

## **PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

31 March 2016

**PRESENT** – Councillor Carson (in the Chair); Councillors Baldwin, Donoghue, L Hughes, (5)

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Cossins, KE Kelly, Lyonette, MR Nicholson, Wright and York. (6)

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Councillors Mrs D Jones, Knowles and H Scott (3)

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

**P44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – There were no declarations of interests reported at the meeting.

**P45. PLANNING POSITION WHILST PREPARING THE NEW LOCAL PLAN** – The Director of Economic Growth submitted a report (previously circulated) clarifying the Council's approach to the application of planning policy in Darlington's context whilst a new local plan is being developed. A PowerPoint Presentation accompanied the report.

Members were informed that since the ordinary meeting of Place Scrutiny on 11 February work had been ongoing on the preparation of an Interim Planning Position Statement (also previously circulated) which was to be submitted to Cabinet, for approval, on 5 April 2016. The Planning Position Statement would provide clarification on the relevant material considerations in determining planning applications under national planning policy.

Following the Gladman appeal decision which allowed 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target based on an assessment of housing needs, the Making and Growing Places Development Plan Document is to be withdrawn and a new Local Plan developed. It was stated that many local authorities were in the same position as Darlington.

It was stressed that the Council still had an adopted plan and that the Core Strategy, minus housing supply policies, and Local Plan saved policies would be used in conjunction with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in making decisions on planning applications for any future developments.

Members were advised that if a submitted application could not be assessed against up to date local policies then national policy would take precedence. The Interim Planning Position Statement will guide local interpretation of national policy, promoting sustainable development, aimed at decision makers and developers to provide clarity on material considerations during preparation of the Local Plan. Officers will continue

to encourage development in strategic growth zones identified in the Core Strategy as the most sustainable locations for growth in the Borough.

To achieve a five year supply the Council needs to deliver housing quickly and is unable to wait until a comprehensive local plan is in place as a backlog of under delivery could develop.

As more housing has to be found over the next 20 years the sites identified in the Making and Growing Places Development Plan Document, although required, are insufficient and developers need guidance as to where additional housing could be located whilst a new local plan is being prepared.

The Council's current policy makes provision to address under-delivery at the urban fringe and larger villages, with all applications being determined against NPPF and proposals being accompanied by a full appraisal of economic, social and environmental dimensions.

Scrutiny Committee was informed that changes were expected around the amount of affordable homes on site as the industry was unable to deliver 30 per cent. Although not ideal for Darlington, 'starter homes' were now to be added to affordable housing.

Particular reference was made to the need to ensure that the future development of the Borough does not prejudice the good planning and future delivery of the strategic vision for the Borough.

The Objectively Assessed Housing Need (OAN), published in 2015, was considered a starting point with the need figure being converted to a Local Plan requirement figure. Members noted that the National Data Sets were currently being reviewed and the OAN would also need to be reviewed to ensure that the Council's plans were still robust.

Scrutiny Committee also heard the views of Councillors Mrs Jones and H Scott, David Phillips representing Friends of the Earth and Alan McNab, Clerk, Whessoe Parish Council.

Discussion ensued on what was regarded as affordable housing for Darlington; the changing role of Registered Social Landlords; a need to consider every planning application on a case by case basis; consultation arrangements in relation to local needs and types of housing; improved dialogue between the Council and NHS representatives to ensure the health needs of the population are catered for; sufficient school places; concerns relating to the transport infrastructure which were being addressed by the Tees Valley Combined Authority and Highways England; and the number of planning permissions which were currently unfulfilled in the Borough.

Consideration was also given to conservation needs within the Borough; maintenance of the green infrastructure; Eastern Fringe Development complementing other schemes; holding of a Big Debate for the Local Plan to finish in Summer followed by detailed work on key strategic locations to ensure a detailed balanced 20 year Local Plan; integration of the River Skerne into the town as an asset; realistic timescales for completing the Plan; and investors in Darlington boosting the Borough's economy.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the report to be submitted to Cabinet on 5 April 2016 be noted.

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(b) That the Interim Planning Position Statement be noted and endorsed.

