

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2 October 2014

PRESENT – Councillor Long (in the Chair); Councillors Baldwin, Carson, Cossins, Culley, Donohue, Harman, Lawton and EA Richmond. (9)

APOLOGIES – Councillors L Hughes and Wright. (2)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Currie, C Hughes, Macnab, Nutt and S Richmond. (5)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – John Anderson, Assistant Director, Economic Initiative, Steve Petch, Place Strategy Manager, Valerie Adams, Planning Policy Manager and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

P20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – Councillor Macnab declared as interest as the Clerk of Whessoe Parish Council and the Vice-Chair of Governors of Longfield Academy.

P21. LOCAL PLAN ; MAKING AND GROWING PLACES REVISED PREFERRED OPTIONS HOUSING SITE ALOCATIONS CONSULTATION RESPONSES AND NEXT STEPS – The Director of Economic Growth submitted a report (previously circulated) which outlined the outcome of public consultation on the Local Plan: Making and Growing Places (MGP) Draft Revised Housing Site Proposals and seeking Members' views thereon. Mr Petch gave a presentation summarising the main contents of the report.

Members were advised that the purpose of the meeting was to consider Officer responses to the consultation comments received. These only indicated a direction of travel rather than the officers final recommendations on points raised.

Reference was made to the Revised Preferred Options (RPO) housing policy which planned for 5,800 new homes to be provided to 2026. The RPO identified land that could accommodate about 6200 new homes to ensure delivery of the 5,800 and provide a buffer as required by National Planning Policy..

The submitted report outlined the process of the community and stakeholder consultations which were held from 23 May to 4 July 2014. In excess of 750 written responses had been received and comments were made by around 400 people who attended drop-in events and meetings. Responses were received from the public, local interest groups, landowners and developer interests and statutory consultees and covered a range of planning and non-planning issues.

There was strong local opposition to development on the proposed allocated housing sites many of which related on potential impact on traffic, access difficulties, impact on the local amenity of adjacent properties, biodiversity concerns, flooding, surface water and drainage issues, loss of recreational open space, loss of views, impact on property values and availability of more appropriate alternatives.

Concerns were also expressed that large housing sites would place a strain on existing community services such as GP surgeries, hospitals and schools.

Officer comments and key actions for the individual sites were highlighted in the submitted report.

Scrutiny Committee gave consideration to individual sites outlined in the submitted report in the following order, based on the number of representatives in attendance.

Muscar House Farm is council-owned urban fringe development site which could accommodate approximately 90 new homes.

Members heard the concerns expressed by the Ward Member, Councillor Tom Nutt and the objections, on behalf of a number of residents, of Mr Graham Foster, Mr John Dixon, Mr Ralph Bradley, Mr Binks, Mr Ted Carter, Mr Jan de Basagoiti, Mr Chris Jackson and Mr Brian Bailey in relation to the relevance of the findings of a Judicial Review undertaken in early 2000, lack of suitable public transport for potential elderly residents, shortage of school places and need to protect green spaces. Other issues raised included an unsustainable increased pressure on the highway network, Barmpton Lane being used by farm traffic on a daily basis, protection of flora and fauna on the site which would have increased since an independent survey undertaken in 1998 by David Green, lack of parking spaces for residents of Barmpton Lane and unnecessary destruction of the landscape of Darlington. Concerns were also expressed about the impact on the health of elderly residents due to increased exhaust fumes, the strain on GP surgeries and school places and the increased risk of flooding in the area.

Harrowgate Hill includes two privately-owned sites and the RPO proposed one of two options on land north and south of Burtree Lane for approximately 370 new homes each.

Members received presentations from Christopher Harrison representing Theakston Waller and Adam McVickers representing Persimmon Homes and Taylor Wimpey which outlined development plans for the site which included two, three and four-bedroomed houses, provision for a new primary school and Nursery to be built and a Green Travel Plan to be undertaken. It was also stated that there would be plenty of employment opportunities available for the building trade with emphasis on apprenticeships. Concerns were expressed by Councillor Macnab, representing Whessoe Parish Council and Friends of Stockton and Darlington and Whessoe Parish Councillor Sylvia Dawson in relation to potential health issues of siting a school near electricity pylons, difficulties associated with traffic access and egress via Burtree Lane, impacts on wildlife, the strain on local GP Surgeries and the local hospital and the effect of over-development of communities.

