

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 20 October 2009

PRESENT: Councillor Tony Woods (Chair); Councillor Chris Millar (Deputy Chair); Councillors Wendy Amos, Sandra Barnes, Richard Church, Stephen Clarke, Keith Davies, David Garlick, Andrew Grant (substitute), Joan Kirkbride (substitute), Ken Melling, Brian Markham and Mr David Dickinson.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Bass, Brown and De Savage.

The Chair welcomed Councillor David Garlick to his first meeting of the Joint Committee and also to Mr David Atkinson who had been recently appointed as Head of the JPU but had not yet taken up the post.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 AUGUST 2009

The minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee held on 4 August 2009 were signed by the Chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- (1) Councillors Sandra Barnes, Richard Church, Chris Millar, Tony Woods and Mr David Dickinson declared personal interests as members of the WNDC Board.
- (2) Councillor Brian Markham declared a personal interest as the Chair of Northampton Borough Council's Planning Committee.
- (3) Councillor Wendy Amos declared a personal interest as member of WNDC's Daventry Planning Committee.
- (4) Councillor Steven Clarke declared a personal interest as a member of the East Midlands Regional Assembly.

4. MATTERS OF URGENCY

None.

5. REVIEW OF THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

The Interim Head of the JPU submitted a report that set out an invitation from the Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM) to review the Local Development Scheme in recognition of the complex infrastructure issues that needed to be better understood or resolved before pre-submission of a Joint Core Strategy took place. She elaborated upon the need to complete the evidence base, ongoing work to analyse the responses to the consultation on the Emergent Joint Core Strategy and potential risks in reworking the timetable for the production of the Joint Core Strategy. The Interim Head of the JPU also referred to the situation in respect of the Affordable Housing and Developer Contributions Development Plan Document.

The invitation from GOEM to revise the Local Development Scheme was welcomed although the inherent danger in leaving what would essentially be a policy vacuum was

noted. It was important for the Joint Core Strategy to be firmly evidence based and as far as was practicable that it was acceptable to the public. In answer to a question the Interim Head of the JPU commented that in respect of the Urban Capacity Study, the Strategic Housing Land Availability Study was almost complete and a study of employment land that might be used for housing purposes instead was also nearly complete. She also noted that in the meantime, before a Joint Core Strategy was approved, Councils could use national guidance, regional policy guidance and their own saved policies to consider any planning applications that were received. Engagement with Councillors would be timetabled as far in advance as was practicable.

Comment was made that in terms of public acceptance, the Joint Core Strategy needed to be clear that without the appropriate infrastructure being in place then housing development would not be acceptable. Paying for the appropriate infrastructure would be critical and enabling development as proposed in the EJCS would be required. It was questioned whether the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy would generate sufficient funding bearing in mind it was not intended to meet the full cost of any such infrastructure in any case.

The Chair noted that by publishing the Emergent Joint Core Strategy a number of problems with the Regional Spatial Strategy and the existing infrastructure deficit had been flushed out. He acknowledged that whilst there was a risk of speculative planning applications during this period there was also a risk of an incoming government, post the General Election, making sweeping changes at regional level which could also create a policy vacuum. There were issues around who would be paying for the infrastructure as it seemed unlikely that developers would be able to in full, even if they were willing to; that there was already a gap in funding, and the need for the infrastructure to be in place before development took place.

The Interim Head of the JPU reported that the support of other statutory agencies to work within agreed timescales was already being progressed. It was intended that a report to the Joint Committee would be made in December in respect of the Local Development Scheme and this would include the position of the key statutory agencies. Work with the WNDC was taking place in respect of funding mechanisms for the necessary infrastructure. Progress on all these matters would be reported through the Business Sub Group and a workshop that already been planned for November.

RESOLVED: (1) That the review of the Local Development Scheme be agreed in principle.

- (2) That discussions with the Government Office for the East Midlands include the separation of the Affordable Housing and Developer Contributions Development Plan Documents.
- (3) That the abandonment of the work on the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document for legal reasons as detailed in the report be confirmed.
- (4) That a revised Local Development Scheme be brought to the Joint Committee in December once the critical paths for outstanding evidence and policy making have been mapped and a common understanding with key agencies on a way forward has been reached.

6. RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON THE PARTIAL REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY FOR THE EAST MIDLANDS

The Interim Head of the JPU submitted a report that set out a consultation of a partial review of the East Midlands Regional Plan. The partial review looked forward to 2031 and focused upon housing, transport and climate change. It was noted that partner authorities had individually made responses to the consultation and that a common thread was the need for evidence of infrastructure being put in place to support development. Housing growth must

be linked to funding streams and, so far, West Northamptonshire felt that it had been let down by the Regional Strategy where funding had been concentrated on the Nottingham, Leicester, Derby triangle. Just because West Northamptonshire was on the fringe of the East Midlands region was no reason for it not to be supported by regional investment. It was also important for the Regional Strategy to recognise that current housing targets would not be reached both currently and in the near future and that the RSS should be revised downwards to set more realistic targets.

It was also noted that while the transportation issues were now being recognised as being challenging there did not seem to be any sign, as yet, of any proposed solution coming forward.

Councillor Chris Millar commented that Daventry District Council had, in considering the West Northamptonshire options for future development, rejected Option 4 which was to focus growth more evenly across the area in a dispersed pattern of development.

RESOLVED: (1) That subject to the following amendments the response to the consultation on the partial review of the East Midlands Regional Plan be agreed:-

- To add to the response set out at paragraph 1.9 a new paragraph to read “Given the current economic climate and lack of infrastructure or realistic prospect of securing it, the WNJSPC concludes that the current annualised housing targets need to be revised downwards significantly. The Regional Assembly needs to ensure that there is a clear alignment of environmental capacity, infrastructure needs, economic growth and housing requirements at the regional level before requiring any spatial allocation at sub-regional level.”
- To add at the end of the response set out at paragraph 1.28 an additional sentence in the final paragraph to read “However, the WNJSPC considers that the proposed Option 4 is inappropriate in any circumstance in what is a largely rural area.”

(2) That the Interim Head of the JPU, in consultation with the Chair, be authorised to agree the final response to the consultation.

The meeting concluded at 19.34 hours.