

TENT 1 JOINT STEERING GROUP



MINUTES OF THE TENT 1 JOINT STEERING GROUP MEETING HELD ON THE 27th NOVEMBER 2013

PRESENT:

Martin Vink (**MV**) – Ashford Borough Council Planning.
Leo Hickish (**LH**) – Partner at Batcheller Monkhouse & TTC Consultant.
Jill Hutchinson (**JH**) - Ashford Borough Council.
Paul Clokie (**PC**) - Ashford Borough Council & Tenterden Town Council.
Mike Bennett (**MB**) - Ashford Borough Council.
Roy Isworth (**RI**) – Save Tenterden Action Group.
Peter Davies (**PD**) - Tenterden & District Residents Association.
Jon Bradburn (**JB**) – Montagu Evans LLP.
Gary Heard (**GH**) – Peter Brett Associates.
Charlotte Robinson (**CR**) - Welbeck Strategic Land LLP.
Robin Wade (**RW**) – Tenterden Town Council.
Jennifer Crickmore-Porter (**JCP**) – Tenterden Town Council.
Mike Carter (**MC**) – Tenterden & District Chamber of Commerce & Tenterden Town Council.

Administrative Assistant Robert Parham was also present and took notes.

MV was in the chair.

- 1. APOLOGIES:** Apologies were received from Colin Kinloch (Tenterden Town & Rural Partnership), Richard Thomas (Welbeck Strategic Land LLP) and Chris Moore (Taylor Wimpey).
- 2. MINUTES.** It was agreed that the notes of the meeting held on the 16th October 2013 were a true and correct record.
- 3. FEEDBACK ON EXHIBITION AND CURRENT POSITION OF PROPOSALS.**
JB reported that attendance levels at the public exhibition [held at the Town Hall on 15th and 16th November 2013] had been very encouraging – 220 people had signed the attendance book, and it was estimated that approximately 250 people had attended in total. It had appeared that most attendees were relatively happy with the plans on show. In excess of 50 feedback forms had been submitted. One issue raised by a number of attendees had been the perceived loss of the Wildflower Meadow as a public amenity, although unfortunately this was a necessity as part of the land allocation. **RW** commented that the replacement land [the east/west strip of land between phase A and the proposed phase B] gave every appearance of being a superior space for use by the public.
JB reported that other areas of concern included traffic issues [at Six Fields Path, Recreation Ground Road and the High Street], issues with the existing poor water pressure in the immediate vicinity, drainage of surface water across the site and concerns related to the capacity of the existing infrastructure [schools, healthcare etc.] to cope with the increased population. **JB** indicated that with these concerns in mind it was understandable that some attendees were reluctant to fully endorse the plans at that stage.

JH stated that she had been very pleased to see that there had been no hostility in attendees at the exhibition, but had noted that people were still concerned over the development becoming a "rat run" from East Cross to Smallhythe Road.

AS reported that attendees had been particularly concerned with Social Housing and the number of vehicles the new homes would be bringing into the town and the impact this might have on the junction between Recreation Ground Road and East Cross, but had not encountered any particular sadness over the loss of the Wildflower Meadow. He added that many attendees were already interested in buying homes in the development. **JB** concurred that there had been significant interest in purchasing properties, and this was seen as fairly unprecedented at this stage of the planning process.

PC suggested that the majority of feedback forms might be filled in by residents who were staunchly against any development, which might skew the feedback in a certain direction. He also noted that he had encountered an attendee who had expressed great disappointment that there was no provision for new allotments in the master plan.

PD stated that many attendees had thought that more detailed designs of the properties themselves would be on show, including greater focus on architectural details. **MV** indicated that these details would be on show at the Tenterden Gateway at a later date, and **RW** added that the plans could also be exhibited at the Town Hall to ensure that members of the public were given the maximum opportunity to view them, and that he thought it might be a good idea for the Town Council to hold a public meeting to measure public opinion before it submitted its views on the final planning application. **PC** stated that he felt it was important that TTC gave its own view as well as that of residents, while **MV** added that while it would be appropriate to ensure that the proper channels of democracy were observed, TTC should offer its view even if a consensus had not been reached at a public meeting.

RI asked how much money TTC would receive for the sale of the Wildflower Meadow, who would receive this money, and how it would be used. **LH** replied that the volatility of the market meant that it was impossible to give an accurate figure [it could vary by 30-40%], and it would therefore be impossible to give an answer in advance of the sale. **RW** stated that TTC would need to be satisfied that the Wildflower Meadow was adequately replaced, and reiterated that the planned east/west public space appeared to be superior to the meadow. TTC would receive the money from the sale, and would use it as it saw fit.

