

Community Planning Panel (Special Meeting)

Start time: 6.30pm (online MS Teams meeting)

Attendees:

Runnymede Borough Council (RBC):

Georgina Pacey (GP) (Planning Policy and Climate Change Manager)

Stephanie Broadley (SB) (Principal Planning Policy Officer)

Paul Wade (PW) (Planning Policy Officer)

Judith Orr (JO) Assistant Planning Policy Manager

CPP Members

Englefield Green Neighbourhood Forum (EGNF)

New Haw Residents Association (NHRA)

Friends of the Hythe (FoH)

The Friends of Rowtown Residents Group (RRG)

Thorpe Ward Residents' Association (TWRA)

Ottershaw Neighbourhood Forum (ONF)

Franklands Drive Residents Association (FDRA)

Virginia Water Neighbourhood Forum (VWNF)

Planning Reforms and changes at a national level

GP gave a presentation on the changes to the planning system following Levelling Up and Regeneration Act coming into effect and subsequent significant events which include [Future Homes and Building Standards public consultation](#), [Written Ministerial Statement on Local Energy Efficiency Standards](#), [consultation on proposals for heat network zoning](#), [Consultation on revisions to the to the NPPF](#), [Written Ministerial Statement on the updated long term plan for housing](#) and the [Street Vote Development Orders public consultation](#).

The slides and notes are being circulated with the Minutes.

Planning Reforms: Question and answer session:

-FoH questioned what sort of response we usually get for public consultations – are we happy with it – and how will our Local Plan Review timetable account for a new Government and potentially a different approach to national plan-making?

GP responded that the number of responses received in response to public consultations varies a lot – often depending on the issues. E.g. Local Plan and Green Belt issues generated a very large response. Recently, we're experiencing a higher response rate, particularly among young people, to social media posts and digital forms of consultation. GP confirmed that a citizen's panel was being established and this may improve levels of engagement, and attract a wider range of voices.

GP Acknowledged that we may get mid-way through a Local Plan Review and then need to adapt to a new system. Can only respond to the national policy landscape which exists at the time.

-VWNF mentioned that they would value a meeting with SB to discuss climate change policies in the draft Virginia Water Neighbourhood Plan. He also asked if the revised NPPF contained any updates on flooding and flood zones. GP confirmed that there were no flood-related changes in the most recent update (in August 2022 however, changes were made to the definition of the functional floodplain-this is one of the more significant changes in this policy area in recent times). Subsequent changes in this area may well occur via the next update to the NPPF which is due this Spring/Summer. It was expected that the next iteration of the NPPF would contain more information on National Development Management Policies, and it was thought likely that a national DM policy would be proposed on flooding.

ACTION: SB to explore whether a meeting with VWNF would be beneficial before or after the Council submits its Reg14 response. Post meeting note: It may be that there is more benefit in giving the Forum time to digest the written comments before a meeting is considered.

-EGNF questioned whether the Forest Estate in Englefield Green could be prioritised for local Biodiversity Net Gain [BNG] use. RBC own a large proportion of it and it desperately needs greening up. Forum can work with bodies like Woodland Trust to plant trees, but need to think on a bigger scale.

ACTION: GP to raise this possibility with the biodiversity officer.

-EGNF also questioned whether, once the 5 Year Housing Land Supply period runs out, would this be 'open season for speculative development'. GP confirmed that the period runs to July 2025, but if we're preparing a new plan, it was likely based on proposals set out in Government consultations, that the Council would get an extra 30months of protection under transitional arrangements. Whilst speculative development is a risk, GP felt that Runnymede was at lower risk than some other boroughs/districts given the high % of Green Belt land as long as our housing land supply does not become critically low. Although we should not allow ourselves to be complacent

-NHRA queried whether Battery Energy Storage Systems were covered under the new Heat Networks consultation. SB confirmed that these were different matters. NHRA advised to contact the case officer in writing in relation to the live planning application which relates to a BESS proposal with any questions or concerns.