**P46. NEW LOCAL PLAN: PROCESS, TIMESCALES AND STRATEGIC ISSUES AND OPTIONS** - The Director of Economic Growth submitted a report (previously circulated) detailing the process and timescales for production of the new Local Plan (including the Local Development Scheme and draft Statement of Community Involvement), and highlighting associated challenges and risks. It was also requested that consideration be given to the draft Strategic Issues and Options as the basis of consultation and community engagement. A PowerPoint Presentation accompanied the report.

Members were advised that since November 2015 Officers have been involved in a range of actions to understand and inform the potential for a more streamlined process to begin to identify strategic development options in the preparation of a new Local Plan. It was also stated that the Council is required to produce a Local Development Scheme setting out the timetable for developing the Local Plan, with the Statement of Community Involvement highlighting how the Council will involve local communities, businesses and key stakeholders in its preparation.

The first key stage of the new Local Plan is to identify and consult on the Strategic Development Issues and Options facing the Borough. Focussing on the strategic housing issues will form the basis of consultation with key stakeholders over the summer.

Following withdrawal of the Making and Growing Places Development Plan Document an Interim Planning Position Statement has been produced which provides guidance to developers on the local interpretation of National Planning Policy. As Local Plans can take a number of years to complete, a national Local Plan Expert Group was established to evaluate current processes with a view to establishing a more streamlined approach. It was reported at the meeting that the Group had recently reported its findings and recommendations.

The overall aim of a successful Local Plan for Darlington is to ensure well planned, high quality, sustainable places providing certainty for residents and stakeholders, economic growth and a vibrant retail sector.

Members were advised that there was a need to develop a communications strategy which provided an engaging identity for the Local Plan; detailed topic and area focused interaction with key stakeholders; improved information delivered, primarily online; more regular updates; and slimmed down, possibly more electronic, documents.

Particular reference was made to the role of Members in the preparation of, and engagement around, the Local Plan and the need for more continuous involvement. Details were supplied of the establishment of a Local Plan Members Group, which would be involved throughout the process and meet on a regular basis.

Scrutiny was informed that Officers have met with adjacent authorities sharing information and best practice on Local Plan preparation with master planning being identified as a potential useful tool for quality place-making on a strategic level.

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Developers have indicated they would consider contributing to such an approach and discussions with ATLAS, the HCA's strategic development support and advisory service, suggests Darlington could benefit from their expertise on master planning.

Details were supplied of the Local Development Scheme 2016 to 2019, a statutory requirement which sets out the planning policy documents the Council will prepare over the next three years and a revised Statement of Community Involvement, which sets out how people and organisations can get involved in shaping the local plan, to replace the 2010 edition.

Members were informed that key issues and challenges, aligned to priorities within One Darlington: Perfectly Placed, will need to be explored whilst developing the new Local Plan and the 'Big Debate' consultation exercise will focus on how to plan for the housing needs of the Borough up to 2036. Some preliminary work undertaken to look at potential options has identified seven initial Strategic Development Options, some of which may be ruled out when more detailed assessments are undertaken.

Details were also supplied of resource and financial implications involved in the production of the new Local Plan.

Scrutiny Committee also heard the views of Councillors Mrs Jones and H Scott and Alan McNab, Clerk, Whessoe Parish Council.

Discussion ensued on the number of Masterplans within the Borough and the detailed work involved in their preparation. It was stressed that Master Planning was not part of the Local Plan, a Brief would be set and landowners would need to demonstrate a feasible plan. Master Planning would set design codes and standards and any badly designed development could be refused by Planning Applications Committee.

Reference was also made to developers 'land banking' and the use of short-term timescale implementation planning conditions; the potential role of Neighbourhood Plans in the Local Plan; Parish Councils and Friends of Stockton/Darlington Railway being part of any consultation exercise; and the need for Members to fully comprehend in order to engage with the public

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

(b) That the comments of this Scrutiny Committee be taken into consideration whilst endorsing the Local Development Scheme; Draft Statement of Community Involvement; the Housing Requirements Technical Paper; and Strategic Issues and Options Paper.

(c) That an all Members briefing be arranged to outline the content and implications of the reports and papers covered at this Scrutiny Committee.

(d) That a further report be submitted to this Scrutiny Committee in September outlining the consultation feedback and Preferred Strategic Options.

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