evaluate policy directions and choices and the evolving package of policies against these considerations. A Sustainability Appraisal and explanation of the process followed accompanies the published Deposit Plan.