

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Planning Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Tuesday, 8 September 2015 at 10.00 a.m.

Portfolio Holder: Robert Turner

Councillors in attendance:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitors: Kevin Cuffley

Opposition spokesmen: Aidan Van de Weyer

Also in attendance: David Bard and Anna Bradnam

Officers:

Jonathan Dixon	Principal Planning Policy Officer (Transport)
Jane Green	Head of New Communities
Tony Pierce	Interim Development Control Manager
Ian Senior	Democratic Services 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 10 August 2015.

3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE CODE FOR SUSTAINABLE HOMES ON THE FEN DRAYTON FORMER LAND SETTLEMENT ASSOCIATION ESTATE

The Planning Portfolio Holder considered a report seeking his approval for the 'Fen Drayton Former Land Settlement Association Estate – Implications of the Withdrawal of the Code for Sustainable Homes' document to be applied as Council Policy and used as a material consideration when considering planning applications. The Principal Planning Policy Officer described this as a short term measure, anticipating inclusion in the draft Local Plan in due course, and possibly a new Supplementary Planning Document.

Councillor Mark Howell and Councillor Nick Wright had been consulted as local Members, but had not raised any concerns. Those present at the meeting were satisfied with the document presented to them.

In response to a question from Councillor Anna Bradnam, officers believed that houses were currently under construction on the Land Settlement Association (LSA) Estate that had been permitted through the policy.

In response to a brief discussion prompted by Councillor David Bard, the Portfolio Holder said he would investigate whether or not there should be a corresponding policy relating to the LSA Estate at Great Abington.

The Planning Portfolio Holder **approved** the 'Fen Drayton Former Land Settlement

Association Estate – Implications of the Withdrawal of the Code for Sustainable Homes' document (see Appendix A) as Council Policy to be used as a material consideration when considering planning applications.

4. CONSULTATION ON DRAFT AMENDMENTS TO THE DELEGATED POWERS AND FUNCTIONS FOR PLANNING DECISIONS

The Planning Portfolio Holder considered a report setting out proposed draft amendments to the current scheme of delegation, which forms part of the Council's Constitution, so that officers would have the powers to determine a range of applications, and Planning Committee could focus on making robust decisions relating to schemes of an appropriate scale and nature.

The Interim Development Control Manager said that the aim was to achieve a balance between greater efficiency and continued representation of local interests. He referred to paragraphs 9 and 10 in the report from the Planning and New Communities Director, and commented that it was unusual for parish councils to have the right to refer applications to Planning Committee automatically without prior reference to relevant officers and the Committee Chairman. The aim should be to ensure that Planning Committee could focus on planning applications and other issues of more strategic significance, while other matters were dealt with by officers using powers contained in a redesigned scheme of delegation.

The Planning Portfolio Holder and those present noted the process chart in paragraph 16 of the report.

The Interim Development Control Manager mentioned two options, which he did not recommend be given further thought. The first of these was the delegation of some decisions to parish councils. The danger in such circumstances was that the District Council might find its integrity as Local Planning Authority compromised in some cases. The second option was that of Area Committees which, he said, proved expensive to operate. The preferred option was to work more proactively with parish councils and local communities by improving presentation and communication.

The Planning Portfolio Holder and those present discussed the proposals set out in Appendix A to the report. For practical reasons, the Portfolio Holder asked that the first bullet point be amended so as to extend the period within which local Members could request that applications be referred to Planning Committee from 21 days to 28 days. He also asked that the sixth bullet point be expanded so as to state, "The application is one that in the opinion of officers, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, should be determined by Committee because of special planning policy considerations, complexity, or of significant and / or strategic importance to an area beyond both the specific site and parish'.

The Portfolio Holder was keen to end up with a process that saved officers from having to write unnecessary reports while preserving and enhancing the interests of parish councils and local residents, through improved engagement. He expressed disappointment with the current system which frequently led to applications being referred automatically to Planning Committee by parish councils, which then did not send representatives to address Committee meetings.

Councillor David Bard referred to situations where the Parish Council raised no objection, but where local residents had significant concerns. In reply, the Portfolio Holder said that such applications should be deemed significant enough to warrant them being presented

to Planning Committee for consideration by Members. Similarly, any application arising as a result of the District Council being unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply should be referred to Committee by default.

Councillor Anna Bradnam had some sympathy with parish councils not being represented at Committee meetings if nobody was available, but pointed out that Members always took their written representations into account. Councillor Bradnam said that extending the time for responses from 21 days to 28 days would be useful. She welcomed any steps that would improve parish councils' engagement in the planning process. In principle, householder applications should not be referred to Planning Committee.

The Portfolio Holder reminded those present that all local Members were routinely notified of planning applications in their wards, and had an important role to play in the subsequent process.

Councillor Bard highlighted the logistical problem faced by parish councils, especially those with fewer members or less frequent planning meetings, in co-ordinating with the Local Planning Authority's timetable. In particular, this could be an issue where a parish council, having discussed a matter with a planning officer, or received new information, wanted to rescind a previous decision. For this reason, a 28-day period for consultation would help.

The Interim Development Control Manager emphasised the link between development control timescales and performance statistics.

Councillor Aidan Van de Weyer commented that the parish councils in his ward appeared to value the automatic referral system. He conceded though that one answer might be to strengthen the criteria parish councils had to meet before referral could be made.

Councillor Kevin Cuffley described the proposals in Appendix A as positive. Parish councils could often be swayed by public opinion. Local knowledge remained an important part of the planning process. Councillor Cuffley referred to the significance of providing planning training for parish Councillors.

Looking to the future, the Portfolio Holder said that the current review of the number of District Councillors could make it imperative that a robust system of delegation to officers be in place.

The Head of New Communities concluded discussion by saying that comments made at this meeting would be taken to the next Parish Council Workshop, and would help inform the consultation forming part of the process towards a revised scheme of delegation. Particular weight would be given to a 28-day period for responses (instead of 21 days), stricter criteria for referral to Planning Committee, and the role and training of Parish Councillors and Parish Clerks. Steps must be taken to strengthen liaison between parish councils, local Members and the Local Planning Authority.

The Planning Portfolio Holder **approved**, as the basis for consultation with parish councils, local members, the Planning Committee and members of the public, Appendix A of the report from the Planning and New Communities Director, subject to

1. The amendment of the first bullet point to extend the period within which local Members can request that applications be referred to Planning Committee from 21 days to 28 days; and
2. The sixth bullet point being expanded so as to state, "The application is one that in

the opinion of officers, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, should be determined by Committee because of special planning policy considerations, complexity, or of significant and / or strategic importance to an area beyond both the specific site and parish'.

5. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS OF THE LACK OF A FIVE YEAR SUPPLY OF HOUSING LAND IN SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE

The Planning Portfolio Holder considered a report about recent advice received regarding the Council's approach to planning applications where a lack of a five year supply of housing land is a material consideration.

The Interim Development Control Manager reminded the Portfolio Holder and those present that officers had asked the Local Plan Examination planning inspectors to report upon the principle of relying on a joint housing trajectory for South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council. No such report had yet been received. It was noted that Appeal Inspectors could give weight to the lack of a five-year supply of housing land as a material planning consideration. The Interim Development Control Manager commented that the Council had received invaluable advice from the Planning Officers Society, and referred specifically to paragraphs 19 to 24 in the report from the Planning and New Communities Director.

Councillor David Bard asked whether, if endorsed by the Local Plan Examination Inspectors, the Joint Trajectory would become operational with immediate effect, or only upon adoption of the Local Plan itself. The Interim Development Control Manager said the Joint Trajectory would become effective immediately.

Councillor Robin Page regretted the absence of any assurance in the Local Plan regarding open space, food security, the environment or Green Belt.

The Planning Portfolio Holder **endorsed** the approach set out in the report from the Planning and New Communities Director.

6. WORK PROGRAMME

The Planning Portfolio Holder and those present noted the Work Programme attached to the agenda.

The Portfolio Holder and those present discussed the principle of a Shared Planning Service, similar to the one that had been operating for several years between St. Edmundsbury Borough Council and Forest Heath District Council in West Suffolk.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next Planning Portfolio Holder meeting would be on Monday 19 October 2015, starting at 2.00pm.

The Meeting ended at 11.10 a.m.
