



REGULATION AND PLANNING POLICY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting of the Regulation and Planning Policy Committee held on Thursday 17 September 2020 at 12.00pm

Committee Members Present: Councillors: F Ellis, (Chairman) B Duffin, J Savage, W Kemp, S Nuri, T Spruce and V Thomson

Apologies: Councillor: J Halls

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

Officers in Attendance: Director of Place (P Courtier), Assistant Director of Planning (H Mellors) and the Housing Enabling Officer (K Mitchell)

66 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 May 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

67 RESPONSE TO MINISTRY OF HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT (MHCLG) CONSULTATIONS

The Assistant Director for Planning introduced the report which advised Members of the key changes proposed by the MHCLG on the future of the planning regime. Members were asked to agree on the proposed consultation responses to two planning related documents: a White Paper entitled 'Planning for the Future' and a consultation paper on 'Changes to the Planning System'.

Officers advised Members that in the White Paper the Government was seeking to simplify the role of Local Plans so that they focused on identifying land under one of three categories: growth areas, renewal areas and protected areas. Additionally, housing numbers would no longer be set locally, but by the Government. Members noted that the local plan would be restricted to 30 months, with a digitally accessible format being used. It was further proposed to replace the Community Infrastructure Levy and S106 agreements with a new Infrastructure Levy.

Members noted in the second consultation paper that the proposed changes included variations to the standard methodology for assessing local housing need and also

introduced new proposals to secure First Homes. There was also a proposal to lift the affordable housing requirement threshold on small sites from ten to 40/50 homes.

In response to a query about the status of a First Home after it had been sold the Housing Enabling Officer explained that they would be the same affordable housing tenure as Discounted Market Sales with the 30% discount would remaining in perpetuity.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr J Fuller explained that the proposals would see a reduction in housing requirements in urban areas, and an increase in the countryside, which would place additional demand on rural Districts like South Norfolk. Referring to the increase in housing numbers, he explained that the Council would therefore have to contemplate a new settlement, as there was a limit to how much could be added to the existing Village Clusters. The Portfolio Holder also noted that there were a number of principles within the papers which the Council could welcome.

In response to the Portfolio Holder's comments, the Assistant Director of Planning pointed out that the drafted responses were based on the implementation of the proposals as drafted. More detail from the Government would be required before the responses could be expanded upon. Key areas of concern included; the overall lack of detail, the change in the Community Infrastructure Levy and affordable housing.

The discussion turned to the proposal of 'Beautiful Homes' and how this would be measured, due to its subjective nature. A Member noted that South Norfolk already had an excellent Design Guide which had 14 different vernacular architectures styles within the District. The new proposals would allow the District to expand upon this.

A Member expressed concerns regarding sections 3.28 and 6.2 of the report. The first concern dealt with the Government's proposal to ensure application were determined within statutory timelines and impact this would have on officers' workloads. The Assistant Director of Planning explained that practice at the current time was to allow extensions for applicants to submit amendments worked well and advised Members that removing this could result in more refusals. Members noted there was a risk with workload volumes and resources not being in place, that there would be a struggle to meet deadlines. In relation to the concern raised over section 6.2 of the document, regarding resource implications, it was explained that the Government anticipated that there would be a redirection of resources from Development Management, as a result of the proposals, to plan making and design codes.

Officers and Members highlighted their concerns about the affordable housing threshold increase to 40 or 50 homes and about the potential for developers to avoid the provision of affordable homes. A Member advised the Committee that some Housing Associations had been developing land themselves for affordable housing to combat the decrease. Officers stressed that affordable housing remained an important consideration in the Council's response to the consultations and the Council wanted to see its delivery maintained.

The Portfolio Holder for Stronger Economy commented on her concerns on the Development Management Policies being replaced with national ones, highlighting its unrealistic aim due to the wide range of areas within the Country. Officers advised that some policies could be used nationally, but bespoke policies would still be needed in certain areas. The Portfolio Holder also noted that South Norfolk had a better rate of successfully defending refused planning applications than the national average. Officers confirmed that they would make an addition to the Council's response pointing out the Council's performance in this area.

In response to various points raised in the report regarding the proposed increase of new housing numbers in the District, a Member noted the Officers' concerns over the difficulty of achieving the new proposed figure in the current Village Clusters, and suggested the possibility of expansions of two or three additional clusters to help meet the target within existing villages. Members noted it would be dependant on the direction taken by the Greater Norwich Local Plan. However, it remained apparent that to meet the new proposed number, a bigger settlement would be needed. Further discussion followed where the Chairman stated that a new settlement in the District, if well-built, would be a great place for the area to grow and develop.

A Member stressed the need for the environment to be a key consideration within the policy, and Officers explained that part of the planning process was to always protect the environment and the Committee were reassured that although the proposals sought to simplify the planning process the importance of the environment would be maintained.

A Member spoke of their concerns that the White Paper encompassed the lower common denominators in the Country and the Council was suffering because it did not fall into that group. It was noted that the Council already had a Local Plan alongside other components and felt that this should be reflected in the Council's response.

The Assistant Director for Planning summarised the salient points of the discussion, which included amending the Council's responses to incorporate making Development Management Policies as local as possible, added statistics regarding the Council's own appeals turnover and finally highlighting the existing Local Plan and Policies which the Council had in place. The Chairman thanked Officers for all their work regarding the Council's response to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Consultations.

A Vote was then carried out by roll-call, and it was unanimously agreed that the draft responses, incorporating the suggestions by the Committee, be recommended to Cabinet.

RESOLVED: To Recommend that Cabinet

1. agree the draft responses to the following MHCLG consultation documents as outlined in appendices 2 and 3 of this report, subject to the inclusion of the suggestions of the Committee above:

Changes to the current planning system
White Paper: Planning for the future

2. Delegate any updates to these responses to the Director of Place in Consultation with the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Stronger Economy.

(The meeting concluded 13:10 pm)

Chairman