

# 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 July 2023**.

## **Present:**

Cllr Bartlett (Chair)  
Cllr Ledger (Vice-Chair)

Cllrs Mrs Bell, Blanford, Hallett, Harman (ex-Officio), Meaden, Michael, Roden and Spain.

Also present:

Cllrs Bell, Gathern

## **In attendance:**

Spatial Planning Manager; Team Leader - Plan Making and Infrastructure; Team Leader - Plan Making and Infrastructure; Team Leader, Plan Making and Infrastructure; Deputy Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure; Deputy Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure; Monitoring Support Officer; Principal Solicitor - Strategic Development; Member Services Officer.

## **1 Apologies and substitutions**

1.1. No apologies had been received.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

2.1 The Chair made a Voluntary Announcement in respect of item 6, that he was a Member of Kent County Council who was responsible for the Local Transport Plan, but that he had had no input into it.

2.2 Councillor Harman made a Voluntary Announcement regarding item 5, that she was the Chair of Aldington and Bonnington Parish Council and Chair of their Neighbourhood Planning Team; she said she would listen to the discussion and be respectful of the confidentiality of the meeting.

2.3 Councillor Mrs Bell made a Voluntary Announcement in respect of item 6, that she was a Member of Kent County Council who was responsible for the Local Transport Plan, but that she had had no input into it.

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

3.1 **Resolved**

The Notes of the meeting of 17 March 2023 were received and noted.

#### **4. Progressing a new Local Plan to 2041**

- 4.1 The Spatial Planning Manager gave a presentation, drawing Members' attention to the timeframes required to prepare, adopt and maintain a robust Local Plan. He outlined the potential additional policy areas that would likely need to be included and the challenges that this could present. Alongside the Plan, an Infrastructure Delivery Plan and a borough-wide Design Code would be prepared. The Call for Sites for the new Local Plan was to begin in the late summer.
- 4.2 The item was opened up for discussion and questions.
- 4.3 A Member asked how the Council could protect itself against developer claims of non-viability, in respect of Section 106 contributions and climate change mitigation measures. The Spatial Planning Manager replied that there were some set contribution parameters that had to be met by developers; other expectations would need a strongly-evidenced cost calculation to prove viability, if challenged.
- 4.4 A Member asked if sufficient resource was available to keep to the timescales. The Spatial Planning Manager intended to collaborate with neighbouring LPAs, and utilise other networks such as Parish Councils to tap into local knowledge.
- 4.5. A Member asked that Parish Councils be appraised early and comprehensively of the intention to Call for Sites. It was felt Members had a clear role to play in aiding communication regarding this, and they asked to be alerted at least 24 hours beforehand, to facilitate the message being passed on. It was stressed that a comprehensive communication plan was needed, to keep all partners engaged.
- 4.6 A Member queried if the recent Government announcements on 'inner city' development might encompass central Ashford too. The Spatial Planning Manager acknowledged the potential link with Ashford's Growth Area past, but the current announcements do not specifically mention Ashford. It was agreed a skyline strategy could be considered as part of a wider discussion on densification of urban areas.
- 4.7 A Member requested reassurance that green corridors could be preserved, as biodiversity buffer zones.

**Resolved**

**That the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group noted the content of the report and agreed:**

- **A Local Plan period of up to 2041;**
- **The use of the standard method as a starting point to enable work to begin on updating the evidence base for housing and other relevant objectively assessed needs within the borough;**
- **For an Infrastructure and Delivery Plan and a borough-wide Design Code to be prepared alongside the regulation 18 version of the new Local Plan.**

## **5. Aldington and Bonnington Neighbourhood Plan**

- 5.1 One of the Deputy Team Leaders gave a presentation, commenting that the production of such a plan involved a great deal of complex work for Parish Councils; the role of the Local Planning Authority was that of 'critical friend' in providing support. Good communication throughout the process smoothed the pathway to approval. The feedback that ABC wished to make at this stage was detailed in the report.
- 5.2 The Chair acknowledged and commended the amount of effort already expended by all involved, and opened the item up for comment and questions.

### **Resolved**

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

- **Received and noted the report;**
- **Delegated authority to the Assistant Director of Planning and Development to finalise and agree the response to the Aldington and Bonnington Neighbourhood Plan in consultation with the Chair of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group.**

## **6. Kent County Council Consultation – Local Transport Plan**

- 6.1 One of the Deputy Team Leaders explained that this was a scoping exercise by KCC, with feedback informing a first draft for consultation in Spring 2024. He suggested the priorities for ABC were Operation Brock, Eurostar service re-instatement and the decarbonisation of the travel sector.
- 6.2 The item was opened up for discussion and questions.
- 6.2 A Member queried the breadth of the exercise at this stage. It was confirmed that any individual member of the public or any group can express their views via the portal on the KCC website.

- 6.3 A Member had concerns regarding the proposed new Lower Thames crossing negatively impacting on unsuitably-sized and constructed roads, where satellite navigation on mobile phones indicated all routes in the county were viable for heavy goods vehicles.
- 6.4 A Member wished it to be recognised that maintaining and upgrading well-used existing footpaths and bridleways that were not adjacent to the highway would continue to encourage walkers and cyclists to access the town in an environmentally-friendly way. It was noted that a number of footpaths were not disabled-friendly, requiring improvement.

## **Resolved**

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

- **Received and noted the report**
- **Delegated authority to the Assistant Director of Planning & Development to finalise and agree any responses in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing Delivery & Communication, and the Chair of Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group.**

## **7. Member Tracker**

- 7.1 It was agreed to add a 'building height and density' item to the Tracker, in preparation for the Local Plan and any clarification from Government regarding definitive criteria of an 'inner city'.
- 7.2 It was agreed that meetings would continue to be held on the dates and times already set into calendars, as virtual meetings.
- 7.3 A Member asked for more information regarding biodiversity net gain and whether aspirational targets above the statutory requirement were being considered. A workshop was suggested.

## **8. Date and time of the next meeting**

- 8.1 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023, at 2pm, via TEAMS.

Councillor Bartlett  
Chairman – Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group