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TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

Thursday, 11th June, 2020

Present: Cllr N J Heslop (Chairman), Cllr M A Coffin (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr R P Betts, Cllr R W Dalton, Cllr P M Hickmott, Cllr F A Hoskins, Cllr S A Hudson, Cllr D Lettington, Cllr B J Luker, Cllr M R Rhodes and Cllr M Taylor.

Together with Addington, Aylesford, Borough Green, Burham, Ditton, East Malling and Larkfield, East Peckham, Hadlow, Hildenborough, Platt, Plaxtol, Ryarsh, Shipbourne, Trottiscliffe, West Peckham Parish Councils and County Councillors Mrs T Dean, Mr M Balfour, Mrs S Hohler and Mr H Rayner.

Councillors D J Cooper, P J Montague, Mrs A S Oakley, W E Palmer, H S Rogers, J L Sergison, T B Shaw and N G Stapleton were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mrs C B Langridge

PART 1 - PUBLIC

PPP 20/9 CHAIRMAN ANNOUNCEMENT(S)

The Chairman welcomed Members to the first virtual meeting of the Parish Partnership Panel and, in his role as Leader of the Council, thanked the parish councils for their contribution in providing community support and help to ensure vulnerable residents received appropriate assistance and information during this challenging time.

PPP 20/10 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PPP 20/11 UPDATE ON ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

The Chairman advised that an update would be provided on the Public Consultation on Planning Applications (Minute Number PPP 20/4) and comments on the proposals for development management were invited from the Parish Councils.

It was explained that Cabinet on 3 June 2020, had deferred the recommendations of the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board of 3 March (as set out in [PE 20/4](#)) until the 30 June in order to allow for discussion at the Parish Partnership Panel.

PPP 20/12 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT - PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES**(PPP 20/4 – Public Consultation on Planning Applications)**

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure (Councillor David Lettington) provided an update on the development management proposals, which were intended to ensure parity and improve efficiency and effectiveness for all parties in the planning system.

The Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) (Tonbridge and Malling) was thanked for compiling comments received from parish councils as these would aid discussions in advance of the Cabinet meeting on 30 June. In response KALC expressed appreciation to the Cabinet for deferring the matter and indicated that parishes remained keen to share their concerns.

It was recognised that the proposals represented some challenges for parish councils, who might have to adapt their current practices to adopt the changes. Unfortunately, a planned period of engagement with the parish councils had been delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, it was reported that Planning Officers would undertake engagement with parishes, developers and agents via a survey and webinar as soon as possible.

Parishes reiterated concerns that the Borough Council would not accept representations on applications received after a 21 day notice period from any party not included in the statutory (technical) consultees definition, such as parish councils. It was felt that insufficient weight would be given to the response of the parish council and, as many of them followed a 28 day parish council meeting cycle, it would be difficult to meet the proposed 21 day response deadline.

A number of other points were raised and related to:

- Clarification as to the definition of the 21 day period and whether Bank Holidays were excluded;
- The perceived changed working relationship between the Borough and Parish Councils;
- Lack of hard copy for significant and large planning applications; and
- Any flexibility to extend the 21 day response deadline at the request of individual parish councils when required.

In response, the Cabinet Member reiterated it was important that all parties were treated equally. In addition, parish councils were encouraged to register to receive email notifications when a planning application was lodged and validated on the planning portal (Public Access). This would give advance warning that a response would be required and would assist parishes in meeting the 21 day response deadline. The Panel were also assured that the views of parish councils were taken very seriously.

In summing up, the Chairman recognised that a number of significant points had been raised and these would be reflected upon in advance of Cabinet on 30 June. In his role as Leader of the Council, he also committed to meeting with KALC, and potentially a small number of parish representatives, to discuss these points further.

Any outcomes arising from the period of engagement with stakeholders would be considered further by Cabinet on 30 June 2020.

PPP 20/13 RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC AND THE WAY FORWARD

The report of Management Team, considered by Extraordinary Cabinet on 19 May, provided a strategic overview of the Borough Council's response to the national emergency, the impacts on service delivery, the introduction of priority initiatives and financial impacts. A framework for the development of a future recovery was also considered.

As part of this future recovery plan, the Cabinet of 3 June had approved a one-year addendum to the Borough Council's Corporate Strategy. This would provide a framework within which to consider a wide range of issues in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Particular reference was made to the Climate Change Strategy and it was reported that the consultation period had been extended until the end of June. The responses submitted during the earlier consultation period had been received and recorded.

