

PLANNING POLICY & BUILT HERITAGE WORKING PARTY

Minutes of the meeting of the Planning Policy & Built Heritage Working Party held on Monday, 22 March 2021 remotely via Zoom at 10.00 am

Working Party	Mr A Brown (Chairman)	Mrs P Grove-Jones (Vice-Chairman)
Members Present:	Mr N Dixon	Mr P Fisher
	Ms V Gay	Mr P Heinrich
	Mr R Kershaw	Mr G Mancini-Boyle
	Mr J Punchard	Dr C Stockton
	Mr J Toye	

Members also attending: Mr H Blathwayt
Mrs A Fitch-Tillett

Officers in Attendance: Planning Policy Manager, Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services & Governance Officer (Regulatory)

82 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor N Pearce. There were no substitute Members in attendance.

83 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None.

84 MINUTES

The Minutes of a meeting of the Working Party held on 22 February 2021 were approved as a correct record.

85 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

86 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

87 UPDATE ON MATTERS FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING (IF ANY)

The Chairman welcomed Councillor R Kershaw to his first meeting following his appointment to the Working Party in place of Councillor T Adams. He expressed his thanks to Councillor Adams for his work during his time as a Working Party Member.

88 PLANNING POLICY - MONITORING REPORT 2019-20

The Planning Policy Manager presented a report that provided an overview of the main development trends in the District in the period 2019-2020 and measured performance against adopted Core Strategy policies and corporate objectives. He presented slides which gave more detail in respect of the key indicators in the

Monitoring Report. He stated that the document would be published on the Council's website within the next few weeks and would send the link to Members once the document had been published.

The Chairman stated that the Annual Monitoring Report was an important baseline document and thanked the Planning Monitoring Officer for his report.

89 NORFOLK STRATEGIC PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The Planning Policy Manager presented a report that provided an update on the progress of the Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework and Statement of Common Ground following a recent review. He explained that this document would provide evidence to the Planning Inspector that the Council had fulfilled its legal duty to co-operate with neighbouring authorities and other relevant bodies on cross-boundary issues at the examination stage of the Local Plan. The document would continue to be amended and reviewed. However, there had been an indication in the Planning White Paper that the duty to co-operate might be removed at some time in the future. He recommended the formal endorsement of the revised document.

Councillor J Punchard considered that strategic employment sites should be developed to serve the north and west of the District, bearing in mind the amount of housing that would be built in Fakenham and the Cromer/Sheringham area. He also considered that there should be more emphasis on improving digital connectivity for all dwellings, whether new build or existing, as many people suffered from poor connectivity and internet speeds and there was a greater need now more people were working from home.

The Chairman stated that employment promotion and the need to provide employment to support housing developments was raised regularly at the Working Party. The main towns of Fakenham and North Walsham, in addition to the existing Enterprise Park at Scottow, were primary areas to consider for development. The Duty to Co-operate Forum had discussed connectivity issues and the need to improve the 4G connectivity before investing in 5G.

Councillor R Kershaw considered that it was evident from meetings he had attended on behalf of the Leader that there was a concentration on the tech corridor from Cambridge to Norwich, but nothing for the west of the area. There were assets such as West Raynham and Tattersett that should be developed, but these were not covered in any detail in the document. He considered that there should be more engagement for North Norfolk in the tech sector, and particularly in the west of the District.

The Planning Policy Manager advised the Working Party to support this version of the document, but to make the point that the next version should take a broader view of the issues affecting the rural economy and place greater emphasis on the specific issues affecting North Norfolk. With regard to issues raised regarding connectivity, he stated that this document related to land use issues and therefore the retrofitting of existing dwellings and informing decisions in respect of network investment sat outside the Local Plan process. The Local Plan could influence the delivery of specific measures through planning applications for new build developments, but the broader aspects relating to roll out were corporate objectives rather than land use planning issues.

Councillor P Heinrich considered that there was little point considering industrial developments if the telecommunications was inadequate and pressure should be put

on the Government and Openreach. He stated that it had been reported that North Walsham was likely to be connected to gigabit fibre within the next few years but it was also needed in other parts of the District.

Councillor C Stockton supported Councillor Heinrich's comments and stated that there were myriad small businesses around the District which could only operate properly if they had a decent standard of broadband. Businesses could not be developed unless the telecommunications problem was sorted out.

Councillor N Dixon referred to the proposal to develop an enterprise zone at Egmere that had not been progressed. He had previously made the point that there would be a void in the west of the District if it did not come forward as envisaged and there should be additional weight given to the allocation of a site in the west. He also supported Councillor Heinrich's points regarding the need for infrastructure to support employment.

In addition, Councillor Dixon referred to agreements 21, 22 and 23 of the document, in particular with regard to water resources and flooding problems. He considered that there was insufficient capacity for the supply of water to meet the domestic, economic and environmental requirements and the water supply problem had not been sufficiently highlighted in the document. Foul water capacity was also an important issue and there had been a number of incidents recently where foul water had caused problems in various parts of the District. He also considered that the document did not adequately reflect concerns regarding road infrastructure capacity or landscape and wildlife conservation. He considered the finalised version of this document needed to be strengthened and be more accurately reflective of the day to day problems.

