

Statement of Common Ground

as agreed between

Sevenoaks District Council and

Gravesham Borough Council

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1. Introduction

The basis for preparing this Statement of Common Ground

- 1.1** This Statement of Common Ground (SCG) has been prepared by Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) together with Gravesham Borough Council (GBC). It reflects the agreed position between the parties.
- 1.2** The purpose of this SCG is to set out the basis on which SDC and GBC have actively and positively agreed to work together to meet the requirements of the Duty to Cooperate. SDC has prepared their Local Plan for submission in Spring 2019. GBC is preparing their Local Plan Site Allocations and Development Management Policies document for Regulation 18 (Stage 2) consultation in Autumn 2019. It should be noted that the Local Plans of the two councils are not based on the same time periods, with the new SDC covering the period 2019-35 and GBC undertaking a partial review to 2028 in accordance with an undertaking made at the examination of its Core Strategy in 2014. This statement describes the established mechanisms for ongoing cooperation on strategic matters within this context.
- 1.3** Under section 33A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (amended by section 110 of the Localism Act 2011) and in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019 it is a requirement under the Duty to Cooperate for local planning authorities, county councils and other named bodies to engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis in the preparation of development plan documents and other local development documents. This is a test that local authorities need to satisfy at the Local Plan examination stage and is an additional requirement to the test of soundness.
- 1.4** The Duty to Cooperate applies to strategic planning issues of cross boundary significance. Local authorities all have common strategic issues and as set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) "*local planning authorities should make every effort to secure the necessary cooperation on strategic cross boundary matters before they submit their Local Plans for examination.*" The statutory requirements of the Duty to Cooperate are not a choice but a legal obligation. Whilst the obligation is not a duty to agree, cooperation should produce effective and deliverable policies on strategic cross boundary matters in accordance with the government policy in the NPPF, and practice guidance in the NPPG.
- 1.5** The administrative areas set out in Appendix A show that SDC and GBC share an approximate 6km common boundary within the rural area designated under Green Belt policy. Both councils are therefore required to work cooperatively in an effective way to address key cross-boundary strategic matters. Aside from any such obligation under the duty to co-operate, the two authorities engage via a number of other fora.

2. Key Matters

The NPPF defines the topic areas considered to be strategic matters (para 20). Those strategic matters relevant to SDC and GBC are explored below.

2.1 Housing

- 2.1.1 Government policy places much emphasis on housing delivery as a means for ensuring economic growth and addressing the current national shortage of housing. The NPPF is very clear that *“strategic policy-making authorities should establish a housing requirement figure for their whole area, which shows the extent to which their identified housing need (and any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas) can be met over the plan period.”*
- 2.1.2 The Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) published in 2015 identified that Sevenoaks falls within a West Kent housing market area which includes Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. It goes on to state that *“there is a close set of interactions between the towns of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells which reflect their geographical proximity.”*
- 2.1.3 GBC has also prepared a Strategic Housing and Economic Needs Assessment (SHENA, 2016) in conjunction with Medway Council that establishes Gravesham falls within a North Kent housing market area that primarily comprises Dartford, Gravesham and Medway but is also influenced by the outward migration of households west to east from London along the River Thames¹.
- 2.1.4 Given the evidence, it is clear that SDC and GBC do not share the same housing market area. However, that is not to say that there are no interactions between the two authority areas. It is likely that there is some connectivity close to the border given proximity to services at centres such as Hartley and New Ash Green and Longfield, within the Dartford Borough Council area. However, it is considered that these connections are likely to be relatively localised and not key strategic drivers overall.
- 2.1.5 SDC has undertaken its Regulation 19 consultation on a Plan that includes proposed Green Belt release but which would still not fully meet objectively assessed housing need for the SDC area. SDC is constrained by the Green Belt (93%) and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (60%) and SDC considers that it has justified why it cannot meet its need in full within its own administrative area. SDC’s Regulation 19 Plan outlines a housing supply of 9,410 units. Based on a requirement of 707 units per annum, or 11,312 units in total over a 16 year period (2019-35), this leads to an unmet housing need of approximately 1,900 units (or 17% of the requirement).
- 2.1.6 Given that SDC and GBC do not share the same housing market area, and the limited extent of functional connections between SDC and GBC, it is likely that SDC would first seek assistance on unmet need from the authorities within the West Kent housing market area, namely Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, before turning to any others of its neighbours. Discussions

¹ For the North Kent SHENA documents see <https://localplan.gravesham.gov.uk/consult.ti/sareg18/consultationHome>

have taken place with neighbouring authorities on this basis to discuss assistance with any unmet need, but no authority to date has been in a position to assist SDC with its unmet need.

