

<b>Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> August 2024
<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Local Plan Review – Vision, Objectives and Growth Options</b>
<b>EMT Lead</b>	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
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<b>Lead Officer</b>	Stuart Watson, Project Manager (Policy)
<b>Classification</b>	<b>Open</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Members of PTPWG to recommend to Policy and Resources Committee the proposed vision and objectives for the Draft Plan Regulation 18 document; and</li> <li>2. Members of PTPWG to recommend to Policy and Resources Committee a growth strategy for the Draft Plan Regulation 18 consultation.</li> </ol>

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 As part of preparing the draft Plan Regulation 18 document it is essential for members to agree both the vision and objectives of the Plan and to provide a steer toward the Plan’s growth strategy.
- 1.2 The vision and objectives of the Local Plan Review set out what the Plan’s priorities are and what is to be achieved. The vision and objectives were last reviewed as part of the Regulation 18 issues and preferred options consultation in October 2021.
- 1.3 This paper will discuss two main issues:
  - the Local Plan Review’s vision and objectives, and;
  - the previously used Local Plan Review growth options and alternatives.

**2. Vision and objectives**

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023 sets out the approach to Plan Making at Chapter 3, and paragraph 15 states that “... *Succinct and up-to-date plans should provide a positive vision for the future of each area; a framework for meeting housing needs and addressing other economic, social and environmental priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings*”. Whilst the vision states what a Local Authority intends the Plan to

deliver at headline level, a series of underlying objectives set out the specific aims of the Plan which will enable that vision to be realised. As part of preparing the Draft Plan Regulation 18 consultation it is important to confirm what members agree is the vision for the Plan and the objectives to reach that vision.

- 2.2 The latest version of the vision and objectives of the Local Plan Review were consulted upon as part of the Issues and Preferred Options consultation (Regulation 18) in October 2021 and are set out below at figures 1 and 3. A report that summarised responses to the consultation was taken to the Local Plan Panel on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022. The summarised consultation responses for the vision and objectives are contained in Appendix 1 and 2 below.
- 2.3 When reviewing the draft vision in the Regulation 18 consultation from 2021 the responses on the whole were supportive. There are a number of suggested changes which are addressed in the Regulation 18 objectives and are more detailed than appropriate for a vision. However, the Kent Downs AONB unit suggested the strengthening of focus on the natural environment to include “conserve” as well as “enhancement”. This position would align with the NPPF 2023 paragraph 185 that is concerned with habitats and biodiversity and uses the phrase protect and enhance. Natural England also suggested strengthening the vision’s focus towards climate change mitigation. Whilst the vision contains statements on low/zero carbon and renewable energies, climate change is not specifically referenced.
- 2.4 A revised draft of the vision that incorporates these amendments, corrects a number of grammatical issues to sharpen the focus of the vision and reflects the language and ambitions of the Corporate Plan is provided for members’ consideration at Figure 2 below. At this stage the revised vision is a working draft and will benefit from further revisions once the strategic policies of the Local Plan Review have been updated and agreed with members.
- 2.5 The draft objectives in the Regulation 18 consultation from 2021 again received support in the responses. However there was some concern over objective 4 needing further clarification towards creating sustainable lifestyles, as set out in the requirements of the NPPF 2023 and in doing so defining what a transport hub should be. Responses also focused on the requirements to conserve and enhance the natural and built environments and the objectives would benefit from this approach.
- 2.6 Members are asked to consider and make any comments on the revised draft vision below and whether objective 1 should have a stronger focus on conserving and enhancing the natural and built environment and that objective 4 should set out a definition of a transport hub. As above, the objectives should be considered a working draft, which will benefit from further revisions once the strategic policies of the Local Plan Review have been updated and agreed.

**Figure 1: Draft Vision Regulation 18 consultation October 2021**

## **Draft Vision**

Generally, new development will have come forward to meet local needs and contributed to supporting low/zero carbon and renewable energy initiatives, enhanced the natural environment through biodiversity net gain, ensured quality design and place making which has capitalised on the borough's extensive natural heritage assets in a way that supports the health and wellbeing of our communities.

At Sittingbourne, a re-focussed town centre aimed at securing a vital and viable retail heart supported by leisure and dining opportunities, whilst enabling new high density residential and community activity and recognising its heritage assets. This has been achieved by wider regeneration, public realm improvements, and reconfigured and improved sustainable and active transport connections at and around the town.

