

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 13 MARCH 2012**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Mrs Blackmore (Chairman)  
Councillors Field, FitzGerald, D Mortimer, Paterson,  
Yates and Hinder

**129. The Committee to consider whether all items on the agenda should be web-cast.**

**It was resolved** that all items be webcast.

**130. Apologies.**

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs Parvin.

**131. Notification of Substitute Members.**

Councillor Butler substituted for Councillor Mrs Parvin.

**132. Notification of Visiting Members.**

Councillor Burton was present as a Visiting Member with an interest in Item 8, Neighbourhood Action Planning.

**133. Disclosures by Members and Officers:**

Members made the following disclosures of interest in relation to Item 8 Neighbourhood Action Planning:

- Councillor FitzGerald – Chairman and Trustee of Fusion Healthy Living Centre;
- Councillor Burton – Trustee of Fusion Healthy Living Centre; and
- Councillor Hinder – Former Director, Golding Homes.

Councillors Field, FitzGerald, Paterson, Mortimer and Hinder all made disclosures of lobbying in relation to Item 9, Community Development Strategy.

**134. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.**

It was agreed that all items should be taken in public as proposed.

**135. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2012**

It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2012 should be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and duly signed.

### **136. Neighbourhood Action Planning**

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Sara Hutchinson, Manager at Fusion Healthy Living Centre, Ellie Kershaw, Policy and Performance Manager, Sarah Robson, Community Partnerships Manager, Caroline McBride, Head of Community Development at Golding Homes, Richard Cannecot, Head of Regeneration at Golding Homes, Councillor Marion Ring, Cabinet Member for the Environment, Jackie Pye, Chairman, Bulk Buy Scheme at Park Wood and Jade Webster, Chairman, Parents is the Word.

The Chairman invited Caroline McBride and Richard Cannecott to give a presentation on behalf of Golding Homes. This detailed Golding Homes' involvement in Neighbourhood Action Planning following the Planning for Real process in Park Wood. As a strategic partner they had supported the process financially and additionally through staff involvement and consultation support. Members were informed that there had been 20 to 25 consultation sessions held at Park Wood.

The Committee were told that Park Wood was a priority area in terms of regeneration. It was explained that there had been significant regeneration in the area and the Planning for Real process had given the organisation an opportunity to engage with residents in a meaningful way and they had sought to build on this.

It was explained that Golding Homes had chosen to look at the whole of Park Wood and as a result the regeneration proposal was going to take place in 3 phases. Members were informed that Golding Homes had wanted to present the regeneration project to stakeholders and other parties. This desire had led to a recent four day exhibition. Golding Homes had used the exhibition as an opportunity to gather feedback from residents, completing 160 feedback forms. From this they were able to gauge whether the regeneration proposals were endorsed by residents. Mr Cannecot reported positive feedback in relation to the schemes design. Residents were said to favour houses to flats and the inclusion of external storage facilities with properties. CCTV was deemed to be important also.

Mr Cannecott explained that Golding Homes was focused on diversifying the tenure of its housing stock, that at present was mainly socially rented. Members were informed that if residents were living in an area they were happy they would be more likely to buy their property.

The Committee questioned the approach taken by Golding Homes with regards to setting time frames and informing residents. It was explained that in relation to the regeneration of Park Wood Golding Homes would not let areas of housing where residents would have to move after a short period of time. Residents had been informed on the entire regeneration project and the 3 phases involved so that there was an awareness of the larger plan for the area. A five year timescale was set. Phase 1 would be

completed by the end of the first year, Phase 2 in 18-24 months and Phase 3 in three years. Mr Cannecott explained that Government funding had disappeared after the initial engagement with the community but at the end of 2011 the situation changed which was why Golding Homes were currently in consultation with residents. The Committee was informed that the budget for the regeneration project was to be approved on the Thursday following the meeting.

Jackie Pye, Chairman, Bulk Buy Scheme at Park Wood and Jade Webster, Chairman, Parents is the Word sought clarification on rumours circulating amongst residents on the regeneration of Park Wood. These included residents being moved out of the area during the regeneration of the area, having to go through a bidding process to return to Park Wood and payments being made to residents for the inconvenience of being relocated. Mr Cannecott confirmed that these rumours were true. He explained that Golding Homes would not be seeking to recreate what already existed in the area. He informed the Committee that a need for 2 bedroom properties rather than the one bedroom flats that currently existed had been identified. The newly build properties would be let on an affordable rent which was 80% of open market rents rather than a social rent. He confirmed that this was in line with government policy. Ms Webster and Ms Pye raised concerns regarding this, explaining to the Committee that residents wanted to escape the poverty trap and support themselves and felt that this would be perceived badly by residents. They felt residents were being shown properties as part of the regeneration consultation that they would not be able to return to. Mr Cannecott offered assurances that properties would be ring fenced for the purpose of moving households out of Park Wood as part of its regeneration project and Golding Homes would try to find houses in areas where residents wanted to be. It was felt that the meeting was not the forum to continue the discussion and it should be continued by the Regeneration and Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee was keen to identify the successes of Planning for Real and the Neighbourhood Action Plan for Park Wood.