RI asked what plans were in place to ensure that satisfactory medical facilities would be provided to accommodate the new residents. He stated that he was aware that Ivy Court Surgery had been in talks to appropriate the adjacent East Cross Clinic to allow expansion, but felt that as these negotiations had been taking place for eight years without significant progress it was impossible to rely on this as a solution. **MV** replied that the developers would be required to allocate an amount of money in a Section 106 agreement to provide for any improvements to healthcare arising as a result of the development, which would be held by ABC until the local healthcare authority put together a scheme for which it would be used, emphasising that the health authority was responsible for deciding what was required. **RW** added that Ivy Court Surgery had been approached about relocating to a new location within Tent 1 early on in the master planning process, but had declined. He also reported that new powers for Town and Parish Councils under the Sustainable Communities Act allowed TTC to submit specific proposals (that would benefit the community as a whole) directly to the Secretary of State, which could then be put in place as legislation. Using this power TTC could expedite the negotiations between Ivy Court Surgery and East Cross Clinic if it were deemed necessary.

RI asked whether there were any plans in place to implement a Shared Space scheme at the junction between Recreation Ground Road and East Cross. **MV** indicated that this would be outside the scope of the development, as the developers were required to provide only for issues arising from Tent 1 itself rather than existing traffic and pedestrian problems. **MC** stated that he felt there was scope to make improvements to the pedestrian accesses with the High Street from which residents of Tent 1 would access the High Street [at the top of Bells Lane, for example].

RI asked how many trees would be planted in the east/west public open space at the border of phases A and B. **MV** replied that this had not yet been decided, but would be included in the planning application which the applicants hoped to submit in January 2014.

RI enquired as to who would be responsible for the maintenance of public open spaces. **MV** reported that it was not uncommon for local Councils to undertake this, but that in some cases developers would appoint a maintenance company, paid for by a maintenance charge on the properties. If a council decided to maintain the land then the s106 agreement would usually seek a sum for future maintenance. **RW** reported that TTC had provisionally resolved that it would be willing to take over any available public space, as long as funds for its upkeep were forthcoming.

RW asked whether there was any intention that rainwater would be harvested from roofs in the development. **MV** reported that a formal programme for rainwater harvesting was unlikely to be proposed for a site the size of Tent 1, due to the complications arising from the installation of the necessary underground tanks. He added that allowing rainwater to flow through the site naturally offered benefits to ecology and also provided a very sustainable way to deal with runoff as long as the rate of flow was controlled.

- 4. PUBLIC PARKING.** **GH** reported that surveys carried out on the car parks in Tenterden in both February 2013 and July 2013 had shown that at the busiest times they were filled to only 75% capacity, suggesting little need for the proposed 200 space car park to be built in Tent 1. **PC** stated that he felt that existing parking problems Tenterden were caused by the high cost of parking, and that it was essential that a car park in Tent 1 would have greatly reduced all-day rates, and would need to be accompanied by the implementation of Controlled Parking Zones in residential streets near the town centre, to encourage use of the car parks. He added that while he felt it was permissible for the car park to be located in phase B of the development, it was essential that the cost of providing it was spread across both phases. **GH** reported that the existing car park at the Leisure Centre would be increased in size by 30 – 40 spaces as part of phase A.

MC stated that he felt it was important that any new parking would be located at the centre of the town rather than on the periphery, but **MV** noted that there was no possible location at the centre of the town. **MV** added that in any case it was up to the developer to evidence that there was no need to provide new parking as part of the Tent 1 development, as this had been mandated by ABC's currently adopted core strategy. **JB** expressed the developers' opinion that they would not wish to include a car park in Tent 1 if it were to go unused, as this would lead to maintenance costs to ABC, without any significant financial return.

MV requested that the full report be provided to the Steering Group for its consideration at a meeting in early January 2014.

- 5. HIGHWAY PROPOSALS.** **GH** reported that research had indicated that the new development would most likely see an extra 120 vehicle movements (i.e. a total of in and out movements) during the busiest hour of the morning, and 120-130 in the busiest hour of the evening. 60 – 70% of this at the Recreation

Ground Road junction (averaging a little over one extra vehicle per minute). This number did not suggest a need for major work to be undertaken at the junction, merely an adjustment to the phasing of the lights.

JCP enquired as to whether a roundabout might be more appropriate for keeping traffic moving, but **GH** replied that this would not be viable because roundabouts only tended to function properly when all spurs carried similar volumes of traffic, which would not be the case where Recreation Ground Road met the main A28. **GH** reported that while KCC undertook reviews of the phasing of traffic lights at junctions with some regularity, it could sometimes be years between studies, so re-phasing them as part of the Tent 1 development ought to be beneficial to all users of the junction.

