

THURSDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2021

Minutes of a meeting of the **Development Committee** held in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 9.30 am when there were present:

Councillors

Mrs P Grove-Jones (Chairman)
Mr P Heinrich (Vice-Chairman)

Mr A Brown
Mrs A Fitch-Tillett
Mr R Kershaw
Mr G Mancini-Boyle

Mr P Fisher
Dr V Holliday
Mr N Lloyd
Ms L Withington

Mr C Cushing (In place of Mr N Pearce)
Mr J Rest (In place of Dr C Stockton)
Mr J Toye (In place of Mr A Yiasimi)

Officers

(* attending remotely)

Mr P Rowson, Assistant Director for Planning
Mr N Doran, Principal Lawyer
Mr G Lyon, Development Management and Major Projects Manager
Mr J Mann, Major Projects Team Leader
Miss L Yarham, Democratic Services & Governance Officer (Regulatory)
E Denny, Democratic Services Manager

40 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DETAILS OF ANY SUBSTITUTE MEMBER(S)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N Pearce, C Stockton, A Varley and A Yiasimi. Three substitute Members were present as shown above.

41 MINUTES

The Minutes of a meeting of the Committee held on 23 September 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

42 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

43 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

<u>Minute:</u>	<u>Councillor:</u>	<u>Interest:</u>
44	P Heinrich	Knows Mr Stibbons, Chair of Paston Foundation and had worked with him on education projects 20 years ago.

44 NORTH WALSHAM - PO/20/1251 - FORMER SPORTS GROUND - ERECTION OF UP TO 54 DWELLINGS WITH PUBLIC OPEN SPACE, NEW VEHICULAR ACCESS, LANDSCAPING AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE (OUTLINE

APPLICATION WITH FULL DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED MEANS OF ACCESS ONLY. DETAILS OF LAYOUT, SCALE, APPEARANCE AND LANDSCAPING ARE RESERVED FOR FUTURE DETERMINATION

The Major Projects Team Leader presented the report by remote link. He recommended approval of this application as set out in the report. A copy of the visual presentation had previously been forwarded to the Committee. He displayed an additional plan showing the existing open spaces in North Walsham.

Public Speaker

Nick Moys (supporting)

Councillor N Lloyd stated that the land had been bequeathed to North Walsham almost 400 years ago. The land had recently been used for a triathlon and was open to the public occasionally for that purpose, although it had been unused for most of the time since it was fenced off in 2017. Flooding was a regular issue in North Walsham due to the amount of building that had taken place in the town. There did not appear to be any drainage proposals in the application and he did not trust Anglian Water's view that there would be no issues. He considered that the hedgerow should be retained and that the existing levels of biodiversity should be protected. He considered that the current level of biodiversity was unlikely to return to the replacement hedging due to the development of the site. He referred to the concerns regarding the existing road and footway and the high level of opposition from local residents, including the Town Council. He questioned the need for additional housing in this location as there was no threat to the Council's housing supply and the emerging Local Plan would provide for at least 1800 more houses, which would include a percentage of affordable housing. Whilst he supported the amount of affordable housing provided by this application, he considered that there would be much more coming to the town in future years and there was a question as to how much more development North Walsham could take. In his view, this proposal was unsustainable. He considered that the development should be viewed as an exceptions scheme, there was insufficient mitigation for the loss of open space and he disagreed with the Education Authority that education land would not be necessary, given the large number of additional dwellings planned for the town in the future. Existing sports facilities were already struggling to cope with demand. He noted that there was no mention of climate change in the proposal or any detail of the type of dwellings that would be built.

Councillor P Heinrich stated that the land was not used for sport, nor had it been for some time. He considered that the proposed landscaping mitigated against the loss of open space and could potentially bring more biodiversity to the area. He was particularly concerned regarding the footpaths and pedestrian access into the town. There was a clear need for a link onto Weavers Way and onto the footpath to the rear of Trackside Park, but this would not feel safe at night and pedestrians would use the footpath along Station Road. This path was narrow, necessitated the crossing of Norwich Road and visibility was poor. Vehicles tended to travel in excess of the speed limit towards the railway bridge. He proposed that this application be deferred to seek further information as to how the issues regarding the highways, footpaths and drainage would be dealt with.

Councillor G Mancini-Boyle supported the views expressed and considered that construction traffic would be a major problem. He considered that the proposed entrance to the site was not good. He was concerned that the dwellings would be fitted with gas boilers instead of green technology.

