

Community Planning Panel

Representatives present at 19th April meeting

Egham Residents' Association – ERA

Englefield Green Village Resident's Association – EGVRA

Hamm Court Residents' Association – HCRA

The Chertsey Society – The CS

The Ottershaw Society – The OS

Thorpe Residents' Association – TRA

Virginia Water Community Association – VWCA

West Addlestone Residents' Association – WARA

Council Officers present at 19th April meeting

Corporate Head of Planning and Environmental Services – Ian Maguire (IM)

Policy and Strategy Manager – Richard Ford (RF)

Planning Assistant (Policy and Strategy) – Anna Murray (AM)

The meeting opened at 6.30 pm.

1. Introductions

RF welcomed all in attendance and invited round table introductions from all parties.

RF stated that the purpose of the meeting was to inform the Community Planning Panel (CPP) of the preferred approaches of the Issues and Options document. This document is anticipated to go to public consultation in late June until mid/late August. The Policy and Strategy team have considered it appropriate to make the consultation 7 weeks long, instead of the required 6, in light of the summer holidays. The material of this consultation will be made public on the 15th June on the Runnymede Borough Council website before it is put forward for approval at Planning Committee on the 22nd June.

2. Local Plan – Issues and Options

2.1 Spatial Vision

RF introduced the first topic of Spatial Vision. RF stated that the question of the proposed removal of land in the Green Belt in the Borough of Runnymede is a necessity in order to accommodate some of the housing need identified in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment. If the Council does not show that everything has been considered in an attempt to address our housing need then the Government will intervene.

IM presented the Resultant Land Parcels from the Green Belt Review. The preferred approach was explained. IM explained the three sites located in Lyne would not be taken out of the Green Belt as they are not very sustainable and there are topography issues. Likewise one of the parcels in Ottershaw that includes Chaworth Close will not be taken out of the Green Belt as a large part of it is within the SANG. The OS asked whether this was definitely the decision that would be made. IM stated that the Council are not proposing to take this site out of the Green Belt as the SANG within it would not be taken out. However, the other parcel in Ottershaw has been slightly tweaked after site visits around the boundary and the Council will be proposing to take this site out of the Green Belt. IM highlighted that it would be a very large site within the recommended options. IM continued to clarify that with the parcels within Virginia Water, the Council would not be proposing to take these out of the Green Belt as the majority are situated within Wentworth and therefore would not be viable. Other parcels that are being proposed by the Council to take out of the Green Belt have been slightly tweaked.

IM reiterated that this is the preferred approach but will need to be taken to members for approval at Planning Committee and will be subject of public consultation during the summer. IM added that none of these sites have been through Sustainability Appraisals or Transport Impact Assessments; the review was purely to assess the how the Green Belt in Runnymede performs against the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. The OS asked that the document for Issues and Options will go through committee for approval and then will go to public consultation. RF confirmed that the document will be in the public arena in mid-June.

The OS asked what the CPP can tell their residents at this stage of the Local Plan process with regard to the issues and options document. IM emphasised that Runnymede Borough Council is a transparent authority and the CPP can tell their residents what they have heard during the evening's meeting as these will be the preferred approaches that the Policy and Strategy team will be recommending to their Council members.

WARA asked whether these sites are all privately owned or are some owned by Runnymede Borough Council. IM replied that none of these sites are owned by the Council, although there is one small part of land in the Addlestone/Row town area that is owned by the Government. Therefore, all the gains will be private apart from one DEFRA gain. RF added that it is also dependent on availability of the land. WARA residents would be interested in the development of any land around Franklands Drive; WARA asked whether this land is or is not privately owned. There has been a mix of responses, with some private owners expressing positive feedback, some silence from private owners and a few objections. IM answered that it is owned by a private farmer and by the vet labs that have internal estate roads. It may be considered that Strawberry Fields is returned to the urban area and then protected through another designation such as Local Green Spaces; this would define the Green Belt boundary better. The CS asked whether any Local Green Spaces submitted were included in any of

the sites that were being proposed to be removed from the Green Belt. IM stated that from his recollection no sites included in these Green Belt areas had been submitted for Local Green Space consideration. At the moment the existing use is empty fields.

TRA asked whether the defined boundaries for the village of Thorpe had been produced yet. IM replied that planning officers were in the process of defining the boundary of Thorpe known as Stage 2 of the Green Belt Villages Review. The historical boundary was firstly looked at but there are obvious anomalies within this that are being addressed. TRA raised a concern about development of a residential estate in Thorpe. RF commented that Councillor Gillham had informed him on this matter.

