

THE COUNCIL'S STATEMENT OF PURPOSE FOR DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT?

The planning system requires Councils to find an appropriate balance between two opposing strands of public interest: the need for more and up to date housing, employment, shopping, recreation and leisure opportunities (the growth agenda) and the natural desire of people to keep the places they cherish as they are (the preservation agenda). Significant changes within society (e.g. population growth and people living more independently, longer and in smaller households) mean that the number and sort of buildings we need in the Borough will change over time. The current economic downturn has slowed the pace of these changes, but will not alter them fundamentally.

Development management recognises this reality and commits the Council to finding ways to achieve growth through development that respects local character.

WHY DO WE NEED A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE?

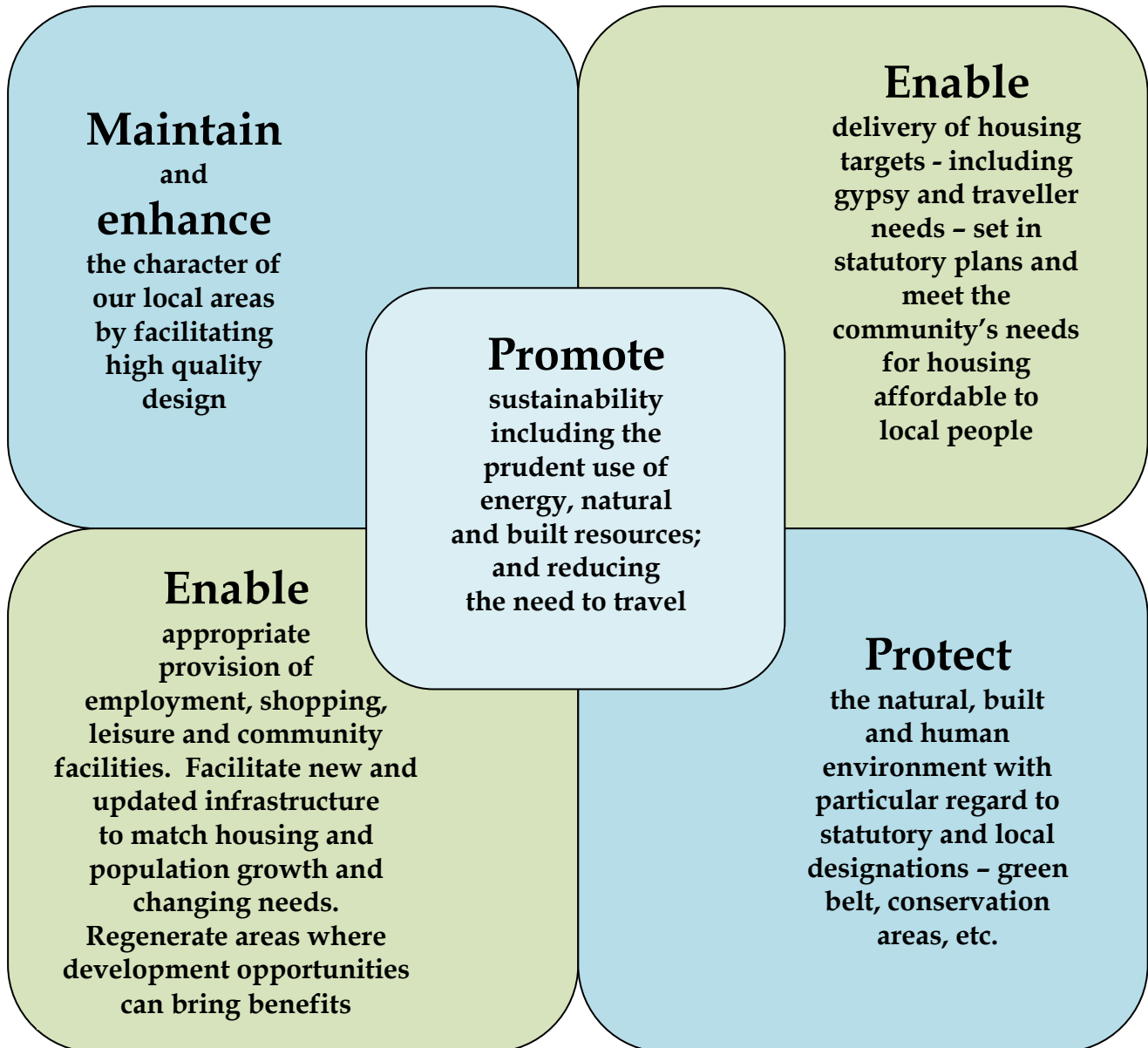
In the past, growth was often accommodated by building over countryside, but that is not a sustainable way of meeting our needs any longer. As a result, new development has been largely been within existing towns and villages in recent years. This is often in low-density residential areas where the greatest opportunities for more efficient use of land arise but where existing residents may be reluctant to see changes to their environment. This, and greater public interest and participation in planning matters, have increased the pressures on our planning service, where the tensions between the growth and preservation agendas are played out.

