

PLANNING POLICY & BUILT HERITAGE WORKING PARTY

Minutes of the meeting of the Planning Policy & Built Heritage Working Party held on Monday, 19 April 2021 remotely via Zoom at 10.00 am

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

Members also attending: Mr H Blathwayt
Mr N Lloyd
Mrs L Withington

Officers in Attendance: Planning Policy Manager, Planning Policy Team Leader, Senior Planning Officer (CD), Senior Planning Officer (SH), Democratic Services & Governance Officer (Regulatory) and Democratic Services Manager

90 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N Dixon, N Pearce and J Punchard.

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91 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None.

92 MINUTES

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

93 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

94 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

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

The Planning Policy Manager informed the Working Party that revised agreements under the Duty to Co-operate relating to surface water drainage and flooding had been prepared as requested at the previous meeting. The revised agreements would need to be signed off by all Duty to Co-operate Forum partners at a meeting

to be held later in the week. The Working Party would be updated at its next meeting.

96 LOCAL PLAN DRAFT POLICY APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Planning Policy Team Leader introduced a report that recommended policy approaches to sustainable development for inclusion in the Local Plan. He asked the Working Party to consider if it now wished to place greater emphasis on low carbon sources of energy and, in particular, wind turbines, in the light of the declaration of climate emergency. In doing so it would be necessary to accept larger turbines that produced more power. Less weight could be given to landscape sensitivity in determining planning applications, which would open up more of the District to such developments.

The Senior Planning Officer (CD) presented the revised policy SD7. She outlined the background to the current version and highlighted the changes that had been made since January 2019 to take into account the updated national policy and guidance. She explained that removing the landscape sensitivity element in order to make the policy even more positive would effectively open up the whole of the District to large scale wind turbine proposals.

In answer to a question by the Chairman, the Senior Planning Officer confirmed that the Broads Authority area had the same protection as the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Councillor J Toye stated that whilst the area was sensitive, there was also a need to consider biodiversity. He stated that the footprint of a wind turbine was much smaller than that of ground mounted solar panels, and a great deal of land was lost in producing the same amount of power from solar as from wind energy. He considered that wind energy should not be discounted as future technology may fit better into the landscape in some areas. He asked if storage facilities such as batteries were classed as renewables.

The Senior Planning Officer explained that battery storage fell under renewable and low carbon energy so proposals would be assessed against Policy SD7.

Councillor R Kershaw stated that he had slight concerns with regard to the policy. It was anticipated that most of the major wind energy would come from offshore turbine developments, such as Vattenfall and Vanguard. He considered that there was no chance of an offshore ring main coming forward within the timescale of those developments and there was insufficient infrastructure to take the power that would be generated. In East Anglia, the UK Power Network grid was not sufficient to cope with the growing demand for electric vehicles, let alone offshore power, and it was necessary for local solutions such as battery storage to be included in the Local Plan. He was concerned that there would not be an AONB to protect if climate issues were not tackled.

Councillor N Lloyd, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services, Climate Change and Environment, was pleased that the context of the policy had gone further than he expected. He considered that there would be more emphasis on local energy in the medium to longer term and energy storage was therefore vital. He asked for Officers' views on the Bodham wind turbine case and was concerned that the Council was setting a policy that was not supported in law as a result of the judgment in that case, although he was pleased to see that the draft policy as it

stood protected the AONB. He considered that the wording of the policy should reflect that other technologies could come forward in the future. He referred to the development of small wind turbines that could be sited in private gardens without being visible above fences, but generated a large amount of energy. He considered that future proposals for housing developments would need to include details of how they would produce their own energy. It was likely that such measures would eventually be included in legislation in order to meet the Government's 2050 target. Overall, he supported the policy subject to suitable wording to cover future advances in technology.

The Planning Policy Manager stated that although Local Plans were based on 20 year cycles, there was an expectation that local authorities would review their plans every five years. If a Local Plan was out of date it would be necessary to produce a new Plan. However, local authorities often passed resolutions to apply their policies in a different way, with different material considerations being attached, and this could apply to advances in technology.

With regard to the Bodham case, the Planning Policy Manager explained that the site lay just outside the AONB but within its setting. The new policy might allow such a proposal provided the applicant was able to meet the policy criteria. He referred to the Inspector's judgment in the appeal case, which weighed in favour of the ability of proposal to generate a significant amount of power against the harmful impacts, and considered that the Inspector may have come to a different judgment had the site been located within the AONB.

The Planning Policy Manager considered that the proposed policy struck the right balance for the District. It provided significant opportunity for renewable energy in the less sensitive parts of the District and made a contribution to the national requirement, reflecting the special nature of the area and its national designation all along the coastline that the Council had a responsibility to protect. He suggested that reference could be made in the policy preamble to an informal policy review for future developments in technology etc.

The Chairman referred to the importance of the AONB and Broads Authority area to tourism in the District and the need to be mindful of protecting it for the foreseeable future. He considered that the policy currently struck a balance, identifying through the Landscape Character Assessment those areas where turbines up to 100 metres could be acceptable and contribute towards the Council's responsibility towards low carbon energy within the District.

Councillor P Heinrich stated that he was not much in favour of onshore wind turbines, particularly the larger ones, but he considered that small clusters such as those at West Somerton were acceptable as they were not particularly intrusive. He considered that Officers had done well to balance an issue that was difficult in planning terms while meeting the public expectation. However, there was no mention of small scale developments, such as photovoltaics on new housing development, which was a small individual source that could collectively make a very large difference to the production of electricity. He proposed acceptance of the recommendation.

The Planning Policy Manager explained that roof mounted photovoltaics etc. fell outside the scope of planning as they did not require planning permission, except when associated with listed buildings, and therefore did not require inclusion in the policy. He suggested that the wording in the policy preamble regarding the general support for renewable energy within the fabric of buildings might be appropriate, but

it was possible that this was included elsewhere.