Councillor Ring felt told Members that initially £50,000 had been secured for Neighbourhood Action Planning by the Council for improvements to the area and £10,000 from the community chest which was specifically for residents and charities to spend in the area.

Ms Pye and Ms Webster addressed the Committee. They explained that they were keen to put themselves forward as representatives for Park Wood residents to engage with partners involved in Park Wood. Ms Pye and Ms Webster shared their vision with the Committee of making Park Wood and the facilities available to residents better with the aid of the many willing volunteers that they were coming forward all the time. Their ambition was to take over the running of Heather House at Park Wood. Sarah Robson, Community Partnerships Manager explained, in relation to Heather House, that there was to be a review of all community halls and areas that would be addressed would include community asset transfer and long term transfer. The Committee noted the invaluable offer of

volunteer time highlighted by Ms Pye and Ms Webster. Councillor Ring advocated the resident's vision and told Members that support was needed.

Ms McBride noted that the involvement of children had been excellent and Bell Wood School had been involved in making the model of Park Wood which was then taken out on road shows to residents. This was identified as a key part of the Planning for Real process and part of its success. Members questioned the involvement of children currently. Ms Pye and Ms Webster explained that children came along to resident's meetings at the Meadows Centre and Fusion Health Living Centre and Arts and Crafts classes for children had recently started at Fusion. In addition to this 'Walk Out Wednesday's' picnics continued which residents attributed to Jim Boot's work in Park Wood in getting people together. Members were informed that Ms Pye and Ms Webster were utilising Facebook to communicate with other residents and they had just started working with Sara Hutchinson the new manager at Fusion. Ms Hutchinson told Members that Fusion's youth cafe, held on Thursday evenings attracted 25 teenagers and there were plans to extend this.

Visiting Member and Ward Member for Park Wood, Councillor Burton, felt that there was a need to scrutinise the Council and understand why actions to address the resident priorities, highlighted in the Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan, had not happened as quickly as the might have. Members considered the various reasons for delays in action. It was felt that often the Council and partners went into the community telling residents what they wanted rather than asking residents what they wanted. Some Members felt that developers could often be slow to deliver on section 106 agreements that would provide improvements to an area. The Committee reasoned that the correct approach would be to secure funding and then go to the community and ask them what was needed, once there was an ability to deliver.

The Committee sought to establish the lessons that had been learnt from the Neighbourhood Action Planning Pilot Scheme at Park Wood and the Planning for Real process with a view to it be rolled out to other areas. It was felt that the 20-25 consultations that had taken place demonstrated the lack of action that had been taken. Members saw this as a negative outcome of the process rather than a positive one.

The Committee addressed the priorities identified by residents as part of Planning for Real and detailed in the Park Wood Neighbour Action Plan 2010-15. One of the less successful aspects of this process highlighted to Members was the way in which the priorities of partner organisations were addressed as part of this. Ellie Kershaw, Policy and Performance Manager, who had been involved in the consultation process with residents, explained that the process had been done backwards. When residents were initially engaged with the Officers involved went in with a blank sheet and asked residents for their priorities issues. It was only at the end of the process that the evidence based priority issues such as teenage pregnancy, mortality and drugs and alcohol were addressed with residents. Ms Kershaw felt that the approach failed to inform residents on

the clear parity between the issues they knew existed and the obvious links to partners who were attempting to address the same issues. Some Members disagreed, arguing that the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the resulting priorities for statutory authorities should not be dealt with by Planning for Real. They felt that that the process should simply be residents identifying the problems as they saw them. Ms Pye and Ms Webster informed Members that it was the way in which information was presented to residents by organisations that caused confusion. They often used complicated language and confusing diagrams when simple, clear information was needed.

It was felt that a more coordinated approach was needed. The Committee considered Maidstone Borough Council's role in the process going forward. It was felt that residents needed information and guidance as there was an obvious willingness from residents to get involved and improve the area they lived in. It was highlighted that Park Wood continued to hold Multi Agency Partners (MAPs) meetings and therefore communication channels existed which could be utilised.

Sarah Robson, Community Partnerships Manager felt that the Council's role was to help remove obstacles for residents so that they could have an empowered role in developing their own communities. She explained that the Community Development team could be utilised for this purpose.

Ms Pye and Ms Webster circulated a resident's newsletter to the Committee. Members felt that this was something that the Community Development Team and the Council could help produce. It was agreed that the format of a single, double sided sheet was something that could be progressed quickly. It was felt that it was important that all partners involved in Park Wood were represented on the newsletter. Mrs Robson confirmed that the Council could facilitate and assistance would be given with design and printing.

Ms Pye and Ms Webster highlighted the residents' fete they were organising. Members were informed that Councillor JA Wilson had levied the fee for the cost of the site to be used and Play Place were working with residents to help them obtain liability insurance.

