

RURAL FORUM

TUESDAY, 6 MARCH 2018

PRESENT: Councillors Christine Bateson (Chairman), David Evans (Vice-Chairman), David Coppinger, Colin Rayner and Malcolm Beer

Also in attendance: Councillor Samantha Rayner, Louise Warbrick (Thames Valley Police), Colin Hudson (Thames Valley Police), Tim Parry (Community Council for Berkshire), Paul Rinder (Rinder Ltd), Nick Philp, Liz Hadden (BCA), Robert Byde (Lakeside Equestrian), Richard Copas (Copas Farms), Michael Craig (Forest Green Farm), William Emmett (Hornbuckle Farm), Andrew Randall (Randall Farms), Annie Keene (Applehouse Farm), James Copas (Copas Farms), David Jacobs (Copas Farms) and Barbara Story (Sunninghill and Ascot Parish Council).

Officers: Harjit Hunjan, David Scott, Helen Steward, Andy Carswell and Ashley Smith

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting asked those present to introduce themselves.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Kellaway, Jonathan Greaves, Jane Jennings and Alan Keene.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

None received.

MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were unanimously agreed as an accurate record.

RURAL HOUSING

Ashley Smith, Deputy Head of Planning, welcomed questions and comments relating to housing from members.

Paul Rinder asked if it was possible for a more relaxed approach to be taken for farm workers applying for needs in relation to key worker housing. He stated that his farm had recently taken on three new employees who were able to afford monthly rents of between £500-600; however the average rent in the Royal Borough could be as high as £1,400 and his new workers had been unable to find their own affordable accommodation. Paul Rinder stated that professions such as nurses, teachers etc. were entitled to apply for needs for key worker housing and asked if these guidelines could be extended to farm workers. He stated there was a skills shortfall due to the lack of farm workers who could afford to live in the Royal Borough. Ashley Smith stated that the whole of the Royal Borough was Green Belt land, which meant there were constraints relating to new housing; however rural worker dwellings were potentially acceptable development within the Green Belt providing the relevant tests were passed and justification provided. Such planning applications were considered on a case by case basis and it was for the applicant to demonstrate a genuine need for accommodation. Typically initial permissions would be of a temporary nature with a condition tied to any

approval tying the accommodation to agricultural occupancy. Temporary permissions may be superseded with permanent permissions should the case continue to be justified.

Ashley Smith said there was a strong commitment through the Local Plan and the APPF to providing affordable housing in the Royal Borough, and the Council was seeking to secure 30 per cent affordable housing in the Royal Borough. The possibility of Rural Exception Sites had been retained in the draft revised NPPF. This was reiterated by Cllr Evans, who said it was hoped that the first development sites, with 30 per cent affordable housing, would be released in the summer. He said that the affordable units would have a rent of at least 70 per cent of the market value, and possibly as low as 50 per cent. Cllr Coppinger stated that the affordable units would include social housing, in order to provide for as broad a spectrum of housing needs as possible.

Ashley Smith stated that Prior Notification Permitted Development Rights were a possible option to create rural workers' housing, with PD able to provide up to three dwellings in certain circumstances subject to certain restrictions. However the farm needed to have been used exclusively for agriculture and it needed to be demonstrated that it had been used for such a purpose prior to March 2013. Ashley Smith stated that he was not aware of a new category relating to Permitted Development Rights being announced to date. Applications under Prior Notification Permitted Development Rights are not planning applications and so are not considered in the same way; however full planning applications would need to provide a justification for need to show why they are required.

Helen Steward, Housing Enabling Manager, stated that affordable accommodation provided under Permitted Development Rights would firstly be offered to anyone who was eligible living inside that parish; if there were no applications, it could then be offered to eligible applicants living outside the parish. Under the Rural Exception Scheme, accommodation would only be offered to people living inside that parish, regardless of their occupation. It was a requirement of the Rural Exception Scheme for accommodation to remain affordable and, if applicable, in shared ownership in perpetuity. Ashley Smith stated that some housing schemes below a certain threshold did not have to provide any affordable housing, although the government was reviewing mechanisms to reduce affordable housing avoidance by developers. In accordance with the NPPG affordable housing can be sought on any development of ten or more dwellings.

Regarding the Borough Local Plan, the Forum was told that this had now been submitted and a June inspection date was hoped for. Draft findings would then be published by the inspector after the public examination.

