
Extraordinary Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 18 November 2025 from 7.00 pm - 8.04 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Lloyd Bowen (Vice-Chair), Charles Gibson, Tim Gibson (Chair), Alastair Gould, Angela Harrison, James Hunt, Elliott Jayes, Mark Last, Ben J Martin, Kieran Mishchuk, Richard Palmer, Julien Speed, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Natalie Earl, Robin Harris, Joanne Johnson, Onawale Kuforiji, Larissa Reed, Philippa Richardson, Anna Stonor and Stuart Watson.

OFFICER PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Emma Wiggins.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Peter Marchington.

463 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

464 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

465 **Local Plan Review - Regulation 18 Consultation Launch**

The Planning Manager (Policy) introduced the report which set out the background to the recommendations made by the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group (PTPWG) during its meeting on 4 November 2025 with regard to the Local Plan Regulation 18 (Reg 18) document and the draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report Update. She highlighted the different sections of the report and appendices and said the consultation would run for six weeks, from 12 January 2026 until 23 February 2026.

The Chair and members of the Committee thanked and praised all officers, both past and present, on the work they had completed so far on the Local Plan Review.

The Chair invited Members to make comments and these included:

- Acknowledged that the five substantially updated climate change related policies were draft and were not Council policy until the Local Plan was adopted;
- suggested there be some policy wording about the preservation of the borough's considered chalk streams to tie in with the work that the Southeast Rivers Trust had been undertaking;
- needed a policy on groundwater source protection zones;
- the policy wording about Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGS) was not to be included until the Regulation 19 (Reg 19) stage, but suggested this needed to be tested before that;
- suggested solar farms should not be built on best and most versatile agricultural land (BMV) and this should be set out in policy; and
- by insisting on using the term 'settlement hierarchy' with regard to rural exceptions sites, considered this went against the whole point of exception sites.

If remote areas come forward, having 'settlement hierarchy' there complicated matters and sent out the wrong message, suggested the phrase be removed

In response, the Planning Manager confirmed that the five substantially updated climate change policies were in draft form, it was a draft Plan, and this was the first stage of the Local Plan process. Following the consultation, everything would be looked at again at the Reg 19 stage, and any changes taken on board from the consultation would be added to the Reg 19. With regard to SANGS, this would be addressed at the Reg 19 stage as it was a strategic policy, and there were no strategic policies within the Reg 18, so it could not be brought forward at this stage. In terms of no solar farms on BMV, officers did not currently have the evidence to support a policy on that.

The Principal Planning Officer referred to chalk streams and groundwater source protection zones and said that groundwater source protection zones were referenced already in the policies, but chalk streams were not.

Councillor Mike Baldock moved the following amendment: That chalk streams be included, along with groundwater source protection zones, within the early part of Policy C10, and also wording to ensure chalk streams were not subject to inappropriate development, with appropriate wording to be agreed by officers, in consultation with Councillor Baldock. This was seconded by Councillor Elliott Jayes and on being put to the vote was agreed.

The Project Manager (Policy) spoke on the rural settlement strategy, and explained that officers felt it was appropriate to keep the term settlement hierarchy in the document to ensure that development was sustainable. The term focused the scale of what was being proposed on the rural exception site, and that it would be located close to appropriate level of services. He said there were a lot of settlements at the lower level of the hierarchy and anything not in the hierarchy was considered open countryside. The scale of what was being proposed needed to be appropriate to the level of service provisions in the settlement.

Councillor Baldock moved the following motion: That the phrase settlement hierarchy, as it did not add anything and could potentially be counter-productive, be removed from the policy. This was seconded by Councillor Richard Palmer.

The Planning Manager responded and said the settlements at the bottom of the hierarchy were not sustainable in nature and sustainable development was the central principle of the planning system.

Members made the following comments on the motion:

- Noted on page 51 of the agenda pack where rural exception sites were set out and specifically the wording 'where sites would not normally be used for housing'; and
- acknowledged the points made in regard of settlement hierarchy, but considered points like this could be raised as part of the consultation, for officers to respond to at a later date.

On being put to the vote, the motion fell.

