



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: THURSDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2022 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Westley (Chair)
Councillor Chamund (Vice Chair)

Councillor Ali
Councillor Gee

Councillor Aqbany
Councillor Pantling

In attendance:

Councillor Kitterick
Councillor Sandhu
Councillor Waddington

Councillor Rae Bhatia
Councillor Valand
Councillor Whittle

Councillor Cutkelvin – Assistant City Mayor (Housing and Education)

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28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fonseca, and from Councillors Joel and Porter as invitees of the Economic Development, Transport and Climate Emergency Scrutiny Commission (Minute 33 refers).

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest separate from those recorded in the Members' Register.

30. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 1 August 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

31. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no Petitions had been received, in accordance with Council procedures.

32. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS OR STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no Questions, Representations or Statements of Case had been received, in accordance with Council procedures.

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

The Chair reminded the Commission that Members of the Economic Development Transport and Climate Emergency Scrutiny Commission had been invited to attend the meeting and welcomed their participation.

The Head of Planning then submitted a report which outlined the main strategies and policies of the submission of the Local Plan for public consultation in November 2022. A presentation was also given, which covered the content of the report and related details.

It was reported that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) required all local planning authorities to produce a local plan and in view of this officers had been working on a new plan which would replace the current core strategy and saved policies from the previous local plan of 2006. The key consultation stages were outlined.

It was noted that the draft plan would cover the period 2020–2036 sought to:

- Meet the needs for homes, jobs, shopping, and leisure
- Allocate sites for development including strategic development sites
- Protect important sites such as those with heritage value
- Set clear policies that guide decisions on planning applications
- The plan was required to be viable and deliverable

It was clarified that this would be the final consultation before the plan was submitted to the independent Planning Inspectorate for an Examination in Public (EIP). The Chair commented on the consultation process, involving submission of comments to the Overview select Committee prior to final consideration by Full Council.

The Chair then referred to the attendance of Councillor Kitterick, who he had allowed to speak in accordance with Scrutiny Procedure Rules, alongside the Members of the Economic Development, Transport and Climate Emergency Scrutiny Commission.

The presentation detailed the questions received in advance from Councillors Kitterick and Waddington and the following key points were noted:

In respect of the documents supplied referring to site allocations, it was suggested that they did not appear to be included within the policies document, and in response it was clarified that:

- Space standards had been considered and the issue with the potential "studio" loophole had been covered in the Draft Plan as defined in previous consultation in 2020. It was proposed that the standards would apply to all residential C3 accommodation, and it was confirmed that the case would be made to apply the standards to studio flats.
- In terms of the retention of "whole" houses and resisting sub-division of houses into flatted units where there was a proven demand for whole house accommodation, it was clarified that the new Policy drafted sought to secure this objective within approved Article 4 Direction areas.
- Purpose built student accommodation would be considered with the same criteria-based policy to that set out in the Regulation 18 Draft Plan
- An adapted policy on Hostel accommodation to the previous version is proposed sought to strengthen management controls.
- The Tall Buildings policy and city centre streetscape it was reported that Character Area assessments published in full at the previous consultation stage had been refreshed in line with new Government Guidance and new Supplementary Design Guidance to deal with specific tall building policy application would need to be prepared for further detailed consultation after the Local Plan adoption.

In terms of site allocations, it was questioned whether there had been any consideration to a much broader approach to changing planning designations where it is clear the location no longer fits the use. The recent development of the Freeman's Common area was debated. In response it was noted that allocations could only be made for sites which could be proven as available and deliverable, and as the estate was fully occupied it did not therefore comply with those requirements. It was also noted that as well as housing the Plan would accommodate employment need and the implications of the reliance on Charnwood District Council accommodating the unmet employment need was recognised and acknowledged.

It was also questioned that some of the figures for residential capacity were dubious where it was clear that capacity was greater than quoted and it was suggested that these should be explored further.

It was reported that the capacity formulas had been revised and reviewed especially in respect of the Central Development Area resulting in a substantial increase in plan supply capacity. This considered emerging proposals and planning approvals.

In respect of brownfield sites, it was requested that a map of sites should be made available and the example of the derelict factory sites in Woodgate in private ownership was suggested, including proposals and recommendations

for their future use for housing or employment.

In response it was noted that the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment was a full comprehensive database to support the plan and further documents would set out how site allocations were arrived at to provide this information.

The Chair thanked the Head of Planning and all Officers involved in the process for their detailed work in preparing the Local Plan.

