

REPORT OF MEETING WITH BEN FITTER-HARDING AND ANDREW THOMPSON 9.6.22

Present: Richard Scase, John Walker, Wendy Le Las, Martin Vye (Canterbury Society): Ben Fitter-Harding, Andrew Thompson (Canterbury City Council)

The Canterbury Society Group presented questions under the five headings agreed by the Council Matters Working Group.

NUMBERS OF NEW HOUSES Andrew Thompson, the officer in charge of preparation of the next Local Plan, confirmed that the numbers required to be built during the life of the next Local Plan were dictated by the Government, and they were non-negotiable. They were based on an estimation of need, carried out in 2014, and in this case the extra numbers required from 2022 to 2040 amounted to 9000 for the District. He also confirmed that the Government increased the numbers if the ratio between average price of houses and average household income was higher than a certain figure, by means of an algorithm. House prices in Canterbury District were high, whereas average household income was comparatively low. That probably explained why the percentage increase in houses deemed to be needed was higher here than in another cathedral city, Winchester.

Ben F-H said that the Council had to take into account the cost of infrastructure, and this affected the number of houses to be built, as more houses mean more developer contributions to pay for that infrastructure. The plan period had been revised to 2045, and the numbers to this date are the numbers dictated by the housing need calculation.

The Canterbury Society put in a strong plea to the Council not to contemplate development of areas rich in wildlife, and valuable as green spaces where urban dwellers could enjoy the natural environment. Ben F-H said that they had, in March, put out a call for 'natural environment and renewable energy opportunity sites' in the district, to establish what land is potentially available for specific renewable energy and natural environment purposes. The Canterbury Society representatives expressed a firm wish that areas like the Old Park, of great environmental and historic interest, and next door to the most deprived area of Canterbury, would remain protected from housing or road development. Ben F-H said they would be providing detail in the next draft of the Local Plan and would seek to neutralize the impact of any development on such areas.

WASTEWATER

Ben F-H said that the Council recognized that nutrient pollution of waterways, and the special sites at Stodmarsh was a major concern Along with the MPs of Ashford

and Canterbury, and the Leader of the County Council, he was making representations to the Government about this issue. Clearly all major developments would have to have Wastewater Treatment Plants installed on site, with the capacity to purify the effluent to an acceptable level. When it was pointed out that Government guidance on Local Plans stipulated that small developments should contribute to the numbers of houses required, and that such small developments could not be expected to house Treatment Plants, Andrew Thompson conceded that this posed a problem. Wendy Le Las said that good professional advice was absolutely essential, and said that she knew an outstanding professional who had advised on many water treatment projects throughout the world, and offered his services.

When asked whether the Council had received the advice from Natural England and the Government which had been publicized in March, on how to mitigate the effect of a development on nutrient pollution Andrew Thompson replied that it had been underwhelming

TRANSPORT

The question was asked: has a calculation been made of traffic movements if the number of houses in the Council's Preferred Option were built. Andrew Thompson said that this was work in progress, as they had yet to determine which sites to allocate for development and had to await traffic modelling data from KCC. Ben F-H emphasized the point that by-passes had been proposed in order to free the A28/ring-road from the increasing congestion and pollution caused by use of private vehicles. Access to the city on foot and by bicycle would be very much more attractive if modal shift on this axis could be achieved. The point was made by the Canterbury Society that in order to affect a significant modal shift bus services needed to be greatly extended; and that in order to achieve that travel plans needed to be negotiated with businesses, schools, healthcare institutions, and other organizations, with the establishment of Clean Air Zones and workplace charging levies to back up the pressure. Ben agreed that these measures should be brought in, but only when alternative routes across the urban area had been established. As for bus services, the Council recognized that Stagecoach was justified in asking for re-allocation of road space to bus lanes. Another problem was the present configuration of the bus station. The Levelling Up bid sought to enhance it as a transport hub and entry point to the city, and increase its capacity, and the Local Plan will seek to improve access to the bus station, by the removal of private vehicles from the Rheims Way. Wendy Lelas pointed out that the movement of children to school by private cars was one of the main reasons for congestion on the

road network. She then said that in her view developers, if required to provide funds for bus services to and from their new developments, were allowed to delay their contribution too long, and by the time the money and the services came forward residents in the new development had accustomed themselves to using private cars. Andrew Thompson agreed with that view and said they would try to negotiate tighter timetables for introduction of bus services.

CARBON EMISSIONS CAUSED BY NEW BUILDINGS

In response to the question as to whether the new Local Plan would require all new buildings to be carbon-neutral, Ben said that this was the Council's aim, and that they were working hard to calculate the viability of this approach. They were talking with developers about this issue. In general, it seemed that developers had taken the point that it was vital to build new homes that were carbon neutral. John Walker asked whether the Council would be prepared to use planning conditions rather than Building Regulations to set a zero-carbon standard for new dwellings.

AFFORDABILITY

The question was asked: given the fact that average household incomes in Canterbury District were low, would the definition of affordability in the new Local Plan take this into account? Andrew Thompson said that Government guidelines limited the ability of local planning authorities to set their own criterion of affordability. John Walker pointed out that developers could plead non-viability of a generous affordability criterion (and indeed of building houses to a tight zero-carbon standard) because landowners could demand a very high price for their land.

Ben said he recognized the importance of this issue. The Council had not been able to build many council houses over recent years, because the impact on the Housing Revenue Account of the mismanagement of the stock of council houses while they were under East Kent Housing was considerable.

THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Richard Scase asked what vision the Council had for much-needed development of the local economy. Ben replied that they were concentrating especially on the unique heritage of Canterbury, and on how to make sure its economic value was maximized. The Council's bid to the Levelling Up Fund was focused on this.

John Walker took the opportunity to promote the idea of a Canterbury Heritage Forum, which had been mooted at the Canterbury Society committee, and he asked whether the Council would be willing to take part in this. Ben said it would.