The Chairman considered that there would be increasing numbers of applications by private householders to install ground based solar panels within their gardens and it was a question of setting out the approach to this type of development.

The Planning Policy Team Leader explained that energy generation from renewables on developments was covered within the carbon reduction policy and construction standards policy, through fabric improvements in house design and add-on technologies such as heat pumps, solar panels etc. SD7 was concerned with setting the parameters for larger scale renewable infrastructure. However, it would be possible to add wording to the supporting text to link the policies and to reference solar panels in developments.

Councillor Ms V Gay stated that she shared Councillor Heinrich's view on the West Somerton turbines. She supported the inclusion of airfields in the policy. She also supported the views expressed regarding local solutions and local provision as it would help to address the high level of fuel poverty within the District.

Councillor Mrs P Grove-Jones considered that the policy was well written. She considered that wording should be included regarding continuous review. She requested clarification with regard to anaerobic digesters. She supported the production of energy from waste, which could be used by farms or within local developments.

The Planning Policy Manager confirmed that the policy would cover all types of low carbon energy generation, including anaerobic digester development.

The Planning Policy Team Leader stated that anaerobic digesters tended to have a moderate to low impact on the landscape, although there were issues around biodiversity in relation to the types of crops grown to fuel them, and it would need to be demonstrated that any impacts could be satisfactorily mitigated.

The Chairman stated that the Working Party was satisfied that the policy would be brought up to date in comparison with the existing version in the current Core Strategy, although there was some work required to the wording to cover technological developments and local energy schemes. He asked if there would be a need to update neighbourhood plans if they did not refer to low carbon energy and size of wind turbines.

The Planning Policy Team Leader explained that national policy and guidance included provision for neighbourhood plans to identify suitable sites or schemes for renewable energy. It was explicit in the policy that community led schemes would be supported. Policy SD2 also included support for community developments without the need for a neighbourhood plan where local support could be demonstrated. He considered that the community aspects were covered within these policies.

The Chairman referred to Councillor Kershaw's comments regarding the timing of an offshore transmission network. He understood that the Government was planning to introduce measures in the Energy Bill, which could take up to two years to be enacted. Schemes would be underway before the situation with the offshore transmission network was known.

RECOMMENDED unanimously

1. That Cabinet endorse the revised Policy SD7: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy.

That the responsibility for drafting such an approach, including that of finalising the associated Policy, be delegated to the Planning Policy Manager.

97 NORTH WALSHAM WESTERN EXTENSION: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Senior Planning Officer (SH) presented an update on the work on the Development Brief for the North Walsham Western Extension and the proposed consultation website.

The Chairman and Members of the Working Party praised the Officers for the work that had been carried out to date.

Councillor G Mancini-Boyle asked if Officers could foresee any negative issues or had any negative comments.

The Planning Policy Manager stated that the proposals would not be universally supported and there had been some local concerns. However, there was acceptance that the basic premise behind the scheme was sound, given that the options elsewhere were limited. At this stage it was necessary to prove the concept to some local residents and Town Council Members who considered that their issues had not been properly addressed. This was the start of two rounds of public consultation which would show the Council's initial thoughts on the proposals and seek opinion on them from the wider public. The document would then be reviewed and a further version produced for public consultation along with the next stage of consultation on the Local Plan. He considered that there would be many challenges as it was a major proposal which would take many years to develop. Whilst it was hoped there would be a great deal of support, it was accepted that there were many people who were yet to be convinced by the proposals, and concern was being expressed from further afield with regard to the impact of the proposals, such as increased traffic through Coltishall.

Councillor P Heinrich welcomed the report and wished to place on record his thanks to the Senior Planning Officer and Planning Policy Manager for their work and the progress that had been made. He stated that he had received no adverse feedback from organisations in the town regarding routing etc. and he considered that the consultation was crucial in bringing the majority of people on board. It was essential that the overall design and concept met the needs of North Walsham. He had concerns regarding the impact of traffic routing and Coltishall would bear the brunt of it. He considered that the vision statement was very good and along with the core themes provided a very sound basis to move forward in a positive way. He hoped that the development brief would be a national exemplar of good practice.

Councillor C Stockton stated that many of the issues that people were concerned about were outside the control of the Council, such as infrastructure in terms of doctors' surgeries, dentists and schools and there was a need to involve providers in order to remove that criticism. Lack of jobs was another issue which frequently caused concern, and whilst it was good that the report mentioned job opportunities and employment, it was another area over which the Council had limited control.

Councillor N Lloyd, as local Member, stated that most of his comments had been covered. He supported Councillor Stockton's comments and stated that there was a

perception that the town was being expanded and there were not enough dentists. The view that there were not enough school places was incorrect and this should be made very clear in the consultation. Concerns had also been expressed with regard to doctors' surgeries and jobs. He considered that such criticisms were to be expected. He considered that the consultation proposals were very good and thanked the Officers for their work.

Councillor Ms V Gay considered that Officers had been sympathetic to the concerns of local Members and were well aware of some of the underlying concerns of North Walsham residents. She considered that concerns regarding medical provision had been expressed across the District and the situation was worsening.

The Chairman and Portfolio Holder thanked the Senior Planning Officer and his team for their excellent work.

It was proposed by Councillor P Heinrich, seconded by Councillor Ms V Gay and

RECOMMENDED unanimously

- 1. That the approach to public engagement on the emerging principles in the Western Extension Development Brief be approved, and;**
- 2. That delegated authority is given to the Planning Policy Manager on the final timing and content of the engagement material following consultation with the Chair of the Planning Policy and Built Heritage Working Group and North Walsham Members.**

The meeting ended at 11.20 am.

Chairman