Members made further comments on the substantive motion:

- Happy to support the comments made and changes requested by the PTPWG, as set out in Appendix IV to the report;
- it was important that the Council had an up-to-date Local Plan, especially in terms of where housing was to be sited;
- this was a really good Reg 18 document;
- noted Policy B1, paragraph 38.035 on the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) which had been sent to the Secretary of State and was not available publicly at the moment and looked forward to seeing that document;
- clarification sought on implications and on some of the dates in the process and whether any of them would clash with the Local Government Reform (LGR) timetable and what position the Council would be at that time;
- considered development proposals needed to demonstrate that they were deliverable and viable and suggested Policy G1 on page 40 be amended to include that development proposals must demonstrate that they are viable and deliverable;
- clarification sought on why the rate of affordable homes was listed as being 30% (Policy H1), rather than 40%;
- the timetable set out predicted there being a decision on the Highsted Park Inquiry by June 2026 so that could be taken into account when the Reg 19 was published, however considered there might not be a final outcome on that, because of any appeal or judicial review;
- the document had been updated to reflect the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), clarification sought on whether there was anything that was not consistent with the latest NPPF;
- would like to see a policy on not constructing solar panels on BMV land;
- phrases and language used throughout the document needed to be consistent; and
- the consultation needed to be accessible to everyone, with the option of leaving out a question if it was not relevant.

The Planning Manager confirmed that officers too were waiting for the Kent and Medway LNRS document and the most up-to-date position would be included in the consultation version of the Reg 18. She explained that everything in a Local Plan had to be deliverable and viable and she did not see the value in adding this to Policy G1. She said that she could take the matter away and discuss with the Development Manager, and report back in the Full Council report. The Planning Manager said there was nothing in the document that was inconsistent with the NPPF. She confirmed that not every question needed to be answered in the consultation and officers would check through the document to make sure phrases were consistent.

The Chief Executive responded to the LGR question and said that whilst Swale Borough Council (SBC) was in existence, the Local Plan was SBC's Local Plan. A Local Plan would not halt as a result of LGR and the Government were clear that progress needed to continue. If there was a shadow authority, the shadow authority would be the authority for the new unitary and so would not have any say over any decision SBC made. So, providing SBC's Local Plan was adopted before vesting day, that was the Local Plan that went to the new council and remained the Local Plan for this area until the new council developed their own Local Plan.

The Project Manager explained that a whole plan viability assessment had just been published and it tested a series of policy aspirations, including affordable housing and that in the adopted Local Plan Bearing Fruits there was a variety of affordable housing requirements that included no affordable housing on the Isle of Sheppey, 10% in Sittingbourne and the urban extensions, with higher requirements of 35% at Faversham and 40% in the rural countryside outside of settlement confines. The whole Plan Viability Assessment tested the viability of types of development in the three principal settlement areas of the borough, Faversham, Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey, and it concluded that based on the policy requirements sought through the Local Plan, that 30% affordable housing could be achieved across the whole of the borough on greenfield sites and only 10% was achievable across the borough on brownfield sites. The affordable housing target was determined by the strategic housing market assessment that set a borough-wide need of 27.7% of all housing should be affordable. Seeking 30% affordable on greenfield and 10% on brownfield should be an appropriate strategy to meet the affordable housing need for the borough.

Councillor Julien Speed moved the following motion: That officers prepared an evidence-based report to assess whether solar farms should be built on BMV land. This was seconded by Councillor Baldock.

The Planning Manager said that officers would need to look into the feasibility of the proposal and that it would not be ready for Reg 18, and would go to Reg 19. The Chief Executive said that it would need to be considered by the PTPWG for them to decide.

Councillor Speed amended his motion: That officers prepared an evidence-based report to assess whether solar farms should be built on BMV land and the report be considered by the PTPWG. This was seconded by Councillor Baldock and on being put to the vote was agreed.

Councillor Baldock proposed the recommendations and these were seconded by Councillor Charles Gibson.

Recommendations:

- (1) That the Local Plan Regulation 18 document in Appendix I and the draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report Update in Appendix III be recommended to Full Council for approval for consultation purposes.***
- (2) That it be recommended that Full Council delegates to the Head of Place, in consultation with the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group Chair, the making of minor amendments and corrections to the Local Plan Regulation 18 document prior to the start of the consultation period.***
- (3) That chalk streams be included, along with groundwater source protection zones, within the early part of Policy C10, and also wording to ensure chalk streams were not subject to inappropriate development, with appropriate wording to be agreed by officers, in consultation with Councillor Baldock.***
- (4) That officers prepared an evidence-based report to assess whether solar farms should be built on BMV land and the report be considered by the PTPWG.***

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