

Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

Notes of a Meeting of the Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group held on the **28th October 2015**.

Present:

Councillor Clarkson (Chairman);

Councillor Bennett (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Mrs Blanford, Britcher, Burgess, Clokie, Heyes, Hicks, Michael, Shorter.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(iii) Councillors Burgess and Hicks attended as Substitute Members for Councillors Galpin and Wedgbury respectively.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Galpin, Wedgbury.

Also Present:

Cllr. Sims.

Richard Alderton – Head of Planning & Development, Simon Cole – Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development, Andrew Osborne – Economic Development Manager, Ian Grundy – Principal Policy Planner, Daniel Carter – Principal Policy Planner, Jeremy Baker – Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development), Catherine Hughes – Planning Consultant, Danny Sheppard – Senior Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

1 Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 Councillor Burgess made a Voluntary Announcement as an Ashford Borough Council appointed representative on the River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board, which employed Kent Wildlife Trust in various roles.
- 1.2 Councillor Clarkson made a Voluntary Announcement as a Director of A Better Choice for Property Ltd.
- 1.3 Councillor Hicks made a Voluntary Announcement as an Ashford Borough Council appointed representative on the River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board, which employed Kent Wildlife Trust in various roles.
- 1.4 Councillor Shorter made a Voluntary Announcement as a Director of Kent Play Clubs and A Better Choice for Consultancy Ltd and as a Tenant Farmer of Council land at Tudor Farm and West Hawk.

2 Notes of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group Meeting held on 28th September 2015

- 2.1 The Chairman said he had agreed with Officers that as they moved forward with a reduced number of shortlisted sites, they should meet with individual Ward Members to allow them to have input in to the sites in their Wards. Officers could then come back to this Task Group with that input already incorporated. A Member suggested that the four Ward Members for Tenterden might like to meet with Officers together as there would inevitably be some overlap of sites for discussion. It was also agreed that a composite list of all shortlisted sites would be sent out to all Task Group Members as soon as possible.
- 2.2 The Task Group Members agreed that the Notes of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group Meeting held on 28th September 2015 were an accurate record.
- 2.3 It was also noted that the Notes of the 16th September 2015 meeting of this Task Group had now been sent out to Members and had been considered by the Cabinet on the 8th October 2015. They included some important points about windfall sites.

3 Local Plan to 2030 – Strategic Employment Policy

- 3.1 The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development introduced the item. He advised that some of what Members would see here was a continuation of current policy but there were also a number of issues that needed to be considered to arrive at a more nuanced policy.
- 3.2 The Economic Development Manager and one of the Principal Policy Planners then gave a presentation on employment requirements and site provision. It covered: - the policy position; key drivers; growth sectors; existing strategic employment allocations (Commercial Quarter; Eureka Business Park; Sevington; Orbital Park; Waterbrook) and Rural Sites; and considerations around existing business parks, choice of sites and infrastructure requirements.
- 3.3 The item was then opened up to Members and the following points were raised: -
- The number of small employers and people working from home in Ashford meant that good broadband would become an even bigger issue. It was considered that developers should be leaned on to provide good broadband on new developments.
 - With regard to employment figures – 1500 jobs had been created between 2010 and 2014 which, when extrapolated to 2030, would leave a shortfall in the overall jobs target. Was there any cause for concern? It was noted that in developing targets for the Local Plan, the employment figure would go up and down in the years up to 2030 through different national economic cycles. 11,100 jobs would need to

be delivered between 2014-2030 and the requirement for employment land could be met from existing site allocations.

- Could policies for businesses in the rural area be more flexible? There was forecast to be a shortfall of space based on existing trends continuing in terms of floor space requirements and the rural area did have an important part to play in the economic prospects of the Borough.
- With regard to power supplies, the Chairman said that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had been discussing how it may operate more effectively and one of the things they had considered was the option of calling in utility companies to discuss their plans for Ashford and how they tied in with what the Council was doing.

