

**Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held at St Johns School, Provender Way, Grove Green on Thursday 27 September 2012 commencing at 7.40 pm.**

Councillors present – Mr Ivor Davies (Chairman), Mrs P Brooks, Mr P Dengate, Mr T Harwood, Mr Bob Hinder, Mrs Wendy Hinder, Mr D Holmes , Mrs K Macklin, Mr K Perry, Mr G Smith, Mrs A Spain, Mr A Springate and Mr P Sullivan together with the Clerk, Assistant Clerk, 47 members of the public and County Councillor I Chittenden.

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming the public and explaining why the Extraordinary meeting had been called. He notified everyone how he was planning to conduct the meeting and thanked KCC Emergency Planning Department for the loan of the sound equipment so that everyone would be able to be clearly heard.

**1. Apologies and absences.**

Cllr V Davies (convalescing) and Cllr Waller (holiday). Borough Councillor D Butler. County Councillor Paul Carter (KCC commitment).

**2. Declaration of Interests or Lobbying.**

All Councillors declared that they had been lobbied.

The meeting was adjourned at 7.42 pm to allow members of the public to address the councillors. 17 people took the opportunity to raise concerns and issues regarding the proposed development for junction 7. The meeting reconvened at 8.17.

**3. Core Strategy Strategic Sites Allocations Consultation.**

Due to the resolution, signed by 4 members, to revisit the response to the Core Strategy consultation made by the Environment Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2012, members had received a briefing note and a copy of the minutes relating to the consultation.

It was commented that the original response might only need its stance changed as the majority of comments were still relevant. Cllr Harwood proposed seconded by Cllr Spain that "**Boxley Parish Council strongly objects to the proposed policy SS4 Newnham Park within the Maidstone Borough Council Core Strategy Strategic Sites Allocations**". This was **agreed** (11 for and 2 abstentions).

After detailed consideration the actual response was **agreed** and is attached as an appendix to the minutes.

The meeting was adjourned at 9.25 pm to allow members of the public to address the councillors. Three people took the opportunity to comment and the meeting reconvened at 9.30.

The Clerk was given devolved powers to amend the Environment's Committee's Core Strategy Integrated Transport Strategy response to reflect changes made in the Strategic Sites Allocations response. Changes to be notified to the Environment Committee for ratification.

Meeting closed at 9.32 p.m.

Signed as a correct record of the proceedings.

Chairman.....Date.....

Appendix.

Explanation. This appendix is a true representation of the response to be made to MBC. Some of the Environment Committee's responses (previously circulated to the Council) were not presented on the overhead projection for discussion. This was because they were deemed, by the Clerk, as not controversial – the responses in question are marked with \*.

An error in reproducing the briefing document resulted in a response, by the Environment Committee not being included and this is marked as \*\*.

### **Core Strategy; Strategic Sites Allocation Consultation.**

The Parish Council's response to the consultation is as follows:

#### **\*Policy SS1 Strategic housing location to the north west of the urban area.**

**Policy SS1a Bridge Nursery.** No comment.

**Policy SS1b - East of Hermitage Lane.** No comment.

**Policy SS1c - West of Hermitage Lane.** No comment.

#### **Policy SS2 - Strategic housing location to the south east of the urban area**

**Policy SS2a - Langley Park**

**Policy SS2b - North of Sutton Road**

**Policy SS2c - North of Bicknor Wood**

Boxley Parish Council has grave concerns over the impact on Grove Green should these proposals be adopted. It is likely that many residents of the proposed 1,075 new dwellings will use Willington Street/Ashford Rd/New Cut to access the motorway at junction 7 even though the area is slightly closer to junction 8.

Policies SS2a-c contains S106 payments for highway improvements in the immediate area but with no contribution to highway improvements further afield.

Such development is contrary to the NPPF which requires "*when considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference should be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre*".

Although Policy SS4 deals with traffic issues caused by the proposed development at Newnham Park, it contains no reference to any additional traffic from the three 'Sutton Road' development areas. The lack of a strategic overview connecting the two increased traffic flows is considered a weakness in both the Core and Integrated Transport Strategies.

