
LOCAL PLAN PANEL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Monday, 29 October 2018 from 7.00pm - 8.21 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Andy Booth, Richard Darby, James Hunt, Gerry Lewin (Chairman), Peter Marchington and David Simmons.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Alan Best, Philippa Davies, James Freeman, Gill Harris and Jill Peet.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Mike Henderson.

APOLOGY: Councillor Bryan Mulhern.

288 FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

289 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 September 2018 (Minute Nos. 221 – 227) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

290 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Monique Bonney declared a non-pecuniary interest as she was Chairman of the Five Parishes Group.

291 RESPONSES TO 'LOOKING AHEAD' CONSULTATION

The Principal Planner introduced the report which set-out the results of the 'Looking Ahead' consultation, and included representations from the accompanying quick questionnaire. The Principal Planner explained that Members were being asked to note the comments that had been received, plus there were some cases where officers sought steers from Members on whether to commission further supporting evidence.

The Principal Planner provided an overview of the various sections within the report. The first section gave the headline about the consultation, and he considered the level of responses had been relatively good for this stage of the process, with responses from local residents, particularly in Sittingbourne and the surrounding area. He referred to page 5 of the report which outlined the 'big' themes which had come out through the consultation process. These had centred on concerns with the housing growth, and that infrastructure and environmental resources were stretched. There had been a strong view that more was needed to be done to protect the environment. The Principal Planner drew Members'

attention to the appendices within the report, and explained that a number of them had been available for Members to view in the Members' Room. Appendix I provided a summary of the responses, and an indication of any actions to take forward. Appendix II showed pie charts which indicated results from the quick questionnaire and the top preference and overall preferences. Appendix III set-out meeting notes from four workshops that had been held during the consultation.

The Principal Planner welcomed a steer from Members and whether they considered any additional evidential work needed to be commissioned.

The Chairman proposed the recommendations in the report, including the proposals outlined on page 33 of the report, and this was seconded.

In response to issues raised by Members the Principal Planner explained that consideration of different types of housing, such as for the disabled/elderly would be taken into account in any case within the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), another key piece of evidence to be reported in 2019. He also explained that issues were mainly considered Borough-wide, and neighbourhood areas were often more difficult to focus on, as this involved more 'drilling-down' of the data to small area level. However, this would be looked into as part of the SHMA work.

A Member considered the consultation response rate had been 'appalling'. The Principal Planning Officer gave an example of a response rate of 6% at another Local Authority, and the Member estimated that the response rate in Swale for this consultation had been 0.28%. The Member explained that she was unhappy in the way the consultation had been presented to the public, it had been very complicated, there was a lack of paper copies of the consultation, the online portal had been a 'nightmare', and the pie chart data had not added much clarity to the responses.

In response, the Principal Planner explained the methodology around the data provided by the pie charts, as indicated on page 188 of the report, and at paragraph 2.9 of the covering item.

Members questioned whether job density standards for employment sites were also required; and the need to understand the implications of the impact of Swale sitting on an aquifer with reference to proposal (ii).

In response, the Principal Planner explained that details relating to proposal (ii) were included within Question 20 of the report and related to design standards to improve water usage. He added that further consultation with the water companies and the levels of growth, would be taken into account in future consideration of the local plan review potential development strategy options. The water companies had not given a formal response as the work was still at a very early stage, but they were aware of the likely levels of growth and had not so far indicated any 'showstoppers'. However, they would become more involved in detail at later stages of the process. The Principal Planner also assured Members that health services had already been drawn-in even at this early stage and that the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) were statutory consultees throughout the Plan process in any event.

A Member considered that all instances of brownfield sites should be considered for development. The Principal Planner explained that brownfield sites were those that had previously been developed, but they were still required to pass the test of whether they were available/suitable/deliverable. The Member also felt that the wording of brownfield sites needed to be wider so that it included under-used and redundant sites.

Another Member drew attention to paragraph 2.59 in the report and considered there was some confusion within the paragraph, with the use of double negatives/positives. He explained that there was an argument which stated that if there was not a suitable amount of housing land in Swale, the Council might be expected to build less housing. The Member gave examples of this type of land, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), Grade I agricultural land, green spaces and land developed on already. He explained that a couple of years ago the figure was well over 50%, of land that was not possible to build upon. The Member requested that these areas be researched and quantified, and by having these areas itemised, this would assist in arguing the case for no further housing, and he suggested paragraphs 2.60, 2.61 and 2.62 be re-written to reflect the areas that could not be built on, take a positive view of this fact, and to strengthen the Council's potential. The Principal Planner responded that although Swale did have a high percentage of constrained land, it still did have large areas which were less constrained in terms of national planning policy. Work on open space standards was already in-hand and biodiversity protection and enhancement had been strengthened through the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). He also acknowledged the double-negative error.

