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Date: 31st January 2018  
Ask For: Madeline Homer  
Direct Dial: 01843 577002  
Email: madeline.homer@thanet.gov.uk



Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP  
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government  
Department for Communities and Local Government  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

By e-mail: [sajid.javid@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:sajid.javid@communities.gsi.gov.uk)

Dear Secretary of State,

I refer to your letter to this Council, dated 16 November 2017, regarding possible Local Plan intervention.

The Council understands the importance of having an up-to-date Local Plan and has been attempting to make progress on its Plan.

The Council published its draft Preferred Options Local Plan in January 2015. Since then, the Council has reviewed its objectively assessed housing need and sought to allocate land to meet the increased identified need.

During this process, one of the key issues has been the future of the Airport site at Manston, and this has been the primary cause of delay to the progression of the draft Local Plan.

The Airport closed in May 2014. During 2014 and 2015, the Council carried out a number of exercises to seek to identify a CPO Indemnity Partner (a third party who could cover the costs of compulsory purchase of the Manston Airport site). However, following a number of unsuccessful exercises, in June 2016 this process was discontinued.

Following legal advice, in the latter part of 2016, the Council took the further step of commissioning AviaSolutions (a specialist aviation consultancy) to advise on the potential viability of Airport operations at Manston. The commission required advice on "whether an airport would be a viable operation for the site and whether there would be a reasonable prospect of that occurring within the period of the Local Plan (i.e. to 2031), so that [the Council] can fully consider the options for the site".

The report concluded that "airport operations at Manston are very unlikely to be financially viable in the longer term, and almost certainly not possible in the period to 2031". The site is largely previously-developed, and was subsequently identified for mixed-use development in Proposed Revisions to the draft Plan, published for consultation in January 2017.

A report regarding the Publication and Submission of the draft Local Plan was considered by Cabinet in October 2017 and Overview & Scrutiny Panel in November 2017. We have taken external planning advice which indicates that the draft Local Plan, as recommended to Council, would meet the tests of soundness. Officers have done everything necessary to seek to ensure that a sound Plan would be published.

/cont.

Madeline Homer  
Chief Executive

Direct line: 01843 577002  
email: [madeline.homer@thanet.gov.uk](mailto:madeline.homer@thanet.gov.uk)  
Fax: 01843 290906

Thanet District Council  
PO Box 9  
Cecil Street  
Margate  
Kent  
CT9 1XZ

01843 577000  
[www.thanet.gov.uk](http://www.thanet.gov.uk)

Officers at a senior level did discuss with Members the possibility of including a clause in the relevant draft policy that would effectively defer the allocation on the Airport site for a period of two years. This would allow the proposed Development Consent Order to be submitted and considered. However, this suggestion was not accepted. At the Council meeting on 18 January 2018, the recommendation to submit the draft Local Plan was rejected.

Following that decision, we have considered what possible next steps could be taken to progress the draft Plan to submission. The Council will need to identify suitable alternative sites/locations for housing to meet the identified objectively assessed housing need for the district. This will involve, as a minimum:

- A review of the sites previously submitted for housing and a further "call for sites" to seek to identify any more suitable sites/locations. An initial review of existing SHLAA sites has already been undertaken, and it is intended to commence the "call for sites" within the next two weeks;
- Identification of sites/locations to accommodate the 2,500 dwellings displaced from the Airport site, and (depending on whether the Government's proposed changes to housing methodology is confirmed), identification of sites/locations to accommodate an additional 3,090 dwellings;
- A review of the Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulations Assessment work, as appropriate;
- A review of the Transport Strategy, jointly prepared by the Council and KCC, as appropriate;
- An updating of other supporting studies, as needed;
- Followed by a further report to Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny Panel, and Council; and
- Decision to publish a pre-Submission draft Plan.

The expectation is that this process is likely to take 8-10 months. The Council intends to be in a position to publish a pre-Submission draft Plan by December 2018 (Regulation 19), and subsequently to submit a draft Plan for Examination (Regulation 22) by April 2019. It is intended to prepare, and publish, a revised Local Development Scheme (LDS) that reflects the above programme.

If you need any further information, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Madeline Homer  
Chief Executive

c.c. [john.romanski@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:john.romanski@communities.gsi.gov.uk)  
[catherine.holton@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:catherine.holton@communities.gsi.gov.uk)