The Planning Policy Manager explained that this document would be the principal evidence to demonstrate that local authorities were co-operating in an effective way, and it would be better to go to examination with the most up to date document available. He considered that other partner authorities that were closer to examination than North Norfolk would have concerns if the document were returned for major redrafting. The framework was subject to a continuous process of updating and he suggested that whilst there was nothing substantially wrong with the document as written, there were some deficiencies that could be flagged for further consideration in the next version, which was likely to be published within the next 18 months. He recommended that the Working Party endorse the document subject to the list of issues raised by Members for consideration in the next version.

Councillor Dixon considered that the points relating to flooding, both by foul and surface water, should be reinforced in version 3, as it was a current issue that affected everybody and needed to be dealt with now and not at some point in the future.

Councillor Ms V Gay supported Councillor Dixon and considered that some specific requirements could be strengthened. She welcomed the attention to health issues in the document. However, she noted that whilst there were laudable aspirations in the section relating to Norfolk's rich and biodiverse environment, the wording 'where possible' was used and she was concerned that there was a lack of strong, serious commitment. She considered that the document should be endorsed but could have been stronger.

The Planning Policy Manager explained that the purpose of the document was not to set policies. It was a list of agreements and it was necessary to avoid writing the

document in such a way that it prevented individual authorities from writing their own policies in their Local Plans, hence the use of words such as 'where possible'.

Councillor Mrs P Grove-Jones stated that the Internal Drainage Boards were very important but had only been mentioned once in the document. She stated that the IDBs were trying to persuade landowners to build reservoirs on their land to hold potable fresh water that was currently pumped away to sea during heavy rainfall. Whilst houses should not be built without employment opportunities to support them, she questioned the need for large commercial/industrial sites if the majority of population growth was in the over 60 age groups. North Norfolk thrived on its many small business and the tourist trade.

The Planning Policy Manager stated that the latter point was a difficult one. The Working Party was reluctant to see employment land released for other purposes but there were large allocations that had not been developed. In other parts of the District, such as Hoveton, expanding businesses could not find suitable land to retain their businesses in their current location. There was a need to provide the opportunity for people who wanted to come and invest in the area and needed traditional employment land, but also to promote small business growth which did not require it. Employment allocations were increasingly used for other purposes, eg. care facilities which created significant local employment and included well-paid jobs, whereas some manufacturing or distribution businesses did not generate many jobs. There was a need to consider a range of employment opportunities, rather than concentrate on one particular sector.

Councillor Mrs Grove-Jones considered there would need to be a large increase in the care support system as the Government was moving towards encouraging people to be cared for in their own homes. She considered that this area of economic development had not been fully considered in the report or the Local Plan and there was a need to provide a decent wage base.

The Planning Policy Manager stated that there were many policies in the Local Plan that related to living at home, assisted living and elderly persons accommodation. Land was allocated in the Plan for employment purposes and policies were very permissive regarding all types of employment. It did not frustrate the Council's ability to grow the employment base and create better quality jobs, but this was a wider strategy than the Local Plan, the purpose of which was to set out land use policies to enable growth.

Councillor J Toye referred to the water issue and stated that, without this framework, there was potential that this authority could set strong policies with regard to water use and sign up to Water Resources East, but a neighbouring authority may not. The agreements were a baseline upon which to build and whilst this framework could not set policy, it would ensure that there was a shared responsibility to deal with issues across the wider community.

Councillor R Kershaw stated that whilst he supported the framework document, there was uncertainty as to the future impact on the pandemic on businesses in the area, and there was already a change in approach with smaller businesses coming in that could change the way the economy worked. Climate change would also have an impact. He considered that there would be a much more rapid change in the economy over the next few years, and it was very hard to forecast what would happen given that the situation would be very different in 18 months' time. He considered that there would need to be caveats and changes to the framework document before it moved forward.

Councillor Dixon considered that all authorities would be experiencing similar issues with regard to surface and foul water flooding and he suggested that there could be some scope to give extra emphasis on these issues in this version of the document.

The Planning Policy Manager summed up the Working Party's views that Members were happy to endorse the document, subject to improvements to the flooding/drainage agreements before publication, and a number of matters to be included in version 4, recognising the changes that may arise in 18 months' time as a result of the pandemic.

Councillor Toye pointed out that whilst it had not been covered in any great depth, agreement 8 referred to the New Anglia Covid Recovery Restart Plan.

Councillor Punchard stated that he had attended many flooding incidents with the Fire and Rescue Service and there were always particular areas that suffered. He stated that 1 in 100 year flooding events were becoming more frequent. Whilst it was right to build more housing, they created more surface area that would require drainage.

Councillor Toye considered that there were issues with maintenance of existing drains and although it was outside the scope of this document, it was necessary to find an appropriate way to deal with it.

The Chairman stated that the Strategic Planning Framework was an important document for the Inspector as plans were referred back to local authorities if they had not fulfilled the duty to co-operate requirements. He asked if it was possible to use a similar process to develop a statement of common ground in relation to major developments.

The Planning Policy Manager confirmed that it was the intention to introduce statements of common ground. They were not legally binding, but they were useful to demonstrate to the Inspector that there was a reasonable prospect of development coming forward on allocated sites, and to defend the Local Plan against claims that the strategy was not deliverable.

RECOMMENDED unanimously

- 1. That the *Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework and Statement of Common Ground 2021* and the Agreements contained therein are endorsed by North Norfolk District Council, subject to the inclusion of an improved agreement in relation to surface and foul water drainage.**
- 2. That the Council supports and welcomes the commitment to continued co-operative working and periodic review of the framework.**

The meeting ended at 11.27 am.

Chairman