

Greater Norwich Development Partnership Board Meeting Minutes

Date: Wednesday 16 December 2020

Time: 10.00am

Venue: Virtual Meeting

Board Members:

Broadland District Council:

Cllr Lana Hempsall, Cllr Sue Lawn, Cllr Shaun Vincent (Chairman)

Norwich City Council:

Cllr Kevin Maguire, Cllr Alan Waters

South Norfolk Council:

Cllr Florence Ellis, Cllr John Fuller, Cllr Lisa Neal

Norfolk County Council:

Cllr Barry Stone

Broads Authority

Cllr Melanie Vigo di Gallidoro

Officers in attendance: Nick Booth, Mike Burrell, Phil Courtier, Judith Davidson Stuart Guthrie, Trevor Holden, Phil Morris, Graham Nelson, Jonathan Pyle, Marie-Pierre Tighe, Matt Tracey.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman advised the meeting that through his consultancy Abzag, he was promoting, on behalf of the landowner, a site for residential development in Colney through the Greater Norwich Local Plan. When this site was under consideration he would declare a disclosable pecuniary interest and shall vacate the chair and leave the meeting.

In the interests of transparency, he also brought to the Board's attention, that his father, Malcolm Vincent, through his company Vincent Howes, was promoting, on behalf of the landowners, a site for residential development in Costessey /Bawburgh through the Greater Norwich Local Plan. In this case under the provisions of the Code of Conduct, there was no interest to declare which would prevent him from participating in the debate and chairing the meeting.

The Chairman also advised the meeting that one of today's questions from the public was from Easton Parish Council, which his consultancy also advised on planning matters. This was not, however, a pecuniary interest but was being declared in the interests of transparency.

Cllr John Fuller and Cllr Barry Stone advised the meeting that they were Members of the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association.

2. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Cllr Stuart Clancy, Cllr Andrew Proctor and Cllr Mike Stonard.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

4. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Question 1 Green Belt – CPRE Norfolk

Question

CPRE Norfolk notes that the GNLP Reg 19 v1.4 at paragraph 117 states that: *"Greater Norwich does not have a nationally designated Green Belt. National policy is clear that new Green Belts should very rarely be established. Therefore, this plan will need to carry forward policies for protecting our valued landscapes."*

We are concerned that the GNLP has reached this stage without a more thorough and detailed (at least one that is available publicly) consideration of the provision of a Green Belt for Norwich, preferably on the "green wedges" model. CPRE Norfolk would like an explanation as to why the exceptional circumstances for creation of a Green Belt for Norwich as required by the NPPF do not exist.

The wholly exceptional circumstances around the current Covid-19 crisis are just one example which demonstrates not only how essential it is to maintain and protect green spaces, but also how circumstances have changed since earlier drafts of the GNLP. Moreover, the Government's proposed changes to the planning system and housing requirements suggest that more robust protection of valued green spaces is now more pressing than ever, along with the long-term need for climate change mitigation which the provision of a Green Belt would help to guarantee.

GNLP Officer Response

The Green Belt issue was thoroughly addressed in the Regulation 18A consultation Growth Options document. This clearly set out the national policy requirement to demonstrate exceptional circumstances to establish a new Green Belt. All responses to the consultation are included in the Draft Statement of Consultation published in September 2018. No evidence has been provided at any stage through the Regulation 18 period that demonstrates such exceptional circumstances. The GNLP provides strong policies to protect green spaces and enhance green infrastructure.

Covid-19 is an exceptional circumstance nationally, it is not exceptional to the

local plan area. The CPRE are correct to point out that the pandemic has reinforced the importance of green spaces, but in this respect the most significant need is for green space to be accessible. The function of Green Belts is not to provide accessible green space; this is best provided through a green infrastructure strategy. Similarly, the function of a Green Belt is not to address climate change. Indeed, because development may need to leap-frog Green Belts, they can be detrimental to climate change by extending commutes and other travel needs.

The issue may need to be reconsidered in the next local plan to address any relevant requirements of the proposed new planning system and to take account of any new settlement proposals.

