

MINUTES of a meeting of the LOCAL PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2014

Present: Councillor J Bridges (Chairman)

Councillors D De Lacy, C Large, J Legrys, V Richichi and S Sheahan

In Attendance: Councillors R Johnson and T Neilson

Officers: Mr M Sharp (Consultant), Mr S Bambrick, Mrs M Meredith, Mr I Nelson and Mr S Stanion

## **29. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence received.

## **30. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Councillor J Legrys declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 5 – Town Centres – Review of Boundaries, as a volunteer at Hermitage FM which was located within Coalville town centre.

## **31. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

Councillor D De Lacy asked if there was any progress or setbacks to report on the agreement of the SHMA figures and the housing land supply.

The Director of Services advised that in respect of the SHMA figures, a memorandum of understanding was undergoing agreement across Leicestershire; there would be a report to Cabinet in October and to a meeting of Council in November. He added that ours was the last Council to agree, therefore subject to that, there would be an agreement in respect of the housing requirements across the Housing Market Area. He advised that as reported at the last Planning Committee, the Council was currently achieving a 6.2 year housing land supply provision.

The Consultant commented that these processes all took so long that the position was bound to change. He referred to comments made by a planning inspector that local authorities should not ignore the housing implications of economic development aspirations. He added that the differences between economic aspirations and housing needs were at odds in some authorities. He advised that the housing need issues would need to be considered and compared against the aspirations. He added that it would be a matter for local authorities to convince an inspector how robust the housing need figures were in light of reality and aspirations. He stated that as far as the Local Plan was concerned, he felt that there was time to undertake this work and officers were talking to others in the area to see if this issue would affect the robustness of the housing land supply.

Councillor J Bridges stated that he understood officers were looking into this however he felt that further discussion was required with Members. He expressed concern regarding aspirations and felt the situation should be monitored.

Councillor J Legrys concurred with Councillor J Bridges' comments and felt there were a number of issues that Members needed to keep on top of. He referred to the Packington Mill and Charnwood inquiries. He stated that he had taken the personal view that the SHMA was only as good as inspectors were prepared to sign it off. He requested a written briefing to all Members to explain the situation.

Chairman's initials

Councillor V Richichi sought clarification whether more weight would be given to economic aspiration or housing need. He commented that this was a chicken and egg situation in his opinion.

The Consultant commented that the aim of planning was to balance the demand for one against the other. He added that SHMAs were built up from demographic projections and some economic assumptions, however inspectors were now saying that if you have high economic aspirations, you need to have enough housing to satisfy this. He commented that it was a question of balancing aspirations and reality, and the aspirations needed to be carefully considered to ensure that housing was not oversupplied.

Councillor V Richichi agreed with those comments and felt that houses should be built to encourage people to come to the area.

Councillor D De Lacy sought clarification on why the Parish Councils were not being consulted on the limits to development, and why this was being treated differently to the town centre boundaries. He felt that the limits to development issue was equally as important.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that as part of the report on the limits to development, consultation was suggested. He stated that his recollection was that Members had wanted to delay the consultation until after the workshops had taken place. He referred to the last resolution which agreed that a report be brought back to the Advisory Committee to agree the next steps. He stated that his advice was that the consultation should still take place.

Councillor D De Lacy commented that he welcomed this.

It was moved by Councillor J Legrys, seconded by Councillor S Sheahan and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2014 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### **32. COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

The Terms of Reference be noted.

### **33. TOWN CENTRES - REVIEW OF BOUNDARIES**

The Director of Services presented the report to Members. He advised that the current town centre boundaries were set out in the existing Local Plan and had not been reviewed for over 20 years and were clearly in need of review. He explained that in a number of cases, there were uses which would no longer be regarded as town centre use, and in most cases the suggested town centre boundary was significantly smaller than the existing boundary. He sought comments from the Advisory Committee on the report and each of the settlement boundaries suggested by officers. He advised that it was proposed to undertake an informal consultation with the Town and Parish Councils.

Chairman's initials

Councillor J Legrys asked that Ward Members be included in the consultation. He commented that there may be other organisations that could be included in the consultation and felt that this should be considered.

Councillor D De Lacy asked if the results of the consultation would be reported back to the Advisory Committee.

The Director of Services advised that the results could be reported back if desired, subject to the timings.

Members agreed that they would want the results of the consultation to be reported back to the Advisory Committee in the first instance.

Councillor S Sheahan pointed out one property in Measham which had been marked as residential, which was currently being fitted out for a shop unit. He sought clarification on whether function or form was the primary consideration. He commented that it was very difficult to say where the town centre began and ended. He also sought clarification on the significance and implications of defining the town centre.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that in defining the town centre boundary, this would be the area where officers would seek to direct retail and town centre type uses to initially. He added that this was a way of trying to maintain town centres as the main concentration of retail and other town centre uses.

Councillor S Sheahan commented that it seemed officers were trying to stop the decline of town centre areas, and it was a hard judgement.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that this was the case; the boundaries had shrunk in many cases and it was about maintaining a concentration. He commented that the fringe areas were transitional zones and this was a matter of judgement.

Councillor J Bridges commented that he was sure the Parish Councils may express different views when the matter was out for consultation.

Councillor C Large commented that it would have been useful to have had sight of the policies that would be applied to the town centre boundaries. She asked for example if a shop that was just outside the boundary would have any restriction on how they could erect signage.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that in that particular circumstance there would be no restriction, as this would relate to an already established use. He advised that the policies would impact upon new applications for a change of use.

Councillor J Legrys commented that town centres such as Ashby de la Zouch would be more critical. He asked what the position would be if a premises was just outside of the town centre boundary and applied for a change of use. He expressed concerns as a lot of properties in Coalville in particular were changing from residential to retail use. He asked what would happen in this circumstance.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that the policy would require a sequential approach and as such the applicant would be asked to demonstrate whether there were any premises within the town centre which would accommodate the business, whether these were appropriate. He advised that the evidence provided by the applicant would be taken into consideration in the officer's recommendation, and proximity to the boundary would also be a factor. He added that applications would be determined on a case by case basis.

Councillor J Legrys referred to the existing shops along James Street and commented that he had received a complaint from the owner of one of the shops that he was unable to be a member of the Coalville Town Team as he was not classed as being within the town centre. He asked if those shops would be converted to residential use once they became vacant.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that already established uses would not be affected. He referred to the current ongoing DCLG consultation outlined in the report which, if agreed, would significantly reduce the Council's ability to resist applications for a change of use.

In response to a question from Councillor J Legrys, the Planning Policy Team Manager confirmed that a change of use to a fast food establishment would still require planning permission and such applications outside of the boundary could be refused subject to the wording of the policy.

Councillor J Legrys referred to the Ford garage site and noted that this had been included within the town centre. He stated that he was pleased that this had been included considering the forthcoming planning application. He expressed disappointment that the market hall had not been included because this was located in the primary shopping area. He commented that this would lead to criticism. He asked if there was any flexibility in light of that application being approved and implemented.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that bearing in mind a further report would be brought to the Advisory Committee following the consultation, any changes in the interim could be picked up at that point. In respect of the market, he stated that this was a different type of retail use as it was a more concentrated use, and only open for part of the week. He commented that it could be included in the consultation, or left out to see what comments were received.

Councillor J Legrys commented that the Belvoir Centre was declining and was likely to lose more units. He added that to the west of Memorial Square, there was a large retail unit which probably had a greater footfall than the town centre itself, which had not been included. He added that he would be lobbying for Snibston Museum to be included in the town centre and sought clarification on why this had not been included.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that it had not been included for the simple fact that it did not relate that well to the town centre and was not what would be classed as town centre use.

Councillor J Legrys expressed disappointment that Snibston Museum had not been included in the town centre, particularly with the regular running of the railway from the museum to the town centre to increase footfall. He agreed that town centres needed to shrink but residential properties also needed to be put into town centre to increase footfall. He asked if research had been properly done in respect of the actual current situation within town centres.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that the research had considered a concentration of uses, however there was no footfall data available. He clarified that it was the use which had defined the town centre area. He added that the Asda site did not fit in with the definition of a Primary Shopping Area when looking at the surrounding area.

Councillor J Legrys commented that the Council's drive to deliver a rival market policy indicated that there was a push to having the market not at the market hall. He added that he felt the Walmart site had a higher footfall than what had been hatched in red on the plan.

Councillor S Sheahan commented that if the town centre boundaries were being tightened and people were being directed to look there initially, there was a risk that this could create an upward pressure in rent levels within the town centre and perversely make the fringes more attractive. He asked if changing the town centre boundary would affect the conservation area. He also commented that officers had considered the town centre boundary on the basis of the daytime economy; however insofar as the night time economy in Measham, the centre of gravity would shift.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that there would be no impact upon the conservation area, as this was covered by different legislation and was for a different purpose. In respect of the night time economy he advised that this had been considered in areas such as Ashby de la Zouch and Coalville; however the daytime economy was when most retail use took place. He added that the risk was that the area could be diluted to the detriment of the retail use. In respect of the upward pressure on rents within the town centre, he felt that this would not be significant enough to make people move out of the town centre.

Councillor D De Lacy commented that Snibston had not been graded at all on the map and there was a restaurant and a gift shop on the site. He added that it was within 300m of the town centre boundary and asked why it had been left out altogether.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that this was because the shop and cafe were ancillary to the main use of the museum.

Councillor D De Lacy asked why the museum had not been included since it was classed as leisure use.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that the museum was not within the existing town centre boundary.

The Director of Services asked Members to clarify for what purpose they were seeking to include Snibston museum within the town centre. He clarified that it was not located within the existing town centre boundary and the purpose of this exercise was to look at focussing on the core of the town centre.

Councillor D De Lacy stated that he had raised this issue in terms of achieving a consistent approach as some areas had been graded and not others. He commented that if there was a large supermarket just outside the boundary, surely this would not be excluded just because it was not within the existing town centre boundary.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that there were other uses in the wider area, such as retail parks, which had not been included. He added that to survey all areas in great detail would raise resource issues.

Councillor C Large commented that a lot of development had been approved in Castle Donington and so it was likely that more business use would be forthcoming. She expressed concerns about how restrictive this policy would be. She added that by concentrating the town centre so tightly, this could cause parking issues for people visiting shops.

The Planning Policy Team Manager commented that there were obviously a number of uses that were not retail uses. He added that for any applications falling outside the town centre boundary, a sequential approach would be taken, and if the application was not considered to be detrimental to the town centre it would be approved.

Councillor J Legrys stated that in his opinion, Snibston museum should be included in the town centre. He commented that they had been trying to achieve far less silo working

between the museum and the town team. He added that there was a political will to include Snibston museum within the town centre. He expressed disappointment that the town centre had not been hatched red over an existing area of retail footfall and he would be lobbying for this and Snibston museum to be included. In respect of the retail parks, he commented that these were an 'out of town' retail experience. He commented that the night time economy in Coalville was partly within and partly outside of the boundary. He made the point that a large proportion of Members believed that it should be included.

The Director of Services recognised that there may be a desire to include Snibston museum in the town centre, however his advice was that doing so would increase the alternative development options for that site.

Councillor J Bridges echoed those comments and felt that an alternative might need to be considered.

Councillor S Sheahan commented that it depended whether you considered the town centre in terms of form or function. He added that there was a difference between entity and identity, and Coalville needed to redefine itself; part of which was recognising that Snibston museum was an integral part of what Coalville has to offer. He stated that the physical separation needed to be put aside, and greater consideration be given to what Coalville is, was and hopes to be.

Councillor J Bridges stated that he took on board the comments but stood by the advice of officers. He reiterated the need to be cautious.

Councillor C Large asked if there was any guidance that the Council would need to demonstrate had been followed in drawing up the town centre boundaries.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that there was general guidance on the approach; however it was very much a matter for individual authorities to define the boundaries as they saw fit. He added that the key was having evidence to support the decisions made.

The Consultant advised that the approach taken was consistent with what was happening around the country in terms of boundaries shrinking.

Councillor D De Lacy suggested that the issues be further debated following the consultation process. He sought clarification on how the consultation with the Parish Councils and other organisations would be undertaken.

The Planning Policy Team Manager advised that this would be done by email if possible, and by letter if not. He explained that a copy of the plans and the settlement limits would be sent to relevant organisations.

Councillor D De Lacy asked if time would be allowed for meetings of the Parish Councils to take place. The Planning Policy Team Manager acknowledged that this was an issue, and the wider timescale needed to be considered, however time would be allowed for this where possible.

Councillor C Large commented that there were more Ward Members in her area who would want to ensure they also received copies of the plans and settlement limits.

Councillor J Bridges commented that in the past, officers had been prepared to go and talk to Parish Councils and he hoped this would be the case in respect of this consultation.

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

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY THAT:

The Advisory Committee;

- a) Notes the need to review the existing town centre boundaries;
- b) Notes that the appropriate Parish and Town Councils and the Coalville and Ashby town teams will be consulted on the proposed boundaries (as may be amended in the light of the comments of the Advisory Committee).

The Chairman invited Members to highlight any items they would like the Advisory Committee to consider in future.

Councillor J Legrys requested that Members be kept updated on the situation in respect of the SHMA and felt that all Members should be informed as soon as there was likely to be any change.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.30 pm

Chairman's initials