

LOCAL PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 3 September 2014 commencing at
7.00pm

Present: Cllr. Mrs. Hunter (Chairman)

Cllr. Searles (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Ball, Butler, Dickins, Gaywood, Horwood, Piper, Mrs. Purves,
Mrs. Sergeant, Scholey and Williamson

Cllrs. Brookbank, Edwards-Winser, Ms. Lowe, Mrs. Morris, Ramsay and
Walshe were also present.

13. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 25 March 2014 and 1 July 2014 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

14. Declarations of interest

In order to be clear and transparent, Cllr. Mrs. Sergeant advised that in relation to Minute 15 “Gypsy and Traveller Plan: Site Options” that her family had an interest in land that had been included in the long list from the call for sites.

15. Gypsy and Traveller Plan: Site Options - consultation responses and additional sites and pitches promoted

The Principal Planning Officer presented a report which considered the responses to the recent Gypsy and Traveller Plan site options consultation where 935 registered comments had been received on the 13 proposed sites. A “call for sites” requested interested parties to suggest land that may be suitable for Gypsy and Traveller pitches. Consideration of the responses by the Committee was brought forward from October 2014 as Officers felt able to make recommendations regarding two sites and to give guidance on how the process was to be taken forward.

A list of further sites suggested by third parties where landowners had been approached, since the report was published, was tabled for Members consideration. Officers advised that the recommendation in paragraph (a) was now to read “...consideration in this Gypsy and Traveller Plan covering the period up to 2026”. Additionally Officers updated the Committee that the potential number of pitches at Two Barns, Knatts Valley had risen from three to four. Kent County Council had since responded to the Council and was unsupportive of 2 additional pitches at Polhill Park, Polhill.

The Principal Planning Officer explained that the recommendation included that two sites be removed from the consultation as alternative, more suitable sites had been identified.

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It was considered by Officers that the land south of Mesne Way, Timberden Farm, Shoreham was more sensitive and visible in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) than the majority of the alternative site suggestions and so was to be removed. Regarding the land at Fort Halstead the emerging policy EMP3 of the Council's Allocation and Development Management Plan, relating to it, had developed since the initial consultation and did not refer to Gypsy and Traveller use. A Planning Performance Agreement now also outlined the submission of a planning application for the site on 10 November 2014. As there was not landowner support for Gypsy and Traveller pitches and as the Council was unlikely to adopt a policy to require pitches as part of the wider regeneration before the landowner's target date for determination of an application, pitches on the site were unlikely to be deliverable.

A Member of the Committee expressed disappointment that, despite the recommendation of the Committee on 25 March 2014, the Timberden Farm site had not been removed at an earlier stage from the consultation. She felt that it had caused residents and the Council unnecessary stress and expense. The Chairman explained that it was since more sites had been put forward in the call for sites, which were preferable to the Shoreham site, that Timberden Farm could now be removed from the consultation.

Some Members requested that the Timberden Farm site be ruled out beyond 2026. The Chief Planning Officer advised that the recommendation was for the site to be ruled out for the period of the plan but it would not be down to the current Council to decide for any further period and this could not be enforced.

Officers were asked how far they had gone geographically in consulting neighbouring authorities to see if they could assist the Council in meeting its needs under the duty to cooperate. Immediate neighbours had been consulted and Officers had used their wider professional networks, but without success. Officers agreed that they would continue to investigate at a wider level and recognised there could be competition for available land.

Members raised concerns that new sites should not be concentrated around the existing sites near to Swanley and Edenbridge. The Principal Planning Officer advised that a concentration of sites in one area would be a factor weighing against further sites in areas such as Hextable. There were strong arguments for the Timberden Farm and Fort Halstead sites to be removed at this stage, especially given national policy considerations for AONB. If the further investigation of sites and supplementary site consultation brought forward alternative sites which were more suitable then more sites could be removed when the report was next considered by Cabinet on 13 November 2014.

A member of the public asked whether it was possible to record that the site at Timberden Farm, Shoreham was an unacceptable site and would remain so. Officers clarified that the Timberden Farm site was suitable when considered against the Council's sequential test and paragraph 116 of the National Planning Policy Framework, given the alternative sites that existed at the time that the consultation document was agreed, however the site was no longer needed as more suitable sites had come forward.

The Portfolio Holder for Local Planning & Environment explained that historically Gypsy and Traveller applicants had succeeded in planning appeals against the Council as the Council currently lacked a policy on Gypsy and Traveller sites. Once adopted the policy could give certainty up until 2026.

The Committee thanked Officers for the large amount of work they had carried out and their speed in turning it around.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) the site options previously consulted on in the Gypsy and Traveller Plan: Site Options consultation at Land South of Mesne Way, Shoreham, and Land at Fort Halstead are ruled out of further consideration in this Gypsy and Traveller Plan covering the period up to 2026;
- b) the Council continues to investigate sites promoted to it through the recent call for sites and prepares a supplementary site options consultation, to be considered by LPEAC and agreed by Cabinet prior to publication, to provide an opportunity for interested parties to comment on potentially suitable alternative site options.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.15 PM

CHAIRMAN

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