

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING, INFRASTRUCTURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 6 SEPTEMBER 2023

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillor Mrs Blackmore (Chairman), Cleator, Conyard, English, Mrs Grigg, Hastie, Jones, McKenna and Trzebinski
Cabinet Members:	Councillor Paul Cooper, Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development
Visiting Members:	Councillors Harwood, Jeffery and Russell.

32. APOLOGIES OF ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kimmance and Spooner.

33. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following Substitute Members were noted:

- Councillor English for Councillor Kimmance.
- Councillor Hastie for Councillor Spooner.

34. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

35. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

The following Visiting Members were present for Item 13 – Kent Minerals and Waste Plan Review – MBC Response.

- Councillor Harwood
- Councillor Jeffery
- Councillor Russell

36. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

37. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

The following Councillors stated that had been lobbied on Item 13 – Kent Minerals and Waste Plan Review – MBC Response.

- Councillor Blackmore
- Councillor Cleator

- Councillor Conyard
- Councillor English
- Councillor Grigg
- Councillor Hastie
- Councillor Jones
- Councillor McKenna

38. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

39. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 JULY 2023

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed.

40. FORWARD PLAN RELATING TO THE COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan relating to the Committee's Terms of Reference be noted.

41. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman stated that Item 13 – Kent Minerals and Waste Plan Review – MBC Response would be taken before Item 10 – 1st Quarter Financial Update & Performance Monitoring Report to allow the local residents in attendance for the item to address the Committee.

42. KENT MINERALS AND WASTE PLAN REVIEW - MBC RESPONSE

Kimmy Milham, Sandra Manser and Rachel Rodwell addressed the Committee as Local Residents.

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development introduced the report, stating that the response attached at appendix 1 had been submitted provisionally to Kent County Council's (KCC) Kent Minerals and Waste Plan 2013-2030 Regulation 18 consultation, due to the 25 July 2023 deadline, and was subject to ratification by the Committee. The Council was a statutory consultee, and that the two main issues to address in the response were the extension of Hermitage quarry and the demand for soft sands in construction.

The Cabinet Member stated that as no other sites had been submitted during KCC's call for sites process, which would leave a shortfall of materials that were required for construction purposes, KCC had little choice but to put the site forward as an allocation. It was stated that the proposal was not ideal but was the best solution and that it was possible for maximum mitigation to be achieved through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It was stated that there would be increased environmental and ecological harm caused by transporting materials from an alternative site, or from permission being given to build another quarry elsewhere.

During the debate, several Members of the Committee expressed that the draft response at appendix 1 to the report did not sufficiently outline the effects of the

proposal. This included the loss of ancient woodland which could not be replaced, the harm and impact to biodiversity from the proposal, and that KCC had not provided the evidence to support that the proposal fell within the exceptional circumstances as outlined in the NPPF guidance. There were also concerns that the proposal could lead to increased housing developments on Hermitage Lane once the Ancient Woodland was removed.

In response to questions on the response attached at appendix 1 to the report, the Strategic Planning Manager confirmed that:

- Officers had provided the parameters of what could be included in the response according to the NPPF and it was the Committee's decision to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development what could be included in the letter; and
- There was nothing to prevent KCC from accepting further representations whilst they were in the Regulation 18 stage; should KCC proceed to the Regulation 19 stage, further representations could also be received to the associated consultation at that stage.

The Committee gave consideration to recommending one of the following actions; that the response at appendix 1 to the report be amended, that an addendum be sent outlining the Committee's views, or whether an alternative letter should be produced and sent to KCC. It was noted that the response had been submitted on 9 August 2023, as opposed to the original 25 July 2023 deadline, following an agreed extension with KCC.

Some Members felt that an amended response would be the most suitable to strengthen the sentiment expressed in the draft response and highlight the matters raised by the Committee. Overall, it was felt that the response should be withdrawn and a second response sent in its place using the wording of the Woodland Trust, to outline that the proposal could not be supported.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET MEMBER:

1. That the letter be withdrawn, and a new letter sent in its place using the wording provided by the Woodland Trust of 'given an unacceptable loss of habitat, Maidstone Borough Council are unable to support the proposed quarry extension.'

