

Agenda Item 11

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| Date | 17 th December 2013 |

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| Ward (s) affected | Bookham North and Bookham South |
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| Subject | Bookham Neighbourhood Development Plan - Update |
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RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) That authority be delegated to the Corporate Head of Service (Planning) in consultation with the Planning Portfolio Holder, Chairman of the Local Plan Working Group and the six Bookham Members, to approve the conclusions of a review of the Green Belt boundary around Bookham and the appraisals of the suggested development sites, for the purpose of public consultation.

(2) That consultation on the Green Belt Boundary Review around Bookham and the site appraisals be commenced as soon as possible after the publication of the Housing and Traveller Sites – Consultation Document on 10th January 2014.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bookham Neighbourhood Forum has requested that the Council takes over responsibility for the review of the Green Belt in Bookham and the appraisal of the sites which land owners and developers have requested should be identified for development. As a consequence it will be the Council rather than the Forum that carries out consultation with the local community as part of the preparation of the Housing and Traveller Site Plan.

The report sets out the implications of this request and suggests a way forward for the Council.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

The Council's on-going support for the work of the Bookham Vanguard Neighbourhood Forum contributes to the delivery of the priority theme of **working with our partners and enabling growth in the District** by facilitating appropriate housing development. Working with the Bookham Neighbourhood Forum also supports the Council's priority of **developing the Land Allocations Plan** (now renamed the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan) to improve the quality of the built environment whilst preserving the character and integrity of our towns and villages.

The Executive has the authority to determine the Recommendations

1.0 Background

- 1.1 In September 2012, the Council designated the Bookham Neighbourhood Forum for the purposes of preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan for Bookham.
- 1.2 Following advice from the Department for Communities and Local Government that a Neighbourhood Development Plan could include alterations to the Green Belt boundary, the Forum started work to review the Green Belt around Bookham and to carry out appraisals of the sites which landowners and developers were promoting for inclusion in the Plan. However, it became clear after the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework, that only the Council as the local planning authority could make alterations to the Green Belt boundary.
- 1.3 Consequently, it was agreed that the Forum would carry out a review of the Green Belt around Bookham and prepare an assessment of the sites which had been promoted in Bookham by landowners and developers using the same methodology as the Council had used in preparing the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan – Consultation Document. In effect, the Forum was to act as a sub-contractor for the Council.
- 1.4 It was also agreed that the Forum would then submit its proposals to the Council and also consult the local community and landowners on them. Their responses would be returned to the Council who would use them, together with the Forum's proposals, to inform the District wide review of the Green Belt and the search for potential housing sites for inclusion in the draft Housing and Traveller Sites Plan.
- 1.5 This could include some sites in Bookham if it was to be concluded they are the most appropriate.
- 1.6 A report has been prepared for the Executive's meeting on 17th December to explain a proposal from the Forum that the Council should carry out the Green Belt assessment and appraisal of six sites to avoid any conflict of interest for those carrying out the review and appraisal work on behalf of the Forum.
- 1.7 However, since then a letter was received on the 11th December from the Bookham Vanguard Task Force. They have requested that the Council takes over responsibility in its entirety for the Green Belt review and the site assessments for the Bookham Neighbourhood Area. The Forum has subsequently endorsed this request.
- 1.8 The request has arisen because there is a local perception that the work that Bookham Vanguard has been doing cannot be completely impartial because one of the members of the Housing Group of the Task Force which has been primarily responsible for carrying out the Green Belt review and site assessment work has a conflict of interest as he is a landowners who has offered his site for development. Although the Forum confirms this has been openly declared and they have no evidence that the person concerned has been other than impartial, they do not wish this situation to distract from the important work of reviewing the Green Belt around Bookham and assessing sites which have been promoted. Under the circumstances, the Forum feel it is best if the Council takes on responsibility for this work to ensure there is confidence about the impartiality in the treatment of this important aspect of local planning policy.

2.0 Suggested Way Forward

- 2.1 The Planning Policy Team has reflected on this request and concluded that it will have to carry out a review of the Green Belt around Bookham and conduct an appraisal of each of the twenty sites which landowners and developers have suggested should be identified for development. This will need to be undertaken using the same methodology that has been used to assess the sites which have been included in the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan - Consultation Document to ensure consistency.
- 2.2 However, it will not be possible to conclude this work in time for inclusion in the Housing and Traveller Sites Consultation Document which, subject to the agreement of the Executive at its meeting on 17th December, will be published on 10th January. It will therefore be necessary for the Council to extend its consultation to cover the two Bookham Wards. It is envisaged that an additional chapter on Bookham will be added to the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan – Consultation Document as soon as is possible so that those wishing to comment on the Bookham Green Belt Review and site appraisals have all the background information that will be in the Consultation Document.
- 2.3 Bearing in mind the Christmas and New Year break, it is felt that the necessary Green Belt boundary review and site appraisal work could be concluded by the middle of January. It could be reported to the Executive at its meeting on 4th February and consultation started around the 14th February. However, that would mean the consultation would be running five weeks behind the main consultation on the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan, which could cause uncertainty and confusion
- 2.4 An alternative way forward would be for the Executive to delegate authority to the Corporate Head of Service, in consultation with the Planning Portfolio Holder, Chairman of the Local Plan Working Group and the six Bookham Members, to approve the conclusions of a review of the Green Belt boundary around Bookham and the appraisals of the suggested sites for the purpose of public consultation. If this approach is taken, it should be possible to start the consultation during the third or fourth week of January. This would help achieve a greater alignment with the timetable for the main consultation on the Housing and Traveler Sites Plan.

Financial Implications – There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

Legal Implications – There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

2.0 OPTIONS

- (1) That a report on a review of the Green Belt around Bookham and appraisals of suggested development sites is brought to the Executive's meeting on 4th February 2014.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Corporate Head of Service (Planning) in consultation with the Planning Portfolio Holder, Chairman of the Local Plan Working Group and the six Bookham Members, to approve the conclusions of a review of the Green Belt boundary around Bookham and the appraisals of the suggested development sites, for the purpose of public consultation.

- (3) Delay publication of the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan in order for the Planning Policy Team to 'catch-up' and complete the work on Bookham. However, the launch date of the 10th January has been widely publicised and a Communications Plan and public consultation events have been booked around these dates. The Planning Policy Team is already receiving comments on the content of the consultation paper and to delay further may add to general confusion.

Option 2 is suggested in order to expedite the consultation on the Green Belt Boundary Review around Bookham and site appraisals so that the consultation period can be aligned as closely as possible with that of the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan – Consultation Document.

3.0 CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Monitoring Officer commentary

The Monitoring Officer confirms that all relevant legal implications have been taken into account

S151 Officer commentary

The S151 Officer confirms that all financial implications have been taken into account

Risk Implications

By taking back responsibility for the Green Belt Boundary Review around Bookham and the appraisal of potential development sites, the Council is reducing the risk that it has not acted in accordance with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Equalities Implications

There are no direct equalities implications as a result of this report.

Employment Issues

None identified

Sustainability Issues

The Green Belt Boundary Review and site appraisals are subject to sustainability appraisal.

Consultation

In view of the urgent nature of this report, it has been discussed with the Planning Portfolio Holder and Chairman of the Local Plan Working Group.

Communications

A Communications Plan is being prepared to pave the way for the publication of the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan – Consultation Document. It will explain that a second version of the Consultation Document will be published to include the review of the Green Belt around Bookham and the appraisal of sites that have been submitted there.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Letters dated 11th and 16th December 2013 from the Leader of the Bookham Vanguard Task Force.