

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CRANBROOK & SISSINGHURST  
NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN STEERING GROUP HELD ON 25th  
NOVEMBER 2019

PRESENT: Cllr. Warne (in the Chair) and Cllrs. Fletcher, Hatcher, Kings and Pethurst, Annie Hopper, June Bell, Marion Cranmer, Liz Daley, Marcus Boret, Jeremy Boxall, Laura Rowland, Matt Warne, Tally Wade and Borough Cllr. Tom Dawlings.

APOLOGIES: Borough Cllr. Andy Fairweather, Borough and County Councillor Seán Holden,

Cllr. Warne read out the following statement:

Members are required to declare any interests, dispensations, predetermination or lobbying on items on this agenda. Members are reminded that changes to the Register of Interests should be notified to the Clerk.

Cllr. Warne declared an interest under the site assessments regarding site 122 which had been put forward by a relative.

Cllr. Warne, Annie Hopper, and June Bell declared a personal interest as members of the CVLT (Crane Valley Land Trust). Tally Wade and Matt Warne declared an interest as board members of the CVLT. Members of the various Advisory Groups declared an interest as necessary.

**Discussion with Stephen Baughen, Head of Planning Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Sally Marsh (AONB):**

Cllr. Warne explained that Stephen Baughen and Sally Marsh had been invited to the meeting to discuss how they see the NDP progressing and to what purpose.

A question was asked as to why such large allocations had been put forward in the AONB. Stephen Baughen explained at length the allocations process. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council had first looked at all previously developed land and sought to maximise development of these sites borough wide. They had also looked at Green belt sites. It was only after all other avenues had been explored that they had looked at sites in the AONB and those submitted in the call for sites.

He explained that the TWBC Draft Local Plan responses had now been received, including those from Parish Councils, Natural England and AONB. Although he had read those received from Parish Councils there remained approximately 800 representations still to be added. Stephen Baughen informed the meeting that land developers and promoters also had taken this opportunity to provide more detail regarding sites put forward. He hoped by Christmas all representations would be on the system and then officers will go through them. The Draft Local Plan objectively assessed housing need as set out by the Government through the NPPF. Sevenoaks Borough Council had taken out green belt land and fell short of the assessed need by 1,900 houses. Sevenoaks Borough Council, along with all councils, have a "Duty to Cooperate" with neighbouring boroughs, but it was questioned whether they had followed correct procedure. If their local plan fails or they do not meet need, they will need to start the local plan process again.

Matt Warne asked if TWBC would be moving to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Stephen Baughen explained that TWBC were currently undertaking an independent review on whether to stay with Section 106 Agreements or move to CIL. Many authorities do a mixture of both and in his opinion Section 106 Agreements worked well for the larger sites.

Liz Daley asked if a proposed allocation was for 20 houses and the development said they could get 26? He replied that if the site was allocated for 20 houses and the policy written, then the policy would need to be updated unless there were material reasons to depart from this policy. In general terms developers usually applied for the number of houses in the planning policy.

Tally Wade pointed out that AECOM had completed a housing needs survey for Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish, which resulted in an estimate of 610 dwellings. Stephen Baughen explained that prior to standard methodology councils used to employ contractors to calculate objectively assessed need and AECOM were one of them. Much time has been spent arguing about the assessed need methodology. TWBC uses the means standard methodology standard equation, which will give you a borough wide housing projection. The 2014 household projection was higher than the 2016 figure and the Government decided that the 2016 figure should be ignored and continue using the 2014 figure. In answer to a question Stephen Baughen explained that the supply is the key element to allocation. If just need was taken into account current sites in Tunbridge Wells and Southborough would be replicated, however other considerations and constraints need to be balanced in assessment of suitable sites.

He was aware that the NDP did not agree on all of the sites put forward in the Draft Local Plan, however in his opinion they offered better infrastructure and they were closer to the town and therefore more sustainable. He understood that owners may use vehicles to access work but they looked at the wider picture. With small sites the infrastructure is much more difficult and would encourage a dispersed growth strategy.

Regarding the Turnden site allocation he remarked that when he had met with the CVLT regarding affordable housing on this site, this same advice would apply to any developer in that it had some good credentials which he had made clear at the time. In answer to a question from Sally Marsh (AONB), Stephen Baughen replied that the AONB was not treated the same as a National Park as at present there was no link in the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework). Sites in an AONB have to comply to Section 172 of the NPPF in order to justify development. Planning permission would have to demonstrate that the development is in the public interest and any detrimental effect on the environment could be moderated. Berkeley Homes were in his opinion a good developer who were providing more affordable housing on the site than specified, with much greater care to landscaping and high quality design.

