
LOCAL PLAN PANEL

MINUTES of the Meeting held Via Skype on Thursday, 30 July 2020 from 7.00pm - 8.13pm.

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

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Derek Carnell, Roger Clark, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor, Tim Gibson, James Hall, Angela Harrison, Ken Ingleton, Denise Knights, Lee McCall, Hannah Perkin, Julian Saunders, David Simmons, Tim Valentine, Tony Winckless and Corrie Woodford.

27 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2020/21**

Councillor Mike Baldock was confirmed as Chairman and Councillor Monique Bonney as Vice-Chairman for the municipal year 2020/21.

28 **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.

29 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held 9 July 2020 (Minute Nos. 734 – 741) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

30 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No interests were declared.

31 **GROWTH OPTIONS**

The Chairman said the recommendations would be considered in turn and he invited Members to first comment on the vision, as set-out in paragraphs 2.6 and 2.7 on page 6 of the report.

Local Plan Vision

The Planning Policy Manager introduced the report which asked Members to consider a draft Local Plan Vision, and the options for the distribution of future development growth requirements for Swale and the strengths and weaknesses of each of the growth options. She said that a Member steer was sought on the draft vision at paragraph 2.6 in the report. The Planning Policy Manager said that Local Plans must have a vision, and this was a draft vision, prepared by officers which included comments made at the Regulation 18 stage consultation.

Members raised points and asked questions, a summary of which is provided below:

A Member suggested the Local Plan Vision included wording to say that overall we would like the Local Plan to be acceptable and a fair and balanced Plan that delivered to all parts of the Borough. The Head of Planning advised that the vision was a narrative for the land use of the Borough over the Plan period, and was not sure whether that sentence was applicable, but said the wording could be used to imply that the benefits of development within the Borough should be spread across the whole Borough.

A Member said this was an opportunity to use smaller sites, and to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and the use of brown field sites. He considered brown field sites should be at the forefront and be used before greenfield sites. Developers needed to contribute to the needs of existing residents. A larger vision was required on highways for the future, and infrastructure needed to be improved generally.

Development Strategy Objectives

The Planning Policy Manager said that the Local Plan Review needed an overall strategy for the pattern and scale of development for the Local Plan period, up to 2038. She said there was a broad assumption that all the allocations in Bearing Fruits would be carried forward in the Local Plan Review. Since Bearing Fruits was adopted in 2017, specific evidence had been undertaken and completed, and the Council had also set-out its objectives in the Corporate Plan. The Planning Policy Manager said that a number of principles and objectives had been established which underpinned the Local Plan Review and she said there would be elements of each option that were interchangeable, which could result in Members selecting a further option with these elements. She said the focus needed to be on getting a high level strategy for the Local Plan Review, so that there was a sound Plan which would aid selection of sites for allocation. She said there was a common approach in all the options to develop brown field sites, within the urban areas, especially in the town centres. This would deliver around 1,500 of the 10,000 dwellings that were required. The Planning Policy Manager outlined the five options, as below:

- A. Carry forward of Bearing Fruits (Business as usual) development focussed on extensions to main settlements with a focus on the Thames Gateway area;
- B. More even distribution of the additional Local Plan Review requirement across the Borough's main urban centres and rural areas;

- C. More even distribution of the final requirements (Bearing Fruits and Local Plan Review) across the main urban centres;
- D. More of the overall Local Plan requirement at the eastern end of the Borough; and
- E. Focus on New Garden Settlements primarily located within existing rural area.

The Planning Policy Manager drew Members' attention to Appendix II in the report which set-out the indicative distribution of dwellings against Development Growth Option, and the report included pros and cons for each of the options. She concluded by saying that a steer was needed from Members on which option they preferred.

Members raised points and asked questions, a summary of which is provided below:

A Member referred to paragraph 3.10 in the report and asked for clarity on the definition of where rural areas started around Faversham and Sittingbourne? The Planning Policy Manager said that this was not clear-cut, but rural areas were generally classified as those parishes which did not form part of the main urban areas.

A visiting Member asked at this stage of the Local Plan Review how 'cast in stone' were these five options? He said that in some respects he considered an amalgamation of different aspects of the options might be a better route to take as the Local Plan was developed. The Planning Policy Manager said that a steer was needed, rather than specific allocation policy. Officers had used the information they had available to put the options into realistic categories. It was not about whether housing was put on brown or green field sites, and it was unlikely that there would be any combination of high level options outside of these five options.

A Member sought further clarification on the status of rural areas and how they were defined, and whether isolation and the ability to travel to urban areas was taken into account and how sustainable the area was? The Planning Policy Manager explained that there was an existing settlement hierarchy strategy in the adopted Local Plan and there would also be a settlement hierarchy in the Local Plan Review. In the adopted Local Plan the higher order centres were Sittingbourne, Faversham, Sheerness, Minster, Halfway and Queenborough and Rushenden. Below these were rural local service centres. As such, the higher order centres were the urban areas.

A Member considered an option should be chosen which had the majority of brown field sites. He did not consider any of the options were the right one, but that aspects of each one could be pulled out to a more preferred option. He went into some detail within the various options, including highway issues on the M2; lack of infrastructure; and lack of school provision in the Borough. He considered SE Sittingbourne new settlement proposals to be the best option in terms of being sustainable. The Member considered there should be a mixture of options B, C and E. He added that there were good aspects which he could pick out in all the options, but there was not a totally good option. He said that he would like to see details of what could work in each option.

A Member asked what percentage of windfall sites were appeal sites?

A visiting Member asked about the concept of evenness and considered there should be an element of proportionality relating to the population. The Planning Policy Manager explained that Sittingbourne was the principle town, then Faversham and Sheerness and therefore, the focus for populations within the Borough would reflect their current populations.

A Member raised concern with the high percentage of windfall sites, and whether developers would pick up on this, and he considered that there should be an amalgamation of the options. The Chairman said that the Council did not want to have the situation that had previously arisen where developers did not progress with building housing, and there was no pressure on the larger developers to develop their sites. More freedom for windfalls addressed the 5-year supply quicker, and windfall sites could provide short-term housing numbers. This also meant that more SMEs could be supported because they found it difficult to go through the Local Plan process.

A Member sought clarity on the future provision of a secondary school in Faversham, and also suggested there should be more flats above shops. The Head of Planning said that Kent County Council (KCC) would need to look at secondary school provision at sub-regional levels and not constrained necessarily by Borough boundaries. There had also been pressure within the Canterbury area for new secondary school provision and therefore a site might be appropriate within the Canterbury area to meet Faversham needs. These issues would need to be discussed with KCC.

A Member referred to the previous point made on proportionality, and welcomed any percentage increase to take into account the size of the town.

A Member considered this was a difficult debate for everyone. She highlighted the development that had taken place in the Thames Gateway with Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey taking the brunt of it, and with a deficit of infrastructure. She raised concern with land-banking and considered that, provided there was the back-up of policies, windfall could be a really useful tool. The Member considered 'business as usual' was not the right path to go down, and there should be an even spread throughout the Borough.

A visiting Member reminded Members that these were Central Government's targets. He spoke on the need for affordable housing in Faversham; improvements to the highway infrastructure; and said that the Borough needed to work together to make growth in the Borough viable.

A Member referred to option B at Appendix II and suggested an additional option be added by reducing the windfall percentage to 10% and the remainder split between all the areas except Sittingbourne.

In response, the Head of Planning explained that the windfall figures were what the Local Plan Inspector would look at, as evidence over the years of how many windfall developments had come forward. If the amount of windfall could be reduced, that would be helpful in terms of the examination as this would be

challenged by developers. He said that the reduction of the windfall element could be looked at. Small sites could be brought forward which would diversify housing delivery and bring in SME builders.

A Member considered that overall viability was dependent on the policies put into it, and sought clarification that a more viable choice of sites allowed for stronger policies, and a better impact on the whole of the Borough. The Planning Policy Manager said this was the case to a degree, and that site typology was crucial. As part of the viability evidence in the Local Plan Review, the consultants would look at site typology, characteristics of the sites and any mitigation measures and infrastructure provision.

In response to an earlier suggestion of adapting option B, the Chairman acknowledged what had been suggested and said that the views could be considered going forward. He stated that further options, beyond the five set-out in the report had not been assessed by the officers. He asked each Member their preferred first and second option choice, and the results are set-out in the table below:

	First Choice	Second Choice
Option A	2	1
Option B	1	2
Option C	6	0
Option D	0	4
Option E	0	0
Combination of B, C & E	2	2
None	0	2
Total	11	11

Recommended:

- (1) That Members' suggested proposed amendments to the Local Plan Review Vision be considered.***
- (2) That option C is the first preferred option and option D is the second preferred option and will form the basis of a development strategy for the Local Plan Review.***

Chairman

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