

Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

Notes of a Meeting of the Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group held on the 4th October 2019.

Present:

Cllr. Shorter (Vice-Chairman in the Chair);

Cllrs. Bartlett (left the meeting during Item 3), Mrs Bell, Blanford, Clokie, Michael, Spain, Walder.

Apologies:

Development Partnership Manager

Also Present:

Spatial Planning Manager ; Policy Planner; Head of Planning & Development; Graduate Planner; Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development); Member Services and Ombudsman Complaints Officer.

1 Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 Cllr. Shorter made a Voluntary Announcement that he knew a number of gypsy and traveller families, but he did not have a close friendship with any of them.

2 Notes of the Previous Meeting

- 2.1 The Notes of the Meeting held on 5th July 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

3 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation DPD – Update

- 3.1 The Spatial Planning Manager introduced this item. He explained that this was a complex and important document which required the attention of a dedicated Task Group meeting. He clarified that, at present, Officers were not seeking decisions on specific potential allocations for Gypsy and Traveller sites, but were seeking a steer before commencing on Regulation 18 stage consultation. He advised Members that Ward Members would be involved more closely in consultation once the stage of discussing individual sites had been reached.

- 3.2 The Policy Planner gave a presentation, which covered:

- Update of achievements since the presentation to the last Task Group in July;
- Need and supply – PPTS (Planning Policy for Traveller Sites) guidance and updated Borough calculations;
- PPTS v Cultural Needs;

- Chilmington turnover;
- Retaining a 5-year land supply;
- Potential pitch need calculations;
- Pitch definition and design option Site Assessment process and SA Framework;
- Existing and potential G&T sites Borough distribution;
- Potential site options:
 - Temporary to permanent and regularising unlawful pitches;
 - Family need identified expansion;
 - Potential sites for expansion – more information needed;
 - Site submissions;
 - Previously refused sites;
 - Applications awaiting decision;
- Options for Regulation 18 stage DPD consultation;
- DPD timetable.

3.3 The Vice-Chairman in the Chair opened up the item for discussion, and the following questions/comments were raised:

- A Member asked about the potential for a concentration of sites in a single area and what could be done to mitigate that. The Policy Planner said that this was not specifically scored in the Sustainability Appraisal (SA), but it would be considered as a factor by Officers during further work and in the written conclusion. Members expressed concern that a general area should be considered, rather than limiting the boundaries to Borough wards, and the Policy Planner said Officers would speak to neighbouring authorities as part of the contribution to an overall conclusion.
- A Member drew attention to Objectives 6.4 and 6.5 and said that consideration should be given to the capacity of local primary schools. It was important to focus on the effect on the local community rather than simply considering each individual site. The Policy Planner said that this would be picked up through the SA.
- One Member said that care should be taken that there was not one rule for bricks and mortar dwellers and another rule for Gypsies and Travellers. It was important not to overcomplicate the DPD with too much analysis.
- In response to a question about pitch size, the Policy Planner said that the Inspector was likely to give consideration to future family need and Officers should also incorporate this factor. It was important to establish which sites were suitable for expansion and for larger family pitches. The Council would be in a stronger position to refuse unsuitable applications if alternative suitable sites had been identified.
- In response to a question about the Council's current position, the Spatial Planning Manager advised that there was always an element of risk. However, Officers were now fully engaged in this complex and challenging task. The DPD must be sound enough to pass an examination and

address constituents' concerns. Regulation 18 stage consultation would take place at the end of the year, after which it would be necessary for the Task Group to make decisions on which specific sites to propose for allocation around April 2020, prior to formal public consultation at Regulation 19 stage. The publication of the final DPD would create much more certainty for the travelling and settled communities.

