

Sustainable Development Panel**09:30 to 11:50****15 January 2020**

Present: Councillors Stonard (chair), Maguire (vice chair), Ackroyd (substitute for Councillor Lubbock), Carlo, Davis, Giles, Grahame, Maxwell, Stutely

Apologies: Councillors Lubbock

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2019.

3. Greater Norwich Local Plan – Regulation 18 Draft Plan Consultation

(Mike Burrell, GNLP manager, attended the meeting for this item.)

(A supplementary report containing *Further information to be considered with the report*, which was circulated at the meeting and emailed to members before the meeting.)

The planning policy team leader presented the report. She commented that since she had drafted the report the period covered by the plan had been extended from 2036 to 2038, and apologised that some references had not been amended (paragraphs 3 and 11(b)). The consultation would run from 29 January 2020 to 16 March 2020. The Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) would supersede the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) and site allocation plan. The 47 preferred sites for housing development in Norwich were set out in the draft GNLP Sites document (attached at Appendix 2 to the consultation document). This document excluded preferred site allocations for smaller villages in South Norfolk. South Norfolk Council would therefore be developing a separate “village clusters plan.” The council’s response to the draft plan was set out in the covering report.

The GNLP manager commented on the strategy position on growth and referred to the maps contained in the document and pointed out the main growth areas. He explained that the 9 per cent buffer would be more than was required as it did not account for “windfall” sites that could come forward during the period of the plan. He pointed out that there were contingency sites on the edge of the city at Costessey and at Wymondham. Proposed new settlement locations west of Easton at

Honingham Thorpe and near to Wymondham, around Stanfield Hall and Silfield, have been identified as “reasonable alternatives” through the draft plan for further consideration in the longer term. Around 20 per cent of the GNLP area lived in villages and it did not seem fair to deny new housing in villages. He explained that the proposal for a separate site allocations plan for villages in South Norfolk was legal and complied with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Housing needed to be in sustainable locations on the edge of existing villages, with primary schools and access to public transport. This would be up to South Norfolk Council to determine the allocation of 1200 homes.

The chair by way of introduction to the discussion said that the plan was produced in partnership with Broadland District Council, South Norfolk Council and Norfolk County Council. Each authority had a veto and therefore the plan was based on compromise. There would be opportunities for the council to raise points of concern following the consultation, especially if responses provide leverage to the council's position.

In reply to a member's question, the GNLP manager explained the policy provision which required the use of renewable energy and the electrification of vehicles. During discussion members noted that there would be a modal shift and that technology would come forward during the life of the plan.

The planning policy team leader, in reply to a member, said that evidence was being worked on to support a potential Article 4 Direction to prevent poor quality conversions of office buildings under permitted development rights. A report would be brought before the panel at a further date but early indications suggested that there was evidence. The panel expressed its support for this work.

During discussion on rural dispersal and village clusters, members expressed concern about the need for decent public transport which was affordable and served rural communities. It was noted that many rural villages were inhabited by high paid workers who commuted to Norwich for work and school and did not contribute to the local economy of the village. There was also an inequality in that residents on low wages could not afford public transport or to purchase new hybrid/electric vehicles. Members agreed that they reinforced the city council's view on the separate site allocations plan for village clusters in South Norfolk.

The panel had a lengthy discussion on transport regarding the modal shift to low carbon modes of transport. The panel considered that there needed to be further information on funding for transport infrastructure to meet the growth agenda. Members also considered that there needed to be investment in rail services and consideration of a train station at Thickthorn/Hethersett. The panel also considered bus fares should be affordable and that franchising bus services could address this. Members also noted the potential growth at Costessey and Taverham, on the periphery of the city, and it was suggested that all bus routes should be orbital as well as radial to prevent short car journeys between places on the edge of the city. Members noted that Transforming Cities funding was supporting the growth agenda and that the GNLP could be used as leverage to help access future funding. A member expressed concern that the county council would need to ensure that funding available for transport supported the modal shift to low carbon modes of transport.

During discussion the panel noted the policy provision for sustainable energy but expressed concern that there was too much reliance on the development of new technology and that there was no contingency if the technology did not come forward to meet carbon zero by 2050. The panel also considered that as 73 per cent of the proposed development would be on Greenfield sites, greater weight should be given to biodiversity and the protection of wildlife corridors. It was noted that the Environment Bill, when it became legislation, would require a net gain in biodiversity from developments.

During discussion members considered that it was important that there was sufficient infrastructure to support sustainable communities. The GNLP manager said that officers were working very closely with health services and that the evidence will inform where additional health provision would be required, which would be inserted into the consultation documents under officer delegation. This evidence would cover all levels of health provision and would be reported to a future meeting of this panel.

