

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

26 JANUARY 2021

PRESENT:

Councillors Leytham (Chairman), Ball (Vice-Chair), Warburton (Vice-Chair), Binney, D Ennis, Gwilt, A Little, Marshall, Parton-Hughes, Ray and Robertson.

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

17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ho and S. Wilcox

18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests.

19 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were circulated and agreed as a correct record.

20 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the work programme and it was agreed to remove items on the LEP's and Lichfield BID. It was asked if the Committee could receive an update on the Planning White Paper and it was reported that it would be some time before there was word from central government on this matter. Thanks was given for the distributed Climate Change briefing paper and it was asked if the remit of the item could be widened to the district as a whole and not just the Council. It was also asked if there could be a review of the Taxi Policy especially regarding climate change and the use of electric vehicles and it was noted that this could be discussed with Officers however this may be for the Regulatory & Licensing Committee to consider.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted and amended where agreed.

21 LOCAL PLAN REVIEW 2040 PUBLICATION (REGULATION 19) CONSULTATION

The Committee received a report updating them on the progress of the preparation of the Local Plan 2040 and seeking their views before consideration at Cabinet and then public consultation. It was noted that there had been three previous consultations with residents and interested parties. The document before this committee was a draft version and would be further updated for cabinet, but that this stage of the plan was intended if approved to be the settled view of the council and the last version to be consulted on before an examination. It was reported that it had taken a number of years of work to get to this point and all Officers current and who had since moved on, were thanked for all their efforts and input.

It was reported that the housing target shown in the plan was considered to be the minimum required at this time and made up of two parts. These parts were the local housing number, a fixed formula set out by government and then an additional duty to cooperate provision to help meet the needs of other housing areas in accordance with the NPPF. The target included a

buffer in case any sites did not come forward in the time period of the plan. It was reported that the target would be met by existing approved housing applications and four Strategic sites which were North East Lichfield, Fazeley, Whittington and Fradley. It was reported that these allocations had been chosen as they were extensions to existing settlements, Green Belt take up would only be in the region of 9% and because they would provide for housing growth and much needed infrastructure growth to the areas. The proposals would seek to deliver housing types based on need and to deliver on affordable housing.

It was reported that the government had advised Councils to continue to proceed with Local Plans and it was felt this was the better option than wait for any result of the Planning White Paper and the unknown that that could bring. This point was considered by the Committee and a councillor stated his views that this was not the right approach and a delay would be more beneficial and to follow the process laid out in the new rules when introduced. It was reported by the councillor that other Councils had taken this approach and had challenged the government's advice to carry on the process to get a Local Plan now. He felt that the final Green Belt review going forward hadn't been taken into account and to ignore this was in essence rushing. It was felt that as consultation would be difficult due to the pandemic restrictions and because of the Election purdah period that this was another reason to delay the whole process. While this was discussed, others on the Committee felt differently and that it could be worse to delay the process and have to provide more housing anticipated in the white paper.

The settlement at Fazeley was discussed and it was noted that there had been a large number of representations and objections received from residents as well as from the Parish Council and neighbouring Tamworth Borough Council. Some felt that these views had been ignored but the Cabinet Member assured that they had not and agreed to meet with Ward Councillors and a Member of Fazeley Town Council to address the concerns. Concerns had also been raised that the proposals would mean a complete loss of greenbelt in the area. In response, it was reported that the development of the area was planned for the later part of the plan period so if other sites came forward then this could reduce the numbers required in Fazeley.

The proposal called Whitemoor Village proposed by Tarmac for their quarry site and which Members had received recent correspondence on from the company was also discussed. Some asked if this proposal could be included and then this could reduce the housing numbers at Fazeley. In response, it was reported that the site was not considered to be an urban extension but a new settlement and was neither as sequentially preferable as the sites allocated in the plan, or as deliverable as yet, given the ongoing quarry extraction and conditions on the consent, but it could be considered in the next Local Plan review. Some Committee Members still felt it could be included in the Plan as an option even if not delivered in time. There were further concerns that the Transport modelling had not been completed around Fazeley and there would be a significant traffic impact in the area especially with traffic at peak times also going to Drayton Manor. It was requested that any modelling be completed when out of the Covid-19 situation to give a truer picture out of lockdowns.

It was agreed that infrastructure was needed in in the District including in Fazeley, however, there was scepticism from some Members that this would be delivered when needed which was before development and not after. It was felt that many developers were not held to account in doing this. It was noted that proposals may be more acceptable for residents if they could see these improvements. In response, the Committee was advised that delivery of infrastructure was more likely with larger sites due to the better economy of scale rather than lots of small applications where small developers may not make the margins required to deliver major improvements. It was felt that local rail transport should be prioritised as this would help take vehicles off the road. It was reported that the Council, with other neighbouring Authorities were working with Highways England and other organisations to improve the highway network and public transport for the District. This also included the cycle network which was also considered very important by the Committee.

Commercial infrastructure was discussed and there was concern that with the loss of retail and factories in the area, more and more people were living only in the district and travelling out for work.

Affordable Housing was considered and the Committee were pleased to see the proposals as it would be of benefit to the area. It was requested that the 20% definitely be a minimum requirement and no negotiations below this amount be allowed by developers. The provision of rental properties in the district was also discussed as it was felt there was a shortage in the district. A Member felt there could be greater mention in the plan and it was noted that Policy H1 did cover this matter and would be supported by evidence of need.

There were concerns regarding central government's green energy strategy as it could be deemed as industrialising the countryside with such things as photovoltaic farms and anaerobic digesters. Concern was expressed at the impact these proposals could have on the roads around such sites adding to the problem. It was confirmed in response that the Plan set out the priority for the use of Brownfield sites for photovoltaic farms and not prime agricultural land. It was also reported that Planning Officers needed to consider a number of aspects including biodiversity with any such application.

Members were pleased to note provision had been included in the draft Plan for a Traveller site as it was a known need in the area.

The plans proposals for Burntwood were discussed. Support from members was indicated for the inclusion of the proposed Burntwood Area Action Plan. Some Members requested it be started sooner rather than later to ensure development does not take over and creep up from plan provision. In response, the committee were advised it would be produced immediately after the adoption of the Local Plan. The Committee agreed with this approach. It was reported that Local Plans were subject to reviews with the next one scheduled in five years, and future housing requirements would, by then, be under different methodology to the current plan.

Some concern was expressed that some evidence to support the Local Plan remained incomplete. In response, it was noted and agreed that the Local Plan Sub Committee would continue to meet to consider all data prior to consultation on the plan and the plan would be brought back to Cabinet in the unlikely event that significant new evidence came to light requiring Cabinet review of the plan.

It was asked if the Secretary of State could overrule any part of the Plan to grant permission for an application as this had happened before and it was confirmed that they did have that power.

It was requested that the full Cabinet should agree the dates and strategy for the consultation, make any changes to the appearance, format and text of the Local Plan 2040 publication document or the supporting documents prior to consultation in the interests of clarity and accuracy and no delegation be given to ensure full transparency and accountability to the public.

RESOLVED: 1) That the Local Plan 2040 publication document and accompanying policy maps for the purposes of public consultation with dates for public consultation yet to be decided due to current restrictions around Covid-19 and submission for Examination in Public thereafter. Consultation will take place as soon as is practicably possible in the spring, taking into account ongoing restrictions due to Covid-19 be noted; and

2) That the Local Plan 2040 publication document will be brought back before Cabinet if future evidence indicates the need for significant changes to the Local Plan 2040 publication document for further detailed consideration by members be noted.

22 CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) RECOVERY PLAN SCRUTINY

The Committee received a report on the Council's Covid-19 Recovery Plan updating them on the activity and ongoing issues around recovery and provide a narrative regarding the progress and achievements against the plan developed and issued in May 2020. It was reported that whilst this had been a significant body of work, the longer term impacts of the pandemic on both the authority and the district as a whole were yet to be fully quantified.

The recovery plan was split into four areas of focus; maintaining key services; helping those in need; supporting our businesses and keeping you informed and to support scrutiny of the plan, and due to its broad and overlapping nature, each committee dealt with relevant topics and areas under their remit.

The Leader of the Council answered questions and advised on matters raised.

It was reported that there were many social and working men's clubs that were not eligible for the Government's Wet Led Pubs Grant and this was affecting many establishments in the District which relied on that type of drinks sales to operate. It was reported that Councillors D. Ennis and Robertson had written to many of those organisations to make contact and see what else could be done to get them the much needed support. It was also reported that they had contacted the Leader of the Council regarding this concern and to see if the District Council could also help. It was reported that it had been challenging to distribute grants given the criteria imposed by government, even when discretionary, and associated guidance was at times released at the same time if not after the announcement. It was also reported that there would be an update to the scheme and it was hoped that these establishments would be incorporated. It was noted that it may be difficult to make contact with pubs and clubs with no staff on premises during closure and so local knowledge of Ward Members may be vital. This was deemed especially important as it was noted that the Wet Led Pub Grant had only been taken up by 14 premises across the district.

The Committee wished to express their thanks to all the Officers involved in distributing grants especially in the knowledge that it was a small team from a cross section of service areas in the Council. It was noted that priorities had been reconsidered to ensure this task was undertaken as effectively as possible. It was noted that the feedback from organisations in the grant process had been very positive.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Councillor D. Ennis declared a personal interest as the volunteer treasurer for Grangemoor Working Men's Club

(The Meeting closed at 8.41 pm)

CHAIRMAN