

PLANNING POLICY COMMITTEE

7 June 2022 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Bower (Chair), Hughes (Vice-Chair), Chapman, Coster, Edwards, Elkins, Goodheart, Jones, Lury, Thurston and Yeates

Councillors Bicknell and Gunner were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

47. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

48. MINUTES

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 January 2022 were approved by the Committee and signed by the Chair.

49. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA THAT THE CHAIR OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The Chair notified Members that there was to be a new consultation on the A27 looking specifically at the traffic in and around Walberton. This consultation was likely to occur before the Committee's next meeting on 27 July 2022 but at this stage there were no further details available to discuss at this meeting, and the Chair would therefore keep Members informed as to how they could make their comments and receive a response in due course.

50. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair confirmed that there had been no questions from the public submitted for this meeting.

51. START TIMES

It was proposed and seconded that the start time for the remaining meetings of Planning Policy Committee for 2022/23 be 6pm.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the start time of all remaining meetings of the Committee for 2022/23 would be 6pm.

52. ARUN LOCAL PLAN UPDATE - SIX MONTH REVIEW

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Planning Policy Team Leader presented the report which briefed Members on matters arising from national policy and whether a decision should be taken by the Committee to resume the Arun Local Plan update or continue the current pause, previous agreed by Committee and Full Council, until 2023. He explained that a Planning for the Future White Paper (and an emerging Planning Bill) signalled some significant changes to the format and process of preparing Local Plans and the concern with proceeding with the update was due to the timetable involved and the risk the Local Plan Update would not be fit for purpose by the time it was ready. He further explained that, six months on from the decision to pause, much had changed including a new Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Levelling Up White Paper having been published in February 2022 which signalled a move away from the aforementioned planning bill. He highlighted the four key themes of the Levelling Up white paper [on pages 10 and 11 of the Agenda Pack] and the change in emphasis on the role of planning, in that it was now more narrowly focused on making the best of the current system. He concluded that the above suggested to Officers that there was now no reason to delay and that the Local Plan Update should be resumed.

Members (and non-Committee Members invited to speak) then took part in a full debate on the item where a number of points were raised including:

- the understanding from Government that the housing numbers target, and as a consequence the 5-year housing land supply, would be removed and whether in resuming the update the housing numbers target would have to be looked at again when the Council came to exploring the evidence base
- that by this time next year the Local Plan would not be up-to-date unless the revising of it is started within 5 years and the implications for determining planning decisions in this situation, and, therefore given the long lead times involved in the process, the need to resume the Update
- the lack of a timeframe within the recommendation with regards further detail being made public by Government on the Levelling Up bill and the difficulties in reaching a decision without the context of that roadmap
- the impact to housing targets if the Plan was resumed
- the unachievability of housing targets when considering what developers had managed to deliver and the increases in building prices
- the impacts for policies, such as biodiversity net gain and water conversation, and the consequences for future housing developments if the Plan was not updated with the most up-to-date evidence and practices
- the issues caused by 'planning by appeal' in areas outside of those identified for development and whether any assurance could be gained for residents that the Update and its evidence base would offer some level of protection against this
- a review of the local plan not reducing the number of houses already committed to in the current Local Plan, and any Update most likely involving an increase rather than a decrease in that number

- the process of engaging residents within the Update to the Local Plan and the Statement of Community Involvement
- regret that the Update was delayed in part on the conjecture and guesswork of Committee and non-Committee Members rather than established facts
- any Update needing to be based on facts and reality, including around appropriate housing numbers and infrastructure capacity
- that Arun does not have a failing Local Plan, but that the current Local Plan was allowing the Council to be held to ransom by developers who were not building the approvals they already had and instead applied for more planning permissions which they knew would be overturned on appeal if refused by Committee
- the issue of the 5-year land supply and how it was being kept artificially low due to builders not building and whether as the Local Planning Authority there was more that we could be doing to make these happen
- the planning system being weighted towards developers
- concerns about supporting the resumption of the Update if it meant an increase in the housing numbers required
- the imposition of housing numbers by a Government not familiar with the local area
- whether the Local Plan had to be reviewed anyway as it had not been able to identify a 5-year housing land supply
- the need for the housing stock to be able to respond to the challenges of climate change now
- energy and food security issues, and the need for land use to be optimised
- whether energy saving and technological standards were part of the Local Plan or building codes
- the issue of affordable housing for local residents and the need for more affordable schemes run with Local Housing Associations

The Planning Policy Team Leader and Group Head of Planning provided Members with responses to all points raised during the debate, including:

- any Local Plan under the new system would still have to set out a housing requirement and that the Government's standard housing methodology would provide the starting point though housing numbers would ultimately be determined by the economic and sustainability ambitions and evidence of the Local Plan
- the proposal in the Levelling Up bill to remove the need to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply but that only relating to those Authorities with an up-to-date Local Plan
- the lack of detail from Government around timeframes within the Levelling Up bill and, due to the significant changes made of the previously proposed bill, a considerable amount of uncertainty for planning at the moment
- the need for a 15-year housing trajectory under the current rules if the Plan were resumed
- how getting a Local Plan adopted would offer protection against unsustainable, unwanted or 'by appeal' development, and that this would be for a longer period of time under the proposals in the Levelling Up bill

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- confirmation that within the Housing policy section of the Local Plan adopted in 2018 there was a requirement to ensure delivery of housing numbers over 2 years and that failure to do so was a trigger to review the Plan, which was completed in 2019 and led to Full Council's resolution to update the Local Plan
- that different standards for energy consumption etc could come under the Local Plan if the appropriate evidence was obtained and the Council was able to convince an Inspector that it was viable to impose different standards
- that whilst the Local Plan may be unattractive to Members for political reasons, Officers believed the benefits of preparing one outweighed these reasons
- that the details around housing numbers were a discussion for a later date and were not a reason to stop the recommencing of the progress as they were simply not knowable, beyond an indication, at this stage
- that if the Council chose not to pursue a Local Plan Update that did not mean it would not necessarily end up with one as Government could impose one which it might find less favourable, and the decision to not resume might ultimately take power away from the Council

Following the debate, a request was been made that the voting on the recommendation be recorded. The recommendation was then proposed by Councillor Thurston and seconded by Councillor Coster.

Those voting for the recommendation were Councillors Coster, Goodheart, Jones, Lury, Thurston and Yeates [6]. There were no votes against and Councillors Bower, Chapman, Edwards, Elkins and Hughes abstained from voting [5].

The Committee

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL

That the Arun Local Plan update be resumed.

53. ARUN INFRASTRUCTURE TOPIC PAPERS - A27 JUNCTION IMPROVEMENTS; WASTEWATER CAPACITY; WATER NEUTRALITY; HOUSING MARKET ABSORPTION

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Planning Policy Team Leader presented the report which provided a progress update on the emergent infrastructure issues affecting plan making under the 'Duty to Cooperate', to be addressed as part of the preparatory work to inform Arun's Local Plan update, when this resumed. It was confirmed that the Housing Market Absorption Study was no longer part of this report and would not be brought to this meeting. He highlighted:

- the ongoing work involved in the Duty to Cooperate with Chichester District Council given Chichester's changed approach and potential impacts to infrastructure and housing number requirements
- continuing talks with Southern Water about wastewater capacity

- establishing communication with Natural England and the Environment Agency about water and nutrient neutrality
- non-strategic development infrastructure, accumulative impact and its role in traffic mitigation
- for the Local Plan update, that the topic papers where appropriate become Statements of Common Ground, to set out clearly with our infrastructure partners and Local Authority neighbours, what we do and do not agree with and where any evidence gaps are, and these then can be used at examination to support the Plan in cases of dispute.

