



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
JOINT MEETING OF THE ADULT SOCIAL CARE; CHILDREN YOUNG PEOPLE
AND EDUCATION; HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMISSIONS

Held: WEDNESDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2022 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Pantling - Chair

Councillor Batool

Councillor Kaur Saini

Councillor Khan

Councillor March

Councillor Dr Moore

Councillor O'Donnell

Councillor Patel

Councillor Riyait

In Attendance

Deputy City Mayor Councillor Russell

Asst City Mayor Councillor Cutkelvin

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1. ELECT A CHAIR FOR MEETING

Councillor Pantling was elected as Chair for the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Joshi, Councillor Westley, Janet McKenna, Martin Samuels and Sophie Maltby.

It was also noted that Councillor Batool and Councillor Dr Moore would need to leave the meeting early due to other commitments.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any pecuniary or other interests they may have in the business on the agenda.

There were no declarations of interest.

4. LEICESTER LOCAL PLAN (2020-2036) - PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON SUBMISSION PLAN (REGULATION 19)

The Director of Planning, Development and Transportation submitted a report outlining the main strategies and proposals of the submission for the City of Leicester Local Plan for public consultation in November 2022.

The Chair noted that this was a joint meeting of the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission, the Children Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission and the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission convened specially to scrutinise this item and members from all three commissions were invited equally to contribute to the discussion.

The Chair asked members to restrict their questions to the terms of reference of the three commissions and thanked those that had submitted any questions in advance which officers would attempt to answer as part of the presentation.

Grant Butterworth Head of Planning introduced the report and presented an overview of the background and details of the current position since the last consultation and the processes being followed to bring matters to scrutiny before proceeding to Full Council in October.

During the presentation it was noted that:

- The final stage of public consultation (subject to Council approval) would begin in November 2022, that would be the final consultation before the local plan was submitted to the independent planning inspectorate for an examination in public (EIP) early next year.
- The local plan covered the period 2020 to 2036 and sought to meet the need for additional housing, jobs, retail, and leisure by allocating sites for development but also protecting important sites such as those with heritage value.
- The local plan also set out a range of policies that would guide decisions on planning applications and sought to protect the environment and balance with economic and social objectives too.
- The local plan would need to be evidenced as viable and deliverable.
- The previous Regulation 18 Local Plan consultation and the revisions to the plan now were in the context of consideration given to responses made at that stage.
- At the conclusion of the previous stage the government had increased targets and issued a new standard method of calculating housing need.

In terms of housing need for the city, that was now 39,424 dwellings, an increase of 35% since the last consultation. This was a challenging increase that had required substantial partnership work with districts to meet that increase in targets. It was noted that agreement was being sought on a Statement of Common Ground on the redistribution of unmet housing need as well as finding areas for employment land within Leicester and Leicestershire.

Regarding housing supply, the full list of the strategic sites and other sites allocated for housing were appended to the report and it was noted there had been a net reduction of 23 sites from the local plan since the Regulation 18 version.

Members' attention was drawn to the key strategies and policies included in the Regulation 19 local plan, the work that had gone in to fulfilling those and the evidence reworked to make those fit for purpose: e.g., Climate Change included air quality, transport, energy and flooding; Health and Wellbeing included open spaces, design and connection with existing programmes i.e., cycling and walking; Biodiversity involved protecting designated sites and support for biodiversity net gain.

Members noted that the local plan included provisions for a substantial proportion of employment land, and consideration had been given to balance the pressure for meeting housing targets, employment land and open space without undermining amenities and provision in the city. Although some green space would be lost there were a range of policies in the plan to mitigate that and to enhance biodiversity in smaller sites and adjacent areas, as well as some opportunity to secure new open space on strategic sites and enhance the quality of existing public space.

In relation to transport, policy would be aligned closely to the council's local transport plan and would include improving key transport hubs, provision for walking and cycling as well as network access to local transport services.

17.54 Cllr Batool left the meeting; noted the meeting remained quorate.

Members were asked to note the key local plan strategies, policies, site allocations and provisions for consultation and were invited to discuss the report and ask questions.

Members welcomed the report and congratulated officers on this enormous task.

The ensuing discussion included the following comments:

The plan was speculative since no-one could predict what the world would be in the future and suggested areas may not be approved for development or the types of housing that would be needed. The longer term demographic as far as numbers of single occupants, families, children etc would also need to be known when deciding factors such as the types of housing to be built and the number of schools needed.

In response it was advised that work had been undertaken to explore evidence around housing demand and projected trends as well as the exploring the current demographic make up to predict those points, however the nature of development would evolve, and delivery of housing developments was not all controlled by the council. In relation to the number of schools, planning officers

had worked closely with education colleagues to look long term at potential school numbers/places and to consider infrastructure commitments as well as educational provision and that was within the supporting documentation.

Concern was expressed at the loss of green and open space, and it was queried how that loss was measured in terms of health and wellbeing impacts. It was also commented that the open spaces spread across the city were often in densely built up areas where people needed green space. Further concerns were raised about losing such areas to housing development and it was suggested that where possible the council should look to prioritise the building of more purely social housing on its own sites.

Deputy City Mayor Councillor Russell commented on the importance of supported living arrangements and there was a brief discussion around that, and the issues involved with the local authority building their own sheltered accommodations due to the way in which government funding worked. It was indicated that the council were keen to build their own where they could, but account needed to be taken of such issues as those that had been incurred in other recent developments such as Tilling Road.

There was further discussion about the distinctions between sheltered housing, affordable housing and the specific need for social housing and a commitment to the council building its own social housing where possible was sought.

The Head of Planning clarified in so far as the delivery of housing, the local plan could not dictate the method of delivery on site as that would be for the Executive to decide, however the local plan was the mechanism to establish the principle for development by allocating potential sites. It was noted that the plan only specified policy on s106 contributions for affordable housing need at this stage. There would be more discussion needed around methods of delivery of housing by the Executive and Council and those decisions would be informed by the plan and supplementary guidance would follow to develop other s106 contribution levels in the context of viability assessment work.

In relation to concerns about cumulative health impacts through loss of open space, it was advised that the local plan process had started with reviewing over 1000 sites and through the various stages of consultation the number of open spaces proposed for allocation had been substantially reduced and there had to be a balanced recognition of what had been retained against the overall loss now proposed. A health impact assessment had been carried out although that did not provide a quantitative measure, the proposals put forward tried to balance the benefits of design of open spaces with meeting housing need as well as weighing the costs of reducing green space.

In terms of enhancing open spaces and how development would be funded, it was explained that the nature of the local plan allowed development to happen, and allocation would uplift value that incentivise and fund the development delivery including measures to retain and enhance local open space on site or nearby.

As far as engaging with young people and incorporating their “voice” into the plan, during the last consultation officers had sought to engage as widely as possible albeit during the covid pandemic. In respect of young people, a lot of engagement had been facilitated through councillors and by dialogue held in schools, these talks were very constructive, and a lot of the sites removed near schools were driven by the arguments put forward by school children which had formed a powerful part of the assessment.

Concerns were expressed about the current pressures on health service delivery such as availability of GP services and access to dental practices, and the risks that would be brought by building more houses in areas that were already seeing health or educational inequalities etc leading to further crisis.

It was indicated that as the local plan was a 15 year plan it provided a framework that meant those managing the programmes of investment could see where growth was planned to be and could work to align infrastructure provisions to serve that growth. Delivery of health and education although separate from the local plan was covered via a link through the infrastructure study which defined the investment needed over a range of infrastructure and services over the period, and that was derived through conversations with all the partners involved in providing the infrastructure so there was value in the process.

Members discussed the “ownership” of the plan noting that the next 15 years were likely to see more challenges and less funding that may lead to a need to change the plan. It was advised that the government required the local plan to be reviewed every 5 years and delivery against the targets to be monitored, this could be by way of a partial review, and was monitored through an annual assessment of housing delivery. In terms of ownership, once approved the plan was owned by the Council.

As far as holding the council to account if the designation of an area within the plan had to be changed due to responding to a need it would depend on the strength of designation, e.g., green wedge had a higher level protection and would be very difficult to do that, whereas open space designation was a lesser designation in terms of protection. Once the local plan was adopted it held a lot of weight, however as time goes on the plan becomes more out of date and there had to be a complex weighing up of the plan to national planning guidance, e.g., the rules dealing with the national framework would have more weight than an out of date local plan.

As regards the current process, once the next public consultation had been completed the local plan would be submitted to the independent planning inspectorate for an examination in public (EIP) early next year. The inspector would examine the local plan including whether it was viable and if it were to find it unsound it could effectively go back to start of process, however it was the aim for the inspectorate to make recommendation for modifications and those would come back to full council to consider and approve.

18.27pm Councillor Moore left the meeting – noted meeting remained quorate.

Members were keen to understand better the quotas around sheltered housing and how the council would meet those. It was also queried whether there was anticipation of additional extra care housing. Deputy City Mayor Councillor Russell explained that the term supported housing was now carefully used to cover all types of different housing need and to keep options open and flexible for those different housing needs which were all supported housing.

It was advised that there was no way to say how much of one provision should be provided over another within the plan. Whilst the plan sought to look at the requirements of a whole range of supported accommodation and demands, and the plan would go as far as it could in terms of what standards could be provided, the directional lead on that would come forward through other policies and relied on funding programmes and executive decisions.

There was concern that the housing mix needed would not be reflected and issues raised about existing properties e.g., flats for sole occupants or designated housing for over 65's were sitting vacant and not being repurposed. Regarding the housing mix and whether the right types of homes would be provided it was reiterated that the local plan could only seek to achieve the right number of housing need but the details of the mix of housing would be defined in policy and the plan did not drill down into a site by site basis.

As far as meeting the overall plan target, that was set by government assessment and the council had evidence this as being deliverable, and the studies showed that proposing the delivery of all the housing sites by the Council could not deliver all the housing need. In terms of any "wrong" types of housing built, in a crude sense those would still contribute to the target and national Government planning policy did not allow the council to be so interventional about conversion of existing properties.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and drew the discussion to a close and noted the recommendations put forward during discussion which were formally agreed.

AGREED:

1. That the key local plan strategies, policies, site allocations and provisions for consultation be noted.
2. That it be recommended at Full Council that where possible the Council should look to prioritise the building of more purely social housing on Council owned sites.
3. That it be recommended at Full Council that where possible the Council should act to minimise the impact of new developments on existing inequalities (such as health, education and social etc) especially on sites owned by the Council.

5. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None notified.

The meeting closed at 18:40 hours