

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 17 February 2009

PRESENT: Councillor Tony Woods (Chair); Councillor Chris Millar (Deputy Chair);
Councillors Wendy Amos, Sandra Barnes, Jim Bass, Robin Brown, Richard Church, Stephen Clarke, Keith Davies, Bernard Ingram, Ken Melling, Paul Varnsvery, and Andrew Wilby and Mr David Dickinson

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Jane Hollis, Ben Smith, Andre Gonzales de Savage and John Townsend.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 DECEMBER 2008

Subject to the inclusion of Councillor Keith Davies as an attendee, the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee were signed by the Chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

4. MATTERS OF URGENCY

None.

5. AFFORDABLE HOUSING SPD

The Interim Head of the Joint Planning Unit submitted a report that set out a draft supplementary planning document on the provision of affordable housing in West Northamptonshire for public consultation. A supplementary planning document was intended to provide interim supplementary policy guidance based on the saved Local Plan Policies of the three districts of West Northamptonshire until the adoption of the Affordable Housing Development Plan document and Core Strategy. The Director of Planning and Regeneration noted that the references on page 18 in paragraphs 5.23 and 5.28 to “ten to fourteen dwellings” and “between four and fourteen units” needed to be removed and the wording amended accordingly.

David Dickinson commented that the reconciliation between this draft document and the WNDC document was very good. He noted that the Government was likely to introduce a number of new policies in the next few years. WNDC had included a statement in respect of planning obligations should the Government introduce new policies so that they were potentially encompassed by the document.

In answer to a question it was noted work had been undertaken in respect of the evidence base for a rural threshold starting at four dwellings.

Councillor Wendy Amos commented that the document needed to reflect the intermediate

situation, ie the economic downturn, as targets, for example for shared ownership now seemed questionable. The Director of Planning and Regeneration noted that cascade clauses would be needed in Section 106 Agreements to provide flexibility of provision having regard to viability.

It was also noted that a consultation programme would be undertaken and members would be advised of what would be involved through a briefing note.

The Chair observed that the draft document enshrined the district councils' existing policies in terms of 35% and 40% thresholds and that further consideration would need to be given as to what standard to adopt in the light of any up-dated housing needs evidence. This would be taken into account in any new development plan document.

RESOLVED: That the draft SPD on affordable housing be approved for public consultation for a six week period to commence as soon as possible.

6. RISK REGISTER

The Interim Head of the Joint Planning Unit submitted a report that set out the key risks to the work of the Committee at this time. In answer to a question it was noted that future reports would include all the then current risks and the covering report would draw attention to issues on an exception basis.

RESOLVED: That the risk register and the role of members in managing risk be noted.

7. CHARETTE

The Interim Head of the Joint Planning Unit commented that the term "charette" historically had been applied to architects' work and was used to describe an intensive period of considering a design solution within a tight timescale for a particular project. In the modern context the technique was used to brainstorm a problem on the basis that no single individual could know all the answers. It brought a wide range of people together. In this case attendees had come from each Council and the WNDC in the form of senior officers or specialist officers. The process had commenced on 20 January 2009 and was scheduled to end in the next two weeks. The results of the charette would be sent to members and thereafter used for engagement with all groups including landowners and developers.

The objective of the charette had been to gain a collective understanding of the process and to identify gaps in the knowledge or evidence base. Maps, discussion guides and feedback had been used and the results would contribute to the plan-making process in defining the planning role; the relationship with the region and sub-region; issues in respect of towns and villages; and infrastructure and transport. All the information gained would be written up and provided some answers but also raised further questions. Some discussion had taken place around strategic choices and givens, national policies in respect of key settlements, key directions of growth and rural areas.

In answer to a question from Councillor Chris Miller, the Interim Head of the Joint Planning Unit commented that the work of the charette fitted in to the planning timetable and the current timing was right with the document process. The current economic situation needed to be taken into account and flexibility needed to be built into the plan, which would have a life of twenty to thirty years. It was clear that new build was not proceeding at the rate originally anticipated.

The Director of Planning and Regeneration noted that the charette would help convince any

planning inspector that a robust process had been gone through. He also noted that whilst targets would not change, over time, the trajectory of delivery would alter to take account of the economic situation. During March or April work on the Vision, Objectives and Spatial Portrait would be brought to the Joint Committee and following in April and May would be the start of a debate for the growth around Northampton, Daventry, Towcester and Brackley. Agreed options would then be included in the preferred submission, probably in November 2009. Any delays would be reflected in the risk register, reported separately to the Joint Committee. In answer to a question the Director noted that a briefing note would be produced for Councillors for discussion within their authorities in respect of preferred options to allow advance warning of what was being discussed.

Councillor Richard Church noted that the process should not deliver merely a package of preferred options to Councillors but should lead members towards those options, ie members needed involvement in the criteria for urban extensions rather than just receiving a list of where they could be. It was noted that this was inherently part of the process.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

8. PROGRAMME MONITORING REPORT

The Interim Head of the Joint Planning Unit submitted a report that set out progress on the approved Local Development Scheme Programme and evidence based work streams to date and elaborated thereon.

In respect of the Northampton Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study in paragraph 1.14, the study would be published by the end of March. It was clarified that in the report to the previous meeting it had been stated that that the study would be completed by mid December 2008; this had been a reference to the completion of the first draft. This had been completed on time.

In respect of the Towcester and Brackley Landscape and Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Studies in paragraph 1.14, the study would be published by the end of April. It was clarified that in the report to the previous meeting it had been stated that that the study would be completed by mid December 2008; this had been a reference to the completion of the first draft of the report. This had been completed on time.

In respect of the West Northamptonshire Sports Facility Strategy in paragraph 1.15, it was noted that Sport England's concerns had been of a technical nature. It was now anticipated that the study would be completed by the end of April. Although later than anticipated this had no impact on the approved LDS milestones.

In respect of Pursuit of Evidence of Service Needs workstream in paragraph 1.16, it was noted that discussions had commenced with a variety of service providers including education and the PCT.

In respect of West Northamptonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment in paragraph 1.18, it was noted that the Level 1 report would be issued by the end of February. The procurement process for the Level 2 report for Northampton was now underway. The Level 2 reports for Daventry and South Northamptonshire had been sent to the Environment Agency for checking. In the report to the previous meeting it had been stated that the Level 1 report would be finalised in December 2008. This timescale had not been met as a result of delays in receiving comments from the Environment Agency.

In respect of the West Northamptonshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment, in paragraph 1.25 it was clarified that at the previous meeting some additional viability

assessment may be required and which might need to be commissioned early in 2009. This work would be needed for the Joint Core Strategy. This work was not required for the Affordable Housing SPD as this document provided interim supplementary policy guidance based on the Saved Adopted Local Plan Policies. The scope of the viability assessment work was being considered.

In answer to a question, the Interim Head of the Joint Planning Unit noted that discussions with utilities were underway in association with WNDC. This would feed into an infrastructure plan that would include costings and planning steps. Councillor Sandra Barnes noted particular problems at Silverstone in respect of utilities provision and noted that some villages throughout South Northamptonshire and Daventry were not on mains sewerage. David Dickinson requested that the Brown- field Land Assessment also be included in the evidence base.

The Chair enquired whether this information could be made available to members via an online library and it was noted that the JPU website was being reviewed with a view to making many of the documents referred to available.

RESOLVED: That the progress on the approved Local Development Scheme milestones and the evidence based work streams be noted.

9. REVIEW OF MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING; PROPOSED CHANGES

The Director of Planning and Regeneration submitted a report that set out a review of the Memorandum of Intent in the light of progress experienced and recent decisions of the Joint Strategic Planning Committee so as to bring it up to date. He drew particular attention to paragraphs 3.1, 3.3 and 3.5. It was noted that the Director of Planning and Regeneration at Northampton Borough Council would be the line manager for the Head of the Joint Planning Unit. It was also noted that a financial protocol was currently being drafted.

RESOLVED: (1) That the proposed changes to the Memorandum of Intent as set out in Appendix 1 of the report be recommended to the constituent local authorities for formal approval.

(2) That the Joint Planning Committee delegate to the Director of Planning and Regeneration at Northampton Borough Council in consultation with the Monitoring Officers of the constituent local authorities any necessary authority to make further and consequential future changes to the Memorandum of Intent prior to recommending those changes to the constituent authorities for formal adoption.

The meeting concluded at 19.05 hours.