The Chairman stated that the current proposal related to access only and therefore no information was provided regarding the dwellings to be built.

Councillor Lloyd stated that he understood the nature of the proposals but was concerned that Members would have no control over future negotiations.

Councillor R Kershaw stated that although the road was currently restricted to access only, problems were already caused by heavy trucks accessing the builders' merchants at the end of the road. He considered that additional traffic would be dangerous if the road were not widened.

Councillor J Rest considered that whilst there were negatives associated with this proposal, the development would be low density and offer a generous amount of space around the dwellings.

Councillor J Toye referred to the comments made by Councillor Lloyd regarding future development in the town. He considered that it was difficult to balance the negative aspects of the loss of open space with the need for affordable housing.

The Chairman stated that this was a windfall site and was not included within the future allocations.

The Assistant Director for Planning explained that the housing numbers in the Local Plan were inclusive of windfalls on sites that could come forward at any time. The application site was not allocated, but could be considered as part of the windfall development that would set the minimum level of housing provision in the future.

Councillor Mrs L Withington stated that the Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance had identified that a great deal of flooding emanated from access from new developments. The locality had already been identified as an area with groundwater issues and she considered that information should be provided as to mitigation measures. She stated that Station Road could be difficult at times as it was already used by a significant number of people and therefore further consideration should be given to the highway issues.

Councillor C Cushing noted that no comments had been received from Councillor D Birch as a local Ward Member. He considered that the proposal was finely balanced. It was in the centre of the town and close to the amenities. He considered that the point regarding drainage was well made and that further information was required.

The Chairman stated that local Members who could not attend a meeting should submit a written statement, even if they had not called in an application.

Councillor Heinrich stated that the road under the railway bridge was subject to regular flooding, which prevented pedestrian access into the town, and vehicles sometimes became stuck in floodwater. There was already a large amount of traffic from the Hopkins development and adjacent industrial units, and there would be more development along Norwich Road which would add to the traffic problems. He considered that traffic issues over the wider area should be taken into account.

Councillor A Brown considered that the site had potential for a number of uses due to its location. He was concerned about the highways implications and substandard

junctions. He considered that the application should be refused as he was not satisfied that the loss of open space had been mitigated by the proposed Section 106 Agreement and the proposal was contrary to Policy CT1 as it was arguable that the open space did not contribute to the character of the settlement, the case had not been made that it was surplus to requirements given its possible functions and the proposal did not fulfil the requirements regarding compensation for loss of open space.

Councillor R Kershaw seconded the proposal for deferral of this application.

The Development Management and Major Projects Manager addressed points made by the Committee. He accepted that climate emergency was a hugely important issue and it was recognised by the planning officers. The location of a proposal was one of the significant issues that affected its sustainability and this was a very sustainable location. The delivery of formal recreation space as part of this application would unlock private land for public use, which had been weighed in the balance. He requested clarity on the issues that Members wished to be addressed in the event of deferral.

Councillor Heinrich requested an independent study of highway impact, and consideration of a SUDS to ensure that there would not be water egress from the site onto Norwich Road.

The Assistant Director for Planning stated that concerns had been raised regarding the permeability of the site in terms of footpath access.

Councillor Lloyd requested that further consideration be given to the hedgerow and a pledge sought on the climate effects of the development.

The Chairman reiterated that this proposal related to access and the removal of the hedgerow was to enable the footpath to be widened.

Councillor Brown noted that the access road would be wider than the main feeder road that would be taking a greater volume of traffic. He did not support deferral.

Councillor J Toye requested that an independent traffic report should include the monitoring of traffic flows to see if the road was being used for access only.

RESOLVED by 9 votes to 4

That consideration of this application be deferred to enable an independent study of highway impacts to be undertaken, consideration of the drainage impacts, permeability of the site in terms of footpath access, appropriate consideration of climate change and an ecological assessment of the hedgerow.

45 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Assistant Director for Planning presented a report that set out performance in relation to the determination of planning applications in both Development Management and Majors teams on the basis of speed and quality of decisions against national benchmarks.

At the request of Councillor R Kershaw, the Assistant Director for Planning updated the Committee on vacancies and recruitment. Whilst recruitment had been quite

strong, there was an issue in recruiting senior or experienced officers.

