

MINUTES of an EXTRAORDINARY meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on MONDAY, 12 AUGUST 2013

Present: Councillor G Jones (Chairman) (In the Chair).

Councillors R Adams, G Allman, R Blunt, A Bridges, J Bridges, N Clarke, P Clayfield, J Cotterill, J G Coxon, D Everitt, J Geary, R Holland, J Hoult, P Hyde, R Johnson, C Large, J Legrys, L Massey, C Meynell, T Neilson, T J Pendleton, V Richichi, J Ruff, A C Saffell, S Sheahan, M Specht, L Spence, D J Stevenson and R Woodward.

Officers: Mr S Bambrick, Mr R Bowmer, Ms C E Fisher, Mrs M Meredith, Mrs M Phillips and Miss E Warhurst.

32. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R D Bayliss, D De Lacy, T Gillard, N J Rushton, A V Smith and N Smith.

33. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor S D Sheahan asked the Monitoring Officer to repeat the advice she had given in respect of his land interests.

The Monitoring Officer explained that she had advised Councillor S Sheahan that whilst he had a land interest which was previously affected by the discussion on the Core Strategy, so long as the debate was general and no substantive decision was made, he could remain in the meeting and participate.

Councillor S Sheahan stated that he was not sure that he should take part as the question had been put to the Council whether the Core Strategy should be withdrawn. He added that he felt tonight's discussion would be seen as influential.

Councillor S Sheahan therefore declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in item 3 - North West Leicestershire Local Plan: Core Strategy, having a financial interest in a piece of land in Measham which was proposed to be allocated as housing land under the Core Strategy.

34. NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE LOCAL PLAN: CORE STRATEGY

Having declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in this item, Councillor S Sheahan left the meeting at this point and took no further part in the discussion or voting thereon.

Councillor T J Pendleton presented the report to Members. He stated that he was somewhat surprised that this stage had been reached as there would be a full discussion on the Core Strategy at the next meeting of the Council on 17 September 2013. He added that the reason for this was that certain items were still not totally clear and the Council had sought the opinion of Counsel, which was yet to be received. He stated that the Opposition had been informed of the situation but had proceeded with their five Member motion.

Councillor T J Pendleton stated that following years of consultation and development, the Core Strategy had been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in June 2013. He explained that a public examination must be held by a planning Inspector before the strategy was officially adopted. He added that the Inspector had requested extra

Chairman's initials

information to explain our decision making, which had been provided, and the Inspector had raised some concerns, particularly in respect of the number of new homes to be built.

Councillor T J Pendleton explained that the Inspector had asked the Council to consider withdrawing the Core Strategy. He explained that it was not unusual for Inspectors to raise concerns about core strategies and suggest withdrawal, and indeed it had already happened elsewhere in Leicestershire, as councillors and planning officers did their best to navigate their way through the Government's rule changes.

Councillor T J Pendleton advised that a further report would be brought to Council in September to consider withdrawing the Core Strategy, however if the Council were forced to do so, it would take years to develop another. Councillor T J Pendleton added that Members had a responsibility to the residents of North West Leicestershire to adopt a plan that had local support, and he believed that had been achieved. He requested an explanation for the five Member motion which had led to the calling of this meeting. He moved that the report be noted.

Councillor R Blunt seconded the motion.

The Chairman invited comments from the floor.

Councillor J Legrys thanked the Chairman for arranging the meeting and officers for providing a professional and detailed report. He stated that professional Officers advise and provide options, however the decisions were made by the Political majority, and the blame for the current mess laid squarely with the Cabinet and the political administration. Councillor J Legrys added that the Cabinet were rightly paid extra in the form of a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) to take formal responsibility. He added that the SRA should allow the Cabinet time to seek advice from others outside of the Council.

Councillor J Legrys referred to the unhappiness with the current situation. He stated that Members were blindly whipped by the leadership into agreeing a Strategy.

Councillor J Legrys stated that after 6 years incumbency, inheritance from the previous Labour Administration could not be blamed. He added that a poorly drawn up County wide strategy had been inherited under the old RSS, however this had been drawn up by the Conservative administration at Leicestershire County Council.

