

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 **29 November 2023**.

Present:

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

Cllrs Betty, Blanford, Hallett, Harman (ex-Officio), Meaden, Roden and Spain.

Also present:

Cllrs Chilton, McGeever, Mulholland.

In attendance:

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

1 Apologies and substitutions

- 1.1. Apologies had been received from Cllrs Michael and Walder, and from the Housing Development and Partnership Manager. In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c), the substitute in attendance for Cllr Michael was Cllr Betty.

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 Cllr Bartlett declared that he was a Member of Kent County Council.
- 2.2 Cllr Chilton declared that he was a director of a Planning consultancy but that it did not operate in Kent.

3. Notes of the last Meeting

3.1 Resolved

The Notes of the meeting of 27 September 2023 were received and noted.

4. Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023

- 4.1 The Spatial Planning Manager explained that this was an update on progress, and drew Members' attention to the tables as a useful reference. The main intention of the Act was to speed up the Local Plan process and decision-making. A new NPPF was expected shortly, which would be relevant. The formulation of the new Local Plan for Ashford would continue under the transitional arrangements.
- 4.2. The item was opened up for discussion and questions.
- 4.3 The Chair expressed a concern as to whether local policies would be at risk, particularly those which helped address the differing needs across the diversity of type of development across the borough. The borough-wide design code would have flexibility in scope and breadth to recognise those differences, but the Spatial Planning Manager felt there would likely be challenges to elements of customisation, arising from the short timetable to achieve and approve future Plans.
- 4.4 A Member asked for reassurance that there would be recognition of the conservation areas in the borough, particularly in respect of the town centre. It was thought that national planning policies could be an advantage to the preservation of historical architecture, and help to simplify other decision-making processes.
- 4.5 A Member asked for consideration to be given to recreating a town centre shop-front policy, to prevent empty units from visual deterioration. The Chair added that measures to have consistency and a pleasant visual aspect when businesses were re-let could be included. A Member suggested this could be an aspect of the Design Code.
- 4.4 A Member asked if the influence of Neighbourhood Plans on the Local Plan would be affected. It was thought that the reduced timetable for the formulation of future Plans, and the scheduling of Neighbourhood Plan reviews, might cause some issues. For the Plan formulation in progress, which would be operational until 2041, any Neighbourhood Plan in date until 2030 would be taken into consideration.

Resolved

The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group:

- (i) Noted the contents of the report and Appendix 1; and**
- (ii) Noted that further reports on the more detailed aspects of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act and any future versions of the NPPF would be brought to the Task Group in due course.**

5. Duty to Co-operate

- 5.1 The Deputy Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure gave an overview of the report, stating that this is a legal requirement and our evidence will be tested. The team had good knowledge and understanding of cross-boundary matters. The Duty could be resource-heavy when preparing a Local Plan, so co-operation was focussed on strategic matters. The move to ‘duty to align’ instead was likely to be less challenging.
- 5.2 In response to a Member question, the Spatial Planning Manager listed a number of topics that required co-operation as standard, mentioning others that may become relevant. Another Member mentioned that developments close to boundaries often resulted in displaced or increased traffic in adjacent villages.
- 5.3. A Member asked for consideration of national infrastructure within the borough, and whether there could be an offset for carbon credits across Kent boroughs. The Spatial Planning Manager believed this to be relevant and within the scope of co-operation; all topic policies would be brought to the Group in future.

Resolved

The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group

- i. noted the contents of the report and acknowledged the importance of the ‘duty to cooperate’ for local plan making; and**
- ii. requested a regular (6-monthly) update to the Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group for:**
 - a) relevant Duty to Cooperate issues to be listed and dealt with as part of the Local Plan 2041, and**
 - b) an update on the relevant Duty to Cooperate issues being addressed by neighbouring authorities as part of their Local Plan preparation, and**
 - c) highlighting any policy changes and/or noteworthy cases concerning the Duty to Cooperate elsewhere in the country, where these may have implications for the Local Plan Review.**

6. Ashford Skyline Assessment

- 6.1 The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure confirmed there were no updates to the report presented.

- 6.2 A Member suggested that perhaps the town centre boundary should be extended to include the Newtown film studio and Matalan sites. He felt there were pocketed areas where the skyline could be higher, and that such tower developments should be of excellent quality, offering facilities that supported and strengthened communities. The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure confirmed that the illustrative map showed the boundaries of the town centre as depicted on the Local Plan, but that this did not preclude consideration of peripheral sites as well.
- 6.3 Another Member mentioned that mixed use was an important aspect of densification, as was easy access to all floors, and the consideration of planting in the created heat islands, shading and other thermal impacts of glass reflection.
- 6.4 The Chair had concerns regarding the fire risk that the charging of e-scooters and mobility vehicles created in blocks of flats.
- 6.5 A Member felt that the affordability of flats could be detrimentally affected by building higher. He had concerns under Permitted Development Rights regarding the ease of conversion of houses into flats and sufficient noise insulation between dwellings. He asked for a design guide for shared spaces which encouraged community, and an amendment to the map in Appendix 1 where the four areas of the reset would lie. (post-meeting note: the amended map was provided to the Task Group by email on 1 December).
- 6.6 The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure stated that the recommendation was at this stage a high-level contextual assessment and that future detail would be debated and decided.
- 6.7 A Member asked for occupation information for the new flats in the town centre, and asked for careful consideration of the conversion of listed buildings into flats, as well as sensitivity regarding height versus location, and conversion of retail units into dwellings.

Resolved:

The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group:

- **noted the content of the report;**
- **agreed that officers should commence work to produce a Skyline Assessment that will provide evidence to inform a range of important Council projects; and**
- **that the conclusions of the assessment would be reported back to Task Group at the relevant time; for instance, when projects were being discussed and the findings of the assessment were related.**

7. Tenterden Neighbourhood Plan

- 7.1 The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure confirmed that there were no updates to the report presented.

Resolved

The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group agreed to:

- **The letter in Appendix 1 being submitted to Tenterden Town Council and the appointed Examiner as a representation on the Regulation 16 Tenterden Neighbourhood Plan Review 2023; and**
- **Delegate 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 Tenterden Neighbourhood Plan Group.**

8. Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) 2022-2023

- 8.1 The Team Leader – Plan Making and Infrastructure confirmed that there were no updates to the report presented.
- 8.2 A Member asked for clarification on two instances of financial detail. It was agreed that these were presentational issues which could be revised in future statements.

Resolved

The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group:

- **Noted the content of the appended IFS;**
- **Agreed to delegate authority to the Chair of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing Delivery & Communication and the Assistant Director of Planning and Development, to make or approve changes to the Infrastructure Funding Statement (for the avoidance of doubt including additions, amendments and deletions) as he/she sees fit;**
- **Agreed to the approved/amended IFS being published on the Council's website.**

9. Member Tracker

- 9.1 The Spatial Planning Manager updated Members on the recent Call for Sites (CFS) response, which had resulted in a number of submissions that are currently being assessed. The analysed information would be published into the public domain early in 2024, and begin to inform the housing strategy for the draft Local Plan.
- 9.2 Highlighted issues for the Tracker included a shop-front policy, information regarding the change to Permitted Development Rights to convert a single domestic property into flats as contained in the Government's Autumn Statement, and conservation area protection considerations. The Spatial Planning Manager also committed to drafting a CFS process note for the January meeting.

10. Date and time of the next meeting

- 10.1 31 January 2024, at 2pm, via TEAMS.

Councillor Bartlett
Chairman – Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact
membersservices@ashford.gov.uk

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