

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

Wednesday, 15 July 2009

PRESENT: Councillor Woods (Chair); Councillor B Hoare (Deputy Chair); Councillors Beardsworth, Church, Crake and Paul Varnsvery

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Councillor David Perkins.

2. MINUTES

There were none.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

RESOLVED

- (1) That Mrs Jean Lineker be granted leave to address Cabinet on Item 10, Options Appraisal Review;
- (2) That Mr Norman Adams be granted leave to address Cabinet on Item 10, Options Appraisal Review;
- (3) That Ms Beverley Mennell be granted leave to address Cabinet on Item 10, Options Appraisal Review and Item 11, Bid for HCA Funding for Council House Building;
- (4) That Mr Chris Swinn be granted leave to address Cabinet on Item 9, Housing Asset Management Strategy, Item 10, Options Appraisal Review and Item 11, Bid for HCA Funding for Council House Building;
- (5) That Councillor Palethorpe be granted leave to address Cabinet on Item 7, Central Area Action Plan, Item 9 Housing Asset Management Strategy and Item 10, Options Appraisal Review;
- (6) That Councillor Malpas be granted leave to address Cabinet on Item 9, Housing Asset Management Strategy
- (7) That Councillor Clarke be granted leave to address Cabinet on Item 7, Central Area Action Plan, Item 9 Housing Asset Management Strategy and Item 10, Options Appraisal Review;
- (8) That Councillor Davies be granted leave to address Cabinet on Item 7, Central Area Action Plan, Item 8 Joint Core Strategy Update and Item 10, Options Appraisal Review;
- (9) That Councillor Capstick be granted leave to address Cabinet on Item 10, Options Appraisal Review.

J Lineker asked Cabinet to consider keeping the housing stock rather than selling the stock to Housing Associations and private landlords. She loved her council property and was speaking on behalf of other residents who also wanted their council property to stay under the management of the Council. They trusted the Council and did not trust Housing Associations or private landlords. J Lineker explained that she had a bad experience with Housing Associations when they had not adhered to previous agreements. She strongly believed that tenants should be consulted, as it was such a big decision.

N Adams spoke on behalf of the Defend Council Housing group. He agreed with J Lineker and was glad that she had spoken to Cabinet as she represented the views of council property residents. He commented that in the past, the Council had paid expensive independent advisors to recommend housing options for the Borough, however this had been a mistake. He explained that Cambridge City Council had recently asked council

property residents to vote on the matter on 4 June 2009 and 73% voted against selling properties. He believed that Cabinet should not take the matter any further until the residents really understood the review and that rather than using money on consultants, they should spend the money on good builders.

B Mennell believed that the report for item 11 gave a clear and open understanding about the difficult options that the Council had to face. She also believed that the previous administration had left the housing stock in a bad way to the point that some were beyond repair. She knew that there was a lack of money to spend on Council properties and explained that as long as the Council adhered to regulations and guidelines, she agreed with and supported the plans. With regard to item 11, she believed that the people of Northampton wanted good housing for the future.

C Swinn explained that the previous housing appraisal showed that 74% of tenants had been satisfied with the Council as their landlord and that residents had been told that in 2005, the decent homes standard would be reached. The best consultants were hired, however nothing had been done about the matter and he felt that the consultation property had not been done correctly. He believed that the decent homes standard would allow Councils to retain 100% of the negative surplus. He commented that there had not been a satisfaction survey in 2009.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

5. ISSUES ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

There were none.

6. MINUTES OF WEST NORTHANTS JOINT PLANNING COMMITTEE 17.02.09 & 21.04.09

The minutes were noted.

7. CENTRAL AREA ACTION PLAN

Councillor Palethorpe welcomed the consultation process and commented that the report was an excellent piece of work. He believed that there was a need to build a town of a good standard for future generations and to cater for future needs of the population. He talked about the growth agenda of 35 years ago when planners had not considered the lifetime of the properties and that those mistakes were impacting on the present quality of homes. He commented that the people making decisions about Northampton should be able to look back with pride. He informed Cabinet that the Conservative Party would be engaging with the consultation.

Councillor Davies also welcomed the report. He believed that the improvement of roads, gateways and public transport was vital to the plans in order to allow people to travel in and out of the town. He also believed that the Spring Boroughs area must be improved however, not by the private sector, as there would still be a need for affordable housing. He commented that other areas of the town should not be neglected.

Councillor Clarke congratulated the Planning department at NBC for the document provided to the public about the plans. He believed that the document was important for the future of the town and that the development would make a difference for people living in the town centre. He informed Cabinet that he was speaking on behalf of the residents living in the Spring Boroughs area and that they felt that housing was a serious issue within the area. They had asked for the 2016 deadline to be brought forward as they felt that the matter of housing needed to be dealt with before that date.

As the relevant Portfolio Holder, Councillor Church welcomed the comments from the public speakers and Councillors; he also congratulated the Planning team. He was pleased that there was a cross party consensus. He explained that the plans fell under the Joint Core Strategy and referred to part 2, page 13 of the report; the town was larger than some cities and the recommended changes would make the town feel like a city. It already had some city style facilities. The improvement of accommodation, retail and employment would be part of the city vision and cultural and heritage sites would be maintained to make the town a place to visit. He explained that the riverside was an area that could be capitalised upon.

He agreed that the mistakes of the past must not be repeated and that buildings should be built to make people proud. He would not want a repeat of the Greyfriars bus station. Sustainability and lifetime of the buildings was also important as well as the green agenda and the carbon footprint. Better roads and walkways were part of the plan and the river of Northampton, which had been previously ignored, would be developed as a place to live, work and visit.

Councillor Church believed that it was vital for the residents of Spring Boroughs to be consulted and involved with the action plan. He also believed that the retail development of the Grosvenor centre would play a vital role in the plans. He informed Cabinet that the plan would be shared with NBC's partners including, NCC, WNDC and people who live and work in the town centre.

Attention was drawn to the consultation period, which would take place over 6 weeks beginning in August. On the 4 August 2009, there would be a media launch of the consultation and leaflets would be distributed widely to obtain as many responses as possible to the emerging CAAP. In particular the consultation would be targeted at involving hard to reach groups such as young people.

Councillor Paul Varnsvery suggested that landmarks, such as the gasholder at St. Peters Way be reflected in the proposed redevelopment plans and he referred to the successful gasholder development in Dublin.

It was noted that due to the ambition of the CAAP, there was a need to get it right. The factor of improved transport links was a major factor and the need to break current barriers like Greyfriars. It was hoped that the consensus was to recognise the need to improve the town for the future and for future generations. Councillor Woods highlighted the fact that the improvement of the town would be the largest piece of infrastructure that needed to be delivered as part of the government's growth agenda for Northampton and West Northamptonshire – and, indeed, Northamptonshire as a whole; therefore it needed to be done correctly. He also commented that cycle links throughout the town should be improved.

RESOLVED

1. Following consideration of the report, approval be given for the consultation on the emerging strategy document contained within Appendix A of the report.
2. It be delegated to the Director of Planning in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration amendments to the document in Appendix 1, of required, prior to starting the consultation process.

8. JOINT CORE STRATEGY - UPDATE

Councillor Davies addressed the Cabinet and commented that he supported the growth as long as it was done in the correct way and that any late comments after the consultation were taken into account. He believed that was very important for the infrastructure to be in place before any building took place. The consultation should be used to ensure an even

spread of employment and accommodation. He stated that if consultation was conducted correctly, the people of the Borough would know they were being listened to, discouraging campaigns and protests. He also believed that a maximum growth agenda should apply.

As relevant Portfolio Holder, Councillor Church presented the report to Cabinet and pointed out that the report was part of the joint work between the various authorities involved with the Joint Planning Unit. He agreed with Councillor Davies regarding the infrastructure and informed Cabinet that the Joint Planning Unit would conduct the consultation. It was noted that it was critical that members of the authority were able to consider and respond to the options and that all Councils involved would be doing the same. The decisions that were made would have an impact on future generations. Councillor Varnsvery noted that many people of the town accepted the need for growth however the extent of growth was worrying people. A full consultation would allow people to make their views known therefore encouraging people to be involved with the process.

RESOLVED

1. That Cabinet note the decision of the JSPC on 6 July and agree, in principle, to provide a formal Council response through the consultation process.
2. That after full consideration Cabinet adopt option 3.1.10(c); that the Emergent West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy be referred to Overview and Scrutiny for immediate scrutiny with a view to bringing a report to Full Council in September 2009.

9. HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Councillor Clarke addressed the Cabinet and referred to page 13 of the report where it was stated that over two thirds of the homes in the Spring Boroughs area would not reach the decent homes standard in 2009/2010. He felt that many homes in the Semilong, St. James and the town centre were also not benefiting from the decent homes standard in 2009/2010. He also felt that this was a poor situation and asked the Cabinet to look at ways of addressing deficit within the central area plan. It appeared that areas of non-urgency were being dealt with before areas that were in need like Castle Ward. He referred to paragraph 3.1.3. and expressed his opinion that decisions needed to be taken annually as well as over the long term and also advised against giving too much delegation to officers.

Councillor Malpas welcomed the report as well as the consultation. He was concerned about the report as although it was a draft, it had spelling mistakes and he felt that it could give a poor perception of NBC. He was also concerned about the report on Garages that had recently been presented at an Overview and Scrutiny meeting as it reported on different figures compared to the report attached to the agenda. He was worried that NBC would be perceived in a negative way due to the inaccuracies in the reports.

Councillor Palethorpe congratulated the Director of Housing and her team for preparing a readable document. As the document was easy to read, he felt that the public could now see the extent of the housing problems that NBC had to face. He asked that people who had bought their Council houses also be consulted, as these residents were also a vital part of the community. These owners living in council estates could be affected due to the deterioration of an area having an impact on house prices. Therefore he felt that there was a need to consider both leaseholders and freeholders.

