Preparation of the Shepway Core Strategy Local Plan Commenced in 2007 and since that time the District Council has sought to manage a complex process involving detailed evidence gathering, the development and publication of issues and options, preferred options and submission documents and the consideration of a range of representations following three stages of public consultation/participation.

The preparation of the Shepway Core Strategy has been an iterative process and the document has been shaped by the representations received at different stages in the process and through analysis of the evolving evidence base. In addition the Core Strategy has been prepared against a backdrop of significant changes to national policy that have included the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework, the intention to revoke the South East Plan and the introduction of neighbourhood planning under the Localism Bill.

The Council submitted the Core Strategy for examination in January 2012, with the Examination Hearings being held in May 2012. Whilst those hearing sessions were challenging for both the District Council and other participants the Council recognises the important role that the examination process plays in ensuring the ‘soundness’ of the document considered for final adoption. The Council therefore welcomed the interim conclusions report, prepared by the Inspector following the May hearing sessions, and fully recognises its role in terms of guiding the District Council towards the submission of a series of modifications to the submission document that it is hoped, when taken together with the July 2011 document, will be judged as constituting a ‘sound’ local plan.

The proposed modifications as set out in document M1, along with revised Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulations documentation, were considered by the Council’s Community Overview Committee on 24th September 2012 and approved by Cabinet on 26th September 2012. In addition to modifications aimed at addressing the concerns set out in the interim conclusions report, the modifications document, for completeness, also includes a number of other proposed modifications that reflect the discussions and outcomes of the Examination in Public process held in May 2012. The key modifications proposed are summarised as follows:-

- Insert a new policy within Chapter 2, Strategic Issues entitled Delivering Sustainable Development (DSD). This policy will reflect the need for Shepway District Council to take a positive approach when considering development proposals that reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained within the NPPF. The policy also contained the Council’s policy requirements relating to the implementation of the Core Strategy, as previously set policy CSD10 of the July 2011 document.
• Modification to Policy SS1 to delete reference to the strategic corridor, with a focus on supporting development in the urban area and development that will support the sustainability of other settlements.

• Policy SS8 – removal of policy designating Folkestone Racecourse as a strategic allocation, including the comprehensive redevelopment of the racecourse facilities and the provision of up to 820 residential units.

• Policy CDS4 – The revised policy is generally more proactive about managing and improving Green Infrastructure (GI) to achieve its potential for wildlife, landscape and recreation, clarifying that the maintenance and improvement of GI cannot be achieved by the public sector alone but will need developer involvement. It confirms that development must avoid loss of biodiversity, unless justified by national policy or an overall net benefit is achieved. However a proportionate approach is set out which reflects the hierarchy of nature conservation sites, species and habitats which exist in law and policy. A new paragraph relating to landscape protection is inserted. This focuses particularly on the AONB and its setting but highlights the need to protect other local landscapes in Shepway to ensure a high quality environment.

• Revision of the Sustainability Appraisal and the appropriate assessment carried out under the Habitat Regulation in order to test the proposed changes in accordance with the EU Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive and The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

A public participation process was held from 29th October to 10th December 2012 with the revised documentation, and the representation received, being submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in January 2013.

The Council considers that the adoption of the Core Strategy will represent a significant step forward in the regeneration of the District as it will provide the framework for the development of a more detailed Land Allocations/Development Management Local Plan, a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charging schedule and a number neighbourhood plans, with boundary proposals having been received for Hythe, Lympne, New Romney and St. Mary in the Marsh. Adoption of the plan will also facilitate the progression of planning applications for major sites such as Folkestone Seafront and Shorncliffe Garrison.

In addition to participating in this hearing session the Council is happy to answer, through correspondence, any further questions from Inspector, throughout the remainder of the examination process.