

Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

Notes of a Meeting of the Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group held on the **13th January 2016**.

Present:

Councillor Clarkson (Chairman);
Councillor Bennett (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Mrs Blanford, Bradford, Britcher, Clokie, Galpin, Heyes, Michael, Wedgbury.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(iii) Councillor Bradford attended as Substitute Member for Councillor Shorter.

Apologies:

Cllr. Shorter.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Burgess, Hicks.

Simon Cole – Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development; Ian Grundy – Principal Policy Planner; Daniel Carter – Principal Policy Planner; Danielle Dunn - Policy Planner; Jennifer Shaw - Housing Strategy Manager; Dave Jeffrey - Housing Enabling Officer; Jeremy Baker – Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development); Rosie Reid – Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

1 Notes of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group Meeting held on 9th December 2015

- 1.1 The Task Group Members agreed that the Notes of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group Meeting held on 9th December 2015 were an accurate record.

2 Planning for Gypsy and Traveller sites in the Local Plan

- 2.1 The Policy Planner introduced this item. She explained that in August 2015 the Government had amended the definition of a gypsy and traveller so that in future those who ceased to travel permanently would be excluded from this category and be considered part of the 'settled' population. Ashford's Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) was carried out in 2013 using the old definition and had estimated a pitch requirement of 57 pitches for the 15-year period 2013 – 2028. However, reassessment of pitch requirement using the data from the GTAA in conjunction with the new definition had resulted in a new pitch requirement of 48 pitches for the same period. 27 pitches had already received full planning permission, resulting in a shortfall of pitches to be provided by 2028 of 21. Since the Local Plan covered the period up until 2030, on a pro rata basis there would be a net need for 27 new pitches. The Policy Planner outlined the three options discussed in the report and concluded by saying that the paper suggested a

draft policy which used a combination of approaches by allocating a small number of sites and leaving the remainder to come forward as windfalls. By having a site allocation and criteria-based policy, the Council would be able to resist applications for gypsy and traveller sites in unsuitable locations, with more likelihood of support by the Planning Inspectorate at Appeal.

2.2 The Chairman opened up this item for discussion, and the following points were raised:

- Members felt the proposed policy covered all the important points. They considered that a combined policy was the best approach as the Council would be vulnerable if it did not identify sites in the Local Plan and relied on windfall sites alone. It was suggested that sites should not only be sought in rural areas as there may be some suitable urban sites as well.
- There was a shortage of adequate sites available in the Borough. A Member suggested that current sites could be adopted and extended to mitigate having to establish new sites. He considered that sites needed to be controlled in terms of appearance and efficient functionality. The Policy Planner explained that work was being undertaken to explore a policy to retain existing gypsy sites so that there was not a need to allocate more sites. She confirmed that, at present, a pitch could be passed on to any new gypsy or traveller as long as it was not tied to any specific family.
- The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development said that the Call for Sites had resulted in a poor response in respect of potentially suitable sites. There were some sites available, and these would be discussed at the next Task Group meeting in February, but it was unlikely there were enough suitable sites to cover all of the 27 pitches required. He recommended a balanced approach, allocating any suitable, deliverable sites, plus windfall options to meet requirement. He considered that any applications which met the criteria in the policy should be regarded as acceptable.
- The Task Group agreed a maximum of 5 pitches per site.
- In response to a question, the Policy Planner advised that Ashford had a static gypsy and traveller community. Across Kent, the Council was approximately in the mid-range of authorities regarding the number of sites required.
- It was noted that the new policy would apply to future sites and applications, but not established sites.
- The Chairman thanked officers for the work done to move this issue forward.

Resolved:

That Cabinet be asked to:

- i) agree that the level of need for gypsies and travellers is an additional 27 pitches in the period 2016 – 2030;**
- ii) endorse the general wording of the draft policy appended to the report subject to such adjustments as may be appropriate and to the addition of a clause limiting the maximum number of pitches on any site to 5.**

3 Local Plan to 2030 – Town Centre contribution towards overall housing target

- 3.1 The Principal Policy Planner introduced this item. He gave a presentation which covered the need to agree a broad approach towards key town centre sites in the Local Plan 2030, and establishing a housing figure for the town centre to contribute towards the overall housing target in the Local Plan 2030. The presentation concluded that it was preferable to adopt one policy that covered the whole town centre core area and move away from specific 'quarters' policies, except for the Commercial Quarter. The presentation suggested sites which could be relied upon to deliver housing towards the target, as well as sites which would be referred to but could not be relied on to deliver targets.
- 3.2 The Portfolio Holder for Town Centre Focus & Business Dynamics said he considered that the suggestions presented a pragmatic approach, with a good balance of sites.
- 3.3 Members noted the need to find the balance between flexibility and prescription. They considered that the Vicarage Lane car park was an important site as it was versatile and central and had an impact on the surrounding area. It was important to improve links between that site and the High Street. One Member considered that the site could be a key area for a bus interchange as there was no major bus station in Ashford. Members also discussed the options for introducing high quality residences into the Lower High Street, as well as possible future options for the Bingo Hall.

Resolved:

That Cabinet be asked to:

- i) agree that approximately 1500 units in the town centre core area is considered to be robust and deliverable for the purposes of meeting a proportion of the overall Local Plan to 2030 housing target;**
- ii) agree a strategic policy approach that provides the right balance between encouragement and flexibility, so as not to undermine development potential, yet provides enough of a steer to ensure that the Council's aims and objectives can be delivered.**

4 Response to DCLG consultation on proposed changes to national planning policy

4.1 The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development introduced this item. He explained that the most significant issues in the document were:

- amending the definition of affordable housing to include starter homes. The Housing and Planning Bill defined starter homes as new dwellings for first time buyers under 40 years of age, sold at a discount of at least 20% of market value and at less than the price cap of £250,000 (outside of London). It was likely that a proportion of new development would be delivered as starter homes.
- the Government was proposing to be more specific in policy support for housing development by introducing a presumption in favour of housing proposals on brownfield sites. There was also potential to introduce a presumption in favour of housing schemes on small sites, of less than 10 dwellings, whether brownfield or greenfield, where immediately adjacent to settlement boundaries, if sustainable.
- The Government was proposing greater support for the delivery of starter homes through a change in planning policy. In rural areas this could impact on local needs policy as starter homes could be delivered through existing rural exception sites. The new proposals would present a significant departure from existing policy and could undermine the Council's ability to control urban creep.

4.2 The Chairman opened up this item for discussion and the following points were raised:

- The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development said that the exact details of the new proposals would not be clear when the Council's draft Local Plan was published. It would be necessary to make some assumptions and inject details into the Plan as facts became known. He asked all Members to study the consultation documents and provide feedback. He would need to finalise the Council's response on 10th February.
- The Housing Strategy Manager advised that starter homes could be sold after 5 years at market rates, after which time they would no longer qualify as starter homes.
- One Member considered that by supporting housing development on brownfield land and small sites, the Government was in danger of creating a domino pattern of windfall sites. This would have an adverse impact on the Council's Local Plan. The Member considered that this point required a strong response from the Council.
- Members expressed concerns about developers 'landbanking' and they considered this could be one of the unintended consequences of the new proposals. Members considered that the proposals could take

control away from the local planning authority and put it into the hands of developers, and they felt it was important for the Government to acknowledge the dangers of landbanking.

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

Wednesday 10 February 2016

Thursday 25 February 2016

Wednesday 9 March 2016

Wednesday 13 April 2016

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

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Rosie Reid:
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