

BOROUGH PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
19 APRIL 2011

(7.15pm – 8.35pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Munn (in the Chair);
Councillors Philip Jones, Geraldine Stanford, Ray Tindle and
David Williams.

ALSO PRESENT: Council Officers
Tara Butler (Spatial Planning Manager - Interim); and
M.J.Udall (Democratic Services)

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillor Diane Neil Mills.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 1)

No declarations of interest were made.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Borough Plan Advisory Committee held on 19 January 2011 be agreed as a correct record.

3 UPATE ON RECENT CHANGES TO THE PLANNING SYSTEM (Agenda Item 4)

Tara Butler (Spatial Planning Manager - Interim) introduced the report. There then followed discussion on various issues including the following.

(a) Use of “brownfield” sites – Removal of nationally imposed targets (2nd para., page 8) – Tara Butler advised that existing controls on open space designations were to be retained but officers were checking whether this included local controls as well as national controls.

(b) Consultation arising from the Localism Bill – Tara Butler advised that current consultation arising from the Bill on changes to the planning system which would allow for the conversion to residential use of offices, warehouses and industrial premises without the need for planning permission ends on 30 June 2011 and the Council’s draft response would be submitted to the next Advisory Committee meeting on 15 June 2011; and undertook to provide Advisory Committee Members with a link to relevant papers (associated with the Bill) recently published by the Government.

(NB. The links were subsequently identified as follows – (i) Link to CLG consultation: “Relaxation of the planning rules for change of use from commercial to residential”
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/relaxationchangeconsultation>

and; (ii) Link to “The Plan for Growth” HM Treasury:
http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/2011budget_growth.pdf .)

(c) Possible benefits and opportunities for development arising from the Bill – Tara Butler outlined proactive action being taken, including discussions with potential investors and landholders; and indicated that the report to the next meeting would focus more on delivering projects and development opportunities.

(d) New Homes Bonus – Tara Butler advised that the developments on the Brenley

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and Rowan sites would qualify for this new Bonus whereby local authorities received a payment for each new house built (and further payments for next 6 years).

(e) New Homes – “Buy now pay later” Scheme (6th para., page 8) – Tara Butler advised that at present it wasn’t clear who would pay for the initial acquisition of the land proposed for development of new homes.

(f) Restructuring/resources - Tara Butler referred to the restructuring of the planning policy team; the reduction in resources; and the need to focus on delivering projects with more limited resources.

(g) Predetermination rules (last para., page 11) – There was extensive discussion on this proposal to end the predetermination rules so as to allow Councillors to be free to discuss and lobby on development, and vote on a planning committee on a proposed development without being accused of bias, even when a Councillor has previously expressed an opinion for or against that specific development proposal.

Report otherwise received.

4 REVISING THE CONTENTS OF MERTON’S ANNUAL MONITORING PLAN
(Agenda Item 5)

(i) Tara Butler (Spatial Planning Manager - Interim) introduced the report, responded to queries and also indicated that she would also consult separately with absent Advisory Committee member, Councillor Diane Neil Mills.

(ii) There was extensive discussion on whether the information in the current AMR was useful and was actually used by Members, officers and other interested groups. Particular reference was made to the relevance of some of the AMR data in the consideration of planning applications. (See also (vi) below.)

(iii) Various Members also referred to the need to avoid asking officers carrying out unnecessary work in providing information which is not used or have some benefit.

(iv) Tara Butler confirmed that some current AMR chapters were used a lot in considering planning applications (e.g. Housing) whilst some others were not (e.g. Borough Profile), and explained that for the latter, officers proposed that such chapters be summarised or deleted to enable the report to be effective yet less resource intensive.

(v) Various Members queried the need to retain the chapter “Population and demography statistics” (also referred to as the “Borough Profile”). Tara Butler advised that it would be possible to considerably summarise the necessary data from this chapter.

(vi) Councillor Philip Jones requested that the following data be included in the AMR -

(a) Housing chapter – Greater clarity on affordable housing including clear figures as to what percentage of the total housing stock comprises affordable housing; and similar information in relation to the completion and approvals of housing developments;

(b) Development Control data – In Merton (per annum), the number of

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applications granted/refused; percentage of refusals subject to appeals; percentage of appeals lost/won; and comparative figures for such data with other London Boroughs; and a breakdown of figures for applications refused and appeals by Ward.

There was discussion of whether such data needed to be included in the AMR but no decision was made on the matter at this meeting.

RESOLVED: That a slimmed down version of the draft Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) be submitted to the Advisory Committee, to include such information as is considered essential, but where current sections of the AMR are not widely used, consideration be given to summarising or deleting such sections.

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