Shepway District Council

Opening Statement for Matter 4.2 – Folkestone Seafront

a) Are the location, boundary and proposed mix of uses in this strategic location adequately justified? What alternatives were considered, and why were they discounted? Is the extension to this site boundary that is now being proposed necessary for soundness reasons?

b) Has sufficient consideration been given to the future role of Folkestone Harbour itself and to existing and proposed linkages (notably the existing harbour rail link)

Location

The Folkestone Seafront and Harbour site is a highly prominent site within central Folkestone. Its comprehensive redevelopment is considered key to the regeneration of both central and east Folkestone, Shepway and indeed East Kent as a whole.

The regeneration of Folkestone Seafront is listed as one of the eight spatial priorities within the East Kent Local Investment Programme 2011 - 2026 (A87 page 26). The proposal set out in policy SS6, enjoys support across the broader sub-region.

The site is bordered to the west by Folkestone’s Coastal Park which has in the past 15 years been transformed from being an area suffering from neglect and high levels of crime into an 11 ha public park of the highest quality.

To the north west the site is bordered by Folkestone Town Centre which, whilst facing the challenges being experienced by many high streets, has itself been transformed with the completion of the Bouverie Place retail development in 2007 which has provided an additional 20,000 sq.m. of modern retail floorspace.

To the north east lies the Creative Quarter, and area that has been transformed through investment by the Creative Foundation of over £60 million in 80 properties that they have acquired, with a focus on the creation of a cluster of creative and arts based uses. The Creative Quarter has also seen major investment over the past five year in a brand new performing arts and business centre (Quarterhouse), Adult Education (The Cube) and a new university campus (The University Centre Folkestone).

The proposed strategic allocation therefore represents a significant piece in the central Folkestone ‘regeneration jigsaw’ and for that reason the location is considered to be justified.
Boundary

The site came under single ownership (with the exception of some parcels of land owned by the District Council) in 2006 and the boundary of the site reflects this in the interests of deliverability and consistency with the associated masterplan that is being developed by the Folkestone Harbour Company, whose willingness to progress the development of the site can be clearly evidenced. For this reason the choice of boundary is considered justified in terms of the deliverability and consistent with NPPF paragraph 47 footnote 11 which states:

‘sites should offer a suitable location for development now and be achievable with a realistic prospect that housing will be delivered on the site within five years and in particular that the development of the site is viable’

Mix of uses

The mix of uses proposed in Policy SS6 should be seen in the context of the broader regeneration of central Folkestone and are considered to be complimentary to a broader range of uses within the town. Policy SS6 is considered to accord with NPPF paragraph 23:

Planning policies should be positive and promote competitive town centre environments.

- Allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail, leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural community and residential development needed in town centres it is important that the needs for retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses are met in full and are not compromised by limited site availability.
- Recognise that residential development can play an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and set out policies to encourage residential development on appropriate sites.

The mix of uses of set out in Policy SS6 will also be complimented by a network of high quality public spaces (including the beach) and other outdoor uses which taken together will create a unique destination with increased footfall thereby enhancing the vitality of the area.

The Council suggest change S29 (A117 page 4) provides further clarity on the Council suggested mix of uses (C1, D1 and D2 uses)

Policy SS6 supports the provision of office (B1) use. This is considered justified by the Shepway Employment Land Review 2011 (A8 page 9) which states:

Some 5000 to 8000 sq.m of the office requirement should be provided on new town centre or edge of centre sites in Folkestone that could capitalise on High
Speed 1 Rail links, town centre services and improving perceptions from the towns creative quarter.

To summarise the District Council believes that policy SS6 in accordance with the objective set out NPPF paragraph 157 that states that – Local Plans should allocate sites to promote development and the flexible use of land.

Consideration of Alternatives

Securing the comprehensive redevelopment of Folkestone Seafront has been an objective of Shepway District Council for over twenty years. During that period it has work with a range of different land owners, the regional development agency and other partners as part of an iterative and collaborative process, that has seen a range of alternatives considered including:-

- The comprehensive redevelopment or the inner and outer harbour to provide a marina – rejected due to the cost and effect on viability (NPPF paragraph 173).

