

# Ashford Borough Council: Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

Notes of a Virtual Meeting of the Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group held on Microsoft Teams on **26<sup>th</sup> November 2020**.

## Present:

Cllr. Bartlett (Chairman)

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

## Apologies:

Cllr. Shorter.

## Also Present

Cllrs. Krause, Michael, Pickering, Walder.

## In attendance:

Interim Spatial Planning Manager, Interim Strategic Development and Delivery Manager, Team Leader (Planmaking & Infrastructure), Deputy Team Leader (Planmaking), Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development), Member Services and Ombudsman Liaison Officer.

## 1 Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 Cllr Bartlett declared that he was a Member of Kennington Community Council, which was in the adjoining ward to Boughton Aluph & Eastwell Parish.
- 1.2 Cllr Clokie made a Voluntary Announcement as he was a Member of the Weald of Kent Protection Society.
- 1.3 Cllr Krause declared that he was the Ward Member for part of Boughton Aluph & Eastwell Parish.
- 1.4 Cllr Michael declared that he was the Ward Member for part of Boughton Aluph & Eastwell Parish.

## 2 Notes of the last meeting

- 2.1 The Notes of the meeting of the Task Group held on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

### 3 Five Year Housing Land Supply

- 3.1 The Interim Spatial Planning Manager introduced this item, and he and the Interim Strategic Development and Delivery Manager gave a presentation which covered:
- What is the Five Year Housing Land Supply test?
  - Establishing the position – Housing ‘Target’
  - Establishing the position – Supply
  - Position at July 2020, and why it is below 5 years
  - What does 4.8 years position mean?
  - The role of Policy HOU5
  - What we can do to improve the position
  - Beginning a Local Plan review
  - Stodmarsh issue.
- 3.2 The Chairman opened up the item for discussion and the following points/questions were raised:
- A Member asked what the Council was doing with regard to lobbying and engaging with central Government, bearing in mind the effect of the current pandemic on development. The Interim Spatial Planning Manager replied that this was a national concern and guidance had been sought by the Leader from central Government on how Councils should take account of this factor in terms of housing supply. The Stodmarsh situation added to the disruption to development at present and Officers were liaising with partners and other organisations to determine the best way to progress a solution. The Chairman noted that the housing supply was at risk due to factors outside the Council’s control at the moment, such as the pandemic and the Stodmarsh delay. He also noted that the border facility to be established at Waterbrook could have an effect on the delivery of housing in the shorter term.
  - A Member asked about the impact of the 4.8 year figure on applications at appeal stage. The Interim Strategic Development and Delivery Manager replied that the Stodmarsh issue currently frustrated development in the affected area. Any planning appeal would need to consider this fact, as it was a constraint on the Council in decision-making, and the Planning Inspector would also need to consider the prevailing Stodmarsh guidance. In the west of the Borough, outside the Stour Catchment area affected by the Stodmarsh situation, decisions would need to consider the five year housing land supply position in more detail.
  - Another Member questioned whether, without a five year housing land supply figure, the Council was more vulnerable to ambitious development schemes, such as in the green corridor, where in other circumstances it would be easier to defend a decision to refuse. He suggested that it may not be possible to refuse such applications now due to the presumption in favour of sustainable development. The Interim Strategic Development and

Delivery Manager said it could be argued that it may be more difficult to refuse such applications for the reasons stated by the Member. However, applications must be considered on a case by case basis, and the Council was still in a strong position to defend against unsuitable schemes, and Local Plan policies could still be applied. He conceded that the Council would be in a stronger position if it could demonstrate a five year housing land supply.

- A Member suggested that it may be timely to establish a location for a new town or large village, so that a large amount of housing could be focused in one area, with the emphasis taken off villages to provide development to meet the housing figure. Several other Members agreed that this was a pragmatic approach. The Interim Strategic Development and Delivery Manager said that a similar situation some years ago had been addressed through the Local Plan. However, this was not an overnight solution and the current situation needed to be addressed through a balance between strategic solutions and more readily implementable solutions. The Chairman felt that these were matters that should be properly discussed at another time under the context of a Local Plan Review.
- A Member asked about the role of infrastructure in terms of non-delivery of houses. He also asked about conversation with developers to understand better the reasons for not building out. The Interim Spatial Manager explained that infrastructure could be a determining issue on whether sites would be delivered, as, where key infrastructure was required, developers may decide to deliver elsewhere where there was no such requirement. He questioned where the burden lay regarding housing delivery, and concluded that the Council must find a greater number of deliverable sites in order to achieve the required housing numbers.
- A Member suggested that Appendix 1 of the report should not be published with the current position statement as it would be out of date within a short time. The Interim Spatial Manager explained that the published figures were a snapshot in time, and that they would naturally evolve and change. The Appendix should be published as the position statement. He added that there was an option to establish a fixed 5 year housing supply figure through the Annual Position Statement process, but this would involve a 10% buffer requirement.
- The Chairman noted that more work could be done on existing developments to increase dwellings where permission had already been granted, and that there was an important role for working with existing developers.

