

Folkestone & Hythe District and Parish Councils' Joint Committee

Held at:	Remote Meeting
Date	Thursday, 19 January 2023
Present	Councillors Graham Allison, Roger Joyce, Terence Mullard and Paul Thomas
Apologies for Absence	Councillors Laszlo Dudas and Martin Sweeney
Officers Present:	James Clapson (Case Officer (Committee)), Charlotte Spendley (Director of Corporate Services) and Adrian Tofts (Strategy, Policy & Performance Lead Specialist)

1. Appointment of chairman

Town Councillor Paul Thomas was appointed Chairman for the meeting.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2022 were submitted and agreed as a correct record.

4. Changes to National Planning Policy and the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill

Mr Tofts provided the Committee with an update on the recent changes to National Planning Policy, and the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill. The presentation slides have been attached to the minutes for reference.

During the presentation, it was noted that:

- Consultation was currently underway on the 'Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy'. The consultation period ran until 2 March and interested parish and town councils could

access the consultation documents through the link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill-reforms-to-national-planning-policy>

- Only 40% of local authorities had an up-to-date (5 years old or less) local plan in place. There were proposals to simplify and speed up the local plan process. Reforms were targeted for implementation towards the end of 2024.
- Folkestone & Hythe District Council had an up-to-date local plan that was adopted in 2020, so under the new proposals, it would not need to demonstrate a five-year housing supply; however, the housing delivery test remained in place, therefore the system would remain fundamentally unchanged.
- There were no proposed changes to the method for calculating housing numbers, however national housing figures were to become an 'advisory starting point for establishing a housing requirement'. It was unclear exactly this phrase would mean in practice.
- The Government still had a target to build 300,000 new homes a year across the country by the mid-2020s.
- Previously raised questions such as how to speed up development on sites, or how to consider applications from applicants who have a history of breaching planning conditions, remained unanswered.
- There would be further consultation to come on the National Planning Policy Framework, and consultation on a new Infrastructure Levy.
- Cabinet would consider the Council's response to the consultation when it met on 22 February.

During consideration of the item, the following points were noted:

- There had been a lot of campaigning for more localism in the Levelling Up Bill, however this seems to have had little impact so far.
- The Government indicated that the local plan should be renewed every five years.
- It was becoming harder for the Council to demonstrate a secure housing supply, as the required number of houses to be delivered had increased significantly.
- Some windfall sites were included in the supply calculation, based on previous rates of delivery.
- Parish and Town Councils could contribute to consultation response from the Kent Association of Local Councils' Planning Advisory Committee.

5. **Budget Strategy and Draft General Fund Budget 2023/24**

Mrs Spendley updated the Committee about the Council's Draft General Fund Budget for 2023/24 and the Budget Strategy.

During the update the following points were noted:

- The Medium Term Financial Strategy was reviewed each year. It was adopted by Full Council in November and showed a significant budget deficit over the medium term.

- The draft General Fund Budget 2023/24 initially had a shortfall of £4.286million, the Council's strategy to reduce this gap had the following strands:
 - A review of the Council's Fees and Charges
 - A curtailment of all non-essential spending.
 - To refocus the priorities of the Council, such as re-phasing work in recognition of the current financial and capacity challenges faced by the Council.
 - A wholistic review of services to identify any possible efficiencies.
 - To continue with strategic investments, such as the Otterpool Park project.
 - To undertake a review of the Council's reserves.
 - To maximise opportunities such as remaining in initiatives like the business rates pool; and to continue to apply for funding for enhancements such as the levelling up fund.
- The 2022/23 quarter three budget monitoring position showed that £570,000 of savings had been made without impact on the provision of front-line services.
- The provisional local government settlement was announced in December and offered the Council around £1.7million of funding. Additionally, the Council could increase Council Tax by up to 2.99% without triggering a referendum, this limit had increased from 1.99%.
- The draft Budget that would be considered by Cabinet on 26 January 2023, now showed a budget deficit of just over £2million. Full Council would meet on 23 February 2023 to agree the budget and council tax rates for the 2023/24 year.
- It was likely that the Council would need to use its reserve funds to help close some of the remaining budget gap.
- The budget consultation period started in December and would run until the start of February, people could participate using the following link: [Budget consultation 2023-2024 - Folkestone & Hythe District Council \(folkestone-hythe.gov.uk\)](https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/budget-consultation-2023-2024)
- Members offered their thanks for the budget report, noting that it was straight forward and easy to understand.

