

PLANNING POLICY WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30pm on 8 JUNE 2015

Present: Councillor H Rolfe - Chairman
Councillors S Barker, P Davies, A Dean, S Harris, J Lodge, J Loughlin, A Mills, E Oliver and J Parry

Also present: Councillors J Davey, T Farthing, D Jones, J Redfern and H Ryles

Officers in attendance: J Mitchell (Chief Executive), R Harborough (Director of Public Services), H Hayden (Planning Policy Officer), S Nicholas (Senior Planning Policy Officer), P Snow (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager), A Taylor (Assistant Director Planning and Building Control), A Webb (Director of Finance and Corporate Services) and N Wittman (Assistant Director ICT and Facilities)

PP1

PRESENTATION BY GARDEN CITY DEVELOPMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone present to the first meeting of the Planning Policy Working Group in the present term and introduced Sir Brian Briscoe, John Walker and Lynda Addison from Garden City Developments to give a presentation to the meeting.

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control reminded members that the Inspector at the Local Plan examination had highlighted the need to explore new settlements as a potential way of delivering new required housing growth. The planned presentation would provide useful information to aid future decision making in progressing preparation of the local plan. He invited the three guests to speak.

Sir Brian Briscoe set out the guiding principles of garden city developments. The main principle was to enable the most effective use of land to provide for the necessary infrastructure to support good development. Garden cities were most strongly associated with Letchworth and Welwyn and evolved from a vision established by Ebenezer Howard at the end of the 19th century. Today the Town and Country Planning Association (TPCA) was leading a campaign for a new generation of garden cities and garden suburbs. The intention was to create the best combination of town and country living providing desirable places to live based on community values.

The planning system was difficult to manage. It often involved developers negotiating to get the most they could out of the planning system and the outcomes were not always to the benefit of the local communities. The Garden City Developments public interest company was presently working with Colchester, Tendring and Braintree councils in Essex about the potential for garden city or suburb developments. The key to this process was not to attempt to replace the role of district planners but to give confidence to local authorities in talking to landowners regarding the provision of infrastructure to benefit the communities concerned.

In order for this process to begin to work, the local authority had first to decide what they needed in terms of development, the use of land and the provision of services. The South East was experiencing strong development pressures and it was incumbent on local planning authorities to respond in such a way to provide housing opportunities for young people.

ATLAS (Advisory Team for Large Applications) was an agency of the DCLG and had developed a financial model enabling local councils to identify land and then decide how to develop it. This would enable local authorities to use the land value to supply a quality of development that could not be achieved by adding housing to the edge of existing settlements. This recognised the need for all concerned, including developers, to make a profit across the spectrum to remove the adversarial aspect of property development.

If Uttlesford wanted to pursue the option of a garden city or suburb development the council must come up with a vision for the area and identify land use and needs within a proper planning context.

The Chairman invited questions of the guests and these are summarised below, together with the answers given (in italics).

- What is the lower and upper limit for a garden city/suburb development? *A general guide is that a garden suburb must have at least 4.5/5k houses and a garden city at least 15/20k houses. They can be a different size but much depends on what is there already and how the value of the land can be realised to provide a stream of future income.*
- The suggested size of a garden suburb ruled out the provision of a secondary school. What about primary schools and other services? *It would be feasible to make primary school provision and shopping facilities. Again, a lot would depend on what is surrounding the development.*
- How was the process different from incremental change? *The process allowed for the local council to take control and therefore required a great deal of up front thinking on the part of councillors and officers. The council must think corporately about what it wants and how to get it. Landowners would need to see a credible proposition to consider participating in a garden city/suburb development. This process fundamentally changed the relationship between the council and developers but the rewards could be enormous.*
- Colchester and Braintree had bigger settlements than Uttlesford. It would be necessary to involve parishes in any discussions but how would this work? *The smaller the potential development the more facilities would be contained outside the development so it was important for the authority to have a clear idea of what it wanted. The scope for public objection was well understood so the council would have to talk to the parishes and communities concerned and explain its vision.*
- Would the council have to identify land before the call for land to engage developers in the concept? *The council must think longer term and not engage in fighting developers. This would require forward thinking.*

- One of the key principles was the provision of integrated transport. How necessary was this to achieve? *Yes it was one of the key principles to provide an integrated transport system, although this was not placed any higher in the hierarchy than the provision of other infrastructure.*
- Is central government funding still available and how is it obtained? *In the short term the council must work out a vision and this would have cost implications. Soft loans and grants have been available in the past. The scale and vision must come first.*
- Uttlesford was a small district council with a need to provide 10k houses in ten years. There was constant pressure from developers and not enough time to follow through on identifying a longer term plan. *The adoption of a garden suburb would not solve all problems but would provide a solution for the next 20/30 years. It would therefore take pressure off future developments. Proposals were being explored in adjoining areas for housing sites near to Uttlesford's borders. There may be advantage in exploring these options with a view to possible collaboration. It was a different process from what has been happening in the South East. The council must consider how best to achieve the package of measures it wanted to create the right conditions for delivery.*
- How is an income stream provided? *The council imposes an adoption charge for public facilities extracted from the land value. A funding stream is created as at Milton Keynes by setting up a trust to look after the investment.*
- How is land provided if the land identified is unavailable? *An example was given of the proposed development of 7k homes at Bicester. This allowed a higher quality of development than was normally possible although the development at Bicester was not strictly in accordance with garden development principles. Choosing the site was of paramount importance and this involved creating the council's own vision.*
- Was there a duty to co-operate with neighbouring councils? *Discussions had taken place with Braintree as there were potentially two cross-border sites. A joint approach was possible.*
- The development of 2k houses would conflict with the existing town/parish councils' stance. Was one option to create a separate parish? *Living in the South East was virtually impossible for young people on an average salary. The council must talk to local people and make a strong case for pursuing development and this involved creating the right sort of developments.*
- The importance of providing employment opportunities was emphasised by a member of the public. How could these opportunities be created? *This involved formulating a long-term vision and giving developers the opportunity to compete for work. It was in the long term interests of the bigger developers to become involved in employment provision.*
- How could the development of a local plan operate side by side with the need to provide adequate affordable housing? *Affordable housing provision was an integral part of satisfying housing need but would take a long time to come to fruition. Affordable housing provision was part of garden developments.*

- Development has been progressing at the rate of 150 houses a year. Would a faster rate of development associated with a garden development jeopardise the five year land supply? *Land could be developed more quickly and this would provide more variety because of the involvement of more developers. Garden villages such as at Great Notley were able to provide some facilities and were better than incremental growth.*

In conclusion, Councillor Rolfe thanked the representatives of Garden City Developments for their attendance and careful attention to members' questions.

PP2 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2015 were received, approved and signed by the Chairman, subject to the addition of Councillor Dean's name to the list of those present.

PP3 **BUSINESS ARISING**

i) Minute PP21 – Minutes

Councillor Oliver asked for an assurance that the intended report on the 5 Acres site would be considered at the next meeting. He also asked for confirmation that all sites would be visited by the Working Group.

The Assistant Director confirmed that the report would be submitted to the meeting on 13 July. The Chairman confirmed that a visit would be arranged to all sites under consideration.

ii) Minute 23 – Call for sites

Councillor Dean asked who would carry out the assessment of sites, what criteria would be used, how members would know whether objectives had been met, and who agreed the statutory needs of the district?

The Assistant Director commented that the call for sites was being processed now and the outcome would be sent to Essex County Council to carry out a Sustainability Appraisal. There was a set methodology against which all sites would be assessed. The call for sites exercise had been brought forward and the results of the public consultation would be reported back to the working group in September or October. This was the first stage only and would not be examining which sites would be selected for further examination.

Councillor Dean asked further questions and the Chairman commented that the working group would go forward at the appropriate speed.

Councillor Loughlin asked about the criteria for deciding whether a single site should be recommended or whether developments would be dispersed throughout the district.

In response, the Assistant Director said that the consultation would have to be arranged on the basis of more than one strategy, but the options presented must all be capable of delivery. The point at which assessments of deliverability could be made had not yet been reached and the working group would be asked to form a view at that time.

Councillor Parry asked whether a preferred strategy should have been agreed before the call for sites process. The Assistant Director commented that a strategy could not be agreed before the call for sites as that process would provide the evidence needed to determine the strategy.

In response to a further question from Councillor Parry, The Assistant Director said that additional sites could be added at a later stage if put forward for consideration. There would need to be a concerted effort to appraise all such sites.

PP4 **STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

The Senior Planning Policy Officer reported on the representations received on the Statement of Community Involvement and highlighted officer comments and recommended changes to the text. Once agreed, the amended document could be recommended to Cabinet for approval.

Members asked several questions and took note of the representations received.

RESOLVED to recommend to Cabinet that the amended Statement of Community Involvement be adopted, as set out in the report

PP5 **HOUSING TRAJECTORY AND FIVE YEAR LAND SUPPLY 2015**

The Working Group received a report estimating that 3,530 dwellings would be delivered over the next five years, providing between 4.4 and 5.4 years of supply depending on the housing target and whether a 5% or 20% buffer was applied.

The Senior Policy Planning Officer informed members that the estimated number of dwellings to be built year by year was set out in detail in the trajectory data in the appendix to the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Parry, the Senior Policy Planning Officer confirmed that all small sites had been taken into account in compiling the figures. One error relating to the capacity of a housing site at Jubilee Works in Clavering was noted but this did not affect the overall number of dwellings included.

Councillor Dean asked for clarification about how the annual target of 580 dwellings had been calculated and why a 20% buffer was being applied instead of the previous figure of 5%. In relation to the buffer calculation, the Chairman said this depended on the attitude of the relevant planning inspector and he suspected would vary on a case by case basis.

The Chairman explained how in his view the figure of 580 had been suggested by the Local Plan Inspector. The current Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment would enable the Council to reach a conclusion on the objectively assessed need.

It was agreed to continue to review the position in the light of future Secretary of State/Planning Inspectorate decisions.

PP6

NEXT MEETINGS AND WORK SCHEDULE

Members noted that further meetings of the PPWG would take place on 13 and 27 July. Councillor Oliver asked that Mondays should be avoided in future as that day co-incided with many parish meetings including at Clavering. Further dates would be suggested at the next meeting.

The Assistant Director said that the following items would be considered over the coming weeks:

- Future dates
- Work plan and time scales
- Distribution strategy
- Strategic Housing Availability Assessment (when available)
- Vision objectives

The Chairman commented that not everything could be concluded in one meeting. He would like to arrange a discussion about the merits of garden villages.

In conclusion, the Chairman agreed to drop the name of "Uttlesford" from the title of the PPWG.

The meeting ended at 9.20pm