At Faversham, a thriving market town and heritage destination that has successfully managed 21st century demands. It has been achieved by enabling sympathetic and symbiotic growth whilst reducing congestion and air quality issues along the A2 over the period to 2038 and beyond.

At Sheerness, Minster and Queenborough, the promotion of coastal and port rejuvenation making most use of its heritage assets whilst supporting the needs of the local communities.

At our rural and maritime communities, enable development to maintain and improve local services to cater for the local daily needs of its residents and to support vibrant and healthy communities whilst maintaining the quality of the local countryside environments in which they are set and protecting their heritage.

**Figure 2: Revised Vision for the draft Plan Regulation 18 consultation Autumn 2024**

### **Revised Draft Vision**

It is 2040. Development in Swale has come forward to meet local needs. It has supported climate and ecological imperatives and has conserved and enhanced the natural environment through significant biodiversity gain. Renewable energy initiatives have been high on Swale's agenda. Quality design and place-making has capitalised on the borough's extensive ecological and heritage assets and has supported the health and wellbeing of our communities.

Sittingbourne has a refocused town centre with a vital and viable retail heart supported by leisure and recreation opportunities, and enabled by new high density residential and community activity which has recognised and respected the area's outstanding heritage. Development has secured wider regeneration benefits, including improved public realm, and reconfigured and enhanced sustainable and active transport connections – both in and around the town.

Faversham is a thriving market town and nationally-known heritage destination that has successfully balanced 21<sup>st</sup> century demands with respect for the past. This has been achieved by sympathetic and symbiotic growth.

At Sheerness, Minster and Queenborough, coastal and port rejuvenation has maximised the impact of our natural and built assets and supported the needs of the local communities.

Our rural and maritime communities have seen enabling development maintain and improve local services. The local needs of residents are well catered for, supporting vibrant communities whilst maintaining the quality and special qualities of the countryside setting.

Across the borough development has improved health and air quality, and increased opportunities for local employment, active travel and affordable housing. Development has supported a vibrant sense of community, within and across the Borough. There are thriving built and outdoor sports and leisure facilities, and everyone has access to a decent home. Swale is a place residents, businesses and visitors recognise as sustainable and forward-looking – a place to live, work and enjoy.

**Figure 3. Draft Objectives Regulation 18 consultation October 2021**

### **Draft Objectives**

1. To provide for homes and jobs that are best suited to meet identified local needs;
2. To support and sustain communities across the borough, big and small, by planning to meet identified needs, including needs for community facilities and infrastructure;
3. To protect and manage our resources to address climate change through delivering sustainable growth that supports urban and rural economies and makes the best use of infrastructure;
4. To locate development in the least constrained parts of the borough in reasonable proximity to transport hubs;
5. To provide a range of housing developments across the Borough that deliver a range of housing sizes and types to meet the needs of young people, families and older people;
6. To deliver a level of investment and growth at key locations to facilitate significant improvements to support infrastructure e.g. schools, healthcare and highways and sustainable and active travel options for the benefit of local communities; and
7. To focus development on the contribution that larger sites can deliver in a proportionate way to meet wider plan objectives and ensure delivery during the plan period and beyond.

### **3. Growth Options**

- 3.1 The growth options considered for the Regulation 19 consultation in April 2021 are set out in table 1 below. Officers have also produced an alternative set of growth options from those previously used (table 2) that members can also consider should they feel an alternative approach to those previously presented is preferable. Members are free to choose from both sets of options or to provide an alternative that has not been considered. The Regulation 19 growth options gave percentages of development however in reality some flexibility is required on the levels of development by approach once allocations have been chosen and the capacities known.

- 3.2 A growth strategy sets out the approach to where development is to be delivered and then the evidence base including the HELAA, flood risk, transport and the Plan’s sustainability appraisal amongst other matters determine what sites and their capacities can be delivered against the strategy.
- 3.3 It is critical now for members to provide a steer towards a growth strategy for the Local Plan Review so that potential allocations from the findings of the HELAA and the Employment Land Review can be chosen, site policies written and key evidence as set out above allowed to progress. Any further delay would require an adjustment to the Local Plan Review timetable.