- 2.1.7 GBC's Regulation 18 Stage 1 consultation undertaken between 25 April – 11 July 2018 identified an approximate shortfall of around 2,000 housing units to 2028 when compared against a housing target of 6,170 for the period 2011-28 set out in its adopted Local Plan Core Strategy (2014)². This reflected a requirement to re-assess the borough's need for housing accepted at the examination and is broadly in-line with a figure derived using the Government's standard methodology. It was accepted at the examination and by the Inspector that accommodating any unmet need would be likely to necessitate undertaking a Green Belt review³. However, in line with the requirements of the NPPF 2019, Gravesham too is in the process of approaching neighbouring authorities to determine whether they are in a position to meet its unmet need in advance of making any decisions in this respect.
- 2.1.8 It is understood therefore that, at present, GBC is unable to assist SDC with unmet housing need, due to the constraints on both local authorities, and their inability to meet housing needs beyond their own, irrespective of unmet needs elsewhere.
- 2.1.9 Consequently, both local authorities will continue to work together and identify the position as both SDC and GBC prepare to review their Local Plans at least every 5 years.

Actions

- SDC and GBC will engage through the wider Duty to Cooperate forum with other neighbouring authorities outside each other's housing market area in relation to housing related matters, including unmet need, five year housing land supply, best fit housing market areas, affordability, London's growth, large scale developments and opportunities for meeting any unmet need.
- SDC and GBC to each undertake a 5 year review of their respective Local Plans.

2.2 Gypsies and Travellers

- 2.2.1 There are established links between SDC and GBC in relation to Gypsy & Traveller flows which are rooted in historic patterns of movement of the Gypsy & Traveller community linked to seasonal work such as fruit picking in remote areas such as the North Downs.
- 2.2.2 There has been a need to cooperate with neighbouring authorities to assist with unmet need for Gypsies & Travellers.

² See GBC Local Plan Review Booklet (2018) at https://localplan.gravesham.gov.uk/consult.ti/localplanreview2028?_ga=2.87360538.380058972.1555066039-1390412748.1531306374

³ For Inspector's report on GBC Local Plan Core Strategy examination see <http://www.gravesham.gov.uk/home/planning-and-building/local-plan/gravesham-local-plan-core-strategy>

- 2.2.3 SDC has allocated sufficient pitches/sites for Gypsies & Travellers to meet its need in full, but is unable to assist with any unmet need arising elsewhere due to District-wide constraints.
- 2.2.4 GBC has undertaken a Gypsy and Traveller needs survey to determine the number of pitches likely to be required over the remaining plan period. This has yet to be finalised and the Council's approach agreed at this stage.
- 2.2.5 Both local authorities will continue to operate existing joint working arrangements through the wider Duty to Cooperate forum to ensure that suitable provision can be made as appropriate.

Actions:

- SDC and GBC will engage through the wider Duty to Cooperate forum with other neighbouring authorities outside each other's housing market area in relation to housing related matters, including provision for Gypsies & Travellers.
- SDC and GBC to each undertake a 5 year review of their respective Local Plans.

2.3 Economic Development

- 2.3.1 There is some degree of connection between SDC and GBC in relation to employment. Whilst the links to London exist and create a draw in both areas, these connections tend to run parallel with each other i.e. north south rather than east west. However, given the proximity of London, it can be argued that both authorities form part of a wider regional economy within which many areas share important economic relationships with London. In so far as identifying a functional economic market area it is considered that Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells share the most similar economic characteristics. This reflects evidence of commuting flows and has become defined as a sub-regional economy through the West Kent Partnership.
- 2.3.2 At a localised level, links between SDC and GBC are evident – 3.4% of Gravesham residents work in Sevenoaks and 2.9% of Sevenoaks residents work in Gravesham (Census 2011).
- ~~2.3.3 The Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Economic Needs Study (ENS) published in 2016 identified a need for 11.6ha of new employment land within the SDC area. SDC has allocated sufficient sites to meet employment need in full through the retention of existing employment sites and the potential for intensification/expansion at the Vestry Trading Estate and around the A21/M25 interchange.~~
- 2.3.4 In terms of retail, the common influence on both SDC and GBC is Bluewater Shopping Centre for comparison goods. In terms of convenience goods, some of SDC's retail spend from the Hartley/New Ash Green area flows towards GBC. The Sevenoaks Retail Study published in 2017 identified a need for 32,000sqm of retail floorspace, of which one third is required in relation to convenience goods and two

thirds in relation to comparison goods. SDC has not allocated new sites to meet retail need, instead focusing on an approach that identifies town centre uses in existing centres, and considers the introduction of co-location of uses where appropriate.

