

## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **STRATEGIC PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE**

#### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 10 MARCH 2020**

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

**Also Present:** Councillor Purle

116. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor de Wiggondene-Sheppard.

117. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

It was noted that Councillor Perry was present as a Substitute for Councillor de Wiggondene-Sheppard.

118. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

119. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

It was noted that Councillor Purle was present as a Visiting Member and indicated that he wished to speak on Item 16, Maidstone Local Plan Review – Feedback from the Scoping, Themes & Issues (Regulation 18) Consultation, and Item 18, Local Development Scheme.

120. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

121. **DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING**

Councillors Burton, Clark, English, Garten, McKay and Parfitt-Reid stated that they had been lobbied on Item 15, Lenham Neighbourhood Plan Regulation 16.

All Councillors stated that they had been lobbied on Item 17, Maidstone Local Plan Review – Progress Update and Next Steps.

122. **EXEMPT ITEMS**

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

123. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7 JANUARY 2020

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed.

124. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

125. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were seven questions from members of the public.

**Question to the Chairman of the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee from Mr Peter Titchener**

*'What are the main criteria by which sustainability is judged - for example, does the absence of shops, doctors and regular public transport make significant planned housing in small villages unsustainable?'*

The Chairman responded to the question.

Mr Peter Titchener asked the following supplementary question:

*'Can I ask whether the same conditions on sustainability will apply to the Gypsy and Traveller Community as much as to the settled Community?'*

The Chairman responded to the supplementary question.

**Question to the Chairman of the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee from Ms Anna Wight**

The Chairman noted how Ms Wight was not available to ask her question in person and as such he would ask it on her behalf and answer it in conjunction with the next public member question, due to their overlap.

*'October 2022 has been noted as the deadline for the final plan submission for the Local Development Scheme. Will there be a first round of initial sifting of those sites definitely likely or definitely unlikely to be considered, so that some of the applicants will receive information sooner than October 2022?'*

The Chairman responded to the question.

**Question to the Chairman of the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee from Mr Peter Coulling**

*'We understand that sites submitted as a result of the Call for Sites have been classified into green, amber and red, with red initially thought very unlikely to be selected. Apparently, the results of detailed appraisal for all sites will be released simultaneously; that is red sites at the same time as*

*green and amber. Why, therefore, cannot the detailed analysis for the red sites been done first so that, if they fail to meet necessary selection criteria, they can be declared as such, with clear evidence having been accumulated to support such declaration and to defend at any appeal?'*

Mr Peter Coulling asked the following supplementary question:

*'Why cannot the Officers be instructed to start with the red and knocking out those which clearly fail any reasonable criteria?'*

The Chairman responded to the supplementary question.

**Question to the Chairman of the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee from Mr Steve Heeley**

*'Question 11 of your Scoping Themes & Issues public consultation last year asked residents' for their views on preferred options for future patterns of housing growth.*

*Based on the summary of responses, a focus on Maidstone town centre and/or a dispersal approach across the borough were most favoured. Garden communities was the least favoured option. In light of this, why is this Council pursuing its own council-led garden community at the expense of focusing greater efforts and resource on regenerating and densifying Maidstone town centre as requested by residents in your consultation?'*

The Chairman responded to the question.

**Question to the Chairman of the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee from Ms Claudine Russell**

*'During our campaign we have sought advice from the Government and the then Housing Minister Esther McVey, along with Andrea Hall from development plans who responded saying, and I quote...*

*"I understand Maidstone Borough Council are currently carrying out a Local Plan Review, Scoping Themes and Issues Consultation. I would encourage you to engage with this process to ensure local views are heard."*

*The officers state in their report that MBC received a "substantial response" to this regulation 18 public consultation and that many of them were from Marden residents. People took time and care to respond to this consultation, responding in many different ways but with the overarching theme that they did not want Option C (garden communities).*

*Given this substantial response and the now elongated timescale for the Local Plan Review, I would like to ask this committee how you will ensure that these views of local people will continue to be taken into account in this review process and how will they inform your options for the spatial strategy for Maidstone Borough?'*

The Chairman responded to the question.

**Question to the Chairman of the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee from Ms Donna Greenan**

*'Could you tell me what steps Maidstone Borough Council have taken over the past year and intend to take over the next year to increase the proportion of affordable housing in the borough to meet the needs of local residents?'*

The Chairman responded to the question.

Ms Donna Greenan asked the following supplementary question:

*'With a large number of families like my own, earning local wages, living in private rentals faced with increasing rental costs, do the Council believe that making 85 affordable homes available in quarter three really addresses the local need?'*

The Chairman responded to the Supplementary Question.

**Question to the Chairman of the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee from Mr Robert Adkin**

*'Could you tell us how the Call for Sites assessment will remain politically objective?'*

The Chairman responded to the Question.

Mr Robert Adkin asked the following supplementary question:

*'So as this Committee is independent of the process, a Member of this Committee has recently been in communication with a number of our neighbours saying that Lenham is an obvious target for development, and refers to the fact that that is partly due to the independent nature of our ward Councillors and that no other political party sees much to lose in our ward, so I wonder in light of those comments that have been made to our neighbours in public documents, how do you feel about the independence of this group?'*

The Chairman responded to the Supplementary Question.

Councillor English, on behalf of the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, responded to the question.

Councillor Perry, Leader of the Conservative Group, responded to the question.

The full responses were recorded on the webcast and were made available to view on the Maidstone Borough Council Website.

To access the webcast recording, please use the below link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIUYATcsznk>

126. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

127. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Strategic Planning Manager introduced the Committee Work Programme, drawing attention to item 18 on the agenda – Local Development Scheme. It was confirmed that should the recommendations made be passed, the Local Plan Review Regulation 18b – Preferred Approached Public Consultation would take place in October rather than September, subject to the approval of agenda item 18 at full council.

A member item request was made to include a report, to review the feasibility of a petition that was presented previously concerning a 20mph speed limit on Hale Road. The request was made following a change in the policy and protocol of Kent County Council.

It was agreed that a report would be placed on the agenda, when feasibly possible.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

128. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

Councillors Burton and English presented the reports of Outside Bodies for which they act as Council representatives.

**RESOLVED:** That the Reports of Outside Bodies be noted.

129. 3RD QUARTER BUDGET & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2019/20

The Head of Finance introduced the report and noted how the report content was historical in nature, as it was originally intended to be presented at the cancelled 7 February 2020 meeting of this Committee.

In response to the concerns expressed and questions from Members, the Head of Finance confirmed that:

- The salary slippage seen within the report was due to vacancies being held open during the year, as not all vacancies were filled when the budget was set. Including the vacancies at the beginning of the financial year meant that funds did not have to be saved elsewhere;
- The Income shortfall would likely continue and worsen as the year end approaches. The Head of Planning Development Management had created a plan to address this in the next financial year;
- A small underspend for the Council was predicted in December 2019, however due to actions outside of the control of this

Committee, it was likely that the Council would break-even or have a smaller underspend than originally predicated; and

- The presentation of the figures shown was relatively recent, as it was previously under the remit of the Policy and Resources Committee, which would account for some of the confusion caused.

It was requested that the Head of Finance supply the Committee with the contextual background for the outstanding enforcement cases, which was previously requested. The Head of Finance confirmed that this information would be sent to Member via email as it was not available to hand.

**RESOLVED:** That

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

130. LENHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REGULATION 16

The Strategic Planning Manager introduced the report and highlighted the provisions for the Lenham Neighbourhood Plan within Maidstone's Adopted Local Plan. These included site allocations and the associated infrastructure for 1000 homes.

Lenham Parish Council had undertaken a second public consultation from 14 February 2020 until 27 March 2020. This had been facilitated by Maidstone Borough Council, with opportunities to provide representations to the independent examiner given, which are shown in Appendix 1.

The representations made include concern regarding the robustness of the evidence base used and the lack of strategy to deliver the infrastructure needed for the homes proposed.

The Chair of the Lenham Neighbourhood Planning Group, Sandy Mackenzie, spoke on the item, with the main points summarised below:

- Following recommendations from 2017, the LNPG had moved forward with the publication and consultation on the pre-regulation 14 draft, the regulation 14 draft and the regulation 16 draft neighbourhood plan;
- During the process we had consulted with, and taken advice from, Maidstone Borough Council Officers and have continued to do so;

- The Lenham Neighbour Plan Group was created to include the neighbourhood plan team and representatives of landowners and developers;
- In response to the publication of the agenda for this Committee Meeting, we have been made aware of the Council's draft on the regulation 16 neighbourhood plan;
- Despite the general support expressed for the Lenham Neighbourhood Plan, the work that would need to be undertaken to mitigate the Council's concern over the robustness of the evidence based used, would likely take us beyond the end of the public consultation period; and
- Given this, it was requested that the Committee instruct Officers to assist Lenham Parish Council to create the necessary documentation and to ensure that this would be shared with the examiner when possible, to be considered during the examination process.

The Strategic Planning Manager confirmed that Officers would continue to assist Lenham Parish Council.

The Committee expressed an understanding of the hard work undertaken by Lenham Parish Council in working towards the Lenham Neighbourhood Plan.

**RESOLVED:** That

1. The Lenham Neighbourhood Plan be generally supported, subject to the resolution of matters raised in the Council's representation (Appendix 1); and
2. The Council's representation on the Lenham Neighbourhood Plan, attached at Appendix 1, be approved.

131. MAIDSTONE LOCAL PLAN REVIEW - FEEDBACK FROM THE SCOPING, THEMES & ISSUES (REGULATION18) CONSULTATION

The Strategic Planning Manager introduced the report and noted that publication consultation on Scoping, Themes and Issues for the Maidstone Local Plan Review had taken place for 10 weeks between July and the end of September 2019. It was noted that over 550 responses and three petitions were received during the consultation period.

Within the response, there was a broad level of concern regarding the level of housing growth, in that meeting the housing need would need to occur through multiple approaches. Suggestions made included, the use of brownfield land for development, that any housing built should be accompanied with the relevant infrastructure and community facilities and that specifically transport infrastructure was of great concern.

In response to a question from a visiting member, the Strategic Planning Manager highlighted that Appendix 1 included the responses given by Councillors during the Consultation. It was confirmed that Councillors responses were given no additional weight than an ordinary member of the public. Responses from Parish Councils are attributed the same weight as an individual response.

**RESOLVED**: That the content of this report be noted.

132. MAIDSTONE LOCAL PLAN REVIEW - PROGRESS UPDATE & NEXT STEPS

The Strategic Planning Manager introduced the report and noted the diagram shown in section 1.4 which showed the categories influencing the Local Plan Review.

The Strategic Planning Manager chose to draw attention to the Call for Sites exercise that was undertaken to understand how the market would accommodate the significant uplift in the amount of homes required by the government. The report noted the ongoing work in the consideration of site submissions, alongside additional evidence, so approaches were identified to move forward. There have also been discussions with infrastructure providers to gain a greater understanding of their needs, alongside discussions facilitated with Kent County Council which concerned traffic modelling.

It was recommended that, the gap between the Scoping Themes and Issues Consultation and the consultation on a submission version of the Local Plan Review was such that, a public consultation on approaches to the matters that would be contained in the Local Plan Review should occur in two stages:

- The first stage of public consultation would possibly include gypsy and traveller growth. An independent study concerning this was ongoing. This was referenced in section 1.23 of the report; and
- The second element would occur as part of the February 2021 proposal and consultation process.

**RESOLVED**: That the content of this report be noted.

133. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

The Strategic Planning Manager introduced the report as a statutory document, which outlined the timetable for the future stages of the Local Plan Review.

The current version was approved in July 2018; however, an amended timetable was proposed to reflect the revised proposals including a two-stage public consultation review and information on the overall work programme proposal. Details on meeting the first milestone were shown in sections 1.3 and 1.4.



During the debate it was felt by some Members that the resolution of full Council, passed on 18 December 2019, to expedite the call for sites process, had not been taken into account in developing the Local Development Scheme. The Head of Planning Development Management confirmed that much of the response against proposed development was an inability of the existing road infrastructure to cope with increased demand. Therefore, the importance of a robust evidence-based approach to examining the proposed sites was necessary in order to determine planning applications properly.

A question was asked of the Interim Local Plan Review Director, concerning whether the resources needed to adhere to the newly proposed timetable were available. The Officer responded that the resources would be monitored closely throughout all stages of the process and that if necessary, additional resources would be allocated to fulfilling this timetable. It was also confirmed that should the timetable need to be changed again; it would be subject to the approval of this Committee.

Whilst many Members expressed a sense of unease with the proposed delayed timetable, it was felt that there were no other options than to move forward. Several members expressed their support for Option A for this purpose only.

It was suggested that the Committee be regularly updated, by Officers, on the progress of the Local Development Scheme.

**RESOLVED:** That

1. This Committee resolve to recommend to Council that the Local Development Scheme 2020 – 2022 be approved to come into effect on the 8 April 2020; and
2. Officers provide a short-written update at each meeting of this Committee, concerning any slippage and/or progress on delivering the plan on the timescale agreed, subject to its referral to Full Council.

134. DURATION OF MEETING

6. 30 p.m. to 8.30 p.m.