
LOCAL PLAN PANEL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber - Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 28 March 2018 from 7.00pm - 10.02 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Bowles (Substitute) (In place of Andy Booth), Richard Darby, James Hunt, Gerry Lewin (Chairman), Peter Marchington, Bryan Mulhern (Vice-Chairman) and David Simmons.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Katherine Bescoby, Alan Best, James Freeman and Gill Harris.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Cameron Beart, Roger Clark, Mike Henderson, Alan Horton and John Wright.

APOLOGY: Councillor Andy Booth.

587 INTRODUCTION

The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting, advised that the Council had agreed to change the name of the Panel to the 'Local Plan Panel', and reminded those present that the meeting was being recorded.

588 FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

589 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 February 2018 (Minute Nos. 484 – 489) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

590 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In response to a comment regarding the Housing Infrastructure Bid, Councillors Bowles and Gerry Lewin advised that they would be happy to declare a DNPI in respect of the item called 'Looking Ahead', if it was considered necessary. **Post meeting note:** it is not necessary for DNPIs to be declared.

591 'LOOKING AHEAD' - A LOCAL PLAN DRAFT CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT DOCUMENT

The Principal Planner introduced the report, and drew attention to the copy of the draft questionnaire that had been tabled at the meeting. He referred to the Panel meeting in February 2018 that had agreed for officers to prepare the draft documents attached to the agenda, and thanked Members who had taken the opportunity to make comments since that time. He asked Members to consider if the right sort of questions were being asked, as the document was for a wide audience. He also advised that a session would be arranged for Members of the

Panel at a later date, to work through the questions in the document. Members were also asked to let officers know if there were any questions in particular that should be focused on.

The Principal Planner clarified that the document was still in draft format and so it would be proofread and some of the photographs would be updated. He envisaged that the consultation would start on 27 April 2018 and end on 8 June 2018. He referred to the tabled questionnaire, explained that the purpose of it was to rate priorities, and said that the public would have an opportunity to respond to the full document or the questionnaire or both. The consultation would be promoted via the Planning Policy mailing list (circa 3000 people), social media, parish councils, libraries and Council offices.

The Principal Planner advised of an amendment to the wording of the recommendation as it would not be necessary for the Chairman to agree the questionnaire, as it had been tabled at the meeting. He also clarified that the recommendations from the meeting would be considered by the Cabinet Member for Planning as an individual delegated decision, as there was no scheduled Cabinet meeting until May 2018.

The Chairman invited Members to make comments, page by page. The Chairman proposed, and the Vice-Chairman seconded, the updated recommendation.

A discussion ensued as to why it was proposed that the questionnaire would be anonymous, why there were two different documents to respond to, how the data would be analysed and presented to Members; and what the purpose of the consultation was, with the suggestion that decisions had already been made?

Following debate, it was agreed that the questionnaire would be updated to ask for the respondent's name and address, and officers would look at including appropriate wording to meet the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations. The Chairman refuted an allegation made that decisions had already been made. The purpose of the consultation was explained.

An amendment was proposed by Councillor Mike Baldock as follows: "that the results from the questionnaire are present to Councillors in a tabulated format to show comments and the comments from the Council (i.e. in the normal format)." This was seconded by Councillor Monique Bonney, who spoke in support of the amendment.

A discussion ensued on the amendment, during which the Head of Planning advised that Members would have access to all the consultation responses, however, officers would be presenting key views from it at that stage which was proportionate and would not be giving a response to each comment made. The Principal Planner advised that he expected to be able to give an analysis of where comments had been received from, including age and sector etc. and the specific issues raised in comment boxes. He clarified that all responses would be on the system, however, analysis needed to be proportionate.

The amendment was put to the vote but was lost.

A Member referred to paragraph 5.2 and asked if the responses from the public and the developers could be separated out for Members.

The Chairman then invited comments on the document:

1.0.2 – some Members suggested that the wording was misleading, in that it should say ‘we need to review the local plan’ instead of ‘prepare a new local plan’ every five years. The Spatial Planning Manager advised that the Council was required to review the plan every five years, but at the end of the process there would be a new local plan. In response to a suggestion that the work on the local plan could be postponed, she confirmed that the timescale to review the plan was challenging and so work needed to start now. Later in the meeting a Member referred to 4.0.1 and considered that this wording was correct as it said ‘review or replace’ the local plan.

2.0.3 – a Member asked how the consultation would appear on social media, and was advised that this was subject to discussion with the Communications Team.

Question 1 – it was agreed that reference should be made to gypsy and traveller sites.

Section 5 – the timetable would be updated to reflect the change to the consultation timetable.

Section 6 – The Economy – a Member suggested that officers should look at the terminology in this section and the next few pages, to amend terms such as ‘highly disruptive’ and ‘drastic change’.

Section 6 - Population and social change – it was suggested that the wording could be reviewed to reflect there was a requirement for education and training of the existing population as well.

Section 6 – The Environment – A Member suggested that this section/question should be separated into two parts, one for the natural environment, the other for the built environment. In respect of 6.0.19, a Member asked for a list of areas where there had been gains for wildlife, and referred to statistics that showed a huge decline in insects, birds and small mammals. This point was also made in respect of section 7.7. The Principal Planner explained that there were separate questions relating to the built and natural environment, however, officers would review how this might be clarified within the document structure.

Section 7 – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis – it was suggested that the acronym should be put in 7.1. There was discussion on the content of the SWOT analysis and it was agreed that poor access to healthcare, leisure, education etc. should be included.

Section 7 – Question 9 – there was discussion on the wording of this question, in that it should refer to all strategic sites, rather than the two mentioned. It was suggested that a map of strategic sites could be included in the document, and that the question could be re-worded to say ‘in the Borough’ rather than referring to specific sites.

7.3.5 – there was discussion regarding the terminology ‘passive’ and ‘aggressive’ and it was suggested that more neutral wording should be used. There was also discussion regarding housing numbers, and the need for the Council to be prepared for the Government target which had yet to be announced, even if the target was unrealistic. Members spoke of the need for the Government to announce the figures. The Chairman referred to discussions with the Government’s Chief Planning Advisor and considered that the Council should be prepared for a figure of around 1050. A Member referred to letters already written to the Minister on this subject and emphasised the need for the Council to do research to make sure it was prepared when an announcement was made and to ensure the timescale for the review of the local plan could be met. Some Members referred to the Housing Infrastructure Bid and questioned how target figures of over 10,000 had been included in the Bid, before the Government had announced revised figures.

Section 7 – Question 11 – A Member suggested that more information could be included in this section, such as percentages of land in the Borough that had national and international designations, versatile farming areas and irreplaceable habitats, to emphasise the constraints. The Principal Planner agreed to review the section to include percentages, but advised that agricultural land was not a ‘showstopper’ in terms of Government criteria and that there were other areas in Kent with more constraints than Swale. It was also confirmed that the Council had no authority to review designations such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

A Member asked when the list of brownfield sites would be prepared and the Chairman advised that this would be coming forward at a later date.

Section 7 – Question 12 – it was suggested that the wording of this question could be amended to remove the words ‘increased and’. It was also confirmed that the issue of density of housing was referred to in 7.3.25 and that examples, such as tower blocks or high rise, could be referred to. It was suggested that this could be included in question 14, 17 or 18. The Principal Planner also agreed to review the wording of 7.3.17 to explain meaning of ‘entry’ level exception sites.

7.3.24 – in response to comments, the Principal Planner advised that the Council was required to provide evidence of what people wanted in terms of technical standards, and agreed to look at the wording of this section to give further explanation. Members endorsed the need for technical standards and hoped people would support higher standards, such as carbon neutral, and parking. It was confirmed that work on parking standards was in the programme. In response to a question, the Principal Planner explained the difference between the private housing standard and the social housing standard, and the need for evidence to be collected. He also confirmed that solar panels were included in a different question.

Statement 1 – page 26 – a Member queried whether the terminology should be master plan instead of master developer? Another Member suggested that there should be more explanation of what ‘capturing the value of development’ meant. Attention was drawn to 7.4.6.

7.6.5 – the Chairman confirmed that the wording of this would be reviewed to reflect the Council resolution.

7.6.8 – a Member suggested that this text could be included as a question in itself. The Chairman considered it should be left as currently written.

Question 26 – a Member suggested that the word ‘perceived’ should be removed and that the wording of 7.6.14 should be reviewed to reflect the Council had a duty to improve air quality. A Member suggested that other parts of the A2 were under stress too, however, it was acknowledged that the Local Plan Inspector had specifically referred to Sittingbourne.

8.1.5 – in response to a question, the Chairman confirmed that whilst the list was not complete, work on compiling a list of brownfield sites had started; the data collected so far indicated that there was an inadequate supply.

8.1.4 – in response to a question, the Principal Planner explained that all existing adopted local plan allocations (without planning permission) would go through a process of assessment as part of the review.

Page 35 – Map – the Principal Planner confirmed that this would be a strategic map, and it was agreed that the map would be removed.