Members (and non-Committee Members invited to speak) then took part in a full debate on the item where a number of points were raised including:

- the 'Duty to Cooperate' not being in the Levelling Up bill but common sense to discuss these matters with our neighbours. The closed Oving crossing on the A27 was given as an example of the impacts on traffic and infrastructure across wider areas
- concerns over the actions of Southern Water on water neutrality in exporting water outside of the District, the 'Duty to Cooperate' being paramount and the need for assurances that Arun fully understands Southern Water's forward capital programme and that it supports the Council's endeavours
- the extended timescales of many third party providers and the challenges in delivering multi-party projects
- recognition of the current work involved with achieving water and nutrient neutrality and what still needed to be done (removing rainwater from the sewage system, technological improvements into new housing, water efficiency and the Water Cycle Study, nutrient neutrality in Pagham)
- the need to engage with Portsmouth Water seeking clarification and resolution of their self-confessed network capacity issues
- Pagham Harbour and the need for nutrient assessment in order to work towards achieving nutrient neutrality
- the difficulty of getting a meeting with Natural England regarding nutrient neutrality
- surface water penetration into the sewage system being an issue particularly for older properties and reducing the amount of older housing stock as a solution to this infringement

The Planning Policy Team Leader and Group Head of Planning provided Members with responses to all points raised during the debate, including:

- Officers having been engaged with Southern Water for the last year on their strategic 25-year drainage and wastewater management plan, of which a draft version would shortly be open to consultation. It was hoped that a consultation response could be reported to the next Committee meeting on 27 July 2022
- explanation that a Water Cycle Study would look at the building regulations needed to achieve the efficiency standard of 110 litres per person per day, and what consequences might follow any breaches to the Water Framework Directive on water quality and abstraction

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- there were indications that Natural England had started work on Pagham Harbour in terms of trying to work out what gaps in information they had regarding the quality issues, but that due to the timescales involved the Council expected not to hear anything further until next year
- the securing of a meeting with Natural England was ongoing

The recommendations were then proposed by Councillor Bower and seconded by Councillor Hughes.

The Committee

RESOLVED – To

1. Consider the progress made and outstanding matters in relation to the infrastructure topics;
2. Agree that officers continue to engage with providers on clarifying issues and to identify potential solutions via drafting Statements of Common Ground, which will support consultation responses to plan making authorities and infrastructure providers and help to identify the resources needed to ensure that necessary evidence (e.g., water neutrality) is procured to support Arun's Local Plan update (when it resumes) under the 'Duty to Cooperate'.

54. ARUN HOUSING DELIVERY TEST RESULT 2021

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Planning Policy Team Leader presented the report which briefed the Committee on the annual Housing Delivery Test result for November 2021 which was published by Government on 14 January 2022. It was the national indicator on housing delivery and compared the previous three years' housing delivery to the housing requirement over the same period.

Members then took part in a full debate on the item where a number of points were raised and responded to by the Planning Policy Team Leader, including:

- being pleased to hear that a consultant was being taken on to look at outstanding planning permissions with the aim of moving them along the system
- the impact of the 20% buffer in delivering the revised housing numbers

The Committee noted the report.

55. ARUN LOCAL PLAN UPDATE - TOURISM HOSPITALITY AND VISITOR ECONOMY STUDY

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Planning Policy Team Leader presented the report which provided a summary of a review undertaken into Arun's visitor economy. The study sought to provide a review of the provision of tourism infrastructure across

the Arun District planning area alongside an assessment of future demand, including how the sector might grow and the spatial implications of this growth in supporting emerging planning policy in the new Local Plan. He highlighted the findings of a study done on the tourism and visitor accommodation sector and its importance to the local economy, with the District receiving 4 million visitors and direct spend of £221 million supporting over 4,000 full-time equivalent jobs.

