

PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2017 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Mrs. Hunter (Chairman)

Cllr. Thornton (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. C. Barnes, Dr. Canet, Clark, Gaywood, Halford, Horwood, McGregor, Mrs. Morris and Piper

An apology for absence was received from Cllr. Parson

Cllrs. Dyball, Edwards-Winsler, Eyre, Fleming, Hogarth, McArthur and Purves were also present.

29. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22 September 2016 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

30. Declarations of Interest

There were no additional declarations of interest.

31. Actions from Previous Meetings

The actions were noted. The Chief Planning Officer advised the Committee of the Cabinet discussions which led to both SCIA 2 and 3 not being approved. In relation to SCIA 2 (distribution of planning applications to Town and Parish Councils) he reported that Town and Parish Councils would however, from April 2017, have the opportunity to 'opt in' to receiving electronic copies of documentation and the progress of this would be reported back to Committee.

32. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder for Planning advised, as he had at Scrutiny Committee in November 2016, that the District Council's Planning Department was the busiest in Kent, with 2,078 planning applications received in the year to March 2016. The next highest was Canterbury with 1,795 applications, Maidstone with 1,737 applications and Tunbridge Wells with 1,732 applications. Dartford received 784 and Gravesham 856. The District Council also granted the lowest number of planning applications (80%) whereas Ashford granted 97% and Tonbridge and Malling 95%.

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The existing Local Plan required the District Council to build 3,300 homes at 165 per annum. In 2015/16, there were 414 net housing completions, which was the highest in the plan period since 2006 (second highest was 290 units in 2008/09), primarily due to the contribution of the West Kent Cold Store site in Dunton Green.

Appeals dismissed were below the target of 75%, at 62.5%. The Building Control Partnership had been operating for two years and continued to modernise and improve its customer delivery. A report would come to Committee later in the year.

The current planning policy priority was the preparation of the new Local Plan for the period 2015-35, including planning for housing, retail, employment, infrastructure, recreation and the environment. The Local Development Scheme (LDS) provided the timetable for the production of the new Local Plan and was agreed by Cabinet in July 2016. In summary it outlines:

- Early 2017 - evidence base substantially completed
- Mid 2017 - first public consultation on emerging Issues and Options
- Early 2018 - second public consultation on the draft Local Plan
- Late 2018 - submission for examination by Inspector
- 2019 - adoption (likely to be after modifications)

He advised there would be a presentation to all Members on the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) which had been completed. There was a need for 12,400 homes over 20 years, which did not take into account the high level of constraints in the District, namely the 93% Green Belt and 61% AONB. The focus would be on brownfield sites.

The Community Infrastructure (CIL) Board changed Chairman first meeting in Autumn after Member training.

He had learned that there was also going to be a Thameslink direct service from Maidstone East to Cambridge via Otford and Swanley, from 2018.

33. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

34. Work Plan

The Chairman advised that the meeting scheduled for 2 March 2017 would be moved to Wednesday 19 April 2017. She also advised there was to be an additional meeting on Tuesday 16 May 2017.

The Chief Planning Officer advised Members of the following changes to the work plan which had been agreed with the Chairman:

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25 January 2017

- Swanley and Hextable Masterplan - for consideration
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

19 April 2017

- Local List Update
- Open Space, Sport and Leisure Study
- Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA)
- Strategic Housing & Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA)

16 May 2017

- Local Plan Update (incl. brownfield land, heritage, climate change)
- CIL Governance

22 June 2017

- Issues and Options Consultation Document

21 September 2017

- Budget: Review of Service Dashboards and Service Change Impact Assessments (SCIAs)
- Local Plan Update
- 6 month update by new DC Manager on Viability/red performance indicators on appeals/enforcement
- Building Control Update

35. Green Belt Assessment

The Chairman acknowledged the large number of public in attendance. She advised all present that the report before the Committee for consideration and recommendation to Cabinet was on the whole of the District and completed without the consultants knowing about the 'call for sites'. It could be seen from the report that the vast majority of Green Belt was performing well and that all parcels met the tests to varying degrees and none had failed. She asked the Committee to have a good transparent and generic discussion and not to focus on particular areas. There were some sub parcels which needed further investigation and Officers would be doing this in order that the Council could prove to the Planning Inspectorate that it had been rigorous and had a robust evidence base. The Council needed to be able to prove why land should not be removed from the Green Belt. The Green Belt sites submitted through the 'call for sites' process were not likely to be taken forward unless there were 'exceptional circumstances' for them to be released.

