

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN SESSION 1A – LEGAL & PROCEDURAL MATTERS

Qn1.2 As part of the DTC engagement have Sevenoaks or Tunbridge Wells Councils in west Kent indicated to MBC how they might address a housing needs assessment if they are not capable of being accommodated within their own areas due to Green belt and other constraints?

The green belt in the south east of England and other significant constraints such as AONBs and Special Protection Areas is resulting in significant under-supplies of housing relative to need. Having recently commented on many of the emerging local plans in Surrey, it is apparent that these plans are unable to accommodate their OAN in full. The extent of the shortfall across the south east region is significant.

We are aware of large unmet needs elsewhere in London and Sussex and Kent e.g. Brighton & Hove (10,300 dwelling deficit), Crawley (5,000 dwelling deficit), Hastings (a 4,500 dwelling deficit), Rother and possibly Wealden too owing to uncertainties associated with the effect of development on the Ashdown Forest SPA. This will necessitate continuing cooperation.

Reigate & Banstead Council also has an unmet need that amounts to about 200 dwellings per year as established by the examination there in April 2013.

We are aware that the MBC, Ashford, Medway and Tonbridge & Malling are all now committed to meeting the OAN in full. Swale will probably do so following the examining inspector's preliminary conclusions on this matter (the examination of its local plan is underway).

The situation within Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells with regard to the ability of these two authorities to accommodating their OAN in full is more ambiguous. This is because neither authority has prepared up-to-date evidence to support the preparation of new NPPF-compliant Part 1 Local Plans. We do not know, therefore, whether these two authorities will be faced with a problem of accommodating their housing need. Although they are not part of the HMA that has been defined by the SHMA, we note that some parts of the HMA, especially Tonbridge & Malling, do have strong migration and commuting links with Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells although the relationship with Maidstone is weaker (see paragraphs 2.15 and 2.19 of the SHMA January 2014 report).

It is the HBF's view that the HMA authorities of Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling and Ashford need to continue to work with Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells to establish whether these two authorities are able to accommodate their needs in full. Although it is argued that Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells form their own independent housing market areas, this seems unconvincing when the migration and commuting evidence is examined. Even if it is accepted that they are stand-alone HMAs, both authorities will need to find ways to accommodate the unmet need.

Qn1.3 Would under-provision of housing in west Kent be likely to affect the geography of housing market area? In particular, would those unable to be accommodated locally (including London commuters) seek to live in other areas (including Maidstone) with knock on consequences for their own residents (such as possible displacement of unmet demand towards Ashford)?

This seems possible, although we accept that it is difficult for the three authorities of this HMA to make a precise prediction about what may happen in the future. However, it is certainly the view of the HBF that the Mayor of London's migration assumptions plus the scale of the unmet need in London and in green belt authorities of the south east of England (authorities such as Sevenoaks) would tend to increase migration into relatively more affordable areas – authorities such as Ashford, Tunbridge & Malling and Maidstone. The migration and commuting relationship between London and these three authorities is already strong. Whether this is likely to alter decisively existing housing market geographies over the next decade, or reinforce current patterns, is hard to say.

Nevertheless we consider that the all three plans should make contingency for the likelihood of higher levels of housing need. This would be in keeping with the advice in the NPPF about the need for local plans to be responsive to rapid change (para. 14) and opportunities for higher growth (para. 17).

Qn1.4 As the west Kent Local Plans remain at an early stage without defined housing targets, should this issue lead to a request to accommodate additional housing can it be left to the first review of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan?

In view of the uncertainties associated with the Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells local plans an early review of the Maidstone Local Plan is advisable. This review would need to commence sooner than 2022 which is the date that paragraph 21.30 of the Maidstone Local Plan has committed to. We consider that the review should commence by 2018 given the work involved and given the fact that it will probably take at least two years before the local plan is in a state to be adopted. By 2018 it should be apparent what the housing need and capacity situation is in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells local authorities.

The commitment to a review should be included as a policy in the local plan to ensure that this is binding upon the Maidstone Council.

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