

3 Planning Context

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 The relevant planning policy context for the proposals is contained in Chapter 3, Planning Context, in the Environmental Statement dated September 2007.
- 3.1.2 There has since been a scheme change as reflected in the revised Parameters Plans contained within this Supplemental ES and this supplement assesses the impact of the revised scheme. This chapter sets out the changes to the planning context that have occurred since the submission of the application in September 2007.
- 3.1.3 This chapter is supplemental to Chapter 3 of the September 2007 Environmental Statement and the two chapters should be read in conjunction except for the following paragraphs from Chapter 3 of the ES which are superseded by the Supplemental ES and which no longer form part of the assessment:
- 3.2.1 – 3.2.9 inclusive;
 - 3.3.1 – 3.3.6 inclusive; and
 - 3.4.1 – 3.4.6 inclusive.
- 3.1.4 No new or different planning policy issues arise as a result of the scheme changes. Accordingly the updates set out in this chapter are simply the result of new planning policy emerging, and older policy falling away, over the passage of time since the submission of the initial planning application.

3.2 Regional Policy

- 3.2.1 The South East Plan was published by the Government on 6 May 2009 and now forms part of the statutory Development Plan. It replaces the March 2001 Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG 9). It also replaces the July 2004 Regional Transport Strategy, which previously formed an updated Chapter 9 to RPG 9 and takes precedence over the Kent and Medway Structure Plan. The South East Plan is subject to a six week period for legal challenge ending on 6 July 2009 at which point the Kent and Medway Structure Plan will no longer form part of the Development Plan.
- 3.2.2 In respect of rail freight, Policy T11 of the South East Plan promotes the development of the railway system to carry an increasing share of freight movements. Priority should be given to providing enhanced capacity on four corridors including “Dover/Channel Tunnel to and through/around London”.
- 3.2.3 Policy T12 relates to safeguarding sites that could contribute to moving freight by rail or water and encouraging development with a high generation of freight of commercial movements to be near intermodal facilities.

- 3.2.4 Policy T13 relates to intermodal interchanges. It commits the regional planning body to joint working with relevant stakeholders to identify broad locations for up to three inter-modal interchange facilities in the region which have the potential to deliver modal shift and be well related to the relevant road and rail corridors, the proposed markets and London. In doing so it draws upon work previously undertaken by the former Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) and the reasoned justification sets out some particular criteria which such sites should meet. Site should be of sufficient size and a suitable configuration to yield an appropriate rail layout, transfer operation and 'added value activities'. They should be rail connected or capable of being so at a reasonable cost and should have good road access. In addition, they should to be situated away from incompatible land uses.
- 3.2.5 SEERA made an EIP proposal to delete Policy T13 requiring provision of broad locations for up to 3 intermodal facilities. The Assembly considered that the remaining freight policies, T11 and T12, contained sufficient general guidance in the interim, pending further detailed study.
- 3.2.6 The Panel Report issued in August 2007 endorsed the need for RSS to support the provision of further freight interchanges in the South East. It also specifically recommended that a broad location be identified towards the north western end of the of the Channel Tunnel-London corridor.
- 3.2.7 Maidstone does not fall within any of the specific sub-regional policy areas in the South East Plan, but its circumstances are specifically referred to in section B4 concerning the spatial strategy and section C25 concerning areas outside the sub-regions. Certain settlements are identified as 'regional hubs' which includes both Maidstone and Tonbridge/Tunbridge Wells. Paragraph 4.9 states that they:-

"...are identified as accessible settlements of regional significance with Maidstone identified as having the potential to accommodate significantly higher levels of development during the Plan period than other urban settlements located outside the sub-regional strategy areas".

- 3.2.8 Policy SP2 covers 'regional hubs' generally, including the functions of Maidstone and Tonbridge/Tunbridge Wells. Policy AOSR7 relates specifically to Maidstone. It is proposed that the local development framework at Maidstone will:-

"...make new provision for employment of sub-regional significance..."

- 3.2.9 The August 2007 Panel Report supported the policies for regional hubs, although it considers their roles should be set out more clearly in terms of several functions, including acting as centres for 'transport and other infrastructure' and for 'economic activity and employment'.

3.4 Saved Policies of the December 2000 Adopted Maidstone Borough wide Local Plan

3.4.1 The existing Local Plan was prepared against the background of the previous December 1996 Kent Structure Plan. It spans up to 2011 for employment.

3.4.2 On 24 September 2007 the Secretary of State published a saving direction with the effect that the specified policies were saved for a further three years. Certain policies which previously formed part of the Development Plan have not been saved and therefore have not been included within this assessment.

Environment

3.4.3 The environment section includes the following saved policies of relevance to the application site:-

- Policy ENV28 relating to protection of the countryside, defined as all those parts of the plan area outside the development boundaries shown on the proposals map;
- Policy ENV31 to prevent significant extension of urban areas into the defined strategic gap between Maidstone/the Medway Gap urban areas and the Medway Towns to the north. This affects the western part of the appraisal site between Water Lane and Thurnham Lane;
- Policy ENV34 to protect the defined Special Landscape Areas. The North Downs SLA includes the appraisal site.

Employment

3.4.4 The Plan emphasises the strategic geographic location of Maidstone and its role as the county town of Kent. Also, the Plan area is described in paragraph 2.1 as being:-

“...located on the major motorway and railway communication links between London and the rest of the UK on the one hand, the Channel Ports and Europe on the other”.

3.4.5 Overall, Maidstone is regarded by the Plan as ‘a natural centre for business activity in the county’.

- 3.4.6 The 1996 Structure Plan guideline for employment development over 1991-2011 is 150,000 sq m of A2/B1 space and 110,000 sq m of B2/B8, giving a total of 260,000 sq m. Existing allocations brought forward from the previous local plan were considered to cover the then Structure Plan requirement. Only limited new allocations were made.

Transport

- 3.4.7 The Plan's Transportation section refers to the high priority given to the off-line Leeds/Langley by-pass scheme. This is included within Policy T18.