

Classification: Public

Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 4 January 2021

Reporting officer: Planning Manager (Policy)

Subject: Meopham, Higham and Cobham Rural Housing Needs Surveys 2020

Purpose and summary of report:

- (1) To update Cabinet on the outcome of Rural Housing Needs Surveys undertaken in 2020 for Meopham, Higham and Cobham;
- (2) To request approval to publish these surveys on the Council's website

Recommendations:

- 1. That Cabinet approve the Rural Housing Needs Surveys for Meopham, Higham and Cobham for publication on the Council's website.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Borough Council has a statutory duty (1985 Housing Act) to investigate housing needs and examine ways of meeting those needs. Best practice recommends that in rural areas Housing Needs Surveys are carried out as part of a rolling programme every 5 years.
- 1.2 The aim of the surveys is to provide an impartial evidenced overview of the scale and nature of the full range of housing need in a locality, usually a village or parish. The information from these surveys is then utilised to ensure that new affordable homes built in the area encompass what is needed by existing local residents who have a connection to a particular area. The surveys are a snapshot in time and best practice recommends that they have a 'shelf-life' of no more than 5 years, at which point a new survey should be undertaken.
- 1.3 The outputs of these surveys are the minimum levels of affordable housing needed in an area, not the maximum. As such proposals for new residential development within the Borough are required to comply with the adopted Local Plan Core Strategy Policy on affordable housing, Policy CS16: Affordable Housing. For the rural area this means developments of over 3 units or more on sites of 0.1 hectares or more delivering 35% of a development as affordable housing.
- 1.4 In addition, Councils including Gravesham face a significant challenge in delivering the number of homes required under the Government's existing Standard Method. The evidence collated from rural housing needs surveys assists

the Council in ensuring that the right type of housing is delivered in the right place. However, due to the constrained nature of the Borough, it is not possible for all of the Borough's housing needs to be met from the existing urban area and settlements inset from the Green Belt. Due to this, the current Regulation 18 Stage 2 emerging Local Plan consultation, identifies sites within the rural area for contributing to the Borough's wider housing needs. Rather than, the limited short term needs as set out in these surveys, which to some degree underplay demand due to residents desires to see no additional development within their local areas (see Section 9 comments within attached Appendices 2-4).

- 1.5 The surveys also form an integral part of the evidence needed to support the implementation of Local Plan Core Strategy Policy CS16: Affordable Housing and the delivery of rural exception sites for affordable housing.

2. Timetable for Surveys and Future Rolling Programme

- 2.1 Rural Housing Needs Surveys (RHNS) for Gravesham are undertaken by Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK). As ACRK also undertake such surveys for other Kent districts, they only have the capacity to undertake two RHNS in any given financial year for Gravesham. The household surveys for the Meopham and Higham RHNS were commenced during January 2020 and February 2020 respectively. The household surveys for Cobham were to be undertaken in April 2020, but were delayed until July 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The reports accompanying each survey were not completed until recently (December 2020).
- 2.2 The next RHNS in the Borough are due to be undertaken for Vigo and Istead Rise in June 2022 and July 2022 respectively (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: RHNS Timetable

Parish / Village	Published Rural Housing Needs Surveys	Replacement Rural Housing Needs Household Surveys Undertaken / Agreed with ACRK	Indicative Future Rolling Programme for future Household Surveys
Cobham	March 2015	July 2020	July 2025
Higham	October 2015	February 2020	February 2025
Meopham	February 2015	January 2020	January 2025
Luddesdown	November 2013	October 2018	October 2023
Shorne	November 2013	October 2018	October 2023
Vigo	June 2012	June 2017	June 2022
Istead Rise	July 2012	July 2017	July 2022

- 2.3 As the Council has a statutory duty to investigate housing needs and as RHNS have a shelf life of five years, it would be beneficial to advise local residents and Parish Councils of both the current timetable and future rolling programme by updating the information publicly accessible on our website.

3. Survey distribution and response rate for 2020

- 3.1 The Rural Housing Enabler from Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK) posts survey forms to every household within the relevant Parish or Village. For the three surveys recently undertaken, approximately 5,107 surveys were distributed, with 1,493 surveys being returned. This represents an overall response rate of 29% (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: 2020 RHNS Survey Distribution and Response Rate

Parish / Village	No. of Surveys Distributed	No. of Surveys Returned	Response Rate
Meopham	2,840	863	30%
Higham	1,663	404	24%
Cobham	604	226	37%
Total	5,107	1,493	29%

- 3.2 Following receipt of completed surveys, ACRK prepares draft reports, which are primarily reviewed by the Planning Policy team. The final reports for Meopham, Higham and Cobham are available at Appendices 2-4. The surveys give respondents an opportunity to make general comments as part of their response. These comments are included within each survey report verbatim and summarised at a high level in table 3 below. There is clear support for the delivery of affordable housing to meet local need, however there are concerns held by local residents on the impact of any development on Green Belt land and local infrastructure.