All three sites are extremely valuable wildlife sites and to development them will push urbanisation into the countryside. This is against the NPPF requirement that Planning Authorities "should contribute and enhance natural and local environments". The loss of the sites would contribute to the overall decline in biodiversity, which again is against the NPPF Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment policy.

It is considered that the SS2a-c policies, if approved, should contain Section 106 contributions to highway improvements around Grove Green.

#### **Strategic employment location at junction 8 of M20 motorway**

Boxley Parish Council fought against the KIG development at junction 8. Whilst recognising that some limited development may eventually be allowed at Junction 8, it strongly objects to the development proposed at Woodcut Farm and to the South of the A20. The Parish Council also objects to B1a development on any land as warehousing

and distribution offers, in the main, only low-grade employment. The Hollingbourne site is not considered big enough to be a strategic site.

The development of any of sites at junction 8 would result in an unacceptable loss to the biodiversity of the area and be against the NPPF Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment policy.

**Strategic employment site at junction 7 of M20 motorway Policy SS4 - Newnham Park.**

Boxley Parish Council strongly objects to development on this site because:

- This is a vital buffer zone between the urban development and the AONB. As signatories to the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan, Maidstone Borough Council should be protecting the AONB not endangering it.
- The proposed development allocation is entirely dependent upon the private motor car and as such is not sustainable. It is therefore contrary to the NPPF which requires *"when considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference should be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre"*.
- Such a significant intensification of development will inevitably exacerbate traffic problems, undermine pedestrian safety and increase noise, light and air pollution in the area of junction 7 of the M20. NPPF states that new and existing development should be prevented from contributing to air and noise pollution. Development at Junction 7 will do precisely this.
- The stream feeding Vinters Valley Nature Reserve comes from this site and it is highly likely that pollutants will leech or wash into this stream with dire consequences for the Nature Reserve. This will be contrary to NPPF Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment policy.
- Such intensive development will have an adverse impact on the Ancient Woodland and its current biodiversity which is contrary to the NPPF.
- The Ancient Woodlands on the Newnham Park site and Vinters Valley Nature Reserve contain protected species. Newnham Park is situated within the Kent Biodiversity Partnership's Mid Kent Greensand and Gault Biodiversity Opportunity Area, which means the site has been identified as offering the best opportunities for habitat enhancement, restoration or creation. The NPPF Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment policy requires planning authorities to set criteria based policies and then give *"appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks."* It is considered that MBC fails to do this.
- The adjacent "Eclipse Park" employment site remains largely undeveloped and what little development that has been progressed has by virtue of design and layout significantly and negatively impacted on the setting and foreground of the Kent Downs AONB. It is unsupportable that further strategically located, beautiful and bio-diverse countryside should be destroyed whilst existing allocated adjacent land lies barren and neglected.

Notwithstanding the Parish Councils strong objection if the strategies are approved the Parish Council, requires the following mitigation to be included;

**Provision of a maximum 150,000m<sup>2</sup> of specialist medical facilities set within an enhanced landscape structure.**

MBC should include, where necessary, the relevant Use Classes Order details with restrictions on the Permitted Changes allowable under the Use Classes Order. This will ensure that no 'lower grade' development will be permitted on the site.

**Replacement retail facilities at Newnham Court Shopping Village, confined to the immediate vicinity of the existing footprint of the current retail park;**

The Parish Council would welcome the redevelopment, on its current footprint, of Nottcutts Shopping Village. The current retail uses (garden centre, vet etc.) 'sit well' within the community and area and thus the Parish Council would support similar occupancy but would be strongly opposed to significant change to the type of retail on this site.

The policy should include height restrictions on such development. Rather than wait for 'off the peg, one size fits all' buildings being included in applications, MBC should produce a design or character statement that should strongly influence what goes on the site. Included in this development brief should be strict conditions regarding light pollution, as required by NPPF Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment policy.

