

## Hastings Borough Council Planning Strategy Examination

### Public Exploratory Meeting

13<sup>th</sup> December 2012 – 10.00am

The Stade Hall, Rock a Nore Road, Hastings

#### **Present:**

Richard Hollox (Inspector)

Tim Cookson, Stephanie Roots, Kerry Culbert, Andrew Palmer (All Hastings Borough Council – HBC)

Lara Bolch (HBC – note-taker)

Ellen Reith (East Sussex County Council)

David Marlow (Rother District Council)

Maureen Jarvis, Patricia Stephenson, Colin Simmons, David Bedford, Pam Brown, Aubrey Ingleton

#### **1. Agenda Item 1**

The Inspector explained that the Duty to Co-operate (the Duty) was a statutory requirement under the Localism Act 2011. This obliged a Planning Authority to co-operate with other relevant parties when preparing a Local Plan. The Inspector asked HBC to confirm that they had not received any representations alleging that the Council had not complied with the Duty, and Mr Cookson confirmed this was the case. However, Patricia Stephenson advised that she was not aware of this Duty as she found the consultations complicated and hard to access, and that she would have objected had she been aware of it. The Inspector asked whom Mrs Stephenson felt had not been consulted, and Mrs Stephenson suggested Rother District Council (RDC). The Inspector asked Mrs Stephenson to submit a formal letter by the 18<sup>th</sup> January 2013, setting out how she felt the Council had not abided by the Duty, to the Programme Officer, to which the Council would then need to respond formally. *(Post meeting note – Mrs Stephenson has since formally withdrawn her objection).*

#### **2. Agenda Item 2**

All attendees introduced themselves.

#### **3. Agenda Item 3**

The Inspector restated the purpose of the meeting, which was to explore the matter of the Duty and in that context, the following question “What are the full, objectively

assessed needs for development, and particularly for market and affordable housing, and on which projections do they rely?”

#### **4. Agenda Item 4**

The Inspector advised that paragraph 4.11 of the Local Plan stated that “The demand for new housing arising from trend-based population and household change and growth would result in a need to build many more new homes than previously thought possible – some 7,840 new homes by 2028 or 461 per year”, but page 32 stated that “The [New Homes] target is equivalent to 200 net new homes per annum (as compared to the 210 per annum target contained in the South East Plan)”.

The Inspector asked how the HBC suggested provision of 200 homes addressed the suggested need for 461. Whether any of this apparent shortfall was being covered by a neighbouring authority, and had consultation taken place with RDC accordingly? Page 30 of the Sustainability Appraisal Report listed various options for calculating housing need figures, and option 1 stated “While overall levels of housing will increase, this will not provide sufficient accommodation in line with the predicted increase in population”. The Inspector asked HBC whether they had any additions to the Statement of Compliance.

Mr Cookson read the following statement, and then referred the question to Kerry Culbert.

*“The Planning Strategy contains the “full, objectively assessed need for development and particularly for market and affordable housing”.*

*The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is explicit in the presumption in favour of sustainable development and it is clear that housing supply should not be viewed in isolation, but that Local Planning Authorities should pursue both national and local economic and social objectives in an integrated way to achieve sustainable development.*

*In the changed circumstances since the South East Plan was prepared and in response to NPPF paragraph 47, we have re-assessed housing need, working with RDC in order to understand requirements across our whole housing market area.*

*We looked at a variety of projections but each of these have their drawbacks. At the heart of our assessment is our priority for regeneration led development.*

*This work concluded that for the whole housing market area to meet local need sustainably, the figure is considered to be between 350 and 500 dwellings per year. The Planning Strategies of the two Councils place the combined housing growth fairly in the middle of this target range at around 425 dwellings per annum.”*

Ms Culbert spoke on a number of points, confirming that HBC had undertaken a joint assessment of housing need with RDC, identifying four different options – providing for local growth, trend based growth (including migration), past rates of development (delivered in last 20 years) and the SE Plan requirements.

Across the entire housing market, need from local population growth was negligible. The trend based need was much greater, but the projections were limited by historic data. The SE Plan figure included an assessment of need but also took account of environmental constraints. Regeneration was at the heart of both strategies. The expected level of jobs growth did not lead to a requirement for more homes. Hastings was seeing a real benefit from what had already taken place, and needed to avoid a downturn. HBC had judged realistic economic growth and how it impacted on housing need, but all projections had limitations of some sort.

