
Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 15 July 2025 from 7.03 pm - 7.35 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Monique Bonney, Hayden Brawn (Vice-Chair), Ann Cavanagh, Charles Gibson (Chair), Kieran Golding, James Hunt, Peter Marchington and Mike Whiting.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Billy Attaway, Natalie Earl, Joanne Johnson and Onawale Kuforiji.

OFFICER PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Stuart Watson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillors Simon Clark and Ashley Wise.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mike Baldock, Alastair Gould and Julien Speed.

1 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

2 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 March 2025 (Minute Nos. 742 – 748) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

4 **Local Plan Review - Timetabling and Way Forward**

The Planning Policy Manager introduced the report which set out the barriers to progressing the Local Plan in line with the current Local Development Scheme (LDS) and the options available to Members. The Planning Policy Manager highlighted the three previous decisions made in relation to the emerging Local Plan and said that the Highsted Park Inquiry had been extended to end on 31 October 2025, which meant there was a significant impact on completing the required work in line with the existing LDS.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, and these included:

- It was important the Council continued work on the local plan;
- the option of having a planning inspector visit the borough for a pre-discussion would be beneficial;
- reviewing the options and timeframes, option 1 was the most sensible one as the other options required more work, would cost more and created uncertainty;
- was the advisory visit from the planning inspectorate free?;
- was not convinced that the Highsted Park Inquiry would be finished by 31 October 2025, but important that the Local Plan work was moved forward;
- policy work could be progressed, but recognised any allocations would prove difficult;
- did officers know when the advisory visit would take place?;

- needed to ensure that any questions submitted to the planning inspectorate were the right sort of questions;
- any policy work carried out needed to have the wording carefully considered as it was clear during inquiry hearings that some current Council policy had not been specific enough;
- could officers gain legal advice in the early stages to check that options being progressed were the best options available to the Council?;
- needed to include enough time to make any changes following legal advice and for the working group to consider those changes;
- could officers provide an update to any policy relating to Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGS)?;
- SANGS had a lot of opportunities that were not currently being utilised and had a wider benefit to the borough, not just the area that was being developed;
- at what point were officers looking at viability work?; and
- could members have an updated breakdown of the progress of the evidence base?

The Planning Policy Manager responded to points raised about the advisory visit from the Planning Inspectorate and said that the visit would be free. However, any questions that were asked to the planning inspectorate needed to be in-depth and as detailed as possible to get as much information advice from the inspectorate as possible. The Planning Policy Manager said that the visit from the inspectorate could be organised as soon as possible as currently not many authorities were utilising the visits. She added that under the new system an authority was entitled to two visits from the planning inspectorate so, if needed, the Council could request another visit at a later stage if required.

In response to the workload and timescales of completing the policy work, the Planning Policy Manager said that the timescales were tight but the policy team was now fully staffed and hoped that the team could complete the extra work required. She noted that an update on the evidence base would be shared.

The Head of Place said that the advisory visit with the planning inspectorate could be actioned quickly and agreed that officers would look at all available options to ensure the members of the working group had the opportunity to view the questions being asked to the inspectorate before they were submitted.

The Head of Place informed the working group that officers had spoken to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) who had said that given the special circumstances of Swale, seeking legal advice on the approach and timings of the LDS was recommended.

With regards to the tight timescales and extra work potentially needed, the Head of Place said that officers had been successful in securing a grant from the government to help fund work required on the Local Plan. A proportion of the allocation was being held to fund up to six months of interim staff support, subject to the LDS agreed.

Resolved:

- (1) That the exceptional level and prohibitive nature of work required to meet the milestones in the current Local Development Scheme (LDS) be noted.***
- (2) That an advisory visit from the Planning Inspectorate be bought forward.***

Recommended:

- (1) That the Policy and Resources Committee agree to Option 1, as set out in the report, to progress the Local Development Scheme.***

Chair

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