Councillor J Legrys stated that the meeting had been requisitioned due to the need for Cabinet to publicly account and answer questions from Members in relation to correspondence from Inspector Hetherington about his concerns about the soundness of the submitted emerging core strategy. He added that the Inspector continued to have concerns and Members and the public need to know now what action was intended before the time and expense of an exploratory meeting. He stated that the political Administration wanted to discuss the matter face to face with Inspector Hetherington as they felt he would back down from his earlier comments. He added that this was the position taken by Waverley Borough Council, however this did not prevent Inspector Hetherington rejecting their Core Strategy.

Councillor J Legrys stated that the opposition were not calling for the Core Strategy to be withdrawn. He asked the Administration what action they would take to mitigate the mess that had been created.

Councillor J Legrys stated that recent decisions on the five year land supply had made the situation worse and £11 million funding for improvements along the A511 had been

deleted recently despite officers' advice and recommendation that the A511 was a priority.

Councillor J Legrys stated that he believed the laid back developer led approach taken by the Administration had led to an open house for unwarranted development in the District.

The Chairman indicated to Councillor J Legrys that he had spoken for 5 minutes in total.

Councillor J Legrys attempted to continue his speech.

Councillor D J Stevenson stated vehemently that Councillor J Legrys' vitriolic comments were completely untrue.

At this point in the meeting, the Chairman called for order. Councillor J Legrys concluded his speech.

Councillor T Neilson referred to a letter sent to the Chief Executive from Councillor J Coxon and Ashby Town Council and quoted from it as follows: "The inability of North West Leicestershire District Council to effectively manage the planning and delivery of housing development in the District has left Ashby vulnerable to speculative applications by developers. This will have a long term impact on the town and the ability of its infrastructure to cope with the rapidly increasing population".

Councillor T Neilson stated that officers give professional advice and decisions are made by the political leadership, however there was a clear inability of the leadership to lead on these issues.

Councillor T Neilson referred to a large potential development at Appleby Magna, in respect of which the residents had deep concerns. He stated that they had been left vulnerable to this development and they knew who was to blame.

Councillor T Neilson asked why the 2012 version of the Core Strategy had been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate and whether the discussion at the Council meeting in March had been a waste of time.

Councillor T Neilson referred to the policy of reducing affordable housing in Coalville. He added that other villages may now have to do without the contributions also as developers had been given a free hand.

Councillor T Neilson stated that the Administration had pushed Planning into crisis and should be ashamed of themselves. He asked the Administration to explain what action they were going to take.

Councillor J Geary referred to the number of developers, press and public present and stated that this demonstrated there was clear interest in this matter. He stated that in recent months, residents had been blighted by planning applications which the Council were unable to defend as an effective Core Strategy was not in place, and nor was a five year housing land supply. He added that at present a developer could choose any green patch and stand a good chance of being granted planning permission.

Councillor J Geary stated that half of the affordable housing target had been thrown away due to infrastructure needs. He added that this should be a problem for developers.

Chairman's initials

Councillor J Geary stated that elected Members represented the people who voted for them and had a duty to do the best they could. He added that in terms of planning applications our hands were now being tied by central government as the Council had failed to deliver a Core Strategy and a housing land supply.

Councillor J Geary referred to an answer he had received to a supplementary question he had put to Councillor T Pendleton in respect of travellers at a previous meeting, which had pointed out that the previous Labour administration had failed to act and that was why they were elected out of office. He asked Councillor T Pendleton if he believed the district was moving positively forward.

Councillor J Geary referred to the Tesco and Asda planning applications and stated that this had done no favours in the eyes of the public.

Councillor N Clarke referred to the Council meeting on 26 March 2013 where Councillor T J Pendleton was asked about the consequences of rejecting the Core Strategy. He asked how the current position affected this.

Councillor R Woodward stated that as a Whitwick member, he had supported the Core Strategy, only for the reason that he firmly believed the area of separation would be saved. He sought assurances that this was still the case.

