

## **Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group**

Notes of a Meeting of the Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group held on the **23<sup>rd</sup> February 2017**.

### **Present:**

Cllr. Clarkson (Chairman);

Cllrs. Mrs Blanford, Clokie, Galpin, Heyes, Michael, Shorter, Wedgbury.

### **Apologies:**

Cllrs. Bennett, Mrs Bell.

### **Also Present:**

Cllrs. Bradford, Buchanan, Burgess, Dehnel, Hicks, Miss Martin, Smith.

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; Carly Pettit – Policy Planner; Richard Alderton – Director of Development; Jeremy Baker – Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development); Jennifer Shaw – Housing Strategy Manager; David Jeffrey – Housing Enabling Officer; Rosie Reid – Member Services & Ombudsman Complaints Officer.

## **1 Declarations of Interest**

- 1.1 Cllr. Clarkson made a Voluntary Announcement as he was the Chairman of A Better Choice for Property Ltd.
- 1.2 Cllr. Michael made a Voluntary Announcement as he was the Ward Member for Boughton Aluph and Eastwell.
- 1.3 Councillor Shorter made a Voluntary Announcement as he was a Director of Kent Play Clubs and A Better Choice for Building Consultancy Ltd.
- 1.4 Councillor Shorter declared that with regard to Agenda item 5, paragraph 10, he was a resident of Magpie Hall Road. He would not participate in any discussion relating to this item.
- 1.5 Councillor Shorter declared that with regard to Agenda item 5, Part 1, item c), he knew the owner of Oakover Nursery. He would not participate in any discussion relating to this item.

## **2 Notes of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group Meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2016.**

- 2.1 The Task Group Members agreed that the Notes of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group Meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2016 were an accurate record.

### **3 Housing White Paper – summary of key issues for emerging Local Plan policies and wider LPA functions**

3.1 The Policy Planner (MN) gave a presentation on the implications of the Housing White Paper on the production of the Local Plan. The key announcements covered:

- Accessible Housing
- Affordable Housing
- Build rates monitoring
- Delivery, Five-Year Housing Land Supply and Objectively Assessed Needs
- Density
- Infrastructure Planning
- The Local Plan
- Neighbourhood Plans
- Planning Permissions
- Rural vs Urban Balance
- Self-Build/Custom Build
- Small sites are deliverable
- Space Standards
- Consultations
- Digital Infrastructure
- Housing Delivery
- Local Plan Preparation.

3.2 The Chairman opened up the item for discussion and the following points/comments were made:

- The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development said that the White Paper raised significant issues for the production of the Local Plan and the Council generally, as a Local Planning Authority (LPA). However, there was little mention of exactly how LPAs should go about achieving the aspirations of the White Paper. He considered that it would take significant time to absorb some of the more complex implications and take appropriate action. In the meantime, it was crucial to move ahead with the production of the Local Plan, and to deliver the housing development target, in a Plan-led way, through a democratic and open examination process. He said resourcing issues were a separate matter to this meeting. The Council may wish to respond on some of the consultation questions, and Members would advise officers, in due course, whether they wished to take part in the consultation exercise.
- The Chairman said some positive work had been done on the Plan so far, with a focus on using brownfield sites and getting a balance between urban and rural areas, so as not to destroy the integrity of villages. He considered the mention of HS1 and HS2 reinforced the Task Group's view that the A20 and other arterial roads near railways should be considered for housing development. This would take the burden off the requirement to consider rural areas or the centre of Ashford.

