

ECONOMIC GROWTH, ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

7 SEPTEMBER 2020

PRESENT:

Councillors Leytham (Chairman), Ball (Vice-Chair), Warburton (Vice-Chair), Binney, D Ennis, Gwilt, Ho, Parton-Hughes, Ray, Robertson and S Wilcox.

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No.17 Councillors Eadie and Lax attended the meeting).

7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Marshall and A. Little.

8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests.

9 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were circulated and subject to the inclusion of the attending Cabinet members, were agreed as a correct record.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting be approved.

10 WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme for the Committee was circulated. It was noted that there had been a change of Chairman of the Committee since the last meeting and it was requested that the agreement to discuss possible joint working on the CIL Member Task Group with the Community, Housing & Health (Overview & Scrutiny) Committee Chairman be taken up. It was requested that an item be added to the work programme to consider the spend of the budget available mitigate the climate emergency. An update was given on the progress of the Events Policy and a special meeting may be required to consider it when ready.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted and updated as required.

11 PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE - PLANNING WHITE PAPER

The Committee received a report on the recently published government white paper called 'Planning for the future'. It was reported that the consultation document set out the government's proposals to reform the planning system in England with a range of proposals designed to 'streamline and modernise the planning process, improve outcomes on design and sustainability, reform developer contributions and ensure more land is available for development where it is needed'. It was reported that the proposals related to plan-making, the determination of planning applications (decision-making), design of development and developer contributions. It was noted that the consultation period would end on the 29 October 2020 and the views of the Committee would be part of the District Council representation as approved by Cabinet.

The Committee discussed many aspects of the White Paper and agreed that overall, a simplification of the process was beneficial however there was a significant lack of detail.

It was reported that the proposals were to simplify the Local Plan process and denoting three areas, Growth, Renewal and Protected as well as make producing Local Plans easier and quicker than current. The Committee did not agree with the concept of zones and the idea of zones within other zones unless standards on quality and affordability were in law. Members also thought that the standardisation of calculating housing need would not work as the needs of a seaside town would differ greatly to those of a major city for example.

The proposals also envisioned a change in developer contributions and whether they should be a universal rate or area specific. The Committee felt that any national levy should be robust and of a similar if not more amount than currently received as a lack of supporting infrastructure is a constant concern following development. It was questioned whether the levy could be used as an incentive to encourage commencement of development and charge more if not started within a set time as it was recognised as a current issue. There were views however that it may help give a more even split of contributions across all areas of the district.

Design was reported as another aspect of the White Paper and a proposal for a national design guide. It was felt that this could lead to a loss in the quality in development as well as a drop in the standard and number of affordable housing. It was also requested that representations state that there should be a clear definition of affordable housing that it should be based on income not value of the property.

It was reported that the Development Management aspects of the proposals would require new IT systems and may need a change in resources which would be unknown until requirements to deliver the new ways of working were known. There would be training requirements and naturally some glitches until everything settled. It was noted that there would also be implications for Building Control.

There were further concerns that the proposals were a move to centralise the system and be a threat to localism.

It was felt that there would be a great environmental impact of the proposals including traffic if local decision making was lost. It was also noted that there could be an impact on the agreed and approved neighbourhood plans.

There were views expressed that the proposal were fully supported and welcomed as it was clear that there was not enough development to meet demand and there was a need to speed up the process to tackle this. Performance targets were also welcomed by some Members.

It was asked how residents who petition against development would be able to have their objections considered under the proposals.

It was agreed for Members to submit their views in full to the Overview & Scrutiny Officer to be passed to the Spatial Policy team for inclusion in the final response to the consultation.

RESOLVED: That the views of the Committee be taken and included in the Council's response to the Planning for the Future White Paper.

12 STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Committee received a report on the temporary legislative changes in light of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and the need to review and update the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). It was reported that in respect of local plans the legislative amendments primarily involved changes to face to face interactions to be consistent with the latest guidance on social distancing, the need for the physical placing of consultation

documents for physical inspection becoming a non-statutory requirement, and the encouragement through guidance on increased innovative and creative online interaction being undertaken instead of physical meetings. It was reported that the council would seek to engage with groups. It was also reported that the approach taken would be kept under review.

The Committee welcomed the measures proposed and suggested further ideas including writing to all residents however it was noted that this would require a great amount of resources and cost. There was a further suggestion that mailshots be used in areas where there is a lower digital uptake as not all have access to the internet. It was noted that there had been success experienced in getting vital information to residents via stickers to waste/recycling bins and this could be done on a targeting basis.

The Committee also suggested communicating with schools and sixth forms as local planning would affect pupils in their later lives.

Some Members felt that the priority was to listen to residents when they have tried to engage especially by petition.

It was noted that the more traditional means of engagement would not be ruled out but due to the Covid-19 pandemic would have to be secure and safe for those attending.

Social media was discussed and it was noted that around 92% of UK adults have a Facebook profile but a big issue is whether people are contacting the Council when they need to so access may not be the problem but more educating on when they should.

RESOLVED: (1) That the changes made in the updated SCI in line with the temporary legislation relation to Coronavirus (Covid-19), the associated Explanatory Memorandum to the Town and Country Planning Regulations and the updated government guidance) and adoption statement be noted; and

(2) That the request to delegate authority to allow further minor changes to comply with statutory requirements to the SCI to be undertaken by the Head of Economic Growth & Development in consultation with the Cabinet member for Visitor Economy & Local Plan be noted.

13 LOCAL PLAN REVIEW UPDATE

The Committee received a report updating them on progress of the Local Plan Review and the next steps in the process. It was suggested that future reports when they are only to note progress, be submitted as briefing papers rather than reports and this was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the update on progress of the local plan evidence base and the relevant steps being taken to prepare the regulation 19 publication version of the Local Plan be noted.

(The Meeting closed at 7.40 pm)

CHAIRMAN