

LTR/3786/RL

Canterbury City Council

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REPRESENTATIONS TO CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN (REGULATION 18)

LAND AT RECVLVER

Lee Evans Partnership LLP is instructed by Whitstable Oyster Company Ltd (hereafter, 'the Representer') to submit representations to the Regulation 18 Draft of the Canterbury City Council Local Plan 2045.

On behalf of the representer, this response advocates for a closer review of the Plan's policies relating to economic and tourism opportunities over the plan period, advocating for closer reflection of the aspirations laid out in the adopted Reculver Masterplan and Management Plan 1 and 2 Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), adopted by Canterbury City Council which highlights the Council's aspirations for Reculver to appeal to an increasingly competitive domestic market, by way of a range of experiences and activities, supported by good quality, value for money accommodation, food and drink establishments and interesting interpretation (Reculver Masterplan Volume 1, page 21).

In so doing, it identifies the Representer's interests at Reculver, specifically Land at Reculver Caravan Park, Land at Reculver Shellfish, and Land at Reculver Hatchery. These sites are part of a wider land interest in the Reculver area, subject to submitted planning applications in January 2023 advocating for proposed forms of development centred on tourism and local economic opportunities for redevelopment.

Below we provide commentary on the Plan's policy wording as currently drafted. This response does not offer a detailed comment for all proposed draft policies; reference is made only to those considered most salient to the representer, namely those relating to the (i) Vision and Objectives, (ii) Spatial Strategy, and (iii) Policies R21, R28, DS11, and DS12.

We look forward to engaging the Council in the refinement of the Draft Local Plan over the coming months, and would be happy to discuss the contents of this correspondence should it be of assistance.

CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN 2045

(i) Vision and Objectives

The Local Plan at this Regulation 18 Draft stage identifies a clear vision for the District. Inter-alia, it seeks to promote aspirations for residential growth achieved through a range of homes which will meet the needs of the district, improving affordability and supporting growth. It provides the planning framework to support a strong and resilient economy, improved connectivity, healthy communities and a thriving natural environment. These component parts of the vision are clearly aligned with the purposes of sustainable development, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. The Plan seeks the implementation of this vision over a period up to 2045, with growth focused principally at the urban cores of Canterbury, Whitstable, Herne Bay and proportionate growth across the villages.

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Throughout this vision, a number of key elements are highlighted, including that:

- Business investors will continue to be attracted by the district's connection to London and the Continent, with new and diverse jobs for local people;
- Growth and investment in the district will be centred on Canterbury, and complemented by an enhanced historic and natural environment that will create vibrant cultural and creative areas, and improved biodiversity.
- Significant new areas of accessible, high-quality open space will be created across the district and both new and existing valued open spaces enjoyed by the district's residents will be protected for future generations, ensuring continued access beyond the period of the plan.

The thrust of these specific elements of the vision in supporting the district – beyond housing need – in ways which reflect the opportunities available in creating and sustaining quality investment in its various forms is wholly supported. The recognition of protecting and enhancing the district's historic and natural environment reflects national planning policies, and best practice, and is also supported. As a high level vision, the Representor agrees that new development in the district should aspire to this vision.

To support the implementation of such, a number of strategic objectives are also outlined in the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan. These include:

- Providing high quality housing for everyone, including affordable housing, as part of mixed, sustainable communities;
- Creating a thriving economy with a wide range of jobs;
- Supporting the sustainable growth of rural communities through the provision of affordable housing, community facilities and transport infrastructure while taking advantage of opportunities to grow the rural economy;
- Capitalise on our rich and distinctive heritage and culture, enhancing character, sense of place and quality of life, supporting tourism and the local economy for our residents, visitors and businesses;
- Protect and enhance our rich environment and valued landscapes, creating a network of spaces, supporting wildlife and biodiversity and improving the health and wellbeing of our communities;
- Among other related objectives not repeated here.

