

CABINET

7 January 2013

Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held at the Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea on Monday 7 January 2013 at 11:00am.

Cabinet Members present: Councillors C.R. Maynard (Leader), Lord Ampthill, S.D. Elford, A.E. Ganly, Mrs B.A. George, J.M. Johnson, M.J. Kenward, R.H. Patten and R. White.

Other Members present: Councillors Mrs M.L. Barnes, A.E. Davies, P.R. Douart (in part), Mrs J.P. Gadd, Mrs J.M. Hughes, I.G.F. Jenkins, B. Kentfield, J.A. Lee, P.G. Lendon, P.N. Osborne (in part), Mrs S.M. Prochak, S.H. Souster (in part), D.W.L.M. Vereker, M.R. Watson and Mrs D.C. Williams.

Advisory Officers present: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Services, Head of Regeneration and Estates (in part), Head of Planning, Planning Strategy and Environment Manager, Planning Officer (in part), Partnerships and Community Safety Coordinator, Senior Communications Officer (in part) and Democratic Services Officer.

Also present: 1 member of the public.

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The decisions made under PART II will come into force on 17 January 2013 unless they have been subject to the call-in procedure.

CB12/79. **MINUTES**

The Chairman was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2012 as a correct record of the proceedings.

CB12/80. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor M. Mooney, Chairman of the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

PART I – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL – not subject to call-in procedure under Rule 16 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

CB12/81. **LOCAL PLAN CORE STRATEGY – SOUNDNESS ISSUES**
(6.2)

Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Services which had been presented in order to enable Members to give early consideration to the “preliminary considerations” of the Inspector who had conducted the examination into the soundness of the Council’s Local Plan Core Strategy.

Members were advised that, although the Inspector's letter only reflected her current thinking on the fundamental matters, if the issues raised were not addressed this would mean that the Council's Core Strategy would be found to be not 'sound' which would lead to significant delays in adoption. An early and specific response was regarded as being in the best interests of achieving a "plan-led" basis for development in the District.

The central issue was that of housing numbers: there was a legal requirement for the Core Strategy to be in 'general conformity' with the South East Plan (SEP) which set a target of 5,600 dwellings for the District between 2006 and 2026. The Inspector did not accept that the Council's reasons for its lower housing target justified a reduced overall amount of housing, stating that her initial conclusion was that the significant shortfall in housing provision compared to the SEP target meant that the Core Strategy was not in general conformity with the SEP.

Local Plans were now also required to be consistent with policies within the Government's National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 47 of which included the requirement to meet the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area as far as was consistent with the policies set out in the Framework. Without a clear view of what the objectively assessed need was, the Inspector regarded that the only robust figure available at this time was the SEP requirement and asked the Council to reconsider the Strategy in terms of housing provision suggesting that reverting to the SEP figures, as included in earlier versions of the Plan, was a possible approach.

To achieve the SEP's housing requirement over the plan period would mean that the Core Strategy housing target would need to be increased by some 700-1,000 dwellings to 2028. It was noted, however, that the impact on the requirement for new allocations was not so great if small windfall and exception sites were taken into account. The PSCS had only made allowance for small site windfalls in the last 5 years of the plan period; as presented at the Core Strategy Hearings, this was conservative and it was considered that account should also be taken of windfall sites from years 5-10 along with the delivery of exception sites. The Inspector had not suggested that this was unreasonable and on that basis these would be included in the total housing target at the outset. If these further windfall positions were allowed, the need for new allocations would be some 400-800 dwellings, or 600 at the mid-point. Officers advised Members that by asking the Council to revisit the SEP housing levels was more manageable than having unsustainable levels imposed on the Council.

Although officers were of the view that the Local Plan Core Strategy as submitted properly reflected the local vision for development and change across the District, there were opportunities to increase the housing provisions without fundamentally undermining the overall strategy. These opportunities were outlined as follows overleaf:

- Bexhill: The scale of growth had been reduced in the PSCS to 121-132 dwellings/year as there had been a legitimate concern over matching housing provision to job creation. However, there was

now indication that business units would be built at North East Bexhill at the same time as housing, if not in advance. Along with recent progress on the Link Road, this meant that the area would be able to support economic growth and that there would also be an improved supply of jobs. It was considered that there was capacity to increase the upper level of housing in Bexhill over the Plan period from 2,250 dwellings to 2,700 dwellings (including small site windfalls), although this level of growth was a “stretch target” representing an average build rate of 159 dwellings per year.