The joint housing market assessment looked in greater detail at migration. It was evident that that type of in-migration was very specific and driven by retired or single households, not by jobseekers. The Joint Employment Land Review considered realistic economic growth, and relationship with housing need. HBC did not consider that past trends could be relied upon. The SE Plan attempted to address the imbalance between jobs and homes, and Hastings needed to attract a different demographic for regeneration purposes.

The Inspector confirmed his understanding that HBC was therefore relying on a housing target of 200 homes pa as a fully objective figure based on economic objections, and asked RDC and East Sussex County Council (ESCC) whether they wished to add any comments.

RDC advised that this was a challenging area of calculation, taxing all authorities equally. The SE Plan and the NPPF were both valid, but the Framework had no guidance about the interpretation of an objectively assessed figure, simply mentioning a range of considerations. RDC working with HBC, had looked at a wide range of interpretations taken across the country. They had studied trends and whether they could still be relied upon in these changing times, especially given Hastings' ranking as a deprived area. The priority need was to regenerate the economy, and authorities had given added weight to housing growth for that primary need. HBC and RDC had taken a positive and aspirational approach from the Employment Land Review, to build on local work in progress such as Seaspace. RDC supported the objectively assessed figure of 425 dwellings across Hastings and Rother. Some in-migratory demand had been accepted, but the assessment was more employment-based, and this had been compared with past trends. There had been huge variability in migration in Hastings over the last 5 years alone. In 2005 there were 500 more migrant households in Hastings, but in 2006 400 households out-migrated. It was considered likely that the positive impacts in Hastings were more likely to retain current households than attract new ones, and the national trend was of reduced migration, and predominantly intra-regional rather than inter-regional. The assessed figure was therefore based on a range of factors in line with the Framework and economic demand, and RDC believed the scale of proposed development in this area was fair, and therefore supported HBC fully in its assessment.

ESCC confirmed that it had left the assessment of need to HBC and RDC. Demographic information had been supplied by ESCC to assist these 2 Councils with their calculations. ESCC was involved with the SE Plan, and the figures were based on regeneration aims. ESCC fully supported the approach that RDC and HBC had taken to calculate the objectively assessed figure.

The Inspector asked if there were any further comments on this item.

Pam Brown queried how the Bexhill to Hastings Link Road (BHLR) would affect housing. The Inspector asked RDC whether as most of the newly available land would be in Rother it would contribute to the housing needs of Rother rather than Hastings.

David Marlow confirmed that Rother's housing provision in the SE Plan was predicated on the opening of the BHLR, which was proceeding on course as all legal objections had been dealt with, and contractors were expected to start work mid-January 2013. This scheme would be particularly useful for opening up 50,000 square metres of employment land, with 1300 new homes proposed. The employment land would assist Hastings in the medium term, and there had been full co-operation on the assessment of employment need. The scheduled Hearings on Matters 1, 3 and 5 would further address the matter.

Aubrey Ingleton stated that Hastings was already heavily densely populated with one sixth of the population of East Sussex as a whole. He believed that the target of 200 new homes was too many, with the suggested sites being questionable, and that there were too many permissions granted to build on gardens. The Inspector advised that this could be considered at the Hearing on General Housing. Mr Ingleton offered to supply examples of his concerns, and the Inspector advised that these could be considered during relevant site visits. Mr Ingleton was asked to check with the Programme Officer that the Inspector had Mr Ingleton's representations.

## **5. Agenda Item 5**

The Inspector asked HBC to confirm which bodies they had consulted with under the Duty, and whether there was any record of those consultations.

Mr Cookson read the following statement, and then referred the question to Stephanie Roots.