Note: Councillor Hastie left the meeting after the item's conclusion, at 7.40 p.m.

43. **1ST QUARTER FINANCIAL UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT**

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development introduced the report and stated that:

- There was a £62,000 revenue underspend relating to the Committee's remit, but that the end of year position was a projected £50,000 overspend. The underspend was mainly due to less planning applications (major) being submitted, with it noted that this would likely change in the next municipal year should the Local Plan be adopted;

- The Council had a net overspend of £300,000 for the financial year, and that an overspend of £800,000 was being offset by underspends elsewhere in the budget;
- Capital expenditure had been minimal, and focused mainly on the development of the Town Centre Strategy;
- Two Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had not met their targets, but that these would continue to be monitored; 'MBC Success rate at planning appeals within a rolling 12-month period' and 'Footfall in the town centre'. An additional KPI to monitor empty shop frontages would be created, to ascertain if there were any other contributing factors to the footfall in the town centre.

In response to a question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that the data used to measure town centre footfall did not provide the reasoning for the visit, such as local or tourist visits, but that where visitors came from could be looked at. As part of the Town Centre Strategy, the Council needed to understand the purpose of people's visit to the town, so that this could both cater for and attract a greater number of people.

The KPI figures were noted.

RESOLVED: That the following be noted

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 1 for 2023/24, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified;
2. The Capital position at the end of Quarter 1 for 2023/24;
3. The Performance position as at Quarter 1 for 2023/24, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified; and
4. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund update, attached at Appendix 2.

44. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND BUDGET PROPOSALS

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development introduced the report, stating that the budget setting process was at an early stage and referenced the all-Member held in August 2023 on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and budget proposals for 2024/25- 2028/9. The proposed budget savings relating to the Committee's remit totalled £383, 000, through maximising the funding available and reducing expenditure.

The Cabinet Member stated that the budget gap for 2024/25 was around £900,000 and was projected to increase substantially in future years. The two key assumptions in drafting the MTFS and budget proposals were that:

- Council tax would increase by the referendum limit of 3%; and

- Fees and Charges to increase by 5% overall, in line with the increased cost of services.

The funding provided by Central Government was unlikely to address the budget gap, as 7% efficiency savings were required or services would need to be reduced or reviewed. Fees and Charges would be reviewed in the Autumn 2023.

It was stated that there was no firm assumption that parking fees would be increased but this could not be ruled out; expanding the customer base was being looked into.

During the discussion, parking provisions for residents and the future consideration of fees and charged as part of the budget setting process was briefly outlined.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That

1. The draft Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2024/25 to 2028/29, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved; and
2. The budget proposals set out in Appendix B to the report, be approved.

45. **KENT COUNTY COUNCIL LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN CONSULTATION**

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development introduced the report, stating that Kent County Council (KCC) was currently consulting on the first stage of its draft Local Transport Plan 5 (LTP5), with the consultation due to close on the 18 September 2023. The second stage would be expected in 2024, and would include details or proposed local transport projects, whereas this consultation was strategic in nature.

The Cabinet Member outlined the four areas of the LTP5 and the nine challenges put forward by KCC. The draft response at appendix 1 to the report included a rating of the challenges that the Council felt were most important.

In response to comments, the Cabinet Member stated that they supported the provision of as many transport choices as possible, and that they had asked for KCC's policies to be aligned with the Council's. The importance of greener alternatives was emphasised, but that these should be complementary of the existing road network.

The Committee expressed support for the proposed response at Appendix 1 to the report, including the link to the Council's objectives within the draft response. It was felt that whilst the LTP5's contents were supported and ambitious, there was concern over whether these could be realistically delivered by KCC, particularly in relation to public transport provision.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET MEMBER: That the response at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

46. **DURATION OF MEETING**

6.30 p.m. to 8.25 p.m.

Note: The Committee adjourned between 7.44 p.m. to 7.50 p.m.