



Sustainable Development Panel

16:00 to 17:40

16 November 2021

Present: Councillors Stonard (chair), Giles (vice chair), Carlo, Everett, Grahame, Lubbock, Maxwell and Oliver

Apologies: Councillor Davis

1. Declarations of interest

There were none.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021.

(The draft minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2021 were circulated and would be considered for approval at the next meeting.)

3. Local Development Scheme November 2021

The planner presented the report.

The chair commented on the report and said that it was an important document to demonstrate the hard work that was going on. He also commented that there was still uncertainty about the government's changes to the planning policy and whether it will implement changes to policies that have been subject to consultation.

During discussion the planner, together with the head of planning and regulatory services and members of the planning policy team, referred to the report and answered questions. Members were advised that the establishment of a neighbourhood forum was a lengthy process. An application needed to be made; the forum established; and a neighbourhood plan adopted. The panel noted that the brownfield register was available on the council's website and provided a tool for developers to identify sites where the council wanted development to take place. The production of the register was a legal obligation. The council had access to the Towns Deal funding so could intervene if appropriate to make a positive contribution to bring sites forward for development. The King's Arms, Mile Cross Road, had been an example of a site to be developed for social housing under this scheme.

In reply to a members' question, the planner said that the Local Development Scheme (LDS) was a work programme which identified which local development planning documents would be produced, in what order and when. The public

examination of the Greater Norwich Development Plan (GNDP) in early 2022 would test that development was sustainable and complied with legislation. A member said that she considered that because of the climate and environment emergency, the aspiration in the GNDP should be for new homes of energy efficiency A rather than settling for C and provide more than 10 to 20 per cent renewable energy. The chair said that the members' comments had been noted and would be shared with the Greater Norwich Development Partnership (GNDP's) partners. Members were advised that the review of localised development management policies and guidance would follow the public inquiry. Members noted that the annual monitoring report (AMR) monitored local plan policies, which could result in policy change. A member commented that rising temperatures would lead to greater flood risk and was advised that the policies would be monitored through the AMR. The panel had last reviewed the LDS in February 2021 and reviewed it fairly frequently so had the opportunity to ensure that documents were produced according to the scheme. The panel also noted that the LDS would be reviewed again next year to incorporate into the work programme changes to planning documents in response to any changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and legislation.

In reply to a question, the planner reiterated that the LDS was the work programme for bringing forward planning documents for review. She offered to update the member on the University of East Anglia's requirements for student accommodation and whether this had changed following the pandemic. She explained that the baseline for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) needed to be established across all areas of the city and an assessment made of the provision of purpose-built student accommodation.

RESOLVED to agree the Local Development Scheme and recommend that cabinet approves it for publication under section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended by section 111 of the Localism Act 2011).

4. 2021 Norwich City Centre Shopping and Town Centre Floorspace Monitor & Local and District Centres Monitor

The senior planner presented the report and pointed out that this was the first retail monitoring report since the start of the pandemic and contained for the first-time vacancies for other town centre uses other than retail. Members were advised of a correction to paragraph 90 of the report which concerns the rest of the centre which should read "from 12 to 25" rather than "22 to 25".

The chair thanked the senior planner for the report and commented that the results were better than had been feared and was attributed to the success of the council's policies to protect town centre uses whilst acknowledging that it was a challenging situation. The senior planner highlighted the importance of monitoring and suggested that a full monitoring report was produced annually and reported to members; and, then every 6 months or so the council could carry out the survey, analyse the data and look at trends. Members were advised that this approach would be less resource intensive than a full report every 6 months. The survey work this time had been largely undertaken by the planning technical team and it was hoped that they would be available for future surveys.

During discussion members commented on the resilience of the city and its ability to maintain footfall and vibrancy and considered other measures that could be taken to

increase the offer. A member suggested that vacant retail units could be used for pop-up shops to encourage independent businesses and repair shops, and that the former Debenhams store could be converted to a music venue or that one should be included in the emerging proposal for Anglia Square. Members were advised that the Norwich BID had assisted businesses to use empty shops for temporary uses and this was assisted by the government's relaxation of permitted development rights and change of use. The senior planner said that there had previously been strict policy percentages to retain retail units. A more flexible approach had been adopted to the application of these policies. More leisure uses had been accepted in the Castle Quarter. It was recognised that high streets stores could not compete with online shopping. It was therefore important to diversify the offer by encouraging people to shop in the city centre or at district centres, and create an environment comprising shops and leisure facilities, such as pubs and restaurants. Members considered that the city's cultural and historical offer was important. A member pointed out that the *Dippy the Diplodocus* exhibition at Norwich Cathedral and the *Gaia* exhibition at St Peter Mancroft church had increased footfall and visitors to the city over the summer. The success of the city was reliant on a diverse offer that was greater than just multiple shops or chain stores so it could compete with other towns and cities.

The panel noted that the city had a large catchment area and the importance of public transport. A car was no longer necessary to visit retail outlets when purchasing white goods or larger items as delivery could be arranged. The success of the retail offer might be due to its large catchment which other towns and cities did not benefit from. For example, Ipswich's position might be weakened because it was within easy driving distance of other retail centres such as Thurrock. Members referred to the footfall data and said that it would be interesting to see the proportion of visitors coming into the city from across the county and wider area. A member pointed out that rail transport had an important role in influencing people's ability to visit a place for retail and leisure. Some parts of Norfolk were only accessible by car with no rail access between King's Lynn and Fakenham/Wells.

Discussion ensued on the council's opposition to out of town retail and employment centres that were reliant on car use. A member referred to the Riverside Retail Park and asked what measures were in place to reduce car dependency and promote access by bus or foot. It was noted that this would be considered as part of review of DM (development management) policies. Access along the Riverside Walk from the city had been improved by the St Anne's Wharf development and would be accessible from East Norwich. Members' concerns about lack of signage would be addressed through the River Wensum Strategy which would be considered at cabinet in December. Members noted that out of town retail centres such as Longwater did not have the cultural or heritage offer as the city centre, such as the museums, heritage buildings and The Lanes, for instance.

The chair thanked the officers for the report. Despite the current trend for online shopping the city had fared well compared with other towns and cities and continued to be a vibrant retail centre, minimising its retail loss and attracting inward investment. The council would need to work with Norwich BID and partners to ensure that its policies and strategies protected the city centre.

RESOLVED to note:

- (1) the conclusions of the report;
- (2) the possible implications for development plan policies, particularly those relating to the retention of existing large floorspace comparison retail units in the secondary retail area/large district centres;
- (3) that officers considered it appropriate to repeat the survey in spring 2022 when the longer term trends may be easier to separate from the short term impacts of COVID. In conjunction with point 2 above, these findings should be used to inform a decision about whether a review of policies contained in the DM policies plan is needed.

5. Article 4 Direction to Remove Permitted Development Rights for the Conversion of Offices to Residential

The senior planner presented the report.

The chair commented that it was necessary for the council as a local planning authority to ensure that the proportions of office and residential use were right and that this control would be lost without an Article 4 direction.

RESOLVED to recommend to cabinet that the council proceeds with the introduction of a non-immediate Article 4 direction and that the Article 4 direction to remove permitted development rights for the conversion of offices to residential within Norwich city centre is confirmed.

CHAIR