



Sustainable development panel

09:30 to 11:20

21 March 2018

Present: Councillors Stonard (chair), Thomas (Va) (vice chair), Davis, Carlo (substitute for Councillor Grahame), Jackson, Lubbock, Maguire and Malik

Apologies: Councillor Grahame

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest. However, it was noted that panel members had received emails about the River Wensum Strategy.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 21 February 2018.

3. River Wensum Strategy

The team leader regeneration presented the report. She referred to Appendix 1 which set out the proposed changes to the River Wensum Strategy, and explained that PC2 referred to a comment from the county council's environment, transport and development committee regarding the need to include a reference in the document to the proposed Western Link from the Northern Distributor Road to the A47. She also pointed out that under PC14, the document reference should be to map 5.

Discussion ensued in which the team leader regeneration answered members' questions. Members commented on the strategy which they considered to be positive. A member suggested that there was potential to link in with the Active Hours project in the city, particularly with residents in Mile Cross.

A member commented that she was unhappy with the wording in paragraphs 28 and 30 regarding income generation. It was not fair to say that the city council would generate an income. The pontoons would require maintenance. The chair said that the strategy was financially neutral but had potential to identify income generation schemes which would benefit the city as a whole. There was no specific budget for the strategy but it would act as the basis for funding bids. The Broads Authority would receive mooring fees for the use of pontoons. The team leader said that she understood the point being made that the text should reflect the potential to benefit the city in the wider sense.

Discussion ensued on the development of projects and consultation with residents and communities as funding came forward. A member said that he was pleased that the residents' concerns had been taken on board and the missing link of Riverside Walk, between Fye Bridge and Whitefriars, had been removed from the action plan. He said that he considered that whilst it was a long term ambition to link the Riverside Walk but it would require a lot of thought before implementation at this part of the river.

A member said that she was pleased that biodiversity had been included in the objectives. She referred to her question to council (23 January 2018) and pointed out that as the River Wensum provided the drinking water for the city, she was concerned that pesticides, particularly neonicotinoids, were entering the river system from run off from agricultural land up river and there should be a reference in the strategy. In response other members commented that the health of the river was already covered in the strategy and noting that the EU was considering a ban on the use of neonicotinoids. A member expressed concern that drilling down into too much detail meant that it would cease to be a strategy and it was pointless to include a specific reference to the use of a pesticide which the strategy could not address. The team leader regeneration said that the biodiversity enhancement plan would be developed in partnership with the University of East Anglia and Norfolk Wildlife Trust. The focus was on the health of the river and it might be possible to investigate the use of pesticides as part of this. The chair referred to paragraph 11(b) and suggested that the panel recommended additional wording to reflect the health of the river in its broader context. However, following some discussion members considered that "water quality" should be added to the objective relating to the enhancement of the natural environment and biodiversity.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) endorse the revised River Wensum Strategy and to recommend it to cabinet, subject to the inclusion of "water strategy" in the natural environment, with biodiversity, objective:
- (2) thank Judith Davison, team leader regeneration, for pulling together the River Wensum Strategy and co-ordinating the multi-agency approach.

4. Publication of Draft Revisions of the National Planning Policy Framework

The head of planning services introduced the report and questioned the level of consideration that would be given to responses on the draft framework. He cited the recent consultation on a methodology for assessing housing needs which around 75 per cent of respondents had not supported the methodology yet it was now proposed to be incorporated into the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The team leader regeneration presented the report and summarised the changes proposed to the NPPF. The focus of the changes was on housing delivery and included the delivery of affordable housing and based on recent government consultations. The key themes were:

- Plan making: a crucial area given that over half of local planning authorities (LPAs) in England did not have an up-to-date local plan in place. The

proposed measures included plans and policies that did not duplicate each other; change to test of soundness; and, strengthening joint working through statements of common ground.

