
EXTRAORDINARY PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION POLICY WORKING GROUP

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 4 November 2025 from 7.00 pm - 9.40 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Monique Bonney, Hayden Brawn (Vice-Chair-in-the-Chair), Ann Cavanagh, Alastair Gould, Angela Harrison (substitute for Councillor Kieran Golding), Peter MacDonald, Ben J Martin (substitute for Councillor Charles Gibson) and Mike Whiting.

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Mike Baldock and Councillor Julien Speed.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Natalie Earl, Emma Gibson, Joanne Johnson, Onawale Kuforiji, Chris Mansfield, Jo Millard and Stuart Watson.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Charles Gibson, Kieran Golding and James Hunt.

420 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

421 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Monique Bonney declared a non-pecuniary interest because she was Chair of the Five Parishes Group.

422 LOCAL PLAN REVIEW - WHOLE PLAN VIABILITY ASSESSMENT 2024

In introducing the report, the Project Manager (Planning Policy) explained that Members of the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group (PTPWG) were briefed on the Whole Plan Viability Assessment in July 2024 and this included a detailed question and answer session with the consultants who produced the study. Members had noted the findings of the Assessment including the Policy recommendations set out, at that briefing.

The Project Manager (Planning Policy) said the intended Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation would cover the vision, objectives and development management policies of the plan and it was appropriate to publish this evidence, as it included the achievability of affordable housing contributions for the borough and provided the key evidence for the Affordable Housing Policy that was part of the Regulation 18 consultation. He said the viability evidence demonstrated that across the borough, the Council could seek a 30% affordable housing contribution on greenfield sites and a 10% affordable housing contribution should be sought to help the delivery of brownfield sites.

The Project Manager (Planning Policy) explained that as part of the viability testing, a series of typologies were developed to assess the draft Local Plan policy requirements of which affordable housing was included. He said the typologies ranged from brownfield sites in urban areas to greenfield sites outside of built-up

area confines and the assessment of the typologies would then inform the likely achievability of sites that would come forward in future plan drafting.

The Project Manager (Planning Policy) said the study also considered available strategic sites and it should be noted those strategic sites had been tested at a high level to inform the viability element of future drafting of the plan, and were not reflective of any live planning applications. He added that the Council's policy direction would inevitably evolve through drafting and consultation of the Local Plan, development of its evidence base and through changes in national policy, resulting in a need to provide a partial update to the viability assessment as part of preparing the Regulation 19 consultation intended for Summer 2026.

Members were invited to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Requested that for very large documents such as this, hard copies of Agendas be made available as early as possible;
- colour coding in the charts made it clear and was helpful for visual learners;
- how did affordable housing sit alongside the National Planning Policy Framework's (NPPF) recommendations?;
- highlighted some errors in tables and column headings;
- would the evidence be updated at the Regulation 19 stage?;
- as larger sites naturally carried abnormal costs, it was really important that the Council took particular consideration of this when costing;
- drew attention to the differences in some of the areas that had been grouped together and suggested this should be better clarified;
- highlighted the risks on strategic sites, in delivery and time frame;
- sought clarification on whether the viability of strategic sites was on economic terms only?;
- referred to the 'shopping list' of developer contributions in table 8.4 in the report and questioned whether health would be included?;
- drew attention to table 10.11, and raised concerns about the financial deliverability of the strategic sites from the delayed process and whether there had since been changes?;
- raised that developer contributions should be higher;
- suggested a lower affordable housing target to achieve better quality and standards on other policies; and
- sought clarification on the process.

In response, the Project Manager (Planning Policy) said the Government encouraged the release of green belt land and sought 50% of affordable housing on this land but it was irrelevant to Swale as it did not have any. He confirmed there would be a partial update of the evidence at the Regulation 19 stage, pointing out the areas that would be reviewed. The Project Manager (Planning Policy) said the viability of strategic sites was being considered at a much higher level and there were more issues that needed to be identified before being put forward to the next stage in the process. He advised that since the publication of the developer contributions table there had been a consultation with more detail of the contributions required by the NHS for health matters and this information would be updated at the Regulation 19 stage.

