

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT DOCUMENT TASK
AND FINISH SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY
21 FEBRUARY 2012**

PRESENT: Councillor Burton (Chairman)
Councillors English, Harwood, Paine, Springett and
Mrs Wilson

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

Resolved: That all items on the agenda be webcast.

61. Apologies.

Apologies were received from Councillors Ash and Fitzgerald.

62. Notification of Substitute Members

Councillor Gordon Newton substituted for Councillor Fitzgerald.

63. Notification of Visiting Members

There were no visiting members.

64. Disclosures by Members and Officers

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers

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

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

66. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 24 January 2012

Resolved: That subject to the amendment of Minute 19 SCRAIP Response on the Reference from Council to help protect the open countryside to read:

'In 2010/11 there were 707 residential units permitted compared to ten permanent and two named gypsy units'.

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2012 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and duly signed by the Chairman.

67. Cabinet, Council or Committee Report for Core Strategy: Targets for Gypsy & Traveller pitches and Travelling Showpeople plots

The Chairman welcomed Sarah Anderson, Principle Planning Officer, Flo Churchill, Interim Head of Core Strategy Development and Rob Jarman, Head of Planning to the meeting and asked them to introduce the item.

Sarah Anderson told members that the last Gypsy and Traveller assessment undertaken in 2005 was now out of date and that since it had been adopted the national guidance on planning for Gypsy and Traveller communities had changed. Miss Anderson explained that the new assessment outlined in the report and undertaken by Salford University provided a refined approach for assessing site based need, done principally by a household survey of the Gypsy and Traveller communities in the borough to understand who meets the planning definition of Gypsy and Travellers.

The Committee noted that there was 18 permanent pitches to deduct from the baseline figure of 157 contained within the report due to consent since having been granted.

The debate began with a query on whether the Development Plan Document (DPD) would set historical context as areas of Maidstone had records of Gypsy and Traveller settlements going back to the 17th century. It was confirmed by the Officers that the DPD would clearly state the historical context and this was a requirement of the guidance circular.

The Committee questioned if the site search was taking into account preference of site size as it had been expressed by the Gypsy and Traveller communities that they would prefer to live on smaller sites as larger sites could cause social problems. Officers informed the Committee that the Council was not restricted to one large site and that the targets could be met through several smaller sites and acknowledged that family size plots are often the most successful in terms of management.

Concern was expressed by Members that public perception was that once there are public sites that private site applications would disappear when this was not the case. Even with public sites, private site applications would still be received and judge on their merits accordingly. Officers reminded the Committee that although the provision of public sites would not preclude private site applications being made it would make unauthorised site easier to enforce.

Members asked if the call for sites to be put forward and the accompanying selection process would produce an audit trail. Officer told the Committee that the decision still remained with Members and that they would be provide with detail of the sites submitted and a mechanism for judging each site against the relevant criteria. The Committee agreed that the message needed to be put out to parishes, landowners and other possible stakeholders of the positives for public sites, along with a clear explanation as to why sites were needed. It was noted that this was the second time that the Council had asked for possible sites to be put

forward but that the difference was that this time the Council was in a better position with funding available. The Committee concurred that it was in parishes own interest to put sites forward to ensure that they had control and involvement in the process. Officers asked Members to be aware that it was unlikely that any site would score top marks in the selection process but that for some factors migration could resolve some issues for example noise and landscaping. A Member queried if quality would be considered as there were some site in Kent that did not offer its residents a very good quality of life. Officers confirmed that quality of site would be taken into account and that the HCA had criteria that took quality of life into consideration.

A Member posed the question if it is in the public domain that the Council is looking for prospective site and had money to spend – how would value for money be achieved? Officers advised the committee that there were conditions attached to the HCA grant including a method of valuing sites and that the sites coming forward would probably be unsuitable for residential use.

Resolved that:

- a) The process of requesting sites to be put forward be supported by a clear and transparent explanation as to why we are looking for sites and circulated to relevant stakeholders.

One avenue for this being the Parish liaison day 5th March

- b) The Committee would like to reaffirm that it has a concern about the internal cohesion of the sites as small communities and therefore site size should be taken into consideration in the selection process.

68. Future Work Programme

The Performance & Scrutiny Officer updated the Committee on the forward plan, informing them that the publication version of the Core Strategy was not due to Cabinet until June 2012. The Committee requested that the item on the Parking Strategy be moved forward

It was suggested by a Member that it would be prudent for the Committee to hear an update on the Water Cycle Strategy as it was considered a critical issue for the borough. Councillor Harwood informed the committee that the latest data may be worse than expected and needs to be considered. The Committee requested an Officer Update on the Water Cycle Strategy before the end of the munispile year.

The Committee noted that an update was expected on the position or release of the National Draft Planning Policy Framework guidance in March and requested an update when more information was available.