**Resolved**

**That the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group:**

- i) **endorses the broad approach advocated in this report,**

- ii) notes the next steps identified and agree the Actions,
- iii) agrees that the Position Statement is published on the Council's website in order to frame future decision making.

## 4 Boughton Aluph & Eastwell Neighbourhood Plan – ABC Representation

- 4.1 The Deputy Team Leader (Planmaking) introduced this item. She explained that no response had yet been received from Natural England, but it would be possible to move quickly once that arrived. The appointment of the Examiner was progressing. She said the Parish Council had done a good job in developing their Neighbourhood Plan and the Borough Council had taken a critical friend role throughout the drafting process. Under the regulations, the Local Authority could only formally assess a Neighbourhood Plan and whether it met 'basic conditions' after it had been through the examination process. For this reason, the Council sought to work with Neighbourhood Plan groups to iron out any concerns prior to examination. Officers currently had concerns with two of the policies within the Neighbourhood Plan, and they had made these clear to the group, and would also make them clear to the Examiner. Officers would bring this item back to the Task Group to discuss the Examiner's findings.
- 4.2 The Chairman opened up the item for discussion and the following points/questions were raised:
- A Member asked about Policy NP2 and whether this would inhibit further development, given that the site was designated as a sports/recreation facility. One of the Ward Members for the Parish asked whether Officers had concerns over the actual words or the general meaning of this part of the Plan. The Deputy Team Leader (Planmaking) explained that Officers had no concerns regarding the local green space designation itself, but that the wording was more of a concern as the added layer of protection was not required. No work had yet been done to establish the specific details of what designated sports hubs needed, so it was not known whether future expansion would be desirable. The current wording of NP2 may preclude future development, such as a new sports building, for example.
  - A Member asked whether sports hubs were deliverable within the Local Plan. The Interim Spatial Planning Manager replied that hubs were identified as public facilities, with a likelihood that they would expand in some way in the future. Sports and recreation sites had been identified, but the exact requirements of the facilities were not yet known. The current wording in the Neighbourhood Plan would undermine the potential for development, and it was important to retain the ability for hubs to function as was considered most necessary. The Chairman said that the Task Group would consider sports hubs again during the next review of the Local Plan.

- A Member asked about Eureka site, and noted that the land had no designation at present. He was concerned that this land, identified for a local centre in NP7, may automatically become part of housing development. He questioned whether this should be left open for housing, or whether the wording should preclude this option. The Deputy Team Leader (Planmaking) said it was important to note that adopted policy S20 in the Local Plan allocated the whole area for housing and employment uses only and outlined a masterplanning requirement for the whole area. Officers were highlighting to the Examiner where the Neighbourhood Plan policy was in conflict with the Local Plan policy.

**Resolved**

**That the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group:**

**Agrees that the letter in Appendix 1 (and copies of all historic communications on the matter) are submitted to the BAE NP group and the appointed Examiner as a representation on the Regulation 16 Boughton Aluph and Eastwell Neighbourhood Plan.**

## **5 Tunbridge Wells Draft Local Plan and Duty to Cooperate**

- 5.1 The Team Leader (Planmaking & Infrastructure) introduced this item. He explained that this was a formal written approach from Tunbridge Wells Council for Ashford Borough Council to assist with their housing needs. This was part of Tunbridge Wells Council's Local Plan review process, and it was a formality for them to approach neighbouring Councils for assistance with housing provision before they could consider building on green belt land.

**Resolved**

**That the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group:**

**Asks the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development to respond formally in writing to TWBC to thank them for their consultation and to indicate that the Borough Council is unable to assist in providing additional housing and employment development land to meet the needs of TWBC.**

## **6 Date of Next Meeting**

- 6.1 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020 at 10am, Microsoft Teams

Councillor Bartlett

Chairman – Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

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