

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2019 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Mrs. Bosley (Chairman)

Cllr. Edwards-Winsor (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Abraham, Ball, C. Barnes, Barnes, Mrs. Bayley, Bosley, Brown, Dr. Canet, Carroll, Clack, Clark, Coleman, Dickins, Dyball, Esler, Eyre, Firth, Fleming, Hogarth, Kelly, Lake, Layland, London, Lowe, Maskell, McArthur, McGarvey, McGregor, Mrs. Morris, Parson, Pearsall, Pett, Piper, Purves, Reay, Scott, Scholey, Searles, Miss. Stack and Thornton

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Gaywood, Grint, Halford, Hogg, Horwood, Mrs. Hunter, Kitchener, Krogdahl, Parkin and Raikes.

34. To receive any declarations of interest not included in the register of interest from Members in respect of items of business included on the agenda for this meeting

Councillor Mrs Morris advised that she did not have an interest in Agenda Item 2(a) (Minute 35 below). However, there appeared to be some public perception that she did, therefore she would remove herself from the room during consideration of this item and left the Chamber.

35. Matters considered by the Cabinet

- (a) Local Plan - Results of the Regulation 19 Local Plan Consultation, agreement to submit the proposed submission version for examination

Members' attention was brought to a tabled replacement page 4 of the report, which set out the tabled information more clearly but provided no new information.

Councillor Fleming moved and Councillor Piper seconded the report which sought agreement to the submission of the Regulation 19 Proposed Submission version of the Local Plan for examination.

Before the commencement of the debate, the Chairman advised she would initially take any questions of factual clarification.

Cllr Clark asked that with reference to the report, whether officers had held meetings with the promoters of developments on the large sites in and around Ash, Fawkham and Hartley, including: MX52 & MX53 (Land at Corinthians Sports Club

and Banckside, Hartley) MX61 (Land south of Redhill Road, Ash) and ST2 - 37 (New Ash Green Village Centre) and, if so, what the outcome was.

His second question was that, noting the overwhelming number of comments from individuals and statutory bodies which opposed the proposed development on the additional strategic site MX61 south of Redhill Road, Ash, what circumstances might persuade the Council to give favourable consideration to an application for inappropriate development on any part of this land.

Councillor Fleming replied that officers offered meetings to the promoters of all the Greenfield 'exceptional circumstances' sites listed in the draft version of the Local Plan. The purpose of the meetings had been to inform promoters of the procedural aspects of the examination, such as timetable, the examination process and next steps. Promoters had also been given an opportunity to inform officers on any updates to their proposals for information purposes, on the basis that there was no scope to make changes to the current version of the plan prior to submission. It was also noted that should the Planning Inspector decide on any main modifications to the plan after the hearing sessions, these would be subject to a further round of public consultation prior to adoption.

In response to the second question, he stated that the National Planning Policy Framework set out what should be regarded as inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and made clear that planning applications should not be approved except in very special circumstances. However the Framework did not define what those circumstances might be, so it was up to the decision maker to consider each application on its individual merits. As such, to set out now what those circumstances might be could well be considered to be predetermining the outcome of any future application, which would be unwise. It should be noted that this site was not included in the submission version of the Local Plan, and that the consultation was only to seek views of stakeholders/general public, so that the Council was better informed regarding the specifics of the site.

Cllr Edwards-Winser advised that he had concerns regarding the expansion of the Vestry Estate. He asked where the terminology for 'Poorly Performing Green Belt' had originated from as it was not one of the five reasons stated in the Ove-Arup report, nor did it exist in the NPPF. In the Council's own assessment, the area had rated strongly for purposes 1, 2 and 3, and he wanted some clarity as to why it had been included in the local plan. He also stated that if the Vestry increased in size, then the resultant traffic would almost certainly increase and asked why the infrastructure had not been addressed in the plan.