Councillor A Brown asked if the number of applications for which extensions of time were granted would reduce significantly as the pandemic subsided, and what the benchmark would be in percentage terms as the service transitioned towards more normality.

The Assistant Director for Planning explained that there was an improving situation with fewer live applications on hand and improvements in performance, so there should be a reducing need to seek extensions of time. Performance in respect of extensions of time would be discussed with individual officers through the Team Leaders, but it was too soon to set a percentage commitment for the service as a whole. The aim was to drive down the requirements for extensions of time and make as many decisions as possible within 8 or 13 weeks. This was being hindered by other external factors such as delayed receipt of consultation responses.

In response to a question from Councillor Brown regarding training on the Uniform system, the Assistant Director for Planning explained that the project group was now satisfied that the Uniform system was stable and that progress could be made towards decommissioning the Acolaid system. Training was being offered on the GIS mapping on Uniform, with new training being offered to newly recruited officers. There had been an issue with the training launch and the fact that most officers were working from home, which restricted the opportunities for learning on the job and sharing experience with colleagues. Training needs would be identified through the appraisals process.

The Development Management and Major Projects Manager explained that he would be reviewing processes and procedures across the Development Management and Major Projects Teams as part of his team plan. This would include a review of how Uniform was working and how processes could be improved to help officers deliver timely decisions.

Councillor J Toye stated that staffing and recruitment, and increasing workload and enforcement, appeared to be an issue across the country. This was not only within planning departments but also in the consultation areas. However, it was necessary to acknowledge the improvement in performance, the hard work that had been put in to achieve that improvement, and the workload that was still carried by the officers. This was a significant achievement with the background of the software issues, pandemic, training and remote working. It was important to continue to work together and share any concerns. He thanked the officers for their good work.

The Chairman stated that she echoed Councillor Toye's comments.

Councillor G Mancini-Boyle asked if any further consideration had been given to improvements in customer service in terms of keeping applicants informed.

The Assistant Director for Planning explained that improving customer service was a focus of the team plans. Officers were striving to keep applicants and agents informed of progress but it was not easy due to the current high caseloads. However it was apparent that communications had improved.

Councillor Toye stated that the service was moving in the right direction and changes were being made, although there was still some way to go. As Portfolio Holder he would work through the issues with the Assistant Director for Planning and his team.

Councillor V Holliday stated that it was good to see improvement and she was aware of how hard the planning officers worked on a daily basis. She considered that it would be interesting to see the statistics broken down by Ward, and to include benchmarking in the performance report.

The Assistant Director for Planning stated that it would require a great deal of work to report by Ward, but he would consider if this could be done at intervals. He suggested that benchmarking could be included either quarterly or half-yearly. The tables in the report referenced national tables that could be viewed on the Government's website.

Councillor Mrs L Withington stated that Sheringham Town Council had expressed appreciation for the support given by officers in respect of a large development in the town. She expressed her thanks to the officers.

The Assistant Director for Planning stated that he would pass back the positive comments to the team.

46 **APPEALS SECTION**

(a) NEW APPEALS

The Committee noted item 9(a) of the agenda.

(b) INQUIRIES AND HEARINGS - PROGRESS

The Committee noted item 9(b) of the agenda.

Cley-next-the-Sea ENF/18/0164 – the Assistant Director for Planning informed the Committee that the matter had been further delayed as the appellants had now submitted three further planning applications. Discussions were due to take place with the agents regarding this matter and concerns had been expressed to them that the mediation process related to a single application. The Committee would be updated at the next meeting regarding the additional applications and the local Member would be kept informed.

(c) WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS APPEALS - IN HAND

The Committee noted item 9(c) of the agenda.

Councillor J Rest stated that the appellant for Fakenham PF/21/0192 and LA/21/0193 had informed him that the Inspector had recently carried out a site inspection.

(d) APPEAL DECISIONS

The Committee noted item 9(d) of the agenda.

The Assistant Director for Planning stated that more appeal decisions were now coming forward from the Planning Inspectorate.

In response to a question from Councillor J Toye, the Assistant Director for Planning explained that Cromer ADV/20/1701 had been allowed as the Inspector had come to a different judgement from the officers regarding visual amenity issues.

(e) **COURT CASES – PROGRESS AND RESULTS**

The Committee noted item 9(e) of the agenda.

The meeting closed at 11.02 am.

CHAIRMAN
Thursday, 18 November 2021