

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 12 May 2014.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs D Bowater
C C Gomm
Ms A M W Graham
K C Matthews

Cllrs B Saunders
A Shadbolt
P Williams

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| Members in Attendance: | Cllrs P N Aldis Mrs A Barker | Chairman of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee |
| | A D Brown | Deputy Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development |
| | Mrs C F Chapman MBE C Hegley | Executive Member for Social Care, Health & Housing |
| | P Hollick | Chairman of General Purposes Committee |
| | D J Hopkin | Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources |
| | J G Jamieson | Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Executive |
| | R W Johnstone D Jones Ms C Maudlin T Nicols I Shingler Miss A Sparrow B J Spurr | Chairman of the Council |
| | B Wells | Executive Member for Community Services Deputy Executive Member for Community Services |
| | R D Wenham | Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources |

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| Officers in Attendance: | Mr S Andrews | – Strategic Planning and Housing Manager |
| | Mr R Fox | – Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy |
| | Mrs S Frost | – Local Planning and Housing Manager |
| | Mr J Partridge | – Corporate Policy Manager |
| Others in Attendance | 13 members of the public | |

SC/14/11. **Members' Interests**

None.

SC/14/12. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman apologised to Members of the Social Care, Health and Housing OSC for curtailing the length of their meeting so that Sustainable Communities OSC could commence at 2pm.

SC/14/13. **Petitions**

None.

SC/14/14. **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

The Chairman advised the Committee that several questions had been received from a residents in relation to why Central Bedfordshire would take up the shortfall in problems with housing. In respond the Executive Member agreed to provide a written response to some aspects of the question in writing after the meeting but in principal the Council was required to be seen to act on the duty to co-operate. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) established that Luton's need had previously been underestimated. Central Bedfordshire Council was mindful of the shortage of school places and work was underway to determine what was needed. Local transport concerns had been addressed and a new school was being built in Marston Park. Several other issues would be addressed via the Allocations Plan and a letter in regard of these issues would be provided and also distributed to Members of the Committee.

SC/14/15. **Call-In**

None.

SC/14/16. **Requested Items**

None.

SC/14/17. **Development Strategy Update**

The Strategic Planning and Housing Manager delivered a presentation that focused on the outcomes of the SHMA and the impact of changing housing numbers for Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) and Luton Borough Council (LBC). The presentation also highlighted the ways in which CBC might contribute to the level of unmet need for housing in Luton; and the other changes that were proposed to be made to the Development Strategy.

In addition Cllr Young commented that he felt the Council would be in a position to finalise the numbers of homes to be included in the draft Development Strategy by 21 May 2014. It was important that the document sat along side the Housing Allocations Policy and that it was used to update other documents to ensure that they were still fit for purpose. The Development Strategy also enabled the Council to prevent hostile planning applications that would arise in the absence of an agreed plan. The Council had reviewed cross-border migration, the largest amount of which took place between Central Bedfordshire and Luton (a net 1,000 person increase in Central Bedfordshire annually). There was a continued challenge with regard the removal of the greenbelt in Central Bedfordshire that would be addressed through the Development Strategy.

In light of the information provided Cllr Nicols highlighted the substantial number of homes that were planned in his ward and raised specific queries in relation to the following:-

- Whether the Planning Inspectorate would take into consideration potential growth east of Luton, given that North Hertfordshire District Council had historically stated that they did not require growth of their area. In response the Strategic Planning and Housing Manager commented that the SHMA area covered parts of North Hertfordshire, including the area to the East of Luton. It was anticipated that the Inspector would take into account growth options around Luton and this could impact on the total numbers. Whilst it was not CBC's responsibility to meet the need for Luton in its entirety as CBC's strategy was first to reach inspection the Council would need to be able to provide a coherent statement regarding growth in the area.
- Whether the purdah period in March 2015 would have an impact on the proposed timetable for the development of the plan. In response the Strategic Planning and Housing Manager commented that the timeline had been drafted using advice from the Planning Inspectorate and did not think it would be impacted by the purdah period. In addition Cllr Young commented that the period of time taken for the inspection might depend on the number of representations received during the consultation. The Council was in the hands of the Planning Inspectorate (PINs) although once it reached enquiry the Council would try to resolve the enquiry as quickly as possible.
- The reliability of the quantum of homes that were proposed to be included and whether there was sufficient accuracy to ensure that these numbers were now accurate. In particular Cllr Nicols was concerned that additional homes should not be 'glued' into his ward and sought reassurance that this would not occur. In response Cllr Young commented that whilst the

quantum of housing had increased in total the number had actually reduced for Central Bedfordshire, although the number for LBC had gone up substantially. The total was up to around 30,000 but CBC was questioning LBC's urban capacity. There were additional homes required (approximately 600-800), which might impact on Cllr Nicols' ward. The plan making process would require CBC to seek further sustainable sites and due to the uncertainty over Land North of Luton the Executive Member expected to look at the south reaches of Cllr Nicols' ward, particularly if they are sustainable and have good links. As soon as possible areas were known the Executive Member agreed to discuss it with the local ward Members personally.

Cllr Hollick queried the manner in which CBC was required to co-operate with LBC and the manner in which the allocation for additional housing between these areas was determined. In response Cllr Young commented that the Housing Allocations Policy would respond to the challenge of allocating affordable homes and the criteria for cross-border mobility, which would make it clear that CBC residents would be put first. Any discussions regarding social housing would require a separate agreement that to date was not being proposed. In addition the Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy commented that CBC had to demonstrate that it had taken sufficient steps to do all it reasonably could to support its neighbours needs but that did not mean all of their needs. It had been recommended that various authorities meet a percentage of Luton's housing need and other local authorities needed to contribute in addition to CBC.

Cllr Chapman queried the sanctions that could be imposed on local authorities if they did not co-operate. In response the Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy commented that CBC was in a challenging position due to being first to an examination hearing and could be deemed 'unsound' if it had not co-operated fully.

Cllr Barker queried whether there would be pressure from other local authorities such as Peterborough or Cambridge to provide for unmet need in their areas. In response Cllr Young commented that CBC would have to co-operate with those immediate neighbours in the Strategic Housing Market Area and further sites would need to be sought across Central Bedfordshire.. The Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy also commented that at present there were no further areas requiring support from CBC to provide for unmet need although further meetings with neighbouring authorities were planned.

Cllr Jones raised concerns with regards to infill development and what actions that Council could take to prevent or limit infill development, particularly in the Houghton Regis area. In response Cllr Young commented that it was extremely difficult to prevent applications for infill where an area of land was surrounded by approved housing developments. An approved development strategy would put the Council in a stronger position but it would be struggle prevent them completely. In addition the Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy commented that although the Council was not currently able to confirm where additional homes would be located the Council would

undertake a call for sites across Central Bedfordshire to ascertain sustainable locations for development.

In light of the presentation and further clarification provided at the meeting the Committee discussed the following issues in detail:-

- The period of the Development Strategy, which was up to 2031.
- The manner in which the Council would address the level of affordable housing and the percentage of the remaining housing stock that would be available on the open market and open to residents from Luton. In response the Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy commented that the Council would have control over the 30% of allocated affordable housing but would have not control over the remaining 70% of the housing stock although consideration had been given to this based on historic migration patterns.
- Whether the Council had an agreed set of criteria to determine which potential sites were considered to be sustainable.
- Whether figures in relation to windfall applications or sites coming forward through neighbourhood plans were achievable. In response the Strategic Planning and Housing Manager commented that windfall applications had provided a significant amount of deliverable sites over the previous 10 years and progress continued to be made. Final figures would be included in the report to the Executive on the Allocations Local Plan. In addition Cllr Young commented that 300 homes had been provided through windfall he was confident that 1,700 homes could be delivered. The majority of housing allocations were within the settlement envelope and the neighbourhood plans provided an opportunity to consider allocations outside of that envelope.
- The importance of having accurate alternative means of making assumptions with regard to housing if the census was not undertaken in the future.
- The value of a design guide in order to provide clarity on the density of housing that would be permitted within Central Bedfordshire.

In summary Cllr McVicar commented that having considered the report the Committee needed to make a recommendation based on the figures within the report. It was accepted that the numbers might change over time but the Committee accepted that they weren't going to see them again before the Executive meeting in 27 May.

RECOMMENDED to Executive that that the Sustainable Communities OSC could not dispute the additional housing numbers contained in the their report but would request that careful consideration be given to the criteria imposed in a subsequent call for sites.

SC/14/18. **Plan Making Programme**

Cllr Young introduced a report that set out the requirement for the Council to undertake a call for sites that would identify a viable land supply for at least a period of five years. Due to delays elsewhere CBC would need to consider

sites in the south as well as the north of Central Bedfordshire. In addition the Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy commented that the Council was in a strong position to find the best sites as it was likely that more would be identified than was required.

In response to questions from Councillors it was confirmed that Council-owned sites could be proposed during the call for sites that would include any land that the Council's assets team would like to put forward. Proposals to designate an area of green space between Milton Keynes and Aspley Guise had also been proposed in the draft Development Strategy. It was accepted that some villages might be receptive to small scale development to provide housing for local residents and this would be taken into account by the Council. Cllr Young also clarified the periods within which developers were required to complete developments and it was confirmed that the Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan was on track to be finalised for submission to the Secretary of State in June 2014.

In response to a query from Cllr Shingler it was confirmed that discussions with Town and parish Councils would continue in relation to emerging neighbourhood plans.

In light of the interest with regards to the proposed Allocations Local Plan it was suggested that a more detailed scoping report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

In light of the report the Committee also discussed the need to consider the inability of existing communities to absorb additional housing over a short period of time within the criteria for the call for sites and the instances in which it would be suitable to extend housing development into greenbelt. Whilst the Committee agreed to endorse the plan making programme it was agreed that a report should be presented in relation to the allocations plan

RECOMMENDED to Executive

- 1. That the preparation of the three Local Plans (Development Strategy, Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan and Allocations Local Plan) and other associated documents be endorsed;**
- 2. That the programme of plan-making which sets out the formal Local Development Scheme for the whole of Central Bedfordshire be endorsed.**
- 3. That a detailed report on the Council's Allocations Local Plan be presented to the Committee following its preparation.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 2.15 p.m. and concluded at 4.30 p.m.)

Chairman

Dated