

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Planning, Transport and Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 15 APRIL 2014

Present: Councillor McLoughlin (Chairman), and Councillors Chittenden, Munford, Ross, Springett, de Wiggondene and Mrs Wilson

Also Present: Councillors Mrs Gooch

117. THE COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER WHETHER ALL ITEMS ON THE AGENDA SHOULD BE WEBCAST

RESOLVED: that all the items on the agenda be webcast.

118. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Watson.

119. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

120. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS/WITNESSES

Councillor Mrs Gooch was present as a visiting member for Agenda Items 8 and 9.

121. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures.

122. 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.

123. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 MARCH 2014

RESOLVED: the minutes of the previous meeting were held over until the next meeting of the Committee so that further clarification could be sought on minute no. 115 Maidstone Borough Council Integrated Transport Strategy.

124. CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND DEVELOPMENT REVIEW OF PRIORITIES FOR 2013-2014

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Paine, Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development to the Committee.

Cllr Paine told the committee that over the last twelve months his workload had been dominated by the Local Plan. He explained that the new housing need figures had pushed back the timetable due to the need to review the supporting evidence base. However, the Plan was now out

for consultation and both the SHLAA and SHMA were complete and were due to be examined next year.

Councillor Paine informed the committee that a different approach was being taken for the consultation on the Local Plan as lessons had been learnt from previous consultation. It was explained that this involved conversing with communities in areas where high levels of housing had been allocated. However; one member raised concerns that the brief given to South East Design to carry out the consultation work was different to that Cllr Paine had described, and requested further clarification from the Cabinet Member. In addition the Committee heard from one member that they were aware of three landowners whose sites had been included in the plan for consultation but they had not been told that their land was included. As a result of this one of landowners concerned had received nuisance phone calls. The Committee stressed the need going forward to ensure that checks were undertaken to confirm the identity of the landowner and communicate with them accordingly to ensure availability of sites.

The links between the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans was debated, and the committee agreed that Neighbourhood Plans and the Local Plan should confirm with each other and that this would be mutually beneficial to both parties, as better links could impact on the five year land supply in a positive way. The Committee asked if this could be explored prior to the 2nd call for sites.

The Committee expressed some concerns about the use of agency staff in the planning department. It was explained to them that over the last year there had been some difficulty resourcing the planning department but following a recruitment exercise three officers were due to start at MBC within the month. In response to a question Cllr Paine told the committee that planning officers were currently in high demand but in the latest recruitment drive a market supplement had been offered. The Committee noted that work was already in progress to look at possible sharing arrangement of specialist officers such as conservation with other authorities in Kent, and requested further information about which specialism were being considered.

The Committee noted that the downturn in Park and Ride (P&R) patronage had continued this year but that the re-tender was nearly ready. Cllr Paine explained to the committee that he wanted the new service to be of benefit to commuters and that the buses would be re-banded and have wi-fi to allow working on the move. In response to a query about why patronage had dropped off in the last three years, Cllr Paine said he thought that the current service was dated and people could be put off using the service as at present the P&R buses got stuck in the same queues traffic as cars so the perception was that P&R would not save them any time, coupled with plenty of town centre parking. It was noted that the modelling proposed priority bus lanes in the Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) to combat this.

Concerns were expressed by the committee that the greenfield sites in the Local Plan were likely to be developed first and queried if these could be refused on the basis of the Local Plan. Cllr Paine clarified that at present there was no method for constraining development to on greenfield sites in order to use the brownfield sites up first. He explained that this was difficult as the council did not have a 5 year land supply however; he expected would be in place by March 2015 and this would help curb it. In response to a question about phasing development it was confirmed that this could be done but it was dependent on infrastructure but Cllr Paine told the committee that he was not confident this would give the type of control that the committee were seeking.

In a response to a question around the public gypsy and traveller site the Committee were informed that the original site had been found to be unsuitable and that a further site was being sought. Cllr Paine told the Committee that he was not in a position to provide further details at this stage due to confidentiality but suggested that the Committee request a briefing if the Committee wanted further information, the Committee agreed to request a briefing from the relevant officer.

RESOLVED:

- a) That Councillor Paine check and provide clarification on the briefing that was given to SE Design to carry out consultation on the Local Plan.
- b) That at the next call for sites landownership is carefully checked and the landowner is communicated with accordingly to ensure the availability of sites.
- c) That the committee is provided with information about which specialist roles (within planning) that are being consider for sharing with other local authorities.
- d) That at the next call for sites discussions with parishes and officer on neighbourhood plans takes place to ensure our land supply figures are complete as possible subject to further investigation.
- e) That the committee receives a briefing on the progress of the public gypsy and traveller site.

125. MID KENT PLANNING SUPPORT SERVICE AND PLANNING ENFORCEMENT PROCEDURES UPDATE

The Chairman welcomes Ryan O'Connell, Mid Kent Planning Support Manager and Jon Lawrence, Planning Enforcement Officer to the meeting.

Mr O'Connell gave a brief overview of the new shared service the main points of which were:

- That the new service including officers was to be based at Maidstone House and they would be employed by Maidstone Borough Council;
- That the new team was expected to be in place by May;
- That they were in the process of standardising processes but that the back office was not changing; and
- That the IT infrastructure was changing and that the deadline for the first stage of implementing the new IT system had been met.

After hearing about the new IT arrangements including technology that was to be introduced for officers undertaking site visits the Committee expressed concerns over being able to see actual plans. Mr O'Connell reassured the Committee that although officers would use tablets while on site, in the office planners would have two large screens to view plans and there was going to be an internal threshold for significant applications, which the plans for would be available in hard copy. In addition although the planning duty desk was going to be removed, gateway staff were to be trained to provide access to planning applications and plans.

It was explained to the Committee that the new operating model for planning support was designed to be paperless. This provoked debate about how this would impact on parishes. Mr O'Connell informed the Committee that they had already surveyed parishes about their ability to cope with the changes and that all of the parishes had email access but that the visual presentation aids available varied between parishes. It was explained to the Committee that a pilot was underway with parishes who were more technology savvy to assess the level of support parishes need to enable this. The Committee requested an update on the pilot once the first stage was completed.

The Committee heard how this was a new operating model that was not operating anywhere else in the country but if successful could provide the council with a commercial opportunity.

RESOLVED: That the committee receives an update on the paperless pilot with parishes for planning support.

126. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the draft future work programme and forward plan of key decisions. They noted that the additional dates that had been requested at the meeting on the 18th March 2014 had been added to the future work programme.

The Committee expressed some concern that the items schedule for the 9th June's meeting may need to run over two meeting so that they there was time for them to be properly considered. The Policy & Performance Officer agreed to raise these concerns with the Scrutiny Officer on their return.

RESOLVED: That the future work programme and the forward plan of decisions was noted.

127. DURATION OF THE MEETING

18:30 to 21:35.