

Minutes of the Meeting of the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 4 July 2018 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Martin Kerin (Chair), Peter Smith (Vice-Chair), Alex Anderson, Terry Piccolo and Jane Potheary

In attendance: Steve Cox, Corporate Director Place
Andrew Millard, Assistant Director - Planning, Transport and Public Protection
Kirsty Paul, Principle Planning Officer
Kallum Davies, 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.

1. Items of Urgent Business

There were no Items of Urgent Business

2. Declaration of Interests

There were no Declarations of Interest

3. Development Plan Update

The Chair began the meeting by reading aloud the two recommendations of the report (1.1,1.2) to the committee before inviting Andrew Millard, Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection, to present the report.

Andrew Millard introduced the report and explained that recommendation 1.2 referred to the proposed report to Cabinet which had been scheduled for the following week. The officer further explained the need to review and update the Local Plan was because the current plan was out of date in terms of timescales, but also because it needed to have references to the South Essex Joint Strategic Plan added.

The officer introduced a PowerPoint presentation which aimed to highlight key matters and facilitate debate. He further emphasised that this was not a consultation on the plan itself, but was a consultation on a step towards the creation of a Local Plan. This step set out a series of questions that sought responses which would be used to shape the Local Plan going forward. Lastly the officer explained that this stage of the plan was not about agreeing on specific locations or numbers of homes, rather it was agreeing an approach to, and the teasing out of views on options that were available. These views were to be used in the future when decisions were to be made.

The Chair invited Members to pose questions. Councillor Potheary asked if the choices referred to in the presentation were the choices that residents were asked to express a preference on and, in terms of the guide figure of 32,000 new homes, if any one of the options presented would realistically provide that number of properties. The Councillor further asked if that was not the case, did the consultation in its then form fail to manage the expectations of residents by inviting them to express a preference but ultimately it might be necessary to use all the options.

The officer stated that it was highly unlikely that any single option would meet the required provision, and that a blend would be required. The Officer clarified the presented options were to highlight the pro's and con's of each approach and further pointed out that some of the options would, by their nature, not be appropriate for some locations.

The officer added that the report referred to developments which the development industry had expressed interest in, in order to gain an understanding of how it envisions future growth in Thurrock. This was because one of the tests for a local plan was if the plan was deliverable. If calls for sites did not yield any interest within the industry for bringing sites forward, the plan was not deliverable. The spatial categories gave an understanding of what land owners and developers were looking to provide in the borough and opened the debate about each option.

Councillor Potheary sought clarity, asking if it would be a combination of the options regardless of the consultation. The Officer confirmed this was correct.

Councillor Potheary asked whether the approach would leave the Council at the mercy of developers who may be serving their own business interests. The Councillor asked if the Council should be more proactive in undertaking developments itself.

Steve Cox, Corporate Director for Place, responded saying it was essential to ensure deliverability of plans and that this would not have been the case if developers were not interested. The Officer stated that if sites were brought forward it allowed the Council to challenge developers and landowners to deliver schemes that were wanted in Thurrock.

Councillor Potheary asked if relying on a broken market was the most sensible approach. Steve Cox responded stating that the majority of houses that would be built in the borough would be built by the market and that it was a question of how the Council made sure they were getting the type of development that they wanted.

The Officer expanded stating that the consultation would arm the Council with the evidence to demonstrate what people in the borough wanted.

Councillor Potheary stated that the quoted figure of 32,000 included people who had been living with their parents in Thurrock.

The Councillor did not believe that allowing developers to build houses and sell them for maximum profit would allow those people to move out of their parent's house. The Councillor expressed a concern that this was not solving Thurrock housing crisis, rather it was solving London's housing crisis.

Andrew Millard stated the difficulty in the market was down to a lack of choice, because all the significant spaces had already been developed. The Officer explained that this consultation allowed the Council to shape at a very early stage what would be developed going forward.

The Chair interjected and invited Councillor Smith to pose a question. Councillor Smith asked Andrew Millard if there had been any evidence of Land Banking in Thurrock, specifically in any areas where the borough had an ambition to develop and which might be holding the Council back.

Andrew Millard stated there may have been patches of it but he was not aware of any major issue with Land Banking in Thurrock. The Officer stated that in previous years when the market had been weaker, developers would sit on consents, however this had diminished massively. Kirsty Paul, Principal Planner added that their monitoring had revealed that starts and completions of approved planning applications had both increased in recent years, and very few developments had been considered to be stalled which suggested there was not an issue with Land Banking.

Councillor Piccolo stated that the figure of 32,000 had already been eroded and that by his calculation the number would be roughly below 30,000 because of the houses that had already been built since the number was issued, and would continue to be eroded by developments that had been taking place. Andrew Millard confirmed this interpretation to be correct.

Councillor Smith raised a concern about the significant workload on Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee which was only set to increase. Steve Cox commented that this was a valid concern and that Members are invited to help in shaping the Work Programme for the Committee.

Councillor Potheary questioned who the report had been written for as it had been quite long and included planning jargon and asked for reassurance that there would be a more user friendly approach for residents.

Andrew Millard stated that this had been a high level strategy document and whilst there were statutory requirements for what must be included, and that the consultations themselves would be varied and tailored to the community.

Councillor Smith commented that he had attended two of the roadshows for "Your Place, Your Voice" and stated that they had been brilliant. Councillor Smith further asked that Cabinet consider redoubling their efforts with regard to public engagement in this regard, and go further to become the national leader in this approach.

Councillor Piccolo stated that in his role working for Thurrock CVS he received a call asking if CVS office would be willing to have a set of documentation for the consultation and some hard copy response forms. The Councillor added that the caller had openly invited suggestions from CVS on any other ways that the Council could reach residents and that he had been pleased to witness this proactive outreach which evidenced the Council's efforts.

Councillor Anderson asked if failings by our neighbouring local authorities in their Local Plan could affect the development of Thurrock, and if so how. Andrew Millard responded stating that there was a government requirement to create a Statement of Common Ground with neighbouring authorities and pointed out that such authorities were able to approach Thurrock through the consultation process. The Officer added that no local authorities had requested we take any of their housing numbers, but in the event that they did, Thurrock would be duty bound to consider this.

The Chair thanked Officers for the report and asked that the Committee have sight of more details around affordable homes for Thurrock as he felt affordability to people moving to the borough from London was significantly higher than it was to current residents. The Chair further stated that he could not find any specific commitment in the report to providing housing to alleviate the 9,000 person waiting list for Council properties. Councillor Smith stated that at Full Council there had been a motion for Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider investigating if 8,000 new homes could be built in Thurrock for this purpose. Councillor Smith further requested this be added to the Work Programme.

The Chair, referring to Councillor Anderson's question, asked how was the Council assuring that Thurrock was leading in the process and not "being done to" by the partnership.

Andrew Millard, referring to the previous affordable housing question, stated that the definition of "Affordable Housing" for the purposes of the report meant social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing that was provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. The Officer stated that Joint Strategic Plan had representatives from all neighbouring local authorities and that he was Chair of the board, adding that the approach that had been taken was of collaboration to ensure no borough had been "done to".

The Chair stated that he felt there had been a need for a task force to work solely on the Local Plan and invited other members to comment on his idea.

Councillor Piccolo stated he supported the idea of a task force but that it should look at individual components of the plan rather than as a whole and further requested that the committee see the responses so far from the consultations in September.

Councillor Smith stated he also supported both the idea of a task force, highlighting the success of the Lower Thames Task Force, and Councillor Piccolo's proposed approach. Councillor Smith added that the Terms of Reference for any such task force "must have teeth". Councillor Pothecary supported the suggestion of a task force and stated that this had been the time for members to become more involved. Councillor Anderson supported the proposition and agreed with Councillor Piccolo's suggested approach.

The Chair and Councillor Smith asked Officers to advise on and draft a Terms of Reference for a suitable body, to be approved at the Committee's next meeting. Councillor Piccolo requested that the proposal be provided as soon as possible before the meeting in order for discussions to take place with group leaders.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 The Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented on the Issues and Options document and the Local Plan Engagement Strategy.**
- 1.2 The Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented on the South Essex Statement of Common Ground, Revised Local Development Scheme and Draft Statement of Community Involvement.**
- 1.3 The Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee further resolved that a suitable body be established to review in detail all aspects of the Local Development Plan.**

Work Programme

The Chair raised that Full Council had, in Motion 4 of its 27 June 2018 meeting, moved that the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider adding to its Work Programme;

"research into the feasibility of building 8,000 council, housing association and low-cost homes within the next five years without such buildings threatening the character of any existing settlements within the borough and to seek to explore the extent to which Thurrock Regeneration Limited could input into such a target."

Members of the Committee agreed this Motion be added to the Work Programme.

The Chair requested that an update be provided on the Grays Underpass Development as this was a matter that affected his Ward. The Vice-Chair seconded this request.

Councillor Potheary stated that the Committee needed to receive an update on schemes that had been in progress, specifically Grays Town Centre Traffic Flow and the Stanford Transport Hub.

The Vice Chair requested that Purfleet Regeneration Company attend before Christmas to do a presentation and give the Committee a workflow as to current progress and when key milestones would be met.

Councillor Potheary asked that C2C and Network Rail be called to attend, for questioning about their contingency planning and communication in relation to delays and service issues within the last few months.

The Chair thanked the Members for their engagement, the officers for their hard work and the members of the public for their attendance.

The meeting finished at 8.16pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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