

Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

Notes of a Meeting of the Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group held on the **22nd December 2016**.

Present:

Cllr. Clarkson (Chairman);
Cllr. Bennett (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Mrs Blanford, Burgess, Clokie, Hicks, Michael, Shorter, Wedgbury.

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

Apologies:

Cllrs. Chilton, Galpin, Heyes.
Principal Solicitor – Strategic Development; Housing Enabling Officer

Also Present:

Cllrs. Link, Miss Martin, Pickering.

Simon Cole – Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development; Ian Grundy (IG) – Principal Policy Planner; Ashley Taylor (AT) – Principal Policy Planner; Matthew Nouch – Policy Planner; Rosie Reid – Member Services & Ombudsman Complaints Officer.

1 Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 Cllr. Bennett made a Voluntary Announcement as he was a member of the Weald of Kent Protection Society.
- 1.2 Cllr. Mrs Blanford made a Voluntary Announcement as she was a member of the Weald of Kent Protection Society and the Campaign to Protect Rural England.
- 1.3 Cllr. Burgess made a Voluntary Announcement as he was a member of the Weald of Kent Protection Society.
- 1.4 Cllr. Clarkson made a Voluntary Announcement as he was a member of the Weald of Kent Protection Society and the Chairman of A Better Choice for Property Ltd.
- 1.5 Cllr. Clokie made a Voluntary Announcement as he was a member of the Weald of Kent Protection Society.

2 Notes of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group Meeting held on 6th October 2016

- 2.1 The Task Group Members agreed that the Notes of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group Meeting held on 6th October 2016 were an accurate record.

3 Review of the Demographic Assumptions for the Ashford Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

- 3.1 A Member expressed concern about the figures used to identify the revised Local Plan housing target. The Chairman said that the consultants who had been invited to comment on the validity of the figures used were satisfied with the soundness of the approach.
- 3.2 Several Members said that they considered this matter to now be closed and that the Council should progress a review of the draft Local Plan on the basis of the content of the revised SHMA report from GL Hearn.
- 3.3 A Member asked about the long term strategy regarding infrastructure. The Chairman responded that at the moment the main focus was on publishing the Local Plan to 2030. The Council was currently spending more on infrastructure than any other nearby authorities. It was important to maximise opportunities, which need not necessarily be expensive or complicated. A Member said that the current road structure was limited in terms of potential expansion, and that it was important to look at building more arterial roads around the town centre. The Chairman said that this was not on the Council's agenda at present. The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development said it was important to ensure that the infrastructure capability would support growth. He pointed out that infrastructure needed to be related to new development. Officers were currently working to collate infrastructure plans for each proposed development, and were in discussions with KCC, who were responsible for a large part of the infrastructure in the Borough and other service providers. The NHS also needed to be involved, as some of their requirements would become clearer in due course. The Council would work with other service providers going forward, as it was important to identify their needs and ensure they were planned for. An infrastructure plan would be appended to the final version of the Local Plan when it was published, and this would seek to identify what developments should contribute and when. The Chairman said he had annual discussions with KCC regarding education and plans for integrating new schools with developments.
- 3.4 A Member said there had been many new developments over the last 15 years, and there was much development planned for the future. He questioned whether the current road structure was adequate. The Chairman responded that the road structure, although not always ideal, was still relatively good.
- 3.5 One Member said that as a rural Councillor, she often had feedback from residents who feared that the infrastructure would not be able to cope with

new development. She considered that the Council needed to communicate the situation better, so residents understood that infrastructure was a priority Council focus. She said broadband was needed in rural areas so residents could communicate better with the Council, and have access to information on the Council's website. The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development said the Council made efforts to communicate as much as resources allowed. It was not always easy to ascertain the needs of partner organisations, but officers did all they could within the limitations of resources. However, officers were always prepared to look at opportunities to communicate better with residents to provide more understanding. The Member said that there were some sites being considered in rural areas which were controversial. She considered the Council should take ownership of communication so residents better understood the pressures facing the Council. The Chairman said that the Council had undertaken extensive consultation and explanations over the development of the Local Plan, and he was satisfied with the time and effort spent on communication.

- 3.6 A Member said KCC were giving priority to broadband development in the Borough. The Chairman advised that the Council had identified a need to have broadband in every area across the Borough, and the Portfolio Holder for Information, Technology and Communications was working on this. Planning consent for every new development included an obligation to include provision for broadband. The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development advised that the Council was ahead of other authorities in this respect. However, work was still needed to bring broadband provision up to 100% across the Borough, particularly focusing on rural areas, rather than replacing existing facilities in the urban area.

