

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (LOCAL PLAN) held at ZOOM, on THURSDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2020 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)
Councillors C Criscione, G Driscoll, R Jones, G LeCount and G Sell

Officers in Attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director - Corporate Services), C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer), G Glenday (Assistant Director - Planning), S Miles (Local Plans and New Communities Manager), S Payne (Local Plan Project Manager) and C Shanley-Grozavu (Democratic Services Officer)

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

SC41 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillors Coote, Dean and Lavelle. Councillor Khan also sent apologies as he could not attend as a substitute.

SC42 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2020 were approved and would be signed by the Chair as a correct record at the next opportunity.

SC43 GOVERNANCE UPDATE

Councillor Evans summarised his report regarding governance and the Local Plan process. He said that as well as the organised meetings described in the report, there was continuous contact and in-depth co-operation between himself and Officers.

Councillor Evans said it had been agreed at the beginning of the Local Plan process that the governance structure and progress of the Plan would be reviewed at the end of the year and therefore would be presented at the next meeting. He acknowledged the significant contribution of the late Councillor Storah in setting up these structures and procedures in order to govern the Local Plan process.

Councillor Criscione asked for a definition and scope of the Project Sponsor's role. He also asked that any review of the Project Initiation document be extended to include all bodies. The functions and role of the Portfolio Holder and Chair of the Local Plan Leadership Group (LPLG) are not included and he suggested that they were in the future.

Councillor Evans said it was a helpful suggestion and agreed to extend the categories of bodies. He said that Councillor Bagnall the Chair of LPLG would attend future meetings.

In response to a question from the Chair, Councillor Evans agreed that the workload was substantial but stated he was committed to the process and had no doubt he would be able to cope. He recognised that the evidence produced would be the most important part of the Local Plan, and the explanation to residents and conversion of this into policies compliant with the NPPF and following legislation and regulations would be vital.

Councillor Sell welcomed the report and said it was essential to get the project right. He said communication was crucial and the committee had to add value without duplication and asked how best this could be done.

The importance of attendance at these meetings by the Chair of LPLG, Councillor Bagnall, to answer questions was discussed. In his absence the Vice-Chair, Councillor Pavitt should be available to take his place. Councillor Evans reiterated that it was Councillor Bagnall's intention to come to future meetings.

The Chair stated the importance of a seamless flow of responsibility to enable business to proceed in a quick and efficient manner.

Councillor Sell made a suggestion that Cabinet resources be allocated to pressure points in the process.

The Assistant Director, Corporate Services said he had received a report from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny which emphasised the Committee's questioning should be directed at the Cabinet Member, not the Chair of the LPLG. This document would be circulated to all Committee Members. In response to a question from Councillor Driscoll, he said the report was purely for advice, but would be a good guide. There would be workshops arranged for further discussion.

The Local Plan Project Manager explained the report. The Risk Register document had highlighted changes of risk (shown on page 18). These were as follows:

- Two members of staff had handed in their notice, a Transport Planner and Urban Designer.
- The National Planning White Paper had reduced in risk; the Government received 44,000 representations nationally and were committed to review and consider responses.
- The risk of inconsistencies between the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans was reduced due to Officers examining and reviewing the emerging Neighbourhood Plans.

Four new risks were identified by the Local Plan Project Manager, he drew particular attention to:-

- The effectiveness of the Community Stakeholder Forum
- The risk of Government intervention was not a high risk if the timetable was adhered to.

The Local Plan Project Manager said the dashboard was showing 126 live tasks, none of these were identified as red (currently no significant risk of the project timetable being compromised).

The overall status of the Local Plan in the report was shown as amber, however the Local Plan Project Manager stated that progress in the last few days had led to his assessment changing to green. This was due to two changes:

- Budget approved by Full Council.
- Recruitment process started and interim cover by skilled staff arranged.

The Councillors were in agreement that the report was well written and a good working document.

Further to questions from Councillors, the two vacancies were discussed and the following points made by Officers:-

- The posts represented 2 out of approximately 10 full time equivalent members of staff.
- Both members of staff would be leaving in December
- Temporary replacements of the same calibre had been found.
- Officers were confident that excellent replacements would be found.
- There was a bigger pool of potential recruits, as working from home was now standard.
- A Job share would be considered.

In response to a question from Councillor Driscoll, the Local Plan Project Manager explained that the documents from page 24 to page 39 were taken from Microsoft Project; the percentages shown were the overall progress through each topic. For example, theme 1 was 39% but, once the other tasks set out below had been progressed, the percentage total would be increased.

Councillor Criscione commented that the project management system was clearly working. He asked if the Community Stakeholder Forum had been successful, and if it had remained focused on the named topic. He thought for the discussion to be effective it would need to be clearly steered and the Forum well briefed to avoid moving away from the theme. The Local Plan and New Communities Manager said the meetings had been focused and the discussion afterwards had stuck to the topic.

There was a discussion about notice periods, Councillor LeCount said it was a risk to the project and thought one month's notice was not acceptable. He was concerned that if senior staff left in the future this posed a high risk. He asked for grades and notice periods to be circulated.

SC45 **ISSUES & OPTIONS**

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager explained the process and invited comments.

In response to a question from Councillor Criscione, the Local Plan and New Communities Manager explained the Community Stakeholders Forum and said the public were invited to attend and make comments after each meeting. He stressed the importance of public engagement at this point as no decisions had been made and so comments would directly influence the Local Plan first draft.

Following a concern from Councillor LeCount regarding the timescale of potential sites for development to be submitted by Uttlesford District Council, (UDC), the Local Plan and New Communities Manager agreed to bring the Council's input forward. He said sites allocated would have to be deliverable.

After receiving statistics from Councillor Evans on participation and responses, members undertook to encourage resident's participation through their monthly meetings; newsletters; Parish magazines; churches and social media.

In answer to a question from Councillor Criscione, the Local Plan Project Manager said the current report on Issues and Options was complete. However, he said as debate developed and the program continued there would be other lines of enquiry that would be picked up.

In response to a question from the Chair, Councillor Evans stated that the Local Plan must be evidence led. He said the process would not be the same as before, and he stressed the importance of residents contributing to the process and their views being listened to.

In response to a further question from the Chair about information sharing specifically related to a call to sites from Cambridge and South Cambridge there was a meeting set up with Greater Cambridge and UDC next week.

SC46 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

In response to a question from Councillor Criscione, the Local Plan Project Manager said that new consultees could be added to the list. It was agreed that an e-mail to all members for suggestions would be sent.

The Chair thanked everyone for their work and said he had confidence that the plan was progressing.

The meeting ended at 8.40pm.