

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Monday, 16 December 2013, at Northampton

PRESENT: Councillor Chris Over (Chair); Councillor Rebecca Breese (Deputy Chair); Councillors Jim Bass (observer), Alan Chantler, Michael Clarke, Stephen Clarke, Andre Gonzalez de Savage, Robin Digby, Penny Flavell, Tim Hadland, Phil Larratt, Chris Millar and Jonathan Nunn.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Irving-Swift (substituted by Councillor Millar) and Councillor Capstick (observer).

2. MINUTES (OF MEETING HELD ON 2 OCTOBER 2013)

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2013 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

Councillor Hadland stated that he had omitted to declare a personal interest at the meeting in any items which might relate to a site in Brackley on which he had advised a former client.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hadland declared a personal, non-pecuniary interest in item 6 – Proposed Main Modifications to the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy as Submitted as he had advised a former client regarding a site in Brackley. Councillor Hadland stated that he would leave the room if there was any discussion on that site.

4. MATTERS OF URGENCY

None.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (IF ANY)

The following speakers addressed the Committee on item 6 – Proposed Main Modifications to the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy as Submitted.

Mr Patrick Cross on behalf of Whitehills and Spring Park Residents Association (WASPRA) referred to a planning application for dwellings on Buckton Fields in 2011, which Daventry District Council (DDC) and Northampton Borough Council (NBC) had rejected on traffic grounds. Following receipt of a traffic consultant's letter DDC had reversed their decision without any material changes, whilst NBC had again rejected the application. In April 2013 WASPRA had made a submission to the Inspector voicing concerns about the inadequate provision of appropriate roads to support housing developments. Mr Cross referred to some roads being at maximum capacity and some minor roads operating today at 47% more than projections for 2021. He handed a report from WASPRA on this matter to the Chair and circulated a photograph to Committee members. He believed that the minimum 20% modal shift shown in the Transport Schedule was too optimistic. Mr Cross stated that the Joint Planning Unit (JPU) informed the Inspector at the April meeting that the M1 is really our north-west bypass, but still now publish plans for the delivery of a north-west bypass. This, he believed, would lead to more traffic, including HGVs, in the north of Kingsthorpe. WASPRA asked for a review of current and future traffic volumes by the appropriate authorities, including the Government, taking into account the impact of all proposed housing developments, commenting that the attractiveness of the North of Northampton for business investors and residents would be undermined if infrastructure was not provided before major house building.

Mr Michael Stead on behalf of the Friends of Boughton Area (FOBA) commented that the large scale housing development proposed to the north and west of Northampton should not be contemplated without a proper north-west bypass and comprehensive review of the traffic impact of all the projected Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs). He stated that paragraph 162 of the National Policy Planning Framework (NPPFF) stressed the need to ensure the provision of transport infrastructure able to meet forecast demand and that the proposal for a north-west bypass or northern relief road as set out in the report would be inadequate. He stated that the analysis and findings of WASPRA were supported which found that Boughton was being used as a “rat run” increasingly by vehicles trying to find east/west routes and to escape traffic jams on the A508.

Mr Robert Boulter on behalf of the Hunsbury and Collingtree Residents Alliance commented that the plan as a whole failed to address issues relating to the increase in car numbers, the need for a thorough assessment of flood risk for all the water courses that affect Northampton and the need for a new hospital. He stated that the A45 was becoming too congested and that there were no plans to increase the road’s capacity and advice received suggested the road would be gridlocked within the life of the plan. There was reference to modal shift in the plan but no indication that would occur. He referred to the proposals for a business park which would increase traffic. Mr Boulter referred to serious issues of viability and sustainability in respect of SUE 5. He asked that SUE 5 be removed from the plan.

Mr John Goodall on behalf of the Nene Flood Prevention Alliance (NFPA) commented that the Alliance objected to Policy BN7 on grounds of unsustainability until specific issues and omissions had been addressed. He stated that there was an absence of survey information and assessments for the material consideration of flood risk and that there would be problems without strategic site information. He stated that there was not a policy for a strategic drainage infrastructure upgrade of the 1970-1980s 50 year standard. Mr Goodall stated that there was an issue in respect of Article 14 of the Human Rights Act regarding discrimination on defence standards for Wootton and Dallington Brooks as existing developments have at best a 1 in 50 year standard whilst new developments are being provided with an on-going 1 in 200 year standard. He would like a legal opinion on this issue. The NFPA requested that a decision on the plan be deferred until these issues and omissions have been addressed.

