



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TRANSPORT AND TOURISM SCRUTINY
COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 12 OCTOBER 2020 at 4:00 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Waddington (Chair)
Councillor Sandhu (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Broadwell
Councillor Joel
Councillor Porter

Councillor Rae Bhatia
Councillor Valand

In Attendance:

Councillor Clair – Deputy City Mayor Culture, Leisure and Sport
Councillor Clarke – Deputy City Mayor Environment and Transportation
Sir Peter Soulsby – City Mayor

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89. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Fonseca.

90. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Broadwell declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in relation to agenda item 5, “Draft Leicester Local Plan (2020 – 2036) – Public Consultation”, in that she ran a business restoring and refurbishing electric bikes.

Councillor Porter declared for openness that he had objections to a number of elements of the Draft Local Plan and had expressed these opinions publicly, (agenda item 5, “Draft Leicester Local Plan (2020 – 2036) – Public Consultation”, referred).

Councillor Rae Bhatia declared for openness that he was one of the Councillors representing Beaumont Leys Ward, which was impacted by new developments such as Ashton Green, (agenda item 5, “Draft Leicester Local Plan (2020 – 2036) – Public Consultation”, referred).

Councillor Sandhu declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in relation to agenda item 5, “Draft Leicester Local Plan (2020 – 2036) – Public Consultation”, in that his wife owned a property in the St George’s Character Area.

91. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

92. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representation, or statements of case had been received.

93. DRAFT LEICESTER LOCAL PLAN (2020 - 2036) - PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The City Mayor introduced the Draft Local Plan, stressing that the decisions made and adoption of the Plan were for politicians to do. This was a long process, so it would be beneficial for Members to consider the whole document now, in order that full scrutiny could be undertaken.

The Team Leader (Generic Planning) gave a presentation, a copy of which had been circulated with the agenda papers. During the presentation, he drew particular attention to the following points:

- A response to the Government’s White Paper “Planning for the Future” was being prepared for submission at the end of the month. Proposed changes included growth / renewal / protection designations; removing the duty to co-operate; local design codes and national development policies; and new housing methodology. New use classes and Permitted Development Rights also needed to be considered;
- The City Council currently worked with neighbouring district councils on meeting housing need, as the City Council was the only one of these authorities with unmet housing need, and would continue to do so. However, it was noted that the level of this need could change due to Government methodology changes and as sites became available or were no longer available. In addition, the City Council had participated in Examinations of neighbouring districts’ Local Plans, in order to ensure that sufficient provision for the city’s unmet housing need was included in those Plans;
- The Council also had unmet employment need and needed to co-operate with neighbouring authorities over cross-boundary issues such as transport and other infrastructure;

- Despite the proposals contained in the White Paper, the Government wanted local authorities to proceed with Local Plans;
- The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) had been revised due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The revised SCI made more provision for online participation and set out how people could participate in the consultation if they did not have access to the internet;
- As part of the process of developing the Draft Local Plan, a 'call for sites' exercise had been carried out, to invite sites to come forward for development;
- The allocations for housing, employment and schools were draft. Proposed allocations were likely to change as the Plan progressed;
- The significant impact of changes in use classes recently implemented would be considered, particularly in relation to the central development area and other employment areas, as big changes to retail and employment policy would be required;
- It was recognised that there would be some difficult decisions to take in achieving a balance between housing, employment and public open space. However, where developments did not accommodate the provision of public open space, use was made of financial contributions from developers towards this provision in adjoining areas;
- Promotion of walking, cycling and sustainable transport would include links to areas outside the city boundary;
- Policies in the Government's White Paper on climate change currently were unclear. Notwithstanding this, it is recognised that the policies in the Draft local Plan needed to be updated and work was being commissioned to look at this issue. The Strategy and Action Plan developed in response to this Council's declared Climate Emergency therefore would need to be considered in the next Draft Local Plan; and
- A new focus for the Draft Local Plan was addressing public health and wellbeing, with this theme running throughout the Plan. It also was proposed to assess the public health impacts of developments over a certain size.

The Head of Planning then shared information on the main themes identified for discussion within the Draft Local Plan. Details of this are attached at the end of these minutes for information.

The Commission scrutinised the Draft Local Plan, commenting as follows:

- How much of the city's identified unmet housing need would be provided by private developers and how much by the City Council?

Response from the Head of Planning:

It was intended that the Local Plan would promote both private developments and Council-led partnership developments. However, the Plan would not dictate which type of development would be expected to be implemented on which development site. If developments were pursued by private developers, policies and standards for affordable housing were applicable.