The Project Manager (Planning Policy) said there may be some fluctuations in the financial values but the approach of selections of sites were still valid. He added that the update to the Regulation 19 would confirm changes and once sites were selected, there would be an informal engagement with the site promoters to reconfirm their availability and deliverability. In respect of higher developer contributions, the Project Manager (Planning Policy) said the document had been produced by industry specialists following national policy and guidance, and tested existing and estimated land values, building costs and sale values and they concluded the contributions set out in the document were the viable costs for land in the Swale area. The Project Manager (Planning Policy) said the affordable housing target was determined by the Strategic Housing Market Assessment.

Resolved:

(1) Members noted the report.

423 LOCAL PLAN EVIDENCE BASE - NET ZERO POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The Principal Planning Officer (Policy) introduced the report which sought Members' agreement to note the findings of a study that the Planning Policy team commissioned on the development of Net Zero Policy for Swale Borough Council. She said the study followed on from the Council's net zero ambitions, as established in the Climate and Ecological Emergency Declaration and Action Plan, and the need for new development in the borough to be carbon neutral. The Principal Planning Officer (Policy) explained that the consultants worked for a number of local authorities on climate policy, and several local authorities that had received policy recommendations had adopted local plans with ambitious climate policies, using the approaches and more accurate metrics advocated in the study. She added that the recommendations in the study had been tested by viability consultants.

The Principal Planning Officer (Policy) said Members had been involved in the policy choices, and she highlighted the workshop that took place for all Members in September 2024 where a steer towards the most ambitious, best practice, option was given as the path the local plan should follow. She said the policy recommendations set out the evidence base study had fed directly into policies C1-C5 in the draft Regulation 18 document which was the next item on the Agenda to be discussed. She acknowledged that whilst ambitious, the policies were considered robust and achievable and would enable new buildings in Swale to be truly net zero.

Members were invited to ask questions and make comments which included:

- None of the new policies had yet been formally agreed by Members and felt uncomfortable they were included without indicating they were draft policies;
- welcomed the draft policies put forward in draft ready for consultation but had concerns on Policy C5 District Heat Networks as they were not low carbon solutions and there were increased costs to residents;
- pleased to see the draft policies;
- would the viability report be updated to reflect any policies that were agreed?;

- referred to the development management policies that were in the Regulation 19 from 2021 as the starting point and policy criteria tweaks that had been made since;
- the climate change policies were new policies that needed to be tested through the viability update;
- said the planting of trees in the borough was a natural way of reducing CO2 and was pleased that so many trees had been planted in the borough and encouraged more planting;
- referred to page 300 in the Agenda, and asked whether the current Government stood by the statement made by the previous Government in 2023 on local efficiency standards?;
- there needed to be proper in depth discussions by Members on new policies before it went out for consultation;
- sought clarification on the route the new policies would take as Members had not had proper input;
- raised concern over Policy C5 – renewable energy development and infrastructure, and the risk of where it might be located due to the generic wording in the policy;
- needed to pay attention to Government legislation rather than a ministerial statement that had lacked clarity;
- there had been previous Member debate that built into the policies and there needed to be a starting point policy to debate;
- there had been many years of debate to include additional policies;
- should be ambitious and bold in policies; and
- commended officers for their work.

The Head of Place advised the new draft policies had not been ratified by Council. She said officers had used the evidence to develop the draft innovative policies and the start of the ratification commenced with the discussion at this meeting and for Members to agree or otherwise for the policies to go out to consultation. The Head of Place reminded Members they had the option to shape the policies in the way they desired and the policies set out should be seen as draft policies. In respect of Heat Networks, the Principal Planning Officer (Policy) agreed to discuss with the consultants who carried out the study about including reference to the end user affordability in using Heat Networks.

The Principal Planning Officer (Policy) advised the consultants had discussed the policy proposals with the viability consultants previously and would be engaging again for the update to the Regulation 19 consultation. She confirmed that the statement made by the previous Government in 2023, still stood with the current Government and acknowledged there was a risk that policies might not be supported by Inspectors at Local Plan hearings. The Principal Planning Officer (Policy) said the discussions that took place at the workshop in the Summer of 2024 concluded that the Council should be ambitious when introducing new policies.

The Head of Place explained the process and said the purpose of the report was to note the evidence base. She drew attention that the final report on the agenda was the Regulation 18 consultation launch and Members would have the opportunity to comment on the policies within it and consider whether they were ready for consultation, make changes and recommendations, before moving on to look at the

Regulation 18 consultation document as a whole which was where the new draft policies featured. The Planning Policy Manager added that Members had previously agreed that all evidence was uploaded onto the evidence-base part of the website, once noted by Members of the PTPWG.

