

MINUTES of a meeting of the LOCAL PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on TUESDAY, 18 MARCH 2014

Present: Councillors J Bridges, C Large, J Legrys, V Richichi, S Sheahan, A V Smith MBE (In place of R D Bayliss) and R Woodward (In place of D De Lacy)

In Attendance: Councillors R Adams, R Adams, R Blunt, R Johnson and T Neilson

Officers: Mr S Bambrick, Mr D Gill, Mr D Hughes, Mrs M Meredith, Mr I Nelson and Mr M Sharp

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The Director of Services opened the meeting and sought nominations to elect a Chairman for the remainder of the municipal year.

It was moved by Councillor A V Smith, seconded by Councillor C Large and

RESOLVED THAT:

Councillor J Bridges be elected Chairman for the remainder of the municipal year.

Councillor J Bridges took the chair and advised everyone present that this was a cross-party Committee and Members would work together to deliver a sound Core Strategy for the area.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R D Bayliss and D De Lacy.

3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor J Legrys sought clarification on declaring interests as the Committee would be looking at the whole of the District. In particular he requested advice as most Members owned their own properties.

The Legal Advisor clarified that when matters were considered in broader terms, and Members were equally as affected as everyone else in the area, there was no requirement to declare a pecuniary interest on that basis. He referred to the setting of the Council Tax as an example.

Councillor J Bridges encouraged Members to seek advice on interests in advance of the meeting.

There were no interests declared.

4. COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Director of Services referred Members to the Terms of Reference of the Committee which were attached for information. He stated that he intended to attach the Terms of Reference to the agenda for each meeting to ensure Members remained focussed on the role of the Committee.

Councillor J Bridges encouraged Members to seek advice if there was anything they felt should be incorporated into the Terms of Reference.

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Councillor J Legrys stated that as the process evolved, the Terms of Reference would need to be reviewed. He welcomed the idea that the Terms of Reference would be included in each agenda.

5. UPDATE ON NATIONAL PLANNING AND LOCAL PLAN PROCESS

Mr M Sharp introduced himself to the Committee and explained that his role as a consultant was to advise the Council on the Local Plan process. He added that he was delighted to be able to assist the Council.

Mr M Sharp gave a presentation to Members outlining the changes to the planning framework, the current position locally and the progress of the review to date.

Councillor S Sheahan asked how the duty to co-operate would work in practice.

The Director of Services advised that a Housing Planning and Infrastructure Group had been established for Leicestershire at officer level. He explained that this would feed into the Members Advisory Group, where it was intended that discussions around strategy and housing requirements would take place. He added that this structure was intended to demonstrate that the duty to co-operate had been fulfilled.

Councillor S Sheahan requested that the minutes of the Housing Planning and Infrastructure Group and the Members Advisory Group be made available to the Committee.

Councillor J Legrys welcomed the recommendation in respect of viability work. He sought clarification on the mechanism for this and expressed concerns regarding the availability of resources to undertake this work as he recognised the amount of detail required.

Mr M Sharp advised that the expertise required was not necessarily something the Council would already have in-house. He explained that there was established methodology and experts who could be called upon to undertake the work. He added that Councils across the country were taking this approach so he was confident that the work could be undertaken within a reasonable budget.

Councillor J Legrys referred to the duty to co-operate with all neighbouring authorities, including those in Staffordshire and Nottinghamshire.

Mr M Sharp confirmed that conversations with all neighbouring authorities would need to take place. He explained that the Housing Planning and Infrastructure Group was based on the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) area, which was accepted as being the Leicestershire area.

Mr M Sharp advised that the guidance made reference to Local Plan preparation and suggested that Members read this section.

6. POSSIBLE SCOPE OF THE LOCAL PLAN

The Director of Services presented the report to Members, drawing their attention to the recommendations as set out in the report, which sought a decision from the Committee on whether a new Local Plan should be produced and what the plan period should be. He advised that a decision from the Committee would take the form of a recommendation to Council. He also referred Members to the appendix to the report which set out some initial thoughts on the structure of the Local Plan and the policies that would be unique to North West Leicestershire and not contained elsewhere.

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The Director of Services referred to the previous item and the presentation Members had received which had outlined the direction of travel nationally and what the good practice guidance was suggesting. He explained that assumptions had been made about how long it would take to produce a new Local Plan. He advised that these assumptions had now been reviewed, and taking into consideration the fact that work was still being undertaken on the SHMA, the updated advice to Members was that it would take no longer to produce a single Local Plan than it would to produce a revised Core Strategy.

In respect of the plan period, the Director of Services advised that the preferred time horizon set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was 15 years from the adoption of the plan. If the plan period remained as at present and the plan was adopted in 2016, this would only just meet the 15 year horizon, which could place the soundness of the plan at risk. Therefore it was recommended that Members consider extending the plan period to 2036, which would have the added benefit of coinciding with the SHMA.

Councillor C Large welcomed the idea of moving forward with a single Local Plan as this would fit in very well with the NPPF. She also felt that the plan period should be extended to 2036, especially as it coincided with the SHMA. She stated that some Local Authorities were looking at limits to development as well as local allocations, and asked if this Council would be considering this also.

The Director of Services stated that it would be a matter for Members to decide what types of policies were included in the Local Plan. He explained that considering the limits to development would add another layer of detail to the Local Plan and there would be a lot of detail to consider, which could potentially add time to the process. He added that there were other ways to address the limits to development, however this was not a decision that needed to be made today. He advised that he would want to present the Committee with more detailed information which Members would need to consider before a decision could be reached.

Councillor J Legrys added that this was an issue at Planning Committee and when meeting residents. He stated that as an alternative method was being proposed, this would be considered in due course, however it was essential to define communities. He welcomed the change from Core Strategy to Local Plan as it made it easier for people to understand that the Council was going through a different process. He added that it was a matter of debate as to how much detail should be included. He recalled that one of the criticisms of the Core Strategy was that it was too vague from the point of view of members of the public. He stated that he accepted the recommendation in respect of the plan period due to the risk of the plan failing again.

Councillor S Sheahan sought advice in respect of his position regarding recommendation B and his interest in HS2.

The Legal Advisor clarified that at present Members were making a general recommendation that this policy should be included. However if sites were being considered in detail at future meetings, further consideration would need to be given in respect of interests.

The Director of Services emphasised that the appendix was a very initial list of potential policies and was by no means the end of the process. At this point it was intended that Members discuss the direction of travel and whether the policies listed were appropriate. He highlighted that under the Local Plan structure there would be significantly fewer policies. He invited Members to consider whether individual policies were unique to North West Leicestershire and were not covered nationally. He also advised Members to consider whether the Local Plan should be divided into chapters. He highlighted that it was recommended to include a policy on Gypsies and Travellers, however the allocation of sites would be dealt with elsewhere. He added that it was not proposed to include a

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traditional policy for town centres, as the retail policies were covered in the NPPF and were therefore not needed. He also advised that much of the detail in respect of conservation areas and listed buildings would be included elsewhere. He suggested that there was a need for place based policies, principally around the main areas in the District.

Councillor C Large stated that she had given careful consideration to specific policies. She felt that the NPPF was very vague on the Rural Workers Dwellings policy and stated that this needed careful consideration. She added that the Local Needs Housing policy seemed to have been lost from the Core Strategy and she felt this was a good policy. She stated that there would be a lot of debate on the development strategy and asked how long Members would have to consider the list of policies.

The Director of Services advised that there would be as much time as needed to consider the policies. He also encouraged Members to feed back directly with their views.

Councillor J Legrys stated that he would welcome a discussion around alternative methods of infrastructure delivery to Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) as there were other ways of breaking the logjam. He added that developers were saying that they want to develop, but the infrastructure needed to be in place first. He stated that in respect of the development strategy it was necessary to be flexible enough to make changes if a major development came forward during the development of the Local Plan. He added that he preferred sites to be mapped with clear defined boundaries rather than a list of sites. He expressed concerns regarding the town centre policy and felt that discussions were necessary in respect of defining retail sites. In respect of potential transport routes he referred to the railway line running through Castle Donington and added that he would like to see the line protected for potential passenger transport. He reiterated the need to secure a rail link into East Midlands Airport. He added that the racetrack should also be included in the list of policies. He welcomed the idea of breaking the Local Plan up into chapters as he felt this would make it clearer. He felt that there were some bigger issues that needed to be resolved and the bigger picture needed to be considered. He sought confirmation that there was a separate working group looking at the issue of Gypsies and Travellers.

Councillor J Bridges confirmed that this was the case, however this also needed to be considered as part of the overall strategy.

Councillor J Legrys stated that there was no mention in the appendix regarding consultation with the public, parties, action groups and developers in the early stages of the process. He felt it should be made clear that consultation would have to be undertaken and it would need to be considered how this would be done.

The Director of Services wholeheartedly agreed that consultation was absolutely fundamental. He added that allocations would not be made without showing the sites on a map and the intention was that this would be available for all to see. He stated that discussions had taken place in respect of the racetrack, which was unique to North West Leicestershire, however consideration would need to be given to what would be included in the policy as there was no proposed development at the site. He added that if there was something particular to say about the racetrack, it would be appropriate to have a policy.

Mr M Sharp added that the racetrack could be referenced in the Local Plan without having a specific policy.

Councillor R Woodward referred to the lack of consultation which had taken place at the beginning of the Core Strategy Process. He stated that he would be keeping an eye on

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how much consultation was taking place, with whom and how much notice this Committee was taking of the feedback.

Councillor S Sheahan stated that if viability and deliverability was being considered, Members needed to look long and hard at affordable housing as whatever the Council was doing at the moment was not working well.

Councillor C Large stated that she completely agreed with Councillor S Sheahan and this related well to the Rural Exception policy also. She felt that this was definitely worth looking at.

Councillor J Bridges reiterated that the list of policies in the appendix was for the Committee to review and Members of the Committee had a duty to seek the views of their colleagues. He encouraged Members to discuss any issues with the officers.

It was moved by Councillor J Legrys, seconded by Councillor C Large and

RESOLVED THAT:

a) It be recommended to Council that:

(I) A new Local Plan be produced incorporating strategic policies, allocations and some detailed policies; and

(II) The plan period cover the period 2011-2036.

b) The Advisory Committee's comments on the suggested initial draft structure for the local plan as set out in Appendix A be noted.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Local Plan Advisory Committee take place on Tuesday, 29 April 2014.

Councillor R Blunt left the meeting at 5.53pm during the discussion on item 5 – Update on National Planning and Local Plan Process.

Councillor T Neilson entered the meeting at 6.20pm during the discussion on item 6 – Possible Scope of the Local Plan.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 6.39 pm

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