
LOCAL PLAN PANEL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Thursday, 30 January 2020 from 7.00pm - 8.08 pm.

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

OFFICERS PRESENT: Simon Algar, Kellie MacKenzie and Matt Randall.

492 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

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

493 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 November 2019 (Minute Nos. 374 – 383) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

494 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mike Baldock declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of the Swale Heritage Strategy and Associated Action Plan as he was the lead Cabinet Member for that item.

495 SWALE HERITAGE STRATEGY AND ASSOCIATED ACTION PLAN

The Chairman introduced the report which outlined the content of the draft Swale Borough-wide Heritage Strategy and its accompanying (3 year period) Draft Action Plan, in order that the Local Plan Panel could form a view on whether the documents, as set-out, would properly support the current adopted and emerging replacement local plan.

The Chairman, also Cabinet Member for Planning, thanked the Conservation & Design Manager for his excellent work in producing the Strategy. The Chairman explained that the Strategy was needed urgently to ensure that all the Borough's Conservation Areas and management plans were up-to-date. The Strategy would help to support the local plan and also assist the Council's position when defending planning appeals.

The Chairman stated that the Strategy would help protect the many listed buildings at risk in the Borough and also help to promote tourism. He explained that the Strategy had been considered by the Council's Policy Development and Review Committee the previous night, and following a request from a Member at that meeting, the Conservation & Design Manager was already exploring how 'heritage plaques' could be included.

The Conservation & Design Manager advised that the Strategy was a hybrid document i.e. Local Plan part evidence-base and part corporate policy/strategic. He explained that the wider public consultation was due to close on 31 January 2020, and there had been a relatively good response with over 60 responses received to-date. Most of these had been positive and agreed with the overall content of the Strategy. He outlined some of the comments received: agreed with the visions and priorities; provided suggestions for areas of historic interest and local designation including Iwade; considered it was too little too late, a lot of damage had already been done; hoped a better job protecting heritage assets would be achieved moving forward; concerned about how new housing developments would impact and how the strategy could protect them; concerned about how the Strategy could be funded after three years; frustration that the Council had not supported heritage sites maintained by volunteers ; and how would the proposed work be resourced.

The Conservation & Design Manager reported that Historic England (HE) had responded and raised concern as to whether particular issues with listed buildings at Sheerness Dockyard could be resolved. He explained that he was currently liaising with human resources and senior officers in Planning, and Economy and Community Services about how the necessary resources could be provided, and had had informal discussions with HE about the possibility of some additional funding for this.

The Conservation & Design Manager reported that it was hoped the Strategy would be agreed by Cabinet at their meeting on 18 March 2020. The actions could then be implemented from the beginning of the 2020/21 financial year.

The Local Plan Manager stated that HE had also commented that the Strategy compared well with other similar strategies in the Kent area, and applauded Members for their input.

The Chairman invited Members to comment on the document.

Members raised points and asked questions of the Conservation & Design Manager. A summary is provided below:

- Page 68 of the Strategy - what was meant by "...including through interpretation.."? And would QR codes be used on the interpretation boards? The Conservation & Design Manager explained that it referred to interpretation boards which were a well-used tool to improve heritage education in the area, and confirmed that QR codes would be used where possible to improve the overall level of information/education value that could be achieved in each instance;
- Priorities on page 7 of the Strategy – considered that the wording “..where possible” should be removed;
- paragraph 1.6 on page 14 of the Strategy - assumed that once the Corporate Plan was adopted appropriate wording would be included? The Conservation & Design Manager confirmed that it would;