-TWRA pointed out a significant number of trees had been removed/lost recently. This may undermine the purpose of BNG when someone takes all the trees down on a site ahead of a development proposal being submitted. GP confirmed that there were provisions in the legislation/regulations to prevent this, because a baseline position was set at 30 Jan 2020.

-It was queried whether we have a plan to survey the borough with the help of communities. GP confirmed that Surrey County Council [SCC] will start to assess 5 sites put forward by the Council this Spring. There's potential to use existing SANG for BNG. Beyond Spring, our biodiversity officer will begin with his own surveys of sites that he identifies as being potentially suitable to support the BNG transition. Post meeting note: Call for Sites for the Strategic Land Availability Assessment due to commence in April-this will also now for landowners to put sites forward for BNG.

ACTION – CPP to pass ideas of any BNG sites to GP for further consideration.

-TWRA highlighted an opportunity for a community renewable energy project using methane gas, and potentially as part of the River Thames Scheme. Methane / gravel pit waste could be a good source of energy. GP confirmed that the Council would be developing an Energy Strategy as part of the climate change action plan (but not in the 2024/25 financial year), and the climate change team would like to work with local communities on any community renewable projects.

Runnymede Design Code

SB gave a presentation on the development of the Runnymede Design Code including an overview of the origins of the project and why we are required to produce a Design Code, the key stages, timetable and high level approach to public engagement

The slides and notes are being circulated with the Minutes.

Question & Answer session on Design Code:

-NHRA stated they are very interested in the project and would like to get involved. Asked whether the code will look at visual quality or take a more holistic approach. Cited the former Marconi site in Addlestone as an example of where layouts, interaction with surrounding buildings etc could be improved.

SB confirmed that the design codes would look at visual quality as part of the ten characteristics of a well-designed place (which includes attractive and distinctive identity and enhancement of the surroundings).

-ONH - Ottershaw plan that has been informally submitted to RBC contains a Design Code for their area. In the Ottershaw design code, they set their own character areas. These differ from the Design SPD character areas. ONH questioned where their Design Code would sit in the hierarchy: which would take precedence in the event of a conflict between the two documents?

SB recognised that Forums had already undertaken engagement with their local communities on their Design Codes, and responded that this is something that needs to be discussed with the consultants. Work needs to be done to establish how the Borough-wide Design Code integrates with design codes of Neighbourhood Plans to avoid duplication. RBC wants to capture what Forums have done and integrate where possible. SB confirmed in response to a further question that the Borough-wide Design Code is intended to be adopted eventually as a Supplementary Plan. Under the new plan-making system, Supplementary Plans will have the same status as Local Plans. This would give the Design Code requirements more weight in decision-making.

-FoH – Recommended that fellow CPP members read the National Model Design Code guidance. Raised a number of questions:

- 1 - can a link be provided to RBC's Design SPD. (This can be found using [this link](#))
- 2 – can the name of the consultants be confirmed – SB confirmed the consultants are [BPTW](#) in partnership with Design South East.
- 3 – could a bit more be said about how councillors will be engaging with the process as surprised members not involved at the moment. GP confirmed that the Planning Cmte was aware that the project was just starting. Councillors will be key stakeholders in the project but currently the project is at a very early stage and officers are yet to develop an Engagement Strategy (work on this will begin in May, after the local elections).

-FDRA stated that they want to be involved and would be interested in attending another session. Queried how the design code could be applied to office buildings or development carried out under Prior Approval and/or changes of use? SB responded that there is limited opportunity for application of the Design Code in Prior Approval or change of use applications due to the nature of the legislation – only a very limited number of issues can be considered by decision-makers.

-VWNH asked if the design code would be part of the emerging local plan? Officers responded that it would be beneficial to develop the Design Code alongside the Local Plan Review and eventually adopt it as a Supplementary Plan.

Meeting closed