A Member requested that further work be carried out on the provision of affordable housing, and to look into the actual meaning of affordable housing and whether it be determined as being affordable as a person using only one third of their gross income to pay for the property. The Member also considered that housing standards should include improved open space, bio-diversity and natural environment, and that developers needed to be aware of this emphasis on new developments. The Principal Planner acknowledged these comments and stated that these issues would be revisited through the SCMA evidence supporting the local plan review and in light of new NPPF definitions of affordable housing. In response to further questions, the Principal Planner explained that Faversham was not represented within the NHS Swale CCG, and although the NHS Canterbury CCG representative had been invited to the infrastructure workshop reported at Appendix IIIa to this report, they had withdrawn on the day. Consultation with Faversham on this aspect would be followed-up separately by officers. The Principal Planner added that environmental bodies had attended a workshop specifically on this topic and their comments were included within the notes on page 211 of the report.

A Member drew attention to the large amount of development that was carried out on the best and most versatile agricultural land, and to think carefully of the rate that this land was being lost. In respect of the proposals, the Member agreed that (i) minimum density standards should be considered, (ii) that research should be carried out into technical standards for water space and accessibility, (iii) request that other measures be introduced, such as tax breaks for developing brownfield

sites, there needed to be an increase in the use of these sites, and keep loss of best land to a minimum, (iv) there should be an inclusion of an air quality policy in the Local Plan and (v) climate change should be kept in mind, and the Council should insist on the installation of solar panels on new builds.

A Member considered there had been a lot of publicity on the consultation and responses had been good, and they had backed-up what the Council had been thinking.

Another Member commended the work that officers had carried out on the report, which covered the responses in good detail. The Council needed to be conscious of the imbalance between the gypsy and traveller community and the settled community. The Member also considered there should be more scope for eco-homes in the Borough; that green energy be considered, but with concerns with the cumulative impact, and demonstrable harm that green energy (particularly wind turbines) could have in some areas (paragraph 2.138). Achieving provision of solar panels on new development was seen as an area Swale could do much better in. The Member also raised issues of the loss of beautiful countryside on the Isle of Sheppey if there were further road upgrades, and the loss of wildlife if there was a round-England coastal footpath.

Another Member supported the minimum density standards, but requested that there be more bungalows. He also stated that extreme weather conditions needed to be considered, wind as well as potential flood risk.

Members were reminded that, the recommendations from this report would inform additional research: and that a summary of the consultation and how it was used to progress the plan process would be included in a Statement of Consultation which would accompany the local plan review when it was eventually submitted to the Secretary of State for examination in public.

The Chairman thanked all those who had responded to the consultation, and he considered the quality of the input had been very good and well-informed.

Recommended:

(1) That the report be noted, and the Cabinet be asked to agree Member steers, plus those listed at paragraph 3.1.

292 REVISED NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SWALE ADOPTED LOCAL PLAN AND THE EMERGING LOCAL PLAN REVIEW

The Chairman thanked officers for the report and welcomed Jill Peet, Principal Planning Officer, to the meeting.

The Principal Planning Officer introduced the report which set-out a brief overview of the revised NPPF following its revision published on 24 July 2018. She advised that the revised NPPF only applied to local plans submitted for examination after 24 January 2019, and so the local plan review for Swale would be assessed against the revised NPPF.

There was some discussion on whether the housing target needed to increase in the Borough. The Principal Planning Officer explained that this was outlined in paragraph 59 of the revised NPPF 'Delivering a sufficient supply of homes'. She stated that a SHMA would be carried out in accordance with the NPPF new standard methodology, to establish overall housing targets and the type and tenure of houses needed within that total.

In response to a question, the Spatial Planning Manager explained that the minimum number of housing was already set, through the NPPF and accompanying Practice Guidance on standard methodology, published on 25 October 2018. This advised that the starting point for establishing the housing target was based for now on 2014 housing projections and this would not be going down. She added that any plans submitted to the Secretary of State after January 2019 would be subject to using the standard methodology. Local Plan Reviews were mandatory every five years; and should the housing target no longer be in accordance with the relevant Office for National Statistics household projections and standard methodology, then a Local Plan would be out-of-date and not NPPF compliant. Actioning these findings through reviewing targets and land allocations was then imperative. In response to a further question, the Spatial Planning Manager explained that the recently released 2016 based ONS household projections had shown a downward trend nationally. Adhering to these to set new local plan housing targets would not enable the Government's national target of 300,000 dwellings annually to be met. The latest Planning Practice Guidance had therefore advised that local planning authorities continued to use the 2014 based projections until further notice. In Swale's case there was very little difference between 2014 and 2016 based projections, so the target estimate of around 1,050 dwellings in the Looking Ahead consultation was not likely to change significantly.

The Chairman proposed the recommendations in the report and this was seconded.

Recommended:

(1) That the content of the report and the implications of the revised National Planning Policy Framework and Practice Guidance for the emerging local plan review; and adopted Local Plan policy be noted.

Chairman

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