



Sustainable Development Panel

16:00 to 17:15

10 January 2023

Present: Councillors Stonard (chair) Hampton (vice chair), Carlo, Grahame, Oliver, Osborn and Padda

Apologies: Councillors Giles and Lubbock

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meetings held on 15 November 2022.

3. Local Development Scheme Update 2023

The planner (report author) presented the report, and together with the planning policy team leader answered members' questions. The updated Local Development Scheme covered the period 2023-2025 and had last been updated in December 2021. The proposed changes to update the scheme were set out in paragraph 6 of the covering report.

In reply to a member's question, the planning policy team leader confirmed the decision-making process set out in paragraph 6(g) of the covering report leading to the adoption of the East Norwich Strategic Regeneration Area (ENSRA) supplementary planning document (SPD) was standard practice. The SPD would be subject to statutory consultation and either adopted with the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) or after its adoption. The chair and planning policy team leader assured members that no developers were represented on the East Norwich Partnership Board as it entered the implementation stage but ongoing engagement with developers would continue.

A member commented that a progress update on the River Wensum Strategy would be useful for the panel. The planning policy team leader stated that the River Wensum Strategy delivery board had not met for some time due to resources being diverted to address Nutrient Neutrality and other priorities. Progress was however being made on some biodiversity opportunities along the riverside and this could be reported to a future meeting at an appropriate stage, along with any other progress.

During discussion members noted that guidance on the implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain had still not been provided. Members also noted that there

was a process in place for the Norfolk Green Infrastructure and Recreational Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (GIRAMS) and that governance arrangements for this were currently being developed. This was a different process to biodiversity net gain. There was discussion between the county and district councils about measures to be implemented from the funds collected under the GIRAMS scheme from residential development to mitigate the impact on designated sites from increased visitors. Members of the panel indicated that they would like further information about these measures, which included a new country park outside Norwich to provide an alternative attraction for visitors, new pathways, education and wardens to provide information to protect natural habitats at designated sites. A member suggested that improved public transport and cycle routes to the designated sites would help protect sites and asked that this was taken into consideration.

During discussion a member commented on the review of the Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) advice note that was anticipated to be conducted in 2023/24 to reflect current need and asked whether this could affect sites with current planning permission but where development had not commenced. The planner pointed out that planning permission was conditional on a time limit, usually of 3 years for construction to be commenced. Sites with current planning permission for PBSA would not be affected by a review of the advice note.

In reply to a member's question, members were advised that there needed to be clarity from the government on national development management planning policies and the final content of the GNLP before revising development management (DM) policies. A member expressed her frustration about waiting to the end of 2023 as some DM policies were weak and needed strengthening, for example, renewable energy, and that biodiversity net gain was a good policy that should not be delayed. The planner confirmed that some work was underway which would support new policies such as that to establish a baseline for biodiversity net gain.

A member referred to the East Norwich SPD and asked how it would reflect new information on rising sea levels and flood risk. The site maps showed areas that given the new information would fall within flood risk zone 3, such as the Deal Ground which was between two rivers, and despite the proposed mitigation, she considered that these areas should not be developed. The chair acknowledged that there was a time lapse between writing reports and information becoming available. He pointed out that the masterplan was indicative and showed the amount of housing and employment spaces that could be provided on the site. Final layouts were subject to further consideration. Flood risk was an ongoing workstream of the project and new information would be considered. The planning policy team leader undertook to pass on the member's concerns to the ENRA project manager.

During the discussion on ENRA a member welcomed the proposed improved access to Whitlingham Country Park for cyclists and pedestrians. The chair said that this meant that Whitlingham Broad would be a fifteen-minute walk from the train station.

A member asked to what extent would the government's Enabling a Natural Capital Approach (ENCA) be used in the biodiversity baseline survey. The planner said that this work was being conducted by colleagues at the county council and she was not aware of the exact methodology that was being used but would enquire whether this tool was being used and report back to members.

RESOLVED to agree the Local Development Scheme 2023 update and recommend that Cabinet approves it for publication under section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended by section 111 of the Localism Act 2011).

4. Retail Monitor

The planning policy team leader presented the report. The survey was carried out in October 2022 and provided a snapshot of the retail sector in the city centre, and local and district centres. It showed that there has been a fall in vacancy rates, with vacancy rates improving more than they have nationally.

During discussion a member welcomed that the retail sector was continuing to thrive in Norwich and that he supported the closure of Exchange Street to vehicular traffic and was of benefit to pedestrians. The chair said that businesses in Exchange Street had been delighted with the proposals and the council would continue to support its closure. There had been some traffic congestion, but this could be attributed to pre-Christmas additional traffic, lighting phases needing to be adjusted and awareness that other routes could be used. In reply to the member's suggestion to increase pedestrian areas to benefit local businesses, the chair commented that highways was now a function of Norfolk County Council and whilst the council would continue to have those discussions it was not in a position to implement it.

A member commented on the impact of out of town retail and said that there were a number of "big holes" in the city centre, arising from the closure of British Home Stores, Debenhams and House of Fraser and the relocation of Marsh to Broadland Business Park, and asked how the council could use its duty to cooperate with its neighbouring councils to prevent further peripheral growth. The planning policy team leader said that the duty to cooperate was likely to be repealed and replaced by an alignment test so the council would need to continue to work together with its partners to align its key and cross boundary policies. The chair confirmed that there was political opposition at national level to the government's plans to abolish the duty to cooperate.

During discussion, members commented on the resilience of local retailers as opposed to high street multi-national stores. Members noted that this could be that independent stores offered unique offer which provided a pleasing place to visit, that pedestrian areas were free from pollution and near to coffee shops and other leisure outlets. Members also noted that diversifying the retail offer into leisure activities, spread risk and contributed to the vitality of the city centre. The panel considered that Norwich provided a unique offer, particularly Norwich Market and the Lanes. Members considered that the council had a duty to ensure that buildings were in use and were advised that buildings did not need to be in the council's ownership to do that. A member suggested that climate cafés and workshops would bring vacant buildings into use. The planning policy team leader confirmed that they would enquire into what the city council could do to facilitate "meanwhile uses" in vacant premises and report back.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) note the findings of the October 2022 Norwich City Centre Shopping and Town Centre Floorspace Monitor & Local and District Centres Monitor;

- (2) having considered the reasons set out in paragraph 21, to agree to return to annual monitoring.

CHAIR