

# 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 **27 September 2023**.

## **Present:**

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

Cllrs Mrs Bell, Blanford, Hallett, Meaden, Michael, Roden and Spain.

Also present:

Cllrs Bell, Campkin, Feacey, Gathern, Hicks, McGeever, C Suddards

## **In attendance:**

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

## **1 Apologies and substitutions**

- 1.1. Apologies had been received from Cllr Harman, Cllr Walder and the Development Partnership Manager.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

- 2.1 Councillor Mrs Bell made a Voluntary Announcement in respect of item 5, that she was Ward Member for Upper Weald, in which the village of Pluckley was situated.

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

- 3.1 **Resolved**

**The Notes of the meeting of 26 July 2023 were received and noted.**

## **4. Identifying the housing requirement for the Local Plan 2041.**

- 4.1 The Spatial Planning Manager stated that this was the starting point for many discussions regarding the potential housing need being considered in the Plan. The Call for Sites had commenced, and it was believed that the

standard method of calculation of housing need, as prescribed in the NPPF, would be appropriate to progress. Figures included in the Plan, when presented for examination, would need to be clearly evidenced and there were many factors to be taken into account along the way.

- 4.2. One of the Team Leaders – Plan Making and Infrastructure explained the reasoning behind the figures presented in the report, which had resulted in an indicative need for 6,700 new homes within the Plan; this provided a base line to begin formulating the Plan.
- 4.2 The item was opened up for discussion and questions.
- 4.3 A Member questioned if the windfall calculation of 150 homes had taken into account the Stodmarsh issue which had resulted in unexpected windfall sites coming forward outside of the catchment area during the current Plan period. The Spatial Planning Manager noted that the figure was consistent with that included in the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030, which was supported by the Inspector.
- 4.4 A Member expressed concern that there was generally a lack of supporting infrastructure for new developments and asked Officers if there was a strategy in place to avoid overloading individual areas. The Spatial Planning Manager advised that options for the distribution of the planned new growth in the form of alternative development strategies would be the subject of future reports to Task Group.
- 4.5. A Member asked if the 10% buffer was sufficient and what would happen if the Call for Sites did not result in enough land being identified. The Team Leader - Plan Making and Infrastructure noted that the 10% was a minimum recommended in the NPPF, but this can be revisited once the results of the Call for Sites exercise has been completed.
- 4.6 A Member commented on the desire for excellent innovative architecture within the town centre and suggested an open architectural competition to encourage this. Other Members underlined the viewpoint, querying the recent use of the Design Panel and expressing the need to extend good design into rural areas. The Spatial Planning Manager advised Members that officers would consider this, and that preparing the borough Design Code and Local Plan in tandem presented an opportunity.
- 4.7 A Member had concerns that the Duty to Co-operate with other neighbouring boroughs could increase the pressure on Ashford to accommodate additional housing. The Team Leader - Plan Making and Infrastructure noted that the Duty is due to be replaced under the Levelling Up Bill, but would continue to be an important consideration for this Local Plan under the current rules. However, it was not a 'duty to agree'; it was more important to be able to demonstrate that cross-boundary issues have been positively and proactively addressed during the plan-making process.

## **Resolved**

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

- **that the standard method for calculating housing need for the new Local Plan and an indicative housing requirement of 6,700 net new dwellings should be used to enable further evidence to be prepared and frame our initial thoughts around the spatial strategy for the Local Plan 2041;**
- **that on-going work will explore the robustness and impacts of a contingency buffer of a minimum of 10% on top of the housing need calculation;**
- **that a future Task Group debate will be held regarding the London out migration issue, once the Strategic Housing Market Assessment evidence has been produced; and**
- **to receive further reports on refining the housing requirement and on the matters set out in bullet points 2-5 of paragraph 5 in this report as evidence is produced to better understand and inform the spatial strategy moving forward.**

## **5. Pluckley Neighbourhood Plan**

- 5.1 The other Team Leader confirmed there were no updates to the report as it was presented.
- 5.2 A Member acknowledged the dedication and determination of those involved to review this Plan, but stated that there was cynicism as to how effective it would be in protecting the village in practice. She also asked that a clear and consistent approach to advising villages regarding Stodmarsh be adopted to help reduce the workload involved.
- 5.3. A Member complimented the Plan review in its wish for development to 'significantly enhance the immediate setting'.
- 5.4. A Member asked if such a review was premature, given the likely upcoming Government changes to planning policy, and the formulation of the new Local Plan. The Team Leader - Plan Making and Infrastructure noted that there was nothing to prevent a Neighbourhood Plan coming forward at any time. The Spatial Planning Manager added that the synergy of Neighbourhood Plans and the emerging Local Plan would be considered in a future report to the Task Group in due course.

## **Resolved**

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

- **agreed that the letter in Appendix 1 is submitted to the Pluckley Neighbourhood Plan Group and the appointed Examiner as a representation on the Regulation 16 Pluckley Neighbourhood Plan Review 2023; and**
- **delegated authority to officers in consultation with the Assistant Director of Planning & Development, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing Delivery & Communication, and the Chairman of the Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group to incorporate any additional comments made by Members at the meeting into a final response for submission to Pluckley Neighbourhood Plan Group.**

## **6. Response to the Government's Consultation on Plan Making**

- 6.1 One of the Team Leaders – Plan Making drew Member's attention to the 18 October closing date, and asked for comments to be emailed to Officers by close of play on the day of the meeting. The response was to be shared with South East Councils.

### **Resolved**

**The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group agreed to:**

- **note the contents of this report and the suggested responses to the set questions in Appendix 1; and**
- **delegate authority to officers in consultation with the Assistant Director of Planning & Development, Chairman of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group, and the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing Delivery and Communication to incorporate any additional comments made by Members at the meeting into a final response for submission no later than the 18 October 2023.**

## **7. DLUHC Consultation on additional flexibilities to support housing delivery, the agricultural sector, businesses, high streets and open prisons**

- 7.1 The Chair noted that the consultation had now closed. A paper with updated proposed responses had been circulated prior to the meeting.

### **Resolved**

**The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group noted the contents of the report.**

## **8. Member Tracker**

8.1 Officers were asked to add a Skyline and Streetscape policy to the Tracker.

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

8.1 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023, at 2pm, via TEAMS.

Councillor Bartlett  
Chairman – Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

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