

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 **24 June 2022**.

Present:

Cllr. Bartlett (Chairman)
Cllr. N Bell (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Mrs Bell, Blanford, Harman, Heyes, Ledger, Spain, Sparks and Wright.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Burgess, Michael

In attendance:

Director of Place, Space and Leisure, Spatial Planning Manager; Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure; Deputy Team Leaders – Plan Making and Infrastructure; Planning Officer – Plan Making and infrastructure; Principal Solicitor - Strategic Development; Member Services Officer.

1 Apologies and substitutions

- 1.1 All the Task Group Members were present.

2 Declarations of interest

- 2.1 A voluntary declaration was made by Cllr Harman in respect of item 4 – Neighbourhood Planning Protocol as she was involved in the Neighbourhood Plan for Aldington and Bonnington.
- 2.2 A voluntary declaration was made by Cllr Spain in respect of item 4 as he resided in Charing, where a Neighbourhood Plan was in preparation.
- 2.3 The Chairman emphasised the confidential nature of the meeting, and Members confirmed that they understood the need for confidentiality and privacy.

3 Notes of the last meeting

- 3.1 The Notes of the meeting held on 13 May 2022 were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

4 Neighbourhood Planning Protocol

- 4.1 The Acting Deputy Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure introduced the report explaining that the intended protocol was to assist Neighbourhood Plan Groups by clarifying the roles of the Borough Council and Neighbourhood Planning bodies and to consider the likely necessary resource within the Plan Making and Infrastructure Team. The Group was asked to endorse the content and to publish on the ABC website.
- 4.2 A Member referred to the impact of national legislative changes on plan making in respect of keeping plans up to date. He asked if some mechanism or process could be produced to flag up when changes are made and the consequences of those changes. The Spatial Planning Manager acknowledged the challenges facing plan makers noting that there had been a number of planning reforms and changes to legislation and guidance over recent years. Plans can only ever be a snapshot in time, which is why it is important to carry out regular reviews and update as necessary.
- 4.3 A Member agreed that it was important to reflect the most up to date legislation and it was in the interest of the Parish that the Neighbourhood Planning Group review regularly.
- 4.4 The additional challenge of first establishing a Neighbourhood Planning Forum in unparished areas before preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan could commence was highlighted by a Member. The Spatial Planning Manager recognised the challenges faced by unparished areas. He advised that local communities can always participate in the Local Plan process to consider local policies for inclusion. .

Resolved

The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task group received the report and:

- i) Noted the contents of the report;**
- ii) Endorsed ‘Neighbourhood Plan Protocol’ for publication on the Council’s website, subject to the agreed amendments;**
- iii) Noted that authority to make any subsequent amendments required to the ‘Neighbourhood Plan Protocol’ was delegated to the Assistant Director of Planning & Development, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder of Planning & Development and Chair of Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group.**

5 For Member's information – the current approach to Stodmarsh issues and how they impact the Five Year Housing Land Supply debate

- 5.1 The Deputy Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure summarised the report and the key issues arising, namely the impact of Stodmarsh and the Council's 5 year housing land supply position in relation to decision making and planning appeals. The Deputy Team Leader explained that for the purpose of 5YHLS, due to Stodmarsh the borough is essentially split into 2 component parts. The Deputy Team Leader explained this further and outlined the approach to be taken in each part.
- 5.2 The Spatial Planning Manager added that the greatest challenge being faced as a borough is in the areas outside of the Stour catchment, as developers are arguing that more delivery should take place outside of the catchment area, to compensate for under delivery in the catchment.
- 5.3 Members thanked the officers for their comprehensive report.
- 5.4 A Member asked where this left ABC regarding existing outstanding appeals. The Spatial Planning Manager replied that the Council's case in most current appeals adopts the approach outlined. . It will be interesting to see how these appeal Inspectors respond.
- 5.5 A Member asked an update on the Stodmarsh mitigation measures that the Council is pursuing. The Spatial Planning Manager replied it was hoped that by the end of September an all-Member update briefing would be possible.
- 5.6 A Member referred to a specific appeal in his ward. In response to the discussion regarding this appeal it was agreed to circulate a list of outstanding appeals by parish, including any set dates.

Resolved

The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group received and noted the contents of the report, in expectation of an all-Member briefing in the autumn.

6 Planning Reforms – Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill Update

- 6.1 No further updates required presentation.

Resolved

That the report in respect of the progress of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill be received and noted.

7 Update on Strategic Developments in Neighbouring Authorities

- 7.1 The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure confirmed that there were no updates to the report. He noted that adjoining authorities are relying very heavily on new garden settlements to fulfil their future housing growth.
- 7.2 A Member thanked the officer for the report. He noted that a couple of the developments mentioned new or revised railway station provision. He believed these were of great importance to developments of such size. He asked that ABC reinforce the message that enhanced rail connections were paramount to reducing cross-county road traffic. It was confirmed that ABC were actively engaging with Folkestone and Hythe regarding provision for Otterpool. The Chair commented that we should endorse public transport enhancements, particularly for commuters.
- 7.3 A Member asked if the proposed Lenham Heath garden community was approved before the Stodmarsh issues were known. He commented there was a lot of pressure to build on the A20 corridor. The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure confirmed the development was not yet approved, and there were plans to include a new waste-water treatment plant to mitigate the Stodmarsh harms.

Resolved:

The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group received the report and:

(i) noted its contents;

(ii) anticipated the potential for further reports in due course, in particular in relation to the proposed Heathlands Garden Settlement in Maidstone Borough;

(iii) anticipated the submission of an ABC response to the consultation on the revised Otterpool Park Outline application in Folkestone and Hythe District by the Portfolio Holder, to be reported back to Task Group if considered to be necessary; and,

(iv) noted that officers continue to attend regular ‘Duty to Cooperate’ meetings with adjoining authorities, although the recently published Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill proposes to abolish the Duty in favour of other arrangements which will presumably become clearer as the Bill makes its way through

8 Member Tracker

- 8.1 The Chair noted that as the 5YHLS update may not be ready in time for the August meeting and the Charing Neighbourhood Plan consultation closes at the end of July he suggested the August meeting be cancelled in favour of a longer meeting in September. The Spatial Planning Manager agreed any issues arising from the Charing Neighbourhood Plan could be brought to the Leader as Ward Member, the Chair and the Portfolio Holder for Planning too, in the meantime.
- 8.2 A Member questioned whether an Agenda item could be added in September regarding an expected change to the NPPF. The Spatial Planning Manager responded that anything of significance relating to changes to the NPPF would be shared.
- 8.3 A Member asked for reassurance that the item on Policy SP7 be considered at the September meeting, which was agreed by the Chair.
- 8.4 The Group agreed to cancel the August meeting and extend the September meeting by a half-hour.

9 Date of Next Meeting

- 9.1 16 September 2022 at 10am.