

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Planning Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Monday, 10 August 2015 at 10.00 a.m.

Portfolio Holder: Robert Turner

Councillors in attendance:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitors: Kevin Cuffley

Also in attendance: David Bard, Anna Bradnam, Lynda Harford,
James Hockney, Peter Johnson and
Tim Wotherspoon

Officers:

Caroline Hunt	Planning Policy Manager
Jo Mills	Planning and New Communities Director
Trovine Monteiro	Consultancy Unit - Team Leader
Tony Pierce	Interim Development Control Manager
Ian Senior	Democratic Services Officer
Alison Talkington	Senior Planning Policy Officer

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Planning Portfolio Holder signed, as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2015.

3. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS: WATERBEACH AREA DESIGNATION

The Planning Portfolio Holder considered a report relating to Waterbeach Parish Council's request to designate the parish of Waterbeach as a Neighbourhood Area, and agree to an addendum to the Local Development Scheme regarding neighbourhood planning.

The Senior Planning Policy Officer highlighted the basis for the application, set out in paragraphs 16 to 19 of the report, and referred to the nature of consultation responses received by the end of the revised consultation period. Out of the 107 responses, only five had been objections, and these were summarised in paragraphs 27 to 29. The Senior Planning Policy Officer referred the Portfolio Holder to paragraph 15, which compared the Waterbeach application with similar applications elsewhere in the country where strategic sites were factors. Paragraph 32 set out the key points for consideration by South Cambridgeshire District Council. While the Parish Council would be preparing its neighbourhood plan, there would be a number of strategic factors and projects affecting Waterbeach and the surrounding area. The Council had eight weeks to decide the application. The report contained two options – one to designate the whole parish, set out in paragraph 34 and recommended by officers for approval by the Portfolio Holder, and the other favoured by the promoters of the proposed New Town at Waterbeach, which sought to exclude that strategic site from the Neighbourhood Area (paragraph 35). The preferred option would be subject to the Parish Council and District Council agreeing roles and working arrangements by 21 August 2015.

The Planning Portfolio Holder thanked the Senior Planning Policy Officer and her

colleagues for preparing such a comprehensive report, and then introduced the public speakers.

Parish Councillor Brian Williams said that Waterbeach Parish Council was keen to be involved with the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan. He was concerned by the suspension of the draft Local Plan and by the resultant danger of speculative development. Far from wanting to stop strategic development of the New Town, Waterbeach Parish Council simply wanted to secure the best outcome for the existing community by working alongside South Cambridgeshire District Council and other stakeholders.

Parish Councillor Kate Grant emphasised the importance of local knowledge. She said that infrastructure must be put in place before any strategic development started. Councillor Grant summarised the current drainage arrangements in Waterbeach, which were unsatisfactory in terms of the current population, and certainly needed to be addressed prior to any large scale development taking place. Referring to Waterbeach village as a rural community, she highlighted the importance of any future strategic development including an appropriate amount of green, open space. Waterbeach was currently a “balanced community” and recognised the importance of its direct rail link with London. However, strategic development must not be allowed to upset that balance by turning the community into a “commuter town.” While balance was important for the local economy, the Parish Council recognised the need to embrace development. However, the status of the A10 was an ongoing concern. Councillor Grant concluded by saying that the Parish Council wanted to be constructive, and to lead the community in working alongside South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Jane Williams said that Waterbeach would be setting the standard for the entire district of South Cambridgeshire. The City Deal and Affordable Housing were of prime importance. The Parish Council wanted to see any strategic development remain sympathetic to Waterbeach’s setting as a Fenland community.

Parish Councillor Alice Grant highlighted the fact that the originally-proposed green separation between Waterbeach village and the New Town had been subjected to speculative development already.

Councillor Peter Johnson (Parish Councillor and a local District Councillor) supported the Parish Council’s application that the entire parish be designated as a Neighbourhood Area. Flooding was a key issue to be addressed. He feared urban sprawl unless the entire parish was designated as a Neighbourhood Area.

Councillor James Hockney (a local District Councillor) also favoured designating the entire parish as a Neighbourhood Area. He agreed that flooding was a key concern. While acknowledging that the green separation between the village and the proposed New Town had been lost, he welcomed the Neighbourhood Plan as an opportunity for “joined up government.” He saw it as offering a better future for Waterbeach.

The Planning Portfolio Holder then invited comments from other Members present.

Councillor Lynda Harford said it was disingenuous of developers to want the strategic site excluded from the Neighbourhood Area when it was developers who had compromised the green separation that had been proposed as a buffer between the village and proposed New Town. She expressed concern that the developers might be able to challenge the Neighbourhood Area designation if it were to cover the entire parish. In reply, the Planning and New Communities Director said this was unlikely. The national guidance stated that it was the local planning authority that had the responsibility to

designate a neighbourhood area, and there was no mention of a formal process for third parties to have the opportunity to challenge a designation. Any challenge would be by Judicial Review of the Council's decision.

Councillor Anna Bradnam favoured designating the entire parish, saying the Neighbourhood Plan would be more successful if all parties worked together.

The Planning Portfolio Holder welcomed the level of support, and thanked Waterbeach Parish Council for engaging positively in the process. He was very happy to include the entire parish in the Neighbourhood Area designation. The Portfolio Holder conveyed his best wishes to Waterbeach Parish Council, and said he was willing to attend their meetings and give advice and support if required and where possible.

The Planning Portfolio Holder

1. **Approved** the designation of a Neighbourhood Area for Waterbeach that included the whole parish with South Cambridgeshire District Council and Waterbeach Parish Councils agreeing a framework, by 21 August 2015, as to how they would work together;
2. **Noted** that the Parish Council had expressed its willingness to work with all the parties involved in the future planning of Waterbeach; and
3. **Approved** an addendum to the South Cambridgeshire Local Development Scheme listing the Neighbourhood Areas that had been designated and which indicated where Neighbourhood Plans were being prepared by Parish Councils (Appendix D to the report).

4. REVIEW OF CONSULTANCY TEAM

The Planning Portfolio Holder considered a report updating him on progress following the introduction, in April 2014, of the new Consultancy team, a new vision and ways of working. The report also set out the direction and priorities of the team for 2015-16, which would be incorporated into a team plan.

The Interim Development Control Manager highlighted the very significant reduction in the number of complaints received during the last six months.

The Team Leader, Consultancy Unit was confident that, during the forthcoming year, the team would have sufficient capacity to cope with demands such as Northstowe Phases 1 and 2, Neighbourhood Planning, Five-year land supply, the Tithe Barn in Landbeach and the Tannery in Sawston.

The Portfolio Holder welcomed evidence of good engagement with Members and local residents. Councillor Kevin Cuffley agreed that good liaison was crucial.

Councillor David Bard said that capacity must be assessed not just in terms of speculative development but also in the context of the Local Development Framework and the draft Local Plan.

Councillor Lynda Harford was disappointed that the report was framed largely in general terms, saying specific figures would have been helpful. While she understood the rationale behind becoming more commercial and earning money for the Council, she urged officers not to overlook the demands made by minor developments. The Team Leader, Consultancy Unit said that Minor developments of fewer than ten dwellings were dealt with

by Planning Case Officers. Measures were in place to provide training for Case Officers, and Consultancy Team members would continue to provide advice where required. The team also provided weekly surgeries to provide verbal advice of minor applications.

The Planning Portfolio Holder said that he would be willing to get involved, if required.

The Planning Portfolio Holder

1. **noted** the progress made by the Consultancy team;
2. **endorsed** the outcomes and recommendations in paragraph 7 of the report to be taken forward in the Team Plan; and
3. **endorsed** the new team vision, as set out in paragraph 22.

5. PERFORMANCE 2014/15 AND PROGRESS IN SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

The Planning Portfolio Holder **received and noted** a report updating him about a number of service issues and progress concerning planning and building control performance and the delegation of planning decisions to officers.

The Interim Development Control Manager announced that, with effect from 10 August 2015, an updated duty officer scheme had been introduced. Appointments would be made for meetings and telephone conversations with the duty officer, and straightforward queries would be answered by the contact centre and technical support officers. The first 15 minutes would continue to be free.

The Portfolio Holder reminded officers that Members possessed a substantial amount of local knowledge, and should not be reluctant to take advantage of that fact.

Councillor Anna Bradnam urged caution about the planning process becoming paperless, not least where computer networks fail. Following discussion, the Portfolio Holder accepted that the emphasis should be on moving *towards* a paperless planning service, and that South Cambridgeshire District Council should adopt a flexible approach to achieving best practice in meeting the expectations of customers.

Referring to paragraph 14 of the report, the Portfolio Holder was anxious that the morale of current members of staff should not be affected adversely by measures included in recruitment campaigns. The Planning and New Communities Director said that the Council operates within its adopted policies, and takes care to treat all staff fairly. It is hoped that the Council's recent achievement of Gold Investors in People status should assist the recruitment process and also the continued personal development of Council employees. The Portfolio Holder said that there must be total transparency, including in recruitment and retention matters, when moving towards a planning shared service.

Referring to planning decision delegations (paragraph 18), the Interim Development Control Manager said that a detailed report would be presented to the Planning Portfolio Holder meeting on 8 September 2015. Consultation with the public and Parish Councils would take place during September and October, and with the Planning Committee on 4 November.

6. WORK PROGRAMME

The Planning Portfolio Holder **received and noted** the Work Programme attached to the agenda.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next Planning Portfolio Holder meeting had been scheduled for Tuesday 8 September 2015, starting at 10.00am.

The Meeting ended at 11.25 a.m.