These strategic objectives are considered at this stage to reflect the intent of the overall vision for the district over the plan period to 2045. The targeted delivery of these objectives is supported in broad terms, albeit subject to commentary on related planning policies as drafted. The scope of these objectives is deemed appropriate for the district, reflecting its diverse environments across urban, rural, coastal, and in-land resources, with a rich heritage across the district. It is particularly important that due regard is retained in later iterations of the Plan to the importance of tourism and rural economies to the district.

(ii) Spatial Strategy

It is agreed that the Plan should be reasonably informed by an established evidence base. In respect of housing delivery and the overall development strategy for the district, the NPPF is clear that plans should provide for future development needs and further sets out the expectation that identified needs for housing, space for jobs and retail space should be planned for, in full, as part of local plans.

It is recognised that the draft Local Plan has been informed directly by an evidence base comprising the Housing Needs Assessment (2021); the Economic Development and Tourism Study (2020, 2022) and the Retail and Leisure Study (2020, 2022), and a litany of additional topic papers and resources including the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) which provide an objective analysis of the district's development needs through to 2045 alongside an audit of available land interests. The overall ambition of the Plan is supported, supported by an appropriate evidence base.

Policy SS1 addresses the environmental strategy for the district, and identifies how green and blue infrastructure will support the quality and quantity of important and valued natural resources in the district. It is agreed that the district's natural environment should form a central facet of the overall spatial strategy.

In a similar way, Policy SS2 addresses the overall sustainable strategy for the district. Again, the intent of this policy in directing sustainable development is wholly supported. Regard should be had to ensure that policies are not overly prescriptive in their wording, here at criterion 2 which seeks all new development to be net zero operational carbon emissions. It is otherwise generally agreed that development should respond to local context and should contribute towards sustainable development objectives.

Policy SS3 deals with the overall development strategy for the District, specifically the strategy for delivering these ambitions and positively prepared housing and employment space targets. The overall approach to sustainable growth at settlements consistent with their range of services and facilities is supported, in line with the settlement hierarchy. Canterbury, Whitstable, and Herne Bay remain the most sustainable locations for growth in the District, and this is supported.

Reculver is considered to fall within the open countryside, outside of any defined settlement boundaries. In this regard, criterion 7 is most relevant. It reads:

Within the countryside, which is defined as any parts of the district outside of the settlement boundaries of the urban areas, rural service centres and local service centres, priority will be given to protecting the rural character of the district. In this context, new housing development will only be supported in very limited circumstances and new community facilities, business space and tourism facilities will only be supported where the need for the development outweighs any harm. Existing community facilities and services within the countryside will be protected.

Whilst this is generally considered a sound approach to sustainable development, it does not wholly recognise the role of redevelopment in supporting limited growth and development opportunities through the reuse and/or reinstatement of existing resources. In particular, it fails – as drafted – to provide sufficient scope to bring forth deliverable redevelopment opportunities aligned to local employment opportunities and tourism-led development, consistent with the overall vision for the Plan.

This should be revisited to ensure that sufficient flexibility is catered for within the Plan to deliver on the fullness of its vision. Cross reference to other policies in the Plan should perhaps be made, namely relating to Policies DS11 and DS12 where appropriate, which deal with tourism and rural diversification.

It is also noted that there is a distinct lack of cross-reference to the adopted Reculver Masterplan SPD throughout the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan. This should be more appropriately reflected in later iterations of the Local Plan, to ensure that the development management process can efficiently process proposals for development within the defined area of the Reculver Masterplan SPD, as is the case here. This case is further made later in this correspondence.

(iii) Proposed Development Management Policies

A number of detailed policies are proposed, centred on matters of design, transport, amenity, biodiversity, landscape, and other such disciplines. Whilst detailed commentary is not provided at this stage on the Plan as a whole, it is evident that such policies are necessary to guide development over the plan period. Whilst an interim evidence base has been prepared to support the proposed draft wording of such policies at this stage, commentary on such is reserved until the Regulation 19 consultation process.

