

Planning for the Future and Other Planning Reforms

Item PE/20 referred from Extraordinary meeting of the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board of 29 September 2020

The report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health summarised the Government's current proposals for reforming the planning system.

In addition, the Borough Council's proposed responses to the Governments consultations 'Changes to the Current Planning System (set out in Annex 1) and 'Planning for the Future' (set out in Annex 2) were presented for consideration. The deadline for submission was 1 and 29 October respectively.

Careful consideration was given to the proposed changes to the current planning system (set out in paragraph 1.2 of the report). Members expressed significant concern about the revision to the standard methodology for assessing housing need and the potential requirement for Tonbridge and Malling to generate 1,440 units annually. It was noted that if this figure was confirmed as the new housing need allocation for the Borough it represented a doubling of the figure currently in the submitted Local Plan.

A number of other concerns were also raised including the fragility of the current infrastructure network to support any increase in local development; whether the proposed increased housing figures could realistically be delivered; the loss of decision making by residents and elected members; the lack of affordable housing for local people, particularly first time buyers, and the lack of suitable mix of accommodation types and the proposals around 'permission in principle.

It was also commented that the performance of the Borough Council in delivering new houses was well above average nationally and disappointment was expressed that Tonbridge and Malling appeared to have been penalised for performing so well in the past.

However, Members recognised the importance of retaining employment land in the Borough and providing suitable accommodation for all.

A technical response on the issues raised was provided by the Director of Planning, Housing and Environment Health, the Head of Planning Policy and the Development Control Manager.

Careful consideration was then given to the Planning for the Future White Paper and Members expressed significant concern regarding affordability in the South East; the proposal to identify land types and how conflicts regarding growth areas, renewal areas and protected areas would be resolved and the missed opportunities regarding climate change and providing accommodation for older persons.

With regard to establishing a standard method for housing requirements (Proposal 4) it was suggested that the response to question 8(a) be revised to include 'no' or 'not sure'. This was noted by the Head of Planning Policy who would consider the response further before final submission.

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure reminded Members that there would be further discussion on the Planning White Paper at Cabinet on 14 October and encouraged all to submit comments in advance of this meeting.

A technical response on the issues raised was provided by the Head of Planning Policy and the Development Control Manager. The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health also offered to detail the points and concerns raised that could not be included in the Borough Councils consultation response in a covering letter to Government.

Finally, Members welcomed the joint letter sent by Kent Members of Parliament and the letter of the Leader of Kent County Council to the Secretary of State requesting a meeting to discuss the proposals further. In addition, the Leader of the Borough Council intended to write to the Secretary of State setting out the concerns raised by Members.

In conclusion, Members expressed significant concern on a number of the proposals and felt that the proposed response of the Borough Council (set out in Annexes 1 and 2) was well balanced, highlighted the main areas of concern and offered potential solutions.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the content of the report be noted;
- (2) subject to the concerns raised by Members and summarised above, the proposed response to the consultation on 'Changes to the Current Planning System' (set out in Annex 1 of the report) form the basis of the Borough Council's formal response to the Government;
- (3) the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health, in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure, finalise and submit the Borough Councils response to the 'Changes to the Current Planning System' consultation by the deadline of 1 October 2020;
- (4) subject to the concerns raised by Members and summarised above, the proposed response to the Planning White Paper – Planning for the Future (set out in Annex 2 of the report) form the basis of the Borough Council's formal response to Government, pending the views of Cabinet on 14 October; and
- (5) the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health, in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure, finalise and submit the Borough Councils response to the Planning White Paper – Planning for the Future consultation by the deadline of 29 October 2020

***Referred to Cabinet**