Councillor J Ruff asked the Cabinet to outline the reason that the Council had been unable to produce a plan that was fit for purpose. She referred to the revoking of the regional strategies in 2010, and the government stated it should be easier to understand. She added that this seemed to have been altered over the years in favour of developers. She referred to recent applications which had been approved with no amenities. She stated that what was wanted was a viable plan that worked, and that local residents believed in.

Councillor D Everitt expressed concern for the people who people put such a lot of work and effort into planning matters. He added that he felt these people needed an apology as the green wedge was no longer safe. He felt that the Administration should admit they had made a mistake.

Councillor A C Saffell expressed concern as to why the meeting has been called as a full report would be received in a few weeks. He added that he was disappointed that the Labour Group had used this meeting as an opportunity to criticise the leading party.

Councillor A C Saffell stated that there had been reference to blame, however the officers give advice, and the blame laid right at their door.

Councillor J Legrys sought to raise a point of order. At this point in the meeting, the Chairman called for order in the Chamber. Once order was restored, the Chairman allowed Councillor A C Saffell to continue.

Councillor A C Saffell stated that he was a member of a group which was asked to investigate the planning department and the group asked for measures to be put in place. He stated that the recommendations had been forgotten and he expressed his disappointment that officers did not take the opportunity to take on board the recommendations. He stated that the same problems still existed today because nothing had been done.

Councillor A C Saffell stated that the planning department was more of a reacting department. He added that they should be planning what was best for our district,

Chairman's initials

however they are constantly fire fighting rather than planning.

Councillor A C Saffell referred to recent development in Castle Donington which he felt had been pushed through without infrastructure. He stated that officers had failed and had not offered the right advice to Members.

Councillor M Specht stated that he was new to politics but he was aware that the housing targets were somewhat reduced under this Administration to what they were under the previous Labour Administration. He added that additional housing was needed due to Labour's open door policy and the resulting exploding population. He added that, contrary to some opinions, he felt that the Council's officers were doing a good job under the circumstances. He added that the issues could be properly debated when the full facts were known, and stated that this was scurrilous scaremongering.

Councillor M Specht made reference to the allegations in respect of the employment of foreign workers by Next and Tesco.

The Chairman called for order at this point in the meeting.

Councillor R Johnson sought to raise a point of order.

When order was restored the Chairman allowed Councillor M Specht to continue, reminding him to direct his comments to the business at hand.

Councillor M Specht stated that the point of the Core Strategy was to fight Labour's open door policy and put infrastructure in place. He added that the Administration would look for solutions in the best way possible.

Councillor R Adams stated vehemently that he was disgusted with Councillor A C Saffell's comments in respect of his allegations against officers. He added that this was a scapegoat as the blame laid with the Cabinet and the Conservative Administration, and not with the officers that the Council employed.

Councillor R Johnson asked Councillor T J Pendleton if he had consulted with other councils in respect of our Core Strategy. He made reference to the objections made by Hinckley and Bosworth and Oadby and Wigston Borough Councils to the Core Strategy in 2012.

Councillor R Blunt offered apologies to those who had been summoned to this meeting because the Opposition wanted to showboat. He stated that the green wedge was more at risk tonight due to the action which had been taken by the Opposition.

Councillor R Blunt stated that the Opposition had provided no indication of what action they would take if they ran the Council. He stated that nothing had been heard but vitriol and negativity.

At this point in the meeting, the Chairman called for order. When order was restored, he invited Councillor R Blunt to continue.

Councillor R Blunt stated that no one wanted housing developments near to where they live. He added that this was the biggest threat to quality of life and property value. He referred to the reduction in the housing target achieved by the Conservative Administration.

Councillor R Blunt asked the Opposition to explain what action they would take if they were in control of the Council.

Councillor T J Pendleton stated that Members of the Labour Group had also signed off the Core Strategy. He gave a chronology of how the Core Strategy has had to be developed against a changing national, regional and local planning policy context.

The motion to note the report having been moved and seconded, the Chairman put it to the vote. The motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

The Chairman opened the meeting at 6.30pm.

Having declared a disclosable pecuniary interest, Councillor S Sheahan left the meeting at the commencement of the debate on item 3 - North West Leicestershire Local Plan: Core Strategy, and took no further part in the meeting.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.16pm.

Chairman's signature