

# 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 **16 December 2022**.

## **Present:**

Cllr Bartlett (Chairman)

Cllr N. Bell, Blanford, Harman, Ledger, Spain, Sparks, Walder, Wright.

## **Also Present:**

Cllr Burgess.

## **In attendance:**

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

## **1 Apologies and substitutions**

1.1. Apologies had been received from Cllr. Mrs Bell.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

2.1 Cllr Bartlett declared that he was a Member of Kent County Council.

2.2 Cllr Spain declared that, under item 5 on the agenda (4 in these Notes), he knew the site owner of site S28, although not well. He also declared that the first of the sites mentioned in the draft Charing Neighbourhood Plan was adjacent to his property, not part of it despite the name given to it, and asked that the site's name be corrected.

2.3 Cllr Walder declared that she was a founding member of Tenterden Wildlife.

## **2. Notes of the last Meeting**

3.1 The Notes of the meeting of 4<sup>th</sup> November 2022 were received and noted.

### **3. Climate Change Guidance for Development Management**

3.1 One of the Team Leaders – Plan Making and Infrastructure introduced this item and gave a presentation which covered:

- What the Guidance requires and who it is for.
- EV Charging.
- Solar photovoltaics
- Rainwater harvesting.

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

- A Member congratulated the team on an excellent piece of work. She asked about the permeability of the hardstanding areas on new developments, especially car parks. The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure replied that on major new schemes the SUDS policy would be relevant where non-permeable hardstanding was proposed. However, officers tried to discourage this approach where possible. She suggested that this issue could be included when the review of the Local Plan was triggered and the Chairman concurred.
- A Member said that she would like to see a stronger approach by officers than just encouragement to follow the Guidance and she considered that officers should insist on certain standards being met, rather than accepting arguments by developers against inclusion on the grounds of cost.
- A Member pointed out that there was an error on page 30 above figure 1 and that the population statistics quoted were incorrect. He went on to ask if there was a mechanism for officers for assessing schemes and the various arguments given against inclusion. The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure said that officers liaised with the Climate Change and Building Control officers where necessary and were able to tap into the available in-house expertise. A Member commented that it would be helpful to have the Climate Change Officer attend this meeting going forward to provide further information.
- Regarding water retention, one Member said that she considered that a water butt should be provided at every new house as a minimum and that officers should do more to encourage developers to incorporate water harvesting and water re-use in new developments. The Team Leader - Plan Making and Infrastructure said that officers were liaising with Southern Water regarding rainwater harvesting, and she could provide links to further information on this from Southern Water. She advised that the Guidance also introduced other mechanisms for rainwater harvesting on major developments.

- A Member said that she thought this was a positive report and she recognised the limitations of the Guidance. She considered that solar technology should be incorporated as mandatory on new developments and that officers should design a new strategy to encourage this approach. One of the Team Leaders – Plan Making and Infrastructure advised that it was proposed to introduce legislation to make solar panels mandatory on all new dwellings from 2025.
- One Member suggested that EV charging points were needed more than ever in rural areas, and she was concerned that developers would not make this a priority. She did not believe that Conservation Areas in rural villages should be an exception to installation of charging points. The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure said it should be possible to achieve this in a sympathetic manner. Conservation Officers could assist with schemes to ensure that charging points were delivered in a sensitive manner on new dwellings. She added that charging points needed to be front-loaded through the planning process to ensure that this could be achieved.
- The Chairman requested that an addition be made to the Tracker document to include the addition of surface water run off as part of the Local Plan Review.
- In response to a question, the Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure confirmed that insulation was checked by officers at the building regulations stage.
- A Member asked whether Climate Change officers were official consultees on planning reports and the Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure responded that they were consulted on a discretionary case by case basis.

## **Resolved**

**That the report be received and noted.**

## **4. Five Year Housing Land Supply 2022-2027 and the Housing Delivery Test**

- 4.1 The Spatial Planning Manager and the Deputy Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure introduced this item and gave a presentation which covered:
- Housing Delivery Test
  - Five Year Housing Land Supply
  - Five year requirement
  - Calculating supply – what sites can be counted
  - How sites are counted
  - Stodmarsh
  - Windfall assumptions

- Factors affecting the supply
- Decision making and weight of the Local Plan
- Policy HOU5
- Local Plan Review
- Recommendations.