Bellburn Lane is an urban greenfield Council-owned site proposed for new housing development.

Members heard the concerns and views expressed Mrs Beverley Swainston which included the disturbance of Great Crested Newts on the site, cessation of grass-cutting to allow development of a wildlife meadow, lack of school places, strain on GP Surgeries, traffic concerns around Bellburn Lane and Hartington Way, the need to

retain green open spaces for leisure purposes as indicated on a DBC publication and concerns that the water table has risen at Cocker Beck. Councillor S Richmond, a Ward Member, highlighted the quality and quantity of concerns expressed by residents especially in relation to the number of proposed dwellings and the need for community space and Councillor Carson expressed concerns on the volume of traffic currently in the north west of Darlington and the inevitable adverse impact of a residential development. Officers confirmed that the number of proposed dwellings would likely be reduced following consultations.

Scrutiny Committee then considered the issues generated by the consultation for the following privately-owned sites and Members raised specific issues on some of them.

Town Centre Fringe (TCF) is a strategic site which it is considered will provide significant new housing. Members considered the views of an objector who believed that there was no justification for allocating 300 dwellings within the TCF area within the Plan period as there was no reasonable prospect of its delivery. Officers confirmed that further work is ongoing to gather robust evidence on vitality and deliverability.

Lingfield Point – Lingfield Investments Limited have indicated that there could be 250 less than the 1200 houses with outline planning permission as a lower density development is likely.

Eastern Urban Fringe generated concerns, written and raised at the drop in event, including increased flooding risk to properties adjacent to the river, surface water impact generated by new housing, adverse effects on the landscaping and loss of agricultural land, existing road system inadequate to accommodate a large increase in traffic movements, protection of the line of the 1825 Stockton and Darlington Railway trackbed and lack of community facilities. Member recognised the need to be sensitive to the heritage assets of the general location, balanced against the need to provide sustainable housing development.

Land east of Haughton Road, north of River Skerne was a new site submitted in response to the consultation and therefore had no public comments yet.

West Park had received no comments from residents although Bussey and Armstrong had indicated that there was likely to be 150 fewer completions due to changes to larger house types and use of part of the land for an extension to the local centre, possibly including a new food supermarket.

North West Urban Fringe had generated two letters, one of support and one suggesting that delivery rates proposed on the site is unrealistic.

South of Bowes Court/Haughton Road had generated concerns from Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway on the impact of development on the nationally important Grade II listed engine shed and trackbed on the site.

Land at Haughton Road raised concerns relating to unsuitable road access, Great Crested Newts possibly being present on the site, overdevelopment of industry of housing, overlooking and unacceptable noise during development.

Polam Hall School was seeking allocation of this new site to enable reinvestment of money from the school to the school facilities to safeguard its long term future as a free school.

Scrutiny Committee then considered the issues generated through the consultation for the following Council-owned sites and raised specific issues on some of them.

Lime Avenue generated concerns relating to shortage of greenspace, recreation grounds and children's play areas, brownfield sites should have been given greater consideration, footpath network links could be lost, biodiversity would be damaged, drainage issues, shortage of school places and traffic congestion in already overcrowded streets.

Former Springfield School area generated residents' concerns relating to the need for a children's play area, loss of amenity for current residents; access and increased traffic congestion, the presence of a natural spring on the land deeming the land unsuitable for housing development, biodiversity and flooding resulting in damage to existing properties.

Alexander Street/Blackett Road generated concerns relating to Haughton Road being too congested already, biodiversity needed to be preserved and enhanced; part of the site was prone to flooding, greenspace needed to be protected as a children's play area and there was contamination on the site from existing methane tanks.

Eggleston View generated comments in relation to a live planning application for 24 units on the site. Councillor Baldwin and Councillor Cossins drew attention to the concerns of local residents including road safety issues and traffic congestion, amenity of the surrounding area, increased flooding risk, brownfield sites being considered as opposed to greenfield sites, retention of biodiversity and greenspace especially the nature reserve and noise pollution to residents during construction.

