

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12th November, 2012

PRESENT – Councillor Long (in the Chair); Councillors Carson, Cossins, L. Hughes, Lawton, E.A. Richmond and Wright. (7)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Baldwin and Harman. (2)

ABSENT – Councillors Grundy and Lewis. (2)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Curry; Mr. and Mrs. Ord (Members of the Public).

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Steve Petch, Head of Strategy and Commissioning; Valerie Adams, Principal Planning Officer; Emma Williams, Planning Officer; Karen Johnson, Planning Officer; Jennine Nunns, Planning Technician/Support Officer and Allison Hill, Democratic Officer.

P20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

P21. LOCAL PLAN – VARIOUS PRESENTATIONS – Members of this Scrutiny received a number of presentations from Officers to give an overview of work underway on the Local Plan (formerly known as the Local Development Framework). The Local Plan sets out the policies and proposals for the use and development of land in the Borough. Handouts were available to Members to supplement the presentations and to provide an update on issues, such as executive and affordable housing which the presentation was unable to cover at the meeting.

Making and Growing Places - The Head of Strategy and Commissioning gave Members an overview of the Making and Growing Places document which is being prepared for the period 2011-2026. The Making and Growing Places document will form a key part of the up to date Local Plan for the Borough and once adopted will replace all remaining saved Borough of Darlington Local Plan Policies and will reflect 2012 National Planning Policy Framework.

Members were advised that progress to date included the preparation of the scoping report; undertaking sustainability appraisal scoping; evidence collection for the gypsy and traveller sites study, the Town, District and Local Centres, a method for housing site assessment; and flood mitigation modelling for the Town Centre Fringe.

Future works will include further evidence collection and analysis e.g. for potential housing sites and employment land; policy development as some policies cannot be drafted until findings of outstanding pieces of work elsewhere are completed e.g. parking strategy; regulatory requirements; and further community engagement including targeted consultations in early 2013.

The presentation also outlined the timetable leading up to the programmed adoption of the Plan in December 2014, commencing with targeted consultations in December/January, 2013, presentation of preferred options in May 2013, further consultations in

May/July, 2013, presentation of a publication draft in January 2014, submission to the Planning Inspectorate in April, 2014, Inspectors Report September/October, 2014 and final adoption in December, 2014.

Housing – A Principal Planning Officer gave a presentation on planning for new housing which included how many houses the Council are planning for; where this housing should go; and how potential housing sites are being assessed.

The number of houses to plan for is set out in the adopted Core Strategy which plans for 2011-26 and Policy CS10 states that the Council should plan for about 350 net additional dwellings each year to 2021 and about 400 net additional dwellings each year 2021-26. It is anticipated that more land than indicated in the Core Strategy is likely to need to be identified in the 'Making and Growing Places' development plan, to deliver new housing in the earlier years of the plan period, including up to 2016.

The presentation outlined where the sources of land for new housing is identified which includes sites that already have planning permission e.g. College Gardens and West Park and sites that have not yet commenced e.g. Central Park and Lingfield Point which it is expected will deliver most of the new housing needed up to 2016 but less than half that needed by 2012, and a very low percentage of that needed from 2021. There have also been sites identified in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), which was first prepared in 2009 and updated annually and preliminary findings of the latest update indicate that in addition to sites with planning permission, 167 new homes could be delivered on sites currently suitable, available and deliverable during 2013-2016 and a further 112 from 2016-18.

Other potential sources of housing supply include large and small windfalls, though these cannot be included as part of supply for the first five years of the plan period; car park sites which the emerging Parking Strategy indicates would no longer be needed for that purpose; any employment land sites emerging from the Business Sites and Premises Review where work suggests the land is no longer an essential part of the employment land portfolio required to deliver the new Economic Strategy; and Council owned land with constraints that could be overcome.

The Town Centre Fringe Masterplan will be considered by Cabinet in February 2014 and the specific proposals contained within the plan will be reflected in the Borough wide Making and Growing Places document. The Town Centre Fringe area has been subdivided into six sub-areas, to make sense of a very extensive and diverse area for planning policy purposes. These areas differ in their proximity to the town centre, mix of existing uses and surrounding uses, and the constraints on development that they face e.g. contamination, flood risk and hazard.

Housing Intensification – Valerie Adams, Principal Planning Officer gave a presentation on Housing Intensification and highlighted the three main forms of housing intensification, namely: conversion to flats, sub-division of existing housing stock into houses in multiple occupation and garden land development and advised Members that currently there are several existing policies in the Borough Local Plan which cover housing intensification.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that local planning authorities should set out their own approach to housing density to reflect local circumstances and

Local Plan Policies seek to control subdivision of dwellings, particularly in the areas of Greenbank Road, Corporation Road, Station Road and Westbrook Villas. Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in Darlington have steadily increased and there are now 100 per cent more than in 2005. The areas worst affected by an over concentration of flats and HMOs will be identified on the Local Plan Policies Map, with an associated policy designed to help minimise further degradation and loss of family properties by restricting additional conversions/subdivisions. To be effective the policy will have to include a commitment to preparing an Article 4 Direction to cover specific areas. This will have an implication for workload for Development Management without any associated fee income. However, it could help to reduce the number of complaints that are received regarding HMOs by the Private Sector Housing team.

Following Members discussion it was agreed that there is strong justification for controls over Houses in Multiple Occupation, particularly in the Northgate area and it is clear that areas of saturation need to be identified to enable more controls of further HMOs. Members gave consideration to the need for a Policy on Garden Development.