4 Local Plan to 2030 – Allocations strategy update and 5 year housing land supply

- 4.1 The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development advised that this report emanated from the discussion at the Task Group in October, when Members indicated their wish for officers to establish a 5 year housing land supply through allocations in the emerging Local Plan. The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development gave a short presentation which covered:

- The current position
- The new position (using the 'Sedgefield' approach)
- The new position (using the 'Liverpool' approach)
- New allocations

He said it was important for Members to decide which approach would be most suitable for Ashford, and agree the strategic buffer level.

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

- A Member said either of the presented approaches created a problem if developers were not delivering on agreed sites. He considered that it was important to continue lobbying Government to provide incentives to developers to get on with building and thus prevent land banking.
- Members discussed the pros and cons of the two approaches and favoured the Liverpool approach, although agreed that neither approach was ideal. The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development advised that, subject to further legal advice, the Liverpool approach should be embedded into the Local Plan and form the basis for a development delivery and allocation strategy, and subsequently promoted at the Local Plan examination. It was hoped that the Government would address the issue of housing land supply in a White Paper early in 2017.
- A Member asked when information would be available regarding rural areas. The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development responded that a report would be coming to this Task Group around March which would provide more information regarding quantities of housing planned for rural areas, as well as any additional proposed sites for allocation in the draft Local Plan. During January and February officers would be working on options and discussions would take place with Ward Members, the Leader and the Portfolio Holder. However, a decision at the meeting today would decide the direction of the forthcoming work. If it was agreed to use the Liverpool approach, there would be less pressure to identify rural sites. In any event, allocations in rural areas would be limited, as far as possible, to adjoining existing settlements, or easily accessible sites.
- One Member suggested that more use should be made of storeys in new developments to help meet housing demand. However, other Members were against the idea as they did not favour the high-rise effect which might ensue, and considered that it could detract from the cohesion of community.
- There was some discussion about a buffer figure in the context of a Liverpool method of calculating 5 year housing land supply. The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development advised that a 5% buffer would be a prudent starting point and recommended that the Council should adopt this figure.
- A Member expressed concern about the need to avoid ribbon development, which could prevent well-structured future development. The Chairman said that it was important to identify sites on the outer edges of the town centre which could be developed quickly, without opposition from residents, and which had established road networks.

Recommended

- (i) **The Task Group agrees, subject to further legal advice, that the allocation strategy for the Local Plan to 2030 should be based on a ‘Liverpool’ approach to meeting 5 year housing land supply.**
- (ii) **The Task Group endorses the principle of investigating potential residential site allocations on land served by the main arterial roads into Ashford that is not covered by national land use designations or constrained by major infrastructure improvements.**

5 Local Plan Consultation Responses Update

- 5.1 The Principal Policy Planner (AT) introduced this item. She said the report set out responses to consultation, but further work and research was needed in order to assimilate the feedback. A further report would come to the Task Group in due course. A provisional timetable for the next steps had been prepared.
- 5.2 A Member asked about the potential for using flat-pack houses, as currently used in the north of England. He questioned whether it would help increase the rate of build. The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development said officers had not yet spoken with flat-pack providers, but may well investigate this option further in due course.

6 Reviewing the London Plan

- 6.1 The Principal Policy Planner (IG) introduced this item. He said the Mayor of London had published the first stage of the London Plan and a draft timetable. The draft Plan indicated that although the Mayor would be seeking to meet as much of London’s housing needs within its boundaries, there may be a need for some neighbouring authorities to assist in meeting London’s housing needs.
- 6.2 A Member asked about the implications of the London Plan on the Ashford Local Plan. The Principal Policy Planner responded that the Ashford draft Local Plan would already be established by the time the London Plan came into being. The Ashford draft Local Plan already anticipated an element of out-migration from London. The only risk lay in not knowing how specific the London Plan would be, but this was considered more of a theoretical than practical risk. A Member noted that the Council had a duty to cooperate. He recalled the London overspill programme of the 1950s and 60s and said this changed the character and nature of the Borough’s villages and town centre. He considered that Ashford now had a major link with London and there was a high risk that Ashford could be affected by the London Plan. He urged that, although the Council would be obliged to cooperate, care should be taken not to change the nature of Ashford.