4.2 The Chairman opened up the item for discussion and the following questions/comments were raised:

- In response to a question on the Government's likely future position on housing targets, the Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure explained that the Government were likely to retain targets as an advisory starting position, with proposals to change the calculation method. Genuine constraints could be used to argue a lower housing target. The Duty to Cooperate was likely to be cancelled, and the 20% buffer figure was subject to consultation prior to removal. The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure explained that further details were required from Government to clarify its proposals. He advised that the Government were seeking to reset the relationship between the Planning Inspectorate and local authorities to provide greater weight to local concerns and community issues, and a balance was sought between local evidence and concerns and the pressure from housing need.
- A Member pointed out that there was an error in the report in the table on page 98 of the agenda. 'Burleigh Bungalow' should read 'land adjacent to Burleigh Bungalow'.
- A Member asked when Stodmarsh credits would come forward and the Spatial Planning Manager replied that this was likely to happen when the Government and Natural England decided that there was sufficient certainty on the solution, which could be as early as Easter 2023 if all went well. In response to a question, the Deputy Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure advised that approximately 33% of the dwellings counted in the Five Year Housing Land Supply were affected by Stodmarsh.
- A Member asked whether the Government had reconsidered a more punitive approach to developers over the issue of land banking. The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure advised that the Government was considering imposing financial penalties on developers who did not build out permissions, and also whether the character of developers could be used as a material consideration. The Chairman said that he believed that development company shareholders put pressure on the management to refrain from land banking. A Member also asked about the proposals for zones, which had been suggested in the White Paper 2020. The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure confirmed that this idea had fallen by the wayside.

- In response to a request, the Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure said he would share a copy of the Ministerial Statements with the Task Group.
- The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure advised that the idea of ‘street votes’ was currently being considered to give local communities’ views greater weight and more chance to voice their wishes. The Chairman said he would like to hear more about this issue in future.

## **Resolved**

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

- **Notes the contents of the report;**
- **Agrees that the final HLS Position Statement for 2022-2027 shall be agreed by Assistant Director Planning & Development, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning & Development and the Chair of Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group, once all the remaining calculations have been finalised, and be published on the Council’s website (in February 2023) to frame future decision-making.**

## **5. Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan Review Regulation 18 Consultation**

- 5.1 The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure introduced this item and drew Members’ attention to a number of key points in the report.
- 5.2 The Chairman suggested that if Members had any points they wished raised with Kent County Council, either he or the Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure could pursue those points on their behalf.

## **Resolved**

### **That the Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group**

- **endorses the contents of the paper as a means of framing responses to the consultation on the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan Review;**
- **agrees to delegate authority to the Assistant Director of Planning and Development and Assistant Director of Environment, Property & Recreation to finalise and agree any responses between the Portfolio Holder for Planning, the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Property & Recreation and The Chair of Task Group.**

## **6. Member Tracker**

- 6.1 Members reiterated a requirement for surface water run-off to be added as an item for discussion at a future meeting on the Tracker, and requested that a

Stodmarsh update be provided, possibly in the form of a confidential all-Member briefing session. It was agreed that the Spatial Planning Manager and the Principal Solicitor would liaise outside the meeting regarding the timing of any briefing session or extra Task Group meeting around the pre-election period.

- 6.2 Members requested an additional Tracker item should be added to consider a policy for solar farms to be included in the next Local Plan. The Spatial Planning Manager suggested that the first Task Group meeting after the elections could discuss what the Local Plan review should cover. This would assist in scoping out a policy framework for moving forward. He added that there was a policy in place in the current Local Plan on renewable and low carbon energy (Policy ENV10), and this could also be discussed at a future meeting. It was agreed that an early meeting under the new administration would be required post-elections in May.

**Resolved:**

**The contents of the Tracker were noted, subject to the above discussion.**

## **7. Date of Next Meeting.**

The next meeting had been arranged for 4 February 2023, at 10am, via Teams.

Councillor Bartlett  
Chairman – Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

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