He also queried why all the commercial buildings in the plan were allocated to the Vestry when it was hardly mentioned in the Economic Needs Study until the conclusion and recommendation, and whether it would be better to have the units spread across other suitable sites in the district to prevent unnecessary travel.

Councillor Fleming responded that the Council's Green Belt Assessment (Ove Arup report) split the whole district into parcels and classified them as either strong, moderate or weak performing Green Belt, based on the 5 purposes (or 'reasons') outlined in national policy (the NPPF). It also identified a small number of weak

performing sub-areas, and the Bartram Farm area fell into this category. The evidence base report outlined that the area was ‘functionally attached to the settlement as opposed to the wider countryside and played no role in preventing encroachment and its relative enclosure limited its contribution to preventing sprawl or maintaining the gap between Sevenoaks and Otford. It was acknowledged that the wider parcel was not classified as weak performing, but its proximity to Sevenoaks and the Vestry Estate along with the enclosure of the site by road and rail corridors, had led to it being considered an appropriate allocation. Infrastructure had been addressed in the Plan as it was central to the strategy that sites came forward with infrastructure to meet existing community needs, not just the needs of those who would live in the new homes. It was important to recognise that this was about a Local Plan allocation not a planning application. If the allocation was adopted in the new Local Plan, any future planning application would still need to demonstrate (through a Transport Assessment) that the proposed development was compatible with the local transport network or what mitigation measures needed to be put in place. The Economic Needs Study identified the level of employment provision required over the Plan period and did not focus on the sites suitable for this provision.

He added that Bartram Farm was not the only ‘new’ commercial site in the Plan, there was also: Sevenoaks Garden Centre; Sundridge (opposite Dunbrik); and the Park and Ride site, Otford Road. In addition to this, the Plan sought to retain all of the existing employment land base, and this was distributed across the District.

There were no further questions.

Councillor Fleming spoke in support stating that he was proud of the process and consultation undertaken and thanked Members and Officers for all their hard work over a number of years. It had not been an easy process with central government policy of increased housing in conjunction with the pressure already felt by the South East, on top of which the District had 93% Green Belt. However, the Council had listened and achieved this stage by following the process set out.

Councillor Piper stated that it had been a long journey and thanked the Advisory Committee for their help over the years. The Council had carried out more consultation than some of its neighbouring boroughs and districts and more than legally required, which had led to a good number of responses of which most were favourable. The Green Belt had been around for 70 years and the District had 93%, putting immense pressure on the remaining 7%. From the initial Call for sites and over 400 greenfield Green Belt responses, it needed to be remembered that only 2 exceptional circumstances sites with one for review after 5 years were actually being put forward. Up until the Regulation 19 consultation the process had had to be neutral which had not proven popular, but it had been essential that the Council had been seen to have a fair and transparent process for all stakeholders. He believed that the Plan before Members was balanced, sound and preserved the Green Belt.

Councillor Thornton as Vice Chairman of the Planning Advisory Committee read a statement supporting the recommendations from the Chairman of Planning Advisory Committee who could not be present, and along with the Chairman added

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her own thanks to officers stating that the evidence led process had resulted in this proposed submission.

During the debate some concerns were raised which Cllr Fleming responded to by advising that planning permissions were able to deliver strategic infrastructure. The concerns raised with regards to: the increased and ageing population; homes for life; affordability; social and private lettings etc.. had already been addressed in the Council's adopted Housing Strategy which was almost unique in the country in addressing these issues even down to ward by ward level, and the Local Plan. The Local Plan before Members provided 76% of the housing required for the Plan period 2015-35, and in addition to this protected 99% of the existing 93% Green Belt within the District.

Resolved: That the Regulation 19 Proposed Submission version of the Local Plan be submitted for examination.

(Having declared that she would remove herself from the room during consideration of this item, Cllr Mrs Morris left the Chamber before the start of this item and did not take part in the debate or voting thereon.)

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.34 PM

CHAIRMAN