

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 **24th June 2021**.

Present:

Cllr. Bartlett (Chairman)

Cllrs. Blanford, Clokie, Harman, Ledger, Shorter, Walder.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Mrs Bell, Michael, Spain.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Burgess, Campkin, C. Suddards, Wright.

In attendance:

Spatial Planning Manager; Planning Consultant - Spatial Planning; Team Leader - Plan Making and Infrastructure; Strategy and Policy Development Manager; Senior Planning & Development Solicitor; Member Services and Ombudsman Complaints Officer.

1 Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 Cllr Clokie made a Voluntary Declaration that he was a Member of the Weald of Kent Protection Society.

2 Notes of the last meeting

- 2.1 The Notes of the meeting of the Task Group held on 5th May 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

3 Steps towards a Greener Planning Agenda in Ashford Borough

- 3.1 The Spatial Planning Manager introduced the report, and gave a presentation in conjunction with the Planning Consultant and the Team Leader, which covered:
- Ashford Context
 - How can Planning contribute?
 - Green is not the only colour
 - Challenges
 - Recent SoS determined Sittingbourne Appeal
 - What can we require?
 - What can we currently only encourage?

- Signs of optimism
- What are other local authorities doing?
- Next steps

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

- A Member said as a general point that there was an increasing focus by activist groups on local authorities as a target for failure to introduce climate change measures. She went on to say that Tenterden Town Council would like to be involved in any Council programme to push forward the green agenda, and had commissioned a range of work already associated with the preparation of the Tenterden Neighbourhood Plan. The Spatial Planning Manager said that the Council would welcome this work being shared.
- In response to a number of questions from a Member, the Spatial Planning Manager explained that currently the Council was meeting the housing delivery target, but had fallen behind on the 5 year housing land supply target. Hence national policies and the presumption in favour of sustainable development applied. He also advised that there was no specific policy at present to require the provision of microgeneration in new developments, but this was something that the next iteration of the Local Plan could possibly address. The Chairman mentioned the KCC Solar Together Scheme, which encouraged the introduction of solar panels on individual homes, and noted that the Council had bought land for a solar farm in Shadoxhurst. A Member said she had not found the Solar Together scheme to be helpful in designing a system to make a positive contribution to energy use. She emphasised that the scheme should not require deposits to be paid by customers in advance of agreeing to undertake the works and that deposits should not be retained for long periods of time. The Chairman acknowledged that there were some failures with the first version of the Scheme, but he was confident that the next version would be much improved.
- A Member asked about the potential for the planning system to ban the installation of gas tanks on new developments. The Spatial Planning Manager said that although he understood that viewpoint, the current position was that the supply of renewable energy was encouraged, and that officers would need to look into whether it was appropriate to resist gas tanks in new development in more detail. The Spatial Planning Manager confirmed that there was nothing in the current policy framework which would allow for such an approach.
- In the context of delivering on the green agenda, a Member commented that the Government's green agenda and requirements at the local level were still not joined up, for example with Building Regulation requirements. He suggested that the Council should continue to lobby Government to raise these issues. The Member said that he was concerned that there would be the development of a 2-tier system at Chilmington, with Court Lodge and Kingsnorth Green failing to meet the same policy aspirations.

The Spatial Planning Manager said he understood the concerns over the timelag between one scheme and another later one. He said the nature of the planning system was such that once developers had acquired the site and got planning permission, often by the time construction commenced build requirements had changed. Another Member supported this, commenting that the South Ashford Garden Community was likely to come forward in separate parcels of development and the legislation pertaining at the time would apply to each development. New buildings would benefit from changes in legislation to address the green agenda.

- A Member suggested that any scoping document should include a broad list of issues, including broadening the cycling and walking strategy that was already in place. He also said that urgent work was needed to understand Biodiversity Net Gain and to pressurise developers to adjust to new requirements in this area. Woodland creation needed to start now, not in the future, and the Green Corridor Action Plan should be reviewed/updated to ensure that green and blue corridors were fully connected and extended into surrounding villages. It would be important to include parishes and villages in any discussions surrounding the development of a scoping document. The Spatial Planning Manager said he would discuss this issue further with the Member outside the meeting. A Member said he would like to see timescales for a scoping document and a project plan, and the Spatial Planning Manager agreed to share these details with the Task Group in due course.
- In response to a request for an update on Stodmarsh, the Chairman noted that this item was due to be discussed by the Task Group on 9th September. However, he considered that it should be brought forward to an earlier meeting, possibly as a confidential all-Members briefing.
- A Member said that the Council should be as ambitious as possible in working towards carbon neutral status. She realized that the Council's progress may be held back by national guidelines but believed issues such as domestic heating should be tackled urgently. She questioned why new housing were still being built with no solar panels and believed the planning system should encourage developers to build for the future as a matter of course. She said retrofitting in existing houses was likely to cost in the region of £20K per house. The Spatial Planning Manager acknowledged that existing stock was carbon generating but he questioned whether the planning system was the most appropriate method to address this. He said most developers were committed to building in the most environmentally friendly way but they would not be responsible for retrofitting at a later date.
- Several Members were supportive of lobbying Government to highlight the constraints on the Council to deliver a greener agenda. The Chairman noted that the consultation on the Council's carbon emissions strategy closed in October 2021 and he suggested that any lobbying of Government might be more appropriate once it was clear what residents wanted the Council to achieve in this area.

