



**Sustainable Development Panel**

**16:00 to 17:50**

**3 October 2023**

Present: Councillors Hampton (chair), Calvert (substitute for Councillor Osborn), Carrington, Champion, Driver and Hoechner

Apologies: Councillor Giles (vice chair), Lubbock, Oliver and Osborn

**1. Declarations of Interest**

None.

**2. Minutes**

**RESOLVED** to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2023, subject to the insertion of “vice” to the minute under item 2, Appointment of Vice Chair, to accurately record that Councillor Giles had been appointed as vice chair for the ensuing civic year.

**3. Plan Making Reform – Government Consultation**

Mike Burrell, Greater Norwich Policy Manager, presented the report. The government consultation was on proposals to speed up the local development plan making process. Our current local plan had taken 7 years to reach the stage of being ready for adoption. The council’s response was supportive in principle but there were concerns that it was the right approach.

The Greater Norwich Policy Manager explained that if the local plan process was to be completed within a 30-month timeframe, it would require a lot of preparatory work and evidence gathering. It was not possible to present a vision without evidence to support it. He referred members to Appendix 1, Figure 1 (which demonstrates the proposed 30 Month Plan Timeframe) and the draft response to Chapter 2, question 6. During discussion the Greater Norwich Policy Manager confirmed there was the right level of staff to deliver the plan within the 30-month timeframe, but it would require significant evidence gathering in preparation for the beginning of the process.

In reply to a member’s question the Greater Norwich Policy Manager said that if the government proposals were implemented, the 30-month timeframe would apply to the next round of plan making. It would not affect the current Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP), expected to be adopted in March 2024. If the 30-month timeframe was implemented the Greater Norwich Local Plan Partnership authorities would benefit from the experience of the first tranche of local planning authorities (LPAs) who would be making plans under the new system in the next 2 to 3 years.

During discussion members of the panel questioned the council's draft response to Appendix 1, Chapter 13, questions 39 and 40. The Greater Norwich Policy Manager explained that the proposed approach for Community Land Auction (CLA) risked the planning system being seen as a means of buying permissions, or for less sustainable sites being brought forward over better located sites. A member said that he considered that the responses should be more nuanced to support CLA. There was no compulsory purchase. The council could either exercise its legal option to purchase the land or it could sell it on. The Greater Norwich Policy Manager said that other mechanisms of capturing the uplift in land value resulting from the sites being allocated and permitted for development had been suggested in the past and might work better than CLA.

A member referred to the government's proposals to increase digitisation to streamline the plan making process and asked whether this would mean that certain groups were unable to access this. The Greater Norwich Policy Manager said that this was a concern and that traditional methods of engagement would also be available as well as digital methods. The 30-month timeframe included all consultations and examination. The government had not provided any details of sanctions against LPAs that did not complete the process within the 30-month timeframe.

In reply to a member's question, the Greater Norwich Policy Manager said that the response was from Norwich City Council. Broadland District Council and South Norfolk Council might make separate responses. The concerns of these rural authorities were different to the city council's and, whilst not aware of the councils' specific views on this consultation, he considered them to be generally supportive. The Planning Policy Team Leader said that the government would probably receive many comments from national local government organisations and lobby groups, as well as councils. The government should publish the responses to the consultation. The Greater Norwich Policy Manager said that this was the second attempted government reform of the local plan process in recent years. Responses to the 2021 government consultation were not published on the website.

Discussion ensued in which the panel considered that it was a balanced response and reflected members' views, except for the responses to Chapter 13, question numbers 39 and 40, which should be nuanced in favour of CLAs.

In reply to a member's question, the Greater Norwich Policy Manager explained that this consultation was only on the plan making process.

**RESOLVED** to:

- (1) endorse the draft response as set out in Appendix 1 and recommend it to the Executive Director of Development and City Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council (Cabinet Member for Inclusive and Sustainable Development), for submission to the government's consultation, subject to amending the responses to Chapter 13, questions 39 and 40;
- (2) ask the Greater Norwich Policy Manager to rewrite the responses to Chapter 13, questions 39 and 40 and agree them with the Leader of the Council.

(The revised responses to Chapter 13, were subsequently approved by the Leader of the Council and included in the council's response to the consultation. The revised responses are set out below:

**Question 39: Do you have any views on how we envisage the Community Land Auctions process would operate?**

*Norwich City Council strongly supports the principle that LPAs should direct a major part of the uplift in land values resulting from planning to fund infrastructure delivery. However, it is essential that the detail of the process for the implementation of the CLA is such that the planning system is not seen as a means for buying permissions, or for less sustainable sites to be brought forward over better located sites.*

**Question 40: To what extent should financial considerations be taken into account by local planning authorities in Community Land Auction pilots, when deciding to allocate sites in the local plan, and how should this be balanced against other factors?**

*It is important that land-use planning principles based on the promotion of sustainable development are the most significant factor in the selection of development sites. Sites which will provide funding for infrastructure delivery will be the most likely to provide the best locations for sustainable urban extensions and new settlements.)*

**4. Government Consultation on Proposed Changes to Permitted Development Rights**

The Planning Policy Team Leader presented the report and explained that, due to the timeframe of the consultation on proposed changes to permitted development rights, it was for information. The response had been submitted by the close of the consultation on 25 September 2023 and had been approved by the Executive Director of Development and City Services in consultation with the Leader of the council. The consultation response was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

In response to a member's question, the Planning Policy Team Leader explained the process that the council had undertaken to introduce an Article 4 Direction to prevent certain office spaces being converted into residential accommodation in the city centre. It had been a difficult and costly process, taking two years and requiring external consultants to collate the evidence, but it had been a strong case as a third of office space in the city centre had been lost since 2008. She advised members that there would need to be specific targeting and evidence gathering if the council wanted to introduce further Article 4 Directions. She assured members that the regular Retail Monitoring report was due to come before the panel in the new year.

A member said that the conversion of office accommodation into schools had resulted in schools in accommodation that was not fit for purpose. The Planning Policy Team Leader said that she was not aware of any further office conversions into schools in the city.

**RESOLVED** to note the response to the government consultation on Proposed Changes to Permitted Development Rights as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

## **5. Biodiversity Net Gain – Update**

(The chair agreed to take this as an urgent item.)

The Planning Policy Team Leader said that the government had recently announced a delay of several months to the publication of its guidance for the implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). This would delay the publication of the council's guidance note. It had been the intention to consider it at this meeting and then go out to public consultation in November, with adoption in January 2024.

**RESOLVED** to note the government's delay in producing the guidance.

CHAIR