- Hastings Fringes: The PSCS envisaged only 55-80 net additional dwellings over the Plan period. Land south of Battle Road, adjacent to Breadsell Farm, was a key contributor to the original proposals for the Hastings Fringes with capacity for up to 200 dwellings in Rother and 800 in Hastings; however Natural England had made a strong objection to this which required further monitoring to determine if this could be overcome. The possibility of some additional housing on the fringes of Hastings falling within Rother was likely and therefore the target could be increased to 100 dwellings.
- Battle and Rye: Battle was already being asked to accommodate a significant proportion of development and, with acknowledged constraints, there had been little argument on the proposed scale of housing of 400-440 dwellings (excluding small site windfalls in years 5-10) during the examination. There were demonstrable site development constraints affecting the deliverability of existing key sites at Rye; it was noted that even the mid-point of the current range of 250-350 dwellings could require some further, not yet identified sites to be forthcoming. It was concluded that it was not possible to increase housing provisions at Rye, other than to allow for small site windfalls in years 5-10.
- Rural Areas: Most villages were situated in the AONB and were already being asked to accommodate a significant amount of new development. It was accepted that the total housing target for the villages of 950-1,000 dwellings was less than the upper limit in the PSCS of 1,150. To attain a level closer to the upper figure, the expectation would be that villages would seek to achieve the upper level in the range; on-going work was progressing with Parish Councils on that basis. While it might not be possible to meet the upper level in all villages, it was considered that a commitment might be given to achieve a higher overall figure of 1,080 dwellings (excluding further windfall sites) for the villages without revisiting the figures for each individual village. The overall strategy was to retain the existing settlement pattern.

It was noted that the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) undertaken had concluded that a lower rate of housing than the SEP figures would be more sustainable as it would have less impact than distributing development elsewhere in the District due to a number of factors. Further SA work was required to assess the sustainability merits of the revised approach prior to submission to the Inspector; this work was in hand and would inform full Council’s consideration of the report.

The biggest impact of the proposed modifications on employment and retail provision would be at Bexhill where demand for an additional 340 jobs in business / industrial areas could arise. More new housing in the short term could exacerbate competition for available jobs which placed more emphasis on securing business space in association with new housing wherever possible. It was considered that, in relation to retail provisions, the broad scale of provision in the Core Strategy for the towns was still appropriate although further work was anticipated for Bexhill. In terms of transport, and in the context of increased housing figures, planned transport schemes would be even more important in improving access to jobs.

Consideration had been given to the phasing of housing to align broadly with likely job growth. It was difficult to place a definitive rate of job growth and therefore, rather than set a definitive phasing at this stage, it was proposed to amend the existing phasing policy (Policy IM3) in the Core Strategy to enable further consideration of phasing of housing and jobs growth for individual settlements as part of the site allocations process.

The Inspector had also asked the Council to commit to an early review of the Core Strategy; this was accepted and should benefit from further guidance on assessing need as well as the outputs from the 2011 Census.

The main modifications that would need to be made to the PSCS were set out within Appendix 1 to the report; it was noted that some of the figures presented required correction and these would be updated in the version received by full Council. In addition to this, officers had suggested 4 modifications to address particular issues raised in relation to the presumption in favour of sustainable development, business land, tourism, and for Fairlight; these were set out at Appendix 2 to the report.

Interested parties would be able to comment on all 'main modifications' as these would be subject to a 6 week public consultation. Representations on the proposed modifications would be considered by the Inspector before her final report was made.

In conclusion, while there were reservations about increasing the housing provisions in the Local Plan Core Strategy, it was clear from the Inspector's letter that the Council needed to at least seek to achieve the existing SEP target in acknowledgement of the Government's push for house building; the modifications proposed were regarded as the most sustainable way of doing this.

During their consideration of the modifications presented, Members raised the following points:

- It was important to revitalise Bexhill and support a vibrant local economy - employment provision as well as housing had to be considered hand in hand.
- It was vital to continue to protect the AONB.
- Members were surprised at the content of the Inspector's letter and questioned whether the Council should be standing its ground a little more.

- Members felt that increasing the housing numbers for the Council seemed to be going against the principles of Localism.
- Concern was raised at whether sufficient attention was being given to developing brownfield sites, although Members stressed that some had previously been developed for local employment use which it was important to maintain.
- Members considered that, while the Government could push for an increase in housing provision, it could not dictate when houses were built or who bought them; the prevalence of holiday homes, second homes and holiday lets within the Camber Whitesands resort and in Winchelsea were prime examples.

Members questioned what the total cost to the Council to date had been for the preparation of the Core Strategy due to the fact that, if the prepared draft was found to be not 'sound' this could mean starting the whole process again to produce a revised strategy. The exact figure was not available at the meeting; however it was advised that it was a considerable amount.

An amendment was considered with regards to the deletion of "in order to achieve the level of housing set out in the South East Plan" from part 1(b) of the recommendation. After discussion it was agreed that it would be prudent to leave this in for clarity.

In supporting the modifications proposed, the Leader thanked all Members for the good debate that had taken place. Thanks were also extended to the Planning Strategy Team for the work they had undertaken in response to the Inspector's letter and to the Council's Planning team in general for the work that they undertook on a day to day basis.

RECOMMENDED: That in response to the Local Plan Core Strategy Inspector's letter dated 13 December 2012:

- 1) the Director of Services, in liaison with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, be authorised to:
 - a) Undertake an additional Sustainability Appraisal of the proposed Main Modifications to the Core Strategy, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report; and
 - b) Submit proposed Main Modifications to the Core Strategy, together with any additional consequential changes, subject to (a) above, in order to achieve the level of housing set out in the South East Plan; and
- 2) the Modifications proposed during the course of the Hearings, as contained at Appendix 2 to the report, be endorsed.