4 Local Plan to 2030 – Biodiversity Policy

- 4.1 One of the Principal Policy Planners introduced the report which outlined a draft policy approach to the protection and promotion of biodiversity and set the context for where that may sit in the Local Plan 2030. In simple terms, biodiversity referred to the variety of plant and animal life that populated the many and diverse habitats of the Borough. The intention was that this would fall within a wider Green Infrastructure chapter of the Local Plan which would be shared with the Task Group in due course when drafted.
- 4.2 He outlined the current requirements in terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other legislative requirements and explained that in light of those it was proposed to keep a hierarchical approach in place for the Local Plan 2030, whereby the most sensitive sites or assets were afforded the greatest protection. It was also important to note that the emphasis should be on improving, as opposed to merely avoiding harm so the policy would seek to enhance biodiversity rather than simply seeking to preserve it. Greater emphasis was also placed on Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) and Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) which indicated where the delivery of BAP targets should be focussed in order to secure maximum biodiversity benefits (there were currently seven BOAs in the Borough). BOAs were not 'designations' and were therefore not in themselves statutory instruments, but they were helpful in showing how networks could be promoted in a wide area should the opportunities present themselves. A full summary of the policy was contained within the papers.
- 4.3 In response to a question about BOAs and the potential for people to build on them and cause harm, the Principal Policy Planner advised that there was no absolute restraint and an assessment would be carried out in the same way as on any other site. A survey would take place to assess the potential impact on that habitat but there would be an additional layer of detail required demonstrating the potential effect on the BOA.
- 4.4 A Member suggested that the Millennium Wood at Singleton should be included in the list of sites covered by the Policy.

5 Local Plan to 2030 – Feedback from Review of Existing Development Plan Policies

- 5.1 The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development gave a verbal update on some of the Member feedback that had been received so far on the existing Development Plan Policies. This had demonstrated that many of the existing policies would not require significant change and Officers could begin to use them to start populating large sections of the Local Plan 2030 document. It had also become clear that some content was out of date as it had been superseded by the NPPF so could simply be deleted. There were also opportunities to consolidate and reduce some of the content as a result of this and as some were only one page long. He advised that each Policy would come back to the Task Group as it was re-drafted.
- 5.2 One of the Principal Policy Planners highlighted some of the initial comments that had been received. He advised that the main message was certainly to slim down and consolidate the Plan Policies to avoid duplication. It had certainly been a very useful exercise and he thanked those who had responded. The feedback would help Officers and they would be reporting back to Members in due course.
- 5.3 During the course of discussion the following additional points were made: -
- The use of ‘subjective’ wording should be avoided where possible so as not to leave uncertainty.
 - Some of the policies in the NPPF were very precise and categorical and where this was the case the Council had little option but to follow them. There were some areas that were less prescriptive and there may be opportunities to explain why the Council considered a certain approach may be appropriate and acceptable in a certain context, and this may allow the Council a little flexibility in those areas.
 - Significant levels of consultation were scheduled for the Local Plan 2030, and indeed much had been undertaken already. It was a long process and there had been and would be opportunities for engagement and dialogue all the way through. That was not to say that everybody would be happy with the outcome and it would not be possible to incorporate everybody’s wishes but it would certainly not be due to a lack of opportunity to engage. The Council was also duty bound to give a response to all comments received. An eight week period of formal consultation was planned, which was in excess of the minimum six week period, but Officers would be guided by Members over the length and form of consultation. The indicative timetable showed that Officers were looking to get the Plan to the Inspector by the end of 2016. They were therefore aiming to present the draft Local Plan 2030 to the Cabinet at its April 2016 meeting.

6 Dates of Next Meetings

- 6.1 The dates of the meetings to the end of the current Municipal Year would be: -

All at 2pm

Monday 23 November 2015
Wednesday 9 December 2015
Wednesday 13 January 2016
Wednesday 10 February 2016
Wednesday 9 March 2016
Wednesday 13 April 2016

6.2 **Post Meeting Note: The meeting on the 23rd November has now been cancelled. The next meeting will be Wednesday 9th December 2015.**

Councillor Clarkson (Chairman) –
Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Danny Sheppard:
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