
Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Committee Room - Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Thursday, 13 March 2025 from 7.00 pm - 8.47 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Monique Bonney (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Ann Cavanagh (Substitute for Councillor Kieran Golding), Charles Gibson, Alastair Gould, James Hunt, Elliott Jayes, Julien Speed, Karen Watson, Mike Whiting and Tony Winckless.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Natalie Earl, Joanne Johnson, Kellie MacKenzie and Anna Stonor.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Martin Ross.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Dolley Wooster.

APOLOGY: Councillor Kieran Golding.

742 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

743 **Vice-Chair in-the-Chair**

Councillor Monique Bonney (Vice-Chair) took the chair for this meeting and would be referred to as 'Chair' for the remainder of these minutes.

744 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 September 2024 (Minute Nos. 243 – 251) and the Extraordinary Meeting held on 13 November 2024 (Minute Nos. 379 – 381) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

745 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

746 **Local Plan Review - Call for Sites 2024 and Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment progress**

The Principal Planning Consultant introduced the report which set out the call for sites 2024 process and provided a high level summary of the progress being made on drafting the Council's Housing Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA).

The Chair invited comments from Members, and points raised included:

- Concerned that the 'dividend' of submissions was so low;
- could see how the Classic Cinema, High Street, Sittingbourne could be used as a mixed use, but it was important to ensure the façade was kept largely intact;
- Sutton House, London Road, Sittingbourne was a 'beautiful' building and supported it being renovated and used as flats;
- the Council should ensure that the heritage buildings within the Sittingbourne High Street Conservation Area were improved, and the owners considered

- whether they wanted to convert the upper floors into flats to make them viable;
- what would be the impact of the low submissions on the rest of the housing numbers?;
- 500 park homes would be great but this could lead to infrastructure issues;
- would the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) need to be updated given that the minimum 850 dwellings stated within the SPD would not be achieved?;
- the current poor economic situation was affecting confidence in the construction industry and Members needed to understand this;
- disappointed with the lack of interest shown in respect of Sittingbourne High Street;
- had Park Home sites on the Isle of Sheppey been consulted?;
- how many units could the Royal Cinema, Sittingbourne site accommodate?;
- Phoenix House and Sports Direct in Sittingbourne High Street could be potential sites;
- if brownfield employment sites were used for housing, would the Council need to provide more employment sites to replace the loss of that brownfield site?; and
- the appearance of Sittingbourne high street seemed to be failing and it seemed Members were powerless to do anything about it.

In response, the Principal Planning Policy Consultant said that officers had assumed for Sittingbourne High Street a 70% residential and 30% retail split and that some of the figures provided in the report could be 'conservative'. The Royal Cinema site could potentially provide between 50 and 60 units. The Planning Manager (Policy) reported that the final call for sites and final assessment and options would be considered at the next meeting of the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group (PTPWG). The Head of Place said that officers were currently looking at densification and sites with headline transport constraints, as also requested by Members, and the results would be considered at the next PTPWG meeting.

With regard to park home sites, the Principal Planning Consultant said further assessment work was needed to establish what the demand was within the borough, and the Planning Manager (Policy) said a specific question in that regard could be added to the Regulation 18 Consultation, and confirmed officers would look into including the topic of demand for Park Homes in the Stratic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). The Planning Manager (Policy) confirmed that officers had written to a lot of the existing park home providers and to national providers and agreed to forward the list to Members. She explained that a balance was needed to ensure new park home provision on existing caravan parks would not negatively impact tourist accommodation provision on the Isle of Sheppey.

The Planning Manager (Policy) reported that some of the sites put forward within the SPD, such as the Rainbow Homes site, were currently not viable. However, officers would not be re-writing the SPD, but would update the relevant Policy within the Local Plan, and highlight any risks regarding densities. The Planning Manager (Policy) clarified that if employment sites allocated for housing were in the Council's Local Plan, the loss of employment would be accounted for. If they were not allocated then that loss of employment would need to be replaced elsewhere in the borough.

The Planning Manager (Policy) asked that if Members were aware of any additional sites available they informed officers by Friday 21 March 2025. She reminded Members that sites could still come forward as planning applications or windfall sites.

Recommended:

- (1) ***That the update report on the Call for Sites 2024 and the progress being made on the Housing Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) be noted.***

747 Water Cycle Study: Update Report

The Principal Planner (Policy) introduced the report which provided an update on the Water Cycle Study, a joint study between Swale and Medway Councils, which formed part of the non-statutory evidence base for the Local Plan. The report set out the headline findings of Phase 1 (to look at background data and evidence and the local situations, providing high level policy input). However, due to delays in receiving available data and other issues, as set-out in the report, the Water Cycle Study was not yet finalised.

The Chair invited comments from Members, and points raised included:

- This was an important piece of work which painted a 'bleak' picture on what Swale could support in terms of water;
- needed to explore how to change residents' habits to lower their water consumption;
- the nutrients within the water supply were an important piece of work that needed to be provided as well;
- sought assurance that the Council were liaising with water providers for the whole of Swale;
- a strong report but concerned that officers had not been able to progress to Phases II and III, could an interim report be provided and published?;
- residents needed to understand where their water came from and the impact new developments had on it;
- wastewater and sewage in Swale were already at capacity and the ramifications on the Council's Local Plan were enormous;
- the cost of improving the infrastructure of water provision was huge;
- engagement with the Environment Agency (EA) was crucial; and
- asked that the study be published prior to the decision on the Highsted Park Inquiry which was due in July 2025.

