

## TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### PLANNING POLICY COMMITTEE

Minutes and report to Council of the meeting of the Committee held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Station Road East, Oxted on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022 at 7:30pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Sayer (Chair), C.Farr (Vice-Chair), Blackwell, Bloore, Booth, Botten, Gray, Jones, Lockwood, Prew and Steeds

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillors Allen, Crane, S.Farr, Gillman and N.White

**ALSO PRESENT (Virtually):** Councillors Moore, O'Driscoll and Pursehouse

#### **43. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 10TH MARCH 2022**

These were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

The Chair updated the Committee regarding the following two minutes:

##### Minute 275 – 2022/23 budget – Recommendation C

Details of non-householder pre-application fees had been agreed soon after the (10<sup>th</sup> March 2022) meeting and were now shown on the website at bottom of the pre-application advice request form. (The setting of these fees had been delegated to the Interim Chief Planning Officer and Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee).

##### Minute 279 – Planning Protocol

The Chair explained why it had not been possible to prepare a final draft Planning Protocol for consideration by the Committee for this (23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022) meeting. This had been due to other unforeseen work pressures, especially in pursuit of legal injunctions against unauthorised Green Belt incursions. The Chair confirmed that a revised Planning Protocol would be submitted to the Committee's next scheduled meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022.

#### **44. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 26TH MAY 2022**

These were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

#### **45. QUESTION SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER 30**

A question was submitted by Councillor O'Driscoll regarding the backlog of planning applications and associated staffing matters. The Interim Chief Planning Officer responded to both this and a supplementary question from Councillor O'Driscoll, the details of which are attached at Appendix A.

The Chair was then pleased to confirm that a Principal Planning Officer had taken up post earlier in the week and that a Senior Planning Officer would be joining early next month. She also advised that a limited number of householder applications had been contracted out for a period of six weeks to help clear the backlog.

## 46. COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL) WORKING GROUP - 8TH JUNE 2022

Before any discussion took place regarding the minutes of the Working Group's meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 2022, the following Councillors declared non-pecuniary interests:

Councillor	Nature of interest
Councillor Botten	Governor of St Peter & St Paul school, Caterham. Councillor Botten left the Chamber before any discussion took place.
Councillor Pursehouse	Member of the Blanchman's Farm Local Nature Reserve Management Committee. Councillor Pursehouse remained on-line.
Councillor Bloore	Council's representative on the Blanchman's Farm Local Nature Reserve Management Committee. Councillor Bloore remained in the Chamber.

Councillor Blackwell, as Chair of the CIL Working Group, proposed that its recommendations regarding the allocation of CIL funds be approved. This was seconded by Councillor Lockwood and approved by the Committee without further discussion.

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the CIL Working Group's meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 2022, attached at Appendix B, be received and the recommended CIL allocations in item 4 be adopted.

## 47. LEVELLING UP AND REGENERATION BILL

A report was presented which informed Members about the coverage of this Bill and the potential implications for the Council in terms of future plan making, development management and enforcement processes.

It was anticipated that key aspects of the Bill would be subject to future consultation and possible amendment prior to receiving Royal assent in 2024. Any additional resource requirements associated with new regulations would need to be assessed in due course. At the present time, there was little detail about how the proposals within the Bill would be implemented. The Interim Chief Planning Officer responded to questions and clarified that:

- the Bill was unlikely to weaken environmental standards or undermine the Environment Act 2021 – the objective was to simplify the process for presenting the environmental impact of proposed developments
- key elements of the Local Plan making process would have to continue until the relevant aspects of the Bill become law

- Parish Councils should continue to be encouraged to bring neighbourhood plans forward.

The Committee discussed the implications for the Local Plan making process.

In view of the likely changes to the planning policy / development management regime, the Chair proposed that a Planning Policy Working Group of four Members be established (2 x IOLRGA; 1 x Liberal Democrat; 1 x Conservative) to enable timely engagement with Members. The Group would have no decision-making powers but would enable officers to consult more effectively in between Committee meetings. It could also be asked to monitor supplementary planning documents that will be coming to the Committee. This proposal was seconded by Councillor C.Farr. Following a request from Councillor Pursehouse, it was agreed that the Independent Group could also be given a seat on the Working Group.

**RESOLVED** – that:

- A. the report be noted; and
- B. a Planning Policy Working Group be established comprising:
  - two IOLRGA Councillors
  - one Liberal Democrat Councillor
  - one Conservative Councillor
  - one Independent Group Councillor.

