

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 12 JANUARY 2021

Present: Councillors D Burton (Chairman), Clark, English, Garten, Mrs Gooch, Mrs Grigg, McKay, Parfitt-Reid and Perry

Also Present: Councillors Round, J Sams, T Sams and Springett

284. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Munford and Spooner.

285. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Councillor Gooch was present as Substitute Member for Councillor Munford.

Councillor Perry was present as Substitute Member for Councillor Spooner.

286. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were two urgent items; Item 17 – Urgent Update report with regard to the Government Consultation and Item 18 – Discounted Battery Electric Vehicle Parking. The reasons for urgency were that the Government Consultation closed on 28 January 2021, before the next meeting of the Committee and that delaying a decision on battery electric vehicle parking charges would result its implementation after 1 April 2021.

287. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

Councillors Round, Springett and T Sams were present as Visiting Members for Item 15 – Duty to Co-operate.

Councillors Springett, J Sams were present as Visiting Members for Item 16 – Local Plan Review Update.

288. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

289. **DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING**

Councillors D Burton, English, Garten, Mrs Grigg and Perry had been lobbied on Item 15 – Duty to Co-Operate.

Councillors Clark, English, Garten, Mrs Grigg, Parfitt-Reid and Perry had been lobbied on Item 16 – Local Plan Review Update.

290. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

291. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 DECEMBER 2020

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed at a later date.

292. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

293. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

294. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

295. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Strategic Planning Manager explained that the Regulation 18 Consultation Responses would be presented to the Committee at its March 2021 meeting, due to the ongoing processing and analysis of the submissions received.

The Review of Building Control item would be removed.

The AONB Management Plan would be added to the work programme and reviewed during the agenda setting process.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

296. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

297. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

Item 18 – Discounted Battery Electric Vehicle Parking be taken before Item 14 – Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget Proposals.

298. DISCOUNTED BATTERY ELECTRIC VEHICLE PARKING

The Parking Services Manager introduced the report and stated that the proposed scheme was intended to increase Battery Electric Vehicle (BEV) ownerships and support the Council's low emissions strategy. The

discounts would be linked to cashless transactions processed through Ringo and PodPoint.

The Committee were informed that the discounts proposed were unsustainable in the long-term, due to the expected increase in battery electric vehicle usage particularly from 2030 after which new diesel and petrol vehicles will no longer be sold in the United Kingdom. Therefore, the discount would be reviewed annually. The 50% discount proposed would lead to an income reduction of between £3120-£6480 per annum. The number of transactions recorded under the scheme, if agreed, would be monitored and considered as part of the annual Fees and Charges review.

The committee expressed support for the concept of promoting increased battery electric vehicle ownership and the Council's efforts to improve air quality. However, it was felt that further consideration was needed to consider the discount proposed, with a view to increasing the discount. The Parking Services Manager confirmed that the implementation of any agreed discount scheme would likely come into effect after 1 April 2021.

RESOLVED: That consideration of this item be deferred, to enable the Officer to report back to the next meeting of the Committee with further information relating to the feasibility of free parking for electric vehicles.

299. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND BUDGET PROPOSALS

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced the report and referenced the Medium-Term Financial Strategy presented to the Committee on 8 December 2020, whereby the financial implications and budget gap caused by Covid-19 were outlined.

As a result of the Local Government Finance Settlement and the Chancellor's Spending Review, the Council's budget gap had been reduced from £2.4 million to £1.6 million but remained significant. The savings proposals outlined would enable the budget gap to be closed over the next three years. Those proposed within the Committee's remit focused on the planning service through Better use of technology and Service improvements, that would each deliver a £75,000 saving for future years by 2022/23 and 2023/34 respectively. The service improvements were explained in the context of the Government's 'Planning for the Future' White Paper, that aimed to streamline the planning process.

The Committee were informed that if the nine parking spaces in King Street were permanently lost to a further active travel scheme, the income reduction would total £26,000. Any proposals by Kent County Council would be subject to public consultation.

In response to questions, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement explained that whilst the £860,000 in Government funding was not ringfenced, it was designed to assist the Council in coping with the pressures arising from Covid-19 and would be a one-off payment. It was not intended to bridge the Council's budget gap. The £139,000

provided through the Local Tax Support Grant was also a one-off payment and would be used in lieu of New Homes Bonus.

The Director of Regeneration and Place confirmed that the exploit of synergies between the planning and economic development service areas had been examined but could not be achieved at the present time.

The Committee felt that further resources should be directed to the formation and strengthening of the Council's planning policies, including those linked to climate change. There were concerns expressed that the Local Plan Review budget was insufficient, with further funding requested. Reference was made to the projected savings figures outlined for future years.

RESOLVED: That the revenue budget proposals for services within the remit of this Committee, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be agreed for submission to the Policy and Resources Committee, subject to the following:

1. The expected £75,000 saving for 2023/24, shown in Appendix A to the report, be removed;
2. That the Policy and Resources Committee be requested to allocate £140,000 of the funding available from the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Fund for planning policy development; and
3. That the Policy and Resources Committee be requested to allocate the £139,000 in Local Tax Support Grant to the Local Plan Review budget.

300. DUTY TO CO-OPERATE

The Senior Planner introduced the report which provided an update following the Duty to Co-operate report presented to the Committee on 25 June 2019 and outlined the future co-operation arrangements proposed. The activities undertaken with neighbouring authorities to date were shown at Appendix 1 to the report.

Under the duty to co-operate the Council had engaged with a range of prescribed bodies to shape the draft plan. Future discussion would focus on strategic matters. The approach outlined to engaging with prescribed bodies considered the organisational structures and governance arrangements within non-governmental bodies. It was proposed that future updates from those engagement meetings would be provided through the Local Plan Review Update agenda item.

The Senior Planner highlighted the importance of recording progress on discussions, matters of agreement and disagreement and statements of common ground; the latter would be signed by all neighbouring authorities and where necessary, other prescribed bodies, to address key issues. The sign-off procedures proposed were referenced.

The Committee favoured an increased level of Member involvement throughout the process of Level 1-3 meetings was favoured to provide greater awareness of the issues being discussed. It was felt that a record of meetings held being publicly available would increase the process' transparency.

The Strategic Planning Manager explained that the Committee would be requested to sign-off the document at the Regulation 19 stage, after which the elected member in attendance at the Level 3 meetings would be expected to be available to be briefed of any ongoing changes.

The Committee felt that as well as the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee should be eligible to be involved in the meetings where appropriate.

RESOLVED: That the framework for future duty to co-operate activities, the sign-off procedure for future meeting minutes and the arrangements for statements of common ground be agreed, subject to the following:

1. Officer Duty to Co-operate meetings will take place in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee;
2. Member meetings would involve the Chair and Vice-Chair of both the Policy and Resources Committee and the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee, as required;
3. A basic record the meeting would be published on the Council's website;
4. Statements of Common Ground be held in draft form and then presented to the Committee when ready for agreement, with any urgent subsequent changes to be in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee; and
5. The protocol be re-presented to the Committee, to include the changes requested, for ratification.

301. LOCAL PLAN REVIEW UPDATE

The Strategic Planning Manager introduced the report and reiterated that the Regulation 18 public consultation responses would be presented to the Committee in March 2021. Around 3,000 submissions had been received.

The public consultation was due to end on 22 December 2021, however several requests to submit late representations were made, citing directly the increased prevalence of Covid-19. The consultation was then extended through the appropriate delegations, until 8 January 2021, with a statement and press release published in response.

The two proposed garden settlements of Lidsing and Heathlands were referenced; the Local Planning Authority had requested that the Council

also consider the land north of the A20 for the latter. From the 16 December 2020, the Government's new interim standard methodology was released, which reverted the Council's housing need figure to approximately 1200 per annum. Significant uncertainties remained, with the Government response to the 'Planning for the Future' White Paper to be released in the Spring of 2021.

The Strategic Planning Manager confirmed that the introductory wording within the Lenham Policy outlined the sites within the regulation 18 preferred approached document for that area.

It was confirmed that the June 2021 target date for Regulation 19 remained unaffected.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

302. URGENT UPDATE REPORT WITH REGARD TO GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

The Head of Planning and Development introduced the report, highlighting that the Government consultation on Supporting Housing Delivery and Public Service Infrastructure would occur between 3 December 2020 and 28 January 2021.

Specific attention was drawn to the new consolidated youth class, Class E, which included numerous commercial and service uses classes. Any properties within Class E could be changed to dwelling houses without requiring planning permission. The impact of Covid-19 on business recovery and online shopping was referenced.

The Head of Planning and Development highlighted that the government had tightened the prior notification procedure, with compliance to national space standards now required when converting a property for domestic use. Fire regulations would be adhered to, alongside building regulations. Permitted development rights would be extended further for buildings such as schools, hospitals and prisons, through the National Infrastructure Strategy.

The Committee expressed concern for those industries most affected by Covid-19 and the importance of ensuring that these commercial units remained available to aid in the local economic recovery. The Head of Planning and Development confirmed that whilst the government proposals included that developers would be expected to pay the Community Infrastructure Levy, the process for how this would be calculated remained unclear.

It was requested that the Development Planning Document for the Town Centre consider the potential impact of the development rights arising from those units within the Class E category.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and that the Committee's feedback be taken into consideration.

303. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 9.28 p.m.

Note: The Committee adjourned for a short break between 8.47 p.m. to 8.52 p.m.