Ms Hutchinson informed Members that Fusion's role was also one of facilitator. It was explained that Fusion would be used for the Bulk Buy Scheme in the summer holidays when access to the usual venue at Bell Wood School was an issue.

Members' questioned whether the lessons learnt at Park Wood would be taken on board before moving forward into other areas. Mrs Robson assured Members that they would be. She told Members any new model would include consultation with residents and key elements from the Planning for Real process could be maintained.

Miss Kershaw informed Members that the Council would be going back to residents to evaluate the pilot scheme in Park Wood. The Officer told

Members that she hoped that Ms Pye and Mrs Webster would be involved in the process as it was taken forward to other areas.

The Committee questioned the planned timescales in taking Neighbourhood Action Planning to other areas. It was confirmed that Shepway would be the next area but there were no timescales set. Members were informed that there was some budget to carry forward from Park Wood. Mrs Robson told Members that a piece of work would be completed within the current Municipal Year on this.

The Committee queried the Neighbourhood Action Planning training that had been cancelled in 2011. It had been offered widely to Members, Staff and Partners but had been postponed due to problems with the trainer. Mrs Robson informed Members that this would be offered again 2012/13. It was clarified that this was not training in the Planning for Real methodology.

**It was recommended that:**

- a) The Community Halls Audit report is taken to the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to address the possibility of communities running facilities like Heather House in Park Wood;
- b) Golding Homes and residents from Park Wood are invited to Regeneration and Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny to address the issues that arose regarding the regeneration of Park Wood;
- c) Golding Homes clarify with residents how they can access new properties in Park Wood;
- d) The priorities arising from the Planning for Real process be coordinated better when evaluating residents' needs and the overarching priorities of the partners involved;
- e) Assistance be given by Will Solley from the Community Development Team to Park Wood residents in producing their newsletter;
- f) Case Studies should be used to convey the successes achieved in Park Wood when delivering Neighbourhood Action Planning in Shepway. This should be done with the involvement of established residents' groups in Park Wood and should include Jade Webster and Jackie Pye.

**137. Draft Community Development Strategy**

Sarah Robson, Community Partnerships Manager, explained that the Community Development Strategy was out for consultation until the end of March. The document had been set around three priorities and against each priority there were action based outcomes.

Some Members were disappointed that as a Maidstone Borough Council the strategy said too little about what the Council would do, concentrating on Kent County Council and the Locality Board.

Members highlighted the information presented on Maidstone as a place. It was felt it read too much like a tourist brochure and should include the priorities and challenges faced by community.

Other areas highlighted included Community Commissioning, it was felt that this term should be explained and the section expanded further.

Where quantitative data was used it was noted that there was an inconsistency in the approach taken across the report. It was felt that the use of percentages could be misleading in terms of transparency and accessibility to the public. Members suggested that one uniform approach was taken.

With reference to worklessness, the Committee asked that youth unemployment be referenced within the document and addressed separately to include Anti Social Behaviour and how Maidstone hoped to address this with diversionary activities. Mrs Robson explained that the Community Development Team which included Community Partnerships and Community Safety would be less focused on sports and play activities in the future and would have the ability to develop a programme focused on this.

Members questioned whether homelessness should also be considered in the document. Miss Kershaw informed the Committee that this was already addressed within the Housing Strategy. Mrs Robson told Members that there was an opportunity to cross reference it within the document.

Members questioned how the consultation had been carried out. The Officer explained that the first stage had been to circulate the document internally to Parishes, staff and Councillors. The second stage had been to consult with the community and voluntary sector via Voluntary Action Maidstone. The document had been advertised to the public in the Kent Messenger and had also been taken to the Locality Board.

Some Members felt that with regards to consultation with parishes the consultation process had been too short as Parishes met on a monthly basis.

The Chairman invited Dr Speight, a member of the public in attendance, to speak. Dr Speight questioned the consultation process and the way in which the public had been consulted. Mrs Robson informed Dr Speight that the public had been consulted via the Kent Messenger, the Council's website and existing networks.

Dr Speight felt that the community had been excluded from the consultation process. He felt that there had been a lack of consultation with the public and it was made difficult for people to become involved.

The Chairman referred to Dr Speight's letter which had been used to lobby some Members. It was felt that it did not relate specifically to the Community Development Strategy but should be noted.

**It was resolved that:**

- a) The section describing Maidstone should be rewritten;
- b) Community Commissioning should be expanded and explained more fully;
- c) Data should be presented in a consistent way throughout the report;
- d) Reducing worklessness should include a separate section on youth unemployment; and
- e) Homelessness should be referenced in the report and cross-referenced to the Housing Strategy.

**138. Future Work Programme and Forward Plan of Key Decisions**

The Committee considered its future work programme and the Forward plan of Key decisions. It was agreed that that the final meeting should be to approve the Committee's reports for the year.

**It was resolved** that the Committee should approve its review report at the April meeting.

**139. Duration of Meeting**

6.33 p.m. to 9.08 p.m.