

Examination of the Maldon District Local Development Plan
Maldon District Council Opening Statement

Tuesday 20 January 2015

- 1 The Maldon District Local Development Plan sets out the planning strategy for the District over the next 15 years. The Plan meets the future needs of the District whilst protecting its unique rural and urban identity and character.
- 2 The production of the Plan has been informed by extensive public consultation and a considered and comprehensive examination of the issues. It has been developed through extensive ongoing consultation with parish and town councils, neighbouring local authorities, local groups, residents and businesses. The Council has also implemented its responsibilities under the Duty to Co-Operate, and these are outlined in the Duty to Cooperate Statement of Compliance (SD06).
- 3 Despite understandable local concern raised in relation to the impact of the development planned for the District, the Council has received significant support for the Plan's vision and strategy demonstrated by the feedback received from over 3,500 local residents and businesses during Autumn 2013.
- 4 A number of changes in national planning policy and guidance have resulted in substantial amendments being made to the LDP during the course of its production, presenting the Council with significant challenges to overcome.
- 5 The production of the Plan was started in 2006 in the form of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy. However, in response to the planning reforms introduced by the Government the Council took the decision in 2011 to widen the scope of the Core Strategy into a more comprehensive Local Development Plan which has been informed by the consultation undertaken as part of the earlier Core Strategy process.
- 6 The Council has responded positively to address the concerns raised by the Inspector following the submission of the Plan in April 2014 by: undertaking further work; providing additional evidence; and suggesting modifications to the Plan where required. This has included:
 - Commissioning and undertaking additional work to ensure that the Plan correctly identifies the **full Objectively Assessed Needs for housing**. This has led to a slight increase in the overall proposed housing target for the District;
 - Making minor changes to the Plan to ensure that **the amount and rate of housing delivery** anticipated is deliverable, and agreeing to invite the submission of planning applications where appropriate to encourage timely delivery of sites;

- Making minor changes to the Plan and undertaking further detailed work with site promoters, ECC and other delivery agencies to ensure that **infrastructure provision will be viable and deliverable**;
 - Making minor changes to the Plan and providing clarification in relation to the **Plan's allocations and development management policies**;
 - Amending the Plan's approach to the future provision of **Gypsy and Traveller** pitches to reflect the need for a focussed review of the Policy in light of substantial changes in the evidence base and potential changes in national policy; and
 - Commissioning up to date **employment and retail** studies.
- 7 The Plan meets the 'objectively assessed needs' for housing as required by the NPPF. This necessitates a significant uplift in the amount of future housing development required in the District – from 115 dwellings per annum previously to approx. 310dpa today, an almost threefold increase in the annual residential delivery rate.
- 8 This increase poses a number of challenges given the constraints of the District, including:
- Being a predominantly coastal District, surrounded by coastline on three sides;
 - Significant areas at risk from flooding;
 - Historic underinvestment in infrastructure to support growth due to the previous identification as an 'area of restraint' at a regional level;
 - Limited accessibility and relatively restricted transportation links;
 - The rapidly ageing local population;
 - Valued coastline and rural areas, including areas of environmental or natural protection;
 - Unique identity of the District and rural villages; and
 - Limited availability of local services and facilities, including education and healthcare.
- 9 The Council has accepted that this increased level of housing provision must be planned for through the release of greenfield sites and is not seeking in any way to constrain the figure based upon policy considerations. The Council has embraced the opportunity provided and identified that the most appropriate strategy to meet future needs is to concentrate the majority of future growth at the largest and most sustainable and accessible settlements in the District, Maldon, Heybridge and Burnham-on-Crouch. This approach will maintain the quality of life, protect local services, provide for business needs and retain the identity and character of rural villages.
- 10 Many alternative options have been considered throughout the production of the Plan, but these have not been taken forward following consultation and

assessment. This has included the consideration of a new settlement in the south of the District to accommodate future needs. However, planning for a new settlement is a complex and lengthy process that would not allow the short-term needs of the District to be met.