Employment Land – Emma Williams, Planning Officer gave a presentation on employment land. The Core Strategy provides up to 360 hectares of additional employment land. Members were advised that there is currently a Business Sites and Premises Review underway which is expected to be completed by November, which once completed will feed into Local Plan policy development. The Review has included employment forecasting, visioning workshops and detailed site analysis and forecast results range from 18-128 hectare requirements of employment land over the plan period. The Review is also looking at the potential for some sites to be de-allocated.

Town Centre and Retail Policies – A Planning Officer also outlined to Scrutiny the policy options relating to Town Centre and Retail Planning including the national and local picture of retail, the existing policy framework, and details on the Town Centre and District and Local Centres.

It was highlighted that closure of major multiple retailers nationally has led to an increase in shop vacancy rates and comparison goods retailers have been hit the hardest and the fact that High Streets are generally changing. Locally vacancy rates in Darlington have risen slightly to 13.5 per cent in the number of vacant units.

It was noted that vacancies seemed to be scattered across the Centre as a whole and that at this point, the spatial pattern did not suggest that vacancies were particular to a specific street or location. Members were interested in whether planning policy allowed for temporary or alternative uses of vacant dwellings as a means by which to bring them back into use and to reduce the impact of vacancies in the Town Centre. An Officer advised that in primary and secondary frontages, current retail planning policy did not permit change of use and that this was in place to protect the character of the retail frontages. Whilst recognising that there may be an opportunity to introduce some flexibility in policy to allow other commercial uses within the Town Centre boundary and that this could involve temporary uses, at present there was continued focus on retail uses.

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out guidance to ensure the vitality of town centres and gives guidance to local planning authorities in drawing up Local Plans. Local Authorities are required to define primary and secondary frontages and the

factors taken into consideration when defining these areas include the proportion of A1 use retail outlets, vacancy rates, footfall and ensuring a mix of other uses.

The High Row has the majority of A1 usage and has the highest footfall, comparable to Northgate. The majority of the national retailers are located in the town centre.

It was reported that the majority of primary and secondary frontages in the town are still relevant however there are some changes proposed to Horsemarket, Tubwell Row and Bondgate to remove some areas from secondary frontage classification as they are no longer perform a shopping function and further work alongside BID Members will be undertaken to consider the function of different parts of the Town Centre.

Members discussed Skinnergate and expressed concerns over the number of vacancies and 'money' shops. The view expressed was that Skinnergate was part of the main shopping centre but was deteriorating in terms of shopping offer. The potential for creating better links to Grange Road was raised.

Members were advised that as part of the preparatory work being undertaken to inform the Making and Growing Places Preferred Options a review of retail policy in the Skinnergate area was underway which would examine whether the retail policy was too restrictive in this area.

It was also stated that work was also being undertaken on the district and local retail centres e.g. Cockerton, North Road, Mowden, Neasham Road, Whinfield and Yarm Road. West Park and Middleton St. George have also now been identified as local centres.

Heritage Policy Options – Members received a presentation on Heritage Policy Options.

It was reported that there are 20 ancient monuments, 540 listed buildings, 2 historical parks and gardens and 16 conservation areas listed as Darlington's designated heritage assets. There are also non-designated heritage assets which include buildings of local interest and archaeological finds.

There is a requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework on local planning authorities for the conservation and enhancement of historic assets. Darlington has a quaker influence on historic development and also a railway heritage influence in the North Road area and around Bank Top Station.

It was also reported that currently there is a strong policy framework to conserve heritage assets in general, but a local policy should reflect the specific assets relating to the railway and Quaker heritage assets. Further work is underway to identify the broad significance of Darlington's heritage assets and also work with Durham County Council Archaeological Team to identify 'areas of Special Archaeological Significance' and these will be identified on the Local Plan Policies Map. Any potential development on these identified sites involving ground disturbance will be required to have an archaeological assessment.

Any deliverable site specific proposals arising out of the work of the Railway Heritage Enquiry Group will also be reflected in the draft heritage policy, if they are available in time.

Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document – Members received a presentation to update Members on the consultation responses and key amendments to the Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document which sets out when planning obligations will be sought from new residential and non-residential development.

Community and stakeholder engagement was carried out between 29th June and 20th July 2012 and 25 responses were received, the majority from statutory organisations, planning consultants and house builders. Members of this Scrutiny considered the Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document at their meeting held on 14th June, 2012 and comments made have been reflected in changes to the Planning Document.

It was also noted that a new section on Community and Member Involvement had been included in the Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document and that the contribution towards school places had been reduced.

Darlington Local Plan Monitoring Report – Members views were sought on proposed fact sheets as a new method of reporting annually on the Darlington Local Plan monitoring.

RESOLVED – That Place Scrutiny Committee :-

- (a) Supports the Council having a facilitation role through working with other agencies such as land owners, developers, the Environment Agency and Highways Agency to bring forward housing sites;
- (b) Notes that while the Council is responsible for allocating a sufficient and deliverable supply of land for housing to meet housing need over the plan period, the actual delivery of housing units will continue to be heavily dependent on market conditions;
- (c) Applauds the approach to housing site allocations and view this as flexible and realistic;
- (d) Supports every effort to bring forward housing sites within the Town Centre Fringe and main urban area as a priority, while understanding other uses may need to be brought forward if housing is found not to be deliverable due to market conditions;
- (e) Adds the Business Sites and Premises Review into its Work Programme to examine once it has been completed; and
- (f) Where long term vacancy of retail units was an identified problem there may be cases where there was need for a more flexible approach to retail policy on primary and secondary frontage uses where this was deemed essential for maintaining the vitality and viability of the Town Centre.