
PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION POLICY WORKING GROUP

MINUTES of the Virtual Meeting held via Microsoft Teams on Thursday 6 October 2022 from 7.00 pm - 7.40 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock (Chair), Monique Bonney, Alastair Gould (Vice-Chair), Mike Henderson, James Hunt, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Richard Palmer, Eddie Thomas and Mike Whiting (Substitute for Councillor Peter Marchington).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Flo Churchill, Eze Ekeledo, Kingsley Izundu, Kellie MacKenzie, Jo Millard, Jill Peet, Larissa Reed, Anna Stonor and Aaron Wilkinson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Tim Gibson, Ken Rowles and Roger Truelove.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Peter Marchington and Ghlin Whelan.

364 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

Not applicable as the meeting was held virtually.

365 MINUTES

The Chair asked that the minutes be deferred for consideration at the next meeting so that notes from the informal meetings could also be included. This was agreed by Members.

366 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

Part A Minutes for recommendation to Policy & Resources Committee

367 LOCAL PLAN REVIEW UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS

The Planning Policy Manager introduced the report which set-out the risks of progressing the Local Plan Review (LPR) in light of recent changes in Central Government personnel and delays with expected policy guidance at national level. She advised that it was recommended to delay the LPR timetable so that any formal consultation could take place when the Council had greater certainty about the government's direction of travel. She advised that detailed work on the LPR would continue with a view to being able to undertake the Regulation 19 consultation under the transitional arrangements once the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB) had gained Royal Assent. She explained that it would likely mean a delay to a Regulation 19 consultation of around 12 to 18 months.

The Planning Policy Manager spoke about the significant changes at national level and the proposed planning system which were put forward in August 2020 with the publication of a Planning White Paper. Subsequently, an alternative approach was followed which proposed changes to existing regulation, policy and guidance. The

prospectus of changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which was expected in July 2022 had not been forthcoming.

The Planning Policy Manager said that delaying the Regulation 19 consultation allowed for policy at the national level to settle down and avoid abortive work and allowed for consideration of longer consultation time frames. She assured Members that the commitment to producing a LPR remained, and officers recommended it be paused for the reasons set out in the report.

The Planning Policy Manager said that officers would continue to work on the evidence base, making sure it was up-to-date and proportionate to support a sound plan. Work was already underway to assess the policies and proposals of the adopted local plan for compliance with the NPPF. Officers would continue to keep a close eye on the LURB and other national policy changes, including new responsibility forthcoming from the Environment Act so that a revised Local Development Scheme (LDS) could be prepared and formal consultation and submission of the LPR could take place.

The Chair invited Members to comment. Questions and points raised included:

- Were other councils proposing to delay their local plans in the same way?;
- would the Council be at risk from speculative developments if the LDS was suspended?;
- supported the proposal as there was no clear direction from Central Government;
- considered the proposal was the right approach;
- agreed with the report and considered it was the Council's only option;
- what impact would the Housing Land Supply Position Statement have on the five year housing supply?;
- officers should provide further updates as they happened;
- supported the proposal to suspend given that the prospectus was still unpublished, and Government policy was unknown;
- if the Council agreed to pause would the risk from speculative developments increase?;
- the recommendation to pause was a common-sense approach;
- concerned that Central Government were unsure what direction they wanted to take so it could be some time before the Council had a Local Plan;
- Central Government had put all local authorities in a difficult position;
- disappointing but this was the best option for the Council;
- this was the only option for the Council;
- had already warned the Working Group at previous meetings of issues and said that until the Council had the evidence to press to a Regulation 19 the LPR should be paused;
- what impact would the loss of the LPR calculations have on the five-year housing land supply in terms of appeals?; and
- there was value in pausing due to a decline in housing needs because of increased mortgages and building costs.

In response, the Interim Head of Planning Services reported that she was aware of 19 other local authorities that had officially declared pauses or were withdrawing

their local plans for various reasons. The Council's position in respect of speculative developments would remain unchanged as the Council did not have an up-to-date Local Plan or a five-year housing land supply.

A Member sought clarification on what was meant by paragraph 2.4 in particular "*additional allocations to the west of Sittingbourne is likely to overheat the market and impact delivery*". The Planning Policy Manager explained that the paragraph highlighted the difficulties in trying to meet the local housing need using the standard method figure and provided context around the difficulties of identifying meeting the Council's housing need.

In response to a comment from a Member, the Chair advised that officers had been constantly collecting evidence and the statutory responses to the earlier Regulation 19 had been one of the main sources of evidence. The Planning Policy Manager said that whilst getting evidence was complex because of the interdependencies, officers had been gathering evidence since the Local Plan Bearing Fruits was adopted at Full Council in July 2017.

The Planning Policy Manager advised that the Housing Land Supply Position Statement was a snapshot in time and would consider whether or not it would be appropriate to include emerging allocations in a future version. She advised that the draft Housing Land Supply Position Statement would be published in November 2022, and she confirmed that a Member Working Group could be set-up to provide training and information on the figures and the Councils approach.

Recommended:

- (1) That the published LDS be suspended, and Regulation 19 consultation paused until the LURB gained Royal Assent.***

Chair

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