## 48. LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

The Committee was required to adopt a Local Development Scheme (LDS) 2022 on behalf of the Council. This was in connection with:

- (i) the ‘best case’ work programme issued to the Planning Inspector on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2022 (TED55) as part of the on-going Local Plan examination; and
- (ii) the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (Section 15) which required Local Planning Authorities to maintain such schemes.

A draft LDS was presented on this basis. The work programme referred to in (i) above set out, as far as reasonably possible, how the Council will seek to meet the Inspector’s requirements as set out in ID16, ID20 and ID21. The timescales for the individual elements were based on Officers’ understanding of the types of work being sought and how long these would usually take. However, as explained within the accompanying report, some timescales were dependent on the work of third parties which was beyond the Council’s control. Certain variables could also affect progress, including national policy changes and case law.

The Council’s current LDS had been adopted in January 2020. The proposed 2022 version reflected the impacts of the extended Local Plan examination period. The report also provided an update about the budget for the planning policy service.

During the debate, it was highlighted that certain tasks in the work programme had slipped passed their deadlines. The Interim Chief Planning Officer stated that these were ‘works in progress’ and confirmed that more detailed analysis of the status of each task could be circulated to Members without having to wait for the next scheduled Committee meeting. The Chair also advised that fall back positions for implementing the work programme would be discussed with the Planning Policy Working Group (Minute 47 refers).

It was confirmed that the emerging Lingfield Neighbourhood Plan was about to become the subject of a ‘Regulation 14 consultation’ once approved by Lingfield Parish Council.

The Chair was sorry to announce that this was Marie Killip’s (Strategy Specialist) last Planning Policy Committee meeting. The Chair thanked Marie for her valued services to Tandridge and wished her well for the future. This was echoed by other members of the Committee. The Chair also confirmed that two additional officers (currently interims in the Development Management Team) would be joining the Planning Policy Team and that the process for recruiting a Head of Planning Policy was underway.

**RESOLVED** – that:

- A. the content of the report be noted; and
- B. the Local Development Scheme 2022, attached at Appendix B to the report, be adopted.

#### **49. LIMPSFIELD CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN (SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT)**

The Committee was invited to adopt a Limpsfield Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (LCAAMP) which had been produced in partnership with Limpsfield Parish Council and Surrey County Council’s Heritage Team. The accompanying report also recommended minor changes to the boundaries of the conservation area and a renaming to ‘Limpsfield Village Conservation Area’.

The LCAAMP:

- fulfilled a commitment of the Limpsfield Neighbourhood Plan which had been ‘made’ by the Council in June 2019
- described the key features and historical importance of the conservation area, and how they can be preserved and enhanced
- assessed the previous boundary and recommended minor changes
- identified management actions to preserve and enhance the conservation area
- would serve as a Supplementary Planning Document to support and inform planning decisions in the conservation area in line with the Core Strategy and adopted Limpsfield Neighbourhood Plan.

The report also summarised the consultation process undertaken by both the Parish and District Councils which culminated in the production of the draft LCAAMP.

During the debate, Members acknowledged the hard work of all concerned which had contributed to such a high-quality document.

**RESOLVED** – that:

- A. the recommended minor adjustments to the boundary of the conservation area be made;
- B the name of the conservation area be changed from Limpsfield Conservation Area to Limpsfield Village Conservation Area; and
- C the LCAAMP be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document which will form part of the local planning policy framework for the Council to be used in the assessment of planning applications within the Limpsfield Village Conservation Area.

## 50. GATWICK UPDATE

A report was presented to update Members on the progress to date with Gatwick Airport Limited's 'Northern Runway Project Development Consent Order' (DCO) and other related workstreams. The report included reference to:

- GAL's indicative timetable of next steps following its statutory consultation towards the end of 2021 – this confirmed GAL's intention to submit the DCO to the Planning Inspectorate during the first quarter of 2023 (over six months later than originally intended)
- GAL's six-week public consultation (ending on the 27<sup>th</sup> July) regarding its updated highway design proposals
- the work to be undertaken by officers regarding the DCO process, both at the pre-submission stage and as part of the subsequent examination process
- work undertaken with the Gatwick Member / Officer Group to respond to GAL consultations regarding:
  - the Future Airspace Strategy Implementation (FASI) change proposal; and
  - the Gatwick Airspace Route 4 Option 7 Design Change
- a preliminary response to a GAL consultation regarding the way aircraft noise from Gatwick is considered in planning applications for noise sensitive developments.