**Creation of a parkland nature reserve of 3.03ha on land to the south east of the site, as shown on the policies map, to be transferred to the Borough Council or maintained by a Trust;**

The Parish Council agrees to the creation of a parkland nature reserve to the south-east of the site but it does not consider that there is enough protected land overall. Semi-natural nature reserves can be used as part of the landscaping and this should be required.

**Construction of high quality buildings of a sustainable design that reflect the site's prime location as a gateway to Maidstone;**

Rather than wait for 'off the peg one, size fits all' buildings being included in applications, MBC should produce a design or character statement (by a robust development brief) that should influence what goes on the site. This is a very sensitive area and MBC must protect the AONB and local communities from the fashions and vagaries of architects. The Parish Council does not want another Eclipse Park.

**Mitigation of the impact of development on the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting by the provision of new and the retention and enhancement of existing structural and internal landscaping, by the use of the topography in site layout plans to exclude development on more prominent parts of the site, by the restriction of building heights to a maximum of two storeys and the use of low level lighting, and by the use of green roofs where practical;**

MBC should include a reference to the need to mitigate the impact of any development on the views from Grove Green as well as the AONB.

The reference to excluding development on the most prominent parts of the site is considered weakly worded. MBC should include in the Core Strategy the creation of additional parkland nature reserves on some of the prominent parts of the site, thus requiring the developers to include landscaping and planting to mitigate the impact of the new development and to increase bio-diversity. At 6.10 MBC refers to the need for a robust internal landscape structure but unless this is identified, in the actual plan and policy, locations or minimum square footage there is little faith that it will be successfully delivered.

Newnham Park is situated within the Kent Biodiversity Partnership's Mid Kent Greensand and Gault Biodiversity Opportunity Area, which means the area, has been identified as offering the best opportunities for habitat enhancement, restoration or creation.

**The cumulative quantum of retail floorspace will be restricted to the provision of up to 500m<sup>2</sup> above that which already exists, and any additional retail floorspace above this limit must be complementary to town centre uses and, by**

**means of a sequential sites assessment, demonstrably require an out of town location;**

The Parish Council is concerned about the impact on the town centre if more retail space is included at Newnham Park. Retail attracts more traffic from a wider area and this will have an impact on an already congested highway infrastructure. Safeguards should be put in place to ensure that no changes could be made to the site if it is likely that it would attract more traffic. The NPPF requires "*when considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference should be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre*".

**Submission of a retail impact assessment for both comparison and convenience goods, to be approved by the Borough Council, in order to assess the impact of retail park proposals on the town centre;**

It is felt that this is weakly worded. A caveat should be included that retail provision on the site will be excluded if it is proved that there will be any adverse impact on the town centre. (MBC has to be assured that the national or local policies actually exist to so control retail development). Without robust wording in the Core Strategy MBC will always be open to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate.

\*\* Retail development at Newnham Park would also impact on the local Grove Green shopping area. A retail impact assessment should be produced as any adverse impact, resulting in closure of facilities, could affect the more vulnerable members in the community.

**Provision of a minimum 30m landscape buffer along the northern and eastern boundaries of the site to protect Ancient Woodland, with tracts of planting extending into the body of the development;**

This is felt to be an inadequate amount of protection and should at least be doubled.

**Provision of a minimum 10m landscape buffer on both sides of the stream running north-south through the site (minimum 20m width in total);**

This is felt to be an inadequate amount of protection and should at least be doubled.

No consideration has been given to the residential properties at Gidds Pond Cottages. It is considered that a similar landscape buffer zone should be included to protect these properties from the massive development to the rear boundary. The provision of a small area, adjacent to Gidds Pond Cottages, of off road car parking, for property owners might be welcomed.

**\* Submission of a full landscape assessment and ecology survey, to be approved by the Borough Council;**

Agreed.

**\*A watching archaeological brief;**

Agreed.

**\*Vehicular access to the site from the New Cut roundabout, with bus and emergency access from the A249 Sittingbourne Road;**

Agreed, but only if the proper improvements to the highway infrastructure are included.

