

MINUTES of a meeting of the LOCAL PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 14 MARCH 2018

Present: Councillor J Bridges (Chairman)

Councillors R D Bayliss, J Cotterill, R Johnson, J Legrys and M Specht

In Attendance: Councillors J G Coxon, D Everitt, D Harrison, T J Pendleton and A C Saffell

Officers: I Jordan, Mrs M Meredith, Mr I Nelson and Mr J Newton

20. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor V Richichi.

21. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no interests declared.

22. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2018.

It was moved by Councillor J Legrys, seconded by Councillor R Johnson and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2018 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

23. COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Chairman reminded members that the purpose of the Advisory Committee was to enable cross-party discussion, guidance and support for the development of the Local Plan.

The terms of reference were noted.

24. GYPSY AND TRAVELLER SITE ALLOCATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

The Planning Policy Team Manager presented the report to members and gave a presentation outlining the process which had been undertaken so far to identify sites and the reasons for preparing the allocations document. He highlighted the risks of failing to identify sufficient sites in terms of unauthorised sites and the impact upon the local plan review. He emphasised the importance of the revised definition of gypsies and travellers, which meant that travellers who were not travelling on a regular basis were no longer included in that definition. He explained that a new needs assessment had been undertaken last year across Leicestershire, and the changes to the definition of traveller had resulted in a dramatic reduction in the assessed level of need. In terms of transit provision it was suggested that around 36 spaces were needed over 2 – 3 sites across Leicestershire, and it was also suggested that this need was greatest in the city and in the north west of the county.

The Planning Policy Team Manager explained that the initial call for sites undertaken in 2016 had involved consulting with landowners, agencies, parish and town councils and other stakeholders. Unfortunately no sites had been put forward as a result of this exercise. Officers had therefore undertaken a very detailed search for sites and he

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outlined the process which had been undertaken to filter out sites that were too small, where there was an existing planning permission for residential development or had an uncertain likelihood of being delivered. He added that sites identified in the SHLAA and on the East Midlands Gateway route had also been excluded. He explained how the list of potential sites had been sifted further by undertaking a detailed sustainability assessment which tested the economic, social and environmental sustainability of each site. He explained the reasons why sites had been omitted at this stage, leaving 3 sites in total as proposed in the document at Appendix A.

The Planning Policy Team Manager summarised the proposals set out in the DPD and advised that the proposed site at Sinope had obtained planning permission after the study was completed, and therefore this site effectively met the identified need for permanent traveller accommodation. The landowner of the former Measham Mine had confirmed that they were willing to make the site available and the site was capable of accommodating the 20 plots identified in the needs assessment to accommodate travelling showpeople. On the issue of transit provision, the Planning Policy Team Manager advised that there was an identified need for 36 pitches across Leicester and Leicestershire. He advised that study also highlighted that there was some uncertainty in these figures as the changes to the definition of what constitutes a traveller had happened to recently to enable an understanding of the impact this might have on future need. He explained that a managed approach seeking to manage unauthorised encampments was preferred, and in view of the fact that the study showed that there was a need for a transit site, officers considered that it would be prudent to make provision for such a site as part of this plan, but only if there was a persistent unmet need for transit accommodation in North West Leicestershire. The number of unauthorised encampments over the next 3 years would determine whether or not this provision needed to be made available. He added that there was a high risk that the inspector would find the plan unsound if provision was not made for a transit site.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that the Development Plan Document would be considered by full Council on 20 March, and subject to approval at full Council, a 6 week consultation period would be undertaken commencing on 9 April. Subject to the outcome of this, the plan could be ready for submission in July.

The Chairman stated that he was aware some councillors may know of sites that could be brought forward for inclusion in the development plan document. He asked members not to name specific sites in the meeting but to discuss these with officers who would give them due consideration.