- A Member asked about ways to ensure that community leaders engaged with the DPD. A Member said that it was vital to consult Ward Members and key stakeholders in parallel with other consultation. The Spatial Planning Manager added that it would ultimately be the responsibility of Task Group Members to make decisions, but providing thorough groundwork was done it should be possible to justify these decisions.
- A Member thanked Officers for the hard work done recently. She said that previously she had not been satisfied with the baseline figure used in the past, or the methods of achieving it. However, she recognized that a huge amount of work had been done and believed there was good evidence that the Council was now starting from a solid baseline. Other Members joined her in adding their thanks to Officers.
- A Member noted that Gypsies and Travellers were often accompanied by horses and asked whether any consideration was given to this when allocating suitable sites. The Policy Planner said that that this issue could be included in the options report as part of the site location, employment needs and pitch design sections. The Member said it was important to ensure that Gypsies and Travellers took responsibility for their animals and that provision was made for the upkeep of horses.
- With regard to sites providing for employment use, the Policy Planner said that SA scoring took into account whether sites had extra space for storage, vehicle turning, parking of larger vehicles and small workshop facilities.
- The Policy Planner advised that a Kent-wide scheme may be an option for providing transit pitches, and that this may potentially be located within the Ashford Borough. The Head of Planning & Development said that this was something he would discuss with colleagues from other Kent authorities at a Kent-wide meeting. A Member said he wanted to see this project included in the programme of delivery, and that any plans for a county-wide transit site should carry on in parallel with the DPD. It was understood that Ashford had an identified need for a small transit site and Members agreed that the Regulation 18 stage consultation should include this issue
- The Policy Planner advised Members that the draft Regulation 18 stage DPD consultation document would be submitted to the Task Group in November 2019.

Resolved

The Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group notes the progress made on the Regulation 18 version of the Gypsy & Traveller DPD and endorses the approach to the options and recommendations outlined in Part n. of the report for inclusion in the DPD for public consultation, or for further Officer assessment.

4 Date of Next Meeting

18th October 2019 at 10am in the Council Chamber.

Councillor Shorter
Vice Chairman in the Chair – Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

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Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group

Notes of a Meeting of the Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group held on the **18th October 2019**.

Present:

Cllr. Bartlett (Chairman)
Cllr. Shorter (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Mrs Blanford, Clokie, Forest, B. Heyes, Ledger, Smith, Spain, Walder.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c) Cllrs. Forest and Smith attended as Substitute Members for Cllrs. Mrs Bell and Michael respectively.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Mrs Bell, Michael.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Harman, Ovenden.

Spatial Planning Manager, Principal Policy Planner (AT), Principal Policy Planner (DC), Head of Planning and Development, Senior Solicitor (Strategic Development), Planning Policy Officer (2), Graduate Planner, Member Services and Ombudsman Liaison Officer.

1 Five Year Housing Land Supply

1.1 The Principal Policy Planner (AT) introduced this item and gave a presentation which highlighted the key points within the report as follows:

- Background
- Annual Position Statements (APS)
- Housing Delivery Test (HDT) and Buffer
- Definition of Deliverable
- Methodology and Site Assessment
- Five Year Housing Land Supply – five year requirement
- Five Year Housing Land Supply – calculation
- Changes since 2018
- Actions to maintain/improve the position.

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

- A Member said that it was important to find ways to encourage developers with planning permission to build out more quickly. He asked whether flats

counted as individual units in calculating the housing land supply and, if so, whether the Council's housing department could accelerate the building out of Council owned sheltered properties. The Principal Policy Planner said that flats could be included in the count as windfall sites, but it should be borne in mind that cases such as the redevelopment of housing schemes could actually result in a net loss of housing. She agreed that it was important to encourage developers to build out as quickly as possible, and progress on a site-by-site basis could be analysed in more detail as part of the action plan. She clarified that the general assumption used for annual build out rate was 60 dwellings per year per brand/per builder, assessed on a site by site basis