Comment is provided on the following draft policies at this juncture:

Policy R21 – Local Service Centres

This policy deals expressly with identified settlement boundaries for Adisham, Barham, Broad Oak, Harbledown, Hoath, Lower Hardres, Petham, Rough Common, Stuppington, Westbere and Wichambreaux. It does not expressly address the spatial context of Reculver, though it does outline at Criterion (2) that the Council will seek to protect and enhance the sustainability of the local service centres by – inter alia – supporting proposals for new community facilities and services, business or employment space and tourism facilities outside settlement boundaries where:

- There is identified local need which outweighs any harm;
- The development would be well related to and proportionate to the scale of the existing settlement and protects the rural character of the area;
- The development is appropriately accessible by walking and cycling; and
- The development would not undermine the viability of existing provision within the settlement.

Policy wording should make clear whether or not such provisions as drafted apply broadly to the district-level (including any and all development outside settlement boundaries, or simply to those settlement boundaries of the listed rural service centres. Whilst it is expected that this applies only to the settlements listed directly in Policy RS1, it is currently unclear, and this should be revisited to aid in the implementation of the Plan.

Policy R28 – Countryside

Land at Reculver falls within the open countryside. Criterion (3) is most relevant to the Representor's interests, and deals with proposals for new community facilities and services, business space, and tourism facilities. It outlines that proposals will only be supported where meeting the requirements of R2 (2) (d) OR R21 (2) (d), or where:

- (a) there is an identified local need for the proposal which outweighs any harm;
- (b) the development protects the rural character of the area, including in terms of any cumulative impacts of similar developments, and any adverse impacts on the landscape and heritage are appropriately mitigated;
- (c) the development can be accommodated by the local highway network, has appropriate vehicular access is appropriately accessible by public transport and walking and cycling; and
- (d) the development would not undermine the viability of existing provision within the area.

Whilst the general objective of controlling the scope and extent of development in the countryside is agreed – and indeed reflects principles of sustainable development per national planning policies – further and closer reference must be had to other policies within the Plan. Specifically this includes for Policy DS11- Tourism Development and Policy DS12 – Rural Economy. These policies would appear somewhat at odds with Policy R28, insofar as they more appropriately consider the opportunities for limited development and diversification in rural areas, including through redevelopment. It also does not reflect fully the aspirations of the adopted Reculver Masterplan as articulated elsewhere in this response.

A reconsideration of the precise wording of Policy R28 must also take place to ensure that the Plan as a whole can be read with consistency throughout.

Policy DS11 – Tourism Development

The detailed policy wording of Policy DS11 is wholly supported, recognising the importance of new tourism development within the district.

Paragraph 6.26 as drafted reflects: "*while most tourism development should be focussed in and around the city and town centres, it is recognised that there is scope to increase rural tourism, such as that related to*

environmental or viticultural tourism, provided these are sensitively located and designed". This aspiration and underpinning to DS11 is agreed by the Representor as an appropriate basis for guiding development over the plan period. In particular, it recognises in principle that rural tourism is not simply related to tourist accommodation per se, as reflected in the detailed policy wording of DS11. Such a principle is agreed, given that the district benefits from extensive opportunities for quality tourism operations and development across its built and natural environments, subject to other relevant planning policies.

Policy DS11 recognises at Criterion (3) that there are opportunities to promote tourism outside of urban areas, including through rural diversification. It goes on to clarify that "*Environmental or agricultural focused tourism initiatives which foster environmental, ecological, agricultural, viticultural, gastronomic and/or cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation will be encouraged*". This is wholly supported by the Representor.

The same Criterion outlines that:

New tourism development, change of use, conversion or extension of existing buildings to provide tourist accommodation, attractions or facilities will be supported provided that:

- (a) The nature and scale of the proposal is in keeping with the character of the area; and
- (b) The development will contribute positively to the diversification and quality of tourist attractions and accommodation in the district; and
- (c) There is no adverse impact upon residential amenity; and
- (d) The development takes all reasonable opportunities to maximise accessibility by sustainable and active travel.