A Member noted that the landscape section within the GNLP Strategy clearly showed that policies would be carried forward to protect locally significant strategic gaps between settlements that were valued landscapes. He suggested that this could be strengthened to explicitly include the Southern Bypass Protection Zone, as well.

Question 2 Self-Build – Louise Minkler

Question

The majority of the question is largely about the operation of the self-build register. This will be forwarded to each of the councils to respond to individually. The element of the question directly relevant to the Greater Norwich Local Plan is:

Could you please tell me if the local Norwich/ Norfolk framework will be encouraging and addressing this issue for legitimate self-builders to build a family forever home and not associating us under the same umbrella as small building companies for affordable housing, which is much easier for the companies to gain planning outside of the boundary than a legitimate self-build?

GNLP Officer Response

The emerging GNLP will help provide more opportunities for self-build on larger sites, smaller sites and as individual dwellings as follows:

1. Policy 5 provides for self-build plots on larger sites (except for flats). It states that *At least 5% of plots on residential proposals of 40 dwellings or more should provide serviced self/custom-build plots unless:*
 - *a lack of need for such plots can be demonstrated;*
 - *plots have been marketed for 12 months and have not been sold.*
 2. Policy 7.4 promotes infill development within development boundaries and also allows for Affordable housing led development, which may include an element of market housing (including self/custom build) if necessary, for viabilityadjacent or well related to settlement boundaries.
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3. Policy 7.5 will be most relevant to the situation described in the question. For every parish it promotes up to a total of 3 or 5 homes to be delivered as small scale residential development *adjacent to a development boundary or on sites within or adjacent to a recognisable group of dwellings with positive consideration given to self and custom build.*

Question 3 East Norwich Masterplan – Gail Mayhew

Question

I note that a new proposal is to allocate significant housing numbers to the East Norwich area and would like to ask the following question:

How do the GNDP intend to deliver the enabling, community and strategic infrastructure to unlock the East Norwich project including the Trowse Bridge which is of significant importance to the City & County's future economic positioning in relation to Cambridge, opening up the Nor-Cam corridor on a sustainable basis and to support sustainable movement into and out of the city? And what are they prepared to commit to in this regard in terms of site assembly and control of the project, if individual owners do not commit to a single sustainable and comprehensive project with an equalisation joint venture agreement?

GNDP Officer Response

The GNDP intend to deliver the enabling, community and strategic infrastructure to unlock the East Norwich project through working closely with all the relevant landowners through a masterplan. The masterplan will be produced by consultants, with procurement being well advanced.

Funding for the masterplan is being provided from the site landowners and other partners in the East Norwich Partnership (a new public sector led partnership led by the city council) including Homes England and Network Rail. Significant additional funding has recently been secured from the Towns Fund both to progress the masterplan and to acquire land to maximise the chances of successful delivery. The masterplan's findings will inform implementation of the GNDP and ensure that possible blockages to delivery can be overcome.

The policy framework for this to be progressed is in policy 7.1 of the GNDP strategy and in the site allocation policy for East Norwich in the GNDP Sites document. The policies and masterplan will promote development of a high density sustainable mixed-use community, co-ordinate delivery of new transport infrastructure and services, enhance green links, provide for a local energy network, enhance heritage assets, protect Carrow Abbey County Wildlife Site and address local issues including the active railway, the protected minerals railhead and flood risk issues.

A Member noted that the East Norwich section of the Strategy provided details

of how the masterplan would be delivered and also included the partners who would be driving forward this strategic regeneration area.

Question 4 Costessey Showground Site allocation Policy – Mr Milliken, Chair of Easton PC

Question

The inclusion of small-scale food retail, including an anchor unit selling a significant proportion of locally produced goods; café/restaurant/public house uses; and other leisure and service uses, to serve the wider function of the showground will also be considered. This has not been consulted on with the local community of Easton, how can this lawfully form part of the Reg 19 submission if the views of local people have not been taken into account?

As a Parish Council we are very concerned in relation to point 4, the interchange is at or near capacity for large portions of the day, conditions for improvements in the area still have not been advanced in relation to improvements across the A47.

Our initial thoughts are that the wording surrounding the expanded usage is too vague and open to interpretation, a pub/restaurant and hotel are already in operation on the Longwater interchange. Retail outlets should be located on the Longwater retail park which is in very close proximity of the showground. The wording other leisure and service uses is very vague and may lead to traffic levels far in excess of what the local network capacity can handle.

Will this amendment to the current policy be withdrawn and rewritten to add clarity before it is consulted on?

GNDP Chair's Response

Thank you for your question on policy COS 5/GNLP2074 Royal Norfolk Showground, Costessey included in the Publication draft Sites document of the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP).

If the proposed policy for the showground, along with other elements of the GNLP Sites document, are approved by the Greater Norwich Development Partnership (GNDP) on December 16th and then by the councils' cabinets in January 2021, the policy will form part of the Regulation 19 Publication draft GNLP.

The Publication draft GNLP will be made available from February 1st to March 15th 2021 for comments to be made on its soundness and legal compliance. These comments will be considered by elected members in deciding on whether to submit the GNLP in July 2021 and will assist the Inspector in deciding on the content of the subsequent examination on the plan. Current information on this next Regulation 19 stage of plan making available from here will be updated as we get closer to February 1st.

In answer to a query, it was confirmed that this response had been drafted by

the Greater Norwich Planning Policy Manager on behalf of the Chairman.

A Member noted that the adjoining areas of Costessey, Queens Hill and Easton had a population of over 25,000, but relatively few of the facilities that a population of this size should expect to have. Hitherto, Planning Policy had failed these residents in providing more facilities and the GNLP, as drafted, was an opportunity to rectify this, whilst retaining the open nature of the Showground. He did not accept that the proposal was unlawful. Instead it was designed to be flexible to meet the challenges of changing circumstances. He also reminded the Board that any proposals would, as always, be subject to the usual development management processes.

The Chairman also noted that South Norfolk Council were promoting a safer crossing of the A47 in that area, which would enhance connectivity for local residents. The Food Enterprise Zone was also in close vicinity, which was going to be of county wide significance as it was developed.

5. ECONOMIC REPORT BRIEFING

The Board were given an outline of the findings of the reports used for supporting evidence for the development of the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP).

Avison Young had been commissioned to update work, first produced by GVA in 2017, in the form of two addendum reports covering jobs growth, employment land need, town centres and retail.

The reports use the latest available data, including an extensive range of statistical information that would also be useful for economic development activity generally.

The reports made clear that with the ongoing impacts of COVID-19, post-Brexit uncertainty and changes to the planning system there could be little assurance about future performance, however, they considered that a V shaped recovery was most likely and their Cities Index viewed Norwich as more robust than the national average.

The reports had an employment forecast of an additional 32,700 jobs for 2020-2038 in Greater Norwich. Of this total, around 25,410 jobs were likely to be in retail and personal services; i.e. jobs that did not take up employment land.

Retail demand in the Norwich urban areas was flat with little or no demand for non-food premises, although there was some potential for growth in this sector in the more rural areas of South Norfolk and Broadland.

The reports concluded that Local Plan policies needed to be flexible to enable change and that there was a continuing need to support and protect town centres to aid their recovery and transition.

As a result of the findings, clarification had been added to the Strategy to explain the reasons for the oversupply of employment land (to provide flexibility and

choice and that land was targeted at particular sectors, which it was hoped would grow and expand) had been added. Also clarification was provided regarding the impact assessment for out of centre developments and the latest requirements on the new use classes.

RESOLVED

To note the contents of the report outlining the main findings of updated economic evidence.

6. GREATER NORWICH LOCAL PLAN REGULATION 19 PUBLICATION STAGE

The Chairman advised the meeting that this item was split into two elements; the first was to consider the latest iteration of the GNLP draft Strategy and the second was to agree the draft sites document.

