

# Thanet District Council

## **Local Plan Examination Opening Statement by Thanet District Council**

**Hearing Day 1 - Tuesday 2nd April 2019**

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# Thanet District Council Opening Statement

1. Firstly, on behalf of Thanet District Council, I would like to welcome the Inspectors, Mr Birkinshaw and Mrs Lucas, and all those attending these public hearings into the draft Local Plan.

2. I would also like to thank Annette Feeney, the Programme Officer, for her advice, experience and support in facilitating the smooth management of the Examination process so far.

3. The purpose of the Examination is to allow independent scrutiny by the Inspectors of whether the preparation of the Local Plan has met the legal requirements for compliance and whether the content of the policies of the Local Plan meet the tests of soundness. However, as part of the background, the Council thinks it is helpful to provide some context as to what the Local Plan is seeking to achieve, as this is relevant to whether the Local Plan is sound.

4. The Local Plan is a key strategy for the Council to deliver its priorities and in doing so it has been produced with a range of issues being considered and addressed. These include:

- Steeply rising housing requirements (from 375 dpa in 2014 to 857 dpa in 2017) in a small district with significant housing affordability issues;
- As part of the consideration of sites for new housing, the Council has allocated some 30ha of less suitable employment land for housing. At the same time, the Council is seeking to support the growth and development of the local economy by ensuring a long-term supply of appropriate employment sites, meeting different needs, beyond the Plan period;
- As a result of previous success in delivering housing on brownfield sites, a relatively limited supply of brownfield land means that to meet objectively assessed development needs, greenfield sites will be required for development;
- Significant levels of important heritage assets (27 Conservation Areas, about 2,000 Listed Buildings and 13 Ancient Monuments) and national and international wildlife sites (SSSI; SPA; SAC and Ramsar sites) which mean that meeting objectively assessed development needs has to be reconciled with the appropriate protection of the district's outstanding environment, including its natural and historic assets; and

- Transport: There are opportunities for improved connectivity and economic links with London and the wider south east economy through the provision of rail journey time improvements and the Parkway Station. The draft Plan also identifies key new infrastructure to support development; improve traffic movement and contribute to better air quality.

5. Thanet is a district of contrasts - it has a wealth of heritage and natural assets, recognised in national and international designations, and 20 miles of coastline with chalk cliffs and sandy beaches and bays, many of which have been awarded European Blue Flag status. The tourism sector has grown substantially over the last few years, and there has also been significant growth in the creative sector.

6. However, Thanet also has some economic challenges to deal with, and the Council's Economic Growth Strategy is one step in responding to those challenges. For example, Thanet's business parks have taken time to develop. The Council is part of a partnership with KCC (East Kent Opportunities), seeking to accelerate the delivery of key employment sites. In addition, average skills levels in the district are lower than the rest of Kent and England, with unemployment levels higher than the Kent average. Wage levels are also lower than the national and regional average, which also impacts on the affordability of housing for local people.

7. The Local Plan seeks to reflect and address these issues - meeting the housing objectively assessed need, at the same time protecting the natural and historic assets which make the district unique.

8. The draft Local Plan sets out a broad vision for the district, and identifies a series of Strategic Priorities and Objectives, relating to supporting the district economy; the regeneration of the coastal towns; meeting housing needs; protecting the district's built and natural environment; and the delivery of key infrastructure.

9. We are working closely with Kent County Council, other district authorities in Kent, the South East Local Enterprise Partnership and MHCLG to support the implementation of the Local Plan.

10. The draft Local Plan is supported by a robust and proportionate evidence base - on housing, employment, environmental policy and standards, infrastructure provision and viability. It has also undergone a thorough and iterative Sustainability Appraisal process, carried out independently and professionally, to assess all reasonable alternatives and consider the Plan's environmental, social and economic impacts. We believe that this process has led to the creation of a Local Plan that successfully promotes necessary growth while protecting important landscapes, habitats and the historic built

environment. The Local Plan responds to the issues facing Thanet by positively planning to fully meet our objectively assessed needs; ensuring that there is a long-term supply of employment land and seeking to plan positively for the provision of key infrastructure to support growth and development.

11. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the preparation of the Thanet Local Plan, including adjoining Local Authorities (DDC and CCC), Kent County Council (on a range of issues - transport, education, and so on), the Clinical Commissioning Group and other statutory bodies, developers and agents, and local residents and groups. The Council has carried out several stages of consultation and engagement before Regulation 19 Publication, and this is set out in the Council's Consultation Statement.

12. The Council has worked constructively and cooperatively with partners, including those specifically under the legal duty to cooperate. The Council has sought to reach agreement on a range of key issues throughout the Plan preparation process.

13. People will also be aware of the role of MHCLG in the latter stages of Plan preparation. In January 2018, the Secretary of State decided to begin an intervention process, with a view to speeding up the Plan work. Many people will be aware that one of the main factors in the delay to the draft Local Plan at that time was consideration of the future use of Manston Airport. This matter is now subject to detailed consideration under the Development Consent Order process, and a decision on that is expected early next year. The draft Local Plan makes provision for the DCO process, whatever the outcome.

14. The Council has responded quickly and effectively to the Secretary of State's intervention, so that in July 2018, the Council was able to agree a revised draft Plan for publication under Reg 19. It was recognised by the Secretary of State that it was unlikely that Local Plan production would be accelerated by his department taking over the Plan. However, he has directed the Council to carry out a review of the Plan within six months of adoption of the Local Plan, and the Council has published a revised Local Development Scheme to this effect, subject to any findings by the Inspectors for this Examination.

15. The Council request the Examination Inspectors, under Section 20(7) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) to recommend any modifications to the draft Local Plan, which they consider are required in order to resolve problems that would otherwise make the Plan unsound or not legally compliant. Some suggested modifications have already been put forward and are identified in the Examination library documents.

16. The Council also requests the Inspectors, through the Examination process, to confirm a 5 year supply of specific deliverable housing sites, as set out in para 48 of the national Planning Practice Guidance.

17. To conclude, the Council considers that the draft Local Plan provides a sound Plan for the period up to 2031.

Thank you.