

Marden Neighbourhood Plan

WHAT IS A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN AND WHY DOES MARDEN NEED ONE?

Planning legislation introduced in 2012 gave greater powers to communities to help them shape the growth of their community in a sustainable way through the development of neighbourhood plans.

The first Marden Neighbourhood Plan (MNP) was approved in July 2020, having been agreed by the community at referendum in February 2020. Maidstone Borough Council, our lead local authority and responsible for planning decisions in Marden, is legally required to take the policies contained in the MNP into consideration when deciding on planning applications in Marden. Already we have seen how powerful the MNP is with several planning applications being rejected because they do not comply with the plan, conversely Marden Parish Council is pleased to support planning applications that do comply with the MNP.

Why are we reviewing the MNP?

Change is constant and since 2020 when the original plan came into force several events have taken place that may change our perspective. We have lived through a pandemic that has changed the way people live and their outlook on life. We are living through an unprecedented cost of living crisis and war in Europe, events which will change our lives and our outlook, and we would never have considered possible when the plan was written in 2018 and 2019. These events coupled with a change of Government in July 2024 have changed the outlook in planning terms to a more bullish approach.

An important aspect of a neighbourhood plan is that it is in conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Local Plan. The NPPF was last updated in December 2024, after the MNP was approved and therefore we need to satisfy ourselves that there are no major changes that impact our plan. The Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan was adopted in 2017 and revisions adopted in March 2024. It is vital that our Neighbourhood Plan is in line with both of these important planning documents, so that MBC Planning Department continues to give it weight when deciding on planning applications, whilst reflecting any changes we all identified in our community.

Why 2038?

The revised Local Plan for Maidstone has an end date of 2038. Marden Parish Council consider that it is sensible for the revised MNP to have the same end date.

How are we going about revising the MNP?

A group of Parish Councillors have done a thorough review of our Neighbourhood Plan and identified several changes that make it more relevant to 2026 taking into account all of the above factors and feedback we have received from residents on previous open days, including the public consultation held in March and April 2025.

Most of the changes we have made are to the explanatory text in each chapter. The most important part of the plan are the policies, as these are used when planning applications are determined. We have made some changes to the policies, which are explained in the modification document. All the changes must be categorised as either:

- **Minor (non-material)** modifications which do not materially affect the policies in the plan and are mainly factual corrections, improving clarity and amending references to supporting documents. These changes do not require examination or referendum.
- **Material modifications (examination)** changes which do not change the nature of the plan but require examination by a planning inspector. This includes additional information, or amendment to a policy but do not change the overall nature of the plan.
- **Material modifications (referendum)** changes which are so significant they change the nature of the plan and need to go to a referendum of electors to determine if the plan is acceptable to the community.

The Parish Council has taken advice from Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) on the scope of proposed changes and concluded that they represent a material modification but that they do not need to go to referendum. Some of our original proposals have been amended so that they are not considered so great that a referendum is required. Many of the changes made are minor.

We are now in the public consultation phase, known as Regulation 14 when we ask residents and statutory consultees as to whether or not they agree with the Parish Council that the modifications made do not change the overall nature of the plan and that a referendum is not necessary for the plan to be approved. This phase runs from 2nd March 2026 to 17th April 2026. Once all the questionnaires and comments are received, they will be reviewed by the Parish Council and any necessary amendments made. The plan will then be submitted to MBC along with documents that evidence the proposed changes.

MBC will then run another public consultation, Regulation 16, and involve organisations such as the Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England. On completion of this phase MBC will then submit the plan to a Planning Inspector who will either recommend adoption, with or without any further amendments or referendum, if the changes are deemed very significant.

Please study the policy changes we are proposing and complete the questionnaire

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS IMPORTANT CONSULTATION