The Greater Norwich Planning Policy Manager informed the meeting that the main changes to version 1.6 of the draft Strategy were additions to the text in Policy 6 The Economy (as referred to in Minute 5 above), some minor amendments to the South Norfolk Village Clusters section; in Policy 2 modern construction techniques were mentioned and the East Norwich text had been updated and reflected the response to question 3 in Minute 4 above.

A Member advised the meeting that the Government had indicated that for the rest of this Parliament local plans would be based on the 2014 housing need numbers. It had also been reported that there would be a change in the Duty to Cooperate to encourage the reallocation of retail premises and preferential access for city regeneration.

Members were reminded that the Strategy had an allocation of 22 percent above the 2014 baseline need and, therefore, it was suggested that a decision be deferred to allow officers two weeks to assess the changes that were due to be announced later today.

Another Member suggested that there could be serious consequences to delaying the process further and that the Strategy had the flexibility to be progressed as it was.

Other Members were in favour of checking the housing numbers in line with the Government view and the Chairman noted that the Board could recommend the Strategy to their respective Cabinets, subject to any final changes resulting from the announcements of the Secretary of State later today. The consultation could then commence as planned on 1 February 2021.

It was suggested that an informal Board meeting be held week commencing 4 January 2021 to sign off on any final changes to the Strategy.

A Member warned that this could involve a lot of work for officers over Christmas and suggested that any changes should be with a very light touch, so as not to derail the whole process.

It was confirmed that the Strategy was based on the 2014 methodology and was uplifted to take account of the 2018 figures. The Board was also advised that if

the Local Plan was to take advantage of the transitional arrangements that were being put in place by Government it must be agreed for consultation by the Cabinets meeting in January, as this would be the only means of avoiding the purdah period of the local government elections. If this could not be done the earliest that the consultation could begin would be June, which would mean a delay of five months.

Members' attention was drawn to the recommendation that delegated authority to officers to make changes to the pre-submission documents, prior to being taken to their respective Cabinets. This would allow officers to digest any information that came from the Government and identify any changes that needed to be made to the Local Plan and discuss these changes informally with Members before being finally reported to the Cabinets.

In summing up, the Chairman confirmed that the Strategy should go ahead as per the timetable, but with an informal meeting to be held week commencing 4 January 2021 to agree any final changes resulting from the announcement from the Secretary of State later today.

RESOLVED

That the Board:

- Recommends to the councils that they should agree to publish the Regulation 19 Pre-submission Draft Greater Norwich Local Plan Strategy, for representations on soundness and legal compliance; and
- Delegates authority to directors to make changes agreed today, plus other minor changes to the document and its background evidence, prior to it being reported to councils in January.

The Chairman advised the meeting that the second part of the report covered the GNLP Sites document and was broken down into the following five elements according to the settlement hierarchy:

- Norwich and the fringe parishes;
- Main towns;
- Key service centres;
- Broadland village clusters;
- Non-residential allocations in South Norfolk.

In respect of Main Towns, the Board were advised that the allocation proposed in Diss was now for 150 dwellings, not 200 due to the awkward shape of the site and that at Briar Farm, Harleston there were some minor changes to the extra care and senior living, active retirement housing numbers.

In key service centres the Board was asked to note that 74 percent of all housing need had already been allocated and was progressing.

Broadland village clusters was a new element of the settlement hierarchy, which it was hoped would deliver much needed housing for residents.

It was noted that a lot of sites from the earlier Local Plan had been carried forward for the non-residential allocations in South Norfolk.

RESOLVED

That the Board:

- Recommends to the councils that they should agree to publish the Regulation 19 Pre-submission Draft Greater Norwich Local Plan Sites document linked from this report for representations on soundness and legal compliance;
- Delegates authority to directors to make changes agreed today, plus other minor changes to the document and its background evidence, prior to it being reported to councils in January.

7. COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

The Board considered the Communications Plan and it was:

RESOLVED

To endorse the approach to communication to partner authorities

The meeting closed at 11.15am
