
LOCAL PLAN PANEL

MINUTES of the Virtual Meeting held via Skype on Thursday, 3 September 2020 from 7.00pm - 8.00pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock (Chairman), Monique Bonney (Vice-Chairman), Alastair Gould, James Hunt, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Denise Knights (substitute for Councillor Eddie Thomas), Peter Marchington, Benjamin Martin, Richard Palmer and Ghlin Whelan.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Philippa Davies, Natalie Earl, James Freeman, Jo Millard, Jill Peet, Karen Sinclair and Aaron Wilkinson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Derek Carnell, Steve Davey, Hannah Perkin, Bill Tatton and Tony Winckless.

APOLOGY: Councillor Eddie Thomas.

65 INTRODUCTION

The Chairman explained that the meeting would be conducted in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panel (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No. 392.

The Chairman welcomed all Members, officers and members of the public to the meeting.

66 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 July 2020 (Minute Nos. 27 – 31) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

67 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

68 KENT DOWNS AONB CONSULTATION DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Planning Policy Consultant introduced the report which set out the review of the Management Plan and asked Members to agree the Council's formal response to the draft Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan. She explained that Management Plans were required to be reviewed every five years, jointly with the 12 other authorities in Kent that had AONB areas, and she highlighted the changes from the previous Management Plan in the report.

The Planning Policy Consultant said that the Council had commented on the earlier, formal draft document and advised that the current consultation sought further views before its adoption. She drew attention to the suggested response at Appendix II.

In response to a Member's question on whether the wording around the definition of 'setting' had changed, the Planning Policy Consultant advised that it was similar to the current Management Plan although she advised that the AONB unit had recently published a position statement on 'setting', outlining its interpretation when considering development proposals, and this could be viewed on their website. In the discussion that followed, the Member said that the wording was not strong enough to preserve the AONB as development could be built right up to the boundary of it. She added that the setting position statement was a separate document not included in the policy and she suggested that it should be included in the policy to be easily identified.

Members discussed the impact of polytunnels as referred to in the Management Plan on page 73 of the agenda and a Member said there needed to be a clearer position of expectation.

A Member said that biodiversity net gain must be achieved, and the Management Plan should be encouraging improvement, not just the maintenance of, biodiversity. He said there needed to be a policy to support all individual sites such as back gardens and roadsides. The Member said that overall biodiversity improvements on an acre by acre level, for the whole of the AONB, should be considered. In referring to 3.6 Sustainable development – principles on page 43 of the report, he said that a specific biodiversity enhancement policy should be added to the Management Plan.

A Member highlighted the contradiction of some of the responses in Appendix 2 which included information that did not support agreement with the question, whilst the strongly agree option was ticked, and he gave examples at questions 29, 53, and 57. He asked why there was no response to question 58? The Planning Policy Consultant said this would be updated and clarified that no comments had been received to question 58.

A Member referred to the wording at paragraph 7.4, Shooting in woodlands on page 85 of the report and said that it was poorly explained as it seemed to be encouraging the shooting of birds to control grey squirrels. She said that woodlands needed to be managed but shooting was not the only answer. The majority of Members agreed and supported a request for feedback to be given on this.

In summary, the Planning Policy Consultant agreed to update the response to include:

- More attention drawn to the impact of the setting of the AONB;
- more detail on the impact of polytunnels;
- reinforce the importance of biodiversity;
- update the response to tick boxes in questions 29, 53 and 57; and
- concern over shooting in woodlands.

Recommended:

(1) That, subject to any additional comments, the Council's response to the consultation on the draft Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan at Appendix 2 of the report be agreed.

69 SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY STUDY

The Planner introduced the report which outlined the need to provide a positive vision for the future of Swale and set out a strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development. He explained that the Settlement Hierarchy was reviewed to consider whether any changes were required as part of the Local Plan review and whilst a settlement hierarchy was not required by the National Planning Policy Framework, the identification of settlement tiers was a well-established principle of plan-making.

The Planner explained that a settlement hierarchy contributed to the formation of the settlement strategy by giving the most sustainable locations within the Borough, giving the best access to services and facilities, and it assisted officers in development management when considering planning applications. He said that no changes were proposed to the existing hierarchy.

The Planner asked Members to email any amendments to the settlement audit matrix as it was a snapshot in time and might not be entirely up to date.

In referring to the settlement audit matrix, a Member said that more detail should be included in services in a geographical area as some of these were limited. In response, the Planner advised that more detail such as capacity of schools or GP services would be included when the Local Plan was drafted, and the settlement hierarchy was a general overview.

A Member said that local Members' input was vital and suggested the report and Settlement Hierarchy Study documents be sent out to all Members to make comments.

There was a discussion on internet services and a Member said different levels of internet access connectivity might be received by different parts of a community, particularly in rural villages. The Planning Policy Manager said that Kent County Council had produced work on broadband connection in the county and it was a key piece of information that fed into the Infrastructure Delivery Plan work that was being prepared for the Local Plan review. She added that broadband speed was critical infrastructure, particularly for the rural areas.

Recommended:

(1) That the report and the Settlement Hierarchy Study at Appendix 1 be noted subject to the receipt of responses from Members by 9 September 2020, and be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning to consider the implications of any changes.

70 GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE STUDY

The Senior Planner introduced the report which set out the Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Strategy for Swale. She said that it was recognised as critical infrastructure for the health of Swale's residents, wildlife and habitats.

The Senior Planner said that the strategy looked at Swale's current infrastructure resource, green and blue infrastructure priorities going forward, the multi-functionality of green and blue infrastructure and the opportunities in Swale. She advised that the strategy would be part of the evidence base for the Local Plan review, would help to form policies for the emerging Local Plan and would be used to help determine planning applications.

Finally, the Senior Planner said many of the projects were long-term aspirations that would be delivered by collaborative working with a wide range of organisations and community groups through a variety of funding streams, as highlighted in the appendices to the strategy. She asked if any typing errors could be highlighted to her to forward to the consultants to update the document.

A Member asked how the aspirations in the strategy were turned into reality? In response, the Senior Planner said that there would be a lot of collaborative working with partner organisations such as Natural England, The Wildlife Trust, and Parish and Town Councils. She said that there was a range of delivery mechanisms. The Senior Planner added that it was always useful to have schemes in a strategy so that a bid for funding could be made when it became available. She highlighted that it was a long-term plan that could be delivered through different teams and services throughout the Council.

The Chairman praised the good work carried out in the strategy and suggested an action plan to deliver the aims within the next 5 or 6 years. The Senior Planner said that some work would be delivered through the Local Plan, and she would raise with members of the Green Grid Group the suggestion of an action plan at their next meeting.

In response to a Member's question, the Senior Planner agreed to include Marine Coastal Zones in the strategy.

A Member supported the inclusion of Milton Creek Country Park but highlighted the lack of smaller spaces such as The Meads Woodlands and Iwade Country Park. He also highlighted the lack of direct access from The Meads Community Woodland to Chalkwell as stated at paragraph 6.32 on page 331 of the report. The Senior Planner advised that not all spaces were listed in the report due to the high number of spaces the Swale area was fortunate to have and because of budget constraints but they would be included in the maps in the Local Plan.

A Member requested that the final report from the consultants be circulated to all Members.

In response to a question from a Member, the Senior Planner advised that, due to budget constraints not all Parish and Town Councils were consulted on the Strategy

but once agreed, it could be shared with local Members and would be circulated to Parish and Town Councils.

Recommended:

(1) That the report and the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Swale in appendices I, II and III be noted.

Chairman

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel