

**Sustainable development panel****10:00 to 12:45****28 January 2015**

Present: Councillors Stonard (chair), Ackroyd, Boglein, Boswell, Bremner, Herries and Jackson

Apologies: Councillor Sands (M) (vice chair)

**1. Declaration of interests**

Councillor Jackson declared an other interest in item 4 (below) Planning update because of the impact proposals would have on landscape architecture.

**2. Minutes**

**RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2014.

**3. Norwich City Council new build and Passivhaus**

The senior housing development officer (enabling) gave a power point presentation and presented the report, and together with the executive head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods and the strategic housing manager, referred to the report and answered members' questions. (A copy of the presentation is available on the council's website.)

During discussion members welcomed the report and asked for further reports as Passivhaus schemes were developed. Members considered that it would be useful to have an analysis of the costs of a Passivhaus building over its lifetime for comparison with other builds. The capital cost of constructing to Passivhaus standard was higher than for Code for Sustainable Homes level 4 but there would be savings in running costs over the lifetime of the building. Members also noted that capital costs were coming down as more Passivhaus buildings were constructed in the UK. The council wanted to provide as many new houses as possible and reduce its carbon footprint, which involved improving its existing housing stock. The housing revenue account (HRA) business plan included financial modelling for the next 30 years. Part of the capital plan was fed by the revenue. Hastoe Housing Association had reported positive housing management benefits in that there had been a drop in rent arrears from its tenants in Passivhaus dwellings.

Discussion also ensued on educating tenants of Passivhaus dwellings on the behavioural change required for the building to operate efficiently. This included not being able to open windows on a hot day. Hastoe Housing Association provided training and support for its tenants.

Members of the panel considered it would be useful to visit existing Passivhaus dwellings to see how the technology works for themselves

In reply to a member's question, the executive head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods said that Passivhaus technology had been explored with the Clinical Commissioning Group as part of the Healthy Norwich initiative. However the benefits of reducing fuel poverty and the impact on health outcomes would require long-term investment and not be realised for decades which was difficult for a partner facing other priorities.

**RESOLVED to:**

- (1) note the progress of the council's approach to Passivhaus technology to date and ask officers to provide regular reports to the panel as the project progresses and to include analytical data of comparative costs of Passivhaus houses and standard houses over the lifetime of the buildings;
- (2) ask the officers to arrange for the panel to visit a Passivhaus scheme in the area.

#### **4. Planning update**

The head of planning services presented the first part of the report and referred to the government consultations and answered members' questions.

Detailed discussion ensued on the government's consultation on *Stepping onto the property ladder* and members concurred with the approach set out in the report. Members expressed concern about the impact of the government's proposal would have on the planning process and its ability to deliver the supply of housing as a planned and coherent process. The government rationale to boost the supply of homes by using employment land sites where land costs were less expensive did not fit with the National planning policy framework (NPPF) and a plan led approach. The panel considered it was difficult to challenge the principle of home ownership as it was part of the national culture although it was noted that, unlike in the rest of Europe where renting was the norm, the British economy was susceptible to fluctuations in the housing market.

The head of planning services said that some authorities had made the decision to not respond to the government's consultations on planning issues. The council's approach was to continue to do so as the panel had previously requested this to happen. The panel agreed that it was good use of officer time and that the council should continue to respond to consultations.

The planning team leader (policy) presented the section of the report on the national policy changes relating to sustainable drainage systems (SUDS) and, together with

the head of planning services, answered members' questions. Members were particularly concerned about the negotiations with the county council and the need for the city council to have access to technical expertise which was currently held by the county council as the lead local flood authority. The move would also place a burden on developers and local planning authorities. Members noted that because of the changes to national policy, policy DM5 would no longer apply to developments with fewer than 10 houses outside the critical drainage catchments and there was concern about the cumulative effect of these developments on surface water flooding.

The policy planning team leader (projects) presented the section of the report on the Wensum strategy and together with the head of planning services answered members' questions.

During discussion members welcomed early involvement in the development of the strategy by ward councillors and other stakeholders. Members were asked to advise officers of potential stakeholders who would be interested in the project. Members looked forward to opening up the river walk and suggested potential initiatives such as river taxis connecting new developments downstream with the city centre and the railway station; providing a pontoon for river users at New Mills, and the potential to harnessing river power at New Mills. One member suggested that there should be purpose built mooring for house boats on the river. Members agreed that the river was part of city life and its use and vitality should be enhanced.

**RESOLVED to:**

- (1) ask the head of planning services to:
  - (a) respond to the government consultation on *Stepping onto the property ladder* by sending a letter objecting in principle to the proposals and setting out an alternative way in which the provision of starter homes may be promoted to increase the supply of low cost market homes where this would meet local needs (as set out in paragraph 30 of the report); and,
  - (b) circulate a copy of the letter to members of the panel for information;
- (2) confirm that it is good use of officer time to respond to government planning consultations on behalf of the council;
- (3) ask the planning team leader (projects) to contact the owners of New Mills to invite them to participate as stakeholders in the consultation and development of the Wensum Strategy;
- (4) note the remainder of the report.

## **5. Greater Norwich sports facilities strategies**

The planning team leader (policy) presented the report and, together with the head of planning services, answered members' questions.

During discussion members noted that council had agreed its site allocation plan before the Greater Norwich sports facilities strategies had been developed. Members noted the conclusions of the strategy and concurred that it was important to retain and enhance sports facilities, and ensure that there was community access, particularly in the city centre. The need for improvements to the Hewett School's swimming pool and its strategic importance was also noted. Members noted that the loss of the Wensum Sports Centre, unless alternatives could be found, was considered to be regrettable.

**RESOLVED** to note that the Greater Norwich Growth Board (GNGB) Infrastructure Delivery Board has:

- (1) signed off the Greater Norwich Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plans and the Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy and Action Plans and their supporting Needs Assessments as material considerations in making planning decisions and as part of the evidence base for local plan making;
- (2) agreed to ongoing monitoring, managing, updating and implementation of the strategies, action plans and needs assessments, to be coordinated through the existing stakeholder group.

## **6. Environmental strategy**

The executive head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods presented the report, referred to the consultation responses and said that annex B was the final draft of the strategy. The environmental strategy was subject to approval by the cabinet at its meeting on 4 February 2015. The scrutiny committee was also considering the strategy at its meeting on 29 January 2015. Members noted that the target for CO2 emissions for the local area had been set at 2.4% in the emerging corporate plan and should be amended in the draft environmental strategy.

The panel considered that it would be sensible not to replicate comments on the same areas of the report as the scrutiny committee. The panel considered that it would comment on the consultation and process.

Discussion ensued in which the head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods, together with the environmental strategy manager answered members' questions. The consultation had received 23 comments which had been of a high standard. The environmental strategy was essentially an internal document and the consultation had been targeted to a number of organisations and the press. The council was looking at improving access to its consultations and was piloting the use of text messaging. Public interest was more likely to be in the action plan than the strategy itself. A member pointed out that a low number of responses for such a

technical document was to be expected and that it was important to receive comments from groups who were experienced and interested in the subject.

Further discussion ensued on engagement and it was noted that consultation responses which were service specific had been passed on to the relevant service area to be followed up. Members referred to workshops as a way of developing the strategy and taking the action plan forward. The consultation should aim to encourage more responses from the public. The panel considered that the council should explore opportunities for co-designing and co-developing the action plan and future strategy development with stakeholders and the public.

The panel discussed the foreword to the strategy. There was general discussion about whether elements of the Norwich area transportation strategy (NATS) conflicted with the council's environmental strategy. Members agreed to disagree on whether the Northern distributor road (NDR) and the multi-storey car park at Rose Lane/Mountergate conflicted with the environmental strategy. The NATS had achieved the removal of traffic from the city centre and achieved outcomes of improving air quality in the city centre and promoted sustainable transport, walking and cycling in the city. Local authorities needed to make step changes to improve the environment, whilst also ensuring that the housing, jobs and infrastructure that local people wanted was delivered. Members had been disappointed and surprised at the local residents' opposition to the proposal to close Park Lane, as part of the Push the Pedalways consultation, and had to accede to public pressure and amend the scheme.

During discussion members of the panel considered that CO2 usage in the local area should be broken down into sectors ie transport, city council, housing and businesses, etc. The executive head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods said that there was potential to explore this suggestion with the University of East Anglia and the Tyndall Centre, as a research project.

In reply to a member's suggestion, the executive head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods said that he did not consider it necessary to align the expiry date of the environmental strategy with the corporate plan. The corporate plan was refreshed on an annual basis.

Consideration was given to the council's key environmental priorities. The head of planning services said that cycle use was monitored by the Department of Transport and that because of the Cycle Ambition grant the council was expected to exceed the target. The environmental strategy manager said that the environmental strategy would need to be amended where the council, as a district council, could not set the carbon reduction targets

**RESOLVED** to:

- (1) endorse the environmental strategy and recommend it to cabinet for approval;

- (2) recommend to cabinet that it asks the environmental strategy manager to:
  - (a) investigate a way to work with the University of East Anglia and the Tyndall Centre to further break down carbon usage data;
  - (b) look at opportunities for co-designing and co-developing the taking forward of the action programme and future strategy development with stakeholders and the public.

CHAIR