Resolved:

(1) That the findings of the 'Net Zero Policy Development' evidence work be noted.

424 LOCAL PLAN REVIEW - REGULATION 18 CONSULTATION LAUNCH

The Planning Policy Manager introduced the report and reminded Members that the PTPWG agreed to consult on the Regulation 18 in July 2025. She referred to the NPPF being updated in 2024 along with the associated Planning Practice Guidance, several new pieces of evidence base and the Swale Climate and Ecological Emergency action plan documents being updated, a new Swale Affordable Housing Emergency being declared in April 2024 and the Town and Country Planning Association Healthy Homes Pledge being signed in May 2024. The Planning Policy Manager also drew attention to the adoption of a new Corporate Plan (2023-2027), setting out new objectives and priorities. She said all this information would be reflected in the Local Plan and the consultation would provide an early opportunity for the public and stakeholders to engage with elements of the Local Plan.

The Planning Policy Manager spoke about the style a Local Plan Regulation 18 could take and said Members had agreed the scope at a previous PTPWG meeting in July 2025 and these were visions, objectives, the portrait of the borough and the Development Management policies. She said a section on 'Implementation and Monitoring' would be included, but would be more detailed at the next stage of the Local Plan process.

The Planning Policy Manager drew attention that there were no strategic policies sitting above the Development Management policies within the Regulation 18, but they would be included at the Regulation 19 stage. She said extensive informal engagement work was undertaken with Members during 2024 to draft Development Management Policies, and Policies had also been updated to reflect the revised December 2024 NPPF and other updated relevant evidence guidance base documents. The Planning Policy Manager referred to the five new draft policies that Members had not previously seen, in the Climate Change chapter, and said they reflected the ambitions of the Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency and had been discussed under a previous item on the Agenda.

Referring to the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping report, the Planning Policy Manager set out the process, and said that a Scoping Report was undertaken for the Local Plan Review in 2018 but had been refreshed due to the time that had lapsed, and was included in Appendix III.

The Planning Policy Manager drew attention to the challenging timeline and consultation process between Regulation 18 and Regulation 19, set out in Appendix 4. She advised that in order to meet the deadlines, it was proposed that the

Regulation 18 consultation ran for six weeks, from Monday 12 January 2026 until 5pm on Monday 23 February 2026, and officers were liaising with the Communications team on a range of engagement opportunities to enable wide ranging participation.

The Planning Policy Manager advised that the consultation questions within the document would be able to be responded to online via the consultation portal Objective, and general comments could be included. She said all libraries and Council offices would hold hard copies of documents and The Swallows Leisure Centre, Sittingbourne would hold a copy whilst the Sittingbourne Library was undergoing a refurbishment. The Planning Policy Manager said all Parish and Town Councils had been made aware of the consultation period at a Local Parish Councils' Liaison Forum on 24 September 2025. She said that following the consultation period, responses would be summarised and the main issues would be reported to a future PTPWG with recommendations on how issues might be addressed in the Regulation 19 Local Plan.

Finally, the Planning Policy Manager said that due to the breadth and complexity of the document, and the tight timescales to draft information within it, there would inevitably be some minor corrections required before the consultation in January 2026. She referred to recommendation (2) that proposed delegation to the Head of Planning in consultation with the Chair of the PTPWG to make any minor amendments and corrections prior to the start of the consultation period. She asked Members to inform officers in the team if they noted any minor errors.

The Chair thanked all those involved for their input into the document.

Members were invited to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Drew attention to 11.0.4 (Policy H4 Rural exception and community-led housing development) on page 507 and raised concern that rural exception sites might be bound by the settlement hierarchy, and asked for further consideration;
- drew attention to 12.0.4 (Policy H4 Self build and custom build) on page 509, and did not consider deliverability on larger sites was the best way forward;
- raised concern that 17 (Policy H9 Extending the garden of a dwelling in the countryside) on page 518 went against the Council's usual approach;
- highlighted that on page 538, figure 2.22 on Agenda pack – Inset of urban hierarchy of Sittingbourne – land east of A249 was excluded and suggested redrawing the boundary line to include the site where 600 houses had been given planning permission to be built;
- raised concern about water supply and flooding on the Isle of Sheppey;
- congratulated officers on the report;
- raised concern on the lack of detail on solar and the value of BMV land;
- referred to para 30.0.5 (Policy C5 Renewable energy development and infrastructure) on page 563, and sought clarity on whether the commencement of the permission granted for agrivoltaics was from the date of the grant of permission or the date it was connected as the backlog of connections might override temporary permissions that were granted;

