

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 November 2015

PRESENT – Councillor Carson (in the Chair); Councillors Baldwin, Donoghue, Grundy, Lyonette, MR Nicholson, Wright and York. (8)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Cossins, L Hughes and KE Kelly. (3)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors I Haszeldine, B Jones, D Jones, J Kelley and H Scott. (5)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth, John Anderson, Assistant Director, Economic Initiative, Steve Petch, Place Strategy Manager and Lead Officer, Bryan Huntley, Planning Policy Officer and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

Representing Outside Organisations – David Sheen, Middleton St George Neighbourhood Development Plan, Alan Macnab, Whessoe Parish Council, George Cassidy, Chair, Whessoe Parish Council, Bill Paton, Blackwell Parklands Association and Barrington Wearmouth, Supporting Blackwell Parklands Association.

P24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interests reported at the meeting.

P25. PLANNING FOR DARLINGTON'S FUTURE HOUSING NEEDS AND THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN IMPLICATIONS – Consideration was given to a 'call-in' from the Cabinet held on 3 November, 2015 (Minute C70(2)/Nov/15) in relation to its decision in respect of Planning for Darlington's Future Housing Needs and the Development Plan Implications. The 'Call-in' was taken in accordance with the Council's Constitution and had been signed by three Members of this Council.

The Members who had signed the documentation and who had requested that the decision be 'called-in' outlined their reasons for that decision and, in doing so, stressed the importance for Members, to fully ensure that Cabinet had the correct information available in order to make its decision and to request that a revised report be submitted which supported a Local Plan to reflect a correctly adjusted total figure and a figure broken down into property categories as per the Strategic Housing Marketing Assessment.

A report (previously circulated) of the Director of Economic Growth which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 3 November 2015, gave the background to the new information on housing needs and detailed how this affected local plan preparation and the Council's consideration of planning applications for new housing.

Councillor York outlined the reasons behind why the decision has been taken to call in the Planning for Darlington's Future Housing Needs and the Development Plan Implications including the belief that the report submitted to Cabinet was vague and provided an incomplete picture of the housing needs of Darlington.

Councillor York also stated that an accurate picture of housing needs should form the basis for planning decisions across the Borough, not the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Concerns were expressed at the need for 11,160 dwellings during the period 2011 to 2016, as indicated by the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), equating to 495 units per annum which was considered high and reflected a population growth in excess of national population statistics and to the need for a 25 year plan period.

Reference was made to the amount of houses for sale and rent within a three mile radius of Darlington exceeding 2,000 and Darlington house prices being 11 per cent lower than in 2008 suggesting that demand was a long way from supply. It was also suggested planning permission had been granted for up to 1,900 houses which had not yet been acted upon, only 311 out of 1,366 had been completed since 2011 and that an accurate breakdown of required housing types should be undertaken to ensure the true need especially, as suggested by the SHMA, that 20 per cent of the population increase will be over 65's.

Members heard the concerns expressed by David Sheen, representing Middleton St George Neighbourhood Development Plan, Councillor Doris Jones, Ward Councillor for Middleton St George and Alan Macnab representing Whessoe Parish Council in relation to the belief that the figures within the Consultant's report were erratic, accuracy of the Cabinet report, need for a 25 year Local Plan as opposed to 15 years as stated by Government, requirement of intervention to stop developers 'cherry picking' development areas and concerns over the lack of infrastructure to support new developments. Reference was also made to the number of houses within the document, CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England) stating more houses were needed, although an objective assessment was needed and the need to stop developers building on Greenfield sites.

The Assistant Director, Economic Initiative acknowledged that this was a sensitive and controversial issue but the local authority had been charged to provide housing for the Borough and that brought its own consequences. Members were advised that the National Planning Policy Framework requires that local planning authorities identify the Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) for housing in their areas and that Local Plans translate those needs into land provision targets. Following the Gladman appeal a consultant had been appointed to produce an OAN for housing need in the Borough. It was stated that a Local Plan was needed to interpret housing need, considerations had to be given to the nature and type of housing required and that the planning system was in place to meet need and not demand.

As there is not a large demand brownfield sites are not being brought forward and there was a need to show how and where development will happen. The current Plan was too constraining and it was necessary to think strategically around the town and plan for infrastructure to deliver the Plan. The Core Strategy allowed the release of land on the edge of town and the villages and development in Darlington would not ruin the town but provide for its residents. Unfortunately rural areas were under threat as that was where National Policy was pointing.

