

Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

Notes of a Virtual Meeting of the Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group held on Microsoft Teams on **29th July 2020**.

Present:

Cllr. Bartlett (Chairman)
Cllr. Shorter (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Mrs Bell, Blanford, Clokie, Harman, Ledger, Spain.

Also Present

Cllrs. Burgess, Chilton, Walder.

In attendance:

Team Leader – Spatial Planning, Chilmington CMO Project Manager, Development Partnership Manager, Planning Officer (Plan Making and Infrastructure), Deputy Team Leader (Plan Making and Infrastructure), Master Planning & Delivery Coordinator, Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development), Senior Planning & Development Solicitor, Member Services and Ombudsman Liaison Officer.

1 Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 The Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development) advised that the purpose of this Task Group was to consider strategic policy and delivery matters, although unusually, the second report on the Agenda referred directly to planning applications that had been submitted for both of the affected sites. He said this report should be considered explicitly without prejudice to the Planning Committee's deliberations with regard to these applications. He advised Members who sat on the Planning Committee to take care to avoid expressing definitive views on the applications at this meeting, although they could comment in general terms, as they might at a Development Briefing for example, or they might choose to say that they would not be commenting, and this would be noted. He also advised Members that if they sat on a Parish Council who had expressed a view on one or both applications, they could speak at this meeting providing they had not been involved in compiling or putting forward their Parish Council's views. If they had been involved in Parish Council discussions, and the development of a viewpoint, it would be inferred that they were involved in the Parish Council's position. Any Councillor in this position should refrain from voting. Subject to the foregoing, Members could make general comments on the item, provided they had declared any interests they may have.
- 1.2 Cllr Ledger advised that he was a member, and former chairman, of Shadoxhurst Parish Council, whose area abutted one of the sites. The Parish Council had not reached a conclusion or expressed a view on the applications and had been engaged in reporting back events to its residents. Cllr Ledger had been involved

in Local Plan discussions, but had not formed a personal position or made his views on the planning applications known.

- 1.3 Cllr Shorter declared an interest as the Council's nominee as Board Member of the Chilmington CMO, and confirmed that he was not acting as a Borough Councillor whilst representing the CMO Board.
- 1.4 Cllrs Mrs Bell and Chilton declared in writing to the meeting that they were members of WKPS and Stanhope PC respectively.

2 Notes of the last meeting

- 2.1 The Notes of the meeting of the Task Group held on 26th June 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

3 Five year land supply update

- 3.1 The Chairman introduced this item and reminded all attendees that the report was private Council information and not for external distribution. He opened up the item for discussion and the following points/questions were raised:
 - A Member asked whether the impact of under-delivery against the delivery plan had been considered with the need to bring forward more sites. If the Council under-delivered due to the economic situation, there would be a need to identify more sites and bring forward more approvals to maintain a 5 year housing land supply. If more sites were not approved, the greater the likelihood of loss of control. She asked Officers how this was going to be addressed. The Team Leader – Spatial Planning replied that the housing delivery test related solely to the amount of houses that had been delivered. The future 5 year housing supply target number was a different test, and this figure was not yet known. There was a range of actions that could be pursued depending on the nature and context of the situation. The Action Plan provided the options which would dictate the best response to a range of circumstances. He said the Local Plan played a large part in any Council response, but it may be necessary to review the Local Plan in order to maintain land supply.
 - In response to questions, the Team Leader – Spatial Planning explained that the term 'delivered' specifically related to the number of dwellings that had been built, not occupied. He said that there were two tests relating to housing delivery and land supply. The first was the Housing Delivery Test, which was a yearly count of the number of houses delivered. The rate of housing delivery over the last three years was compared with the target to achieve a rate of delivery figure. This was an objective assessment. Officers calculated that the Council's figure by November 2020 was likely to be in the high 80s%, but a figure would not be known until the Government produced it. The second test was the 5 year housing land supply calculation. This was a rolling figure and was made up from completions, committed supply and the timing of planning applications. Under-delivery

against the target would result in the requirement of a buffer of either 5% or 20%, depending on the degree of under-delivery. At this point, the figure was not yet known as the Council was awaiting feedback from the market about a number of sites, and COVID 19 has delayed their response.

- A Member commented that the rate of delivery could be severely impacted by developers failing to build out following planning approval. He said the Action Plan identified that further work was required with house builders to encourage build out and satisfy the delivery test. He considered that this was a key focus for the next year. The Team Leader – Spatial Planning said there was a need to get to know the housing market better. Housing delivery requirements from Government were tested through the Planning Inquiry process. In cases of failure to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, weight and consideration were given to the actions being taken and the level of under-achievement against target.
- A Member asked whether there was some form of qualitative feedback that the Task Group could receive on build out levels, so that Members could monitor the situation. The Team Leader – Spatial Planning explained that a monitoring process was currently being put in place to give a clearer understanding of the situation at any given moment.
- A Member commented that it was essential to be open and transparent, and to ensure clarity over engagement with stakeholders. Another Member said that the Council was seeking to establish closer relationships with developers, and that commercially sensitive information had to be treated with discretion. There were likely to be times when some information could not be made available to the public and this was a matter of discretion and balance.