Members then took part in a full debate on the item where a number of points were raised including:

- the rise in the number of AirBNB accommodation in the area, especially in Arundel
- the impact of the District's demographics on the accommodation requirements of visitors
- the lack of mentioning significant stakeholders in the report (the Town Councils, the Regeneration Board, Bognor Regis BID) who are coming together to support regeneration across the District
- Bognor Regis having needed a mid-range mid-priced hotel for a long time
- support for appropriate AirBNB accommodation in the area as it was what people wanted
- an increase in the Leisure and Hotel sector resulting in a corresponding increase in jobs whilst unemployment in the area was significantly below the national average, and the need to coordinate to ensure a labour supply (with the past experience of Butlins having to accommodate additional staff in order to expand given as an example)
- the need to reinvigorate relations with Northbrook College which offered a range of Leisure and Hotel sector courses
- previous difficulties in attracting hotels to the area and whether a specific allocation of a budget could be used to help facilitate interested parties
- concern for holiday accommodation development in the countryside and a preferred focus on town development
- the need to support the delivery of good quality events with good quality accommodation and associated infrastructure (for example, park and ride)
- the need to consider different types of people and the different types of experiences they may be seeking
- support for smaller developments that could be countryside-based (e.g. camping, glamping)
- the need for any development to take onboard Arun's key theme of sustainability
- from a planning perspective, the lack of hotels in the area could be telling us something about the market and the need to know more about the expected demand and what needed to be catered for before decisions on what and where could be made
- a clear indication that the Council was seeking to support tourism across the District

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Following further discussion Cllr Thurston proposed an amendment, that 'sustainable' be added to recommendation 2 before 'tourist accommodation development' so that the recommendation would read:

2. The Council take a 'pro-active' approach (as set out in section 1.7 bullet 4) to bring forward sustainable tourist accommodation development through working with stakeholders to identify suitable sites opportunities, including examining the Council's own estate;

This was seconded by Cllr Jones. The amendment was then debated by Members where a number of points were raised including:

- defining 'sustainability' in the ecological sense as defined by the Council's greener initiatives and carbon pledges, rather than financial sustainability, and businesses willing to work in that way
- problems with narrowing the definition of 'sustainable' and limiting or excluding other things that might also be necessary to a business' sustainability

Following a vote, the amendment was NOT CARRIED.

The substantive recommendations were then proposed by Councillor Bower and seconded by Councillor Hughes.

The Committee

RESOLVED – That

1. The Tourism Hospitality & Visitor Economy Study form part of the evidence base for the Local Plan Update and be published on the Council's evidence web pages;
2. The Council take a 'pro active' approach (as set out in section 1.7 bullet 4) to bring forward tourist accommodation development through working with stakeholders to identify suitable sites opportunities, including examining the Council's own estate;
3. The Council support the future provision of a new large scale holiday site either through an allocation in the Local Plan Update, or through the use of an appropriately worded policy;
4. The Council support policies within the Local Plan update that encourage the forms and range of hotel and visitor accommodation identified under section 1.10 of this report;
5. The Study be referred to the Economy Committee to consider and agree appropriate economic recommendations.

56. BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN STUDY - UPDATE

The Chair confirmed that this item was now withdrawn and had been deferred to the next meeting of the Committee on 27 July 2022. The Chair explained that it was deferred because there was a need to check the cross boundary implications of the study with neighbouring authorities and stakeholders before the item could be properly considered. In addition, there were some recent initiatives on nature recovery projects that related to Arun that were not yet reflected in the study and it was considered that these would be helpful for inclusion.

57. OUTSIDE BODIES

The Committee noted one report from Councillor Thurston on the South Downs National Park Authority.

58. WORK PROGRAMME

The Planning Policy Team Leader noted that Southern Water's Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan consultation started in June and a consultation response might need to be added to the Work Programme. He also confirmed that work relating to the Local Plan update timetable via the Local Development Scheme (LDS) would be coming to the next meeting. One Member suggested the inclusion of a seminar for Members on the issues of sustainability.

The Committee then noted the Work Programme.

(The meeting concluded at 8.15 pm)