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The Planning Policy Team Leader presented the report which provided an overview of the findings of The Green Belt Assessment (undertaken by Arup on behalf of the Council) which would help inform the production of the new Local Plan for the period 2015-35.

The Green Belt Assessment was a key evidence base document, which, together with other strands of evidence, would help the Council to protect the Green Belt. It provided a comprehensive review of the performance of the District's green belt against the five green belt 'purposes', as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Most of the Green Belt within the District was performing strongly and the Assessment report provided a robust evidence base for its continued protection. A very small number of weakly performing parcels had been identified, including sites like Sevenoaks/Greatness Quarry and the priority was to review those, and other brownfield sites within the Green Belt.

Separately, an analysis of statutory natural and historic environmental constraints and a landscape sensitivity assessment had been undertaken. The results of those separate assessments were overlaid with the NPPF assessment, which had led to the identification of parcels of land / sub-areas which were recommended by Arup for further consideration. At a future stage, further investigation and consultation would therefore be undertaken to determine which sites were to be taken forward into the Local Plan. In the meantime, those sites would not go out to public consultation.

The Chairman asked whether Members had received an email from Wates Developments and whether there was a representative of them present. All Members apart from Cllr Halford had received the email, which would be forwarded to him. The Chairman advised that it would be submitted to the Planning policy team as a consultation response.

The Chairman used her discretion and allowed two members of the public to address the Committee and voice their concerns on the protection of the Green Belt, along with a local ward Councillor. Mr. Dobson called for a visionary Local Plan to include all brownfield options and maximise development on existing sites; Councillor Purves voiced concern about RA-16 and a proposal to develop the land owned by Knole Estates; Mr. Perkins was also concerned by the same proposal and how the loss of Green Belt would impact on the appeal of the town. He wanted Green Belt protected and Members to reject consideration of any Green Belt sites.

The Chairman pointed out that the suggestion to develop RA-16 had come forward from the landowner under the 'call for sites' and was not under discussion. What the Committee was considering was whether the Green Belt Assessment report was correct and robust.

The Vice Chairman added that the methodology used by the consultants had been proven as had recently been examined. Members were being asked to accept whether it was good evidence or not. In response to the public's concerns she did not disagree with regards to needing to protect the Green Belt and it was part of the Council's vision. She requested the Chief Planning Officer explain what exceptional circumstances might mean.

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In response the Chief Planning Officer advised that the NPPF set a high bar with clear Green Belt boundaries which could only be changed through Local Plan review with a thorough methodology and only in exceptional circumstances. There was no actual definition of what those exceptional circumstances might be but there were emerging examples from around the country.

Members discussed the report. With regards to comments made referring to a report to be considered the following week the Chairman reminded Members that was a debate for the following week. Members thanked Officers for their work. Some concern was expressed with regards to the 'if necessary' wording in the second recommendation. The Chairman advised and pointed out that other issues such as open spaces and leisure had yet to come to Committee. The Chief Planning Officer explained that the assessment provided a robust piece of evidence and would be overlaid with other pieces of evidence. There was a clear objective to use brownfield sites over Green Belt. He reminded Members that the Issue and Options report would be coming to Committee in June 2017.

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 findings of the Green Belt Assessment, be noted; and
- b) the further consideration of 'brownfield' sites in the Green Belt and then, if necessary, the limited number of land parcels/sub-areas identified in the Arup report, be supported.

At 8.24 p.m. the Chairman adjourned the Committee for the convenience of Members and Officers. The meeting resumed at 8.27 p.m.

36. Landscape Character Assessment

The Chairman pointed out that the Landscape Character Assessment was different to the small scale one in the ARUP Green Belt Assessment report.

The Planning Policy Team Leader presented the report which provided an update on the Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment evidence base report which would inform the preparation of the new Local Plan 2015-35. Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) had commissioned Land Use Consultants (LUC) to review and update the existing landscape character evidence base. The updated Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) was intended to provide context for policies and proposals within the emerging Local Plan, inform the determination of planning applications, and inform the management of future change.

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A Member queried whether there would be the opportunity to suggest minor amendments to some of the landscape character boundaries . The Chief Planning Officer suggested that if Members were minded a small amendment could be made to the recommendations within the report by the additional wording ‘subject to any editorial drafts that might need to be made.’

Public Sector Equality Duty

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

The Chairman moved the recommendations within the report along with the suggested amendment. It was put to the vote and

Resolved: That the findings of the Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment, which would inform the initial ‘issues and options’ consultation on the Local Plan in 2017 and assist in development management decision-making, be supported, subject to any editorial drafts that might need to be made.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.42 PM

CHAIRMAN