Councillor G Jones addressed the committee. He stated that he wished to show solidarity with the residents of Nottingham Road, Ashby and to represent the potential businesses that might be considering coming to the area. He added that since the document had been published he had received numerous call from residents who were unanimously opposed to proposed site. He expressed his support for the objections raised by residents. He felt that the proposals were damaging and would compromise the hard work of Ashby Town Council which had worked hard to attract new businesses and jobs to the area. He added that he could see no positive aspects to the proposal and felt that this was a recipe for damaging community cohesion. He urged officer to dig deeper, try harder and look further.

Councillor R D Bayliss hoped that the comments made were taken into consideration when the recommendations were made to full Council. He stated that the site was on the outskirts of Ashby de la Zouch and would restrict the future growth of the town if this site went ahead.

Councillor M Specht asked what would prevent a site being delivered. He questioned whether local needs housing was a priority and felt that the needs of a minority group

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should take priority. He asked whether the land at Ashby was to be sold or donated to the Council. He also asked whether the Council could utilise the right of compulsory purchase if landowners were unwilling to sell their land. He made reference to an ongoing appeal and asked how that would impact upon the demand for traveller pitches in North West Leicestershire if it was successful. He also referred to the pitch in Sinope which had been vacant for the last 8 years and questioned whether there was such an urgent need if this site was vacant. In respect of the Showman's Guild site proposal, he felt that there must be a more suitable site than the one proposed as it was remote in its setting, all movements from the site would need to be by motor vehicle and the site was not socially cohesive.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that the transit site would be sold to the Council. He explained that the Council could utilise its powers of compulsory purchase, however there was no guarantee that this would be supported by the inspector. He added that the process was very time consuming and expensive, and would be high risk in terms of demonstrating sustainability. In respect of the ongoing appeal referred to by Councillor M Specht, the Planning Policy Team Manager advised that if this site was to be granted planning permission, this would result in a surplus of provision for gypsies and travellers. In terms of the Sinope site being vacant, he advised that discussions had taken place with the owner and he understood the planning permission had been implemented. He also reminded members that the plan was looking ahead to 2036 and the exact same principles applied as for housing. He advised members that the Measham site appeared to be the most reasonable site of all those considered by officers. He added that there was a footway but he believed this was very overgrown.

Councillor M Specht commented that some sites identified for local needs housing could be utilised to make provision for a traveller site.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that the need for affordable housing was recognised by the Council. He added that there were policies in the local plan, however more often than not, a reduced level of affordable housing was offered. He explained that the approach taken by officers was aligned with the Council's priorities.

Councillor M Specht fully agreed that there was a need for social housing, however he felt that this was already being catered for and therefore the unmet needs of the gypsy and traveller community should be prioritised. He commented that there must be more than 1 site out of the 518 identified that could be utilised to meet this need.

Councillor J Bridges pointed out the reference in the report to ensuring the natural expansion of the Nottingham Road site by means of compulsory purchase if necessary. He commented that perhaps this option should be considered for other sites.

Councillor M Specht felt that a very strong case could be made to the inspector as this was a minority group and could not be seen to be discriminated against. He stated that he was confident the inspector would rule in the Council's favour.

The Head of Planning and Infrastructure stated that there was an element of conjecture on the probability of a compulsory purchase being supported. He was inclined to agree that there was a reasonable chance of succeeding with a compulsory purchase order, considering the identified need and the fact that it was so difficult to find suitable sites that could be supported, providing that all other options had been exhausted. He added that if there were willing landowners, it would be very difficult to make a case for a compulsory purchase of a different site and he would advise that this process be avoided if possible due to the significant costs involved. He added that there was an opportunity for members and the public to put forward any sites through the public consultation.

Councillor J Bridges felt that the proposed site would stifle the natural growth for the businesses of Ashby de la Zouch.

In response to a question from Councillor R Johnson, the Planning Policy Team Manager advised that the site at Sinope had permission for 6 residential caravans.

Councillor R Johnson commented that the site at Sinope was oversubscribed. He felt that the Nottingham Road site was inappropriate given the expansion in Ashby de la Zouch and would be an eyesore. He felt that alternative sites should be considered.

