



MINUTES

Sustainable development panel

09:30 to 11:25

23 March 2016

Present: Councillors Bremner (chair), Herries (vice chair), Grahame, Jackson, Lubbock, Thomas (Va) and Schmierer (substitute for Councillor Bogelein)

Apologies: Councillors Bogelein and Woollard

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2016.

3. Houses in Multiple Occupation – Interim Progress Report

(Three members of the public attended the meeting for this item. The chair agreed to move the item up the agenda. General introductions ensued.)

The head of planning services gave a detailed presentation of the report and explained its background. He also referred to correspondence received from residents in Nelson Ward calling on the council to take immediate action by implementing an Article 4 direction like other university cities and halt the expansion of unregulated houses in multiple- occupation (HMOs). A graph showing the distribution of student only households by ward for 2015 and 2016 was circulated at the meeting. Although the head of planning services cautioned about the reliability of the data, the data showed a drop in the number of student only households in all wards which could demonstrate a downward trend. The concerns raised by residents about HMOs included: inflation of house prices because of competition between buy-to-let landlords and making houses unaffordable for family use; the effect on communities because of former council houses purchased under right to buy and sold as HMOs; exacerbation of pressure on parking spaces from the occupants of HMO properties; loss of council tax from properties used solely by students; HMO properties being less well kept than neighbouring properties and bins not put out for emptying and this had the effect of bringing down the appearance of the area; lack of control of student behaviours and increased in noise and anti-social behaviour; and poor standard of accommodation in some HMOs. Members were also advised that the council held regular liaison meetings with the university and that issues of anti-social behaviour from students were raised at these meetings. He then reiterated the council's approach to assess the need for Article 4 Directions and a threshold for new HMOs in areas with a high concentration when the outcome of the council's

licensing accreditation scheme for HMOs had bedded in and additional new purpose built student accommodation became available, next year.

Discussion ensued. Members commented on concerns about studentification of areas of the city. The head of planning services explained that once accreditation had been completed the council would have a more complete picture of the number of HMOs as reliance on council tax information only showed student only households. He pointed out that HMOs provided accommodation for people with limited choice in the housing market, such as people on low incomes, out of choice, single people or on benefits, and not just students. It was therefore important not to restrict the availability of this type of housing for these people.

During discussion members expressed concern for the immediate problems of residents in areas of the city where former council houses or terraced properties were being converted into shared student housing without regulation and the effect that it was having on the community. Members referred to other university towns where Article 4 Directions had been used to control the expansion of HMOs. Other members supported the recommended approach to keep HMOs under review and wait until the evaluation of accreditation and purpose built accommodation was available before considering the implementation of Article 4 Directions, which could increase the number of HMOs into other areas of the city, ie, moving the issues to other areas, and limit the availability of accommodation for people on low incomes, vulnerable or single people and those on benefits.

Councillor Schmierer said that areas where houses were bought or rented for family use contributed to the community unlike the transient population who lived in HMOs. He considered that the expansion of HMOs needed to be prevented by the use of an Article 4 Direction without delay. Councillor Jackson expressed concern that accreditation did not address the concentration of HMOs in Nelson and other wards around the University of East Anglia (UEA) and considered an Article 4 Direction as the only way forward. He also pointed out that some purpose built student accommodation was dependent on Generation Park being developed. The housing strategy officer explained that the council's scheme was a voluntary accreditation scheme and explained that the scheme did not launch within the proposed timescale because of a technical issue.

Discussion ensued in which the majority of members considered that they needed more information about the use of Article 4 Directions in other university towns (such as Oxford and York) and how regulation would affect small HMOs used by non-students, unable to afford other accommodation. Other members suggested that the city was not in the position of Leeds or Nottingham where whole areas were empty during vacations. The head of planning services reiterated the approach taken and the issues which needed to be considered in implementing an Article 4 Direction, including the financial risk to the council if required to pay compensation to HMO providers.

The panel then discussed the practicality of receiving further background information on HMOs so that it could make an informed recommendation to cabinet at the earliest opportunity.

RESOLVED to ask the head of planning services to provide a detailed report to the panel's meeting on 25 May 2016, setting out the different options available to the council to regulate houses in multiple occupation and the full implications of issuing Article 4 Directions, and recommend a course of action to cabinet for consideration at the first meeting of the civic year. (Councillor Schmierer did not support this resolution as he considered that the panel was in a position to recommend the implementation of an Article 4 Direction to control change of use to houses-in-multiple occupation to cabinet.)

(Councillor Lubbock left the meeting at this point.)

4. Landscape and Trees Supplementary Planning Document

The planning policy team leader presented the report. Revised wording for the text of the supplementary planning document (SPD) was circulated at the meeting as a result of work conducted on the River Wensum Strategy.

Discussion ensued in which members generally welcomed the SPD. The planning policy team leader said that the SPD would provide a focus for officers and developers. A member asked whether the council's policy for street trees could be strengthened through this document but was advised that SPDs provided guidance on the application of policy but could not change the policy itself. The SPD was primarily to provide good practice advice on landscaping or tree planting when a site came forward for development. Members considered that to strengthen the council's position on street trees it would be useful to insert the full wording of policy DM7 into the SPD. It was also noted that the word "early" should be inserted between "considered" and "on" in the first bullet point of considerations on page 25 of the policy. However members welcomed the consideration of maintenance early on in the process.

The panel then discussed the SPD and considered that fruit trees should be added to the list of plants that provided a good food source for insects and birds on page 18 of the draft SPD.

RESOLVED to recommend to cabinet to adopt the Landscape and Trees Supplementary Planning Document, subject to the following amendments:

- (1) page 25 of the SPD, amend the first bullet point of the considerations to read as follows: "Maintenance considered early on and clear demonstration to deliver" and to set out the wording of policy DM7 in full:
- (2) page 18 of the SPD, include fruit trees in the following sentence:

"Flowering, fruit and berry plans will provide a good food source for insects and birds."

(The chair left the meeting at this point for a short break. Councillor Herries, the vice chair, was in the chair for the remainder of the meeting.)

5. Statement of Community Involvement – proposed revisions

The planner (policy) presented the report and together with the planning policy team leader answered members' questions.

During discussion members expressed concern that members of the public had the maximum opportunity to engage in planning consultations. Members noted that in general consultations over holiday periods, ie August, would be avoided. The SCI would need to be in line with SCIs prepared by the council's Greater Norwich area partners, South Norfolk Council and Broadland District Council and variations would need to be discussed.

A member said that the number of issues in local plan documents was often overwhelming. The planning policy team leader explained that there would be public workshops on topics as the first stage of developing the new local plan in the summer. It was not possible to separate out topics as part out the consultation on the plan. Members of the public living in Norwich could comment on the local plans of the partner authorities.

The panel noted a member's comment that the scrutiny committee could consider scrutinising the methodology of consultations. This request could be made by individual members.

RESOLVED to recommend that cabinet approves the revised Statement of Community Involvement for public consultation during June, and, subject to ensuring that consultations do not take place during August.

CHAIR