

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Joint Local Planning Advisory Group held on
Monday, 27 February 2023 at 5.30 p.m.

PRESENT:

Councillor Katie Thornburrow – Vice-Chair

Councillors:	Tim Bick	Peter Sandford
	Neil Shailer	Simon Smith
	Dr. Richard Williams	Henry Batchelor

Councillor Martin Smart was in attendance as a guest.

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

Guy Belcher (Nature Conservation Projects Officer), Jonathan Brookes (Principal Urban Designer), Laurence Damary-Homan (Democratic Services Officer), Ciaran Davis (Planning Policy Officer), Terry De Sousa (Principal Planning Policy Officer), Jonathan Dixon (Planning Policy Manager) and Stuart Morris (Principal Planning Policy Officer) and Lizzie Wood (Senior Planning Policy Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins and Councillor Henry Batchelor was present as a substitute.

With the absence of the usual Chair, Councillor Katie Thornburrow assumed the role of Chair for the meeting. The Chair proposed that Councillor Peter Sandford assume the role of Vice-Chair. This was seconded by Councillor Neil Shailer and agreed by affirmation.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

With respect to Minute 4, Councillor Dr Richard Williams declared that his employer, Christ College at the University of Cambridge, had comment on the parts of the consultation covered by the report. Councillor Simon Smith declared that he was a member of Adams Road Bird Sanctuary Club who had commented as part of the consultation.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

By affirmation, the Group authorised the Chair to sign the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2022 as a correct record.

4. BIODIVERSITY AND GREEN SPACES AND GREAT PLACES

The Planning Policy Manager introduced the report and the Principal Planning Policy Officer, Stuart Morris, presented the section regarding Biodiversity and Green Spaces. Members commended the minimum Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) target of 20% in policy BG/BG, made enquiry on the supporting evidence and requested that developments exceed 20% BNG wherever possible. Officers confirmed that the narrative around the policy was supported by evidence, with research such as the Green Infrastructure Opportunity Mapping being referenced.

Clarity was provided on the link between BNG targets and the Doubling Nature strategy of

South Cambridgeshire District Council. Members were informed that Doubling Nature was a broader vision that included other policy areas, such as land management, whilst BNG was a quantitative policy applying directly to development that also contributed to the wider aims of the Doubling Nature strategy.

Concern was raised over the quantitative nature of BNG and the resilience of the measures introduced to meet BNG targets. Officers assured the Group that, whilst the BNG target was based on a mandatory baseline from DEFRA, the policies would generally aim to either encourage development to take place on low biodiversity sites or ensure that biodiversity gains in the region would be notable where development takes place on more biodiversity rich sites. On and off siting of biodiversity measures was discussed, with Members requesting stronger definitions around on and off siting, and officers stated that a wide range of considerations would be taken into account when assessing how BNG could be achieved and that there would be a number of strategic sites across the region that would benefit from off site BNG.

Members raised concerns over the potential for harm to occur to buffer zones to sites with designated nature reserve protections and expressed a desire for the Local Plan to introduce protections for buffer zones. Officers noted the concerns and stated that they would take them into consideration as the drafting of the Local Plan continued.

Members sought clarity over the types of open space being discussed in the report, noting the differences between private and public open space and the varied demands on open space in rural and urban areas. A request was raised to ensure that the Local Plan incorporate safeguards for the social aspect of open space as well as the ecological factors. Concern was raised over the overuse of Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the region, due to the lack of open space available to the public, and enquired as to how SSSIs could be further protected and enhanced. Officers assured Members that these issues were at the forefront of their thinking and that the full spectrum of open space was being assessed, with various research projects being undertaken, and that this would continue to be taken into account in the Local Plan draft process.

The Great Places section of the report was presented by the Principal Planning Officers, Terry De Sousa and Nancy Kimberley, the Senior Planning Policy Officer, Lizzie Wood, and the Planning Policy Officer, Ciaran Davis. A query was in response to comment 59689 from Historic England as to if a specific tall buildings policy would be useful. Officers informed the Group that the aim of the Local Plan was to group issues in a set of succinct policies, but that they were open to a bespoke policy regarding tall buildings, skyline and setting if further consultation and evidence highlighted a need to. Members were informed that a skyline and tall buildings study was being undertaken and that ongoing dialogue with Historic England regarding this topic was occurring; officers also noted that Historic England were supportive of policies regarding the issue in the 2018 Local Plan but stated that there was a desire to continue to develop this area of policy. The Group was informed that a context-led approach was being pursued where possible and that, whilst definitions of tall buildings that include meterage were useful, there was a desire to avoid a prescriptive approach with quantitative benchmarks to ensure that tall buildings were sympathetic to local character. Further comment on changes to national legislation, including Local Design Codes, was given by officers. Members commended the response from officers but did suggest that, based on experience of previous developments with taller buildings, a specific policy could be useful to preserve and enhance local character.

A question was raised on if the Great Places section of the Local Plan would cover the protection of Public Houses, with officers informing the Group that this issue was covered in the Wellbeing and Social Inclusion section of the Local Plan. Members were informed that housing density policies were to be incorporated into the Great Places section of the Local Plan and discussion was held regarding this.

Concerns were raised over policy GP/QD with and the lack of specific reference to response to local character and how development would respond to the specific requirements of rural and urban areas. Members noted officer comments on Local Design

Guides and their influence on the design of new developments but felt that the inclusion of wording directly referencing local character in the policy would be appropriate. The Group was informed that policy GP/QD included wording that covered numerous factors that would ensure that local character was responded and contributed to, such as use of materials, appropriately scaled frontages, scale and spacing of developments and many other finer details. Officers assured the Group that further work would be undertaken to ensure that language in the policy was precise to ensure that the ambitions of the region and the expectations for developments were clearly conveyed in the Local Plan. Members stated that there had been many examples of development in the region that showed both successful and unsuccessful response to local character in their design which could be useful to officers moving forward.

The Group thanked officers for the presentation and the level of detail included in the First Proposals, consultation responses and the report. Members noted that the session had been very useful and numerous valuable points were raised by the Group. Members stated that they were impressed by the quality of work shown by officers, that they were excited to see continued progress through the draft period of the Local Plan.

5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Group was informed that the next meeting would be held on Monday 13 March.

The Meeting ended at 7.05 p.m.