IM commented that developers often believe their land has special attributes. In addition to the resultant land parcels there will be at least 4 large scale sites, although at the present time IM is unconvinced by any of them. IM reiterated that consultation is the formal chance for any representation to be made. The Strategic Land Availability Assessment mapbook will be published in due course and this lists all sites promoted to the Policy and Strategy team and it is expected that a few will come forward.

The CS questioned how large these resultant land parcel sites would be if they are allocated for development. IM explained that the Thorpe development previously talked about is similar to the size of the Ottershaw resultant land parcel. There is no other land parcel the same size as Longcross Park. The CS suggested perhaps 50 dwellings could be accommodated. IM expressed that it would be closer to 100 dwellings and explained that land area and the number of dwellings often do not connect together.

ERA stated that he accepted the current Green Belt boundary has faults however his heart is set on keeping the Green Belt boundary as it is. He commented that if the Green Belt begins to be cut away for development needs this could subsequently lead to the loss of significantly more Green Belt land. Is the line of logic that if option 2 in this issue does not get approved then it will not be possible to meet option 2 on the housing issue? And if it is not possible to meet option 2 on the housing issue then it is likely the Government will intervene?

RF stated that this was correct and the plan would be found unsound leading to Government intervention if option 2 on the housing issue was not met. In the previous core strategy plan the inspector was not convinced that the Policy and Strategy team had looked at every possible way to help supply the need for housing.

IM mentioned that there are often differences of opinion in this regard. In the previous core strategy plan, planning officers tried to leave the green belt unchanged but in recent years the Government has made it very clear that the Green Belt must be reviewed. It is about doing the best the Policy and Strategy team can whilst acknowledging the Green Belt.

2.2 Housing

ERA asked whether it is the government that is enforcing housing. IM stated that the Policy and Strategy team are required to consider the issue and subsequently have undertaken work that looks at the Housing Market Assessment which provides evidence for how much housing the Borough of Runnymede needs. It may be impossible to meet all of these needs but the Council is going to have to significantly boost housing and must try to achieve that number as close as possible.

RF added that this housing target is the leading piece of evidence. It is possible to put a higher or lower density on a site and IM and another colleague have walked across sites and defined how much housing would be realistically deliverable.

EGVRA asked whether the CPP could have an example of this.

IM stated that the figures he would go on to mention could change. IM added that the DMP had helped to inform the numbers they had produced through professional knowledge and experience. IM began with the Virginia Water North resultant land parcel which is defined on the northern edge by Hollow Lane. IM added that the topography of the land is varied but on the site at the top new housing could have a relatively high density, something in the region of 35/40 dwellings per hectare. The topography in the middle of the site would not allow any development but at the bottom end of the site there could be something in the region of 10 dwellings per hectare, resulting in a cumulative density of 18 dwellings per hectare. The size of the site is 6.94 hectares so that makes an amount of 125 dwellings on that site. An easier site to calculate is Ottershaw East which is 12.75 hectares. The school in this case would be taken out and IM would encourage its protection as a playing field through the Local Green Space designation. Some areas of the site are not developable but IM estimated 40 dwellings per hectare could be achieved, which would result in 510 dwellings on the site. IM would expect the Row town site to replicate the Franklands Drive development with a total of 44.5 dwellings per hectare. Density is difficult as it is so highly influenced by design. In terms of sustainability of these sites they are all urban extensions so would have reasonable connections but would go through the Sustainability Appraisal process. The CS asked whether IM would rather he was not quoted in this context. IM suggested that the residents' associations could quote him however the numbers he had suggested could not be guaranteed. IM stated that the resultant land parcels would produce 3500 homes and stated that that was quotable. IM ended by saying that when the SLAA mapbook is published this will have the definite figures produced within it.

TRA asked what the maximum amount of dwellings per hectare would be. IM stated that design is the decider of this; it is based on individual characteristics. EGVRA asked whether car parking spaces would be reflected in the amount of dwellings per hectare. IM stated that infrastructure would be included in this.

The OS asked whether the 350 dwellings per annum on the preferred approach was referring just to the resultant land parcel sites. IM explained that within the urban area, the Policy and Strategy team have a trajectory of how many homes need to be developed. IM commented that roughly 2000 houses are hoped to be developed in the first 5 years of the plan. A further 600 houses will come through windfall and there will be small sites, like there are every year, that cannot be predicted but will gain planning permission. Additionally, conversions of offices to residential have become more popular in recent months through changes to the permitted development order. An explanation of housing target options 1 and 2 was given to the CPP.