Members were also reminded that the SPG on purpose built student accommodation had been considered by the panel and agreed at cabinet (13 November 2019.)

Members noted the changes to affordable housing that the government was proposing. The panel noted that the intention of the GNLP was to support sustainable development with good access to services and infrastructure. The GNLP manager advised members that there was a requirement of 20 per cent of new homes to be “lifetime homes” which were suitable for people of all ages and needs.

RESOLVED that despite the council’s concerns as noted in the covering report, which the panel endorses, and accepting that the plan is a partnership document which may require a degree of compromise, to recommend to cabinet that it endorses the publication of the draft Greater Norwich Local Plan documents for the Regulation 18 Draft Plan but wishes the following issues of outstanding concern to be taken into account in discussions about future iterations:

(a) **Emphasis on rural dispersal/village clusters**

The proportion of rural dispersal/village clusters is a concern. Members would not want to deny people who live and work in the rural economy the opportunity to continue to live in villages but identified that a lack of affordable and reliable public transport was a problem for them in terms of accessing employment and services. It identified the potential to support this level of rural dispersal by investing in renewable energy in villages which could be used to power electric vehicles. It was recognised that people with low incomes or living in affordable housing would be disadvantaged as they would not be able to purchase electric cars until prices come down, if at all. There also is concern that villages could become dormitories with a limited contribution to the local economy and about potential social inequality in villages, where a significant proportion of residents are high income professionals who commute into the city, which needs to be addressed. The infrastructure is not in place to serve village clusters and accommodate growth. The plan identifies access to primary schools but access to other essential infrastructure needs should be expanded.

Therefore location and sustainability of rural dispersal and village clusters development should be given further consideration.

(b) Transport infrastructure

The basic information on the modal shift to a low carbon mode of transport should be stronger in the plan, which does not recognise the need to integrate transport and land use policies or the use of mobility hubs, and further information is required on how this infrastructure will be funded to meet the needs of the growth agenda.

The panel believes there needs to be greater investment in rail transport, particularly on the Norwich to Cambridge route, to support the Cambridge-Norwich Tech Corridor and to promote links with Norwich Research Park. There is a need for both fast and slower services, stopping between Norwich and Cambridge, and this will require investment in additional track to create the necessary capacity. Consideration should be given to an additional station at Thickthorn/Hethersett.

Public transport needs to be affordable and serve local communities to encourage use. The franchising of bus operators could address this and should be examined as a possibility.

Growth is recommended at Costessey and Taverham, on the periphery of the urban built up area, but current bus service routes into the city are radial rather than orbital. This encourages car use for short journeys and needs to be addressed.

(c) Climate change

Given that the end of the plan period is only 12 years from 2050, the current target for carbon neutrality, policies relating to climate change need to be more ambitious in order for that target to be met. There is concern that the reliance on the development of new technology, such as carbon capture, may not be sufficient to deliver the step changes needed to achieve this target and that, therefore, this requires additional measures to be identified.

It is recognised that the Environment Bill will make it mandatory for all developments to have a biodiversity net gain and that once the bill passes into law, this requirement will be incorporated into the Greater Norwich Development Plan. Given that 73 per cent of the proposed growth in the development plan area will be on Greenfield sites, it is important that enhanced biodiversity measures are included in the policy to mitigate the impacts of this development.

4. Retail Monitor 2019

The chair introduced the report and commented that the reduction in vacant available floor space and decrease in vacant units in the city centre was positive. The removal of traffic in Westlegate had made it pleasant for shoppers.

The senior planner (policy) presented the report and circulated a colour version of Table 9 at the meeting. She explained that the retail vacancies have continued to increase in the secondary retail area but that the large retail unit that had been occupied by Toys R Us remained vacant. She explained that the retail policy in the

emerging GNLP would allow for the diversification of retail units for leisure use which although would reduce retail floor space, would reflect current retail trends.

(Councillor Stonard, chair, left the meeting at this point. Councillor Maguire, vice chair, was in the chair for the remainder of the meeting.)

Discussion ensued on the closure of department or chain stores and potential to use large department stores for other uses. The senior planner (policy) said that if one of the large department stores such as Debenhams were to close then the council would have to assess whether it was appropriate to allow for diversification to other uses. It may be appropriate to retain retail uses at street level whilst allowing more flexibility at upper floor levels with for example encouraging living accommodation on the upper floors.

In response to a question, the senior planner (policy) said that the city was doing better than the national average although it is hard to compare figures due to various methodologies of data collection. The national data was obtained from the Local Data Company and its data could be used to compare Norwich with other cities. Members of the panel agreed that there should be opportunities for small retailers in the city and that the policy should reflect that. Norwich Market was considered to be the best in the country.

RESOLVED to note the findings of the 2019 Retail Monitor.

CHAIR