Councillor J Legrys said that he was very pleased that members of the public had attended the meeting and that their efforts had been worthwhile. He stated that as a member who had to deal with unlawful encampments on a fairly regular basis in his ward, the people living nearby got very tired of seeing one community abuse another. He added that the voters in his ward wanted to see the situation resolved and he felt that a transit site should be provided. He commented that people were fearful of having traveller sites in their area, however there were at least four sites in Coalville and they had never affected growth or social cohesion. He acknowledged however that wherever the transit site was located, it would be contentious. He felt that the fact that people were afraid of these sites needed to be acknowledged and addressed. He supported the concerns raised by Councillor M Specht regarding the site at Sinope where planning permission was granted on appeal and never used. He also expressed anger that the issues at Burton Road, Measham had never been challenged. He concluded that members of the Planning Committee always had to address this problem and whether or not the site at Nottingham Road was suitable, the transit site had to be located somewhere to ensure the people of his ward were protected against unauthorised encampments.

Councillor D Harrison addressed the meeting. He congratulated officers on the work undertaken. He expressed concerns however regarding the impact on the potential of the Nottingham Road area as this was the gateway to Ashby de la Zouch and millions of pounds was being spent developing that area. He added that the site would be cheek by jowl with the only hotel in Ashby de la Zouch which he felt was a serious concern. He acknowledged the need for a site but felt that the damage that would be caused through this inappropriate site could be devastating. He made reference to the ongoing development and the roadwork improvements taking place in the area and he urged members to consider carefully the appropriateness of the site as the growth of Ashby de la Zouch could be affected.

The Chairman urged members to bring forward any sites they were aware of.

Councillor M Specht requested that in view of what had been said, officer take on board the general dissatisfaction that only one site had been allocated and he looked forward to seeing more sites coming forward.

It was moved by Councillor M Specht, seconded by Councillor J Legrys and

RESOLVED THAT:

The comments of the Advisory Committee be forwarded on to Council for its consideration when it considers the proposed Gypsy and Traveller Site Allocations Development Plan Document.

25. PUBLICATION OF STRATEGIC HOUSING AND ECONOMIC LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT (SHELAA)

The Planning Policy Team Leader presented the report to members, explaining that the purpose of the SHELAA was to identify a list of possible housing and employment sites

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and assess their overall potential. He emphasised that the SHELAA was a technical document only, and inclusion of a site did not necessarily mean it was suitable for development or that planning permission would be granted. He added that although local plan policies had to be taken into account, a site could not be excluded from the SHELAA because it did not accord with local plan policies and where constraints were identified, the SHELAA needed to consider that circumstances were needed to overcome them. He summarised the methodology and the constraints that would prevent a site from being included in the SHELAA. He gave a presentation outlining the new sites put forward as potential sites.

Councillor J Legrys made reference to a number of local groups who were putting together a development plan. He asked where the SHELAA fit in with the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland growth strategy and the need to build 10,000 homes in the area.

The Head of Planning and Infrastructure advised that a joint methodology had been agreed to enable a single evidence base to be utilised for the total capacity across the region. He explained that this helped to demonstrate that the required development could be accommodated and provided as much flexibility as possible to identify sites. It also gave confidence that the growth plan was possible.

Councillor J Legrys referred to a site at Appleby which had not been included. He asked if this had been deliberately omitted.

The Head of Planning and Infrastructure confirmed that it had been omitted deliberately and explained that it was optional for landowners to put sites forward for inclusion in the SHELAA. He added that the SHELAA was a snapshot in time so if a site became known to officers after its production it would not be included. He advised that the site in question was the subject of a scoping request rather than the subject of a planning application. He emphasised that the SHELAA gave people the opportunity to inform the Council that land was available for development within the timescales indicated, and inclusion of a site did not mean that planning permission would be granted.

Councillor A C Saffell addressed the meeting, expressing concerns that people were being encouraged to travel to work as the houses being built were not affordable for the employees in the area. He added that only 22% of employees at East Midlands Airport lived in Leicestershire.

RESOLVED THAT:

The content of the SHELAA be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.14 pm

Chairman's signature