- drew attention to the current large deficit in patient/GP ratio in Swale, particularly in higher housing development areas, and warned this would increase with more housing and a mechanism for ensuring developer funding was sufficient to provide the facilities necessary was vital;
- needed to be more specific in the local plan of the GP resources required and where they would be located;
- referred to Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) and said there needed to be a policy to protect these areas from planning applications;
- should consider the suitable governance arrangements for strategic sites coming forward for potential changes arising from the Community Governance Review;
- stressed the importance of having robust health and education policies;
- it was not clear that policies C1 to C5 were unadopted, draft policies;
- the policy on health should contain specific requirements such as distance to health provision to a new development;
- it was time to put the document out to Regulation 18 and continue the development of strategic policies for the Regulation 19;
- there was a section in the Bearing Fruits Local Plan on renewable energy and infrastructure but things had moved on enormously, and it was appropriate for a full re-write of that section;
- the evidence in policies C1 to C5 was in line with the Corporate Plan and the Climate Change Act and NPPF;
- referred to Policy C10 that sought major development infrastructure to be connected to mains drainage and wastewater systems before construction commenced as a vital policy;
- the policies reflected the best possible outcomes and felt pleased they were included as draft policies;
- the definition of 'Greenfield' should be included in the document to avoid future issues;
- care needed to be taken to consider how the Community Governance Review (CGR) might increase responsibilities to Parish Councils and management companies, and this needed to be factored into the document as soon as possible; and
- having a limited Regulation 18 had worked well.

The Project Manager (Policy) said the purpose of the rural exception site policy was to ensure that sustainable development was still being sought and it gave the opportunity for local communities who could not afford sites in their area to seek sites to bring forward in the close proximity. Referring to the Policy H4 Self Build Policy, he said that there had been some feedback from site promoters interested in self-build only. The Project Manager (Policy) said there might be some instances where it was appropriate to consider extensions of gardens and it was reasonable to consider through the policy.

The Planning Policy Manager said the diagrams on page 538 had been used on a previous transport model at a point in time, and suggested adding the year they were produced. She added that ordnance survey did not update their base maps very regularly.

The Planning Policy Manager said health provision was covered in the opening sections of the document on page 19 of the Agenda. She said that as health was such a key issue it would have its own strategic policy in the Regulation 19 plan and it would also be picked up through the infrastructure delivery plan and once sites were chosen any requirements that had arisen would be linked in to policies for allocated sites. The Planning Policy Manager advised the Council had signed the Town and Country Planning Association's Healthy Homes pledge. She advised that the Integrated Care Board would be consulted on the Regulation 18 and officers were proactively engaging with them.

Referring to SANGS, the Planning Policy Manager said that Strategic Access Management and Mitigation Strategy (SAMMs) payments to SANGS was referenced at Policy B1 and more detail would be added to an Environment strategic policy at the Regulation 19 stage. She added that SAMM's schemes had been introduced country-wide. The Planning Policy Manager listed other policies that would provide recreation and wildlife sites within a development of open space.

The Planning Policy Manager reiterated that all policies in the Regulation 18 document were draft until the Local Plan was adopted after the Examination in Public in 2027.

The Planning Policy Manager said that brownfield and greenfield land had now been added to the glossary, and she encouraged Members to inform the team of any typing errors or grammar that would improve the document's clarity. Referring to the impact of CGRs, the Planning Policy Manager agreed to circulate a historical report on stewardship models that Members may find useful.

The Policy Manager confirmed where and how the document would be shared for consultation in the borough. She advised that the cost of the document would be too high to place a copy with all Parish Councils but if a Parish Council wished to fund their own copy they could.

Recommended:

(1) That the Local Plan Regulation 18 document in Appendix 1 and the draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report Update in Appendix III be recommended to Policy and Resources Committee for recommendation to Full Council for approval for consultation purposes.

(2) That the Policy and Resources Committee delegate to the Head of Planning, in consultation with the PTPWG Chair any minor amendments and corrections to the Local Plan Regulation 18 document prior to the start of the consultation period.

425 ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned from 8.07 pm until 8:17 pm.

Chair

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel