

## **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 new housing need figures had pushed back the timetable due to the need to review the supporting evidence base. However, it was noted that the Plan was now out for consultation and both the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) had been completed and would be examined in 2015.

Councillor Paine informed the committee that a different approach had been taken for the consultation on the Local Plan as lessons had been learnt from previous consultations. It was explained that this had 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 described by Cllr Paine, and requested clarification from the Cabinet Member. In addition the Committee heard from one member that they had been contacted by three landowners whose sites had been included in the plan for consultation. However, they had not been told that their land had been included in the plan. The Committee stressed that there was a need moving forward to ensure 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 were debated, and the committee agreed that Neighbourhood Plans and the Local Plan should conform 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 second 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 arrangements for specialist officers, such as conservation, with other authorities in Kent, and requested further information about which specialisms 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-branded and have Wi-Fi. 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 that people could be put off using the service as the P&R buses got stuck in the same traffic as cars, coupled with plenty of town centre parking. It was noted that priority bus lanes were proposed 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 until all the brownfield sites had been used. 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 this would be in place by March 2015 and that it would help restrain development on these sites. 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 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 provides clarification on the briefing that was given to South East Design in relation to the Local Plan Consultation.
- b) That, at the next call for sites, the Committee recommended that landownership be carefully checked and landowners be communicated with accordingly to ensure the availability of sites.
- c) That the committee be provided with information about the specialist roles (within planning) that were being considered for sharing with other local authorities.
- d) That at the next call for sites for development, outcomes from discussions with parishes and officers are linked to the work undertaken on neighbourhood action plans to ensure the council's land supply figures are as complete as possible subject to further investigation.
- e) That the committee receive a briefing on the progress of the public gypsy and traveller site at a future meeting.

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:

- The new service would be based at Maidstone House and officers would be employed by Maidstone Borough Council;
- That the new team were expected to be in place by May 2014;
- That they were in the process of standardising processes but 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 would be introduced for officers undertaking site visits, the Committee expressed concerns over members and customers 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 would be an internal threshold for significant applications, for which the plans 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 had been completed.

The Committee noted the new operating model was not operating anywhere else in the country but recognised that, if successful, it could provide the council with a commercial opportunity.

**RESOLVED:** That the committee receives an update on the paperless pilot with parishes for planning support in six months' time

126. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the draft future work programme and forward plan of key decisions. It was noted that the additional dates, requested at the meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> March 2014, had been added to the future work programme.

The Committee expressed concern that the items scheduled for 9 June 2014 may need to run over two meetings to ensure enough time for scrutiny. The Policy and Performance Officer agreed to raise these concerns with the Overview and Scrutiny Officer on their return.

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

127. DURATION OF THE MEETING

18:30 to 21:35.