

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (LOCAL PLAN) held at COUNCIL CHAMBER -
COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on
THURSDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2021 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)
Councillors V Isham, G LeCount (Vice-Chair), G Sell and M
Sutton

Officers in attendance: C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer), R Harborough
(Director - Public Services), S Miles (Local Plan and New
Communities Manager) and S Payne (Local Plan Project
Manager)

Also in attendance: Councillor J Evans (Portfolio Holder for Planning and the Local
Plan) and Councillor S Luck

SC18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillors Coote, Driscoll, Jones, Lavelle and De
Vries.

SC19 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee (Local Plan) meeting held on 23 June
2021 were approved.

SC20 PUBLIC SPEAKERS

Councillor Pavitt said that he had undertaken a Water Survey in response to an
urgent need to better understand the water supply and related issues in the
district. This had initially been suggested by Councillor Criscione as a Task and
Finish Group for the Committee. Councillor Pavitt said that new houses were
being built but the sewage infrastructure had not been upgraded for 30 to 40
years and problems were arising, for example sewage flooding into the rivers.
He said there was a need to review the processes and mitigate these impacts by
ensuring that future planning applications were properly and appropriately
conditioned. He recommended that the Committee asked Officers to take the
draft from the Task and Finish Group and submit a reworked document to the
Committee next month.

The Committee thanked Councillor Pavitt for his work and supported the Water
Survey and his recommendation. Councillor Evans agreed and said that the last
Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Group (SIDG) meeting had covered water
related matters but unfortunately Councillor Pavitt had not been free to attend.

The Chair read out a statement from Mr Ketteridge, who asked that the 16 larger sites that were being considered through the call to sites, within the Local Plan, were named. He said it was important for transparency to have the involvement of the Town and Parish Council's at an early stage.

Councillor Evans said that these would be identified shortly but it was not possible to make them known at this stage.

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager said that a report would be taken to the Local Plan Leadership Group (LPLG) meeting in the next couple of weeks.

The Chair said that the sites needed to be named and that it was undemocratic to be having discussions without the knowledge of residents and Town and Parish Councils.

Councillor Sell agreed and said that Parishes were required to sign a confidentiality agreement and therefore there could be no issue. He said there was a lot of concern within the community and residents had a right to know which sites were potentially being considered.

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager understood the concerns expressed but said that no decisions had been taken on sites they were working with developers on a without prejudice basis to the assessment of sites, and he said that not all sites would make it to the next stage.

In response to a question from Councillor Sell about when sites would be finalised, the Local Plan and New Communities Manager said that there was a defined process and a potential site selection would be produced for the November LPLG meeting. The final sites would not be known until the draft Local Plan was decided upon early in the New Year.

The Chair said he was disappointed with the lack of transparency he said the disclosure of the sites should include early discussions with developers but needed to also involve local residents.

Councillor Evans said that democratic input would be provided at the LPLG meeting and would be apparent after the technical consultation in October. He said this was an early opportunity to speak to developers and landowners and for them to understand what the Council expected from them. This would then be brought together in a coordinated way to the LPLG.

Councillor Isham said that the local community needed to be part of the discussion and included in the technical consultation.

The Chair said there was no doubt of the view of the Committee, he looked forward to the paper going to LPLG later this month.

LOCAL PLAN QUARTER 2 PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The Local Plan Project Manager gave an overview of the report and highlighted the following: -

- There were 8 changes to the risk register on pages 12 to 14, he said that a new Senior Planner was now in post.
- There was pressure to evaluate all the 299 sites, but this would not affect the overall timetable.
- Page 15 showed the workplan which had no red related tasks although the number of tasks had increased to 559.
- The workstream status on page 16 showed significant progress and a draft vision and overall methodology.
- The live tasks on pages 17 to 21 were there for Members information.
- The draft letter to MHCLG on pages 22 to 23 set out the progress to date.

Councillor Le Count asked if there was enough resource available to evaluate each of the 299 sites within the timeframe. The Local Plan Project Manager said that the consultants were looking at the factual evaluation in parallel with the Officer's own assessments. These would then be published in October to be shared with the Town and Parish Councils and Developers, he said that they would be able to keep to the timetable.

In response to questions from Councillor LeCount, Councillor Evans said that although the net zero carbon status was ambitious, it would be achieved through the policies within the Local Plan and advice from Consultants on best practice. This would then be reiterated continuously throughout the Local Plan process. The developers in the process would also need to pay attention to green issues and it would adversely affect their application if they did not. There would also be discussions with the Planning Development team, who would ultimately use these policies to direct developers to achieve net zero carbon status. The timescales were included in the Local Plan.

Further to a question from Councillor Sell the Director of Public Services said that the review of Planning Development and the resignation of the Assistant Director – Planning would not impact on the Local Plan timetable.

In response to a question from Councillor Sell, the Director of Public Services said there should be a very clear policy on affordable housing however there must always be discretion and scope for other material considerations that might justify a change to the policy. He agreed with Councillor Isham that any departure from the policy must clearly document what other considerations were made.

The Chair summarised the discussion, he said it was a superb and clear document, which showed that the process was under rigorous control. He asked that all the stakeholders be listed under bullet point 6 of the letter.

The Committee unanimously approved the report and the letter.

SC22 **REGULATION 18 LOCAL PLAN GOVERNANCE**

The Local Plan Project Manager said that the supplementary 'Preferred Options Timetable' aimed to make the report clearer. There were two proposed changes which would take more time but this would be made up later in the process. The first was to have an additional LPLG meeting in November to receive the report and set out the reasonable alternatives in order to meet the Council's objectives. In February there would be four extra briefing sessions and a site visit day for the larger sites for the LPLG members to make sure that they were properly informed.

The Committee agreed unanimously with the report.

SC23 **NEW COMMUNITIES COLLABORATION PARTNERSHIP**

The Local Plan Project Manager explained the report's objectives and described the proposed partnership approach for larger developments in the Local Plan. He asked for Member's feedback.

Councillor Sell said that this was the third attempt by the Council to deliver a Local Plan, he said it would inevitably upset some people. He said it was crucial that the Council could demonstrate that it was evidence led. He was encouraged by the report and had no issues.

Councillor Isham said that good progress had been made. He asked if there could be a reference document, providing examples and a guide for best practice, quality and great design which would also act as a checklist for the future. He said this was an opportunity for the Council to be a beacon of good quality and lasting affordable housing.

Councillor LeCount said he was still concerned about the target for net zero carbon and would like some more detail.

The Local Plan Project Manager said there was a parallel workstream which was considering examples of high quality design. He said it was the intention that this process was aspirational and encouraged good development in the district.

The Chair said he supported the approach he said it was a good document that brought together all aspects in a coherent whole. He asked if the role of the Town and Parish Councils could be made clearer as there was a great deal of knowledge and experience of the local area available.

The Local Plan Project Manager said that the Community Stakeholder Forums gave residents a proactive role in the process.

Councillor Evans said this flowed from the previous Local Plan and discussions with developers through the statement of common grounds.

The Committee accepted the report unanimously.

The meeting ended at 8.33pm.