



Sustainable development panel

09:30 to 10:55

21 February 2018

Present: Councillors Thomas (Va) (vice chair) (in the chair), Davis, Grahame, Jackson, Lubbock, Maguire and Malik

Apologies: Councillor Stonard (chair) (other council business)

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 17 January 2017 subject to item 4, Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework, fifth paragraph, deleting “Greater Norwich Local Plan” and inserting “Norfolk” so that the sentence reads as follows:

“The head of planning service explained the process that each of the Norfolk authorities would undertake to sign off the framework over the next couple of months.”

3. Norwich Economic Analysis and its implications for the Greater Norwich Local Plan

The head of planning services presented the report and the appended consultants’ report which would form part of the evidence for the Greater Norwich Local Plan.

A member suggested that the concept of the Norwich Policy Area (NPA) being defined by housing growth to serve the economy of the area was now redundant and asked what its purpose was, if it was not to determine the location of housing growth. The head of planning services said that there had been a County Structure Plan in place prior to the Joint Core Strategy and that this had defined the NPA which had covered a wide range of policy matters not just related to housing. The partner authorities had not yet agreed what the definition of the Norwich Policy Area should be in relation to the GNLP. Government draft proposals to amend the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) indicated an approach to quantify housing need nationally across district authorities would mean that assessing the five year land supply across the NPA would be unfeasible. There was other work to manage housing within the policy district inside the area which included the strategic housing

market assessment. There was more demand for housing with affordable rents in the Norwich Area whilst the outlying rural areas had greater need for shared or intermediate tenure affordable housing. Growth in housing in the outlying areas would not provide affordable housing that served the needs of the city. There was strong policy evidence to retain the construct of a Norwich centred policy area.

Discussion ensued on the robustness of economic forecasting and the impact that the closure of a major employer could have to the city. The head of planning services referred to the forecasting model for the East of England and said that algorithms predicted economic trends based on local factual information and taking into account the continuance of historic trends. This was not the only source of evidence. No economic model could predict with certainty the impact of Brexit on the local economy. Norwich had a concentration of financial services in the city centre and at Broadland Business Park. The cluster of insurance services in Norwich was of national significance. Technological change would impact on jobs but it was really crucial to support and invest in new technology to capture the economic benefits. There needed to be sufficient concentration of financial services and knowledge intensive business services (KIBS) to ensure that businesses were sustainable in the city. A member referred to the closure of Unilever and said that priorities for future growth needed to take into account the constraints of the geographical location of the city. The head of planning services said that prioritisation of financial services; digital; creative industries and KIBS were not reliant on transport links and were key attributes of the city. The links between life sciences and agriculture was also distinctive to Norwich. Advanced manufacturing was not necessarily based in Norwich. The head of planning services said that he would check the food and drink criteria to see if it included the hospitality sector. There was a trend for people to eat out with more restaurants and cafes opening and therefore there was potential for this sector to grow.

A member asked about office space and commented that companies were relocating out of the city centre because of the lack of grade A office space. The head of planning services said that the stock of office accommodation in the city centre was generally of poor quality and unattractive to some businesses. The council had been unable to implement its policy to refurbish office accommodation as set out in the Local Plan 2014 because of the government's change to permitted development rights in relation to the conversion of offices to residential dwellings. The council applied for an Article 4 Directive to prevent this but like many other authorities was turned down. A member said that the function of a city was to bring businesses together. The head of planning services said that clusters of similar businesses created a vibrant core which attracted other similar businesses and other services, such as food and coffee shops, etc.

Discussion then ensued on how the Local Enterprise Partnership's economic vision was perceived across the region by other local authorities and members of the Greater Norwich Growth Board. It was acknowledged that at county level it was recognised that the Norwich area was a key driver of the local economy.

A member suggested that there should be greater targeting and monitoring of office space in the city to ensure that needs were met, through a supplementary planning document (SPD) which would operate in the same way as retail. He expressed concern that office space outside the city was reliant on individual car use rather than in the city centre with links to sustainable transport. The head of planning

services said that in order for an SPD, it would be necessary to establish the principle within areas of the city and this would be difficult in a shared document. Access to the city was one of the key challenges in attracting businesses into the city centre. A member said that she considered there should be more mixed development of sites, comprising office space and housing, as this contributed to employment opportunities in the city.

During discussion a member commented on the need to balance growth in areas of the city and the “domino effect” that this might have on other areas of the city and the impact of on the high street of national chains closing stores and restaurants. He said that he could foresee an increase in empty units. The head of planning services said that many people now considered retail as a leisure activity and ate out more. Many national stores were maintaining a high street presence despite a growth in internet sales. The development of Anglia Square would create a niche offer for leisure and shopping activities which would not compete with the retail sector in the city centre. A member pointed out that public transport needed to be improved as there was a lack of evening buses in some areas which made it difficult for people to attend gigs or visit restaurants after work.

In reply to a question the head of planning services said that “human health activities” encompassed social care where demand would increase in the next 40 years.

Discussion then ensued on the definition of Greater Norwich; how it was understood within the county and how it was identified. Members commented that the recent consultation on the City Vision 2040 showed that many residents were unaware of the district council boundaries within the urban area. Discussion then continued on the marketing of the city to particular industries and businesses. The head of planning services commented on the Financial Industry Group (FIG) presentation to the Greater Norwich Growth Board on 6 February 2018 which set out the vision for the Norwich Financial Cluster. Members considered the constraints of the city in terms of infrastructure and transport and its connections with the rest of East Anglia. Businesses situated in the Midlands had wider catchment areas than Norfolk which was on the coast and had poor quality transport links (road and rail) with the west and north of the country. Better connections with Cambridge and the Oxford corridor would also benefit the city’s economic development. Members considered that Norwich could be the destination for technology and financial employment and that more students to its universities would remain here. There was a need to shift perceptions about Norwich.

A member commented that he would be interested in seeing the evidence on the economic analysis as part of the development of the Greater Local Plan and the council’s submission. The head of planning services said that comments from the panel and cabinet members would inform the council’s response.

RESOLVED to note the Norwich Economic Analysis produced by GVA Hatch for the council preparation of the Greater Norwich Local Plan and that it will form part of the formal submission as part of the evidence for the plan.

CHAIR