This policy is clear in its ambition, which is entirely supported. The policy as drafted appropriately reflects that new tourism development can be varied in its form and type ('new', conversion, extension, change of use) and in its overall off (accommodation, attractions, or facilities). This is agreed, and it is pleasing to see this range of uses included within the policy wording itself.

It is agreed that the sub-criteria a-d (of Criterion 3) would allow for a reasonable assessment of proposals on a case by case basis, reflecting the potential diverse nature of proposals that may come forward under DS11.

In a similar way, Criterion 5 and 6 relate to touring and static caravan tourism sites, and are supported in full in their efforts to retain, refurbish and expand existing sites where no overriding conflict exists. Efforts to retain the tourism uses of such sites are wholly consistent with the vision and objections outlined earlier in the Plan.

As noted elsewhere, no mention is had to the Reculver Masterplan Plan and Management Plan Volumes 1 & 2 SPD, which aims to provide a co-ordinated vision for the enhancement of Reculver. It sets out principles for development in line with existing policies, aspirations of the existing stakeholders and existing and future funding streams. It is important that – as an adopted Supplementary Planning Document – its directives are reflected here, particularly given the proposed wording of other policies elsewhere in the Plan which do not explicitly reference site specific opportunities at Reculver. There is an established commitment by the Council to deliver on the Reculver Masterplan SPD, and the Representor is making progress towards doing so. This should be reflected clearly and confidently in future iterations of the Plan.

The adopted Reculver Masterplan SPD outlines in its introductory text that:

"Reculver has reached a key point in its history as it has been highlighted as a potential strategic hub for a wider regional tourism and leisure strategy...The existing businesses - caravan parks, cafe, shop and public house are having to adjust to a shift in the profile of the visitor that comes to Reculver and are considering how to invest and develop for the future". (extract from Reculver Masterplan Volume 1, page 01).

The Masterplan as a whole seeks – in its own words – to provide a coordinated vision for the enhancement of Reculver. Its own vision is not dissimilar to that of the Plan as drafted, and centres on

- Providing high quality sustainable facilities, improving the experience for visitors and local residents;
- Optimising existing assets and strengths associated with designations and policies relating to Reculver;
- Co-ordinating management of the area bringing together public and private interests;
- Establishing clear linkages to the surrounding area and the wider regional context; and
- Changing negative perceptions and raise the profile of Reculver.

This and any other relevant SPDs should be reflected within the revised Local Plan for Canterbury.

No change to the policy wording of DS11, though it is suggested that due regard is had to the Reculver Masterplan Plan and Management Plan Volumes 1 & 2 in supporting text.

Policy DS12 – Rural Economy

The rural economy is a vital part of the district's overall sustainability strategy. Whilst it is acknowledged that most growth will take place in urban areas and existing settlements, the rural economy remains an important component in the overall success of the Plan.

It is entirely supported that a positive approach to the growth and diversification of the rural economy should take place over the plan period to support the adaptation of rural business over the period. Criterion (1) is supported.

Criterion (2) deals with diversification and outlines that redevelopment and/or diversification will be supported where proportionate to the scale of the existing operation; there is demonstrable need that outweighs any harm' and the diversification protects the rural character of the area and any adverse landscape impacts can be appropriately mitigated.

This range of criteria seem reasonable, recognising that some flexibility must be in-built into the policy to sustain a level of diversification to support the wider rural economy. Criterion (2) is supported.

Criterion (3) address agricultural land classifications, and is noted.

Overall soundness

At the current stage of preparation, it would be premature to consider whether the Draft Plan is legally compliant, is sound, and whether it has met the duty to cooperate. That said, the evidence base as prepared – alongside the reported direction of travel – appears to show positive progress towards planning for sustainable development in the District over the period to 2045, based on an expanding and robust evidence base, notwithstanding the comments made above.

We reserve detailed judgement on this until such a time that the Regulation 19 Submission Plan is available for consultation, alongside the Sustainability Appraisal and wider evidence base, later in 2023.