As relevant Portfolio Holder, Councillor Beardsworth presented the report to Cabinet and explained that the reports for items 9 and 10 on the agenda should be considered together. It was noted that the report was in draft format leading up to the process of consultation. As it was a draft, all views would be considered. The aim of the report was to explain the investment options to provide good quality homes, safe neighbourhoods and attractive

environments. Councillor Church commented that the NBC owned a range of properties in terms of quality, size, type and location.

RESOLVED

1. That Cabinet approve the draft Housing Asset Management attached to the report, for consultation with tenants and receives a report back on that consultation in due course.
2. That Cabinet note that a resource plan will be developed for the delivery of the final strategy.
3. That the authority be given to the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to set up a programme of small scale procurement of contract packages varying in value from £50,000 to £1.6 million as set out at appendix I of the draft Housing Asset Management Strategy, to commence as soon as is practically achievable.

10. OPTIONS APPRAISAL REVIEW

Councillor Capstick addressed Cabinet expressing concern about the Single Persons Accommodation Review and the future of Robinson House. She felt that a homeless centre was vitally important and that consultation carried out by Sally Keeble MP had shown that local people were concerned that history would repeat itself and that the property would become Single Persons Accommodation without sufficient supervision. She believed that there was a need for mixed accommodation. With a shortage of affordable housing in the area, Robinson House could meet some of this need. She suggested that Cabinet listen to local residents before making any decisions.

Councillor Davies also addressed Cabinet and welcomed the information that was provided in the report. His main concern was that NBC would make the decision to go into large-scale voluntary transfer; he believed that this would not be a good decision. Council property tenants wanted NBC to continue to be their landlord. Councillor Woods noted that it was very encouraging that tenants still wanted NBC as their landlord.

Councillor Clarke then addressed Cabinet and commented that public housing was good as it ensured that people had somewhere to live and that this right needed to be protected. He believed that most tenants would be opposed to a Housing Association or private landlord and that most people would accept that bringing homes to the Decent Homes Standard might take 10 years if their property stayed under the NBC umbrella compared with a significantly shorter period under other options. He felt that NBC would need to look into selective transfer in the future, though only transferring properties where it would be an advantage to residents.

Councillor Palethorpe stated to the Cabinet that he was increasingly concerned about the diminishing opportunity for PFI and the continued deterioration of council properties owing to their age. He felt that there could be some campaigns regarding the idea of using the gasholder for accommodation and that views must be respected. He felt that housing issues should be apolitical and commented that the Conservative Party would not pre-judge the option. He stated that he believed in Council housing however he recognised a need to pursue additional funding or alternative options to allow homes to be part of the Decent Homes Standard.

As relevant Portfolio Holder, Councillor Beardsworth outlined the purpose of the report. She also explained that Robinson House was part of the Single Persons Accommodation review and would be on the Forward Plan in the future. The support of other Councillors was welcomed and the housing team were congratulated for drafting the report. Councillor Beardsworth stated that tenants deserve decent homes that were safe, dry and warm

however, the Council could only afford £28 million, which would only pay for one third of the housing stock. At the end of the consultation period, all tenants and service users should understand the issues. The Council would continue to strive to become a two star service. It was explained that further work would be done to explore the different options, as there were still uncertainties about funding. Councillor Hoare felt that there was a need to find a solution to provide decent homes throughout the town. He referred to Leicester Housing Association taking over the ownership of the New Life Buildings as NBC could no longer afford it and felt that this had been a successful example. Councillor Church commented that if voluntary transfer was to be considered, tenants would have the right to vote. If the outcome of the vote was against transfer, then it would not go ahead. The Cabinet members congratulated the work done so far by the housing team.

RESOLVED

1. That Cabinet noted the work to date, and decides which geographical areas require further work, and which options should be progressed. Progress reports to be presented to Cabinet during the year.
2. That Cabinet delegated to the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Advisory Panel the power to appoint legal, financial, communications and independent advisors.
3. That Cabinet reconsidered the membership of the Advisory Panel when the results of the consultation of the new tenant participation structure are known.

11. BID FOR HCA FUNDING FOR COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING

Cabinet was advised of two errors on the report. Firstly, the item was not a key decision. Secondly, although a ward name was mentioned in the report, a number of sites were being looked at, not specifically in one ward.

As relevant Portfolio Holder, Councillor Beardsworth presented the report to Cabinet and asked them to consider a prospective bid to the Homes and Communities Agency for funding to build new council housing on council owned land. It was made clear that the appointment of an RSL partner would be purely for help in securing the bid and not in relation to the ownership of property.

RESOLVED

That the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, be authorised to confirm the terms of a bid to the Homes and Communities Agency for funding and the appointment of a partner RSL.

12. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The meeting concluded at 20.26 hours