

DEVELOPMENT & CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2020 commencing at 5.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Hunter (Chairman)

Cllr. Thornton (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Cheeseman, Clayton, Penny Cole, P. Darrington, Fothergill, McGregor, Pett, Reay and Roy

Cllr. Dickins was also present.

48. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Development and Conservation Advisory Committee held on 7 July 2020, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

49. Declarations of interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

50. Actions from previous meeting

There were none.

51. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder thanked the planning policy team for their work on getting the report on the Planning White Paper to the agenda. She had received positive feedback on the videos and Q&A sessions and the availability of recordings for those that had not been able to attend the live sessions.

She advised the committee of a number of staff updates including that the Planning Enforcement Manager had commenced in post along with a Planning Support Team Supervisor role which added extra resilience and freed up the Planning Improvement and Standards Manager to lead on the transformation agenda. There were currently temporary enforcement officers in post and recruitment was underway for permanent roles.

Referring to the budget report later on the agenda the service dashboard referenced an amber performance indicator for minor planning applications which the Portfolio Holder was happy to advise was now green, and enforcement figures were up. She also advised that staff continued to maintain good spirits despite new working arrangements from home etc.

52. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

53. Budget 2021/22: Review of Service Dashboards and Service Change Impact Assessments (SCIAs)

The Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Officer - Finance & Trading, presented the report which set out updates to the 2021/22 budget within the existing framework of the 10-year budget and savings plan. The report presented savings items that had been identified which needed to be considered, and requested further suggestions from Members, before finalising the budget for 2021/22.

Informed by the latest information from Government and discussions with Cabinet, it was proposed that the Council continued to set a revenue budget that assumed no direct funding from Government through the Revenue Support Grant or New Homes Bonus. This would result in the Council continuing to be financially self-sufficient. To achieve this aim and to ensure a balanced budget position over the next 10-year period would be more challenging this year due to the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The budget process would be shorter with the Council's budget set at the November Council meeting instead of the February Council meeting. This should enable any changes to be implemented before 1 April 2021 and minimise the period of uncertainty for staff.

The annual budget gap included in the report was £826,000 which was largely due to Covid-19. Savings proposals had been identified in the report for this Committee but Members were asked for their suggestions in order to contribute to reducing the budget gap, and their recommendations would be considered by Cabinet as part of the process to set a balanced 10-year budget. By addressing the issues this year, the Council would once again be in a strong financial position that other councils would aspire to.

As a result of the pandemic and forced new ways of working such as planning applicants putting up their own notices, it was believed that there would be savings but they had yet to be quantified. The Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer Planning & Regulatory Services advised that there had been a number of efficiencies which it was hoped could continue but for budgeting purposes they needed to be investigated to see what could be quantified for budget setting.

It was generally agreed that the necessity for remote meetings must have incurred savings and should be looked at for the future. It was acknowledged that this was not the Committee's remit and that this was dependant on legislation.

It was also noted that the dissolution of the Building Control Partnership from Tonbridge and Malling was not financially driven so there were no cost savings to report at this stage.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) the savings proposals identified in Appendices F & G to the report (SCIAs 11 (21/22) and 12 (21/22)) applicable to this Advisory Committee, be considered;
- b) it be noted that no further income or growth proposals were identified; and
- c) consideration be given to asking Officers to maintain current best practice and efficiencies and to examine any cost savings for future budget setting, and to look at building control changes for future savings.

54. Infrastructure Funding Statement - Priorities

The Planning Policy Team Leader (Infrastructure) presented a report which sought agreement to proposed priorities for the Council's new Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) which the Council was required to report to the Government by the end of the year.

Members took the opportunity to ask questions of clarification. Some questions arose around particular possible Kent County Council (KCC) projects and the Planning Policy Team Leader (Infrastructure) undertook to ensure that local members were kept informed of any discussions and projects they were working together on across Sevenoaks.

In response to questions and arising discussion, it was clarified that the report was an evidence based factual document and advice was given against any pre-emption or judgement on any future potential bids for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) or Section 106 funding.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) the criteria for prioritising infrastructure projects for funding in the Infrastructure Funding Statement, as set out at paragraph 35 of the report, be agreed; and
- b) the specific projects and types of Infrastructure recommended in paragraphs 38, 41, 50, 52, 54, 58 and 60 of the report, be identified in the Infrastructure Funding Statement as having a priority for full or partial funding.

55. Planning White Paper

The Chairman on behalf of the Committee extended her thanks to all staff involved with the report and recent Member briefings.

The Strategic Planning Manager presented the report which sought Members' approval to the proposed consultation response to the Government's Planning White Paper. The proposed reforms to the system were presented as three pillars: Planning for Development; Planning for Beautiful Places; Planning for Infrastructure and Connected Places; and the proposed response addressed each of these in turn.

During discussion, Members noted that where the report may say 'no' to a question the actual draft response currently stated 'not sure,' for example as set out for Question 22 (a). Members agreed that they would prefer a 'no' followed by an explanation and generally commented that responses could be more substantive. The desire for officers to be more clear in their responses that the current planning system works well and the need to 'fix' what perhaps only needed 'tweaking' was also requested. It was discussed whether this should be in a covering letter but Members were keen to see this in their response for questions as this was more likely to be considered.

It was also acknowledged that there were a number of minor typographical and grammar amendments that were still required.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That

- a) the content of the report be noted;
- b) prior to consideration of the report by Cabinet, Officers be requested to
 - i) make minor typographical and grammar corrections as required
 - ii) ensure all answers were as robust and comprehensive as possible, with 'not sure' being amended to 'no' with justification, where applicable, and to include reference in the response that the current planning system worked well and there was no need to 'fix' it
 - iii) check whether it was possible to submit a covering letter and produce a draft if allowed;
- c) it be recommended to Cabinet that the proposed response to the Planning White Paper be approved as amended above, and submitted to the Government, in advance of the submission deadline of 29 October 2020.

Development & Conservation Advisory Committee - 20 October 2020

56. Work plan

The work plan be noted, with a 'Building Control Update' report being added to the Summer 2021 meeting .

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 6.51 PM

CHAIRMAN