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Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill Consultation on Reforms to National Planning Policy

Folkestone & Hythe District and Parish
Councils' Joint Committee

19 January 2023

Background

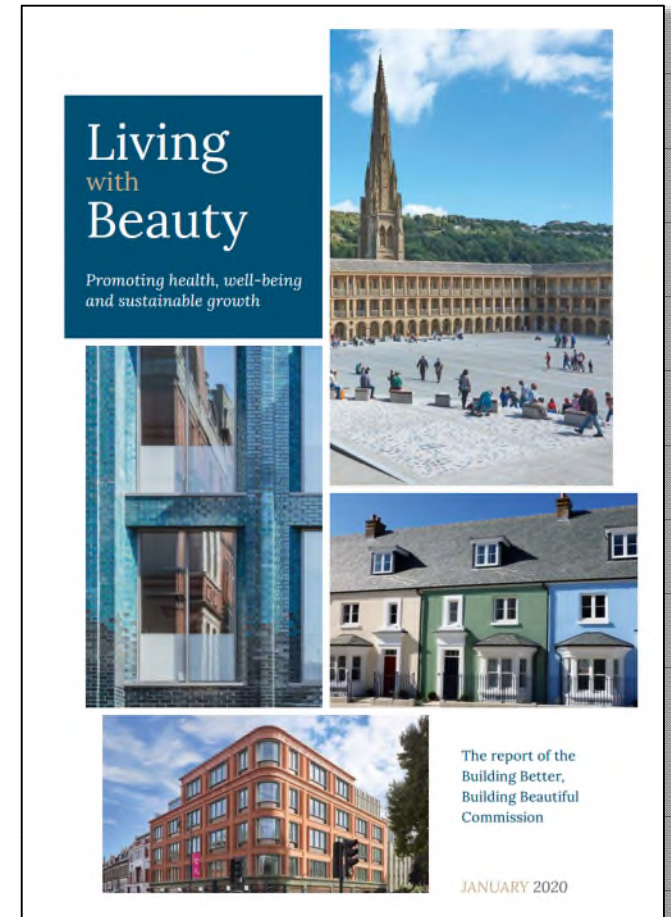
- Planning White Paper '*Planning for the Future*' (August 2020)
- Levelling Up White Paper '*Levelling Up the United Kingdom*' (February 2022)
- Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill – at House of Lords stage in Parliament
- Current consultation - '*Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy*'

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Key Government reforms

- ‘Beauty’ and the use of design codes to secure better quality development
- Digital engagement in the planning process
- Simpler and shorter local plans
- National Development Management Policies
- New infrastructure levy



Current consultation

- Consultation from Department for Levelling-up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) opened 22 December 2022
- Consultation closes on **2 March 2023**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill-reforms-to-national-planning-policy>
- Two parts:
 - Proposed changes to text of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
 - Online document setting out background and additional reforms

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Open consultation
Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy

From: [Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities](#)
Published 22 December 2022

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Summary


The Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities is seeking views on how we might develop new national planning policy to support our wider objectives.


This consultation closes at 11:45pm on 2 March 2023

Consultation description

This consultation seeks views on our proposed approach to updating to the National Planning Policy Framework. We are also seeking views on our proposed approach to preparing National Development Management Policies, how we might develop policy to support levelling up, and how national planning policy is currently accessed by users.

Documents

 [Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy](#)
HTML

 [National Planning Policy Framework: draft text for consultation](#)
PDF, 843 KB, 78 pages

Changes to text of NPPF

- Simplifying local plan process – reducing tests that planning Inspectors use to determine if a local plan is ‘sound’
 - Removing need for authorities to meet unmet housing need from neighbouring areas
- No change to method for calculating housing numbers**, but national housing figures become *“an advisory starting point for establishing a housing requirement for the area”*
- Five-year housing land supply removed as a requirement where there is an up-to-date local plan **but** the housing delivery test remains

Changes to text of NPPF

- Period during which Neighbourhood Plans are up-to-date is extended to five years and reduced scope to override Neighbourhood Plan policies if housing supply is insufficient
- Term 'beauty' is introduced into NPPF at several points (accompanying document states: *'beauty is not a cost to be negotiated away once planning permission has been obtained. It is the benchmark that all new developments should meet'*)
- Support for 'repowering' renewable energy developments
- Support for onshore wind developments, where there is community backing
- Need to consider availability of food producing land

Proposals in online document

- **Government commitment to build 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s is reaffirmed**
- New style local plans to be produced within 30-month timescale – reforms expected to be implemented from late 2024
- All local authorities to prepare and adopt Design Codes
- Discussion about how past irresponsible behaviour (e.g. breaches of planning permission) could be considered when deciding new applications
- Discussion of how developers' slow build-out rates could be tackled
- Discussion about whether planning can do more to promote the safety of women, girls and vulnerable groups

Proposals in online document

- **National Development Management Policies:**
 - National Development Management Policies will be drafted to accompany the NPPF, with increased status
 - Will reflect national priorities and fill gaps in policy
 - Would override local plan policies where there is conflict
- **Local plan policies:**
 - Should not repeat national policies
 - Should focus on local issues (e.g. student housing, basement developments, expansion of business clusters, coastal management)

Overview

- Some welcome reforms
- Lack of clarity in some areas
- Previously-raised issues not advanced to any extent
- More consultations to come!
 - Further changes to NPPF due later in 2023
 - Consultation on new Infrastructure Levy due 'shortly'

Questions?