- A Member asked whether there was any mechanism to encourage those developers who were keen to pursue the green agenda and discourage those who were not. The Spatial Planning Manager said that there were ways in which developers could be encouraged to embrace the green agenda and sustainability, although it would not be possible to penalize those who were less enthusiastic. He suggested that the next Local Plan could investigate developers' views on these issues, and it may be possible to draw up an Ashford charter for developers to sign up to.

Resolved:

That Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group notes the contents of the paper and subsequent presentation and agrees that:

- (1) a scoping document should be produced by officers to look at what issues should be considered in more detail with a view to pursuing a greener planning agenda within the borough, with the scoping document to be supported by a project plan in terms of when such issues might be debated at future Task Groups, etc; and,**
- (2) should the need arise, use be made of the contents of the paper, and in particular the issues identified which currently constrain the Council's ability to deliver it's carbon neutral targets, in shaping any representations the Council may wish to make to central government on this matter at the appropriate point.**

4 Neighbourhood Plans Update

- 4.1 The Spatial Planning Manager introduced this item and explained that there were two amendments to the report since it had been printed. The Egerton Neighbourhood Plan did allocate some sites for housing and was progressing to consultation. The Boughton Aluph Neighbourhood Plan was progressing to referendum stage.

Resolved

That the report be received and noted.

5 Planning Bill and Local Plan Pathfinder

- 5.1 The Team Leader introduced this item and highlighted the key points within the report. He said that the new Bill had not yet been drafted and that the exact contents were not known, but he would keep the Task Group updated.
- 5.2 The Chairman opened up the item for discussion and the following points/comments were raised:
 - A Member said that the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) had made a number of points on this matter, and he requested that officers address a KALC meeting at a future date to answer questions from parishes. He emphasized that parishes wanted to assist and needed to be

kept informed. He also asked whether there was financial assistance for the Planning service to update the mapping system. The Team Leader confirmed that officers could give a presentation to KALC in future, although there was a limit to what information could be shared with the public. He advised that some funds had been allocated to assist with this project but it was not likely to be enough to cover all requirements. The bulk of the funding would be best spent on an officer to assist with GIS technology.

- A Member noted that the Council, Tenterden Town Council and KALC had been consulted and had commented on the draft Bill. He believed it was a credit to this early involvement that the Council had been invited to participate in the pathfinder trial. He considered that this was an opportunity to provide creative comments and feedback, and to have a 'voice' in the proceedings. He recognized that this would be an extra workload for officers, and he thanked them for their willingness to take on the extra work burden.
- A Member asked a number of questions about the pathfinder status. In response, the Team Leader confirmed that officers would keep the Task Group informed on progress with the pathfinder work. He said that officers had already provided comments to the CLG but were only likely to be involved in technical discussions during the pathfinder process, and that it was not the most appropriate forum to comment on matters relating to democracy. In response to comments from the Member, he acknowledged the importance of involving older citizens and this point would be passed back to the CLG.
- The Chairman said he would like a report back to the Task Group on the pathfinder work once it was in progress, with a demonstration at an appropriate point.

Resolved

That the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group notes the contents of the report, and anticipates further reports in due course, detailing the implications of the Planning Bill when published and once it begins its path through parliamentary procedures. Members asked that consideration be given to reaching the full range of groups for consultation.

6 Tracker

6.1 The following were to be added to the Tracker:

- A report on the results of the Draft Carbon Neutral Action Plan consultation which closes at the end of October 2021;
- A report on pathfinder work, at an appropriate time.
- Bringing forward an update on the Stodmarsh situation. An extra meeting could be added, if necessary.

LPPP/TG
240621

7.1 5th August, 10am
9th September, 10am
21st October, 10am
2nd December, 10am

Councillor Bartlett
Chairman – Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

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