- A Member asked about accessible houses and whether every house should have wheelchair access. He also said that distributing growth around the areas of small villages to create new villages appeared to be a potentially viable option.
- Another Member asked whether the latest information in the White Paper would slow down the production of the Local Plan and what it meant in terms of the Council's 5-year housing land supply. The Chairman responded that it was very important to establish a 5-year housing land supply as soon as possible. It was also necessary to digest the new information in the White Paper, and tie it into the Local Plan. The Council should forge ahead with the Local Plan, embracing as much of the White Paper as possible, and get the Plan before the Planning Inspector as soon as possible. Officers had worked hard to move forward on the 5-year housing land supply position, and had discussed the matter with a barrister, who had made suggestions for developing a strong Plan. The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development agreed that it was vital to move forward on the production of the Local Plan so the Council was in a position to make its own decisions. There were several issues in the White Paper which might affect the timescale of the Local Plan's production. He suggested it may be necessary to collect more evidence, which was a time-consuming exercise, but it would be key to demonstrating to an Inspector that the Plan was sound and consistent. Housing delivery and viability were the main areas of focus for the immediate future, and Officers would be in a better position to advise the Task Group within a month or so.
- A Member expressed concern about the potential danger of incursion into the Borough's boundaries by development in a neighbouring authority. He also asked about the 10% affordable housing minimum and whether this was required to be delivered on site. The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development responded that affordable housing was one of the biggest potential changes for the Local Plan policy that would need to be addressed by the Task Group. The issue was less about the percentages, as it was still in the Council's discretion to decide on appropriate percentages, which were ascertained according to the balance between viability and need. The definition of affordable housing had changed to include starter homes and low cost market housing and the 10% initiative was specifically directed at the market affordable housing as opposed to affordable housing across the board. The Government had moved away from a focus entirely on home ownership and more to a balance between home ownership and rental, which was to be welcomed as it provided more flexibility in the market. However, it did raise questions as to informing an affordable housing policy and the degree of flexibility required. The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development said that, in his opinion, this may be the single biggest issue coming out of the White Paper for the new Local Plan.

- A Member said that the White Paper introduced concepts which smacked of social engineering, such as high density urban villages. He was concerned about the flexibility in space standards. The Council had worked hard in the Borough to improve space standards and any legislation which weakened this point was a retrograde step. He considered that the density of some of the housing built in Ashford over the last 15 years was the highest he would like to see and he would not wish to see any higher levels introduced. He was content with the concept of exemption from CIL for self-builds, and he considered that there were advantages to the notion of 10% of all development being on small sites. He was concerned about the development of town centre corporations and Members were also generally against this idea.
- One Member pointed out that the presentation should be amended to show that it would be developers, not the Council, who failed to meet 85% of delivery on the 5-year housing land supply. He considered that an annual Plan review was unviable as it would be too resource-intensive. He also referred to the 'Prescott outcome' of the past, and expressed concern about the well-being of communities who lived in high density areas, particularly the provision of gardens for children. He said that the allocation of less than ½ hectare sites being 10% of the total housing figure was a positive means of promoting small builders, and he applauded this idea. Small builders and small developments could enhance the richness of communities with more variety of buildings. He expressed concern that Ashford might become a target for London authorities and noted the Duty to Cooperate. He did not want Ashford to be used as a London overspill area for relocation of communities. This would lead to too much change in the town's character, as had been proved in the past when large numbers of residents had been relocated from parts of London. The Chairman said he wished to respond to some of these points. Regarding care in the community for the aged, he said that there was going to be an aging population in future, but he considered the Borough was outstanding for all that had been achieved, and was still being worked on, in terms of provision for elderly care. He was not complacent, but felt there was a good deal to commend the Council, both in providing facilities where possible and encouraging elderly care organisations into the Borough. He also pointed out that the Council had been able to resist the 'Prescott outcome' over the last ten years, and would continue to resist any such future pressures. He noted that there was great pressure on neighbouring boroughs at present to accommodate residents from the inner London boroughs.
- A Member expressed her support for moving forward with the Plan to give the Council some measure of security. She also considered that the Council was very strong on delivery of homes but very weak on infrastructure. She agreed with locating small pockets of development in rural areas, and thought it would be acceptable to local residents. However, she remained concerned about what infrastructure improvements could be financed for those areas.