UPDATE FROM THE FARMING COMMUNITY

Nick Philp gave a presentation to members relating to farming. The main points of the presentation were:

- Milk prices had increased during periods when there were shortages of butter. The price was currently above average but was expected to drop.
- Worldwide wheat supplies had increased by 130 million tons over the last ten years. Production was meeting increased demand.
- Use of glyphosate had been re-approved for the next five years, which was welcomed.
- A full ban on neonicotinoids, which was covered by a partial ban, was being considered. It was felt that a full ban would lead to a need to increase insecticide use in order to combat aphid infestations.
- There was still a need to be vigilant over bird flu as migratory birds were still in the country; however the risk was likely to diminish when they migrated back.
- There were now 40,000 confirmed cases of TB in cattle. The Royal Borough was currently on a schedule of annual testing for TB but this may need to be changed to a six-monthly period. There were no recorded cases within the Royal Borough, with the

- nearest reported cases at Nettlebed and Mortimer. Pilots to reduce TB had been successful in Somerset and Gloucestershire.
- Fly tipping remained a problem in the Royal Borough. It was the responsibility of the landowner to dispose of waste that had been tipped onto their land. It was felt more needed to be done to provide a better deterrent to offenders.

RURAL FARM WALK

Members were informed that a date had not been set for the Rural Farm Walk as the programme of meetings at RBWM was currently being reviewed. Members stated a preference for the Rural Farm Walk to take place on June 5th.

RURAL CRIME

The Forum was introduced to Superintendent Colin Hudson, the new Area Commander for the Royal Borough.

Louise Warbrick informed members that since the last meeting there had been four unauthorised encampments in the Royal Borough, all of which had been on non-rural land. They all involved environmental waste and by working with the Environment Agency, the police had been able to link the encampments to regional travellers involved in large scale environmental waste. Louise Warbrick said that two vehicles had recently been seized in connection to two of the encampments and the Environment Agency were looking launch prosecutions.

Louise Warbrick said there had been discussions relating to the Rural Crime Policy, in order to identify signatories from local authorities across the Thames Valley area to agree a policy. However it had proved problematic to identify a signatory from every local authority. Thames Valley Police were committed to sticking to the Rural Crime Policy however.

Louise Warbrick informed members that 21 reports of rural crimes within the Royal Borough had been recorded since October 2017. This figure may be higher however as not all reported crimes were given a categorisation. The 21 reports included 4 of theft, 3 of non-dwelling burglary and 6 of criminal damage. In total across the Thames Valley Police area there were 81 reports of rural non-dwelling burglary, 108 of theft and 157 of criminal damage. Louise Warbrick stated that the most problematic areas of the Thames Valley Police region in terms of rural crime were Milton Keynes and Chiltern/South Bucks, and that the Royal Borough had seen a significant decrease.

Paul Rinder informed the Forum that incidents of hare coursing had decreased, although it remained a problem.

Responding to a question on Windsor Police Station, Louise Warbrick stated that although it was not open to the public, it remained operational and housed a number of specialist teams. A timetable for moving to a new premises had not been made, although a Neighbourhood Policing base would remain in Windsor.

Regarding speeding, Louise Warbrick stated that officers were deployed to carry out regular speed checks were around the Borough but these would be in identified accident blackspots. Speed monitoring equipment was supplied to Neighbourhood Action Groups for checks to be carried out in other, usually rural, areas.

Cllr Coppinger stated that he had recently met with representatives of Sandwell Borough Council to find out more about transit sites, which required police intervention over unauthorised encampments. Cllr Coppinger said the transit sites had been successful in Sandwell and asked if such a scheme had been considered in the Royal Borough. Louise Warbrick said a consultation on this had been carried out, although this was not led by the

police as it related to identifying a site as part of local planning policy. A site was identified but objections were raised.

Annie Keene raised the issue of protestors coming into contact with farmers trying to transport livestock, and stated her belief that not enough was done by the police to deter protestors and to move them away from farm vehicles transporting livestock. Louise Warbrick stated that the police had to abide by national guidance and legislation, which stated that protests were lawful and officers had to demonstrate a level of proportionality when handling a protest. Officers also needed to ensure the safety of the public and a judgement call had to be made over whether police intervention could inflame a situation. Louise Warbrick accepted that, to the public, there were times during a protest where it appeared that nothing was being done to stop the protests.

Louise Warbrick said the police were involved in discussions over traffic management and other issues relating to the Royal Wedding in Windsor. Relevant information that could impact on residents would be circulated. It was anticipated that as many as 180,000 could come to Windsor over the weekend.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No additional items were raised.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

No date had been set for the next meeting. Members were informed that they would be told of the next date as soon as possible.

The meeting, which began at 6.00 pm, finished at 7.37 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....