

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 February 2016

PRESENT – Councillor Carson (in the Chair); Councillors Baldwin, Cossins, Donoghue, L Hughes, Wright and York. (7)

APOLOGIES – Councillors KE Kelly and MR Nicholson (2)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Lee. (1)

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

P38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interests reported at the meeting.

P39. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 17 December 2015 and 19 January 2016.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as correct records.

P40. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the Joint Meeting of the Adults and Housing and the Place Scrutiny Committees held on 26 November 2015.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

P41. MATTERS ARISING – There were no matters arising.

P42. WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16 – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during the current Municipal Year.

It was also emphasised that the work programme was a rolling programme and any Member of this Scrutiny could request an item to be included provided that a Quad of Aims had been submitted to the Scrutiny Committee prior to ensure that it contributed to the strategic aims of the Council.

The submitted report outlined the Work Programme and requested members to reconsider it to accommodate further issues that needed to be included.

The Lead Officer referred to the scheduled in the submitted report and provided Members with an updated position in relation to individual items. It was reported that the Economic Strategy would be submitted to a meeting of this Scrutiny Committee in

June and that a Special Committee would possibly need to be arranged to give consideration to the Local Plan.

Discussion ensued on the lack of provision of signs relating to No Cycling in Post House Wynd and the need to ensure these were erected as a matter of urgency.

RESOLVED – (a) That the current status of the Work Programme be noted.

(b) That the Work Programme be updated to reflect the decisions of this Scrutiny Committee.

P42. PLANNING POSITION WHILST PREPARING THE NEW LOCAL PLAN – The Director of Economic Growth submitted a report (previously circulated) setting out the current policy position in terms of determining planning application and detailing which adopted policies were relevant to the decision making process. The submitted report also set out the circumstances when the National Planning Policy would take precedent. Details were also supplied of planning considerations to be taken into account should National Policy apply. A PowerPoint Presentation accompanied the report.

It was stated that the Council's adopted development plan used in determining the majority of planning applications within the Borough contains certain elements which have been deemed out of date in relation to housing development.

Particular reference was made to the planning appeal decision to allow up to 250 new homes on land at Sadberge Road, Middleton St George, primarily because the Council could not demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing land against a housing target based on an assessment of housing needs. Consequently none of the Council's development policies relating to the supply of housing can be considered up to date and the national planning policy presumption in favour of sustainable development applies. In practice, this means that new housing development should be permitted unless there are site specific or significant sustainability reasons indicating otherwise.

In response to this decision work has been undertaken to quantify the assessment of housing need which is significantly larger than that which was being planned for in the Making and Growing Places Development Plan Document (MGP). The MGP needs to be formally withdrawn to enable work to commence on a comprehensive new Local Plan, therefore its draft policies cannot be referred to in determining planning applications, unless they are agreed as part of an interim planning policy position.

It is considered that preparation of a new local plan will take approximately two to three years and that an interim planning policy position be established comprising use of the Existing Development Plan and publication of an Interim Planning Statement.

Members were informed that these elements would have different weight when determining planning applications dependent upon the stage reached in the plan making process and that an Interim Planning Statement would be prepared to provide clarity to decision makers and developers on material considerations during local plan preparation. Use of these policies would also provide information on how they could be improved before including in the new Local Plan.

Also included within the Statement would be an interim position for new housing acknowledging the latest evidence of increased housing needs, identifying interim allocations that could be utilised for housing development and indicate which development plan policies are regarded as Strategic Policies.

Particular reference was made to the role of Members in the development of the Local Plan including promotion via Newsletters and Ward Surgeries and the possible establishment of a small group of Members to meet regularly; receive updates and feed back to full Scrutiny.

Discussion ensued on the need for a plan for the next two years as interest had already been received from Developers; the Planning Position Statement providing a useful framework for developers which, although not adopted, provided some clarity on material considerations during preparation of the Local Plan; the need and location for additional housing; timescales, pressures from Government and available resources for the production of a Local Plan; more streamlined approach to the consultation process by the use of effective IT; focussed workshops for Parish Council; and adequate infrastructure support for development sites.

Members were also advised that a Developer Day held 14 January 2016, attended by 60+ delegates and comprising several workshops facilitated by various organisations including the Planning Advisory Service and Jonathon Spruce Civil Engineer, had received positive feedback. Developers were keen to execute a Local Plan that the Council created and provided new development that were sustainable and a credit to the Borough. New developments would provide more jobs and apprenticeships and aid the economy of Darlington.

In relation to the needs of the community it was reported young people needed to be engaged as they would be affected in the future, the Council had to consult on strategic options for the provision of 10,000 new housing. All residents had concerns over schools, doctor's surgeries, public space and transport infrastructure and developers had to demonstrate they could provide housing and the necessary infrastructure on allocated development sites.

It was also stated that affordable housing would now include starter homes and the local authority was unable to influence the amount of starter homes on any development sites. The Local Plan had to be compliant with the National Planning Policy Framework and each Borough had to plan for its needs. Darlington's needs were 10,000 new houses and although its options to provide were very limited, developments which were best for the community and the infrastructure were key.

Reference was made to a special meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee being organised, during March 2016, to give full consideration to the Local Plan.

RESOLVED – (a) That the submitted report be noted.

(b) That the approach to the Interim Policy Position be endorsed by this Scrutiny Committee.

(c) That further reports be submitted to future meetings of this Scrutiny Committee to ensure continued involvement in the Local Plan process going forward.

(d) That a special meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee be arranged to give full consideration to the Local Plan.

P43. LITTER FREE DURHAM – Councillor Gerald Lee gave a presentation to Scrutiny Committee around the work of LitterFreeDurham. Councillor Lee made particular reference to the Big Spring Clean 2016 which would be held during the period 28 February to 17 April at which residents, community groups and businesses would be encouraged to litter pick within their areas.

It was stated that the Environment Agency cleared rivers and that over 500 bags of rubbish had recently been taken from the streets by the volunteers. Reference was made to the cost of £1 billion to the United Kingdom to remove litter, the anti-litter message becoming part of the school curriculum and the damage to wildlife and the planet. Reference was made to Wolverhampton Council which had recently employed a company to impose fixed penalty fines of £75 on litter offenders with the income being invested into the cleaner, greener, safer city project.

Members were advised that Darlington was Perfectly Placed and should attract industry and commerce, including tourism, however, a littered town was not welcoming and could impact on the economy of the region.

RESOLVED – That the thanks of the Scrutiny Committee be extended to Councillor Lee for his informative presentation.