- Housing needs and requirements: introducing new standardised methodology for assessing housing and housing products which include build to rent and affordable home ownership.
- Use of land: Measures include protection of green belt land and prioritisation of Brownfield over Greenfield sites; LPAs required to agree housing land supply on an annual basis fixed for one year;
- Housing delivery: Measures to encourage development to be brought forward include introduction of housing delivery test; the use of small sites (20 per cent of supply should be sites of less than half a hectare); and reduction of implementation time scales to two years.
- Developer contributions to support housing delivery: Measures proposed should reduce complexity and support swifter development (by improving viability assessment in plan making and transparent accountability).

The planning system was not the problem in terms of planning delivery. The focus on numbers and efficiency of sites could lose sight of factors that drive high quality housing in places which contribute to quality of life – key factors for local people. Councils need powers to intervene in situations where schemes should be brought forward but there did not appear to be much evidence of mechanisms for enforcement. LPAs need to establish housing need and neighbourhood plans would need to accommodate growth and not be a tool to resist it. The NPPF was not proactive in promoting a strong competitive economy or the development of strong communities which were more than just housing developments. The changes to affordable housing outlined at least a 10 per cent affordable home ownership as part of the overall affordable housing contribution for the site in major housing developments. The implications of this would need to be considered as it was not clear how this would be interpreted. There would be an exemption for sites that only provided Build to Rent homes and affordable private rent would qualify for affordable housing in build-to-rent schemes. The revised NPPF places more emphasis on viability assessment at local plan stage as opposed to the decision making stage. This was a simplistic view of how development economics work and that further assessment was needed as costs and values change over time.

Discussion ensued on viability assessments in which members commented on the 20 per cent profit margin for developers. Members noted that the intention was to deliver housing but this could weaken the local planning authority's position when negotiating affordable housing contributions with developers. A member said that he considered that the proposals transferred the profit risk to the LPA from the developer and there should be more powers to challenge viability assessments. The head of planning services said that a 20 per cent profit margin might deter developers from developing high risk sites. It was considered that there was a danger that the proposed changes may tend to reduce the number of affordable housing units delivered through the planning process. Members were advised that developers must pay the community infrastructure levy and currently this cannot be used to provide affordable housing.

The introduction of the standard methodology for the assessment of housing need was considered likely to promote more new housing in outlying areas rather than in

urban areas and, therefore, there was a strategic risk that of under-delivery of housing where it was needed. The local implications were that the Norwich Policy Area was unlikely to be used to assess housing land supply going forward.

Members were advised that right to buy (RTB) was not part of the revised NPPF but was subject to another review and could affect what the council did in building council houses for rent.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) note that the head of planning services will respond to the government consultations on its proposed changes to revise the NPPF and to reforming developer contributions;
- (2) ask the head of planning services to arrange a members' briefing on CIL and viability assessments.

5. Joint Core Strategy Annual Monitoring Report 2016-17

The head of planning services introduced the report and pointed out that the report touched on the five year land supply which, notwithstanding the proposed changes in the NPPF, was still holding up well.

The team leader regeneration presented the report.

During discussion the head of planning services and the team leader regeneration answered members' questions. The panel noted that 85 per cent of the population in the Greater Norwich Policy Area lived in the city. Developments on privately owned open space were not considered a loss to public open space. The development at Lakenham Sports and Cricket ground had increased public open space because it had provided new cycle or pedestrian routes through the site. An emerging policy was coming forward in the Greater Norwich Local Plan that sought to protect employment in the city centre and promote the use of sustainable modes of transport, such as public transport, walking and cycling. A member said that she was concerned about urban heat generation.

Discussion ensued in which members commented on the report. A member said that he was disappointed that Article 4 had not been implemented to restrict the growth of houses in multiple-occupation in the city. There was a lack of data about renewable energy. The Joint Core Strategy did not contain a policy on self and custom builds and that this should be considered in the development of the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP). The report did not analyse the impact of county council cuts to rural bus subsidies and the impact that this had on access to market towns. He also suggested that with pressure on resources monitoring should be targeted to where it could make a difference.

RESOLVED to note the publication and content of the 2016-17 Joint Core Strategy Annual Monitoring report.

CHAIR