

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 5 NOVEMBER 2019

Present: Councillor D Burton (Chairman), and
Councillors Clark, English, Garten, Mrs Grigg, McKay,
Munford, Parfitt-Reid and de Wiggondene-Sheppard

Also Present: Councillors Adkinson, Cox, Harper,
Kimmance, Perry, Purle and M Rose

67. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

68. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

There were no Substitute Members.

69. **URGENT ITEMS**

The Chairman informed the Committee that he had agreed to take two urgent updates relating to Item 17 – National Approach to Garden Communities and Item 19 – Town Centre Opportunity Sites.

70. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

It was noted that the following Councillors were present as Visiting Members:

- Councillor Adkinson who indicated that he wished to speak on Item 19 – Town Centre Opportunity Sites;
- Councillor Cox who indicated that he wished to speak on Item 17 – National Approach to Garden Communities, Item 18 – S106 monitoring Report and Item 19 – Town Centre Opportunity Sites;
- Councillor Harper who indicated that he wished to speak on Item 19 – Town Centre Opportunity Sites;
- Councillor Kimmance who indicated that he wished to speak on item 17 – National Approach to Garden Communities and Item 19 – Town Centre Opportunity Sites.
- Councillor Perry who indicated that he wished to speak on Item 14 – Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 – 2024/25, Item 15 – Protection of Greensand Ridge, Item 16 – Cil Regulation 123 List

Review; 2019 IDP; and Annual CIL Monitoring Report, Item 17 – National Approach to Garden Communities; Item 18 – S106 Monitoring Report and Item 19 – Town Centre Opportunity Sites.

- Councillor Purle who indicated that he wished to speak on Item 19 – Town Centre Opportunity Sites.
- Councillor Rose who indicated that she wished to speak on Item 19 – Town Centre Opportunity Sites.

71. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

72. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillor English and Councillor Munford stated that they had been lobbied on Item 15. Protection of Greensand Ridge Update.

Councillor Burton, Councillor de Wiggondene-Sheppard, Councillor Garten, Councillor McKay and Councillor Parfitt-Reid stated that they had been lobbied on Item 17. National Approach to Garden Communities.

All Councillors stated that they had been lobbied on Item 19. Town Centre Opportunity Sites.

73. 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.

74. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 SEPTEMBER 2019

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed.

75. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12 Jill Ducker presented a petition in the following terms:

Please do not develop the Broadway Shopping Centre into Housing

The presentation of the petition was recorded on the webcast and was made available on the Maidstone Borough Council website and can be viewed here <https://youtu.be/0imMEdEjitM?t=784> .

The Committee agreed to consider what action to take with the petition after consideration of Item 19. Town Centre Opportunity Sites.

76. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The following questions and supplementary questions were asked of the Chairman of the Committee:

Question 1 – Claudine Russell

What evaluation of the remaining capacity in each previously designated Rural Service Centre has been made, and is intended to be made, in this current ongoing Local Plan Review and what is the timescale for any new/updated evaluation given that the councils preferred options will be discussed in the near future?

Supplementary question - *How will this process be made public?*

Question 2 – Cllr English asked the question on James Willis behalf

Plans and discussions recently published for town centre sites have caused lots of interest. It seems accepted that one of Maidstone's biggest problems is creaking infrastructure. The expression "failing to plan, is planning to fail" may be appropriate, and I welcome getting the best for our county town.

With this in mind, looking more holistically in relation to the Maidstone Local Plan Review, what plans are there for a master plan of the Town Centre area?

There was no supplementary.

Question 3 – Lesley Robinson

Would the Committee consider adopting this revised recommendation:

The Maidstone West (Broadway Shopping Centre) planning guidelines be altered to reflect that:

- The maximum number of units on this site will be limited to 240 units.*
- The maximum height of any building on this site cannot not exceed 25m (the standard height of a 8.5 storey building).*
- All buildings on site are to have high architectural value, and the tall buildings over 6 storeys must be slender in form.*
- The war memorial will not be moved.*
- All buildings will be moved further back into the site, away from the Maidstone gyratory, to allow more space for landscaping along the frontage, and to widen the centre entrance by angling the apartments either side in order to creater a wider entrance and vista of the river Medway.*
- The part of the site directly adjoining the Maidstone Gyratory system and London Road/Broadway will be set aside to allow the Council to explore the opportunity to incorporate improved pedestrian, cyclists and bus lanes.*

The planning guidelines will be altered/updated by Maidstone Borough Council Officers and Savills in accordance with this recommendation. These altered planning guidelines will then be brought back to this committee for a final vote, given 4,500 residents have expressed interest in the design of this site through the 38 degrees petition.