*"The Council has fully complied with the legal responsibilities under the Localism Act's "Duty to*

*Co-operate". The Council's Statement of Compliance with the Duty (August 2012) sets out how this has been achieved. To assist further we have drawn up a list of relevant meetings and further details about the meetings can also be provided."*

Ms Roots confirmed that HBC had a Local Plan database listing parties consulted at all stages of the plan making process. The Statement of Compliance demonstrated this and a list of consulted infrastructure providers was at its Appendix B. A schedule of face-to-face meetings since 2009 had been produced, and notes of those meetings could be produced if required. Likewise written evidence could be supplied from correspondence where actual meetings did not take place. The Inspector advised that it was the Council's responsibility to supply sufficient evidence to convince him that there had been full compliance with the Duty. The Council agreed to supply copies of all relevant evidence to the Programme Officer by 18<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

RDC added that it could assist with this, as it held records of such meetings where it was involved, and there had been close liaison at both officer and member level, all of which was recorded. RDC asked the Inspector how far back this evidence was required to extend, and the Inspector decided it should go back to the introduction of the Localism Act with some previous, background evidence as appropriate. Overall, the requirement was to demonstrate active and effective co-operation rather than just consultation.

The Inspector asked RDC and ESCC to confirm whether they believed HBC had fully met its Duty, and they both confirmed this was so.

## **6. Agenda Item 6**

The Inspector asked HBC how the Planning Strategy demonstrated compliance with the Duty.

Mr Cookson read the following statement, and then referred the question to Stephanie Roots.

*“The engagement with relevant bodies listed under the Duty has assisted in the development of a wide range of matters in producing the Planning Strategy but most particularly these are the level of residential development, employment development, infrastructure issues which include most particularly the Bexhill Hastings Link Road. The issue concerning the possible development at Breadsell Lane has also been assisted by input from Natural England, Rother District Council and the County Council.”*

Ms Roots advised that HBC was in the process of preparing a line-by-line analysis of how the Duty had influenced the Planning Strategy, but she was not sure that the Statement of Compliance was sufficiently detailed in this respect. The shared approach to future prosperity was undertaken with RDC using evidence-based strategies for housing, transport capacity and habitat assessment. HBC was also currently working with RDC and ESCC in relation to the Community Infrastructure Levy. The BHLR was a key strategic issue which appeared in both Local Plans. Transport Strategy Plan 3 demonstrated co-operation, as did the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment which crossed the Hastings/Rother boundary. HBC was preparing more detailed pages which would be submitted to the Inspector. The Inspector asked HBC to confirm that compliance with the Duty was demonstrated in the core documents and the Plan itself, which they duly confirmed, and he asked that the extra detailed information be supplied to the meeting attendees as soon as possible, mad by 18 January 2013.

RDC stated that in relation to the Duty specifically, all strategic matters were of a cross-boundary nature. The Hastings and Rother area was a joint housing and labour market area, and as a result the 2 Councils had initiated a Joint Employment Land Review. There was a shared approach for the future, especially in relation to transport arrangements. The work undertaken on the Combe Valley Park was just another of many examples of collaborative working.

ESCC advised that it fully supported the statements by RC and HBC. It also agreed that HBC had met its obligations under the Duty, for example in traffic modelling and transport areas. ESCC had witnessed ongoing joint engagement by the 2 Councils, including work on the Community Infrastructure Levy and Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

The Inspector then invited questions.

David Bedford stated that the Planning Strategy was not promoting the identification of strategic sites. He and his client (Breadsell Farm) had submitted a technical report on a water study to Natural England, but had not yet had a response. The Inspector asked Mr Cookson to follow this up with Natural England with the aim of obtaining a response from it before 18<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

Mrs Brown queried whether HBC had considered the strong views from social and private housing sectors for more family housing. The Inspector advised that this question could properly be dealt with at the Hearing on Matter 4 - Affordable Housing and Other Needs. Mr Cookson confirmed that HBC wanted to achieve a good mix of housing, subject to site suitability.

Mr Ingleton stated that Hastings had double the number of flats compared with the national average. He considered that the Housing Needs Survey of 2005 was out-of-date in relation to current housing needs. He felt that the balance between Hastings (200 homes) and Rother (225 homes) was not right. The Inspector suggested that this issue is likely to be discussed in at least 3 Hearings.

## **7. Agenda Item 7**

The Inspector stated that page 19 of the Sustainability Appraisal Report suggested 4 options for considering/ meeting housing need and asked whether Rother DC had ever been asked consider accommodating any shortfall in Hastings. HBC responded that the calculations did not point to a shortfall and that Hastings could adequately meet the objectively assessed figure of 200 new homes pa.

The Inspector advised that any outstanding issues around the Duty would be considered during the first Hearing under Question 1.1 scheduled for 5 February 2013.. He then closed the Meeting at 11.15 am.

*Richard Hollox*

19 December 2012