- Another Member said she was also concerned about the amount of housing to be delivered and the infrastructure that would be required to support new development. She said the Borough was already pressured on health provision, roads and improvements for Chilmington. Regarding London overspill, she believed London had a large number of brownfield sites which should be developed before it was necessary to move population to the rural areas. She was in support of small developments, which would provide more variety to the housing mix. She questioned whether Neighbourhood Plans could be overridden by the Planning Inspector. The Chairman said that this was indeed the case and the Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development confirmed this was a challenging area. The Government's view was to promote Neighbourhood Plans by providing Parishes with incentives to prepare Neighbourhood Plans and to seek assistance from the local Council in identifying a housing figure in their area. He considered that the White Paper was moving away from the concept of Localism, upon which Neighbourhood Plans were predicated. A Member said he considered the Government were putting undue pressure on Local Authorities for not delivering enough housing through Localism, and for this reason were moving away from Localism. He was concerned that the shortage of building materials would make it harder for every Local Authority to meet delivery targets.
- A Member said that he supported the option to allocate land for self-build prefabricated buildings. He hoped the Council would pursue this option, and the Chairman confirmed that the Council would consider it.

## **4 Proposed revisions to the draft Local Plan to 2030 – meeting the additional housing requirement**

- 4.1 The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development introduced this item. He explained that the report was written in two parts, which he would introduce in order, with an opportunity for Members to ask questions at the end of each part. He advised that part one of the report had been produced following the Task Group in December 2016 when Members recognised the revised housing requirement that had come through from the national household projections last year. There was a need to accommodate this additional requirement through finding further sites to allocate in the Local Plan. Since then, Officers had collated a series of proposals, which would be discussed on a site by site basis, to explain the recommendations as to how the Council could meet the additional dwelling requirement to 2030.
- 4.2 The Principal Policy Planners (AT & IG) took Members through the proposed revisions to existing draft allocations and proposed additional site allocations on a site by site basis. There was discussion on individual sites, arising from the key questions posed in the report under the headings:
- Is there the potential to increase the capacity on existing Local Plan sites?
  - Are there any new allocations in/adjoining the Ashford urban area?
  - Is there development potential in the Ashford/Charing A20 corridor?

- New rural allocations.
- 4.3 The Chairman said the Task Group noted the email comments provided to the Task Group by the Member for Weald East Ward.
- 4.4 A Member said the Plan should emphasise the fact that, with regard to rural allocations and development, all villages would be required to accept a number of new dwellings.
- 4.5 The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development introduced part two of the report, which considered what action needed to be taken in addition to actions discussed under part one, in order to achieve a robust 5-year housing land supply. The sites previously discussed would go some way towards meeting that objective, but not far enough. The Council would need to be able to demonstrate the delivery of potentially at least another 600 units over the course of the next five years, beyond the units already included in the emerging Plan, and the extra sites discussed above. This figure was predicated on the methodology agreed at the last Task Group meeting. Thus it was considered necessary to identify extra allocations, which an Inspector would deem deliverable within the next five years. These extra allocations would need to be new sites, which may have to be smaller allocations, and which arguably should be located across a range of areas in the Borough. Some of those locations had already been discussed above, but it may also be necessary to identify land which hadn't yet been offered up for development, as well as consider options which had already been put to the Council, but which Officers had not previously considered as preferred options for allocation in the Plan. Officers did not yet have a set of proposals for meeting the need for extra units, but the Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development said that Members should be made aware of this additional requirement, and he sought Members' approval for Officers to start work on identifying how to meet this target. Unless this work was undertaken, the Council would not achieve a 5-year housing land supply through the Local Plan.
- 4.6 The Chairman suggested that Members give their approval for the proposed work to identify extra allocations, based on the advice above, and that the Council's Barrister be invited to advise a future meeting of the Task Group. It was agreed that an informal meeting of the Task Group should also be arranged shortly so that a more detailed discussion could take place.
- 4.7 The Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development advised that Officers would develop a trajectory of all the housing sites in the Plan, showing when it was anticipated that they could come forward. The 5-year housing land supply figure was calculated on a rolling basis, so the sites most deliverable early on would be identified across the whole Plan period. It was important to be realistic about how many houses could be built in the Borough in any single year. It would be necessary to deliver a high number of units yearly on a consistent basis, and this would be a challenge.

**Resolved**

**That**

- i) The Task Group agrees the recommendations set out in Part 1 of the report and that consequential new and amended policies are included in proposed changes to the draft Local Plan, in order to meet the Plan's overall housing requirement to 2030.**
- ii) The Task Group agrees to further work being carried out to find additional new residential allocations which are deliverable within the first five years, in order to achieve a five year housing land supply.**

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

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