The Chief Executive was pleased to report that the Borough Council had been well prepared for remote working, with 90% of staff working from home where possible. In addition, a number of staff had been redeployed to support the work of the Community Support Hub, which had been established to support vulnerable residents by providing essential food supplies and telephone befriending services. The Borough Council had worked with parish councils, community groups and voluntary organisations to identify and signpost to long term support networks.

Reference was made to the financial support distributed to local businesses via rate relief and the delivery of Small Business Grants and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants. It was also reported that there

had been 160 applications to the Discretionary Business Grant Scheme. These applications were being assessed and funds would be allocated as soon as possible.

The financial pressures faced by the Borough Council continued to be significant and extremely challenging, with a loss of income of circa £2m - £5m predicted. A number of options related to the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Savings and Transformation Strategy would be reviewed by Cabinet on 30 June.

The Borough Council recognised the uncertainty around how long lockdown measures would continue. However, it was important for the authority to plan for the future and this would be done within the themes of 'review, recover and reorient'. It was noted that Kent County Council had statutory responsibility to establish a countywide recovery framework.

As a first step towards recovery, retail centres and Tonbridge High Street would reopen on Monday 15 June and the Borough Council was providing guidance to traders. In addition the Borough Council was raising awareness via a communication campaign in the local press, on social media and messaging from the Leader to residents. Posters and signage reminding customers about social distancing would be available to businesses. A number of High Street Support Officers had been engaged to patrol Tonbridge High Street and monitor the retail centres in Borough Green, Snodland and West Malling and to engage with customers and businesses offering reassurance.

The Parish Councils thanked Borough Council officers for continuing to work during the lockdown and for keeping essential services operating. It was hoped that lessons could be learned from the early days of the crisis, especially related to communication, and future emergency planning refined to take account of potential improvements.

PPP 20/14 KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The County Councillor for Malling North (Councillor Mrs Hohler) outlined the County Councils response to the coronavirus pandemic and the measures implemented since the introduction of lockdown in March 2020. A detailed summary was attached to the Notes for information.

Particular reference was made to the establishment of Kent Together which had provided support to a significant number of vulnerable people and demonstrated how different organisations and communities across Kent could work together to help those most in need. Close partnership working with the NHS, Districts, voluntary and community organisations, schools and providers had been essential as had the work delivered by the Kent Resilience Forum.

It was also reported that data showed that Kent had the lowest percentage of care homes reporting a coronavirus outbreak, at 28.7%, despite having the largest number of facilities in the South East.

Kent County Council's priority had been the ongoing provision of as many public services as it had been possible to maintain and the safety and wellbeing of staff, service users and residents.

PPP 20/15 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Chairman, in his role as Leader of the Council, advised that key points of relevance to Tonbridge and Malling had been covered elsewhere on the agenda, as the response and recovery related to Covid-19 continued to represent a significant challenge for the Borough Council.

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm

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Kent County Council Services Update – Councillor Mrs Sarah Hohler – Member for Malling North Division

This is a short summary of some of the key themes for KCC since lock down started in March: PPE supplies; the development of virtual meetings, both formal and informal, and member briefings; the need to keep on top of and adhere to the copious PHE and government guidance; the number of times national government has praised and called on the expertise of local government during the pandemic; the importance of testing and many more.

We have closed and re-opened HWRCs and country parks; popularity of library e-books and magazines and participation in online events; more investigations of scams by trading standards; changes in the way deaths have been registered (by phone) and the cancellation of birth registrations which need to be registered face to face. Support for businesses has been important, including through the Kent and Medway Growth Hub business helpline.

Kent Together was formed and has now dealt with nearly 6,000 requests for support from 4,200 people and continues to embody the way different organisations and communities across Kent have come together to help the vulnerable people most in need. Close partnership working with the NHS, Districts, VCS organisations, schools and providers has been essential as has the sterling work delivered by the Kent Resilience Forum.

You may have picked up from the media the problems facing KCC by the arrival of increasing numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children whom we have a duty to care for. Government officials are seeking urgent offers of support from other local authorities through pledges of care placements, ever more needed with mandatory quarantine.

Recent news is the data on Covid outbreaks in care homes in the south east region. The data shows that Kent has the largest number of care homes and, currently, the lowest percentage of care homes which reported an outbreak, at 28.7%

Our priority has been the ongoing provision of as many of our public services as it has been possible to maintain and the safety and wellbeing of our staff, service users and residents.

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