

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 December 2013

PRESENT – Councillor Long (in the Chair); Councillors Carson, Cossins, Harman, L. Hughes and Lawton. (6)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Lewis and EA Richmond. (2)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Curry, Mrs D Jones, McNab and Mrs H Scott. (4)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Steve Petch, Head of Strategy and Commissioning, Valerie Adams, Principal Planning Officer, Planning Policy, John Anderson, Assistant Director, Policy and Regeneration, Kieron Campbell, Technician and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

P29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

P30. LOCAL PLAN MAKING AND GROWING PLACES – PREFERRED OPTIONS 2013 – CONSULTATION RESPONSES AND NEXT STEPS – The Director of Place submitted a report (previously circulated) on the outcome of public consultation on the Local Plan: Making and Growing Places Preferred Options (MGPPPO). Members views were also sought on the MGPPPO and recommended actions and the next steps in preparing the Local Plan were detailed. A PowerPoint presentation accompanied the report.

The submitted report stated that consultations were undertaken on the MGPPPO during the period 21 June to 9 August 2013 with 350 written responses being received and 600 comments made by attendees of the consultation events. The consultation was widely publicised and responses were received from members of the public, local interest groups, landowner/developer interests and statutory consultees, among others. The responses covered a variety of issues with the majority being objections to proposed housing allocations.

Committee were advised that specific actions were proposed to take forward the development of policies for the Local Plan, taking into account the responses to consultations and additional studies that have been or are being completed since the Preferred Options were drafted, along with consideration of any changed circumstances. Because this may well result in policies that are quite different from the draft policies presented in the Preferred Options document, further consultations would need to be programmed prior to finalising the plan for Publication.

During the presentation Members sought clarification and further information on various points raised.

Discussion ensued on land which had planning permission but had not yet been developed and the effect this had on the Plan. Officers clarified that the Core Strategy allocation of 5,800 new houses was linked to economic growth assumptions of about 2.5 per cent p.a., and discussion continued around the effect the economic downturn

had on housing delivery nationally and the reasons why land for 500 more houses is likely to be required to allow for flexibility in meeting plan targets. Committee were also advised that the Council tried to plan for all types of infrastructure working closely with the Highways Agency, the Council's Traffic Officer and schools places team and the NHS via the Commissioning staff of the NHS Local Area Team and a representative of the Clinical Commissioning Group.

Scrutiny Committee were advised that any development proposal which became an active planning application had to be dealt with as part of that process and not as part of the Local Plan. The planning application process moved much quicker than the Local Plan process and as the Making and Growing Places (site allocations and development management policies) part of the Local Plan was not currently adopted, a Planning Inspector wouldn't be able to give it much weight at appeal.

Concerns were expressed at the amount of housing proposed at Durham Tees Valley Airport which was being promoted as enabling development, although further housing at Red Hall was welcomed by the majority of residents. Members were keen to pursue the Town Centre Fringe as a long-term project, despite the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) withdrawing funding, as it was believed to be a sustainable location and had potential to contribute to the Town's employment and economy.

With regard to sites identified for top-end executive housing, members were keen to have an arrangement where housing and parkland complemented each other, as both residents and the town benefitted. Members also questioned how affordable housing could be protected.

Members were keen that Darlington's Industrial Heritage was protected and that provision was made at planning stage for footpaths and cycle ways on any new developments.

It was stated that a retail study was currently being undertaken to look at the changing role of the Town Centre following the recession and the increase in internet shopping and that planning policies relating to primary and secondary shopping areas would need to be reviewed. Members were keen to provide a vibrant Town Centre which provided various leisure activities and did not shut down at 5.00pm.

With reference to Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation, Committee were advised that the original study was done by Tees Valley and as Darlington had a much larger number of travellers at that time it indicated that on a 'needs where they are seen to arise' basis, Darlington needed to make much more provision than other Tees Valley authorities. There is to be a new Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs assessment which will take into account local evidence such as planning applications and decisions, take-up rates and trends. The results of that study will inform the Local Plan and planning application decision making.

It was stated that a short section in the document relating to disability issues be linked to a separate policy rather than be incorporated within the document as it was acknowledged that accessibility for all was a cross-cutting issue and it be more appropriate to have a separate section.

RESOLVED – (a) That the thanks of this Committee be extended to all Officers for the work and commitment they have shown in preparation of the Local Plan.

(b) That Place Scrutiny Committee believes that the Local Plan is a sound, robust and interesting document.

(c) That it be noted that the consultation exercise and responses received were excellent, the detailed work undertaken was impressive and Officer responses be supported.

(d) That the issues surrounding housing numbers and site allocations be noted, particularly the impact of external factors.

(e).That the need for Masterplans for the North West Urban Fringe, Eastern Urban Fringe and Red Hall locations be generally accepted and supported and the Council continue to work with landowners and local residents in their development.

(f) That commitment to the Town Centre Fringe and aspirations for its completion be re-affirmed.

(g) That this Committee expects that the re-allocation of housing will not affect the preparatory work on the Town Centre Fringe that is required to make it suitable and attractive for new development.

(h) That Officers be supported in reviewing certain sites for employment land in line with the economic growth strategy.

(i) That the need for appropriate community facilities to support new housing development be noted.

(j) That the on-going work of Officers be noted in relation to ‘enabling developments’ at Durham Tees Valley Airport.

(k) That the results of the retail study be brought to a future meeting of this Committee.

(l) That reference in the Local Plan to Darlington’s Industrial Heritage be strengthened.

(m) That the separate section for disability issues within the document be welcomed.
