
LOCAL PLAN PANEL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber - Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Thursday, 6 June 2019 from 7.00 - 8.18 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock (Chairman), Monique Bonney (Vice-Chairman), James Hunt, Benjamin Martin, Richard Palmer, Eddie Thomas, Roger Truelove and Ghlin Whelan.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Philippa Davies, Natalie Earl, James Freeman, Gill Harris, Jill Peet, Anna Stonor and Aaron Wilkinson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Roger Clark, Tim Gibson, Harrison, Ken Rowles, David Simmons, Tony Winckless and Corrie Woodford.

APOLOGY: Councillor Alastair Gould.

34 **EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chairman ensured that those present were aware of the emergency evacuation procedure.

35 **CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP OF PANEL**

It was noted that Councillor Alastair Gould had replaced Councillor Tim Valentine on the Panel.

36 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 March 2019 (Minute Nos. 558 – 564) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

37 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Monique Bonney declared a Disclosable Non-Pecuniary Interest as she was the Chairman of the Five Parishes Opposition Group and also sat on Rodmersham Parish Council.

38 **Part A Minutes for Recommendation to Cabinet LOCAL PLAN REVIEW - OPEN SESSION FOR COUNCILLORS TO MAKE SUGGESTIONS AND TO PUT FORWARD IDEAS TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN THE LOCAL PLAN REVIEW**

The Chairman introduced the item and explained that there would be a presentation, followed by an open session where Members could raise issues, suggestions and ideas going forward.

The Spatial Planning Manager gave a presentation on the Swale Borough Local Plan Review. Members were given a copy of the presentation, a summary of which is outlined below:

Local Plan Review

- Bearing Fruits had been adopted in 2017, and was reviewed every five years;
- Government housing targets for Swale had been increased by 40% to 1,050 dwellings per annum, and strong evidence was required if it was thought that this figure was too high; and
- the Local Plan was a statutory document and evidence-based at each stage of the process.

Geography and Environmental Issues

- The Borough consisted of both constrained and unconstrained areas, with local designations, and different levels of land protection;
- there were small amounts of unconstrained areas;
- Swale was limited by the sea, the M2/A2 corridor, and the Kent Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to the south; and
- there were 52 conservation areas within the Borough.

Constraints or Opportunities?

- Environmental;
- Historic assets;
- Transport;
- Other Infrastructure – schools, health services; and
- Government ‘shackles’ – housing targets, and could these be met, and how?

Evidence – what we know and what we need to find out.....

- Employment land in the Borough was in short supply;
- impact of the Internet on retail; and
- various studies were in-hand at the moment, with some still to be commissioned.

The Spatial Planning Manager outlined the next steps for consideration by the Panel in the next four years.

The Chairman welcomed questions and comments from Members.

The following points were made:

- The Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report, the Employment Land Review and the Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment all needed to be reviewed again by the new Panel, to take into account new ideas and reflect on what Members wanted to do now;
- environmental issues should be addressed and prioritised, including the installation of solar panels on new-builds;
- employment land and density needed to be re-visited;
- residents were fed-up with the increase in housing in the Borough;

- there was a lack of infrastructure;
- there needed to be more affordable and social housing included in the Local Plan;
- viability, based on the expectation of the developer, needed to be looked at;
- opposed to one-place solutions for housing;
- needed to think creatively and how housing could contribute to making urban areas more sustainable;
- there should be small-scale increments to villages in Swale to make them more sustainable and viable;
- the Council should provide land for social and affordable housing;
- the town centres in the Borough needed to be revitalised; with the inclusion of housing above retail units to aid footfall;
- café-culture should be encouraged;
- the 'tech' age needed to be taken into account within the Local Plan and a 'live-work' environment needed to be considered;
- rural areas needed to grow in a sustainable way;
- new designations should be created, to include for example ancient woodland and ancient hedges; and consider natural resources and natural landscapes in more detail;
- infrastructure needed to be improved prior to more housing being built;
- needed to consider what was wanted by residents, not what was deemed as needed, such as certain retail units, and different leisure activities such as bowling alleys;
- park homes should be considered more in the Borough;
- there was already an infrastructure deficit, without any further housing;
- GPs and surgeries should be a requirement within the planning system, and part of what the Council wanted to see developed;
- affordable housing needed to be affordable for local people, and provision for affordable housing to be available on the Isle of Sheppey rather than the current 0% provision;
- tourism throughout the Borough should be encouraged more, strategically Swale was in a great location;
- policies on heritage needed to be looked at more;
- Members needed to be able to understand what developers were looking for, and an understanding of the constraints; and
- briefings were suggested regarding viability, heritage policies, and from a developer's perspective.

In response to a question on the data used as a baseline for the housing target, the Spatial Planning Manager explained that at the moment 2014 Office of National Statistics (ONS) Household Projection figures were required to be used as the basis for the target. 2018 based figures would be out in 2020 and it would remain to be seen how Government would respond to them. She explained that until such time as the Local Plan review was submitted for examination, the housing target would therefore not be 'fixed' and the process was a 'moving feast' up to that point.

In response to questions, the Head of Planning Services explained that there were schemes where development looked at quelling the impact of cars. Consideration needed to be given to live-work units, improved public transport links and, for longer

distance travel, the use of car clubs. He explained that distribution centres could be on the outskirts of larger schemes and electric buggies could be used. The decrease in road infrastructure could then result in an increase in housing density. He added that a viability assessment was very important in this situation.

In response to concerns with the lack of infrastructure, the Head of Planning Services explained that this was dictated by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) regulations and this was a major constraint in the development process.

In response to the need for more doctors/surgeries, the Principal Planning Officer explained that the Council worked with the Clinical Commissioning Groups, both in the Local Plan process and when a new development was built, and there was an ideal ratio of 2,000 residents to one GP. There was not solely an issue with premises, but also in recruiting doctors and other NHS personnel. Work continued in identifying sites for GP practices.

The Spatial Planning Manager explained that in looking at evidence base work already completed, the evidence presented to Panel so far was not policy at the moment, but factual research. In order to generate new policy responses from these research findings, all the work would need to be brought together and considered 'in the round'. This would need to be the subject of a future workshop session(s) to enable the Council to move closer to generating the next consultation draft document and policy responses in the Local Plan process.

Officers noted a series of actions for training, site visits and workshops to advance the process.

Recommended:

(1) That officers take note of the comments made by the Local Plan Panel in bringing forward evidence base work and in the preparation of the Local Plan review.

Chairman

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