In response, the Principal Planner (Policy) assured Members that whilst they were working jointly on the study with Medway, officers would liaise separately with water providers who delivered and treated water across the borough. She considered the study was not currently to an adequate standard to be used as evidence to inform the Council's Local Plan or to be published on the Council's website. The Principal Planner (Policy) said the study provided a lot of useful information for discussions with the water companies. With regard to the modelling, this was dependent on the data available, which in turn depended on the permits issued by the EA for the wastewater treatment works, which currently did not include permits for phosphate and nitrate levels. The EA had requested a more sophisticated modelling approach be used than that proposed by the consultants, and officers would be exploring this with the EA in the coming weeks.

There was some discussion about the funding for the project and the Planning Manager

(Policy) clarified that the budget for funding Phase I of the study had been fully spent on work to-date, but that there were budgets available to complete Phases II and III.

The Chair asked that the Phase I Study be completed and ready for publication by mid-May 2025. This was agreed by Members. The Planning Manager (Policy) stated that the planning policy team would use their best endeavours to achieve this deadline.

Recommended:

(1) That the Water Cycle Study update report be noted, and that best endeavours would be made to complete the Study ready for publication, by mid-May 2025.

748 Local Plan Review - Swale Important Countryside Gaps Review 2024

The Planning Manager (Policy) introduced the report which set out the findings of the Important Countryside Gaps (ICGs) Review 2024. She referred to the Gaps review summaries and policy recommendations set out on pages 22 and 23 of the report, Appendix I (Existing and proposed gap changes), and Appendix II (Swale ICGs Review). She highlighted that there was an error in Appendix I of the report on page 13 and page 38 of the study itself, showing a proposed gap in purple hatching. That map would be removed from the study before it was uploaded on to the website. Members were asked to note the findings of the review and the amendment to remove ICG SG4: Sittingbourne and the satellite village of Bobbing.

The Chair invited comments from Members, and points raised included:

- Considered it inappropriate to remove ICG SG4, as whilst it was close to the A249 the area had a very rural feel and considered the 'hatched' area should be included;
- the map for SG4 was incorrect as it did not show the development opposite Rooks View, Bobbing;
- there was a lot of green space provided within developments at both Tunstall and Iwade, could the ICGs be revisited once the developments had been agreed, and incorporated within the ICGs for those areas?;
- understood that some areas of the proposed country park at Iwade would remain agricultural, so it was 'countryside' rather than a 'country park'. Further detail needed to be included and explored for Iwade at SG5;
- referred to an error on page 49 of the report, the first line of the first paragraph should read '.....south of Bobbing' not Bapchild as stated;
- referred to pages 70 and 77 of the report where it stated 'Bobbing does not have a very strong individual settlement identity' and disagreed with that statement;
- there was a typographical error on page 48 of the report as the wording 'mature hedgerows and result in no views' made no sense;
- referred to page 54 of the report and the first photograph should refer to Barton's Point and not Sheerness Golf Course;
- the land within SG4 had not changed since it was designated so could not understand why the consultants were recommending that it be removed;
- SG4 should remain as an ICG otherwise there would be a continued corridor of housing from Key Street through to Bobbing and there was not the infrastructure to support this; and
- referred to pages 84 and 85 of the report and reference to the Spring Acres

development in Sittingbourne and requested that the wording be amended to make it clear that land to the east of Spring Acres to act as a buffer, would be a country park.

In response, the Planning Manager (Policy) advised that green spaces agreed as part of developments were not countryside in character but valuable open recreational spaces for local residents so would not be considered as part of any ICGs. She said that the location of the ICGs would be considered further at the Local Plan policy making stage. With regard to the comment about Bobbing not having a strong individual settlement identity, this was specific criteria in respect of the landscape character, not the identity people felt as residents.

The Head of Place clarified that whilst the report was suggesting the removal of the ICG at SG4 it was not saying the area should not be protected, but that it was more appropriate to be protected by another designation. The Planning Manager (Policy) said that national designations such as local green spaces might be considered more appropriate in some cases, and they also offered more protection than ICGs which were local designations. She confirmed that there was set criteria for an area to be designated as a local green space and SG4 would likely be too large an area to fit the criteria.

A Member queried how the lack of support for proposed boundary changes could be recorded, given that the report was 'for noting'. It was confirmed that Members could express concerns and caveats whilst 'noting' the report.

Councillor Mike Baldock then moved the following additional recommendations: That Members' views be noted that the Countryside Gap SG4: Sittingbourne and the satellite village of Bobbing should be retained.

That Members' views be noted that the SG5 at Iwade be considered further.

These were seconded by Councillor Tony Winckless. On being put to the vote the additional recommendations were agreed by Members.

Recommended:

- (1) That the findings of the Important Countryside Gaps Review 2024 be noted.***
- (2) That Members' views be noted that the Countryside Gap SG4: Sittingbourne and the satellite village of Bobbing should be retained.***
- (3) That Members' views be noted that the SG5 at Iwade be considered further.***

Chair

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