4 Securing High Quality Placemaking and Coherent Governance across the South of Ashford Garden Community

- 4.1 The Chilmington CMO Project Manager introduced this item. She clarified that the report was not intended to promote discussion on the two specific sites, or their planning applications, but rather on the application of Local Plan policies and how they related to the Garden Community. She drew Members' attention to the key points within the report and explained that Officers were seeking Members' views on how to achieve the highest quality of stewardship across the South of Ashford Garden Community, and how to mirror the stewardship at Chilmington across the rest of the Garden Community.
- 4.2 The Master Planning & Delivery Coordinator outlined the work undertaken last year, and explained that a draft set of key themes had been developed to guide work up until September. Further work would take place between now and September with stakeholders and interested parties via virtual focus groups and webinars. Feedback and learning from this work would contribute to the

development of a viable governance model, and the key themes would be refined into a vision and set of principles for future work.

4.3 The Chairman opened up the item for discussion and the following points/questions were raised:

- A Member congratulated Officers on their work to date. However, he expressed disappointment that only some 40 houses on the Chilmington Green site had been occupied so far. The Chilmington CMO Project Manager explained that this was a complex development and the sale of houses had been impacted by the COVID-19 situation. One developer had carried on working throughout lockdown, but another had stopped all construction. Officers were constantly liaising with the developers to support them in building out, but the figures were ultimately responsive to the market.
- The Member also noted that the Chilmington Green CMO was working well and asked why this CMO could not operate on neighbouring sites to ensure consistency across the whole area. The Chilmington CMO Project Manager said that advice had been sought from consultants last Autumn. At that point, the Chilmington CMO was only in the early stages of its existence and its success was not yet assured. For this reason, the consultants proposed a phased approach with the Chilmington CMO principles being replicated on the other two sites to enable the CMO to take over the other two sites at some point in the future, should the CMO and other parties be agreeable.
- A Member was keen that the stakeholders group which had run previously at Chilmington Green was restarted as soon as possible. The Chilmington CMO Project Manager agreed that this was a very important group which provided a window to the community. It was intended to reframe the community stakeholder group to focus on a wider strategy and context than previously and that the work on the Five Year Strategy for the SAGC provided the ideal opportunity to refocus the group.
- Another Member pointed out that if the developers on the Chilmington Green site could be encouraged to build out more quickly, the upgrade of the road would come forward for the benefit of the area in particular and the Borough as a whole. The Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development) explained the position regarding the developer bond and how this had affected the funding of the road.
- A Member questioned whether any action could be taken to assist developers further in achieving build out. The Team Leader – Spatial Planning replied that the planning system was limited in scope for encouraging builders to complete and more levers were needed at national level. The main focus for Officers was to help developers overcome short term issues, which tended to be the reason for delays.

- A Member expressed concern about the Discovery Park, in particular that sports pitches and recreational spaces would take precedence over wildlife resources. The Chilmington CMO Project Manager said she recognised this concern and it was proposed to return to the Task Group towards the end of the year with more details on the master planning of the Discovery Park. Another Member suggested that the master plan could be developed in partnership with environmental organisations, and that it could be commenced prior to the housing build out so as to ensure community engagement alongside the building programme. The Master Planning & Delivery Coordinator advised that the Discovery Park was intended as a resource for the entire Borough and that it would comprise a mixed offer which would include a wildlife and environmental focus and both formal and informal facilities. A Member commented that he still had concerns about the Discovery Park and the different views expressed. He believed further work was needed to clarify the broad spectrum of opinion on what was required.
- A Member asked about the involvement of Officers from Cultural Services and questioned whether there were sufficient resources to ensure that the most appropriate people were involved in this project. The Chilmington CMO Project Manager said that this was a major corporate project which involved Officers from across the whole organization in a cross-service strategic approach. She confirmed that Officers from Cultural Services were on board and involved in thematic working groups.
- A Member noted the management arrangements at Kings Hill and asked whether something similar could be established for the 2 sites. The Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development) advised on the different background that applied at Kings Hill, and the Local Plan's desired approach in policy IMP4. The Chilmington CMO Project Manager further explained that Kings Hill was not a garden community and therefore different governance rules applied, and these were unsuitable for the local sites under discussion.

The Task Group noted the report.

5 Date of Next Meeting

- 5.1 24th September 2020 at 10am, venue TBC
4th November 2020 at 2pm, venue TBC
16th December 2020 at 10am, venue TBC

Councillor Bartlett
Chairman – Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

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