- Higher education provision on the Folkestone Harbour site – rejected due to alternative provision being made within the Creative Quarter through the redevelopment of the former Glassworks.

- The provision of major indoor leisure facilities (SDLP Policy FTC6) – rejected due to being inconsistent with the creation of a high quality built environment and a failure to take advantage of the location.

- Retention of Harbour Station and passenger ferry services (Policy FTC6) – rejected due to cost of reinstating ferry services, lack of evidence of a viable ferry operation and the development of an alternative access strategy for Folkestone Harbour.

- A range of different options and approaches to residential development which included the submission of an application for planning permission, that was not determined, for a high density scheme, up to 13 storeys in height, for 500 homes on the former Rotunda Amusements site.

The process of developing policy SS6 for Folkestone Seafront has run in parallel with the development by the Folkestone Harbour company of a comprehensive masterplan, in order to secure landowner, stakeholder and community buy in and support for the requirements set out in the policy.

The masterplan process involved consideration of a range of options for the redevelopment of the site and has been the subject of two processes of community consultation in May/June 2010 and December 2011 (A49 section 4).
Options A to G were considered as part of the development of the masterplan. (set out in Appendix 3 to the Folkestone Harbour Company MiQ Matter 4 Statement)

**Extension to Boundary**

A statement of common ground has been prepared by the Folkestone Harbour company and Shepway District Council in order to clarify the position.

b) Has sufficient consideration been given to the future role of Folkestone Harbour itself and to existing and proposed linkages (notably the existing harbour rail link)?

**Future Role**

Policy SS6 seeks to promote the development of vibrant Folkestone Harbour through –

Active uses within the vicinity of the harbour, on the Quayside and on the waterfront.

A vibrant mix of uses to encourage an increase in visitors to the town and increased footfall within the town (including between the upper and lower parts), comprising small shops and retail services and other community and leisure use together with beach sports and sea sports facilities in close proximity.

- The retention of the current fishing fleet and provision for some pleasure craft.

The District Council chose to pursue the option for Folkestone Harbour set out in Policy SS6 for the following reasons:

- Policy SS6 allows for a flexible mix of complimentary uses to be provided that have the potential to increase the vitality of the town and increase visitor/tourist numbers.

- No clear evidence has been presented to the District Council, at either the consultation or public participation, stages that would justify limiting this potential mix of uses by requiring the provision or safeguarding of land for passenger ferry services to be a requirement of any comprehensive development of Folkestone Harbour.

Were the retention of a passenger ferry service a specific requirement within Policy SS6 then, on the basis of the available evidence, the comprehensive redevelopment of the strategic site would not be progressed as no evidence has been presented that demonstrates that the operation of a passenger ferry service is viable.
Connections

Regarding connections, the approach set out in A44 (Appendix 3 Masterplan Report Transport Statement) is considered the most justified and deliverable as this will facilitate, through bus and pedestrian improvements, the key objectives set out in Policy SS6 but in particular it is worth highlighting the following key objectives that will be delivered.

- Connecting East and Central Folkestone and other parts of the District to Folkestone Harbour through new bus routes (both long distance and shuttle services). This would particularly benefit the deprived areas of East Folkestone where car ownership levels are low (35% of households are without a car) and the walk back from the seafront is an up to 3km walk with a substantial (85m) elevation change.

- Connecting Folkestone Seafront to mainline (including HS1) rail services with the potential to make Folkestone Seafront less than 70 minutes from London St Pancras by allowing direct bus connections from Folkestone Central Station to Folkestone Harbour.

A key to unlocking these connections is reverting Tram Road/Tontine to two way operation in order to allow two way operation for buses, a process that is underway via the Shepway Joint Transportation Board and Kent Highway Services (approval given 19th March 2012 for detailed design work for Tram Road and further concept work for Tontine Street).

The Council does not consider that the that the re-opening of the branchline, even if practical and acceptable to Network Rail, is necessary to make the site accessible by public transport.

The Council does however support the use of the line as a high quality cycle/pedestrian link into the heart of East Folkestone, and as an attractive alternative spur for NCR2, but does not consider such provision critical to the delivery of Policy SS6. For that reason such provision is not a requirement of Policy SS6 but is shown on the indicative concept diagram.

A combination of rail and bus services is considered adequate.