LAND AT RECULVER

Reculver is a well-established holiday and tourist location located on the coast in proximity to settlements including Whitstable and Herne Bay. Reculver predominately consists of camping sites and mobile home parks with a seasonal flow of visitors and residents.

Reculver has a range of visitor associated services including Reculver Visitors Centre, Reculver Country Park, The King Ethelbert Public House and two cafés. More services are located at Hillborough (1 to 1.8 miles away) and include Reculver School, local shops, a post office, public house, two doctor's surgeries, village hall and railway station. The site is approximately 1.8 miles from the A299 and Hillborough shopping area and services and is 2.2 miles from the large Sainsbury's super store.

The Site has for over 70 years been a developed part of the Reculver holiday accommodation supply and the Country Park. The Site is located within a couple of minutes walking distance of a number of services. This includes two cafes, a public house serving food, a small shop and the Reculver Visitors Centre and the open spaces of Reculver Country Park as well as the Viking Way coastal footpath and cycle way.

The Representor's interests sit to the southeast and east of Reculver Towers and Roman Fort adjacent to the scheduled monument. This includes Reculver Shellfish Hatchery and the Reculver Caravan Park, which are the subject of aspirational development proposals intended to reflect the objectives of the Reculver Masterplan SPD.

To the southwest is Waterways Caravan Park, alongside a small shop and café. To the northwest is the King Ethelbert Public House and Reculver Country Park Visitor centre with associated facilities. Along the southern and eastern boundaries runs a small water body, the Sluice Drain, beyond which is the farmland that now covers the historic Wantsum Channel.

It is noted that the caravan park constitutes a currently unused site previously used for a mix of touring and permanent caravans, used for tourism purposes. At the peak of its popularity there were some 200+ caravans located on the Site. The numbers had dwindled until the site was cleared in 2013 to allow for a fresh development approach to take place. The Site has been the subject of continuous and active management since the cessation of the previous use in 2013.

SITE DELIVERABILITY

The Representor further wishes to confirm the following information to assist in the progression of the Plan towards the Regulation 19 stage, following this consultation period:

1. *Current planning status*

It should be noted that the Representor is currently preparing Full Planning Applications for submission in January 2023, evidencing the overarching deliverability of the proposed tourism and economic redevelopment of the Sites. Technical work has been instructed to underpin the detailed inputs to these planning applications, and informs these applications which will be considered through usual development management processes.

2. *Firm progress with site assessment work;*

As above, a suite of technical work to support the redevelopment of parts of the Reculver area has already been instructed to inform planning applications in support of the redevelopment of Reculver Caravan Park for a number of glamping pods, and likewise for a public-facing brewery in a redundant building at Reculver Shellfish.

3. *Clear relevant information about site viability, ownership constraints or infrastructure provision:*

The Representor is engaged in agreements with relevant landowners as appropriate allowing for the submission of Full Planning Applications as above, including with Canterbury City Council in respect of the site at Reculver Caravan Park and its redevelopment for a tourism-led form of development. The Representor is committed to seeing the redevelopment of the Reculver area for tourism and local

economy uses, consistent with its role in the adopted Reculver Masterplan as a focus of such development.

The land interests of the Representor should be considered available, suitable and deliverable for the purposes of tourism-led and local economic development and redevelopment opportunities, as evidenced in the prepared planning applications.

SUMMARY

The aspirations and vision of the Plan are supported, specifically in respect of tourism and rural diversification, subject to the commentary above which seeks to refine the policy wording most salient to the Representor's interests at Reculver.

It is emphasised that the content of the adopted Reculver Masterplan SPD is conspicuous in its absence as part of the currently drafted Local Plan, and this should be amended.

The Representor confirms their collective commitment to the delivery of development as part of these Regulation 18 representations, and look forward to progressing a scheme in accordance with refined policy directives as the course of the Local Plan process advances in the coming months.

We look forward to onwards participation in the Local Plan consultation, and to working with officers at the appropriate time in the preparation of a planning application.

Yours sincerely

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