Particular comments from Commission Members, and Members of the Economic Development, Transport and Climate Emergency Scrutiny Commission were noted as follows. It was confirmed that these issues would be considered separately, and Members would be advised of updates accordingly:

- Details of the sites assessed including in the Woodgate area and the associated flood risks would be circulated.
- The previously submitted petition concerning the designation of land on the allocation 309 on Land adjacent to Anstey Lane would be clarified, it being noted that the allocation would not specify detailed site and open space layouts. The issue would be explored with the site promoters, and outcomes would be circulated.
- Similar to the above point, resident concerns about the proposed allocation on land at Netherhall Drive were reported. It was confirmed the Local Plan allocation was to identify around half the site for future potential land use but planning applications for development were not expected in the short term as there would be local engagement on site development and subsequent applications should the plan be adopted. It was confirmed residents would be able to register concerns at the upcoming consultation stage should this be approved by Council.
- Further information concerning the allocation and designation of permanent and temporary travellers' sites was requested. It was confirmed that the revised plan took forward the permanent site proposed at Western park Golf Course as per the previous consultation was proposed together with options for transit provision which would need to be subject to further consultation post Local Plan adoption.

Commission Members and invitees confirmed that they were satisfied with the responses provided arising from their questions and previous concerns.

The Assistant City Mayor (Housing and Education), Councillor Cutkelvin, was invited to comment, and it was confirmed that full consultation on any proposals would involve residents, relevant stakeholders and partner organisations to ensure that any development was sympathetic and of benefit to local communities.

In respect of the ongoing process, the Head of Planning also confirmed and advised that the comments on the Local Plan to be submitted to Overview Select Committee and Full Council would allow a further consultation period throughout November 2022.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked Members of the Economic Development, Transport and Climate Emergency Scrutiny Commission, together with Councillor Kitterick for their input and participation.

AGREED:

That the key local plan strategies, policies, site allocations, and provisions for consultation be noted and supported prior to further consideration at Overview Select Committee and Full Council.

34. HOUSING CRISIS IN LEICESTER - SCRUTINY REVIEW REPORT

As Chair of the Task Group, Councillor Gee was invited to introduce the item.

The report of the review was submitted, and it was noted that the review was prompted by a range of factors, but most keenly felt was the erosion of affordable social housing through the right to buy mechanism which had reduced housing availability for those who most directly needed it. A principal objective was to capture and use the very detailed knowledge that members had within their own communities and their knowledge of local issues.

While a shortage of new social rented housing was a contributing feature of the housing crisis, a full range was highlighted, including problems facing those who own their own homes or living in the private rented sector (PRS). Members recognised the value of the PRS, while also pointing to adverse issues within the sector, particularly high rents, poor housing, antisocial behaviour by tenants, and landlords who failed to maintain the homes occupied by their tenants.

Frustration with the planning system, which appeared to freeze potential housing sites out of the reach of housing providers, and by extension was beyond the reach of those in greatest need, was also a feature of the review.

The related developing crisis of high inflation and energy costs also contributed to the housing crisis and the failures in Government policy were referred to and acknowledged.

The Executive Summary, background to the review and key findings were noted.

Councillor Gee commented on and welcomed the attendance of Councillors Kitterick, Waddington and Whittle, who were not Commission members but had remained in the meeting to discuss the item.

The Chair of the Commission thanked Councillor Gee for his introduction and asked for questions and comments.

It was suggested that the emphasis should be widened from Government blame and comment was made on the availability of Council owned and which

could potentially be developed for housing. The possibility of creating a development company to accelerate this proposal and the need for clear data was stressed to ensure that the work of the Task Group and the Review did not end up being wasted. In this regard it was confirmed that a report to update on progress would be submitted to the Commission at a future agreed meeting.

The Assistant City Mayor (Housing and Education) advised that she hoped for clear asks of Government to result from the review. She added that the crisis should be seen as a corporate responsibility across the Council, including consideration by public health, economic development and other services.

In conclusion the Chair referred to the possibility of a licensing scheme for private landlords to improve conditions which would be a factor for future deliberation.

AGREED:

1. To endorse the final Scrutiny Report - 'Housing Crisis in Leicester'.
2. That the Assistant City Mayor (Housing and Education) and the Executive be requested to consider the recommendations and calls for action to Central Government as contained in the final Scrutiny Report.
3. That an update report be submitted to the Commission at a future meeting.

35. DISTRICT HEATING SERVICE CHARGES

This item was withdrawn.

36. WORK PROGRAMME

The Commission's Work Programme was submitted for information and comment.

37. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.05pm.