

**Sustainable development panel****09:30 to 10:25****15 July 2015**

Present: Councillors Bremner (chair). Herries (vice chair), Bogelein, Grahame, Jackson, Thomas (Va) and Woollard

Apologies: Councillor Lubbock

**1. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**2. Minutes**

**RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2015.

**3. Planning policy update**

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

During discussion members' welcomed this useful report and considered it useful as it brought together recent changes to the planning system and, following the election of the new government, highlighted potential implications for planning policy and the local plan. Members expressed concern that the government seemed to disregard the consultation responses from local planning authorities, such as the city council, and could be considered to favour development from the view of other interested parties. The panel noted that the council sent consultation responses to the Norwich Members of Parliament on a case by case basis but considered that this should be done as a matter of course, so that they could support the city's view point. Members also noted that they had an opportunity to contribute to the council's consultation responses through discussion at this panel.

Discussion ensued on the government's relaxation of permitted development rights and members expressed concern about change of use from commercial to residential, without control. The head of planning services advised members that there had been hints that the government was planning to extend the prior approval for change of use from offices to residential after it expired in 2016. However, there had been a number of recent planning applications from developers for change of use from office to residential because they would not be occupied by May next year. If the government were to terminate these permitted development rights in 2016, then the council would need to consider whether to review the local plan. Policy DM19 (Office development) had been amended during the preparation of the local

plan at the advice of the planning inspectorate to make the plan sound. Unless it was reviewed the council had limited policy basis to regulate the change of office to residential use and retain office use in the city centre as set out in the Joint Core Strategy.

Members considered how public houses could be protected from change of use or demolition. The panel noted that there was one public house in the city that had been listed as an asset of community interest and that this gave justification to the council in opposing development as part of the planning process. A member suggested that listing of public houses as assets of community interest should be encouraged and suggested that all councillors could benefit from a briefing to raise awareness of the process.

Discussion ensued on the use of the temporary occupation of commercial properties on a short term basis and members noted that this was usually by security firms to prevent unauthorised residential use while an office building was unoccupied. This was not a significant problem in Norwich.

A member referred to local development orders and sought clarification on whether the government would be providing additional funding to local planning authorities for the additional resources that it would require. Members noted that the council had commented on the government's proposals concerning the significant financial impact to the council through the loss of income from planning fees and its resources to provide evidence and produce the local development orders. The outcome of the consultation was still awaited. Members were advised that there were around 70 brownfield sites in the city and that the majority of these were designated for mixed use development.

Officers responded to a member's question about neighbourhood plans and explained that it was a difficult process which would involve setting up a recognised neighbour body in urban areas where there were no parish councils; professional planning assistance and running a referendum. The government did provide grants to fund neighbourhood plans. In reply to a question, the head of planning services said that a neighbourhood plan would not be the right approach to the River Wensum strategy which was an asset for the whole city. There were policies in the local plan to protect the river bank and promote the provision of the river walk.

In reply to a question, the head of planning services referred to housing legislation where the councils had the right to ensure that vacant dwellings were brought into occupation either through working with owners to rent out the property or compulsory purchase. The problem in Norwich though was not empty new dwellings but encouraging developers to build on sites.

**RESOLVED** to:

- (1) note the report;
- (2) ask the head of planning services to ensure that the Members of Parliament for Norwich South and Norwich North receive a copy of the council's consultation responses on planning matters.

#### **4. Heritage interpretation SPD – draft for consultation**

The planner (policy) presented the report.

During discussion a member suggested that the draft Heritage interpretation supplementary planning document (SPD) needed further work before it was put out for consultation. He considered that the examples of heritage interpretation were narrow and did not explore other methods of interpretation, such as retaining the building line so that the streetscape was retained. The head of planning services pointed out that this SPD was specific to the provision of heritage interpretation where the heritage asset could not be retained. The interpretation was usually an on-site plaque, statue or street treatment in the public realm. It did not deal with design issues. Members considered that this needed to be clarified in the introduction to the report to ensure that the narrow focus of the document was understood. The head of planning services referred to the former Norfolk and Norwich Hospital site and explained that this SPD would cover the statue commemorating the former hospital but not the retention of the hospital's façade as part of the redevelopment.

Discussion ensued on creative ways that could be used as heritage interpretation. Members referred to the use of smartphones and internet links and noted that it was unlikely that many of the sites deemed necessary of heritage interpretation would be sufficiently of importance to merit this form of interpretation. Norwich Heritage, Economic and Regeneration Trust had implemented some digital interpretation in the city and the council could talk to them about the practicalities. However a member suggested that although this would be good for tourist sites the technology was not guaranteed to last and was not inclusive for people who did not have the relevant mobile devices.

**RESOLVED** to approve the draft Heritage interpretation SPD for publication as a draft for consultation, for a period of six weeks, commencing as reasonably practicable after the date of this meeting, subject to asking the head of planning services to:

- (1) insert additional text to explain the scope and focus of the SPD so that it is easily understood;
- (2) augment the examples of heritage interpretation provided in the document.

#### **5. Norfolk non-statutory strategic framework – update report**

The head of planning services presented the report.

Discussion ensued in which the chair said that he welcomed the report which set out to provide a framework to ensure the continued cooperation on strategic planning issues. The Greater Norwich Development Partnership had been an exemplar of

good practice of co-operative work between Broadland District Council, South Norfolk Council, the city council and the county council.

Two members expressed concern that climate change was not a task and finish group in its own right. They considered that the issues would be lost within a wider task and finish group. The chair and the head of planning commented that the intention was that climate change was one of the overarching principles of each of the task and finish groups and if it were to be separated out could hinder the fluidity of the process.

In reply to questions from members, the head of planning services said that none of the councils were acceding to giving away any of its authority. The forum would be for debate and resolution of issues. No council could impose a strategy on any other council without its agreement. The issue of holding the meetings in the public domain had yet to be addressed. Member level meetings were currently held in private. Members asked for clarification on how information would be accessed and fed into the council to ensure that members were fully informed when they made decisions.

A member pointed out that North Norfolk District Council's request that a mechanism be established to consider cross boundary shared settlement planning, particularly in relation to Hoveton and Wroxham, and suggested that this was "very localised" and therefore not a strategic planning issue. The head of planning services said that there was an issue of these planning authorities working together and that the need for housing and the collection of evidence for it was central to the cooperative working arrangements.

In summary the head of planning services pointed out that the "duty to cooperate" was not necessarily a "duty to agree". He also apologised that the formatting of the report had been altered from the original where the tables had been produced on landscape pages.

**RESOLVED** to note the update on the Non-statutory Strategic Framework and that the updates to the framework will be considered by cabinet on 9 September 2015.

CHAIR