- Members previously had indicated that they would like to see a thread running through the Local Plan recognising the importance of accessibility, so that people were able to physically access accommodation.

Response from the Head of Planning:

The Housing Demand report included statistics to evidence new accessibility policies to be included in the next Draft Local Plan.

- Conversion of family homes to House in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) could lead to an area having a significant transient population. A policy of not permitting the conversion of family homes in to flats also could mean that they became HMOs instead. Stronger reference in the Draft Local Plan to protecting family homes therefore was requested.

Response from the Team Leader (Generic Planning):

Responses to policies in the Draft Plan relating to HMOs were being sought through consultation on the Draft Local Plan. These responses would help determine if restrictions in areas containing HMOs and/or policies needed to be changed.

Response from the Head of Planning:

The government considered HMOs to be a key part of housing supply. The Council's policy on HMOs would need to take into account the evidence from the Housing Needs survey.

- One of the strategic development sites identified in the Draft Local Plan was land at Leicester General Hospital. Some concern as expressed that projected increases in population levels suggested that the demand for health services would increase and other hospital sites in the city were constrained. Proposals for the development of the site at the General Hospital currently were being consulted on by the health authorities, so its inclusion in the list of strategic sites appeared to be premature.

Response from the Team Leader (Generic Planning):

A call for sites exercise had been undertaken as part of the preparation of the Draft Local Plan and this site had been put forward by the health authorities. As part of the process, Council officers needed to determine if the site was available and deliverable. Officers would need to engage with the Health Trust as to its detailed intentions for the site.

A Housing Needs study had been prepared in tandem with the Draft Local Plan and was being consulted on alongside the Draft Local Plan. The findings of this Study would be used to inform the next Local Plan draft.

Response from the Director of Planning, Development & Transportation:

An important part of developing a Local Plan was to discuss proposals such as this with other service providers, in order to help identify what the future would look like, (for example, in terms of population growth). This could help influence those providers' decisions, as well as inform the Local Plan.

- Some areas already being developed, such as Ashton Green, had almost no public transport serving them. How quickly would it be possible to establish services to these areas, or at least provide feeder services to join up with existing bus routes?

Response from the Director of Planning, Development & Transportation:

Ashton Green was a large development site of up to 3,000 dwellings, with additional housing proposed through the Draft Local Plan. Development on this scale needed appropriate infrastructure and the early phases of the development had included dedicated cycle way provision.

Discussions were being held with bus companies to identify what services could be provided to the area and how this could be done, (for example, whether existing commercial services should be extended to Ashton Green), but enough people needed to have moved in to the development for services to be commercially viable.

In addition, finance was available from the Transforming Cities funding for a new Park and Ride terminal at nearby Beaumont Leys shopping centre.

- How would increases in traffic arising from new developments be managed?

Response from the Director of Planning, Development & Transportation:

Transport was recognised an important part of managing the future growth of the city and a Transport Strategy was being developed. This also was embedded in work undertaken as part of the Transforming Leicester programme over recent years.

Through this, encouragement was given to those who could do so to walk and cycle in the city, or use buses, by providing the relevant infrastructure. For example, a "hub and spoke" approach was being used to enable travel in and out of the city, as well as around local

areas, including opportunities to develop infrastructure for cycling and walking.

Both the Local Plan and the forthcoming Local Transport Plan would provide details of how this would be achieved.

- Had any consideration been given to preserving the track beds of lost tram and/or rail networks, or using them to expand the public transport system? Expansion possibly could include electrification of the system, which currently did not receive much attention in the Draft Local Plan. This also could include protecting and/or expanding the rail system.

Response from the Director of Planning, Development & Transportation:

Through discussions on the Local Transport Plan to be held early in 2021, the Council would be asking to hear people's thoughts on the best way to move people around the city.

Some of the redundant track bed of the Great Central Railway now formed the Great Central Way and was very effectively used, (although this did not necessarily preclude it reverting to something similar to its original use). To the north of the city, much of the line had been built over. Officers were aware of a short undeveloped section in private ownership that could be used for walking and/or cycling.

There currently was a freight rail line running to Coalville and Burton on Trent, for which options could be considered for mass transit.

A number of options were available for developing bus use and services, including electrification, but any future developments were likely to include a mixture of options. Suggestions on the future development of bus provision were welcome.

- If the current Covid-19 pandemic continued for any length of time, many more people would be working from home. This needed to be taken in to account when considering how much of the proposed 45,000m² of office space would be needed.
- Was dense development appropriate?

Response from the Director of Planning, Development & Transportation:

Most of the employment land allocation was in the Central Development Area. Dense development there could be appropriate, to enable people living centrally in the city to seek opportunities for employment in that locality. Land for employment development therefore needed to be identified, although a balance needed to be found between dense residential development and providing land for employment uses. The impact of Class E also needed to be considered.

- Was the Council afraid to allow tall buildings?

Response from the Head of Planning:

The Council was not afraid to allow tall buildings, but wanted to be able to ensure that they were in the right place and well designed.

- How could it be ensured that tall buildings, out of keeping with the area in which they stood, were not allowed in areas of predominantly residential housing?

Response from the Team Leader (Generic Planning):

A lot of design work had been done in the Central Development Area to determine the best places for higher density building types, (for example, areas around the station and Mansfield Street).

There also was a tall building policy in the Draft Plan. Tall buildings needed to be looked at in the context of the surrounding area, including design and massing. Proposals needed to be considered on a case by case basis.

- Why was there no reference in the Draft Local Plan to derelict factory buildings, such as those on Woodgate, or near St Margaret's Bus Station?

Response from the Director of Planning, Development & Transportation:

A very comprehensive programme of development had been undertaken in the Waterside area, driven by sites identified in the previous Local Plan. The Draft Local Plan included policies for the redevelopment of this type of area, which included having different types of employment units, (for example, some high grade, but also some smaller industrial units), plus some housing use.

Response from the Head of Planning:

Flood risk assessments also looked at issues facing constrained sites.

The narrative in the Draft Local Plan could be reworded to make the position outlined in the responses to this question clearer.

- The Draft Local Plan should refer more explicitly to the need to create local jobs, particularly in the green economy.
- More emphasis should be given in the Draft Local Plan to providing support for small businesses, particularly to enable those businesses to become established and grow. Many businesses in this position could not afford premises costs, so one possibility could be to provide appropriate premises at cost, or below market rate. Could the Council acquire premises specifically for this purpose? The Council also could link with other organisations to provide support, such as the start-up forum co-ordinated by De Montfort University.

Response from the Head of Planning:

Although an interesting idea, investment decisions of this nature were not a matter for the Local Plan, although its policies would hopefully support the potential for opportunities created through such investment.

This suggestion could be passed on to relevant officers for consideration.

Response from the Director of Planning, Development & Transportation:

The Council had a history of providing what the market was not able to provide for this type of business use. This sort of investment could also help in the diversification of areas, (for example, where premises were no longer needed for retail purposes).

- How had the proposed locations for new schools been identified? The new schools identified in the Draft Local Plan did not appear to be located in the areas in which housing development was anticipated.

Response from the Team Leader (Generic Planning):

Work on identifying future locations was undertaken in consultation with officers from Education services. Without these additional schools, there would not be enough secondary places over the next few years across the city as a whole, regardless of future housing developments. The relatively central locations of some proposed meant they could offer places to residents from various parts of the city, thus reducing the number of children who would have to travel large distances to school. The new allocation at Ashton Green East was well located for supporting new development impacts. Officers would continue to work with Education colleagues on school provision as they progressed with the Plan.

- Was it planned to deliver any of the additional schools identified in the Draft Local Plan in partnership with any academies?

Response from the Head of Planning:

All of the proposed sites would be brought forward by academies / free schools. The government and the academies were responsible for ensuring that the funding required was available and that proposals were deliverable.

- Further information was requested on the reference in the conclusions in the Draft Local Plan to guidance on the location of betting shops and other gambling establishments being withdrawn. It would be preferable for this guidance to be retained, due to the social problems caused when the numbers of these establishments increased in particular areas.

Response from the Team Leader (Generic Planning):

Evidence needed to support policies, but with the move to on-line

gambling no applications for new betting shops had been received in the last few years. The policy on concentrations of such premises in one area had not been included in the Draft Plan on this basis.

- Concern was expressed that consultation on the Draft Local Plan was proceeding during a period of time when the city was under restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Anyone without access to the internet therefore appeared to be prevented from participating in the consultation. This was particularly important in view of the importance of green spaces to people, as the Draft Local Plan appeared to be indicating that many of those spaces would be irrevocably lost. Current circumstances showed the need for these green spaces and that they should not be destroyed. The current proposals in the Draft Local Plan could be amended to encourage building upwards, rather than outwards, to help maintain existing green spaces.

Response from the City Mayor:

It was vital that a good Local Plan was produced that recognised the importance of green spaces in the city. All parts of the city were once green field sites, but ending all development in the city would not enable those currently needing housing to find homes. Both housing and green spaces therefore needed to be provided.

Response from the Team Leader (Generic Planning):

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government was asking planning authorities to continue preparing their Local Plans and to undertake consultation on these.

Although a lot of the consultation would be undertaken through the internet, bespoke arrangements were available for those who could not access the web. For example, telephone conversations were held in which the caller could be talked through the Draft Local Plan; paper copies of the questionnaires were available in the Council's libraries, with pre-paid envelopes available in which to send responses; or relevant parts of the Draft Local Plan could be posted on request to interested parties, along with reply-paid envelopes for responses.

- The Draft Local Plan did not contain specific reference to what green space could be lost through developments. The Plan also should explain how remaining green space would be enhanced and protected.

Response from the Head of Planning:

The increasing population was leading to an increase in demand on green spaces, so the Council needed to assess and make best use of open spaces as far as possible. This included making the best use possible of financial contributions from developers (Section 106 contributions) to fund both formal and informal play spaces.

- Further information was requested on the SCI.

Response from the Team Leader (Generic Planning):

It was a legal requirement that a SCI be produced, as it set out how the Council would consult on the Draft Local Plan, including how those without access to the internet would be reached.

Restrictions on access to public buildings introduced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic made it difficult to provide the access that usually would be available, but if paper documents were not available when needed, officers were happy to talk through issues by telephone.

Leaflets regarding the public consultation had been sent to all households and businesses in the city and the wider Leicester area.

- How had places of worship been identified for inclusion in the consultation process?

Response from the Team Leader (Generic Planning):

A database of all interested parties was maintained, which included some places of worship. Information on which places of worship had been consulted could be provided to Councillors on request.

- As it was possible that the provisions of the Government White Paper would not become law for possibly 24 months and the Local Plan was due to be adopted in approximately 18 months' time, the opportunity should be taken to adopt the Plan and secure the Council's position before the changes proposed in the White Paper were introduced.
- As a second consultation on the Draft Local Plan was scheduled to be undertaken in the autumn of 2021, would responses to that consultation go forward to be considered at the independent examination stage by a Planning Inspector? Would anyone who did not respond to the current consultation be excluded from responding to the autumn 2021 consultation? If they would not be excluded, it could be better to defer from commenting at this stage and just comment in autumn 2021.

Response from the Head of Planning:

It would be better not to delay responding, as the next consultation would be on the Submission Plan, which was almost the final version. The documents submitted to the Planning Inspector for examination would include a summary of all comments made at all stages of the development of the Local Plan. The current consultation was very important, as it was an opportunity to influence what should be included in the Submission Draft local Plan.

- Concern was expressed that the provisions of the White Paper could lead to uncontrollable development, including the loss of green space, with its accompanying health and wellbeing implications.

Response from the Head of Planning:

It was recognised that there was a danger that the designation introduced under the White Paper of development as being "for

growth”, and therefore not requiring planning permission, could lead to a loss of transparency.

The White Paper also vaguely defined concepts such as “gentle” densification or intensification in renewal zones, but no clear definition was available on what was meant by this.

A Government Minister recently had indicated that the introduction of these changes could take a number of years, due to the scale of the changes proposed under the White Paper. Preparing a Local Plan as soon as possible therefore gave authorities more certainty about how areas could be developed.

Members were reminded that, as Councillors, they were in a position to let organisations, groups and individuals in the wards they represented know about the arrangements for public consultation on the Draft Local Plan.

It was suggested that any Members wishing to make individual representations as part of the public consultation on the Draft Local Plan make a written submission, as this would then be formally recorded and responded to.

The City Mayor thanked all members of the Commission for a wide-ranging and helpful discussion.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation be asked to forward the suggestion of establishing start-up and business development premises to relevant officers for consideration; and
- 2) That the Director of Planning, Development and Transportation be asked to accept the comments recorded above as this Commission’s response to the public consultation on the Draft Leicester Local Plan (2020 – 2036).

94. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 6.07 pm

Themes for Discussion

- **Government's new Planning Agenda**
 - Recent changes to use class order and permitted development rights
 - Planning for the Future White paper
 - Possible new Housing target formula and implications for working with the districts
- **Environment and Climate**
 - Climate Emergency
 - Environment and Open space
 - Energy
 - Transport
 - Green jobs
- **Proposed Site allocations**
 - Strategic sites - General Hospital, schools,
 - Non-Strategic sites/ward issues
- **Retail, Leisure and Employment**
 - Future of city centre
 - Offices
 - Implications of the Government's new Class E: combining retail leisure and business use classes
- **Housing**
 - Space standards
 - Accessibility
 - Affordability and delivery of council houses
 - Local issues: HMOs, Article 4 Directions
- **COVID and Arrangements for consultation**
 - Long term vs short term implications?
 - Making arrangements for inclusive engagement
- **Any Other Issues?**

