

# **Community Planning Panel (Special Meeting)**

Start time: 6.30pm (online MS Teams meeting)

## **Attendees:**

### **Runnymede Borough Council (RBC):**

Judith Orr (JO) (Deputy Local Plans Manager)

Stephanie Broadley (SB) (Senior Planning Policy Officer)

### **CPP Members (and representative):**

Englefield Green Neighbourhood Forum (EGNF)

Englefield Green Village Residents' Association (EGVRA)

Ottershaw & West Addlestone Residents Association (OWARA)

Egham Residents' Association (ERA)

New Haw Residents Association (NHRA)

Friends of Hythe (FoH)

Thorpe Ward Residents' Association (TWRA)

Ottershaw Neighbourhood Forum (ONF)

The Chertsey Society (TCS)

Virginia Water Neighbourhood Forum (VWNF)

Runnymede Access Liaison Group

### **Apologies given by:**

Lyne Residents' Association (LRA)

Franklands Drive Residents Association (FDRA)

Thorpe Ward Residents Association (TWRA)

Hurst Lane Residents Association (HLRA)

## **Proposed Planning Reforms – National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Changes**

SB gave a presentation on the proposed *immediate* changes to the NPPF currently subject to consultation. The consultation seeks views on the Government's proposed approach to update the NPPF. Full details are available at: [Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill-reforms-to-national-planning-policy). The consultation closes on 2 March 2023. A wider range of changes to the NPPF are intended to be consulted on later this year.

The slides and detailed notes are being circulated with the Minutes.

## **New Plan-making Arrangements – Implications for the 2030 Local Plan Review**

JO gave a presentation detailing some other proposed changes to the planning system, including the introduction of National Development Management Policies and Supplementary Plans. The

presentation went on to explain the proposed new plan-making arrangements and timescales, and transitional arrangements for both Local and Neighbourhood Plans.

The slides and detailed notes are being circulated with the Minutes.

### Question & Answer Session

FoH: sought clarity about the definition of objectively assessed need (OAN) and how it is calculated and assessed. Queried whether the current requirement of around 650dpa was a challenge to deliver, and what the housing requirements were at a local scale.

JO confirmed that LPAs make objective assessments of the needs for market and affordable housing, drawing on evidence and generally working jointly with neighbouring authorities who share the same housing market area. National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) sets out a step-by-step method for calculating that need (known as the 'standard method'). Any departures from using the standard method figure should be justified in terms of specific local circumstances. JO confirmed that Runnymede's current Local Plan housing requirement is challenging to deliver. JO referred FoH to policy SD1 in the existing Local Plan, which sets out the spatial development strategy for the Borough – including growth aspirations across each of the settlement areas.

FoH: referred to Michael Gove's letter of 5 December 2022 to MPs, recognising the desire to make the planning system work better for local communities. Queried whether Gove's intentions set out in this letter were in fact illustrated in the proposed changes – would his intentions become reality?

JO confirmed that the immediate proposed changes to the NPPF would bring about some of his intentions. For example, by clarifying that LPAs are not expected to review the Green Belt to deliver housing, and that densities should not be wholly out of character with existing areas. Gove has been put under much pressure to water down the requirements for councils to meet their local housing need figures. However, some of the intentions in his letter will only manifest in the wider revisions being consulted on later this year.

EGNF: queried how Design Codes would fit into the new framework, and what level of detail they would contain.

SB replied that the content and level of detail in a borough-wide Design Code would likely vary to that of a neighbourhood-wide Code – it would contain higher-level principles and design requirements. The Planning Policy team was just beginning to scope out the work, and would look at best practice (and less good practice) examples already produced by the pilot authorities.

VWNF: sought clarity on, and JO confirmed, the timescales for examination and adoption of Virginia Water's Neighbourhood Plan, taking into account proposed transitional arrangements. Plans submitted for examination after 30 June 2025 will be required to comply with the new legal framework, so there should be sufficient time for VWNF to prepare and adopt their Plan.

VWNF: queried whether there were any proposed changes in the NPPF which would drive forward net zero carbon development.

SB described how there were very few immediate changes in the NPPF which reflected the net zero agenda, except to enable repowering of renewable and low carbon energy and introducing ways to address communities' views on onshore wind farms. There may be further changes which would form part of the new NPPF to be published and used in the new planning system after Royal Assent. SB described how the Government were still pursuing the Future Homes and Building Standards – full introduction of which is planned for 2025. This would deliver what government describes as 'nearly zero' carbon development.

EGNF described the plans for Building Regulations to be incrementally improved as part of the Future Homes and Building Standards initiative.

VWNF: asked how the pause to the Local Plan Review would affect achievement of carbon emissions targets, and what the Council would do in the interim period until the new planning system was in place.

SB confirmed that the team would continue to work on the evidence base for the revised Local Plan, including a Climate Change Study to identify policy improvements. The team would also start working on implementation of the Climate Change Strategy and formulating an action plan. This might include actions around implementing existing Local Plan sustainable design and active travel policies more effectively. The policy team works with various partners – for example, Surrey County Council, to produce planning guidance such as ‘Healthy Streets for Surrey’; and also with the Development Management team to help ensure this guidance is taken into account in planning applications and that new development supports active travel and movement.

JO confirmed that the team are also currently preparing an Electric Vehicle Strategy, which will help deliver the objectives of the Climate Change Strategy and the Design Code document, referred to earlier in the meeting.

