



## **REGULATION AND PLANNING POLICY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a remote meeting of the Regulation and Planning Policy Committee held on Tuesday 19 May 2020 at 1.00pm

**Committee Members Present:** Councillors: F Ellis, (Chairman) B Duffin, J Halls, P Hardy, W Kemp, S Nuri, T Spruce, V Thomson

**Cabinet Members in Attendance:** Councillors: J Fuller, L Neal

**Other Members in Attendance:** Councillor: V Clifford-Jackson, Mr T Laidlaw

**Officers in Attendance:** The Principal Infrastructure and Planning Policy Officers (Simon Marjoram and Paul Harris)

**Also in Attendance:** Three members of the public

### **64 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 February 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

### **65 SOUTH NORFOLK VILLAGE CLUSTERS HOUSING ALLOCATIONS DOCUMENT SITE ASSESSMENT FORM AND SITE ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST**

The Principal Infrastructure and Planning Policy Officer (Simon Marjoram), advised the meeting that the report sought comments from members on the Site Assessment Form and the Site Assessment Checklist, which would form the basis for the assessment of sites submitted for inclusion in the South Norfolk Village Clusters Housing Allocations Document.

It had been agreed at the last meeting of the Committee on 18 February 2020 that the documents would be considered before the assessment began in late March, but the

Covid-19 pandemic had delayed this and they were, therefore, brought before members today for agreement of the final draft.

Members noted that the Assessment Form used the Norfolk-wide Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) as a starting point, which met with the requirements of the Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework and, therefore, aligned with the site assessment process in the Greater Norwich Local Plan.

Part one of the Assessment Form looked at site details and assumed a density of 25 dwellings per hectare. This was seen as a realistic density, as sites of this size that had been allocated a lower density had often been approved with a higher density on application.

Part two of the form sets out 'absolute constraints', such as is the site in ancient woodland or a national nature reserve or a flood risk zone etc. Due to their modest size, no sites being considered under the Village Clusters assessment would be of such importance as to outweigh the absolute constraints.

Part three of the form was the suitability assessment, which would assess the sites under the Red/Amber/Green (RAG) reporting system. If the HELAA score for the site was red or amber, but the site promoter had included evidence that the issues could be overcome the site scoring column could be changed to reflect this.

The Principal Infrastructure and Planning Policy Officer explained that a significant difference in the Village Clusters assessment related to 'accessibility to local services and facilities' in order to reflect that the focus of the assessment were small scale sites in rural locations. The assessment was split into two parts. Part one used the HELAA methodology, whilst part two increased the range of facilities that counted towards a positive assessment. As the sites were small and in rural locations it was proposed that a green site score would therefore be based on access to three or more core services within 1,800m and that the distance to schools and employment be increased from 2,000m to 3,000m. The agreement of the County Council would be sought on this proposal.

The suitability assessment would also consider criteria such as safe attractive walking routes to encourage a healthy lifestyle and lower carbon emissions. Access to broadband, was an additional criterion under the site score, which was especially significant given the current pandemic. The landscape assessment had also been supplemented to include agricultural land quality, as well as character type and area.

The assessment would be a desktop exercise but would be carried out in consultation internally (e.g. Environmental Health) and externally (e.g. Natural England, Norfolk County Council etc.).

Part four of the form was the Site Visit, which would be undertaken for the majority of sites, to identify the key features of the site and its surroundings.

Part five of the form covered local plan designations.

Part six of the form concerned availability and achievability, which included asking the site promoter to demonstrate the viability of the delivery of the required amount of affordable housing. This would be in accordance with South Norfolk's current affordable housing requirement.

Part seven of the form was the conclusion, which allowed officers to classify the sites into 'preferred' 'reasonable alternatives' and 'rejected' sites.

The Committee noted that the initial timeline had anticipated reaching the Regulation 18 stage on 'preferred' and 'reasonable alternative' sites by September 2020. It was now expected that this would slip by two months due to the pandemic.

In response to a query regarding broadband availability affecting site assessment, it was confirmed that broadband was now seen as a key utility and if there were no plans to improve or provide it the site would be marked down accordingly.

During discussion, one member urged caution about using the Better Broadband for Norfolk website to assess Broadband availability as in his experience the coverage map on the website was unreliable. In response to a further question, the Panel was advised that formal sport and recreational facilities in the suitability assessment were characterised as designated areas where organised sport could be played.

A member also noted that peak time public transport could be limited to one bus in the morning and one bus in the afternoon, which they considered not to be ideal.

A member commended the greater flexibility of the site assessment form in respect of boundaries.

Cllr J Fuller noted that there were 350 proposed sites across the District, which would support small developers, as well as the local supply chain. He did express concern however that Norfolk County Council might object to the increase from 1,200 to 1,500 dwellings. He also emphasised the importance of ensuring that there was local support for the development of the sites.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economic Growth commended officers for their hard work on the documents, which would be more effective by having an increased list of services to meet the suitability criteria and by extending the distances to them.

The Chairman also commended both documents and proposed that they be approved as presented.

The Panel supported the proposal unanimously and it was:

## **RESOLVED**

To approve the South Norfolk Village Clusters Allocations Site Assessment Form and Site Assessment Checklist.

(The meeting concluded 1.55 pm)

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Chairman