

MINUTES of a meeting of the LOCAL PLAN COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 26 MAY 2021

Present: Councillor J Bridges (Chairman)

Councillors D Bigby, J Hoult, R Johnson, J Legrys, V Richichi, A C Saffell and N Smith

Officers: Mr C Colvin, Mr C Elston, Ms S Grant, Ms S Lee, Mr I Nelson and Mrs R Wallace

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Boam and D Harrison.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, Members declared the following interests:

Councillors D Bigby and J Legrys declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 5 – Local Plan Review: Policy Options for EC2(2), Start Up Workspace and Local Employment as they had previously publicly stated their opinions on Planning Policy EC2(2) but were considering the item with an open mind.

Following legal advice, Councillor J Hoult declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 6 – Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment, as his home was in close proximity to a site identified within the report and he was against development. If a discussion on the site was had then he would leave the meeting until the conclusion.

3 PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

None

4 MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2021.

A Member questioned the accuracy of minute number 40 - Local Plan Substantive Review – Renewable Energy Study, as they did not believe they reflected the lengthy discussion held. The Democratic Support Officer reminded Members that the minutes were not a verbatim account and were intended to record the official decisions made with an overview of the discussion held. The meeting was available to watch in full on the website for anyone interested in the full discussion.

Members noted that the minute did not include a full account of the discussions for the item and asked that it be made clear on the online minutes that the meeting could be viewed in full if required and include a hyperlink.

It was moved by Councillor V Richichi, seconded by Councillor J Hoult and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2021 be approved subject to the above amendment.

Chairman's initials

5 LOCAL PLAN REVIEW: POLICY OPTIONS FOR EC2(2). START UP WORKSPACE AND LOCAL EMPLOYMENT

The Principal Planning Policy Officer presented the report and referred Members to the update sheet as circulated prior to the meeting.

In response to a question from a Member, the Planning Policy Team Manager reported that there was no indication yet as to what the freeport would mean for the area. He explained that a piece of work was underway across Leicester and Leicestershire (the Housing and Economic Needs Assessment) in relation to future housing and employment needs which had been asked to consider the potential implications of the Freeport element. A report was expected for the committee in the Autumn.

Comments were made on the wording of the consultation questions as some Members were concerned that the language used was very technical, therefore discouraging people to respond. It was acknowledged that it would be difficult to engage with the public due to the technical subject matter of the consultation. Reference was made to comments currently circulating on social media which indicated that people did not understand this process, Members strongly urged officers to communicate clearly with appropriate language for all to understand. The Chairman also encouraged Members to go out and communicate this to the public as they had the experience and knowledge gained from sitting on the committee.

It was felt that some of the advantages and disadvantages in relation to option 7 within the report were leading in what should be a balanced and neutral position. Officers were asked to reword the disadvantages to make them more of a suggestion than a statement, and to include arguments for the advantages. The Planning Policy Team Manager took on board comments made and reminded Members that the advantages within the report were factual statements used in the NPPF.

In response to a question, the Planning Policy Team Manager confirmed that Members were not being asked to agree the wording for the consultation at this point, all comments received would be considered and a further report would be presented to committee before the consultation commenced.

In relation to start up workspace, a Member felt that the policy should encourage people to use unoccupied agricultural buildings and asked for clear wording on this to be included. A discussion then ensued in relation to the continuing building of new units despite already unoccupied units which affected a number of areas throughout the District. A comment was also made in relation to suitable housing for the people that worked on these sites to reduce commuting.

It was moved by Councillor K Merrie, seconded by Councillor V Richichi and

RESOLVED THAT:

The potential policy options set out in the report for

- a) a review of Policy EC2(2) as amended by the update sheet;
- b) Start-Up workspace; and
- c) Local Employment

be included in the next consultation stage of the Local Plan review.

Chairman's initials

6 STRATEGIC HOUSING AND ECONOMIC LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT (SHELAA) - NEW SITES

The Planning Policy Team Manager presented the report.

Concerns were raised once again in relation to the language used in the consultation. Reference was made to the comments made for the previous item in relation to the clarity of the communication and the current sense of panic amongst members of the public, particularly on social media, due to misunderstanding. It was stressed that not all local people understood the process, and it was causing a significant amount of upset. It was agreed for the consultation key message to be that the SHELAA was not a policy document and did not allocate sites to be developed or grant planning permission.

Some Members felt that the current process was not ideal as it seemed to be led by developers but acknowledged that it was compulsory under the current planning regulations. It was suggested that the message to the public be clear that it was not NWLDC's choice to develop the suggested sites and include the four reasons that a site could be rejected for the SHELAA. The Chairman did not agree that the process was developer led but stressed that if the process was not completed, it could be, as NWLDC would not have a Local Plan in place.

Concerns were raised on the timing of the public statement released, just days after the recent elections, which could be interpreted as a deliberate hold back of information. Criticisms were shared on the lack of explanation provided to the public at this time as many Councillors were blamed unnecessarily due to a lack of understanding from the public.

A discussion was had on the methodology involved when assessing the suggested sites, as a site in Hugglescote St Johns (off Richmond Road) had been included even though it was hazardous due to a national power line. A Member requested that more information be provided in relation to the methodology involved in the process and an explanation be given on the reasons for sites being included or rejected, particularly the site at Hugglescote St Johns as mentioned. Members felt that this information would be helpful as they were being contacted by residents regularly asking for clarity. The Planning Policy Team Manager clarified that all sites available had to be considered and that nothing had been rejected at this time.

In response to a question, the Planning Policy Team Manager explained that future development would not be restricted to only the sites within the SHELAA. Other sites could be considered at any time, however the process would be more difficult as proof of viability would need to be provided, for example the support from the landowner.

It was moved by Councillor A C Saffell, seconded by Councillor N Smith and

RESOLVED THAT:

The significant additional sites that are to be included in the 2021 update of the SHELAA be noted.

The meeting was adjourned for a comfort break at 7.18pm and reconvened at 7.24pm.

7 LEICESTER & LEICESTERSHIRE AUTHORITIES - STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND RELATING TO HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT LAND NEEDS

The Planning Policy Team Manager presented the report.

Chairman's initials

Some disappointment was expressed in that the focus was still only on Leicester/Leicestershire when other neighbouring authorities would have an impact due to the close proximity to NWLDC's northern parishes. It was felt by some Members that housing and employment needs should be being discussed beyond the boundaries of Leicestershire. The Planning Policy Team Manager reminded Members that Leicester/Leicestershire was the housing area NWLDC were in and that was the reason for the focus. However, there would be many Statements of Common Grounds to be agreed and discussions with other authorities moving forward once the appropriate stage of the Local Plan had been reached. He assured Members that these discussions would be had in the future.

In response to a question, the Planning and Policy Team Manager reported that the shortfall and redistribution need was a mixture of many things including commuters from Leicester, first time households and people moving into NWL. He confirmed there was no way of knowing exactly what the need was at this stage but if a proportion was for people working in Leicester it would have an impact on redistribution.

It was moved by Councillor J Legrys, seconded by Councillor K Merrie and

RESOLVED THAT:

The Leicester and Leicestershire Statement of Common Ground relating to housing and employment land needs (March 2021) be signed by the District Council.

The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.40 pm

Chairman's signature