

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Committee Room 1 - The Council Offices, High Street North, Dunstable, on Wednesday, 16 May 2012.

PRESENT

Cllr D McVicar (Chairman)
Cllr A R Bastable (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs	Mrs C F Chapman MBE	Cllrs	J Murray
	Mrs R B Gammons		B Saunders
	K C Matthews		P Williams
	Ms C Maudlin		

Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	P N Aldis	
		Mrs A Barker	Chairman of the Council
		D Bowater	Chairman of Audit Committee
		A D Brown	Deputy Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development
		D J Hopkin	Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources
		J G Jamieson	Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Executive
		R W Johnstone	
		T Nicols	
		A Shadbolt	Chairman of Development Management Committee
		B J Spurr	Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Services
		N Warren	
		B Wells	Deputy Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Services
		J N Young	Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development

Officers in Attendance:	Mr S Andrews	–	Strategic Planning and Housing Team Leader
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Ms S Chapman	– Development Planning Project and Process Team Leader
Mr R Fox	– Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy
Mr J Partridge	– Scrutiny Policy Adviser
Ms S Wileman	– Service Development Manager

SCOSC/12/1 **Members' Interests**

(a) **Personal Interests:-**

None.

(b) **Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-**

None.

(c) **Political Whip:-**

None.

SCOSC/12/2 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

None.

SCOSC/12/3 **Petitions**

No petitions were received from members of the public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Part D2 of the Constitution.

SCOSC/12/4 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

The Committee were told that 5 speakers had registered to speak at the meeting in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 1 of Section A4 of the Constitution. Submissions from 2 speakers were also circulated to Members of the Committee at the meeting. The speakers raised issues and questions in relation to Item 8 (Minute SCOSC/12/7 refers), that included:-

- Whether the draft Development Strategy was employment-led or housing-led and what would happen if additional jobs were not provided to the level proposed in the draft strategy. It was also queried whether housing would be held back by the Council if the proposed level of additional jobs were not provided.
- Why the Council had proposed 28,750 new homes when previous feedback from residents suggested a low level of growth was preferred. The sustainability appraisal had also highlighted that 27,700 homes was the most sustainable figure.
- The level of affordable housing that the Council was seeking to deliver on new developments.

- The importance of providing necessary infrastructure before new developments were delivered whilst also attempting to reduce congestion for current residents of Central Bedfordshire. The draft Development Strategy commented that the delivery of some homes would be permitted prior to the delivery of infrastructure. Assurances were sought that critical infrastructure such as the northern bypass would be delivered before homes and that new developments would not make things worse for those currently residing in areas.
- The draft Development Strategy (policy 58) should be more explicit regarding a joined up approach to delivering the northern bypass, including how the potential phasing of employment may effect its delivery. Assurances were also sought on the current status of funding and deliverability of the bypass.
- Policy 51 would benefit from greater recognition of grey water and the provision of additional water supplies.
- The results of previous stakeholder workshops should be made public prior to the commencement of the next phase of public consultation. It was important that the Council took the results of consultation fully into consideration and that the Council delivered the consultation in relation to its policy on community engagement.
- Assurances were sought that the Council would make information publically available in relation to the timetable for producing the Statement of Community Involvement.
- It was suggested that the draft Development Strategy needed to be amended to assist residents to respond. In particular it was suggested that a summary of key evidence be made available via the Council's website and that the appraisal methodologies and the overarching policies be more clearly explained prior to the public consultation taking place.
- It was suggested that the Council's presumption against inappropriate development within the Green Belt did not seem to correlate with proposals to provide 38% of homes within the Green Belt. It was also suggested that residents should be invited to comment on the existing purposes of Green Belt within Central Bedfordshire as part of the consultation.
- The draft Development Strategy (policy 58) would benefit from greater recognition of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- The Council should consider the designation of additional Green Belt to replace that used for improvements to M1 Junction 12. The Council could also consider the designation of a county park to extend the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) on land adjacent to Sundon Quarry and Rail Freight Interchange. This designation would protect against excessive build up on the site of the current rail freight interchange.
- Lower Sundon had been omitted from Policy 2.
- How the Council planned to reduce out-commuting and why the Council would want to encourage in-migration.
- The Council should consider including only realistic, timely and evidence-based aspirations in the draft Development Strategy.
- The process by which incorrect information contained in the draft Development Strategy would be amended prior to the public consultation so as to limit the number of responses on these matters.

Officers agreed to respond to as many of these issues and questions as possible during the course of the meeting. A written response to any issues that were not discussed during the meeting would be provided and circulated to Members of the Committee and public speakers following the meeting.

SCOSC/12/5 **Call-In**

The Panel was advised that no decisions of the Executive had been referred to the Panel under the Call-in Procedures set out in Appendix "A" to Rule No. S18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

SCOSC/12/6 **Requested Items**

No items were referred to the Committee for consideration at the request of a Member under Procedure Rule 3.1 of Part D2 of the Constitution.

SCOSC/12/7 **Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire**

The Committee received a report from the Executive Member for Sustainable Communities, Strategic Planning and Economic Development, that provided the draft Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire. The Committee were asked to provide their views to the Executive Member prior to a 6-week public consultation. The Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy explained that the Council was presently at an early stage of consultation on the draft strategy and that there would be further consultation undertaken after this initial 6-week consultation period towards the end of the year. It was commented that all residents who had previously responded to consultations would be consulted on the draft strategy and would be invited to comment during the consultation.

In response to questions from the public the Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy commented that the strategy aimed to find a balance between housing and employment development for the area and the environment. The key issues identified within the draft Development Strategy would stimulate debate locally about the most favoured approach to development. It was also commented that the draft Development Strategy was both housing and employment-led as an appropriate mix of the two was necessary to ensure sustainable communities. The Development Planning Project and Process Team Leader further explained the consultation process for the draft Development Strategy and the ways in which it corresponded with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

A Member commented that the draft Development Strategy had been predicated on infrastructure based on the number of homes that were proposed to be developed. Concerns were raised that there would be a temptation to 'glue' on housing in existing urban areas. It was suggested that the draft Development Strategy should emphasise the development of a new urban settlement as opposed to developing housing in existing urban areas if the demand for housing exceeded the levels identified in the draft strategy. There were concerns that there may be an increase in the number of houses proposed after the strategy had been subject to an examination in public. In response the Strategic Planning and Housing Team Leader commented that

the number of homes proposed in the strategy was based on local population trends (the number of households plus 3.8%). A majority of the 28,750 homes proposed in the strategy had already been provided for.

The Executive Member for Sustainable Communities, Strategic Planning and Economic Development commented there was a need for solid and sustainable infrastructure to be delivered alongside housing. It was intended to stick with the numbers of homes and jobs that resulted from the consultation process and the draft strategy had proposed an approach to the delivery of housing in several areas such as South Wixams and being sympathetic to rural exception sites and neighbourhood plans. If there was a need for a strategic change to the plan this would require a strategic change in the proposed infrastructure. The Executive Member stated that the Council would stick with the number of 28,750 homes unless the outcomes of the consultation suggested that the number should be amended. If homes in addition to those currently proposed in the draft Development Strategy were required a further strategic site would be identified and additional infrastructure would be brought forward.

In response to questions from the public and questions and issues raised by the Committee and other Members officers responded as follows:-

- The proposed site to the West of Leighton Linlade had been considered within the draft Development Strategy so as to strengthen its exclusion as a potential site for development. It would be remiss of the Council not to demonstrate in the draft Development Strategy sites that had been considered for inclusion but which had subsequently been discounted. It was also commented that the proposed site to the East of Leighton Linlade had been included in the draft Development Strategy (it is currently the subject of a planning application).
- Further discussion was underway with the Highways Agency in relation to the A5-M1 link and the new Junction 11a.
- A technical paper detailing how officers had determined the proposed figure of 28,750 homes would be published at the commencement of the consultation. The determination of this figure included local trends over a 10-year period including birth, death and migration rates. Results from the most recent census would also be used once they had been published.
- The Council would not encourage the development of homes without appropriate infrastructure. It was however noted that in certain circumstances some housing would be required to be delivered first in order to provide the funding to deliver necessary infrastructure. The Council would consider a phased approach to the delivery of schemes in such circumstances.
- An infrastructure audit was planned to be undertaken by the Council so as to determine what infrastructure was required throughout Central Bedfordshire. The Community Infrastructure Levy, in addition to Section 106 contributions, would provide some of the funding necessary to support the delivery of future infrastructure.
- The Council would always take into consideration the responses provided during consultations but was required to develop policies that were evidence based.

- Whilst there is an adopted Core Strategy for the northern area of Central Bedfordshire the Council was currently vulnerable to planning applications as a result of not having an approved Development Strategy in place in the southern part of Central Bedfordshire. It was considered critical that the Development Strategy, which covers the whole of Central Bedfordshire be approved as soon as possible.

During their consideration of the draft Development Strategy Members discussed the following issues in detail to be presented to the Executive Member prior to the commencement of the 6-week public consultation:-

- The Committee supported the target for 27,000 new jobs for 2011-31 as being appropriate but reserved the right to reconsider this figure in light of the responses to the public consultation.
- More information should have been made available to the Committee relating to local trends and the outcomes of the stakeholder workshops. This information would have helped the Committee to determine whether the proposed housing figures were appropriate. It was noted that this information would be presented to the Committee following the public consultation.
- It was crucial that the Development Strategy promoted the delivery of infrastructure before new housing and ensuring that developments did not have a negative impact on current residential areas. Infrastructure should include not just roads but also services such as doctor surgeries and shops.
- There were several inaccuracies in Table 1 (Site Assessment Summaries) and Table 2 (Summary of findings for assessment of each individual site), which needed to be addressed prior to consultation. For example the scores associated to each of the sites did not appear to be correct.
- The settlement hierarchy (policy 4) needed to be reviewed as there were several areas missing and there did not appear to be a clear rationale for classifying areas as a major/minor service centre or a large/small village.
- The Committee strongly agreed that a review of Green Belt boundaries was necessary in order to accommodate new development. It was important to protect Green Belt and in particular the designation of local green space around Aspley Guise in order to prevent coalescence with any growth of Milton Keynes in the longer term.
- The Development Strategy and subsequently the Council's Design Guide needed to ensure appropriate housing densities throughout Central Bedfordshire whilst also being mindful of the level of land-take. When considering a refresh of the Council's Design Guide it may be appropriate for the Council to consider allowing higher storey properties and to ensure that an appropriate housing density is provided for affordable properties.
- The importance of maintaining an open space between Houghton Conquest and the Wixams so that the former was not subsumed by development.
- The importance of the B530 for carrying traffic from several developments.

- The Council should develop a contingency plan in case there was a shortfall in the number of homes that came forward for development. In addition to producing a Development Strategy the Council may wish to consider further sites that could be allocated for housing if an adequate number of homes were not forthcoming.
- Further information in relation to neighbourhood plans was required to be circulated to Members of the Committee for information.

RECOMMENDED

- 1. That the Executive Member take into full consideration the comments of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, other Members and the public detailed above prior to the 6-week public consultation.**
- 2. That the Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy and the Strategic Planning and Housing Team Leader prepare a written response to those issues raised by members of the public, which had not been discussed during the meeting to be circulated to public speakers and Members of the OSC.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 2.00 p.m. and concluded at 4.17 p.m.)