- A Member said that the current delay in agreeing a scheme for widening the A28 could be a future constraint on building rates at Chilmington. He said this matter was being addressed through the Delivery and Implementation Board (DIB). The Head of Planning and Development added that this issue was actively being pursued by the DIB as a standing agenda item under strategic risks, and it was recognised that it was critical to find a satisfactory funding mechanism. The Chairman said that he and fellow KCC Councillors would make a point of discussing this matter with the new Leader of KCC
- A Member asked about the building rate at Chilmington and whether it was on target at present. The Head of Planning and Development explained that the target figure of 400 occupied dwellings was likely to be achieved around 2020/21, and that the DIB was developing a strategy to track trajectory and delivery.
- A Member noted that the report provided a snapshot of the situation as of this moment in time. However, he questioned whether it was possible to develop a means to provide continuous analysis of the housing supply on an ongoing basis. The Principal Policy Planner responded that there was no system in place at the moment and that the figures were updated on an annual basis. However, it was recognised that it would be very useful to introduce a system to provide an ongoing calculation of the position. The Spatial Planning Manager added that it was intended to develop a means to have a better day to day knowledge of the progress on each site, but that there were a number of complications to translating this into an exact five year figure. Different calculation dates for various factors meant that it was hard to provide anything other than an annual figure.
- A Member said that it would be useful to have accurate empirical data about completions and that there was a need to put developers under pressure to meet infrastructure commitments once target number of houses had been achieved.
- A Member questioned the figure of allocated sites at Shadoxhurst in Appendix 3. The Principal Policy Planner explained that there was planning permission for 19 units but that by April 2019 there had been 12 completions. This left a total of 7 units to be completed this year.

- A Member asked about the nurses' housing in Willesborough, some of which had fallen into disrepair. The Hospital Trust was looking to refurbish the dwellings and bring them back into use as student nurse accommodation. He asked how housing numbers would be affected if this project went ahead. The Principal Policy Planner explained that the dwellings could potentially be counted towards the housing land supply but not necessarily on a one-to-one basis. This would depend on whether there was a net increase or just refurbishment of existing stock. A Member asked whether this also applied to sheltered accommodation. The Principal Policy Planner replied that for new sheltered accommodation that was self-contained this would be counted as an addition to housing stock, but in the case of care homes a ratio would be applied to bedroom numbers, to calculate the housing supply.
- Members noted the delays at the Waterbrook site, and how these were impacting on the Five Year Housing Land Supply figure. It was agreed that these delays were out of the Council's hands and that this should be made clear to the Ministry of Housing.
- A Member asked about the consequences of not meeting the Five Year Housing Land Supply figure. The Spatial Planning Manager said that in this case the relevant Local Plan policies would be considered 'out-of-date' when assessing applications and appeals and that it would be harder to defend refusals of undesirable applications.
- The Spatial Planning Manager explained that a conversation was also needed with the Department for Transport regarding the situation at the A2070 Orbital Park junction. The second phase was due to start following the conclusion of J10a related works to the A2070, but this had now been put back to enable the temporary use of Waterbrook for customs clearance related lorry parking. This delay could affect the Finberry and Newtown Works developments and may have implications for the timing of residential, employment and economic development. Therefore, this junction was at the forefront of housing delivery issues.
- A Member expressed concern about protecting the integrity of green corridors in the Borough in light of the pressures to provide housing. He also said it was important not to undermine the economic viability of the town, with housing being allowed to over-ride all other uses. Economic, cultural and social uses must also be protected. The Spatial Planning Manager explained that the Government view was that there was an urgent need to build more houses nationally. Developers would build as fast as they could dispose of property and the Council's challenge was to enable them to do so. He recognized that there could be too much emphasis on housing delivery at the expense of other uses. The Council had a newly adopted Local Plan which was balanced to meet housing needs in the years ahead, whilst also supporting employment and protecting the green corridor and open spaces. It was vital to implement the Local Plan on the ground to keep a level of control and balance. A Member said it was

important to lobby Local Government organisations in parallel with implementing the Local Plan.

- A Member asked about the potential for the Council to develop and build its own stock, rather than relying on developers. The Chairman responded that the Government had imposed an increase to Local Authorities on the cost of borrowing, and that Government borrowing rates were now above commercial rates. This had created a risk for Local Authorities to implement their own building programmes. The Spatial Planning Manager said it was important to find ways to keep housing supply moving. The windfall housing policies, which had been carefully drafted, acted as a safety valve and enabled the Council to look at windfall sites coming forward in a more flexible way.

Resolved

That the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group endorses the methodology and conclusions of the update set out in the report as the basis for the Council's published five year housing land supply position for 2019-2024.

2 Date of Next Meeting

2.1 To be advised.

Councillor Bartlett

Chairman – Local Plan & Planning Policy Task Group