

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

12 March 2013

Report of the Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 DUTY TO COOPERATE - ROCHESTER AIRPORT DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

Summary

Medway Council is proposing to reconfigure Rochester Airport to provide new opportunities for employment while retaining a functioning airport. There will also be a heritage tourist attraction celebrating the airport's past and associated infrastructure improvements. Part of the site falls within the boundary of this Council.

Officers have been invited to join a working group led by Medway both because it directly affects the Borough and in view of the new Duty to Cooperate. Medway Council has commissioned consultants, jointly with BAE Systems Ltd, to prepare a master plan for the airport site. This report provides Members with an update on progress so far.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Rochester City Council purchased land for a municipal airport in the 1930s and the Short Brothers leased the land for test flying shortly afterwards. Commercial operations followed and during the 1930s and 1940s the site became famous for designing and building the Short Stirling bomber.

1.1.2 In 1979 the lease reverted to the City Council and was subsequently re-let to GEC Marconi. GEC were later acquired by BAE Systems who relinquished operation of the airport in 2002. BAE continue to have a major presence on the site and Medway are keen to work closely with them on this project. The airport, comprising two grass runways, is currently operated by Rochester Airport Ltd on a short term lease to 2014. Much of the infrastructure is in need of significant investment. Current uses include:

- Use by the Police, air ambulances, military, utility and rescue services;
- Three site based flying schools;
- Engineering and maintenance facilities;

- A fixed base for over 80 aircraft owned by businesses and individuals;
- Aircraft hire, leasing and air taxi services; and
- The base for the Medway Aircraft Preservation Society Ltd.

- 1.1.3 In addition to the airport operational land it is proposed to include other parcels of land in the brief. Appendix 1 shows the proposed master plan area, including the areas leased to BAE Systems and RAL, other relevant land holdings and the borough boundary.
- 1.1.4 Medway Council see the airport as being key to the authority's medium to long term economic development aspirations and in particular in delivering quality jobs in the science and technology, high tech and creative sectors. The site's location and visibility, in close proximity to major motorways is also seen as important.
- 1.1.5 The planning policy context is provided in the form of draft policy CS17 in the submitted version of the Medway Local Development Framework Core Strategy, which states that the Council 'particularly recognises...the continuing opportunities at and in close proximity to Rochester Airfield to develop a technology and knowledge based cluster'. The proposed redevelopment of the airport will also contribute to the LDF's target of creating 21,500 jobs by 2028 and also accords with Medway's Economic Development Strategy 2009-12.
- 1.1.6 The current thinking is to release some land for high end employment uses, to complement the BAE Systems operation and the Council's Innovations Centre, which is located on an adjacent site. The airport will retain one runway which will be paved and the airport infrastructure enhanced.
- 1.1.7 In July 2012 officers from Medway invited the Planning Policy Manager to join an internal project group overseeing the master planning of the site. Meetings are held at monthly intervals
- 1.1.8 The proposals were reported to Medway's Cabinet in December 2012, which was accompanied by some wider publicity. A tendering exercise for consultants to prepare the master plan took place in January and an appointment has recently been made with the Tibbalds Partnership. An inception meeting took place on the 15th February.

1.2 Implications for TMBC

- 1.2.1 If successful, the proposed redevelopment of the airport site could generate additional high quality employment opportunities for TMBC residents, which would be welcomed.
- 1.2.2 This may in turn lead to additional investment in the adjacent Laker Road Industrial Area, part of which is located in TMBC, although this may be in the longer term.

- 1.2.3 It will be important to assess the impact of any redevelopment proposals on the local highway network and in particular the effects on Junction 3 of the M2, which is in close proximity to the site, but located in TMBC. The environmental impacts of the airport enhancements, particularly noise assessment, are also an important consideration and officers have emphasised the need to ensure these are taken into account from the outset.
- 1.2.4 Medway officers initially proposed formalising the development brief as a joint Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) with TMBC. However, TMBC officers have advised that to do so would require there being a relevant adopted TMBC policy and currently there are none that would be appropriate. It was also pointed out that the new Government Guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework does not encourage the use of SPD in new Local Plans. It would therefore be more appropriate for Medway to acknowledge in the final document any contribution to the development brief from TMBC and for TMBC to reflect the outcome in the new Local Plan in due course.

1.3 Legal Implications

- 1.3.1 There are no legal implications arising from this update report. The input of officers to the process represents useful evidence of collaborative working in accordance with the Duty to Cooperate.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.4.1 No financial contributions towards the process including the appointment of consultants have been sought. The only financial implication is officer time.

1.5 Risk Assessment

- 1.5.1 Not to be seen to be working collaboratively on this project could be considered to be contrary to the Duty to Cooperate, which may carry a risk for demonstrating the soundness of our Local Plan at a future Examination.

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.6.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

1.7 Policy Considerations

- 1.7.1 The relevant LDF policy covering those parts of the proposed development brief site that are located in TMBC is Core Strategy policy CP11, which states that the location of development will be concentrated within the confines of the urban area, which accords with the proposed redevelopment of this site.
- 1.7.2 This report also contributes to meeting the Duty to Cooperate.

Background papers:

contact: Ian Bailey

Nil

Steve Humphrey
Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	This is an informative report updating Members of proposals to prepare a development brief at Rochester Airport. Full public consultations will take place in due course.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	Yes	By raising awareness of the issue with elected representatives.
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		N/A

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.