

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

MINUTES

Thursday, 9th February, 2023

Present: Cllr R W Dalton (Chair), Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr R P Betts, Cllr M A Coffin, Cllr Mrs F A Kemp, Cllr B J Luker, Cllr M R Rhodes and Cllr M Taylor.

Together with Addington, Aylesford (2nd Vice-Chair), Birling, Borough Green, Ditton, East Malling and Larkfield, East Peckham, Hadlow, Hildenborough, Ightham, Offham, Platt, Plaxtol, Shipbourne, Stansted Parish Councils and County Cllr Mrs S Hohler, County Cllr S Hudson and County Cllr H Rayner

Councillors T Bishop, M Boughton D A S Davis, M A J Hood and J R S Lark were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs M Tatton (Vice-chair), Mrs S Bell and A P J Keeley

PART 1 - PUBLIC

PPP 23/1 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PPP 23/2 UPDATE ON ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

- **Minute Number PPP 22/24 – Update on Climate Change Strategy**

The Chair advised that an update on the Borough Council's Climate Change Strategy originally requested by the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) (Tonbridge and Malling) was no longer required and this item had been removed from the agenda.

PPP 23/3 ELECTION BILL CHANGES

The Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Transformation, in their roles as Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officer, advised of the recent changes arising from the Election Bill and summarised the implications for the local elections in May 2023.

The three changes to be made in advance of the election related to mandatory voter identification, accessibility and the number of subscribers for candidates. There were no changes to postal votes and the verification process remained the same.

Electors would have to show an approved form of photo identification before voting. This could be either a driving licence, passport or immigration document. There were a number of documents that could be used as voter identification and more information was available from the Elections Office. If electors could not provide one of the required forms of identification as set out in legislation, they would be able to apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate from their Elections Returning Officer.

The process for managing voter identification at polling stations was summarised and it was noted that the final details were still to be refined. It was also explained that poll cards would now be in the form of a letter in a buff envelope due to the level of detail required.

There was a national campaign to publicise the introduction of voter identification together with information on the Borough Council website and social media channels.

Reference was also made to the legal obligation to take reasonable steps to support voters with disabilities and to facilitate access to polling stations for wheelchair users. A polling station review had been undertaken and the Returning Officers were confident that Tonbridge and Malling met this obligation.

There had also been a significant change in the number of subscribers required when seeking nomination for a parish council election. To encourage more people to stand individuals only required a proposer and a seconder.

Finally, Members were reminded that following the local election the Borough Council would have a reduced number of elected Members (down to 44 from 54). The Notice of Election would be published on 13 March 2023 and the nominations period would run from 14 March to 4 April 2023. A briefing session for potential candidates and agents was arranged for 1 March 2023.

The Panel asked that contact details to apply for Voter Authority Certificates and a copy of the presentation be provided out of meeting. Concerns in respect of any potential postal strike and implications for postal votes and delivering poll cards were raised. At the current time there were no plans in place to deal with this scenario although there would be a national position if this arose.

Parish/Town Councils were asked to communicate the changes to their residents. If there were any concerns raised when canvassing these should be directed to the Elections Office as soon as possible.

PPP 23/4 PLANNING ENFORCEMENT STRUCTURE AND REGULATIONS

In response to a matter raised by KALC in advance of the meeting, the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure (Cllr D Davis) outlined the recent changes to Planning Enforcement within the Borough Council.

Details of the changes had been considered by the [Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 October and approved by Cabinet on 8 November 2022](#). As a result of these proposals, there was increased staffing to support enforcement activity. Unfortunately, recruitment into planning roles remained challenging. The impact of not having an adopted Local Plan on recruitment was also recognised.

The Cabinet Member outlined the Borough Council's role in enforcement and advised that any action had to be taken under planning law as set out by Government. All investigations required good evidence which sometimes took a while to gather.

Any specific concerns in respect of enforcement should be raised with planning enforcement officers. However, the Cabinet Member welcomed the opportunity to discuss any concerns out of meeting.

Reference was made to submitting responses to planning applications and all were encouraged to use the planning portal.

Finally, Aylesford Parish Council asked how the requirement for developers to reduce the carbon footprint of new houses could be enforced by the Borough Council. It was explained that climate change/biodiversity measures would be reviewed as part of the application process. The enforcing of building regulations was not the role of the planning enforcement team and came under the remit of the Building Control team.

PPP 23/5 LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure (Councillor D Davis) advised that the Regulation 18 consultation in respect to the Local Plan and the associated Interim Sustainability Appraisal had finished on 3 November 2022. The Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee of 6 December 2022 had reviewed the high-level summaries and statistics of the responses received and the key themes identified. Further detailed analysis would be presented to a future meeting of the Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee.

A majority of the comments were in response to the Local Plan rather than the Interim Sustainability Appraisal and the key matters raised had been noted by the Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee in December. The Panel was advised that the call for sites process had been reopened alongside the Regulation 18 Consultation and a further 52 potential new sites had been identified (once duplicates had been removed).

Particular reference was made to recent announcements made by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities indicating new measures in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, which could have implications for housebuilding targets, the Green Belt and the duty to co-operate as there was an emphasis on local decision making.

It was reported that the Borough Council's response to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 14 February 2023 and the papers were now available on the Borough Council's [website](#).

The potential for consultation on the 52 additional sites identified in the revisited Call for Sites exercise was discussed. However, this was dependent on the final detail of the Bill and whether the Regulation 18 consultation should be revisited or Regulation 19 consultation should commence. The Borough Council were proceeding with caution on planning for a Regulation 19 consultation in Autumn 2023 with the Local Plan adopted in summer 2024.

The main areas to be addressed were better engagement with residents and improved infrastructure to support any additional housing. There were also significant pressures on the housing register and temporary accommodation. Whilst the need for new houses in Tonbridge and Malling was recognised it needed to be balanced with infrastructure constraints. The lack of a Local Plan and a five year housing land supply meant that the Borough Council were in a difficult position in respect of planning applications.

PPP 23/6 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(1) Date of next meeting

Members were advised that due to the local Elections in May 2023, the next meeting of the Panel was provisionally scheduled for 15 June. The programme of meetings for 2023-2025 was due to be considered and endorsed in principle by Council in April and dates would be confirmed as soon as possible.

Anyone wishing to submit items for a future meeting should do so as soon as possible and these would be considered for the next available meeting.

(2) Tonbridge and Malling Newsletter

The representative of KALC welcomed the introduction of a regular newsletter and parish/town councils were encouraged to promote this to residents.

(3) Access to Committee papers

Members were reminded that all parish/town councils received an email notification on the publication of agenda papers. These were sent direct to the parish/town clerk for onward cascade to parish councillors.

The Principal Democratic Services Officer also reminded Members that they could subscribe to updates via the committee management area on the [website](#).

The meeting ended at 9.17 pm