The Council wants to build consensus within the community on its broad objectives and responsibilities in delivering the planning service. The Statement of Purpose gives equal recognition to the reality of the growth agenda (e.g. South East Plan house-building targets and regeneration objectives) and the preservation agenda (e.g. local aspirations to protect the character, landscape and heritage of the Borough). It acknowledges that both pressures must be addressed in what the Council has to do and what it wants to do.

Not everyone will like everything they see in the Statement, but everyone should appreciate why it is there. Developers must understand that the housing numbers and other growth can only be achieved through sensitive development that respects local character and so achieves a "best fit".

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Adopted by the Council's Executive 23 April 2009 following public consultation



THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF COUNCILLORS AND OFFICERS

If the Statement of Purpose is about what the Council does, this is about how it does it. Councillors and officers have different but equally important roles in delivering a high quality development management service.

Just as the Statement of Purpose recognises that the Council must face up to conflicting pressures for growth and preservation, councillors and officers have a responsibility to recognise both agendas in their work.

The inherent conflict between these two agendas can result in planning proposals being strongly contested, and feelings can sometimes run high within the community. It is understandable – and welcome – that people care about where they live, so it is expected that planning applications will sometimes provoke strong reactions. Whilst the Council must recognise and respond to those feelings, it must focus on the planning merits of what is proposed, not who is proposing it or what their motives might be. All players in the development process are entitled to be treated with respect, be they landowners, developers, the Local Planning Authority or affected residents.

It is vital that councillors are involved in managing development, to ensure an appropriate balance between the growth and preservation agendas in the public interest. In order to maximise the value of councillor input, it is focussed on development proposals that have the most significant potential to affect or contribute to the local environment and community, and which will potentially contribute to local infrastructure. These applications are decided by the Planning Committee. At the same time, officers routinely decide smaller applications with very limited implications for the local community, and therefore very limited need for councillor involvement, for example, domestic extensions.

For councillors to have the greatest impact on proposals, their engagement should be targeted at the pre-application stage when schemes are more likely to be capable of alteration to better match the community's needs and aspirations.

This engagement can only be truly effective if councillors have access to good quality information to help them make informed decisions about when to contact officers for advice and assistance. The planning officers' professional knowledge provides assistance and guidance to councillors in Committee and outside.

Following public consultation, the Council has adopted seven broad principles governing how councillors and officers will act, set out overleaf.

They cover three main areas:

- Making the best use of councillor and officer time
- A commitment to communication
- How we treat other players

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF COUNCILLORS AND OFFICERS IN DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Adopted by the Council's Executive 23 April 2009 following public consultation

1

Planning Committee members should concentrate on proposals scheduled for Committee determination, where their community leadership role is most relevant, with strengthened emphasis on participation at the pre-application stage.

2

The aim should always be to engage in a proactive approach that seeks to identify a form of development that might prove acceptable in terms of meeting need and reflecting local character.

3

The content of the Statement of Purpose and its implications for decision-making should be made known to other participants in the planning process.

4

Applications not scheduled for Committee determination should only be referred to the Committee exceptionally, following discussion with the Chairman of the Planning Committee and the Executive Member with responsibility for planning.

5

Comments should be focussed on the planning merits of a proposal, not on those proposing or opposing it or their motives for doing so.

6

Criticism of other parties should not be made public. Any questions about the content of reports should be raised between publication of the agenda and the meeting.

7

Officers shall provide professional advice and assistance to members in the discharge of their duties as ward members and members of the Planning Committee regardless of their professional views on the merits of any proposal.