GH stated that studies had been undertaken looking at the current usage of Recreation Ground Road, which indicated that pedestrians tended to cross the road using a speed hump between the small car park adjacent to the public toilets and the doctors' surgery. He proposed that this should be formalised as a zebra crossing, as well as improving all of the speed humps to bring them up to modern standards and improving the drainage around them to reduce the amount of flooding which typically took place in the autumn and winter months. **GH** also noted that the entrance to the car park at Waitrose appeared to be needlessly wide, given that lorries used a different entrance for deliveries, and suggested that it be narrowed to prevent pedestrians having to dash across such a wide opening.

GH reported that the study had shown no need to widen the road itself, as two-way traffic was easily accommodated, but suggested that lay-bys be installed near the school and the surgery to allow drop-offs and pick-ups to take place without inconveniencing other road users. It was also considered that widening the road may lead to faster traffic speeds, which was not to be encouraged. The speed limit of the road would be maintained at 20 miles per hour.

MV stated that pedestrian crossings should be viewed as a priority, and requested that one be figured into the new access road near the leisure centre and that new crossing.

AS noted that people walking to the school from the Shrubcote area tended to use a gap in the hedge adjacent to Sandy Lane, and suggested that this desire line could be formalised as part of the reconfiguration of the Leisure Centre car park. **MV** requested that this be given full consideration ahead of the next meeting.

GH indicated that as relatively little extra traffic was expected to use Smallhythe Road, no major works were proposed at that location.

6. AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND SECTION 106 PROPOSALS. **RW** reported that a presentation to members of TTC on the subject of affordable housing, given by an officer of ABC, had been very useful. TTC had been particularly pleased to learn that as much as 100% of the affordable housing could be allocated to people with a local connection.

MV reported that ABC had specified that 35% of the development should constitute affordable housing, and Taylor Wimpey and Welbeck Strategic Land were working to establish whether this was financially viable. **JB** suggested that at this early stage it appeared that it would not prove to be viable, and would be able to supply a final report on this subject at the next meeting. **MV** stated that ABC would finalise the S106 agreement prior to this meeting, and if the development was not considered viable ABC would take the report to an independent consultant for verification. The results of this verification would inform whether there would be any adjustment of the timescales of other areas of the S106 agreement to improve viability.

RW emphasised that if there was a need to compromise on any area in order to facilitate the 35% affordable housing, it must not be in build quality, as TTC and residents had been very clear that a high quality extension to the town was

of paramount importance. After this, affordable housing was seen as the priority. **CR** confirmed that a high quality build (e.g. timber window frames) was indeed costly, and this played a significant factor in judging the viability of the scheme. **MV** emphasised that all of the developers involved viewed Tent 1 as a flagship project, and would be striving for the best possible final product and that as houses prices in Tenterden were more buoyant than elsewhere the question of viability should be less likely to be an issue.

JCP asked whether there was to be any discussion relating to the Community Infrastructure Levy in regard to Tent 1. **MV** replied that the CIL was not yet in place in the Ashford Borough, and would not be prior to the decision of the Tent 1 planning application. He added that in any case S106 negotiations sometimes offered greater flexibility to the community.

- 7. UPDATE ON INITIAL REPORT OF THE TENTERDEN SPORT, LEISURE AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES REVIEW.** **RW** stated that the review of sporting and community facilities had highlighted a minor shortfall in the areas of football, tennis, lawn bowls and swimming, and that the Leisure Centre was almost full to capacity and would be put under pressure due to the Tent 1 development. **RW** indicated that the report indicated that there were sufficient halls and meeting venues in the town, and this provision would be enhanced by existing plans to convert St. Mildreds Church into a community hub (as had previously been achieved in Ashford).

MC asked whether the New Homes Bonus could be used to help improve facilities. **PC** informed members that Central Government had cut many other grants in order that Borough Councils would be inclined to build new developments in order to fund existing services, so this "bonus" was already allocated for the maintenance of existing services.

- 8. TIMESCALE FOR SUBMISSION OF APPLICATION, INCLUDING DESIGN REVIEW PANEL.** **MV** reported that the Design Review Panel were due to meet to consider the master plan on Friday 29th November, and members of the Joint Steering Group were welcome to attend. The comments of the design panel would form the basis of the planning application, which should be submitted at the end of January. A decision on the application would ideally be made within 13 weeks of submission. He added that in order to allow the decision process to run smoothly the planners should submit the application with all necessary documents in place and a draft s106 agreement.

- 9. NEXT MEETING.** It was provisionally agreed that the next meeting would take place at 9.30am on Friday 10th January 2014, in the Mayor's Parlour at the Town Hall. The design team would be in attendance and would be able to talk members through the application in greater detail.

The meeting opened at 9.30am and closed at 11.37am.