Mr Peter Hawkins on behalf of Great Houghton Action Group welcomed some of the proposed changes, such as the stronger protection for sensitive landscapes, but referred to missed opportunities to protect rural areas within the Borough of Northampton. The Action Group had consistently argued that the target housing figures used in the plan are too high and could see the ONS population projections falling, having fallen by approximately 33% between 2011 and 2012 and the growth estimate falling from 4,700 to 3,200. He urged the Committee to develop contingency plans for lower housing numbers at the earliest opportunity. The Action Group welcomed the comments regarding the Brackmills Extension alternative employment site (SA46 in paragraph 9.16 of the SA Addendum Report) but asked that the bracketed clause be removed as no part of Great Houghton lay to the west of SA46. Mr Hawkins stated that this was most probably the result of human error by the JPU’s consultants but asked that the bracketed clause be removed before the documents went out to consultation.

6. PROPOSED MAIN MODIFICATIONS TO THE WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT CORE STRATEGY AS SUBMITTED

The Head of the Joint Planning Unit (JPU) stated that the Committee was being asked to approve the Proposed Main Modifications to the Pre-Submission version of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS), as amended by the Proposed Changes, for a public consultation period of six weeks between 14 January and 25 February 2014.

Approval was also sought for the Communication and Consultation Strategy which supported the Proposed Main Modification consultation. He also drew attention to an erratum sheet tabled at the meeting, largely covering typographical errors in the report, and suggested a change to recommendation two which would authorise the Head of the JPU, in consultation with the Chair, to agree any changes required to the Proposed Main Modifications.

The Head of the JPU stressed the need for a JCS to be agreed for West Northamptonshire to provide a framework to assist the local authorities to resist speculative planning applications, particularly as the National Planning Policy Framework required local authorities to plan positively and thereby contribute to national economic recovery.

The Development Team Leader then explained the progress on the plan to date, summarised the Proposed Main Modifications set out in the report and drew attention to the background papers used in preparing the plan, as listed at the conclusion of the report. She drew particular attention to the following issues:

- The Proposed Main Modifications had arisen either through discussions and agreed statements considered at the Examination or as a result of the further work requested by the Examination Inspector;
- All previous representations made in respect of the plan remained valid and are still with the Inspector for his consideration;
- The period of the JCS had been extended through to 2029 for the reasons set out in the Committee report;
- It was intended to have a further plan in the form of a Plan review that would potentially run through until 2036 and which it was anticipated would be adopted by 2020.

Councillor Millar stated that Daventry were receiving speculative applications and that as the National Planning Policy Framework favoured sustainable development there was a need for a JCS to combat speculative planning applications. He referred to the need for infrastructure and to the general need for improved transport infrastructure. He stated that the people of Daventry supported the expansion of the town and wanted to take a fair share of the growth in West Northamptonshire. He stated that significant resources had been spent by all partners, including the County Council, on reaching this stage of the JCS and that if the plan was not progressed those resources would be wasted and speculative development would be encouraged. He proposed the recommendations, stating that their main purpose was to approve a six week consultation on the JCS proposed modifications. Any feedback received following this public consultation would then be made available to the ongoing Public Examination, where it would be considered.

Councillor Breese stated that South Northamptonshire also had its share of speculative applications. She endorsed policy E8 and the proposals for employment in South Northamptonshire and Daventry. She seconded the recommendations.

Councillor Nunn referred to traffic, noise and air pollution in the Northampton South area which he said were not addressed in the JCS. He was concerned that the infrastructure was not present, about congestion on the A45 and the proximity of the M1 motorway. He considered that these were real issues and made development in that area a risk. He was disappointed by the JCS as it currently stood and did not consider that it would address the traffic issues.

Councillor Larratt stated that a JCS was needed for West Northamptonshire but did not consider this plan was appropriate to consult on. He stated that the sites for proposed development suited developers but were not where residents wanted development to take place. Development in the South of Northampton, particularly near to Hardingstone and

Collingtree, would be unlikely to benefit Northampton town centre as residents would look towards Milton Keynes for their requirements. He raised issues regarding infrastructure and the capacity of the A45. He referred to housing being foisted on Northampton. He also referred to a public speaker who stated there was an error in the plan and asked how many other errors it might contain. He did not support the plan and stated that it should be a community plan, with community engagement.

In relation to a comment on the housing figures used in the JCS, the Head of the JPU stated that the advice received from Counsel was that the figures provided by Peter Brett Associates were less sound than those provided by the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research, which used a more reliable base.

Councillor Chantler stated that there was a need for a strategic plan for West Northamptonshire and not a patchwork of local plans to protect the area. He did not believe there were many errors in the papers and would be supporting the recommendations in the report.

Councillor Michael Clarke stated that NCC had been consistent through the process, stressing there should be less development in the South and West of Northampton. He considered that the area to the North West of the A43, around Moulton village, had been overlooked and had been a missed opportunity to develop sustainable communities there.

Councillor Hadland expressed concerns regarding the fragility of the numbers on which the plan was based, with differences between the figures produced by the two companies used. He referred to one of the speakers who had stated that numbers could go down as well as go up. He was concerned at the pressures being placed on Northampton and hints that the next figures from Government could be lower than the ones used in the plan. Regarding provisions for transportation, he also questioned modal shift levels. He understood that sustainable development required infrastructure to be in place or to be provided and that without that infrastructure applications for sustainable development could be resisted. He considered that the plan had been process led, rather than community led. He would not be supporting the recommendations.

Councillor de Savage stated that he felt very uncomfortable that the public had not been given sufficient voices to speak on the plan and that the Committee should encourage the public's views to be heard. He was concerned about the impact of the JCS on Northampton. It was essential that the precise need for Northampton was understood. There were increasing pressures on local communities, which would increase gridlock and transport issues were not sustainable. He did not believe the proposals were sustainable and had concerns that the infrastructure could not take any more development on the South and West of Northampton and he did not support development of those areas without being fundamentally sure it was appropriate. He considered that the JCS should run until 2031 (not 2029) in respect of North Northampton. He did not consider that people living in Daventry understood the pressures made on Northampton. He would not be supporting the recommendations.

In response to comments about the JCS the Head of the JPU stated that the Inspector had not indicated whether or not he supported the plan but had requested that more work be undertaken on the plan and on sustainability matters and that the JCS be then brought back to the Inspector for consideration at further hearings.

Councillor Millar stated that without a JCS Daventry had no defence against applications for development. He stated that all the negative comments being expressed at the meeting appeared to relate to proposals for the South and West of Northampton, implying that the North of Northampton was less significant, which was not the case. He stated that West

Northamptonshire had been without a JCS for eight years and the likely undesirable consequences and impact for all partners had to be considered if the recommendations in the report were not agreed at this meeting.

The Head of the JPU stated that the JCS had already been submitted for Public Examination by the Committee in December 2012 and the Inspector expected that further hearings will be required once the further work he had requested had been completed in order to consider proposed modifications arising. The Head of the JPU stated that development would be likely to take place whether or not there was a JCS in place but the plan would allow this development to be controlled. Without the plan there was a real risk that the ability for partner Councils to control development across their areas would at best be weakened and at worse removed.

Councillor Hadland stated that it was unlikely the Committee would reach a consensus and that any vote would be split and require the Chair's casting vote. He suggested deferring the item to seek a consensus.

Councillor de Savage stated that he did not consider the Committee should agree a plan to which all Members were not committed.

It was proposed by Councillor Millar and seconded by Councillor Breese "That the recommendations in the report be approved."

- RESOLVED:**
1. That the proposed Main Modifications, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, to the Pre-Submission version of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, as amended by the Proposed Changes, be approved for a six week consultation period to run from 14 January to 25 February 2014.
 2. That the Head of the Joint Planning Unit be authorised in consultation with the Chair of the Joint Strategic Planning Committee to agree any editorial changes required to the Proposed Main Modifications.
 3. That the Communication and Consultation Strategy, as attached at Appendix 2 to the report, to support the Proposed Main Modifications to the Pre-Submission version of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, as amended by the Proposed Changes, be approved.

Note:

- i) The voting on the recommendations was tied (6 voting in favour and 6 voting against) and was carried on the Chair's casting vote.
- ii) Councillor Larratt requested that his vote against the recommendations be recorded in the minutes.

The meeting concluded at 7:45 pm.