(The Leader had accepted this item onto the Agenda as an Additional Agenda Item in order for the Council's response to the Local Plan Core Strategy Inspector's letter to be considered and recommended to the extraordinary full Council meeting being held on 21 January 2013).

PART II – EXECUTIVE DECISIONS – subject to call-in procedure under Rule 16 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules by no later than 4.00pm on 16 January, 2013.

CB12/82. **CAMBER SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT**
(6.1)

The regeneration of Camber had been identified in the Corporate Plan as one of the Council's long term executive priorities. The Camber Visitor Management Initiative (VMI) of 2004 had indicated that potential existed at Camber to stimulate investment in facilities and infrastructure in order to develop the local economy, extend the visitor season and encourage a higher spending demographic.

Camber was one of the more deprived communities in Rother, being geographically and economically isolated and dependent on a highly seasonal tourist trade, with a preponderance of local employment opportunities being low-wage, seasonal and / or part time. Its exceptional dunes and beach made Camber a hotspot for day visitors in the summer and this high volume, low spend market was the main source of income for many local businesses. Camber was also gaining a reputation as a quiet retreat for more affluent visitors, particularly in the quieter months. Notable private investment had taken place over recent years which targeted this higher spending market. However, future investment needed to be carefully managed and balanced with environmental considerations.

Until now there had been no holistic formal planning policy framework in place specific to Camber to guide future development and investment in a way that reconciled the needs to businesses, residents and visitors with the environmental considerations. This was needed to provide greater clarity to investors and developers and to guide the delivery of public sector investment if future investment was to be encouraged.

Funded partly through the INTERREG IV programme as part of the '21st Century Parks' project, the Council had therefore commissioned consultants Allies & Morrison to prepare a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Camber. This had involved widespread research and consultation with stakeholders including local residents, the Parish Council and other statutory agencies. The draft SPD was now ready for publication and formal consultation; a copy of the draft SPD, as well as a draft Sustainability Appraisal report, had been circulated to Cabinet Members for their consideration.

The draft Camber SPD established an overarching vision for the village and provided guidance for future development in the locality. The SPD was broken down into several sections and these were outlined within the report.

In accordance with Regulation of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, the draft SPD and draft Sustainability Appraisal were required go out to a formal 6 week consultation; all representations received would be carefully considered and, where appropriate, the draft SPD would be amended accordingly.

Members' approval was sought to publish the draft SPD for formal public consultation. Following the end of the 6 week consultation period, a further report would be submitted to Cabinet incorporating any recommended changes and seeking authority to refer the final document to full Council for formal adoption.

Members welcomed the document and considered that anything the Council could do to support the development of the local economy and to extend the season to enable Camber to be treated as a year round facility would be welcomed. Members were advised that one constraint to be aware of was that the dune system and much of the surrounding land enjoyed environmental protection including SSSI status, which created concern when looking at extending the season; a fine balance was required to ensure that the natural environment remained protected.

Attention was drawn to the Pontins Holiday Park in Camber which was a concern for Members; it was considered that any Camber Visitor Initiative needed to address the problems with Pontins as the Council was the landlord for the site. Members were advised that the Council had met with the owners in the past but it had since moved into new ownership; the problems with this site were being looked into.

It was questioned as to how much European funding was received by the Council as it would be useful to have details of all the European money being brought into the District. It was advised that the Council received European funding through the Leader+ Programme as well as the Interreg Programmes (1-4). The INTERREG IV Programme was the catalyst for the work that had been undertaken on the Camber draft SPD; however, in terms of future delivery for Camber, the Council would be looking to encourage partnerships with corporate partners as opposed to external funding.

In endorsing the document for public consultation, Cabinet were in agreement that whatever action was taken at Camber to introduce improvements, whether that be through development or consultation, it was important that this was done in such a way as to preserve the uniqueness of the area.

RESOLVED: That the draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Camber be approved for public consultation.

CB12/83.
(7.1)

COMMUNITY GRANT SCHEME

Through its Community Grants Scheme the Council made provision for up to £130,000 per annum to be made available to community groups or organisations that met the Community Grants Scheme criteria. It was confirmed that just over £100,000 currently remained in the Community Grants funding 'pot'.

At their meeting held on 30 July 2012, Cabinet had agreed to defer an application for funding from South Coast Pitts until all outstanding planning issues had been resolved. The Council's Planning Committee had since approved planning permission for the use of a site in

Coneyburrow Lane, Bexhill, for a Pit Bike scheme until 31 December 2014.

The original recommendation from the Community Grants Panel for consideration by Cabinet had been to award £1,000; this application was now recommended for approval.

RESOLVED: That a community grant of £1,000 be awarded to South Coast Pitts.

(The Leader had accepted this item onto the Agenda as an Additional Agenda Item in order for the funding to South Coast Pitts to be considered as soon as possible).

CHAIRMAN

The meeting closed at 12.15pm

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