

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Monday, 26 July 2010 at County Hall, Northampton

PRESENT: Councillor Chris Millar (Chair); Councillor Mary Clarke (Deputy Chair); Councillors Jim Bass, Sally Beardsworth, Robin Brown, Joy Capstick, Richard Church, Stephen Clarke, Deanna Eddon, Andre Gonzalez de Savage, Brian Hoare, Brian Markham, Chris Over, Colin Poole, John Townsend and Mr David Dickinson.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Wendy Amos and Tony Woods.

2. MINUTES

Subject to the third paragraph of minute 7 "The Northamptonshire Arc" being amended to read "The Arc could only be secondary to...", the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee held on 7 June 2010 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

4. MATTERS OF URGENCY

The Chair was of the opinion that the following item be discussed as a Matter of Urgency due to the undue delay if consideration of it were deferred:

Chair's Reply to a Petition Submitted by Mr Hawkins on 7 June 2010.

The Chair commented that the following reply was a holding response in the light of changing circumstances and that more detail would be available when a pre submission version of the Joint Core Strategy would be discussed by the Joint Committee at its meeting on 31 January 2011.

The Chair made the following statement:

"Partner Councils in their response to the RSS Review Consultation last year urged Government to reduce downwards the annualised housing targets set out in RSS8, as they had become plainly unachievable. The RSS figures themselves were clearly so high that they could not have been found "sound" under prescribed tests. Since then Officers of the Joint Planning Unit in conjunction with Partner Councils have been preparing a strategy for reduced housing numbers, which would represent a local perspective, reflect local circumstances and local knowledge of infrastructure capacity, and respond appropriately to local representations from the emergent Joint Core Strategy's consultation process.

The more recent announcements from the Government concerning their intention to revoke RSS8 are also material to a revised strategy that will need to be considered by the Joint Strategic Planning Committee, before being subject to a further round of consultation. Government advice is quite clear. Revocation of RSS8 is not a signal for Local Authorities to stop making plans for their areas. Indeed the express advice is to continue. Much of the evidence base prepared for the Joint Core Strategy will still be relevant, albeit the headline housing numbers will be substantially be reduced. There will, as a result, be a consequential

impact on other policy areas. To abandon plan making at this time would be unwise and pose a serious risk to all Partner Councils and their communities.

It is pleasing to note that Partner Councils will now be responsible for establishing the right level of local housing provision in their areas, and for identifying a long-term supply of housing land. This responsibility however, cannot be taken lightly and local housing figures will have to be justified with evidence and will be subject to scrutiny at an Examination.

The Partner Councils intend therefore, to proceed together to prepare a pre-submission version of the Joint Core Strategy which will then have a strong focus on local housing numbers, will signal to the development industry that the RSS figures have been substantially reduced downwards, and will be supported with evidence to reflect the housing needs of our local population.

Given the consequential work required of the Joint Planning Unit, a Pre-Submission version of the Joint Core Strategy will be ready for consideration at the 31 January 2011 Joint Planning Committee meeting and during the interim period Partner Councils will continue discussions as to how best to continue plan making into the future.”

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (IF ANY)

Dr Jane Doughty addressed the Joint Planning Committee and thanked the Officers for their responses to her queries. She noted that there had been more than 6,000 responses to the consultation. Dr Doughty expressed some surprise that the comments that she and her husband had made were not readily identifiable and she felt that it would have been useful to have had a quantitative analysis alongside the responses. She believed that only 4% of respondees supported the West Northamptonshire vision and only 2% the policy approach of growth. Dr Doughty noted that £70,000 had been spent on the consultation exercise excluding Officer time and that the Joint Committee needed to be smarter in consulting with the public; not everyone had access to e-mail. She noted that a recent edition of the County Council’s magazine had not included any mention of the consultation. Dr Doughty referred to the minutes of the last meeting of the Joint Committee and the reference to the Northamptonshire Arc and expressed concern at the idea of an “urban spine” through the county. People generally objected to urban spread. Dr Doughty welcomed the change in political landscape and the concept of the “Big Society” with people making their own decisions locally including planning policy. She presumed that all the partner Councils and the Joint Committee would want to embrace this new local agenda.

6. EMERGENT JOINT CORE STRATEGY- CONSULTATION RESPONSES SUMMARY

The Head of the Joint Planning Unit (JPU) submitted a report that requested that the Joint Committee formally receive and note the summaries of the responses that had been received to the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy consultation that had been held in 2009. This was a necessary procedural step in the preparation of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy. She noted that the Joint Committee had already agreed a Local Document Scheme that set out the timetable for the production of a Joint Core Strategy (JCS). The need for a JCS remained a statutory requirement; the Regulations and evidence base remained in place. In having regard to both the volume and content of the consultation responses the resulting JCS still needed to be a robust qualitative plan that was evidenced based.

The Emergent Joint Core Strategy had been published for public consultation for six weeks, but later extended to eight and a half weeks from 31 July 2009. The 30 March 2010 meeting of the Joint Committee had received a summary of the consultation methodology including details of how responses were made as well as a quantitative analysis of the responses to

individual questions. The methods of responding to the consultation had been by questionnaires, e-mail, online, recorded phone messages, exhibition feedback forms and faxes. Nearly 5,000 individuals and organisations had made over 6,000 responses comprising over 120,000 individual comments (representations). All these had been logged and acknowledged and all were available to view on the JPU website or at the JPU offices. The Head of the JPU noted that the quantitative analysis of the responses to the questions previously supplied and an executive summary could be added to the report if required. It was noted that no weighting was given to any particular strength of feeling whether in favour or against as every comment was equally valid.

The appendix to the report summarised all the comments that had been made on the Emergent Joint Core Strategy. Following this meeting all the respondees would be contacted to explain the next steps of the Plan preparation process including the consideration of the Pre Submission Joint Core Strategy on 31 January 2011. Counsel's advice had confirmed the approach adopted in reporting the consultation responses to the Joint Committee.

The Head of the JPU noted, that as reported to the Joint Committee previously, the bulk of responses had come from postcodes to the south, southeast and southwest of Northampton. There were large parts of Northampton and West Northamptonshire from which no responses had come. There had been a higher response rate to this consultation than to similar consultations elsewhere in the country.

The Chair noted that the JPU had been created in the first place to resolve the issue of Northampton needing to expand beyond its current boundaries. The proposal to provide 18,000 homes to the southeast of Northampton had attracted most of the objections.

Councillors noted that people often were uneasy with the term "growth". People generally wanted economic growth and the prosperity that it brought but this would create a demand for housing and would attract people to the area. It was always envisaged that two thirds of the planned growth was to meet local need caused by people living longer and the increase in single person households. This would be the case whatever else applied. Affordable housing would be an important part of housing provision and therefore some respondents negative comments about this were worrying in terms of their interpretation of what this meant.

The Chair drew specific attention to the Next Stages set out in paragraph 6 of the report.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the summaries of the responses that were received to the West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy consultation held in 2009 and set out in the appendix to the report, be formally received and noted.

The meeting concluded at 18.50 hours.