Hammond Drive generated the re-submission of a petition originally received during the Preferred Options consultation highlighting the concerns relating to increased traffic causing a risk to children, alternative sites nearby, retention of the play area, loss of landscape view, Hammond Drive acting as a flood plain during periods of heavy rain and protection of wildlife.

Former Alderman Leach School Field raised concerns around biodiversity, loss of amenity for some residents, provision of an open space and potential further flooding at Sugar Hill Gove and Stooperdale Avenue.

Cattle Mart, Clifton Road generated concerns relating to commuter and residents parking, health and safety surrounding the demolished building, amenity of existing residents, cleansing of possible contaminated land and the effect of this on residents, protection of existing trees and ownership of the mart.

Woodburn Nursery generated concerns relating to access of the site, shortage of green space in the area, over-development of the site, amenity of current residents, access to community services, highway safety, impact on the cemetery and current wildlife and protection of existing listed buildings.

Land north of Red Hall raised concerns relating to the presence of Great Crested Newts on the site and environmental health issues due to a waste facility on the site.

Ravensthorpe, Carmel Road North generated concerns relating to increased traffic congestion, presence of Great Crested Newts, site capacity and anomalies surrounding the amount of proposed housing.

Back Greenwell Street generated concerns relating to traffic and highway safety, health and safety of existing residents, amenity of existing residents and health issues in relation to an abandoned warehouse on the site.

Upper Russell Street generated concerns relating to houses being built on unstable land and the effect of any pile driving on adjacent properties.

Former Arts Centre, Vane Terrace generated a response from the Environment Agency as records indicate the presence of Great Crested Newts on the site.

The submitted report also identified sites for which no comments were received and sites which had been put forward as a result of the consultation period.

Particular reference was made to significant new housing that could come forward outside the plan making process which, if granted planning permission, would be treated as windfalls and additional to the planned allocations.

A finalised draft Local Plan is to be presented to Cabinet on 2nd December and Council on 4th December and, if agreed, further regulatory steps will be taken over the period to mid-February. Public Examination of the draft Plan will be undertaken by an Independent Inspector in late Spring/early Summer 2015 with adoption expected in during Autumn 2015 following consideration of the Inspector's recommendations.

RESOLVED – (a) That Place Scrutiny Committee was pleased to see the level and numbers of responses received as this is seen as a measure of the success of the consultation.

(b) That Place Scrutiny Committee recognises that verbal intimidation of Officers is not acceptable and that future consultation events will require appropriate risk assessments.

(c) That, in relation to the Town Centre Fringe proposals, Place Scrutiny Committee looks forward to receiving updated Environmental Agency flood management proposals and accepts that this work can be phased as new sites come forward, and supports the continued work to amass evidence on the viability and deliverability.

(d) That, in relation to land north of Burtree Lane, Place Scrutiny Committee supports that Officers need to complete a review of the site assessment for each option before a conclusion can be reached.

(e) That Place Scrutiny Committee is confident that the Plan will be sensitive to the heritage assets of the borough, particularly the industrial archaeology, and that detailed issues will be brought forward at planning application stage.

(f) That, in relation to South of Bowes Court/Haughton Road, Place Scrutiny Committee welcomes the inclusion, in the planning requirements of the site, of the listed engine shed and the former Stockton and Darlington railway trackbed.

(g) That, in relation to Hartington Way/Bellburn Lane, Place Scrutiny Committee welcomes the reduction in number of units suggested for this site and the exclusion of the area retained for open space from housing allocation.

(h) That, in relation to Muscar House Farm, Place Scrutiny Committee acknowledges the need for a transport assessment for this area and to assess the potential impact of the proposal on community facilities.

(i) That, in relation to Hammond Drive, Place Scrutiny Committee welcomes a reduced site area.

(j) That the Officers be thanked for their work in relation to the Making and Growing Places Preferred Options Housing Site Allocations Consultation.

(k) That Place Scrutiny Committee notes that all comments received during the consultation period are available to view on the Council's website.