TRA expressed a concern of sites that had been submitted for Local Green Space that were in the Green Belt. IM reiterated that no sites had been submitted for Local Green Space designation within these areas of the Green Belt and stated that all sites which would be taken out of the green belt would be reviewed; for example, the sites submitted in Thorpe.

RF commented that it is clear that, with options 3 and 4 of the Housing target, the numbers start to get bigger. These numbers are not coming from the supply side but instead are the need for the Borough and those in Runnymede's HMA. The SHMA figures, to identify OAN, relate to the need for housing itself, and do not take into account policy and physical restrictions.

IM suggested that Option 4 may at first sight seem a ridiculous – even a nonsense - figure but it is important to consider all of the options. If people were to identify more land during the issues and options consultation then it may be possible to meet those thousand houses, so we have to show in the plan if appropriate. Likewise, the first option will need to be tested, even though if this was the preferred approach, the plan would be found unsound.

TRA questioned that if we can't get those houses then Government has got to say something or intervene. IM suggested that there is a fundamental problem as the UK does not have a national or regional housing plan. A national housing need may lead to new town ideas and the Government are in debates about this but it is not without objections.

TRA asked when the next plan will be made. IM stated that the next plan will be in 5-7 years. It is unachievable to get all houses for those that need it in Runnymede during the 5 year plan period. ERA asked how many new homes a year have been developed in the last few years. IM answered that around 220 homes were developed last year, including for example at Aviator Park. The OS wanted to clarify that all of the Longcross site would be developed. IM confirmed this, and then closed the issue of housing.

RF then led the discussion back to 2.1 Spatial Vision in order to consider the last few options within that section. IM reiterated that there are 3 green belt reviews that have been published by the Policy and Strategy team. The OS raised a concern with the font size of the list.

IM explained the purpose of a settlement hierarchy and then went on to explain the two generic points of climate change and health and wellbeing. Both climate change and health and wellbeing will need to feed into other policies.

RF moved onto the housing mix and density issues, and stated that there will be a minimum density policy. IM added that the Council will have to have a policy that encourages a density of land and some sort of policy that will require affordability. It is unsure yet what exactly these policies will be as there is a lot of change in government legislation at the moment. The CS recognises that housing will have to be at a higher density in the future but there is a flaw in the document as there is no explanation of infrastructure, e.g. congestion, schools. RF explained that the last page looked at strategic policies, which will take these considerations into account through CIL and section 106. The CS raised concern that it just seems like an 'add on' at the end of the document. IM explained that infrastructure is directly interrelated, with people beginning to accept the idea that more housing is needed but this is subject to adequate infrastructure. Work with the TIA and SA is happening and is an ongoing process on which there will be consultations.

RF explained the housing for special groups issue. IM made a broader explanation and explained that each of these special groups is assessed in a different way and, once fully identified, their needs will be needed to be looked at against market needs. EGVRA raised a concern of not creating ghettos of these special groups within the Borough of Runnymede. IM explained that in order to meet the needs of Travellers, 2 hectares are needed, and in order to meet the needs of students, 10 hectares are needed, but the question is whether we should deliver these at the expense of everything else in the market. ERA raised concern as to why Runnymede should be giving students housing. IM explained that students have a housing need in this locality and the Council have to accommodate these needs. .

RF moved onto the issue of site allocations. This included what should go on individual sites. IM explained that the only sites to be allocated will be the resultant land parcels. There will be individual policies for titles on these. The CS asked whether this will include reserve housing sites. IM said that those that haven't yet been granted will be allocated sites, although for those that have already been granted, there will be no allocations made for these sites.

RF drew the issue of housing to a close. RF asked the group if there were any other questions on this issue. The CS questioned how this will be included in the plan. IM stated that the Policy and Strategy team now has an assessment of need, 535, and has different assessments of special housing groups. All these have been reviewed and will be carved up and put into the resultant land parcel sites which were discussed earlier. Not all of these sites will need a high density of housing allocated on them but will have to consider this with landowners and see what is most viable.

TRA raised a concern over the Thorpe neighbourhood plan process and asked whether it will be taken to the local plan. IM explained that the neighbourhood plan process runs parallel to the local plan and it has to be compatible in order to be sound. IM suggested keeping up any conversation between Thorpe Neighbourhood Plan Forum (once constituted) and the Policy and Strategy team so that provision can be made in the local plan for what is wanted in the neighbourhood plan.

2.3 Economy and Retail

RF moved the discussion on to economy and retail. Explained that the first two options present a choice.

IM gave a broader explanation, and explained that it is necessary to understand where the town centre is, which is why primary and secondary frontages are defined. The CS asked whether there will be an update to shop frontages. IM explained that update to shop frontages was a design point; this isn't about the physical façade, but is instead focused on the length of shopping parades, etc..

