

# 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 **31<sup>st</sup> January 2024**.

## **Present:**

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

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

Also present:

Cllrs Bell, Betty, Gathern, Hicks, Shilton and Walder.

## **In attendance:**

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

## **1. Apologies and substitutions**

1.1. None had been received.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

2.1 Cllr Walder made a Voluntary Declaration that she had made a submission under the recent Call for Sites, she clarified that she no longer sits on this Task Group. That site was not being presented during this meeting, and she was present in her role as Ward Member for Rolvenden and Tenterden West.

2.2 Cllr Harman made a Voluntary Declaration that she had been involved in the preparation of the Aldington and Bonnington Neighbourhood Plan and so would leave the meeting for the discussion on item 6.

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

### **3.1 Resolved**

**The Notes of the meeting of 29 November 2023 were received and**

agreed.

#### **4. NPPF Summary of Changes and implications for ABC**

- 4.1 The Spatial Planning Manager explained that this report was a summary of the changes in the new NPPF which had been published in December 2023. He stated that it was likely some of the wording would be the subject of case law in future.
- 4.2 The item was opened up for discussion and questions.
- 4.3 A Member asked if an out-of-date Local Plan meant greater vulnerability to additional applications to develop in non-Stodmarsh areas. The Spatial Planning Manager explained that when the Plan is five years old the tilted balance will re-apply but that HOU5 still applies and enables applications that are unacceptable to be refused. The Senior Planning and Development Lawyer confirmed that weight can still be applied to policies which are deemed out of date if they were in general conformity with the NPPF.
- 4.4 Following a question regarding the Duty to Co-operate and London, the Spatial Planning Manager stated that we will be relying on the Standard Method as a starting point to generate a housing number for this Local Plan which has assumptions built within it. Whether or not we accommodate others needs will be a debate at future Task Groups.
- 4.5 Regarding the changes to the PPTS and the need to identify gypsy and traveller accommodation, the Spatial Planning Manager confirmed that a paper would be presented at a future Task Group Meeting.

#### **Resolved**

**The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group noted:**

- (i) the contents of the report and Appendix 1;**
- (ii) that if further versions of the NPPF were published as part of the Government's on-going planning reforms, further reports would be brought to the Task Group in due course.**

#### **5. An Update on the Environment Act 2021 – Biodiversity Net Gain**

- 5.1 One of the Deputy Team Leaders – Plan Making and Infrastructure gave a presentation to introduce BNG, explained what it means for the planning service and what measures and actions the service have taken so far in order to prepare. He talked about the biodiversity metric, purchase of

biodiversity credits and the 30-year management requirement to maintain the habitats. Guidance, process notes, standardised templates and new software were being put in place to assist ABC officers and developers.

- 5.2 The Chair asked for the ABC contribution costs of the co-funding to be made available to himself and Councillor Mrs Bell.
- 5.3 The item was opened up for questions.
- 5.4 A Member queried the baseline for the calculations, as she had concerns that sites could be stripped back before an application was made, to artificially reduce the BNG burden. It was confirmed that each applicant would have to provide a statement that no site degradation had occurred before the metric result was presented, or provide a revised metric based on to the biodiversity of the site before degradation.
- 5.5 Members asked for more clarity about the credit purchase options and the long-term management. The credit points would be purchased through a third-party provider, who would thereafter provide the management responsibility, which would be secured by legal agreement. The cost of the credits would increase with the distance from the site, to discourage developers from pursuing off site options. Evidence of purchase would be recorded on a public register maintained by Natural England. Breaches would likely first be reported by residents, neighbours, and local councillors.
- 5.6 It was not possible to apply BNG to applications validated before the legislation comes into force.
- 5.7 It was possible for an enhanced target percentage to be set through the Local Plan, but this would be a matter for future discussion at Task Group, and was linked to financial viability.
- 5.8 A Member questioned if the measures applied only to the built environment; he had concerns that the introduction of non-native plants could radically alter the biodiversity. It was stated that the metric had pre-loaded priority habitats with set values, and that there was an option for an 'urbanised garden'.

## **Resolved**

**The Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group noted the content of the report and presentation.**

## **6. Aldington and Bonnington draft Neighbourhood Plan**

## **Resolved**

### **The Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group**

- (i) **Agreed that the letter in Appendix 1 be submitted to Aldington and Bonnington Neighbourhood Plan Group and the appointed Examiner as ABCs representation on the Regulation 16 draft of the Plan; and**
- (ii) **Delegated authority to officers in consultation with the Assistant Director of Planning & Development 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 Aldington and Bonnington Neighbourhood Plan Group.**

## **7. Call for Sites part 1**

- 7.1 The Spatial Planning Manager stated that the first stage of the process had brought forward more than 280 potential sites for consideration. The information would be shared publically at the end of February/beginning of March 2024.
- 7.2 Officers presented a series of slides of areas within the borough, showing the proposed sites on aerial photographs, and explaining their proposed usage.
- 7.3 Further sites would be presented at the next meeting.

## **Resolved**

**The Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group noted the contents of the presentation.**

## **8. Member Tracker**

- 8.1 The Chair asked for the addition of the following to the Member highlighted issue log:
  - Building Heights as 5(c);
  - On-street parking strategy as a new item 6.

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

- 9.1 21 February 2024, at 2pm, via TEAMS.

Councillor Bartlett  
Chairman – Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

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