

Birchington Parish Council
Birchington Neighbourhood Plan Review

1. Introduction

The Birchington Neighbourhood Plan (NP) was made (i.e. adopted) by Thanet District Council (TDC) in December 2023. Since then the policies in the Plan have been taken into consideration by TDC planning officers when making decisions about planning applications.

In keeping with good practice, the Birchington Parish Council planning committee decided that a review should be conducted to examine the operation and effectiveness of the Plan and related topics.

2. Methodology

BPC Planning Committee agreed at its meeting held on 07 January 2025 that a review of the (NP) should be undertaken by a small working group.

Membership

All district and parish councillors were canvassed for interest in participation; Rod Giddins was invited as the Birchington Neighbourhood Plan Forum lead. Members: Cllrs Nick Blankley (Chair), Neville Hudson, Jim Moore, TDC Cllr George Kup, NP Forum Lead Rod Giddins.

Terms of Reference

To review the effectiveness of the Plan, and to progress implementation of the Conservation Area Review and Local Heritage Assets List.

The group will meet as necessary, invite participation as required, report regularly to and make recommendations to BPC Planning Committee.

3. Planning Applications

The NP policy compliance checklist produced locally was similar to the traffic light approach recommended by Locality (Government-funded advisory body on Neighbourhood Planning). The overhead and benefits of applying the full checklist to every application are debatable and it has become apparent that relatively few policies apply directly to small domestic home extensions or improvements therefore some fine tuning is required.

An analysis of 70 planning applications which were considered by the Parish Council and determined by TDC planning officers in 2024, since the NP came into effect, was carried out to determine to what extent the NP featured in BPC deliberations and TDC officer decision making.

The analysis focussed on whether the NP and NP policies had been referred to by TDC planning officers and whether the comments submitted by BPC were given sufficient weight and reflected in TDC planning officers' reports.

It concluded that the NP is referred to in most cases, although some officer reports are better than others – especially in cases where the application goes in front of the TDC Planning Committee.

Applications where refusal is the outcome show a better use of NP policies by TDC planning officers in their reports.

There was, however, little reference to Character Areas and Areas of High Townscape Value (AHTV) by the BPC Planning Committee and TDC officers. BPC Planning Committee should give these greater emphasis in their assessment of applications.

It was noted that there were multiple references to the NP in respect of Land to the rear of 11-19 Brunswick Road, Birchington and Appeal Ref: APP/Z2260/W/24/3347256.

Recommendations

Review the locally produced NP policy compliance checklist to ensure it is fit for purpose

Establish routine data recording of key elements of decided applications for monitoring and future analysis.

Develop an overview guide of the Conservation Area and AHTV to help Planning Committee members in their assessment of applications.

4. Policy Review

It appears the NP is working reasonably well. The policy most referred to is policy B1 Design Codes - this is in two parts (Design and Access Codes and Design and Access Statements). Design and Access statements are not generally required by planning regulations/guidelines for householder applications.

Changes to Thanet Local Plan policies as a consequence of the current review, and the new planning frameworks will provide a better context for review in the future.

There do not appear to be any grounds to seek amendments to NP policies.

Regarding Rossetti Gardens it is suggested that this would be better protected as part of the 'Christie's Bistro building' during development of the Local Heritage Assets list.

Recommendations

Retain existing NP policy schedule.

Rossetti Gardens to be considered part of the 'Christies Bistro building' during development of the local heritage assets list.

5. Local Heritage Assets

A list of Local Heritage Assets (LHA) was produced as part of the NP process and sent to TDC in January 2024. It has since been updated and re submitted to TDC.

As the list was prepared and accepted by BPC and is referred to in policy B3 of the NP, TDC has advised the Parish Council to formalise the LHA in line with Historic England Advice.

Recommendations

BPC 2025/26 work programme includes preparation of a LHA list, in accordance with Historic England advice note HEAN7.

BPC Planning Committee to consider and review the current LHA list and identify a small number of properties from the list to trial the methodology.

Development of the LHA list to be conducted in association with TDC implementation of the recommendations of the Conservation Area Review.

6. Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Plan (CAAMP)

Recommendations arising from the Birchington CAAMP were accepted by TDC Cabinet in July 2024.

The formal six-week consultation about the proposed extension of the existing Conservation Area in line with the management plan recommendations was delayed to May 2025.

Implementation of the other eight recommendations arising from the report should be closely monitored.

Recommendations

Liaise with TDC officers to support the consultation and adoption of recommendations concerning extension of the Conservation Area.

Agree with TDC officers an implementation plan for the other recommendations.

7. Community Projects

Chapter 15 of the NP refers to a list of community inspired projects aimed at developing or enhancing local amenities.

Projects where progress has been made include:

- Conservation Area Review
- Shop Front Design – TDC Design Guide
- Footpath inspections
- Car parking – TDC strategic review

Recommendations

BPC should review the list of potential community projects to produce an up to date phased 5-year delivery programme.

8. Engagement with LPA Offices

Occasional meetings with TDC planning officers had been of limited value and had not delivered the benefits expected.

It is considered important that there is good, constructive engagement between the council and TDC officers and district councillors. Continued efforts should be made to develop a mutual understanding of priorities and expectations. Regular dialogue is particularly important given changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, ongoing work on revisions to the Local Plan and the potential impact of Local Government Reorganisation, introducing new Unitary Authorities.

Recommendations

Liaise with senior TDC planning managers to determine a means of establishing regular engagement to discuss planning matters pertinent to Birchington and avoiding duplication of such engagement elsewhere.

District councillors to be provided with summary information where BPC objects to a planning application.