

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

10 JANUARY 2017

Councillors: G Adshead
Anderson (Chairman)
E Collins
S Hearn
Hicks
Howard
Riddick
C Wyatt-Lowe (Vice-
Chairman)

Officers: Nathalie Bateman
Katie Mogan
Chris Taylor
Sara Whelan
Member Support Officer
Group Manager - Strategic Planning and
Regeneration
Group Manager - Development
Management and Planning

Also Attendance:

Councillor Janice Marshall

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 06 December 2016 were confirmed by the members present and signed by the Chairman.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Ashbourn, Fisher, Matthews, Ransley and G Sutton.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

5 **CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN**

None.

6 **HOUSING AND PLANNING ACT IMPLICATIONS**

S Whelan introduced the item to members and ran through the key aspects of the report. The HPA sets out the increased responsibility of the Council with regards to producing a brownfield land registry, land demand and permission in principle. The housing aspects of the Act include a potential decrease in affordable housing with an increase in homelessness and councils will be forced to sell off their high value properties. The Welfare Reform Act states there must be a 1% rent reduction every year for the next four years and it is predicted to have a £30 million impact on budgets and in 2020, it will affect the amount of money available for new build properties. On 29th November 2016, this report went to Cabinet who noted the financial impact it would have on the year 2017/18 and agreed not to change policy on starter homes until further regulations are provided by central government. The brownfield land registry will have a two year staffing cost attached. It is hoped that the register will be set up in 2017-19 and this register will include all sites capable of delivering five or more units.

The welfare benefit cap will start at households earning £30,000 or more per annum and this leaves a lot of unknowns as the regulations from government are still awaited.

The table in the report sets out the Act in more detail in seven parts. Part one deals with starter homes. These will be offered to people under the age of 40 with a 20% discount on homes under £250,000 however there are rumours that this could change. Part two-five deals with housing and regulations of landlords. Part six deals with planning policies – there is a threat from government that private companies may be able to process development management applications.

The Housing White Paper should be implemented by the March budget.

Questions and answers

Councillor Hicks asked if Pay to Stay no longer applied.

S Whelan said that government regulations were needed to clarify and there are rumours that starter homes could change significantly.

Councillor Hicks asked if this could be presented back to committee when government had finalised the Act.

S Whelan said yes.

Councillor Anderson congratulated officers on keeping track on the Act especially as it hasn't been dealt with via a White Paper and it's all very confusing. A Strategic Housing Land Assessment was completed a few years ago and would this be used as a starting point for the brownfield land register.

C Taylor said there had already been discussions about using this as a starting point. However, this did not include smaller sites.

Councillor Riddick said he did not understand how a 1% rent reduction could lead to an increase in homelessness. Surely a rent reduction would mean rent would be more affordable.

S Whelan said the 1% rent reduction along with a benefit cap on those earning over £30,000 will be a real squeeze on households.

Councillor Hicks asked if this include private rent.

S Whelan said yes.

Councillor Anderson asked Councillor Marshall if she could remember when she was involved in housing if the increase in homelessness was due to the right to buy. He said he thought Housing Association tenants had always had the right to buy.

Councillor Marshall said they haven't always been able to but was unsure when it started.

Councillor Hicks suggested that it was the discount offered that had changed, not the ability to have the right to buy.

Councillor Marshall said that Pay to Stay had not gone away but it was still very unclear on when it would be introduced.

Outcome

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report and thank officers for their hard work on writing the report and keeping track of difficult government legislation.

7 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCIES

S Whelan introduced the report to members and said the report sets out the efficiencies to date in the department. A lot of the changes implemented have been made internally using IT more proactively and reducing the reliance on paper and increase the use of mobile devices. One big change for the next two years is managing appeals better and reducing the length of delegated reports.

One other change is helping Town and Parish Councils to become paperless and the councils have embraced the change and the implementation date is 13th March 2017. Each council will receive an investment of £750 from Dacorum Borough Council to help with purchasing of hardware or software. This will fit in with Dacorum's way of working.

Enforcement officers have been able to deal with cases without regularly having to take them to the Development Control Committee.

Large scale developments now have planning performance agreements which allows the department to effectively project manage and it also increases income. This is particularly important as the Site Allocations has some very big sites and soon developers will start to come forward.

The tender process has started for the back office system that officers use. This will be a full tender process and it should take a year from developing the specification to the migration of data. It is also important that the new system works well with Dacorum's website.

There are some statutory changes to come from government about the need to agree precommencement conditions 10 days prior to an official decision notice and therefore this reduces the eight week window in which to complete a planning application.

There is also new legislation surrounding planning performance as councils will now be monitored on appeals. Currently, Dacorum perform well with regards to appeals but this must continue to be monitored as if it drops below a certain percentage, the council will be put under a monitoring body.