NHRA: queried whether new design code and climate change principles would apply to employment sites and whether New Haw should be looking to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. There were many existing planning applications for employment sites which should be incorporating more renewable technologies such as solar panels – this should be essential to reduce emissions.

SB confirmed that the principles do apply to employment sites – for example, larger proposals, including non-residential proposals, should consider how to reduce the development’s total energy needs using renewable or low carbon technologies. However, JO confirmed that the immediate changes to the NPPF very much focussed on housing, rather than employment.

JO described how the NPPF proposals set out how Local Plans that become more than five years old during the first 30 months of the new system (anticipated to be introduced late 2024) will continue to be considered ‘up-to-date’. In her view, whilst neighbourhood plans will be given more weight when making decisions on applications, the 2030 Local Plan would be considered ‘up-to-date’ for decision-making purposes and therefore it wasn’t essential that New Haw have a Neighbourhood Plan in place. The Council would be seeking clarity on the status of the existing Local Plan in its response to the consultation.

SB reiterated that there may be scope for communities such as New Haw to produce a ‘neighbourhood priority statement’ which RBC would be obliged to take into account when preparing its revised Local Plan. More details were required from government as to the status of these statements, and whether they would attract a larger proportion of CIL, similar to ‘made’ Neighbourhood Plans.

TCS: questioned whether places without a Neighbourhood Plan would be more vulnerable to speculative development – places such as Egham and Chertsey.

JO was of the view that these communities would be at no immediate disadvantage without a Neighbourhood Plan in place, as the 2030 Local Plan would be ‘up-to-date’ for many years to come.

TCS: asked whether there were any immediate changes to the NPPF which would drive forward infrastructure more effectively. Existing infrastructure such as the sewer network and healthcare facilities were inadequate to support new development.

SB confirmed that there were no proposed changes to the NPPF for this Spring 2023 version that would affect infrastructure delivery. Acknowledged that the current system is flawed, and that the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill gives the government powers to create a new infrastructure levy which is intended to provide infrastructure such as schools, GP surgeries and new roads more effectively. However, there was no further detail on this in the Government's current consultation.

ERA: of the opinion that these immediate proposals failed to provide sufficient clarity. Asked how the Council had reached a figure of 649dpa, from a figure of 500.

JO described how the standard method (SM) figure of 649 dwellings is based on a formula. The data that feeds into the formula is updated every couple of years by the Government and as a result the numbers required to be provided increases over time. The housing target of 500 dwellings, included in the Local Plan was derived, prior to the introduction of the SM, and is based on the method of calculating housing need included in the 2012 NPPF.

ERA: asked for more details about the Council's intentions to conduct a Green Belt review, and whether these plans would now be abandoned?

JO described how a detailed review of the GB had been undertaken for the 2030 Local Plan and as a result a number of sites had been released from the GB. The team had intended to ask the consultants to produce an addendum to the GB Study, to consider the performance of GB sites within defined buffers of the Borough's urban areas, which had not had their Green Belt performance assessed previously, this work is now on hold because of the proposed changes to the NPPF, subject to the approval of Members.

ERA: wondered how the Secretary of State would react to Runnymede Borough Council not meeting its housing needs in full, due to constraints such as the Green Belt.

JO felt that the Secretary of State had made it clear in the revised NPPF that Green Belt policy would be strengthened and this provides scope to plan for below required needs. It would be interesting to see how some neighbouring draft Local Plans progress – such as that of Elmbridge Borough Council, who aren't proposing to release any land from the GB and whose housing is falling well short of their housing need requirements.

TWRA: described how the Thorpe community had been proactive in allocating land in the Green Belt for development, to meet identified needs – potentially at the expense of local infrastructure functioning well. It was pointed out that the Thorpe Neighbourhood Forum is no longer an elected body with a mandate. The Forum would need to be re-established if the Neighbourhood Plan needed to be updated.

JO agreed, and pointed out that the Council was in a similar position – the existing 2030 Local Plan had identified several sites for release from the Green Belt to meet needs. JO highlighted how Mole Valley Council had recently asked the Inspector if all the proposed Green Belt sites could be deleted from the draft Local Plan in order to make it consistent with emerging national policy.

TWRA: described a potential community energy project to make use of methane gas minerals at a Green Belt site in Thorpe. There could be potential to keep energy costs down by harnessing this resource. The irony was not lost in being able to justify housing for removal from the Green Belt but not green energy projects in Green Belt, just as the cost of energy is soaring. TWRA pointed out they have identified a site where methane generation currently arises and this has a feed onto the National Grid; and thus could potentially be turned over to e.g. solar generation, if national policy permitted this.

## **Any Other Business**

A discussion followed between VWNF and TWRA around the capacity of the sewage system to accommodate additional development. TWRA described how there had been discharge of sewage into residents' gardens. TWRA also noted that following a previous CPP meeting, RBC had sent on TWRA's comments to the Environment Agency, who had supported the possibility of an Article 4 Direction being introduced in the area to ensure developments (permitted and minor) are designed to lessen their cumulative impact during flood events. TWRA agreed to share recent correspondence that RBC had received and for RBC/TWRA to have a virtual meeting to discuss the issue further **[ACTION TWRA]**.

NHRA was concerned about flood risk around the Rive Ditch, and JO confirmed that she had seen the email regarding hydraulic modelling – she would send a response shortly **[ACTION JO]**.

SB confirmed that she would share the slides and notes with CPP Members **[ACTION SB]**.

The meeting ended at 8.10pm.