

Minutes of the Meeting of the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 September 2017 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Barbara Rice (Chair), John Allen (Vice-Chair), Oliver Gerrish, Tom Kelly, Terry Piccolo and Peter Smith

In attendance: Andrew Millard, Assistant Director Planning & Growth
Ann Osola, Assistant Director Highways & Transportation
Chris Atkinson, Head of Communications - c2c
Charlotte Raper, Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

9. Minutes

Councillor Smith referred to Item 6 Grays Master Plan, in which Members were advised a planning application from JD Wetherspoon was expected over the summer and asked whether Officers could provide an update. No planning application had been received however the final drawings had been shared with Heritage England, as the building was listed, and the applicant was on course to submit their application soon.

The minutes of the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 4 July 2017 were approved as a correct record.

10. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

11. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

12. c2c Update Report

The Head of Communications for c2c delivered a presentation which provided an update of the actions taken to date and planned for future regarding performance of c2c services.

The Vice-Chair felt that the introduction of information boards showing seating capacity was welcome. He asked whether passengers would be able to speak to someone directly from the secure zones and when they were likely to be implemented. The Head of Communications for c2c confirmed that the help points would be situated within the secure zones and passengers would speak to someone in the security office in Romford. The back office work for this had begun and they should be rolled out along the route across the next

12 months. The Vice-Chair welcomed the input towards personal safety and was keen to see these measures introduced.

Councillor Smith noted that there were problems across the borough with parking around rail stations and asked whether c2c had plans to increase parking facilities around stations where there was empty land nearby, such as Tilbury Town. c2c planned to increase their existing car park facilities in the first instance, by decking car parks and adding more spaces. Moving forward c2c hoped to do more with parking facilities for both cars and cycles.

Councillor Gerrish welcomed the progress that had been made. He asked how the improvements regarding crowding compared with the mainline. Growth in Thurrock had been higher than in Southend but figures were consistent with the overall pattern. High growth had been experienced throughout the route but the degrees varied from station to station. Thurrock and the East London stations along the Thurrock line were the fastest growing areas.

Councillor Gerrish asked when the next batch of carriages could be expected. Carriages would be rolled out in three waves, 2019, 2022 and 2024. This schedule would possibly be accelerated to match growth if possible. The contract was currently out to tender with manufacturers and would be finalised within the next three months, with an announcement made before Christmas.

The Chair noted that the main focus, rightly, was commuters but added that Thurrock residents appreciated the schemes ran by c2c during school holidays. She asked how well they were taken up by residents. These schemes were very well used. Tilbury Spirit Group for example had been very popular, with full trains, which was unusual in off peak times. There had been high growth within off peak seasons, but there was great capacity for growth. Members were advised that reverse commuting was also on the increase, especially with developments such as the Amazon site, and this would be mutually beneficial.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee comments on the c2c's action taken to date and planned for future to manage expectations of various stakeholder groups' demands.

13. Thurrock Local Plan Progress Update

The Assistant Director of Planning and Growth introduced the report which provided an update on the progress regarding preparation of a new Local Plan to guide the future development of Thurrock.

The Chair expressed concern regarding consultations. Thurrock could expect rapid expansion and she queried what impact the proposed Lower Thames Crossing would have on the Local Plan and how Officers hoped to plan around the upcoming decision to move forward. The Assistant Director of

Planning and Growth outlined that the Lower Thames Crossing would have a significant impact but reminded Members that at present debates were around a preferred route, the development would still need to go through the official process. Issues would revolve around if and where the route and relevant junctions would be. The Consultation would need to consider both with and without the Lower Thames Crossing, possible locations and what implications would follow.

The Chair asked whether it was known how much Green Belt would be opened up by the route and whether that was relevant to the Local Plan. The issue was relevant but not dependant. The figure of around 32,000 homes remained the same with or without the Lower Thames Crossing, the Crossing simply offered potentially different spatial distribution. Land which was not yet accessible could potentially be opened up but either outcome needn't affect the scale of growth.

The Chair asked if it was possible to meet the 32,000 target without developing within the Greenbelt. The Assistant Director of Planning and Growth confirmed that sequential tests had been undertaken. 6500 homes could be built within existing urban areas, which left around 26,000 to be developed elsewhere. Thurrock was a major regeneration area but also a 65% Green Belt Borough. Assuming 26,000 properties with a relatively low density of 40/hectare, the loss of Green Belt land would only equate to roughly 6% and Thurrock would remain a principally Green Belt Authority.

The Chair stressed the importance of Councillors having answers for their residents, including tangible guidelines to the scale of the development. The Committee heard that there was a need to be proactive as an Authority. A loss of 6% of the Green Belt would allow Thurrock to strongly protect the rest of it and it would be better to direct development and growth to preferable areas than have development forced upon Thurrock.

The Chair added that a key issue amongst residents was infrastructure and how important communication with residents would be. It would be essential to be honest, open and reassuring prior to development. The Assistant Director of Planning and Growth stressed the aims of integrated planning and place making, to avoid growth for growth's sake and ensure Thurrock benefitted from development opportunities, to help rid the borough of existing infrastructure deficits.

Councillor Smith asked whether it was envisaged that the distribution across the borough would be even or whether developments would be built onto existing growth hubs. The development would not be distributed evenly across the borough, but the distribution would be 'considered' and would meet a number of tests. Landscape and land-use issues would be factors and therefore areas of land would be identified as higher than others. The aim would be to minimise environmental impact and maximise regeneration. Councillor Smith sought confirmation that Brown Field sites would be identified above Green Belt. Members were assured that an urban capacity study had been undertaken, which had identified the approximately 6500

properties that could be built on brown field sites. Planning Departments could not look at developing their Green Belt land until these had been considered.

Councillor Piccolo queried whether it would be possible to influence the proposed Lower Thames Crossing route if the Local Plan were at an advanced stage with areas for development highlighted. This was the very reason that the Local Plan had been delayed to allow for updates regarding the proposals, as the Council could not plan in isolation. The relationship between growth and accessibility was intrinsic.

Councillor Piccolo referred to planning applications whereby the S106 responsibilities were only required to cover the impact of the proposed development. He asked whether, within the Local Plan, development could be used to cover any existing deficits. Members heard that it would be easier and more beneficial to look at integrated development frameworks to consider how new developments could provide benefits to the local area.

The Chair asked what the consequences would be, from the Government, should Thurrock fail to produce a sufficient plan. Any plan put forward which did not provide sufficient housing would be likely to be refused by the planning inspectorate. This would lead to reworking the process and might prevent the development industry working alongside the Council and simply making isolated applications. The consequences would be seriously negative for the borough.

The Vice-Chair expressed his view that prospects were scary. Some Green Belt would definitely be unlocked but he questioned at which point the Authority could say no more Green Belt land should be developed. The borough already faced issues of poor air quality. He asked whether NHS England would assist the borough. It was essential that necessary infrastructure was in place. The Committee heard that the 32,000 was a 20 year figure. Beyond that point no-one could reasonably tell what the needs of the borough would be. The Assistant Director of Planning and Growth stressed the need for integrated planning and advised that all interested parties, education, healthcare and similar would be involved in the process.

Councillor Piccolo noted that, in terms of explaining the figure to residents, it would be helpful to learn how much of the 32,000 would be simply to accommodate natural growth of Thurrock's existing population, with Children getting older and moving out. The exact figures were not available but would be circulated outside of the meeting; 75% of the figure was for local growth, but not specifically of the indigenous population.

Councillor Gerrish sought confirmation around Members ability to input and steer the process moving forward. The process would be partly technical however it would also be an exercise in local communities. Due to flood risk, land-use and similar issues there would be a limited range of options but there remained significant opportunity for Members and communities to be involved.

Councillor Piccolo referred to the consultation process and expressed concern that the majority of input had come from other Local Authorities and developers. Input from the general public had been negligible and it would be necessary to have their input. He suggested contacted local groups to help outline the importance of residents involving themselves in the consultation process.

The Chair summarised the issues. Councillors needed the right materials to be conduits of information to residents, the reality remained it would be necessary to build on the Green Belt. The Council had the ability to be proactive and make decisions around which sites to develop, rather than being dictated to. The Lower Thames Crossing and related development would be the biggest change Thurrock would see and it was essential to debate the matter fully, and fully engage residents, to obtain the best outcome

RESOLVED:

1. **That the Committee note the report and provide comment on the approach being adopted by the Council in preparing a new Local Plan.**
2. **That the Committee continues to receive regular progress reports on preparation of the Local Plan and provides oversight of the Plan making Process.**

14. Work Programme

The Committee agreed to hold an extraordinary meeting on 3 October 2017 to discuss the Purfleet Regeneration ahead of October Cabinet.

The Chair requested further debate regarding the Lower Thames Crossing proposals. The Committee was advised that the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force would be meeting monthly and the Chair requested regular updates from the Task Force to provide scrutiny.

Councillor Smith proposed an update be brought to the Committee in November regarding the resilience and readiness of grit lorries ahead of the winter, and the build-up of silt in drains in the borough, which led to flooding.

The meeting finished at 8.25 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**