Reference was made to the provision of 11,160 new homes and the need to demonstrate to Inspectors how this need will be met. It was stressed that 11,160 was the objectively assessed housing need but the authority had to turn the OAN into a

housing requirement and provide a buffer of between 5 and 20 per cent. Devolution, economic strategy and Darlington's contribution to the creation of 25,000 jobs across the Tees Valley all had to be taken into consideration. The substantial increase in the housing numbers meant that the new housing sites would have to be outside the locations identified in the Core Strategy. Advice from the Planning Inspectorate (PINs) confirmed that the Making and Growing Places DPD would fail the 'soundness' test and should be withdrawn in favour of starting on a new local plan.

Committee was advised that a report was intended to be submitted to Cabinet in January 2016¹ to advise on an interim planning policy position in order to assist the Planning Applications Committee when it considered planning applications. The proposals and timetable for a new local plan is anticipated to be presented to Cabinet in the Spring of 2016 with a view to recommendations as to how the planning making process might be speeded up whilst remaining robust against regulatory requirements. Reference was made to the data sets changing in 2016 and a refreshed OAN being produced which could affect the number of houses needed across the Borough.

The Director of Economic Growth confirmed that the OAN was the first stage in a process to get the best development to meet the needs of the Town and that the infrastructure had to be in place to support any planning permissions.

RESOLVED – (a) That having considered the information, this Scrutiny Committee is satisfied that the detail which it felt needed clarifying in respect of the areas requested by the 'call-in' has been presented through the Scrutiny process and is satisfied that Cabinet was fully informed before making its decision.

(b) That further reports developing Local Planning Policy should be reported to the relevant Scrutiny Committee before being considered by Cabinet, unless there are exceptional and urgent circumstances.

P26. LOCAL PLAN – CONSULTATION RESPONSES TO PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AT BLACKWELL - Consideration was given to a 'call-in' from the Cabinet held on 3 November, 2015 (Minute C71/Nov/15) in relation to its decision in respect of Local Plan – Consultation Responses to Proposed Residential Development at Blackwell. The 'Call-in' was taken in accordance with the Council's Constitution and had been signed by three Members of this Council.

The Members who had signed the documentation and who had requested that the decision be 'called-in' outlined their reasons for that decision and, in doing so, stressed the importance for Members, to fully ensure that Cabinet was fully informed before making a decision in relation to provision of apartments on site HE1 at Blackwell.

A report (previously circulated) of the Director of Economic Growth which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 3 November 2015, gave the background to the allocation of land for residential development, in the Blackwell area, into the Local Plan : Making and Growing Places Development Plan Document, including approval to

¹ Following the Committee resolution it is likely that a Special Scrutiny Committee will be called to consider the Interim Planning Policy Position before consideration by Cabinet. This will delay the timetable too as referenced in the paragraph.

the numbers and types of dwellings, approval to restore and enhance the parkland and approval to sell the development land for housing.

Councillor Donoghue outlined the reasons behind why the decision has been taken to call in the Local Plan – Consultation Responses to Proposed Residential Development at Blackwell, which included the belief that Cabinet’s decision was premature, further consultation with Place Scrutiny was required in relation to HE1 and the external consultees involved in the production of the report should be called to Scrutiny to explain its evidence which conflicted with local knowledge of further demand

Members heard the concerns expressed by Councillor H Scott, Ward Councillor for Park West Ward, Bill Paton representing Blackwell Parklands Association and Barrington Wearmouth, supporting Blackwell Parklands Association in relation to further evidence requested by Place Scrutiny Committee on the need for apartments on the site known as He1(a) not being supplied, 200-300 flats were currently available in Darlington, relaxation of the ‘no exit’ clause within the Blackwell Lease following the provision of car parking for residents of apartments, infrastructure not being available to support further apartments in the area, maintenance of parklands and the establishment of a Residents’ Forum to work alongside the local authority,

Reference was also made to less apartments being built recently as people wished to remain in their own homes, ratio of apartments to houses on new development sites, reduced sale prices of apartments and existing planning permissions for apartment dwellings.

The Assistant Director, Economic Initiative outlined the background to the development site which had originally been allocated for Executive Housing. He explained why, at the last consultation event, apartments for the elderly had been introduced. The local authority has to plan for potentially 20 per cent more elderly population as evidenced in demographic trends, a local forum had suggested a need for more elderly accommodation in the area. It was also stated that Heritage England and the Highways Agency had not objected to the development at this stage but needed further assurances about the design approach and traffic impacts. There was currently no specification or scheme to market for the site.

It was confirmed that two local estate agents had been contacted for views on future housing demand and web-based market research had also been undertaken by Officers.

The Chair requested that tree planting should be considered for screening purposes following a recent visit to the site.

RESOLVED - That having considered the information, this Scrutiny Committee is satisfied that the detail which it felt needed clarifying in respect of the areas requested by the ‘call-in’ has been presented through the Scrutiny process and is satisfied that Cabinet was fully informed before making its decision.