Regarding climate change in his view TWBC were at the forefront to make changes to improve on the current situation. The Draft Local Plan included Policies EN3 Sustainable Design Standards, EN4 Energy Reduction in New Buildings, EN5 Climate Change Adaptation. The NPPF states that development should not have requirement to go above those required by Building Regulations.

He explained that the NDP could go one step further if they gathered evidence to justify a policy i.e. passivhaus homes for sustainability, however TWBC did not have the skill to help. The sustainability report was now available and he would forward a copy.

Sally Marsh pointed out that many of the sites in NDP allocations were in AONB and reiterated the fact made earlier by Stephen Baughen they have to comply to Section 172 of the NPPF in order to justify development. Planning permission would have to demonstrate that the development is in the public interest and any detrimental effect on the environment could be moderated. Most of the sites have come out as major and then the test of soundness will apply unless exceptional circumstances. The NDP would be required to demonstrate why sites in the parish which lie outside the AONB were not used first to meet the housing need. After further discussion Sally Marsh recommended NDP go ahead without site allocations with strong policies to protect and restrict development with design policies. There is a great deal the NDP can do without necessary going down the allocation route.

Nancy Warne asked whether the NDP without allocations would be robust and sited Hawkhurst NDP as an example. Hawkhurst NDP key policy was housing 10 dwelling of less, which on appeal did not meet the 10yr supply, therefore their housing policy was out of date. Other policies in Hawkhurst NDP were now given the same weight as TWBC policies such as design and now noted on planning reports. The NPPF states if a neighbourhood plan allocates sites and can demonstrate a 3 year supply of housing, rather than 5 year supply and the plan is less than 2 years old then the housing provision policy still carries weight, which is a positive for allocating sites.

Not allocating but having an input in the policy process by liaising with TWBC planning officers and any positive points raised could be factored in to the draft local plan. This would mean the community can still influence allocation, but still object in principle further down the line, although NDP would have input in producing policies ie. layout, type of housing. After consultation some of the sites in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst may drop out then the overall number of sites would drop down and it would be down to TWBC to look at other areas. If not allocating NDP and TWBC would need to move at pace to input on site allocation policies following the representations received regarding the Draft Local Plan sometime in the Spring. Workshops would need to take place to undertake this work and he hoped the NDP would be part of this as they had huge local knowledge. Stephen Baughen pointed out that even the sites which TWBC and the NDP did not agree on such as Turnden, he considered that the site policies would be stronger with the input of Cranbrook and Sissinghurst NDP. At this point Section 106 agreements could be discussed.

If NDP wished to proceed and allocate all of the sites this would reflect the local views and evidence you feel is right. However, in his opinion the developers would look to exploit any slow pace or lack of certainty. He was of the view that if NDP proceeded using all the sites in the NDP, developers would put in planning applications in for all of the sites and those in the Local Plan which would result in more development.

It was noted that liaison groups had been set up by the NDP who were currently in consultation with developers regarding Turnden/Brick Kiln/Hartley Cluster (only two of Hartley sites). The Hartley sites would need to be master planned and a meeting would be convened with developers, NDP and Parish Council as soon as an application is received. Cllr. Fletcher remarked that it was important to liaison with Brick Kiln Farm and Berkeley developers so they can join up regarding infrastructure which is really important.

Stephen Baughen advised that many of the sites in the draft TWBC local plan would be decided prior to the Local Plan being adopted and would be tested at the planning application stage or by the planning inspectorate.

Marion Cranmer was concerned that a huge number of houses would be built and left empty. Stephen Baughen explained that usually the housing market stopped this happening as developers would not build whilst there was still empty stock as they need a cash flow. Normally only a certain amount is built to raise funds for the next phase. They also slow down the build rate.

Stephen Baughen finished by stating that in recent years there had been some tension between TWBC and Cranbrook and Sissinghurst NDP and he wanted to build bridges as it was far better in his opinion to be united when dealing with developers and he would like NDP input to produce strong policies.

It was agreed to hold an extraordinary meeting for the steering group to discuss this meeting. Date to be confirmed.