- 11 Once adopted, the Plan will demonstrate that a five year land supply for housing exists, which in turn will end the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' which currently applies throughout the District, giving the Council limited power to refuse applications on greenfield sites in and around the urban settlements and villages. An increased number of applications for speculative development on greenfield sites are already being received by the Council.
- 12 The LDP will therefore help to control and manage development and ensure that the development that does occur will take place in the right way and in the right places. It is particularly important to ensure that future growth is strategically planned by the Council given the rural character of the District and the constraints that exist.
- 13 The LDP enables the Council to deliver new infrastructure, services and facilities alongside development. This will be beneficial for the District in a number of ways, including:
 - The introduction of a new strategic flood alleviation scheme for North Heybridge which will protect existing areas and provide a long term solution to flood risk experienced in the area;
 - Two new primary schools, new childcare facilities and the expansion of the Plume School in Maldon;
 - Improvements to the highway network and public transportation;
 - New areas of open space, sports and play facilities;
 - New employment areas will be provided to support the expansion and growth requirements of local firms and businesses; and
 - New and enhanced community and health facilities.
- 14 The infrastructure will be funded and in most cases delivered directly alongside the development. Our infrastructure plans have been developed through joint working with Essex County Council and other organisations, including the relevant developers. The Council is seeking to achieve the earliest possible delivery of infrastructure, but a careful balance has to be met to ensure that the requirements will not render future development unviable. Importantly, this Plan is deliverable, appropriately flexible and realistic.
- 15 Public funding to support future growth is extremely limited, and therefore the Council has by necessity produced a Plan which can be largely self-financing. However, the Council in partnership with Essex County Council continues to lobby central Government, the SELEP and other relevant organisations to provide contributions to support the future growth, and ensure that infrastructure is delivered as early as possible during the plan period.

- 16 At Maldon and Heybridge, new Garden Suburbs are being planned which will provide high quality neighbourhoods integrated with the existing settlements. The Council has already undertaken a significant amount of work to develop masterplan documents outlining how the Garden Suburbs are likely to be developed, following extensive close working with the developers, other relevant organisations and consultation with the local community. The masterplans will help to ensure that the Garden Suburbs are developed in a coordinated and holistic manner.
- 17 The Council has worked closely with Essex County Council and neighbouring local authorities to consider issues of cross-boundary concern and actively seek improvements, particularly in relation to the impact of growth on the road network at Danbury and Hatfield Peverel. The District has one 'A' road only, which is the A414, which runs from Maldon to Chelmsford and beyond. Access to the A12, which leads to the wider sub-region, is therefore limited. Additional congestion on the limited strategic routes in and out of the District is an inevitable consequence of accommodating an almost threefold increase in annual housing growth, and impact on existing congestion points is unavoidable wherever the growth takes place. The Council is clear in its view that the most appropriate and sustainable future strategy is to concentrate the majority of future growth at the existing towns. This allows growth to be planned in areas served by public transport, with good access to local services and facilities, whilst also enabling the Council to deliver improvements to the highways network.
- 18 The LDP in isolation cannot provide radical improvements to infrastructure to redress historic deficiencies. However, where possible the Council has sought to identify improvements to the network which will help to alleviate the impact.
- 19 Recent announcements in the Autumn Statement, Road Building Strategy (December 2014) included commitments to undertake upgrades to the A12 by 2021, by widening to 3 lanes from Chelmsford through to the junction with the A120 South of Colchester. Such upgrades will improve the reliability of the A12 and ensure that the local issues identified at the B1019/B1137 junction at Hatfield Peverel will be minimised. MDC will seek to continue to work with Braintree District Council, Essex County Council, the Highways Authority, the South East Local Enterprise Partnership, and Central Government to raise awareness and seek improvements to this existing issue, taking into account future strategic growth in adjoining districts.
- 20 The LDP also requires developers to provide a substantial amount of affordable housing alongside the market housing, which will help provide local people with housing which is affordable – either in the social rented sector or through shared equity. This will result in a substantial increase in affordable housing provided in the District over the next 15 years.

- 21 An enormous amount of time and effort has gone into the production of the LDP by both Council Officers and Members, with the sole aim of producing a Plan which is the best possible plan for the local community, and which meets the necessary national requirements. The Council has taken a positive approach to meeting the challenges posed by the changes in national policy to significantly increase the housing target. This has included working closely with the HCA Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS), site promoters and other relevant delivery agencies. This is reflected by the Statements of Common Ground and Position Statements submitted to aid the Examination process.
- 22 Without the Plan, the District will change incrementally in an uncoordinated and unplanned fashion which is not in the best interests of the District. The Council is willing to be pragmatic where necessary in order to ensure that the Plan can be adopted as demonstrated by the additional evidence and modifications that have been produced following the Exploratory meeting in July 2014.
- 23 The Plan will ensure that the benefits of development are maximised for the District, and that the unique character of the District's urban and rural areas are maintained for the benefit of future generations. This Plan provides opportunities to ensure that the District can grow in a sustainable manner over the next 15 years, and is urgently required to ensure that the needs of the District can be met.
- 24 The Council is confident that the Local Development Plan is sound and legally compliant, and I commend it to you.