There was no supplementary

Question 4 – Dale Nurden

*I ask the Committee to debate and then take a vote (by show of hands) on each of the five town centre opportunity sites **separately** please - rather than considering them as one item. I ask this as some of the site proposals appear less controversial (e.g. Len House and the Gala Bingo site), whereas others, like the Maidstone West proposal are very contentious. 4,500 have signed a petition that they strongly dislike the plans for the Broadway Shopping Centre. This shows this item should be discussed and voted on separately. Personally, I feel the height of buildings on the Maidstone West site ought to be limited to match its surrounding areas (i.e. a max height of 7 storeys). I also feel the number of units must be reduced to reflect the lower height.*

There was no supplementary

Question 5 – John Hughes

MBC is very unlikely to achieve a reduction of carbon footprint, improvement in air quality and protection of quality of life if, as the Local Plan Review proposes, the current high annual growth which is leading to traffic gridlock is increased by another 40% from 2023 onwards.

Given Maidstone's longstanding traffic problems of increasing congestion, delay and air pollution, rather than a 40% increase in housing target in 2023 and then continuing flat profile after that, would it not be sensible to plan for a series of steps in annual housing target to reflect the roll-out of discrete major sites, thereby giving some breathing space to allow a sustainable transport system to be put in place to support future growth?

Supplementary question – we think that in NPPG, paragraph 34, does allow LPAs pursuing Garden Community Centres to in effect step the profile of the development. And there are other ways which we have suggested that will allow you to do that. So why not take advantage of those provisions?

Question 6 – Peter Coulling

Will MBC give full consideration to the dozen legitimate proposals made to them by the Co-ordinating Team, via Mr William Cornall, that, if seriously deployed by MBC, could flexibly trim and shape annual housing growth from 2023 onwards to allow transport and other infrastructure a breathing space to catch up with the very unwelcome impact of past developments on current residents?

Supplementary question – *must disagree that one cannot do anything about Government dictats. William Cornall letter he states he does not have a mandate to revisit the twelve proposals. Would you give William Cornall the mandate to review the twelve sites?*

Question 7 – Cheryl Taylor-Maggio

Given that population growth, in-migration and housing demand are now significantly less than the assumptions on which the Government's housing growth requirements are based, would it not be sensible to build in flexibility to take advantage of likely reductions in Government housing requirements in the next few years?

Supplementary questions – *does that imply that MBC is happy to deliver the maximum number of houses using government dictats as cover?*

Question 8 – John Horne

Do you accept that air quality exceedances give a valid reason to constrain development until they are remedied, whether by technological improvements or otherwise?

Supplementary question – *I take it that means you are looking at it seriously and the Kent and Medway partnership and looking at the Pond Farm decision you are not just looking to buy your way out of it. This is something that you would subscribe to?*

The Chairman responded to all questions and supplementary questions. The full response was recorded on the webcast and was made available on the Maidstone Borough Council website.

77. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Strategic Planning Manager informed the committee that due to some changes to the planned timetable for local plan review it would be necessary to amend the work programme for the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

78. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

The Chairman presented the outside body report from the Maidstone Quality Bus Partnership. The Chairman highlighted that there were concerns about the early engagement of operators in planning matters.

RESOLVED: That a report on the engagement of bus operators in planning matters involving schools travel arrangements, new developments and the monitoring of conditions be added to the Committee Work Programme.

79. TOWN CENTRE OPPORTUNITY SITES

The Head of Planning and Development presented the report on the Town Centre Opportunity Sites planning guidance documents to the Committee. The item had been deferred from September 2019 to allow further consideration of the documents and the concerns put forward had been responded to in the report.

An urgent update had been provided that updated the Maidstone West document to reduce the height and mass of the indicative proposal and reduce the stated number of maximum homes from 281 to 230 homes. Any reference to relocation of the war memorial was to be deleted.

Stephen Pullen addressed the committee as a public speaker. Strong concerns were raised over the impact of a multi-storey block of flats in the area, including on the former Church of St Peter. Wider objection was also raised to the amount of development and need for infrastructure across the Borough. Questions over the transparency of Maidstone Borough Council acting as a master developer were also raised. The full address to the committee can be viewed online on the Council's webcast channel.

A number of Visiting Members addressed the Committee to raise their concerns regarding the Maidstone West document, particularly in relation to the Broadway Shopping Centre example guideline. As there were multiple guideline documents for different areas the Committee agreed to take each individually.

The Committee requested that the Len House document have references to an additional floor removed throughout the document, though it was noted this would not prevent an additional floor being acceptable.

For the Mote Road document the Committee requested a setback with Wren's Cross and asked for the wording to be toughened up by stating that tree planting would take place and using the words 'significant setback'.

In considering the Riverside planning guideline document the Committee debated the value in setting aspiration in the document, even though it was recognised that delivery was not within the Council's gift for all infrastructure. It was agreed that the document should be more robust in setting aspiration with the removal of contingent wording throughout.