Table 3: 2020 RHNS Surveys – Appendix C1 Summary

Responses to Question 7 – Please provide any further comments that you would like to make in the box below.			
	Cobham	Higham	Meopham
	Frequency		
Support			
But not on Green Belt	6	10	22
Affordable housing for locals	22	44	60
Suitable for downsizing		4	9
Do not support			
Affordable housing	26	51	52
Impact on overstretched infrastructure	19	61	130
Sufficient housing already exists	7	6	8
Would lead to erosion of village character	4	7	22
Would result in loss of Green Belt	2	1	16
Other			
How can you prove / guarantee affordable is given to people in the village	1		2
Affordable housing not something everyone can afford			1
Previous sites have not gone to anyone in the village		3	
Culverstone Valley is under utilised			2

4. Results of the Rural Housing Needs Survey 2020

- 4.1 ACRK's analysis is set out in Table 4 below. Compared to previous survey reports, ACRK now identify the needs of older persons separately. The data provided shows a decreasing need for affordable homes in Meopham and Higham, but an increasing need for affordable homes in Cobham when compared to previous survey reports. There is also a need for market housing that can meet the needs of older person households e.g. smaller accommodation to enable downsizing and reduce day-to-day household costs.

Table 4: Affordable and Older Persons Housing Needs for Meopham, Higham and Cobham

Parish / Village	Previous Housing Need		Current Housing Need				
			Households			Tenure	
			Types	Affordable Homes*	Older Persons Homes	Older Persons (Tenure)	
Meopham	Overall No. of Households	26	Overall No.	21	39	Total	39
	Single Person Households	12	Single Persons	10	17	Market	35
	Couple Households	10	Couples	6	21	Affordable	4
	Family Households	4	Families	4	1	Residential Care	-
	Other Type of Households	0	Other	1	0		
Higham	Overall No. of Households	20	Overall No.	14	23	Total	23
	Single Person Households	10	Single Persons	3	12	Market	15
	Couple Households	7	Couples	4	9	Affordable	8
	Family Households	3	Families	6	0	Residential Care	-
	Other Type of Households	0	Other	1	2		
Cobham	Overall No. of Households	5	Overall No.	7	8	Total	8
	Single Person Households	2	Single Persons	2	3	Market	5
	Couple Households	1	Couples	3	3	Affordable	3
	Family Households	2	Families	2	1	Residential Care	-
	Other Type of Households	0	Other	0	1		

* Excludes needs of Older Persons

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

- 5.1 The reports have been compiled by ACRK using data from the approved rural housing needs survey. It is therefore recommended that the reports are reported to Cabinet followed by publication on the Council's website.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 6.1 Anyone wishing to inspect background papers should, in the first place, be directed to Committee & Electoral Services who will make the necessary arrangements.

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
Legal	The undertaking of and subsequent publication of RHNS for the rural areas contributes towards the Borough Council meeting its statutory duty as set out in the 1985 Housing Act.
Finance and Value for Money	The Council has a rolling programme in place to ensure that all parishes are regularly surveyed. An annual budget of £3,500 has been allowed to ensure the rolling programme of rural housing needs surveys continues. This figure also covers retaining ACRK in an advisory capacity.
Risk Assessment	Failure to undertake RHNS for the Borough's rural areas will mean that insufficient impartial evidence is available to show that the Council is meeting its statutory duty as set out in the 1985 Housing Act. It will also reduce the Council's ability to seek Affordable Housing from developers within the rural area.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i>
	<p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of personal data or special category data or criminal offence data? A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website via the above links.</p>
	<p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? N/A - the answer to question a. is 'No.'</p>
	<p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk.</p>
Equality Impact Assessment	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. No</p>
	<p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer. Yes Contributes towards ensuring the correct tenure and size of properties are built in the rural areas.</p>
	<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>
Corporate Plan	Corporate Objective #1 People: Quality Living: Commitment - increase the supply of high quality affordable housing.

Climate Change	There are no Climate Change considerations pertaining to this report.
Crime and Disorder	There are no Crime and Disorder considerations pertaining to this report.
Digital and website implications	Subject to approval, the RHNS page on the Council's website will be updated with the most recent survey reports, and the RHNS timetable amended to state the replacement Cobham RHNS was undertaken in July 2020 and the future Cobham RHNS will be undertaken in July 2025.
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	There are no "safeguarding children and vulnerable adults" implications pertaining to this report.