**Table 1. Previously discussed LPR growth options**

<b>Option</b>	<b>Description of growth option</b>	<b>Additional development (30% windfall allowance) July 2020</b>	<b>Additional development (26% windfall allowance) 2024 update</b>
<b>A</b>	Business as usual: development focused on extensions to main settlements with a focus on the Thames Gateway area	* Sheppey - 17.5% * Sittingbourne – 30.5% * Faversham – 12.5% * Rural areas – 8.5%	* Sheppey - 18.75% * Sittingbourne – 31.75% * Faversham – 13.75% * Rural areas – 9.75%
<b>B</b>	More even distribution of the additional Local Plan Review requirement across the borough’s main urban centres and rural areas	* Sheppey - 14% * Sittingbourne – 21% * Faversham – 24.5% * Rural areas – 10.5%	* Sheppey - 15% * Sittingbourne – 22% * Faversham – 25.5% * Rural areas – 11.5%
<b>C</b>	More even distribution of the final requirements (Bearing Fruits and Local Plan Review) across the main urban centres	*Sheppey – 14% *Sittingbourne – 10.5% *Faversham – 35% *Rural areas – 10.5%	*Sheppey – 15% *Sittingbourne – 11.5% *Faversham – 36% *Rural areas – 11.5%
<b>D</b>	More of the overall local plan requirement at the eastern end of the borough	* Sheppey – 7% * Sittingbourne - 7% * Faversham - 45.5% * Rural areas 10.5%	* Sheppey – 8% * Sittingbourne - 8% * Faversham - 46.5% * Rural areas 11.5%
<b>E</b>	Focus on Strategic Development Sites (New Garden Communities) primarily located within existing rural areas	* Sheppey – 3% * Sittingbourne – 5.5% * Faversham - 5.5% * Rural areas – 56%	* Sheppey – 4% * Sittingbourne – 6.5% * Faversham - 6.5% * Rural areas – 57%

**Table 2. Alternative growth options**

<b>Option</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>1</b>	Continue Local Plan Bearing Fruits approach	This is the same approach as option A above.  Majority of development focused on Sittingbourne with moderate levels of development at Faversham and Queensborough and Rushenden.
<b>2</b>	Strategic site in west of Borough/settlement hierarchy hybrid	A new option.  1 strategic site carrying good proportion of development need, however there will still be considerable amounts of development to be provided in other locations
<b>3</b>	Strategic site in east of Borough/settlement hierarchy hybrid	Similar to option C above, however more specific approach to delivery.  1 strategic site carrying good proportion of development need, however there will still be considerable amounts of development to be provided in other locations.
<b>4</b>	Strategic sites in east and west of Borough/settlement hierarchy hybrid	A new option.  2 strategic sites, dispersed evenly in the Borough greatly reducing the onus on other settlements to accommodate remaining development.
<b>5</b>	Strategic scale new settlement/settlement hierarchy hybrid	This is the same approach as option E above however sets out how remaining balance of need would be delivered.  Much of the development need focused on one area, however development of this scale is likely to be delivered late in the proposed Plan period and beyond placing strong onus on other settlements to accommodate development need in the shorter term.
<b>6</b>	Very large strategic site in east of Borough/settlement hierarchy hybrid	This is the same approach as option D above.  A site large enough to provide the dwellings and space for a new secondary school. Would significantly reduce onus on other settlements to accommodate need.

#### **4. Proposals**

- 4.2 Members of Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group are asked to recommend to Policy and Resources Committee the vision and objectives as set out in this report and a preferred growth strategy for the Regulation 18 draft Plan consultation.

## 5 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 5.1 The full list of Growth Options used in the Council's previous Regulation 19 consultation in 2021 have been presented in this report as well as an alternative selection of options. The growth options presented are those considered most reasonable based on the Borough's geography and the requirements of sustainability as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

## 6 Consultation Undertaken and Proposed

- 6.1 The review of the vision and objectives and growth strategy options have been developed through informal discussions with members of this work group. The Local Plan Review draft Plan Regulation 18 that will go out for statutory consultation later this year will provide formal consultation on these matters.

## 7 Implications

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Implications</b>
Corporate Plan	The proposals in the report align with the economic objective of the Corporate Plan – To progress a Local Plan with local needs and capacity at its heart.
Financial, Resource and Property	The recommendations of this report will have no specific budgetary implications.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	Preparation of a Local Plan is carried out under a national legislative and regulatory framework.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	The Local Plan will be supported by its own Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulation Assessment at each key stage in decision making.
Health and Wellbeing	None identified at this stage
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.



Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.