**\*A bus interchange as part of the retail redevelopment together with a car park management plan;**

Agreed but it is considered that any development on the site *requires* a bus interchange together with a car park management plan.

**\*Enhanced pedestrian and cycle links to the residential areas of Grove Green, Vinters Park and Penenden Heath, and to Eclipse Business Park;**

Agreed.

**Submission of a Travel Plan, to be approved by the Borough Council.**

The Parish Council has little or no faith in travel plans. However if they are required then they should be properly produced and subject to local scrutiny before being accepted by the Borough Council. The wording should be changed to state that without the submission of a provable sustainable travel plan, with adequate and long-term resources made available, no development will be allowed.

**\*A signed legal agreement for off-site highway improvements prior to the commencement of development;**

Agreed and strongly supported.

**Capacity improvements to the New Cut roundabout at the junction of Bearsted Road and New Cut Road, together with the provision of pedestrian crossing facilities;**

The Parish Council requires that a Section 106 contribution is obtained to install a roundabout at the junction of New Cut and Grovewood Drive South. The current junction cannot cope with the existing traffic and the changes and increased traffic caused by development at Newnham Park and around Sutton Road will not only increase the existing congestion, and the access and egress problems of residents living on Grove Green, but will also endanger lives as emergency vehicles will be further delayed.

**The upgrading of Bearsted Road to a dual carriageway between Bearsted roundabout and New Cut roundabout;**

The wording should be changed to require any land that is needed to do the work must be supplied from the Newnham Court side and not taken from Vinters Valley Nature Reserve, Maidstone Crematorium or other land to the south.

**\*Traffic signalisation of the M20 motorway junction 7 roundabout;**

Agreed and strongly supported.

**A subsidised shuttle bus to operate between the site and the town centre, via New Cut Road and Ashford Road;**

It is not clear why MBC places a value on a subsidised bus service. It is unlikely that someone shopping at Newnham Park would immediately want also to shop in the Town Centre (or visa versa) and, if they did, to do so by bus.

The money should be spent on providing a good bus service that takes in other local residential areas or for subsidising the P&R bus service which could be required to stop off at Newnham Park. Why should Maidstone residents be subsidising an out of town centre?

**Bus priority measures on New Cut Road, where feasible, and traffic signal priority measures at the junction of New Cut Road and the A20 Ashford Road;**

The Parish Council requires that a Section 106 is obtained to install a roundabout at the junction of New Cut and Grovewood Drive South. The current junction cannot cope with the existing traffic and bus priorities will further exacerbate the problem.

**Improved bus links to the site from the residential areas of Grove Green and Penenden Heath.**

Development should not be allowed without this and developers should be asked to fund services to outlying areas through the provision of a high quality bus interchange facility.

**\*Provision of appropriate contributions towards highway improvements.**

Agreed and strongly supported.

Parish Council's Additional Comments.

The site is extremely sensitive, due to its position at the base of the North Downs AONB and its particular ecological value. Landscaping, throughout the site, should be designed to add to and enhance the bio-diversity of the area. It should be designed so as to provide a wildlife corridor between the adjoining woodlands, Weaving Heath and Vinters Valley Nature Reserve.

Highway improvements are required on Grove Wood Drive North because development and increased employment at Newnham Park means that there will be increased use of this road to access the local shopping centre. A S106 contribution should be sought to improve the width of Grovewood Drive North and to install better pedestrian crossing points.

Increased traffic and the introduction of a dedicated bus lane on New Cut Road will require Grove Green Roundabout (outside Maidstone Studios) to be improved. Any bus priority measures should be designed in such a way as not to erode roadside vegetation and habitats or exacerbate road congestion.

The Parish Council is aware that the Grove Green Scouts wish to have a dedicated Scout Hall and require land. As the land at Newnham Court is the only remaining land available for such development it is requested that some land is reserved for community use/facility and that a Section 106 contribution be secured for its development.

A phased development is required to mitigate the impact on the community with relevant infrastructure in place from the start.