

INFORMATION FOR VOTERS

About this booklet

On 3 March 2016, there will be a referendum on a neighbourhood development plan for your area. This booklet explains more about the referendum that is going to take place and how you can take part in it. In this booklet you can find out about:

- The referendum and how you can take part
- The neighbourhood area
- The neighbourhood plan
- The development plan (of which neighbourhood plans are part)

Referendum on the Neighbourhood Plan

A referendum asks you to vote 'yes' or 'no' to a question. For this referendum you will receive a ballot paper with this question:

"Do you want Maidstone Borough Council to use the neighbourhood plan for North Loose to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?"

How do I vote in the Referendum?

You vote by putting a cross (x) in the 'yes' or 'no' box on your ballot paper. Put a cross in only **one** box or your vote will not be counted.

If more people vote 'yes' than 'no' in this referendum, then Maidstone Borough Council will use the Neighbourhood Development Plan to help it decide planning applications in North Loose.

The Neighbourhood Development Plan once adopted will then become part of the Development Plan. In the Maidstone Borough Council Local Planning Authority area the development plan currently consists of the adopted Maidstone Borough Wide Local Plan 2000, the adopted Affordable Housing DPD 206 and the adopted Open Space DPD 2006, and the Minerals and Waste local plans prepared by Kent County Council.

If more people vote 'no' than 'yes', then planning applications will be decided without using the Neighbourhood Development Plan as part of the Development Plan for the local area.

What is Neighbourhood Planning?

Neighbourhood planning aims to help local communities play a direct role in planning the areas in which they live and work.

A community can prepare a neighbourhood plan. This plan can show how the community wants land to be used and developed in its area.

What is a neighbourhood area?

A neighbourhood area can cover single streets or large urban or rural areas. The boundaries of a neighbourhood area are put forward by:

- Town or parish councils
- A neighbourhood forum (a group of at least 21 people in areas without town or parish councils)

In North Loose the boundary of the neighbourhood area was determined by North Loose Residents Association and is identical to three polling districts within South Ward.

Who can prepare a Neighbourhood Plan?

Neighbourhood plans are prepared by town or parish councils, or neighbourhood forums. In this case, the North Loose Neighbourhood Development Plan was prepared by the North Loose Residents Association.

What is a Development Plan?

In England, planning applications are determined by local planning authorities in accordance with the Development Plan. A Development Plan is a set of documents that set out the policies for the development and use of land across the entire local authority area. Within the Maidstone Borough, the local planning authority is Maidstone Borough Council.

Neighbourhood Planning in North Loose

The referendum area is identified on the map overleaf and is identical to the area which has been designated as the North Loose Neighbourhood Development Plan area.

Referendum expenses

Expenses can be incurred by an individual or body during the period of the referendum for referendum purposes.

The referendum expenses limit that will apply in relation to this Referendum is £2601.25. The number of persons entitled to vote in the Referendum by reference to which the limit has been calculated is 4055.

Specified documents

A copy of the specified documents, that is the documents listed overleaf, may be inspected at:

- Maidstone Borough Council, Maidstone House, King Street, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6JQ between the hours of 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Thursday; and 9.00am to 4.30pm on Friday.

The specified documents are the:

- North Loose Neighbourhood Development Plan
- Report of the independent examiner
- Summary of the representations submitted to the independent examiner
- Statement by the local planning authority that the draft plan meets the basic conditions (*Decision Statement*)
- Statement that sets out general information as to town and country planning including neighbourhood planning and the referendum (*Information for Voters*)

All the above documents can be viewed on Maidstone Borough Council's website at www.maidstone.gov.uk/residents/planning/local-plan/neighbourhood-plans2

Can I vote?

You can vote in the referendum if you live the Polling Districts:

XA – South Ward (west), XD – South Ward (west (part)), XX - South Ward (east)

- you are registered to vote in local council elections; and
- you are 18 years of age or over on 3 March 2016

You have to be registered to vote by 16 February 2016 to vote in the referendum. You can check if you are registered to vote by calling our Helpline 01622 60202007.

The referendum will be conducted based on procedures which are similar to those used at local government elections.

Ways of voting?

There are three ways of voting:

In person on 3 March 2016:

- At your local polling station. It is easy and a member of staff will always help if you are not sure what to do
- In North Loose, the polling stations are:

Polling district XA – YMCA, Melrose Close, Cripple Street, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6BD

Polling district XD – Maidstone Hockey Club, Armstrong Road, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6AZ

Polling district XX – The Vine, Boughton Lane, Loose, Maidstone, Kent ME15 9QF
- You will receive a poll card confirming your polling station for this referendum
- If you do not receive your poll card, you can contact our Helpline on 01622 602007 or email us on electoralservices@maidstone.gov.uk to find out where your polling station is
- Polling stations are open from 7am to 10pm

By post:

- If you have a postal vote already, you will receive a postal poll card confirming this
- To vote by post, you will need to complete an application form and send it to
The Electoral Registration Officer to arrive by 5pm on 17 February 2016 at this address:
Electoral Services
Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House, King Street
Maidstone, Kent
ME15 6JQ
- Postal votes can be sent overseas but you need to think about whether you will have time to receive and return your completed vote by 3 March 2016.
- You should receive your postal vote about a week before polling day. If it doesn't arrive in time, you can ask for a replacement up to 5pm on 3 March 2016 by contacting our Helpline 01622 602007.

By proxy:

- If you have a proxy vote already, you will receive a proxy poll card letter confirming this
- If you can't get to the polling station and don't wish to vote by post, you may be able to vote by proxy. This means allowing somebody that you trust to vote on your behalf.
- To vote by proxy, you will need to complete an application form and send it to the
Electoral Registration Officer to arrive by 5pm on 24 February 2016 at this address:
Electoral Services
Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House, King Street
Maidstone, Kent
ME15 6JQ

- When you apply for a proxy vote, you must say why you cannot vote in person. Anyone can be your proxy as long as they are eligible to vote and are willing to vote on your behalf. You will have to tell how you want to vote.

Postal and proxy vote application forms are available from our Helpline 01622 602007 or by emailing electoralservices@maidstone.gov.uk . You can also download forms from www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

Am I registered to vote?

If you're not registered, you won't be able to vote. You can check if you are registered by calling our Helpline on 01622 602007.

If you are not registered to vote, you will need to complete an application to be received by the Electoral Registration Officer by 16 February 2016 at this address:

Electoral Services
Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House, King Street
Maidstone, Kent
ME15 6JQ

Registration forms are available from our Helpline on 01622 602007 or by emailing electoralservices@maidstone.gov.uk . Applications can be made online at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote. For more information on registering to vote, please visit the website www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

How to find out more:

Further general information on neighbourhood planning is available at www.maidstone.gov.uk/residents/planning/local-plan/neighbourhood-plans2

You can also find specific documents on the North Loose Neighbourhood Development Plan.

For queries about planning issues and neighbourhood planning in general, please contact Maidstone's Planning Policy Team on: Tel: 01622 602000

For more information about voting and the arrangements for this referendum, please contact our Helpline on 01622 602007 or email electoralservices@maidstone.gov.uk