- 2.3.5 SDC has allocated sufficient employment land to meet need in full, but is unable to assist with any unmet need arising elsewhere due to District-wide constraints.
- 2.3.6 GBC's approach toward the delivery of employment is set out in broad terms within policy CS02 of its adopted Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) that was found 'sound' on independent examination. This is based on an appreciation that the local economy in the borough is the smallest in Kent and that it is appropriate to grow it to underpin a sustainable form and distribution of development whereby people have opportunities to live and work locally. Gravesend town centre continues to be the preferred location for retail and other main town centre uses within the borough but within a changing retail context where the regional shopping centre at Bluewater continues to be the main draw over a wide area of North West Kent and beyond. This is particularly the case in terms of comparison goods and commercial leisure but it should be noted that Bluewater's offer continues to evolve.
- 2.3.7 Both local authorities will continue to operate existing joint working arrangements through the wider Duty to Cooperate forum to ensure that suitable provision can be made as appropriate.

Actions

- SDC and GBC will engage through the wider Duty to Cooperate forum with other neighbouring authorities outside each other's functional economic market area in relation to economic related matters, including employment land and retail and town centre development.
- SDC and GBC to each undertake a 5 year review of their respective Local Plans.

2.4 Infrastructure

- 2.4.1 There are a number of cross boundary infrastructure issues that have an impact on both authorities including road, health and schools. Any relevant issues are discussed and explored at the regular Duty to Cooperate meetings between SDC and GBC as well as with other agencies/stakeholders such as Highways England, Kent County Council (KCC) Highways and Education and the Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley Clinical Commissioning Group (DGS CCG).
- 2.4.2 In relation to road infrastructure, and in particular the M25, SDC and GBC are committed to continue working together in partnership with the relevant stakeholders, with the aim of ensuring the necessary improvements to support sustainable growth delivered in a timely manner over the period of the SDC and GBC Local Plans. SDC and GBC both recognise that securing sufficient funding to deliver infrastructure improvement schemes is important. The two authorities are committed to working

together to secure the necessary funding and will positively consider all available mechanisms.

2.4.3 In relation to health and education infrastructure, a number of patients and pupils travel across the border to access important services. SDC and GBC are committed to continued partnership working with the relevant stakeholders, including exploring joint bids to unlock funding to support sustainable growth and the necessary infrastructure in both local authority areas over the period of the SDC and GBC Local Plans. SDC and GBC will keep each other fully informed of any changes to any significant infrastructure needs and will continue to liaise on these matters at all levels and for all types of development, where appropriate, including through planning applications that are cross boundary.



Actions


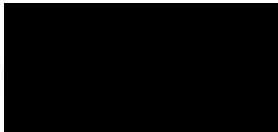
- SDC and GBC to continue to liaise and work together with the infrastructure providers on all cross boundary infrastructure matters, including planning applications.

3. Actions going forward

Key Issue	Agreed Action
Housing	SDC and GBC will engage through the wider Duty to Cooperate forum with other neighbouring authorities outside each other's housing market area in relation to housing related matters, including unmet need, five year housing land supply, best fit housing market areas, affordability, London's growth, large scale developments and opportunities for meeting any unmet need, prior to a 5 year review of the Local Plans.
Gypsies and Travellers	SDC and GBC will engage through the wider Duty to Cooperate forum with other neighbouring authorities outside each other's housing market area in relation to housing related matters, including provision for Gypsies & Travellers, prior to a 5 year review of the Local Plans.
Economic Development	SDC and GBC will engage through the wider Duty to Cooperate forum with other neighbouring authorities outside each other's functional economic market area in relation to economic related matters, including employment land and retail and town centre development, prior to a 5 year review of the Local Plans.
Infrastructure	SDC and GBC to continue to liaise and work together with the infrastructure providers on all cross boundary infrastructure matters, including planning applications.

4. Signatories/Declaration

<u>Signed on behalf of Sevenoaks District Council (Officer)</u>	<u>Signed on behalf of Sevenoaks District Council (Councillor)</u>
	
<u>Position:</u> Chief Executive	<u>Position:</u> LEADER
<u>Date:</u> 20.5.19	<u>Date:</u> 20.05.19

<u>Signed on behalf of Gravesham Borough Council (Officer)</u>	<u>Signed on behalf of Gravesham Borough Council (Councillor)</u>
	
<u>Position:</u> Assistant Director (Planning)	<u>Position:</u> Cabinet Member (Strategic Environment)
<u>Date:</u> 16/05/2019	<u>Date:</u> 17/05.2019

Appendix A: Administrative Areas