RF moved on to employment and stated that the same applies to employment, as we commission consultants to do an employment land review. IM explained the most important sites in the Borough of Runnymede for employment. Firstly, Thorpe Industrial Estate is one area unable to meet the employment needs identified by the consultants, but the estate is meeting an important purpose of providing people with employment needs. Secondly, the Causeway contains the majority of employment retail floorspace in the Borough of Runnymede and is very capable of meeting B1 office needs in the local plan period but this is something that needs to be protected. Longcross may be designated in the next plan for employment purposes and needs. HCRA raised a question about Hamm Court Farm and that it is currently being used for industrial employment uses but the owner is endeavouring to sell. What is the Council's view on isolated instances like this; will it need to be replaced with more employment uses? IM explained that plans need to be streamlined so there would be a couple of areas that would be protected, as they serve an obvious function but the Council would be open to allow other uses on this type of site that HCRA was talking about.

IM explained to the CPP that industrial storage is in deficit in the Borough of Runnymede. It is important to keep this balance, but in the future we could explore not meeting this need at all. However, at the moment this is not possible; in particular, the Council is not sure what is going to happen with the development of Heathrow.

ERA expressed a particular concern with Egham High Street and stated that too many uses in the High Street are the same, such as nail bars and charity shops. IM said that nothing could be done about this as they are within the same use class of A1 and this is where the market takes a lead - planners cannot define the occupier.

IM moved onto the issue of tourism. IM explained that in our 2001 Local Plan there were a lot of tourism policies, but that although there are attractions within the Borough that fulfil tourism, e.g. Thorpe Park, this is not a necessity that needs to be focused upon.

2.4 Natural Environment

RF moved the topic on to the issue of natural environment. An explanation of the preferred approach was given. Whether the UK votes to stay in the European Union would influence the policy on SANGs. The CS asked whether BOAs and the River Thames scheme could be linked together. IM explained that he would expect the River Thames scheme to become a BOA at some point during the Local Plan.

2.5 Built Environment

RF moved on to the built environment, and suggested that the CPP and Officers will look at development management policies at the end of the meeting. RF explained that Infrastructure had already been looked at.

2.6 Recreation and Green Space

IM introduced the issue of Green Spaces and Local Green Spaces. IM explained that no sites were considered that have other designations on them, for example Green Belt, SANGs or Town and Village Greens. Out of a total submission of 70 sites, 5 were to be recommended for Local Green Space designation.

2.7 Flooding

RF introduced the issue of Flooding. The sequential test will be used. RF explained that this is a requirement to consider if you are proposing to put your development somewhere with a risk of flooding.

2.8 Development Management Policies

AM explained that since CPP agenda and meeting material had been sent out, the development management policies document had been changed. The new document was given to members of the CPP.

TRA stated a general concern that it is often difficult to make a decision as most policies rely on the National Planning Policy Framework and personally is unsure what these are.

IM stated that the Policy and Strategy team will have to include full text for that section. IM emphasised that this is useful feedback to inform the public consultation as it is something that will aid the reader. This is a live piece of work that is currently ongoing but in the next alteration we will try to include something that is clearer for the reader.

RF explained that the Government is encouraging the Council to produce new plans and new policies. The OS asked whether we could rewrite the policies.

IM answered that the policies could be rewritten. Within these policies there are no preferred approaches but generally the Council cannot rely on the policies we have at the moment. Some will have completely changed and therefore may be disposed of, for example, renewable and low carbon development, as the Government has now started to move away from this regulation and on to building regulations – most policies linked to this will be included in Government legislation. Parking provision or landscape may be different for each local plan that is produced by different Local Planning Authorities.

The CS raised concern with new legislation in the NPPF regarding advertisements. If the public can get away with transgressions, , then what is to stop it happening in conservation areas? IM stated that other policies within the NPPF will link with others, for example where advertisements in conservation areas are concerned, it may come into the heritage policies instead. Advertisements are something that national legislation will always have control over. The OS raised another concern related to advertisements regarding 'in field' advertisements. IM made clear that it is the National Guidance which states if this is illegal or not. If it is illegal, then those responsible would be prosecuted if appropriate.

ERA raised concern over the removal of Policy GB5. IM stated that the reason that this policy will be deleted is due to Planning Policy Guidance 2 being superseded by the NPPF.

RF expressed thanks to all for attending and assured the attendees that should they have any queries they could contact the Policy and Strategy team at any time.

3. Any Other Business (AOB)

There was no other business to discuss.

4. Date of Next Meeting (DONM)

This will be decided in due course.

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm.