

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 13 July 2017.

PRESENT

Cllr D McVicar (Chairman)
Cllr B Saunders (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs D Bowater
P Downing
Mrs P Everitt
Ms A M W Graham

Cllrs J Kane
K C Matthews
R Morris

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Cllr M Liddiard

Members in Attendance: Cllrs R D Berry
Mrs S Clark
I Dalgarno
T Nicols
Vice-Chairman of Development Management Committee
Deputy Executive Member for Regeneration
Executive Member for Community Services
Chairman of Licensing Committee

Officers in Attendance: Ms C Frost-Bryant – Interim Local Planning Manager
Mr P Keates – Head of Development and Regulation
Mrs R Preen – Scrutiny Policy Adviser

Others in Attendance 0

SCOSC/17/21 **Members' Interests**

None.

SCOSC/17/22 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman announced that the item relating to the Local Plan would be received first with the Committee Work Programme being received at the end of the agenda.

SCOSC/17/23 **Petitions**

None.

SCOSC/17/24 Questions, Statements or Deputations

None.

SCOSC/17/25 Call-In

None.

SCOSC/17/26 Requested Items

None.

SCOSC/17/27 Executive Members Updates

The Executive Member for Community Services provided an update in relation to the closure of Dunstable Leisure Centre; the previous contractors were working closely with the new provider to ensure a smooth transition of services and the TUPE of staff. The pothole jet patcher had been deployed, with many hundreds of defects temporarily fixed which had improved conditions, although the recent high temperatures had caused problems with road surfaces. £500k had recently been invested to allow for gully cleaning which was anticipated to take approximately 14 months to complete.

SCOSC/17/28 The Draft Central Bedfordshire Local Plan

The Executive Member for Regeneration provided a summary of a recent speech given by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government outlining the Government's position on development and growth; new methods for calculating the number of homes required; and the need for transparency in relation to housing need. There were concerns relating to the complexities around percentage rules and penalties in relation to the five year housing land supply and Members were advised that approximately 50% of local hostile applications were refused on the basis of unsustainability. Councils would shortly be invited to bid for Central Government funding for infrastructure, which was acknowledged as crucial to delivery of the plan.

The Local Planning Manager highlighted key dates and milestones in relation to the timeline for the Local Plan with the pre-submission version as the next key milestone in March 2018. Next steps would be dependent upon on the planning inspectorate's internal timescales and public engagement feedback, with the technical evidence base key to ensuring its success. Members were advised of the strategic issues affecting the plan including the housing need methodology, infrastructure opportunities along the Oxford to Cambridge corridor and the need to maintain a five year housing land supply. The Plan was anticipated to generate an increase in jobs and economic growth, ensuring the enhancement and protection of existing communities, landscape, heritage and environment.

Members were appraised of the approach to development on Green Belt land, with the need to consider sustainable development in order to avoid overcrowding in the north of Central Bedfordshire. Growth location options and principles were outlined, with a clear message that existing settlements would

not be coalesced, with country parks created to provide open spaces. The next key stage was to communicate the draft local plan to residents with details shared on social media and online channels with the aim to reach as wide an audience as possible. All comments received would be analysed in order to shape the next version of the plan, with future community planning events and technical studies undertaken before finalising proposals.

The Chairman highlighted that this meeting provided the Committee the opportunity to discuss the broad area of growth options and feed into the public consultation. In light of the report and presentation Members discussed the following in summary:-

- Confirmation that the area defined on the map as 'star 2' in the Marston Vale area was an employment site.
- That at present there was no substantive growth planned in the vicinity of Junction 12 of the M1 Motorway at Toddington, but there could be some moderate growth identified in the next stage of the plan in common with other large Green Belt villages and towns.
- Members queried the methodology behind the site assessment process and it was clarified that at each stage of the process transparency had been assured in terms of the public consultation. Documents were available setting out the methodology and any parties were welcome to view and comment upon the individual preliminary technical site assessments.
- As part of Regulation 18 all Town and Parish Councils, statutory consultees and a database of over 5000 residents had been notified of the consultation period via a number of channels. There was a fully updated website, extensive media coverage and social media alerts, however some Members sought some further clarification on the process and it was agreed that additional information would be provided via an article in the weekly Member's Information Bulletin.
- Whether the Duty to Cooperate with Luton had been met and whether the final number of homes set out within the report as 7350 had been finalised and agreed. It was confirmed that a Draft Position Statement was being prepared with Luton, Aylesbury Vale District Council and North Herts District Council, which included an undertaking that Central Bedfordshire would consider accommodating this unmet need.
- That the final figures in relation to Luton's unmet need would not be determined until the Council had obtained further clarity on its own housing need, following the publication of the new methodology. The quantum of Luton's unmet need had been established at the Luton Local Plan Examination and the residual figure of 7350 homes had been included within the 20-30K new additional homes figure quoted within the Plan.
- If Luton's unmet need became part of the overall target in the next version of the Plan then the homes could be delivered anywhere within Central Bedfordshire and they would be included as part of the overall number delivered, with homes not specifically allocated for Luton.
- There was a lack of certainty whether any Gypsy and Traveller pitches required to meet Luton's need would have to be delivered within Central Bedfordshire and officers confirmed that the Council's pitch requirement set out in the Draft Local Plan was designed to accommodate the needs specifically identified for Central Bedfordshire.

- Concerns and clarification on the location of the proposed largest quantum of growth.
- Clarification that there were not any strategic scale growth location options in the Leighton Buzzard area due to a lack of suitable sites and already high growth proposed there to the east and south, along with an extant permission for over 7000 homes near Houghton Regis.
- That feedback from residents overwhelmingly supported the need for the delivery of infrastructure alongside additional homes and cynicism that developers would adhere to this.
- Reiteration of the need to safeguard against settlement coalescence and to ensure that best practice in terms of the planning and delivery of new villages was adopted.
- The need to acknowledge the anger displayed by residents towards development options in the Green Belt and on greenfield sites and the desire to maintain and protect the rural character of Central Bedfordshire.
- The importance of Members of the committee reflecting on infrastructure needs when making recommendations.
- The importance of regular liaison with the NHS and CCG partners, sharing proposals and requesting formal responses to help address issues in relation to the pressure on current and future healthcare provision in areas of high growth and ensure the health needs of residents were met.
- Recognising the importance of Neighbourhood Plans in the process and liaising at an early stage with Town and Parish Councils to ensure robust levels of engagement and conformity of proposals.
- Concerns regarding the results of a recent water cycle study, that the Central Bedfordshire region was one of the most arid in the UK and the need to plan appropriately for future water need, working closely with utility companies and promoting the use of grey water processes where appropriate.
- The support of the use of Modern Methods of Construction and eco-housing in future developments, including those owned by the Council, acknowledging the difficulty of securing materials within the supply chain.
- The merits of both individual and multiple Parish Council meetings.
- Clarity around the feasibility study of health hubs linking Marston, Cranfield and Wootton.
- The necessity for all sites to be sustainable and deliverable with the need for developers to meet these criteria before allocation was finalised.
- That information be circulated to Town and Parish Councils at the earliest opportunity and with regularity.
- That sound assumptions had been made in advance of the government's consultation on the method for calculating housing need.
- Members expressed disappointment at the lack of residents attending the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and suggested improved methods of advertising public meetings.
- Whether growth would be better placed within towns as much of the infrastructure was already in place.
- That infrastructure would be financed by government bids and from developer contributions.
- Clarification that 40 hectares of land outlined for industrial use was in fact the Sundon Rail Freight interchange.

- That specifics would only be known at Regulation 19 stage of the process, no sites had yet been allocated and no final decisions had yet been made.
- The need to hold engagement sessions locally in appropriate locations, taking into account reasonable travelling distances.
- The difficulties in Members scrutinising complex technical evidence documents, with a suggestion that individual Ward Members focus on the evidence underpinning their own wards.
- The importance of looking at committed growth areas and the rationale behind the signposting of current proposals.
- That mobile homes were unlikely to make up part of the quantum of growth.
- The benefit to Members of understanding the national capital planning toolkit.

In summary Members expressed a reluctant endorsement of the plan, appreciating the technical evidence base supporting the proposed growth options.

RECOMMENDED that the following views of the Committee be provided to the Executive as part of the consultation process on the Plan:-

- **That all necessary steps be taken to ensure infrastructure be implemented before the commencement of development.**
- **The inclusion of the use of Modern Methods of Construction within the Local Plan supported by updates to the Central Bedfordshire Design Guide.**
- **The inclusion of healthcare provision within the Local Plan.**
- **That the full Committee Minutes be included as part of the response to the public consultation.**
- **To increase the focus on future water retention efficiencies.**
- **To support the non coalescence of existing and future settlements.**

SCOSC/17/29 Work Programme 2017-18 and Executive Forward Plan

RECOMMENDED that the Committee Work Programme be agreed subject to the following amendments:-

1. The Parking Enforcement Strategy – September 2017.
2. That concerns relating to the performance of the legal department be considered by Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 1.00 p.m.)