

Minutes of the meeting of the **LOCAL PLAN PROJECT ADVISORY GROUP** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Wednesday, 10 July 2019 at 9.06 am.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor J S Back (Vice-Chairman in the Chair)

Councillors: E A Biggs
T A Bond
D P Murphy

Also Present: Mr K Gowland (Kent Association of Local Councils)
Mr R Green (The Deal Society)
Mr R Ralph (Sandwich Town Team)
Mr P Sherratt (The Dover Society)

Officers: Head of Planning, Regeneration and Development
Policy and Projects Manager
Principal Policy Officer
Senior Policy Planner
Senior Natural Environment Officer
Technical Officer
Democratic Services Officer

11 APOLOGIES

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors N S Kenton and S C Manion.

12 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4, Councillor D P Murphy had been appointed as a substitute member for Councillor S C Manion.

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

14 NOTES

The notes of the meeting held on 30 January 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chairman.

15 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Group's Terms of Reference were noted.

16 LOCAL PLAN TOPIC PAPER

The Group received a presentation from the Policy and Projects Manager (PPM). He advised that topic papers would form the evidence base behind the strategy for the new Local Plan. The papers would then be presented to the Planning Inspector as part of the examination process of the new Plan.

Members were advised that the Government had set a national target of 300,000 new homes being built every year for the next 20 years, a figure that could not be challenged. At a local level this translated to the delivery of 629 dwellings per annum which would be a significant challenge for the Council. Whilst housing was undoubtedly one of the most contentious elements of the Plan, it could create positive opportunities for improvements, such as employment and new leisure and retail facilities. It was recognised that more work needed to be done during the Plan-making process to identify viability issues, in particular where affordable housing could or could not be delivered. Whilst the existing Core Strategy (CS) had focused on population growth in Dover, growth in Deal and Sandwich had been constrained by issues such as landscape, access and flood risk. Alternative growth options would need to be looked at carefully with a view to sharing it out equally across the district, considering issues such as whether growth in urban areas should be higher and the creation of new settlements. The shortfall in the number of developments delivered under the existing CS had been largely connected to problems with developments at Whitfield.

Councillor T A Bond questioned the extent of development in Deal, raising concerns about Deal's infrastructure, including the closure of schools, an overstretched road network, an ageing sewerage system and power outage and waste recycling problems. He suggested that any areas of agricultural land that were not Grade 1 or 2 should be allocated for development. Mr Peter Ralph agreed that access and infrastructure were problematic, adding that local residents had genuine concerns about the adequacy of access at the proposed Woodnesborough development. He referred to two sites in Sandwich that remained undeveloped despite having gained planning permission some years previously. If developed, these sites would increase pressure on the local road network and education.

The Head of Planning, Regeneration and Development (HPRD) emphasised the challenge facing the Council in having to deliver 629 new dwellings when its growth strategy had failed to deliver the previous CS target of 505. The new figure was an assessed need based on the Government's standard formula and would be tested to ensure it was correct. Failure to meet the target could result in the Local Planning Authority (LPA) being placed in special measures. She agreed that infrastructure was crucial, which was why the Council was currently recruiting an infrastructure planner to lead on the Infrastructure Delivery Plan which would set out what infrastructure was needed, who would deliver it and when. The LPA had delivered around 40% housing growth in Dover against a CS target of 70%.

Mr Pat Sherratt supported the use of accommodation above retail units for good quality housing, and proposed that the Council should adopt national standards for flat conversions. The PPM clarified that only self-contained flats were classed as dwellings. He stressed that all sites that came forward would be thoroughly assessed to ensure they were deliverable. It was important not to lose focus on Dover, the principal town of the district which was in need of regeneration and employment growth. Providing employment opportunities and the appropriate facilities for people moving to the district was essential. The Plan would include an element for 'windfall' housing sites, but this needed to be proportionate.

The HPRD added that around 5% of sites would be 'windfall' ones. However, robust work was needed in order to be able to justify their inclusion successfully at examination. She advised that the construction industry had experienced a 60% reduction in capacity after the 2008 recession and was yet to recover fully. She advised that conversions from office to residential accommodation had slowed

down, and confirmed that national space standards did not apply to such conversions which were carried out under permitted development rights.

Councillor E A Biggs referred to the poor quality of housing in Dover and emphasised the need for new, well-designed housing. He agreed that viability was a key issue, particularly for Dover where land values were low. The PPM commented that work was going on outside the Local Plan process to develop good quality housing, an example being the Council's scheme at the former William Muge site. He confirmed that national space standards would be incorporated into the new Local Plan. He also advised that the Council's Authority Monitoring Report included details of all sites with planning permission and when they were likely to come forward. In respect of developments at Whitfield, it was confirmed that their viability would be re-examined and tested against the current criteria, in line with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requirements.

The HPRD commented that Dover was comparatively less viable than Sandwich and Deal, as evidenced by the fact that the LPA had been unable to meet the housing growth target of the existing CS. Southern Water and Affinity Water had been heavily criticised for not investing in infrastructure at Whitfield. However, the rules had changed on 1 April which meant that developers now had to contribute to the costs of providing water infrastructure upfront.

Mr Robin Green pointed out that concerns raised by community groups and others in 2010 about unrealistic growth targets had largely been ignored. In his view far more weight should be given to the opinions of parish councils, environmental groups, etc. The Chairman referred to the fact that temporary measures put in place at Whitfield by Southern Water had proved completely inadequate. He hoped that the recruitment of an infrastructure officer would help to avoid such situations recurring in the future. The PPM agreed that engagement with the towns and parishes was crucial which was why there would be a meeting with them on 25 July. He advised that Southern Water was now subject to much more scrutiny and, as a result, was engaging more with the LPA.

It was agreed that the report be noted.

17 UPDATE ON LOCAL PLAN

The Principal Policy Officer advised that most of the work on the land availability assessment had been completed. The team had sifted through 500 sites, and those remaining would be brought to the Project Advisory Group in August. Consultants were working on the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and particularly whether 629 was an appropriate annual housing target. The results of this work would be brought back to the Group. It was hoped that the infrastructure policy officer and a senior policy planner (to look at gypsy and traveller needs) would be in place by the end of the summer. It was reported that the team was working closely with the Council's public relations team to decide how best to publicise and share work on the Local Plan to ensure that it reached as many people as possible.

It was agreed that the update be noted.

18 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings were noted.

The meeting ended at 10.27 am.