The upcoming housing white paper is expected to increase planning fees, protect green belt and encourage councils to maximise transport hubs for development so this will increase pressure on Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring train stations.

Questions and answers

Councillor Hicks asked if the £750 offered to Town and Parish Councils was a one-off investment and any future equipment would need to be funded by the Parish Council?

S Whelan said yes, it is just a one-off investment to help them purchase equipment needed to go digital.

Councillor Hicks said his parish council has an information office to display paper plans and the council chamber to debate plans so the £750 could cover facilities needed to display plans.

S Whelan said different councils had different needs. Laptop equipment could be beneficial to display plans more easily.

Councillor Hicks asked if the IT department at DBC would be coordinating this.

S Whelan said Sharon Collins is the main point of contact as the Town and Parish Council officer but all the departments will work together. There was a tender for this and out of three systems, IT have picked the best system to use.

Councillor Hicks said he didn't feel the £750 was enough.

S Whelan said there is not a statutory obligation for parish councils to provide access to plans.

Councillor Hicks was concerned that elderly residents were at risk of not being able to access plans.

Councillor Anderson felt that this change was long overdue and necessary. He said that 95% of planning applications were not controversial and saves money by printing less. The committee agendas have now been provided via tablets and saves printing on hundreds of pages of paper that would simply be thrown away at the end of the

meeting. Councillor Anderson said he understands the frustrations but believes parish councils will find a way around it by printing the few applications that are controversial.

Councillor S Hearn said that his parish council would be printing their own copies of plans for the public.

Councillor Anderson said it has worked well at Kings Langley Parish Council and have got a projector to display plans.

Councillor Hicks felt this was discriminating against older people that do not have internet access.

Councillor Marshall said that the weekly list of applications sent to members is brilliant but wondered if it could include the appeals.

S Whelan said there must be a way of including it as the appeals are reported every three weeks to the Development Control Committee. It is important to escalate the awareness of appeals. There are 40 appeals each year out of about 3,000 planning applications. It might be the case that appeals are sent out monthly.

Councillor Anderson said appeals used to be first on the agenda at Development Control. Would it also be possible to identify the wards on the weekly list date?

S Whelan said that was something to look at when the system is out for tender.

Councillor Marshall said the problem of sending appeals out monthly, it would make it awkward for someone wishing to make a representation.

S Whelan said there have been delays of 6-9 months with the planning inspector for a couple of years. S Whelan said she would look at what reports can be run easily by officers for weekly distribution.

Councillor Riddick said the volume of appeals is low and $\frac{3}{4}$ of those that go to committee are generally repeated. A separate document for appeals would be useful if it is achievable.

Outcome

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report.

8 HEMEL EVOLUTION - REVIEW OF REGENERATION PROJECTS

N Bateman gave a presentation to members updating them on the current progress of regeneration projects in the town:

- The Maylands Urban Realm improvements has seen the hard landscaping improvements been completed, a shared pedestrian cycleway, new street furniture and entrance totems.
- Durrants Lakes improvements (Phase 1) – the purpose of this is to improve pedestrian connectivity and lake and river bank repairs have been completed.

- Jellicoe Water Gardens Restoration – started in 2015 and is due to be completed in the spring. Works have included – seven new bridges, silt removal, new planting, play area and community building.
- Maylands Business Centre extension – additional five units to be completed by May 2017.
- The Bury – hoping to apply for Heritage Lottery Funding to enable a café, museum and other supporting uses.
- River Gade realignment Gadebridge Park – purpose to improve the sustainability of the river. Proposal is to realign the river south of the White Bridge to complement splash and play park works. This is subject to Cabinet approval but works could start late 2018/early 2019.

Questions and answers

Councillor Hicks asked for clarification on where the Gade River flows. Is the Kings Langley fishing lake in Kings Langley?

N Bateman said there was a culvert that runs under the Town Centre and the excess water discharges in Kings Langley.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe congratulated officers on the progress made. However, she had one slight issue and asked if officers were consulting widely with local residents. There were reports that a partially sighted resident did not know trampolines had been installed and fell over. This is something to bear in mind for future play areas as there is currently nothing to warn people.

N Bateman said they consult regularly with the public and hold annual consultation days where they present the programs of work for the future. The Communications team also consult widely and the responses have been positive and people seem to have a lot more pride in the town. In relation to the play areas, visually impaired groups were consulted on the plans and it was advised that a change in surface material and use of contrasting colours would help.

C Taylor said the designers thoroughly researched this and all recommendations were adopted and put in place.

Councillor Adshead asked what had happened to the tightrope play equipment in the town.

N Bateman said there were a couple of accidents so it will be replaced with more suitable equipment.

Councillor Adshead said that people should accept the risks that come with the equipment.

C Taylor said checks were carried out but now the risk had been removed.

Councillor S Hearn asked officers if they were winning the battle with the geese in the Water Gardens.

N Bateman said a temporary small fence had been erected on the water edge which prevents the geese from getting out of the water. A fence more in keeping with the surroundings will be installed in the future.

Councillor Howard said there were some very negative comments on Street life and people have said they are beginning to shop elsewhere. They have mentioned issues with the increased parking fees and uneven paths. This site might be worth looking at.

N Bateman said a large chunk of the pavement is the responsibility of Herts Highways and this has been raised with them.

C Taylor said she was surprised to hear of so many negative comments about the town. Hemel Hempstead was runner up in the National High Street awards which is a great achievement.

Councillor Howard suggested that achievement should be advertised more.

Councillor Anderson asked why the bridges were replaced in the Water Gardens.

N Bateman said that the concrete was in a poor state and could not be refurbished so they are replicas.

Councillor Adshead said the old bridges were difficult for wheelchair users to get over. Will the new bridges have a less steep gradient?

N Bateman said unfortunately they are restricted as they are grade 2 listed so they are limited on design. They have put up signage to direct wheelchair users on better, more accessible routes.

Councillor Hicks said he hoped the new concrete would be a better quality.

N Bateman said yes, it is British Standard.

Councillor Riddick asked if there were any fish in the river.

N Bateman said at certain times of the year the public should be able to see some fish.

Councillor Hicks congratulated officers on ensuring the utility companies use the correct materials when completing works in the Old Town. Could this be the same for Berkhamsted and Tring High Street?

C Taylor said that when the Old Town work was being completed, they made sure they had a good stock of spare materials and DBC store these materials on behalf on HCC to ensure the right material is used.

Councillor Marshall asked the committee for their comments regarding promoting and marketing the councils work.

C Taylor said there is a communications officer in the team and they promote the work on social media, The Gazette and the Dacorum Digest. Long term, if the town centre gets its Business Improvement District then this will help to promote the town.

Councillor Adshead asked if there was still a rat problem in the Water Gardens.

C Taylor said there had been extra resources and pest control had upped their patrols but the rats have dispersed after being disturbed by the building works.

Councillor Hicks asked if the town centre had a noticeboard.

C Taylor said there was the big TV screen used for advertising and a third of the time

was to advertise community events. There will also be big screens at the Forum to notify the public of events.

Outcome

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report.

9 TWO WATERS UPDATE

C Taylor introduced the report to members. Two Waters was going to become an area of change and government policy is pushing to develop around transport hubs. The Two Waters Masterplan will focus on high quality delivery. There has been a two week consultation with the public alongside drop in sessions on 4th and 5th November. On the 26th January, there will be an all-day event split into two sessions and 30 members of the public can attend in the morning, and 30 members in the afternoon and this will give them a chance to comment on detailed issues. If they cannot attend the day event, there is an opportunity to comment electronically. The next steps will be transport planning and liaison with stakeholders. A draft plan will be sent to Cabinet and then there will be a further 4-6 week consultation period before taking a final plan back to Cabinet in September.

Questions and answers

Councillor Anderson asked if they had an indication of the view from Herts Highways. C Taylor said DBC are working with them and they are aware that Two Waters will need significant attention in the near future. There will be a growth and transport plan through the strategic corridors of South West Herts. Herts Highways will be attending the event on 26th January.

Councillor Anderson asked if the three storey office building on London Road had been granted permission.

S Whelan said it had not. Prior notification had been granted for a change of use under permitted development. There are three live applications for the site due for a decision in February.

Councillor S Hearn said he was concerned about the Boxmoor Trust land. He asked how protected the land was.

C Taylor said it was very protected unless Boxmoor Trust earmark their own land for development. DBC are working with them to ensure they have the resources to improve and protect land.

Councillor Anderson said he was concerned about the plot of land on the corner of the crossroads. This should be protected as it is a key gateway into the town.

C Taylor said the Boxmoor Trust need to generate their own resources for their own sustainability.

Councillor S Hearn pointed out that if the land goes, current developments become less attractive.

Councillor Hicks asked if the Boxmoor Trust own the land where B&Q is.
C Taylor said they do but the lease expires in 2020.

Councillor Hicks asked why the Beacon wasn't viable to offer affordable housing.
C Taylor said there are a lot of service charges and no housing associations were willing to have tenants in there.

Councillor Hicks asked if they had to pay money to allow for affordable housing elsewhere.

S Whelan said yes, the agreement was £3.5 million.

Outcome

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report.

The Meeting ended at 8.53 pm