



**Sustainable Development Panel**

**16:00 to 17:50**

**28 February 2023**

Present: Councillors Stonard (chair) Hampton (vice chair), Carlo, Grahame, Kendrick (substitute for Councillor Giles), Oliver and Osborn

Apologies: Councillors Giles, Lubbock and Padda

**1. Declarations of Interest**

None.

**2. Minutes**

**RESOLVED** to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2023.

**3. Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill – Reforms to National Planning Policy Consultation**

The senior planner (report author) introduced the report and, as members' views were being sought on the proposed consultation responses to the government's proposals to reform national planning policy, focused on the Appendix 1, Council's Response to the Consultation. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), National Development Management Policies and abolition of duty to cooperate and its replacement with "alignment policy" would be subject to further consultation at a later date when further details were available.

During consideration of Appendix 1, the senior planner, together with the planning policy team leader and planner, answered members' questions.

***Reforming the 5-year housing land supply***

The panel considered the draft council response in respect of this section. During discussion, members agreed that a buffer should not be included in the calculation of the 5-year housing land supply.

Members asked whether the changes proposed by the government would impact on the Greater Norwich Development Plan. The planning policy team leader referred members to paragraph 13 of the report which addressed this issue.

### ***Boosting the Status of Neighbourhood Plans***

The panel agreed that Neighbourhood Plans should be increased from two to five years and aligned with other local plans.

### ***Planning for Housing***

During discussion a member expressed concern about the methodology for the prediction of housing needs and provision, which tended to be housing for marketing. She considered that there needed to be more state aid to support social housing and a land value tax to prevent speculative development.

The chair suggested that the response should include the need for more state aid and that some members considered the introduction of a land value tax to prevent speculative development.

### ***Introducing new flexibilities to meeting housing needs***

The senior planner referred to the proposed responses to questions 11 and 12. Members agreed with these responses and that the government would need to provide clarity on evidence required to support a Local Plan.

It was noted that the council was not a city affected by urban uplift and members agreed that it was not appropriate to comment on questions 13 to 15.

### ***Enabling communities with plans already in the system to benefit from changes***

The panel was advised that the response to question 16 needed to be expanded to include a comment similar to that which Broadland District Council and South Norfolk Council had included in their response about Nutrient Neutrality. This should include a comment about how Nutrient Neutrality has caused disruption to house building and granting of planning permission for new developments. Time would need to be allowed for this recovered and transitional arrangements should suspend the 5-year housing land supply calculation for 3 years from 23 March 2022.

The council was not responding to question 17.

### ***Taking account of permissions granted in the Housing Delivery Test***

Members agreed that local authorities should not be penalised if developments were not built out.

In reply to a member's question, the senior planner explained the proposal to provide a 15 per cent contingency for under-delivery. The planner referred to the current 5-year land supply and said that it could not be certain that 100 per cent of the houses permitted would be delivered. The member considered 15 per cent contingency as excessive and considered that it should be reviewed every 10 years based on evidence.

The panel therefore supported that the response to question 19 be amended to include the need for review based on evidence and data in terms of the contingency percentage.

### **More homes for social rent / More older people's housing**

The panel considered the responses to questions 22 and 23 together. The panel noted that it was important that tenure was based on up-to-date evidence in the local development plan. During discussion, members were advised that the housing need assessment had been conducted for the Greater Norwich Local Plan by consultants using an agreed methodology, and that this determined the requirement for affordable or social housing.

Members noted that the council did not agree to the proposal to amend the definition of affordable housing for rent and that affordable housing should be provided by registered providers or charities to ensure that it remained affordable in perpetuity (proposed response to question 26). A member pointed out that it should be easier for community groups to become registered providers. Discussion ensued in which it was suggested that there needed clarification on this to include charities. A member also suggested that cohousing units and housing co-operatives could provide accommodation at social rent and should be encouraged. The senior planner agreed to amend the wording to this response to reflect that the council considers that the process to become a registered provider and charity should be easier.

The panel considered the response to question 23 and that the provision of older people housing should be evidence based. It was noted that a target should not be set whilst younger people were unable to access housing.

### **More community-led developments**

(Question 26 had been discussed above.)

The panel noted that the council was not responding to questions 27 and 28 as there were no exceptional sites within the city council area and was more relevant for rural areas.

The senior planner commented on the proposed responses to questions 30 and 31. There needed to be further guidance from the government as taking into account an applicant's history could result in local planning authority's losing control of planning as applications would end up being determined at appeal. Members approved the draft response to question 30 and considered that it was worth asking for further guidance.

### **More build out**

The panel agreed with the proposed response to question 32. During discussion a members agreed that the government should provide more guidance and clarity on a national process and address the unintended consequences that might deter developers, such as not developing sites in certain areas because of the local planning process.

## Beauty and ugliness

The panel considered the draft responses to questions 33 and 34. It was considered that “beauty and ugliness” were subjective and that the emphasis should be on place making, enhancing the environment, climate resilient, decarbonising and having connectivity and meaningful local community and stakeholder involvement. The senior planner said that a Mansard roof was not appropriate for many places in Norwich. Members also noted that the Lasdun Building, University of East Anglia (UEA) was considered to be “ugly” and Brutalist but was a listed building. The senior planner said that the UEA was a good example of a building that some may consider beautiful whilst others might consider it to be ugly.

Discussion ensued in which a member suggested that the idea of beauty must fit in with what already existed and went beyond subjectivity – it was what people were used to and bound the community together. The senior planner said that design codes could help define beauty in Norwich and provide guidance on how a new development would fit in with its surroundings. Discussion ensued, in which a member suggested that the government was putting aesthetic over all other considerations. Members considered that the government’s definition of “beauty” was not that of Roger Scruton’s *On Building Beauty* and meaningful placemaking.

## Delivering biodiversity net gain and local nature recovery

The senior planner presented the draft response for question 37 pointing out that the use of artificial grass should be discouraged and that the focus should be on the planting of native species trees. A member suggested that the government should ban the use of artificial grass in gardens as most people were law abiding and it would have significant benefits to the environment. The senior planner said that the use of artificial grass in gardens would not be subject to planning permission. Major developments did not provide turf and therefore the prevention of using artificial grass could not be enforced through landscaping conditions. Members considered that the response should be strengthened to include boundary treatments as fencing panels and concrete posts did not allow wildlife such as hedgehogs access and that there needed to be a link between green spaces. Hedges were important for biodiversity and providing a food source. The provision of birdboxes were no use if there were no food nearby. Members also objected to the use of slate in gardens. The senior planner noted the members comments but pointed out a members suggestion that residents had access to green spaces might go beyond the context of the question.

## Recognising the food production value of farmland

Members commented on the responses to questions 38 and 39 and considered that farmland should be protected unless “in exceptional circumstances” as the ability to produce food was really important. Discussion ensued on the need to protect farmland but also to provide energy through solar power or wind turbines and whether it was possible to achieve both. A member said that he could provide links to briefings on solar power and land use to the officers outside the meeting<sup>1</sup>. There

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.carbonbrief.org/factcheck-is-solar-power-a-threat-to-uk-farmland/>

was potential to provide both large energy production and produce food. Members commented that solar power could be provided in hedgerows and other “unproductive” land and that there was an element of NIMBYism from residents objecting to the large-scale energy projects.

### **Climate change mitigation: exploring a form of carbon assessment**

A member expressed her concern about recent development across the county that were dependent on new road creation. Communities should be sustainable and should be designed around public transport rather than roads and the private car. The senior planner said that the covering email would be amended to include comments on sustainable development and transport. It was noted that East Norwich was an example of sustainable development in an urban area with good cycle, pedestrian and public transport links.

The senior planner confirmed that emissions from demolition for development on brownfield sites would be added to the response to question 39.

### **Onshore wind and energy efficiency**

The panel considered the draft response to questions 41 and 42. A member suggested that wind turbines of 30m in height could be used in an urban setting. During discussion a member said that electricity pylons were tolerated so did not understand why wind turbines were considered any different as there was a need for energy. Another member pointed out that pylons tended to be used in rural setting and that in built up areas there was less wind which would impact on the effectiveness of turbines. Members also considered that there could be noise from the turbines but did not have a specific view on this.

### **Climate adaptation and flood-risk management**

The panel considered the response to question 40 and considered that it should include a cross reference to the stance of Natural England. Following discussion members noted areas were not self-sufficient and required water from other areas in the UK. Members also considered the need to raise the Future Homes Standard for new homes to be 100 per cent renewable energy rather than driving this agenda through local plans and subject to national and local politics. It was suggested that comments could be made in the covering email.

### **Barriers to Energy Efficiency**

The panel considered the draft response to question 44 and discussed the balance of historic buildings and the importance of retrofitting buildings to decarbonise. Members considered that there were very few buildings that could not be retrofitted with some measures and that some weight could be given to heritage buildings in exceptional circumstances on a case-by-case basis. It was difficult to balance the need for energy efficient buildings and bespoke retrofitting of heritage assets, that people cherish and wish to preserve for future generations. Members noted that

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<https://solarenergyuk.org/news/solar-energy-uk-statement-on-solar-farms-and-land-use/>

there were measures that could be used to retrofit properties in conservation areas, such as preserving the façade. Members agreed that significant weight should be made to energy efficient retrofitting of heritage assets and that it should be done in a fit and appropriate manner.

The panel then considered the definition of heritage assets and were advised that the definition was set out in the National Planning Policy Framework definition but included listed buildings, conservation areas, local listed buildings. Members noted that local councillors could call-in applications for retrofitting to the planning applications committee if they were concerned, for instance if timber windows were being replaced with PVC in a conservation area.

The panel noted that questions 45 to 48 referred to transitional arrangements and there was no need for discussion.

### **National Development Management Policies**

Members noted that the introduction of National Development Management Policies was a major change and that there would be more information in due course.

A member suggested that the response to question 52 be amended to remove reference to “low carbon emissions”. Gas had lower carbon emissions than coal but should not be encouraged in favour of renewable energy. The senior planner agreed to make this amendment.

### **Enabling Levelling Up / Levelling up and boosting economic growth**

The panel considered questions 53 to 56 and the draft responses. Members noted the reference to the Article 4 Direction required to manage the office accommodation conversions. Members also noted that such development could lead to unsustainable development. Members noted that East Norwich was an example of a new development within an easy walking distance from services and facilities, and bus services to the university etc. A member said that there needed to be funding to improve public transport and provide electric vehicles.

The panel noted that question 53 was included in the covering email.

### **Levelling up and boosting pride in places**

Members noted that the council had no comments to make on questions 56 to 57.

### **RESOLVED to:**

- (1) approve the response to the consultation, subject to amendment to reflect the comments of the panel;
- (2) note that officers will submit the amended response to the government by the end of the consultation period (2 March 2023);
- (3) ask that a copy of the consultation response is appended to the minutes of this meeting.

CHAIR