- the listed buildings location map on page 20 of the strategy was not clear, and it was suggested breaking them down into the three areas i.e Sittingbourne, Sheppey and Faversham. A Member suggested using A3 maps. The Conservation & Design Manager agreed to look into what would work best to make the information clearer; but explained that the map could easily be enlarged if viewed on-line;
- the first paragraph of page 52 of the Strategy - referred to "...early review of fits current Planning Enforcement Strategy...", and would that Strategy be reviewed as part of the local plan review or separately? The Local Plan Manager explained that enforcement was considered under separate legislation;
- did not agree with the priorities listed on the Action Plan, Appendix I to the Strategy. The areas did not seem to be spread-out equally over the first year, and were mainly for the Sittingbourne and Faversham areas. The Chairman explained that this was because some of the areas listed were areas where housing development was likely and it was important to ensure those Conservation Areas were updated as quickly as possible, other areas were listed as work had already started on them. The Chairman said that the Faversham Society had volunteered to carry out much of the work relating to the Faversham conservation areas;
- Appendix II (Swale Heritage at risk register), Sittingbourne and Newington conservation areas were listed as being 'at risk', so why were they not listed for action in year one?;
- were the buildings and conservation areas at risk, listed in priority order? The Conservation & Design Manager explained that the buildings and conservation areas at risk register were not set-out in order of priority as there were a lot of factors to consider and some may be commenced earlier but due to their complex nature might take longer to complete;
- stressed the importance of protecting the whole heritage network including local springs, ditches and waterways;
- welcomed the review of Sittingbourne High Street but appreciated that this would be difficult work given the fragmented ownership;
- Members local knowledge and contacts were invaluable in supporting the Strategy;
- how could heritage sites such as ship wrecks be preserved? The Conservation & Design Manager stated that there was a designation from HE which could be included in the Strategy, and that he would give this aspect of the Borough's heritage further consideration;
- the photo on page 9 of the Strategy needed to be replaced with a more historic one. The Chairman explained the reasoning for the photo and this

was reinforced by the Conservation & Design Manager, although he advised he would consider the possibility of an alternative image for page 9.

In response to further queries, the Conservation & Design Manager stated that where possible views that were received after the consultation deadline would also be considered, up-to the point where he would need to finalise the consultation report to meet reporting deadlines for the March Cabinet meeting. The Chairman stated that a list of locally important heritage buildings was intended as a Heritage Strategy Action Plan item.

Recommended:

(1) That the content of the draft Heritage Strategy and associated Action Plan be noted, and the recommended changes be considered as a key component of the current public consultation.

496 REVISED LOCAL PLAN TIMELINE - VERBAL UPDATE

The Local Plan Manager reported that the Local Development Scheme, which set-out the timetable for the Local Plan review and adoption, would be considered at the Extraordinary Local Plan Panel meeting on 25 February 2020.

497 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman referred to the suggestions provided at the previous Panel meeting and asked for an update.

Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment - The Local Plan Manager agreed to forward the guidelines around Retail and Leisure Needs to Members to assist them in feeding their comments back;

Landscape Designation Review – The Local Plan Manager said a report could be provided at the February Panel meeting which would explain what the review was and its implications; and

Policy for private unadopted estate roads – The Local Plan Manager reported that as a priority for the Council, this could be considered at the Design Panel Workshops that were currently being arranged for March/April 2020.

A Member stressed the importance of ensuring this policy was adopted as soon as possible as it was the responsibility of the local council to ensure these were properly designed. A Member stated that clearer designs for developers were needed at the early stages of any development.

The Local Plan Manager explained that the National Planning Policy Framework promoted the use of design codes and the inclusion of these within the emerging Local Plan would be considered.

The Chairman invited Members to make suggestions for the Future Work Plan.

- A stronger landscaping policy which provided more detail on protection of ancient hedgerows.

The Local Plan Manager stated that the Sustainable Construction Supplementary Planning Document might include detail on protection of hedgerows, and that this could also be included for discussion at the planned Design Panel Workshops.

Members discussed how ancient hedgerows and local designations could be better protected. The following points were raised:

- The Council did not have the resource to be able to record every ancient hedgerow in the Borough;
- Parish Councils could be asked to identify the hedgerows in their areas and provide proof that they were 'ancient';
- thought that parishes had already been asked to provide this work but many were too busy;
- a clear and simple template on what was required needed to be circulated to parishes; and
- the template should also be sent to organisations such as Natural England and the Kent Wildfowlers Trust.

The Chairman agreed to produce a template and circulate to Parish Councils and other appropriate organisations.

Resolved:

- (1) That the suggestions and actions above be noted.***

Chairman

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