## 8.0 Background papers

- 8.1 Local Plan Panel report 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022  
<https://ws.swale.gov.uk/meetings/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=216&MId=3513>

## 9.0 Appendices

### Appendix 1. Summary of response to Vision Statement Regulation 18 Consultation October 2021

<b>Vision and Objectives</b>
<p><i>Q4 – Do you agree this is the right Vision for the borough? If not, please explain what changes you would like to see made to the Vision and why.</i></p> <p>The main elements for greater emphasis/consideration in the vision are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combating air quality issues from all sources</li> <li>• Protecting and supporting rural communities</li> <li>• Protection of Grade 1 agricultural land</li> <li>• Improved health and wellbeing for our communities</li> <li>• Encompass the desire to conserve and enhance natural environment (<b>Kent Downs AONB Unit</b>)</li> <li>• <b>Natural England</b> suggested the following should be referenced: climate change mitigation, reference to a Green Infrastructure Master Plan and a requirement to recover nature, AONB protection, place making and good design</li> <li>• Maintaining a predominantly rural character</li> <li>• Delivery of the infrastructure required to support sustainable communities</li> <li>• Tackling congestion</li> <li>• Supporting and creating jobs and employment (<b>Kent Science Park</b>)</li> <li>• Include commitment to action the Kent Local Nature Recovers Strategy (LNRS) (<b>Kent Wildlife Trust</b>)</li> <li>• Mix of housing types to meet needs of all sectors of the community</li> <li>• Greater focus for development at Sittingbourne as the principal town in the borough</li> <li>• Specifically reference key characteristics of the three settlements, e.g. arts and culture at Faversham</li> <li>• Brownfield development as a priority</li> <li>• Include reference to existing vision for regeneration of Queenborough and Rushenden (<b>Peel Ports</b>)</li> <li>• Reference to smaller and medium sizes sites as well as strategic sites to deliver the borough’s future development needs (developers)</li> <li>• Various requests for vision to be revisited to support the promotion of individual sites/ broad locations (development community)</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2. Summary of response to the objectives of Regulation 18 consultation October 2021

*Q5 – Do the draft Objectives support the Vision and set appropriate goals for the Local Plan? Please give your reasons, identifying the objectives that you support or objectives that you oppose, explaining any changes you would like to see and why.*

Comments on the proposed objectives:

- Objectives adequately support the vision and are clear
- Objective 4
  - Objectives are likely to contribute to development of sustainable lifestyles by residents and employees working within Swale, reducing overall vehicle trips and the need to travel, consistent with national policy, 'transport hubs' in Objective 4 should be defined and include all modes of travel (**National Highways**)
  - Objective 4 assumes (wrongly) that all railway stations are transport hubs
  - Objective 4 could constrain development and would therefore be contrary to national policy
- Objective 5
  - Greater emphasis needed in Objective 5 for the provision of low cost starter and affordable homes for families
- Objective 6
  - Support for objectives, particularly Objective 6 (**Kent and Medway CCG**)
- Objective 7
  - Concerns that Objective 7 cannot be achieved because of the harm large sites have on small villages and settlements

Additional objectives suggested

- Additional objective should be included – “To enhance the natural environment by developing and implementing a Swale Nature Recovery Strategy to reduce habitat fragmentation and increase ecological connectivity” (**Faversham Society**)
- Additional objective needed to include measurable recovery for nature (**Natural England**)
- Additional objective that protects the nationally important landscape of the Kent Downs AONB
- An objective to inform, agree and action the Kent LNRS must be included, committing the Borough to embedding local nature recovery within the planning system.
- Objectives are supported but amendments suggested to include waste in the list of infrastructure. More emphasis should be included to emphasis Swale’s environment and heritage in the objectives and reference to public health should be more explicit (**KCC**)

General comments regarding objectives

- Active travel is only applicable to urban areas
- Concerns around safety for cycling on existing network making it an unrealistic choice
- Investment needed at transport hubs in sustainable locations, e.g. increased car parking provision at Sheerness station
- Objectives not adequately evidenced and not specific enough to Swale
- Objectives need to cover significant issues such as transport and delivering affordable housing
- Climate change mitigation by any reasonable means, including buildings and how they are constructed and powered should be included in an objective
- Objectives need to include reference to the key role of small and medium sites needed to comply with the NPPF and to support a five year housing land supply and support town centres
- Would like information provided on how the objectives will be achieved
- Larger sites should not be supported because they do not integrate with existing communities
- The role of the agricultural sector should be acknowledged in the objectives