

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 **21st October 2021**.

Present:

Cllr. Bartlett (Chairman)

Cllrs. N. Bell, Blanford, Clokie, Harman, B. Heyes, Ledger, Spain, Walder.

Apologies:

Cllr. Mrs Bell.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Burgess, Michael, Ovenden, C. Suddards.

In attendance:

Spatial Planning Manager; Team Leader - Plan Making and Infrastructure; Team Leader - Placemaking; Deputy Team Leader - Plan Making and Infrastructure; Principal Solicitor - Strategic Development; Senior Planning & Development Solicitor; Member Services and Ombudsman Complaints Officer.

1 Notes of the last meeting

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

2 National Model Design Codes

- 2.1 The Team Leader – Placemaking introduced this item and gave a presentation which covered:

- Background and origins
- Consultation draft response
- Definition of key aims
- Key objectives
- Scope and coverage
- 7 step process to producing a design code
- What the design code might start to look like
- The Office for Place
- New Homes Ombudsman
- Opportunities and challenges ahead.

2.2 The Chairman opened up the item for discussion and the following comments were made:

- A Member advised that community engagement had been part of developing the Tenterden draft Neighbourhood Plan and this had been a complex process. She agreed to pass a copy of the draft Plan to the Team Leader - Placemaking. She asked about stand alone design codes and said that she believed rural areas would appreciate input from Council officers. She said it would be helpful to continue to have guidance on how to undertake Neighbourhood Planning and local design code work.
- Another Member noted the challenges involved in ensuring community engagement in development of village plans. She commented on the delays in receiving feedback from Council officers and questioned the resources in the Planning team to undertake the work involved in developing design codes. She considered that design codes were a fine idea in theory but would be resource intensive. She also commented that design codes were still overly urban and that something more appropriate would be required for rural areas. She agreed to provide the Team Leader – Placemaking with a copy of the draft design guide developed for Aldington village. The Team Leader – Placemaking replied that this was a national idea, and although it may appear to be overwhelming initially, work would commence with partners to develop a more streamlined approach to the key objectives.
- A Member noted that a number of different design codes would be produced for the Borough, and he questioned how they would differ from each other. He believed that common themes were needed, including a basic overall design code for the Borough. Another Member added that a clear table was required setting out which design code applied to different parts of the Borough and how all those parts fit together. A Member commented on the complexity of having different codes and guides, and said that community involvement would lead to a set of ideas specific to each individual area.
- A Member asked for a copy of the presentation that had just been given. He noted the different layers of design codes and questioned the impact of national changes on the various design codes cascading down. He also asked about design codes for non-residential buildings. The Team Leader – Placemaking said that village design codes should be agreed through robust consultation resulting in an SPD and Council approval. This would carry significant weight in considering planning applications and village design codes should retain significant value for a number of years. He confirmed that all buildings, including non-residential, would be covered by design codes.
- There was a question about the future role of the Ashford Design Review Panel. The Team Leader – Placemaking advised that the Panel would continue to operate as it had done in the past and that there was a strong commitment to retaining this part of the planning process.

- A Member noted the important role of the Planning Committee in controlling design in the Borough.
- A Member commented that there were potential complications regarding design codes in wards that were both urban and rural. He also questioned whether design codes would influence housing numbers. The Team Leader – Placemaking replied that where sites came forward separate from those allocated in the Local Plan, a key part of understanding the context of the site would be to study existing densities and current patterns of development, and design codes would help to influence this debate. The Member considered that where development proposals came forward in future, reference to the design codes would be necessary to ensure that plans were realistic and appropriate.

Resolved

That the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group notes the contents of the presentation, and anticipates further reports in due course, detailing the implications of the NPPF, National Model Design Code and associated initiatives to promote beauty, good placemaking and build quality.

3 Local Plan Pathfinder

- 3.1 The Team Leader – Planmaking and Infrastructure introduced this item and reminded the meeting that the information provided in this item was sensitive and confidential. He highlighted the key points within the report and gave a presentation which covered:
- Testing digital tools in the planning process
 - Govt White Paper – interactive web based maps and design guides and codes
 - Expectations
 - Current thinking
 - Interactive maps and prototype for Ashford
 - Zoning – New land categorization, permitted development rights and general permitted development order
 - Unintentional consequences
 - The future.
- 3.2 The Chairman opened up the item for discussion and the following comments were made:
- A Member asked about zoning on mixed use land and location of local employment spaces in villages and suburban areas. The Team Leader – Planmaking and Infrastructure said that this kind of development would be considered under ‘managed change’. He said that further clarification was needed on this, but design codes and guides would be important in conveying intentions and controlling development on such sites.

- A Member considered that permitted development rights diluted the ability of a local authority to manage via design codes. She was also concerned about the issue of inclusion in the drive towards technology. She was skeptical of the digital approach leading to greater community engagement, although she said the standardization of mapping tools and language was welcomed. The Team Leader – Planmaking and Infrastructure said that there was a debate at present about the degree of control which should be exerted by local planning authorities. A question was asked about how the zonal proposals would affect housing delivery and the 5 year housing land supply. The Team Leader – Planmaking and Infrastructure advised that further clarity was needed on this issue and the whole question of the degree of future control by local planning authorities.

Resolved

That the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group notes the contents of the presentation, 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.

4 Tracker

- 4.1 The Chairman noted that two more items were to be added to the tracker on National Design Codes and the Government's future approach to zoning.

Resolved

That the report Tracker be received and noted.

5 Date of next meeting

- 5.1 2nd December, 10am

Councillor Bartlett
Chairman – Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

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