The Committee considered the Maidstone West document and agreed that references to the Broadway Centre be removed throughout and that the petition that had been presented to the Committee be submitted as a representation on the local plan review as it related to the principle of housing on the site. During discussion the Committee debated the need for policy protection on the site and to consider the traffic impacts of Rocky Hill, St Peter's Street and the gyratory. This would be raised with the Highways authority as and when opportunities arose to do so.

RESOLVED: That

1. The following planning guidelines (dated July 2019) be approved, with the Head of Planning and Development being granted delegated authority to amend the "Role of the Planning Guidelines" section of each document, and to make the changes given below:
 - a) Gala Bingo and Granada House;
 - b) Len House, with all references to an additional floor to the building, including rooftop extensions, being removed throughout the document;
 - c) Mote Road, with the wording amended to include a setback with Wren's Cross and to be toughened up by stating that tree planting would take place and using the words 'significant setback'
2. The Maidstone West (Broadway Shopping Centre) planning guidelines be approved subject to all references to the Broadway Shopping Centre, including relocation of the war memorial being removed throughout, with the Head of Planning and Development being granted delegated authority to amend the "Role of the Planning Guidelines" section.
3. The Maidstone Riverside planning guidelines be approved, subject to the removal of contingent words in relation to infrastructure and public facilities throughout, and including a high level aspiration for a reduction in overall traffic movements along St Peter Street, with delegated authority being given to the Head of Planning and Development, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, and Bridge Ward Members to agree the final form of wording for the document.; and
4. The work on the town centre parking management strategy be accelerated, in particular, in the vicinity of Mote Road.

80. **2ND QUARTER PERFORMANCE AND BUDGET MONITORING**

The Interim Head of Finance and the Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer presented the 2nd Quarter Performance and Budget Monitoring report. As a result of a shortfall in planning application income, particular major planning applications, and to a lesser extent parking income there was forecast to be a £410k overspend by year end. Details of the planning income issue were being investigated with reconciliation of figures between finance and planning systems currently underway and a further update would be provided at Quarter 3 stage.

There were four targeted KPIs with 1 green, 2 amber and 1 red. The red target was for planning appeals success which was improving based on recent (3 month) performance. The Committee were updated on the number of enforcements, with 214 open cases of which 153 were pending

consideration. A comparison of figures was requested for the next report so that the Committee could put the amount of work in context.

The Committee recognised the size of the financial issue and requested that they were updated sooner than quarter 3 once the detailed reconciliation work was complete. The Committee considered what action could be taken regarding the shortfall with discussions on the way fees and charges were set, staffing levels and the reasons for the parking shortfall.

In considering the matter the Committee recommended that it be picked up as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy considerations.

RESOLVED:

1. The revenue position as at the end of Quarter 2 for 2019/20, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted;
2. The Capital position at the end of Quarter 2 be noted; and
3. The Performance position as at Quarter 2 for 2019/20, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the positions, where significant issues have been identified, be noted.

81. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2020/21-2024/25

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement presented the Medium Term Financial Strategy to the Committee. The approach was for a stand still budget on an assumption of a 2% council tax increase being agreed. The MTFS also set out adverse and positive budget assumptions.

The Climate Change work would be coming forwards to Policy and Resources Committee in April and would also need to be built in, there was an assumption on capital and revenue spend. The report set out proposed savings and any growth would need to be paid for.

Budget shortfalls, such as that identified in planning, would roll forward and would need to be addressed. The Council's approach was to look within planning first and then if the savings could not be found to expand the net further to other areas.

Capital projects that paid for themselves could be afforded and considered.

The Committee questioned the proposed 5% increase in parking fees and the need to consider whether that would automatically translate into a 5% revenue increase, especially given the current underperformance. It was noted that fees and charges schedule would be coming to the January 2020 meeting.

Continuing their consideration of the issue from the previous item the Committee agreed that the issue of planning budgets underperforming needed to be highlighted to Policy and resources. This was due to the view that sufficient savings could not be found within planning, and that the overall budget was not sufficiently elastic to take the deficit being rolled forward.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 – 2024/25 be noted; and
2. That the issue of the deficit in the planning budget be highlighted to Policy and Resources Committee with the view that sufficient savings could not be found within planning and that there were deep concerns about the elasticity of the budget to accommodate the deficit if it were rolled forward.

82. NATIONAL APPROACH TO GARDEN COMMUNITIES

RESOLVED: The Committee agreed to defer the item until they had received the Member briefing on Garden Communities that was originally scheduled for 12 December but would be postponed to a later date due to the general Election 2019.

83. PROTECTION OF GREENSAND RIDGE UPDATE

During discussion of this item the meeting was adjourned to the reserve date of 19 November 2019.

RESOLVED: That the meeting be adjourned to the date of 19 November 2019.

84. CIL REGULATION 123 LIST REVIEW; 2019 IDP; AND ANNUAL CIL MONITORING REPORT

This item was adjourned to 19 November 2019.

85. S106 MONITORING REPORT

This item was adjourned to 19 November 2019.

86. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 10.00 p.m.