Page 37 – some Members queried the purpose of the list, and the Chairman confirmed that it was a view for people to comment on and the question was on the following page. Members asked for the question to be included on the same page as the list.

8.2.21 – in response to comments on this, the Principal Planner agreed to look at the wording with a view to confirming that for sites to be allocated, they would need to be deliverable.

Page 42 – in response to a comment that the wording of ‘What is a garden community?’ was unbalanced, the Principal Planner advised that there were a number of models available, and not all models meant that decision-making would be by a corporation instead of the local authority. The document did not intend to promote any particular model. The Principal Planner agreed to draft a question to ascertain what type of model was preferred, and to set out additional explanation of the different types of models.

Page 44 – Statement 6 - a Member referred to the first paragraph and asked about the Kent Science Park (KSP) development and how it would run in parallel with the local plan review. The Head of Planning advised that the Council would consider the options that came forward, and that the consultation would find out what options were available. The Principal Planner drew attention to the diagram on page 58 of the agenda which set out how the consultations dovetailed into the local plan review. In response to a question, the Head of Planning advised that he was not aware that KSP development was referred to in the Housing Infrastructure Bid.

During the debate, Members advised of typographical errors in question 15 and 7.4.13 (2). Members also asked that where possible, photographs should be in the Swale area.

The Chairman then invited comments on the tabled questionnaire.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the wording of the questionnaire should be amended as follows:

- To make the wording clearer that the intention was for people to rank the options, with 1 being the most preferred option, and the highest number being the least preferred option.
- To make it clear in the introduction that people did not need to rank every option if they did not wish to.
- To encourage people to respond to the full consultation. The Principal Planner undertook to liaise with the Communications Team to look how best to do this via social media.
- Question 4 – officers agreed to share the calculation regarding housing numbers with Members.
- Question 9 – officers were asked to separate this into two questions, one on housing land, the other on employment land, and to make the wording clearer.

The recommendation was put to the vote and agreed. Councillors Mike Baldock and Monique Bonney asked that their vote against be recorded in the Minutes.

Recommended:

(1) That subject to the comments made at the Local Plan Panel Meeting as set out in the above Minute, the document 'Looking Ahead' be updated and published for consultation, for a period of 6 weeks, together with the simplified questionnaire.

592 ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

At 9.40pm, the Chairman adjourned the meeting for five minutes.

593 THE 'NEW GARDEN COMMUNITIES' PROSPECTUS

The Principal Planner introduced the report, which asked the Panel to agree the 'New Garden Communities' Prospectus. He explained the purpose of the prospectus was to invite submissions from landowners and developers, drew attention to key parts of the prospectus in particular regarding vision and standards, and outlined the 16 week consultation period as set out in the report.

Members discussed the report, and a Member made comments regarding the timing of the consultation, the length of the submission process and whether a site had already been decided on. Another Member considered that the document was well-written and suggested an amendment to the wording at the bottom of page 54 of the agenda, to change 'should not' to 'cannot'.

Another Member asked for financial implications of the consultation, and considered that the Council should prioritise on other work such as parking standards.

The Vice-Chairman proposed and Councillor Bowles seconded the recommendations in the report, saying that if the Council was forced to build more houses, he would rather look for one, two or three sites rather than affecting all wards.

Officers answered Members questions and the Head of Planning confirmed that pre-application discussions had taken place with Quinn Estates regarding a planning performance agreement which was an agreement available to all developers and would not prejudice the outcome of any planning application. There was no such agreement in place regarding the KSP, but there was for Wises Lane, and he clarified that the funding in the agreement was for the estimated planning officer time on pre-application work and work arising from the determination of any future planning application.

In response to a question regarding the map that would be inserted into the document, the Principal Planner advised that it would be a map of Swale in the context of its surroundings, and would be Ordnance Survey based and similar to that used in economic development promotion material. The Principal Planner also confirmed that links would be provided in the document to the 'Looking Forward' document and the report prepared by Peter Bretts, as referred to on pages 8 and 41 of the agenda.

The recommendations were put to the vote and agreed. Councillors Mike Baldock and Monique Bonney asked that their vote against be recorded in the Minutes.

Recommended:

(1) That subject to the document being updated to reflect the feedback at the Local Plan Panel Meeting, the document 'New Garden Communities' Prospectus be published to invite submissions from parties interested in developing such communities in Swale.

(2) That the final version of the launch Prospectus be agreed by the Chairman.

(3) That the arrangements for the advertising and launch of the Prospectus and the opportunities to receive further updates upon close of the submission deadline be noted.

594 SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

At 10pm Members agreed to the suspension of Standing Orders so that the meeting could complete its business.

Chairman

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All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel