



**Sustainable Development Panel**

**16:00 to 16:45**

**14 June 2022**

Present: Councillors Stonard (chair, following appointment), Giles (vice chair, following appointment), Carlo, Grahame, Hampton, Lubbock, Oliver and Padda (from item 5, below)

Apologies: Councillor Osborn

**1. Appointment of chair**

**RESOLVED** to appoint Councillor Stonard as chair for the ensuing civic year.

**2. Appointment of the vice chair**

**RESOLVED** to appoint Councillor Giles as chair for the ensuing civic year.

**3. Declarations of interest**

There were none.

**4. Minutes**

**RESOLVED** to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meetings held on 7 March 2022.

**5. Article 4 Direction to remove permitted development rights for the conversion of offices to residential**

The planning policy team leader presented the report and summarised the reasons for the delay (as set out in paragraph 4). Officers would be meeting with the representatives of the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on 21 June to discuss the best approach to progress the introduction of the Article 4 Direction. Any new approach would be brought back to the panel before consideration at cabinet. The delay in the introduction would impact on the emerging Greater Norwich Local Plan which would need to be updated if the area covered by the Article 4 Direction was amended.

Discussion members commented that the risk to the proposed Article 4 Direction being acceptable was not unexpected. Members noted that at this stage it was too late to learn from other local planning authorities' experience. It was positive that the DLUHC was engaging with the council and the solution might be Article 4 Directions for smaller areas in the city. The planning policy team leader said that there were examples of London Boroughs with large Article 4 Directions but there had been a

subsequent change in policy, which required a more targeted approach. The head of planning and regulatory services said that the council would engage the original consultants to develop the new approach and proposals would be brought back to the panel as part of the consultation.

Discussion ensued in which members noted that office accommodation floor space had reduced by 30 per cent since 2008. There was no correlating data for the number of new dwellings converted from office accommodation. The head of planning and regulatory services said that the issue was the poor standard of the residential accommodation. Members noted that the conversion of offices to accommodation could be turned round quickly. The Article 4 Direction would not remove the ability to convert office buildings but would require the council to consider a planning application. Members were advised that the office conversions under permitted development rights required prior approval from the council as the local planning authority. These applications should appear on the weekly list of planning applications and other related applications that was circulated to members so that they could call them in to committee if the application met the criteria.

**RESOLVED** to note the delay to the introduction of the Article 4 Direction.

## **6. March 2022 Norwich City Centre Shopping and Town Centre Floorspace Monitor**

The planning policy team leader presented the report.

During discussion members considered that the increase in footfall and new investment coming into the city in the form of a new hotel in Guildhall, student accommodation in the former Debenhams and vacant retail units being taken up by Morrisons, Tesco's and Costa Coffee, were encouraging. Members' perspective of the increased footfall differed. A member said that she considered that the city was quieter than before and that she was concerned about the impact of on residents and shops from the road works in St Stephen's Street. The chair referred to the evidence that supported the increased footfall and referred to Town Deal funding for the St Stephens Street scheme, stating that it was necessary and the works justified.

A member suggested that the council owned retail units could be let at a peppercorn rent for alternative uses such as eco-hubs, workshops, hotdesking, food banks, hot desking and hybrid or blended meetings, adding to the vibrancy of the city. The head of planning and regulatory services said that she would forward this suggestion to the assets team, although commenting that the infrastructure for hybrid meetings was expensive.

Discussion ensued in which members were advised that there had been some pre-application discussions about proposals for the housing led development at the Cathedral Retail Park. Members noted that Castle Mall management company proposed to diversify its retail offer and increase focus on food and leisure. Members queried the authenticity of the "street food stalls" within an urban shopping mall and noted that market research had identified a target audience of young people.

**RESOLVED** to note the findings of the March 2022 Norwich City Centre Shopping and Town Centre Floorspace Monitor.

CHAIR