

Minutes of the meeting of the **LOCAL PLAN PROJECT ADVISORY GROUP** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Wednesday, 30 January 2019 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor J S Back

Councillors: N S Kenton
B Gardner
M J Ovenden

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

Officers: Head of Regeneration and Development
Principal Policy Officer
Senior Planner (Policy)
Senior Natural Environment Officer
Technical Officer
Democratic Services Officer

1 APOLOGIES

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors S F Bannister, D P Murphy and F J W Scales, and Mr Gareth Dodes (Dover College), Mr Mark Huntley (Megger Instruments Ltd) and Mr Richard Ralph (Sandwich Town Team).

2 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4, Councillor M J Ovenden had been appointed as a substitute member for Councillor F J W Scales.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

It was noted that there were no declarations of interest.

4 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Group's Terms of Reference were noted.

5 ORDER OF BUSINESS

It was agreed that the order of business be varied in order to consider Agenda Item 7 (Update on Local Plan) as the first substantive item.

6 UPDATE ON LOCAL PLAN

Members received a presentation on the process involved in updating the District's Local Plan. The Principal Policy Officer (PPO) advised that the first formal stage of the process involved gathering evidence and the preparation of a draft Local Plan for public consultation. This would be carried out in line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which set out who would be consulted and how. Representations and comments received during consultation would then

inform the second stage of the process which involved preparing a version of the Plan for submission to the Secretary of State for final examination before its adoption by the Council. It was anticipated that the draft Plan would be finalised in December, presented to Cabinet and full Council in January 2020 and then published for a consultation period of eight weeks.

The PPO advised that the structure and content of the draft Plan was currently being considered, but it would include a number of strategic policies that set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development in the District. It would also include a number of non-strategic policies dealing with issues such as transport and community facilities. The other major element of the Plan would be the allocation of sites for housing, employment, self-build, etc. The allocation would include existing sites plus new ones put forward by the public or identified by Officers.

In response to Councillor J S Back, the PPO confirmed that settlement confines would be reviewed as part of the update. Councillor B Gardner expressed concern that the process was being carried out in private without Member input or scrutiny. In response, the Head of Regeneration and Development clarified that the Leadership Forum did not have decision-making powers but was a discussion forum that helped Officers evolve options and ideas. Decision-making associated with the Local Plan process rested with the Portfolio Holder, supported by recommendations made by the PAG. The PPO added that Officers were in the process of surveying potential sites to establish whether they were suitable. Once completed, they would report their conclusions and make recommendations to the PAG.

Councillor Gardner maintained that there had been less Member input during this review. Councillor N S Kenton agreed that there had previously been more Member input, with allocations having been changed as a result of Member and community contributions. He was concerned that the proposed consultation timetable would not allow meaningful Member and community input. He was of the view that many of the Council's Planning policies hindered the ongoing sustainability of communities as they largely prohibited the building of houses in rural areas whereas he believed that such housing would help to support the survival of local shops and pubs. In summary, he thought that there was a need to examine how and why sites were being allocated.

In response to Councillor M J Ovenden, the Head of Regeneration and Development advised that sites in the existing Local Plan would be reconsidered and only rolled forward if considered appropriate. Essentially, all sites would be considered, including those refused previously, existing allocations and 'opportunistic' sites. The PPO reported that the process of assessing viability was now much more stringent, as was the assessment of sites to establish that they were deliverable after infrastructure costs, etc were taken into account. It was likely that the revised Local Plan would be ready for adoption in mid to late 2021.

Mr Pat Sherratt stated that the Dover Society was very much in favour of converting flats above shops into residential properties. However, the Council had not adopted the 2006 Flat Conversion Guidelines which raised concerns that flat conversions in the District were not being done to a high standard. The Head of Regeneration and Development clarified that the Government had prescribed that national optimal housing standards could only be adopted by incorporating them into the Local Plan process. The Council therefore had no choice in the matter.

Councillor Kenton raised concerns that sites were being assessed against existing policies when those policies might be dropped or fundamentally changed as a result of the review. He questioned whether these sites were likely to meet future policies. In his view, this illustrated the need to get the public and Members involved in the process at an early stage. The PPO advised that the PAG would become involved once Officers had carried out their initial assessment and visited the proposed sites. These assessments would be undertaken in accordance with national guidelines and it was important to adhere to the prescribed methodology. It was anticipated that there would be five or six months within which to engage with Members. Consultation with the public would follow a set framework, in accordance with the SCI.

Councillor Back commented that many Members knew of potential sites in their wards. It therefore made sense to consult them early in the process as this would avoid the need to make changes to allocations later on. The Head of Regeneration and Development reminded Members that the timetable had limited flexibility. He clarified that sites were not being ruled out because of existing policies. He had no recollection of visiting sites with Members during the last Local Plan review, but recalled that sites, once identified and assessed by Officers, were considered at meetings using Google Earth.

The PPO clarified that Neighbourhood Plans were standalone documents that would be incorporated into the Local Plan. Individual Neighbourhood Plans would contain the relevant policies and site allocations.

It was agreed that further information was needed on how Officers proposed to engage Members in the review process, particularly in relation to site allocations.

7 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Members received an update on the Landscape Character Assessment (LCA). The PPO advised that the existing LCA had classified land outside the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) into twelve broad areas without consideration of the landscape condition of those areas. This time round the LCA was a much more comprehensive assessment whose purpose was to inform land-use planning by identifying and explaining the combination of elements and features that made the District's landscapes distinctive. The LCA was a working document which would be subject to ongoing review by Officers who were working with the IT team to get it online by the spring.

Councillor Kenton commented that the document was quite negative. He suggested that the LCA should indicate that development in the AONB was not ruled out per se but should be of high quality. The Head of Regeneration and Development clarified that the LCA was not designed to make judgements on sites but rather to draw out what made one landscape different to another. Its purpose was to enable a systematic and objective assessment to be made of a site. This LCA was much more detailed than the previous document and, as a result, would be more useful.

Mr Sherratt raised concerns about the number of trees that were being felled or left to die in the District's urban areas, particularly those along the A20 Townwall Street. The PPO agreed that measures needed to be taken to enhance the urban landscape, including ensuring that developers provided landscaping, planting, etc. in their proposals and maintained them.

It was agreed to note the Landscape Character Assessment.

8 UPDATE ON OPEN SPACE AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGIES

The PPO advised that consultants had been appointed to develop the Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategies. Mr Keith Gowland stated that he had known nothing about the meetings held with town and parish councils in January, and expressed disappointment that the Kent Association of Local Councils had not been informed given that it represented the majority of parish councils. He also requested that parish councils be represented at the steering group meeting on 25 February. The PPO understood that the consultants had principally been responsible for organising the parish council meetings, but undertook to ask the Principal Infrastructure and Delivery Officer to contact Members to explain further. She also undertook to ensure that invitations were sent to the towns and parishes for the Green Infrastructure Strategy workshop on 27 March.

It was agreed that clarification would be sought from the Principal Infrastructure and Delivery Officer regarding the arrangements for the town and parish council events.

9 UPDATE ON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS

The PPO advised that Ash Parish Council was developing a Neighbourhood Plan, and had commissioned a report that would indicate their local housing need. The report would be reviewed by the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) consultants and the findings reported to Cabinet. A formal response would then be made to Ash. The first workshop on the Dover Town Neighbourhood Plan had been held on 28 November and had been well attended. A neighbourhood planning training event for town and parish councils was being held in Sandwich the following weekend.

It was agreed that the update be noted.

10 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that there were no meeting dates available.

The meeting ended at 12.07 pm.