The report also proposed that the Gatwick Member / Officer Group should continue with its existing terms of reference and membership (i.e. Councillors Botten, Flower, Gillman, Lockwood and Moore). In this respect, the Chair considered that a more comprehensive geographical representation would be achieved by the addition of an Oxted or Limpsfield Ward Councillor.

Councillor Lockwood advised that GAL would be engaging with stakeholders concerning its obligation to create a 'noise envelope' (applicable to all airports seeking to increase capacity) and that she had been invited to represent the various Gatwick noise management / monitoring groups (of which she was a member) on the GAL's Noise Envelope Working Group. She would therefore be inviting all Members to provide her with any relevant comments / suggestions about Gatwick for her feedback to GAL via that forum.

**RESOLVED** – that:

- A. the contents of the report regarding the progress made to date in the DCO process and other workstreams be noted;
- B. the authority delegated to the Chief Executive and / or the current Interim Chief Planning Officer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair, to respond to future consultations and other forms of engagement from relevant stakeholders at various stages of the DCO process remains as previously agreed; and
- C. the Gatwick Member / Officer Group will continue with its existing terms of reference and that its membership be increased by the addition of an Oxted or Limpsfield Ward Councillor.

Rising 8.40 pm

Planning Policy Committee – 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022 - Agenda Item 5**Question submitted under Standing Order 30 from Councillor O’Driscoll**

A resident of Tandridge has approached me and advised they have put in a planning application which has taken five weeks to acknowledge and is still 19th in the queue to receive a letter of acknowledgement at the time of submitting this question. I feel this is completely unacceptable as it gives our residents a lot of uncertainty around whether they can trust our planning department to deliver the best service for our residents.

Could an explanation be given as to why it is taking so long for Tandridge to process planning applications and what steps are being taken to reduce the staff turnover in the planning department?

Response from the Interim Chief Planning Officer

*To clarify one matter ...whether a planning application is submitted electronically to the Council through the planning portal, or as hard copy by post, the standard procedure in both cases is that an acknowledgement letter is sent out straight away. This letter contains a Council application number. The letter has also been recently amended to refer to the backlog of applications awaiting validation so applicants are aware of the current situation.*

*Unfortunately, the Planning Department’s validation team do have a backlog of applications awaiting validation. This is due to both staff changes within the Planning Department and the increased number of applications being received. Consequently, there has been a delay in sending out letters confirming (or not) that a particular application is valid and giving a determination date and this may be what is being referred to by the complainant who has contacted Cllr O’Driscoll.*

*Steps are being taken to urgently reduce the number of applications awaiting determination, including:*

- increasing the number of validation officers from within existing staff numbers in the Planning Department;*
- recruiting a new validation officer for which there is existing provision in the Planning Department staffing structure and budget; and*
- retaining an interim validation officer, pending the completion of training of transferred or new validation staff members.*

*In general terms, within the Development Management team over the last two months, staffing levels have improved. The number of planning applications being handled by individual planning officers has fallen sharply. This means that applications are being determined more quickly. While there are no reasons to be sanguine, the situation is steadily improving, both in terms of interim / temporary and permanent planning staff recruitment.*

*What this Council is facing, like other Councils across Surrey, is an acute shortage of experienced Development Management planning officers. Every effort is being directed at recruiting new, permanent planning staff, including new initiatives to attract potential candidates. Other short-term initiatives to reduce the number of applications awaiting determination are also being tried to make individual officer caseloads more manageable still.*

Supplementary question from Councillor O'Driscoll

It's really positive that we are managing to recruit more staff, but have we got a timeframe for the validation officers?

Response from the Interim Chief Planning Officer

*One is already in post – the individual was transferred from another position in the Development Management team in the last few weeks. There is one vacancy as a result of placing a former validation officer on a career path (planning assistant) who expressed an interest in becoming a planning officer. This reflects a wish to work towards 'growing our own' professional staff as much as possible and to encourage those who aspire to progress and become professionally qualified. So, we have this one permanent validation officer post to fill which is currently occupied by a temporary member of staff. With all the changes going on within the Council as part of the overall transformation project, I have discussed with the Chief Executive the desire to fill it with someone currently working elsewhere within the Council who might otherwise be made redundant.*