

# SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

## Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

### Meeting held 19 January 2021

(NOTE: This meeting was held as a remote meeting in accordance with the provisions of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.)

**PRESENT:** Councillors Denise Fox (Chair), Ian Auckland (Deputy Chair), Neale Gibson, Dianne Hurst, Alan Hooper, Abdul Khayum, Mohammed Mahroof, Barbara Masters, Ben Miskell, Moya O'Rourke, Sioned-Mair Richards, Chris Rosling-Josephs, Martin Smith and Paul Turpin

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#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Bryan Lodge.

#### **2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

#### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

3.1 In relation to item 7 on the agenda (Sheffield Local Plan), Councillor Ben Miskell declared a personal interest as Cabinet Adviser for Business and Investment.

#### **4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

4.1 The minutes of meetings of the Committee held on 27th November and 15th December 2020, were approved as correct records.

#### **5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

5.1 Brian Holmshaw raised the following question - In one recent local planning application, 'substandard living conditions' were not considered to be grounds for refusal. In another application for 'student residential accommodation', the developer defended tiny room sizes as not being intended for 'long-term student occupation'. This is not acceptable for the wellbeing of current or future residents. Why have Sheffield City Council never put minimum space standards for housing in place and are they going to do it now?

5.2 In response, Simon Vincent (Service Manager, Strategic Planning) stated that the Government had introduced nationally prescribed space standards in 2015, which were to replace all locally set standards, but in order to apply these nationally set standards, local authorities would have to have a local plan. Therefore, until the new Local Plan had been formally adopted, the Council was unable to apply the nationally set standards until that time. The nationally set standards were available for inspection on the Government website.

## **6. UPDATE ON THE SHEFFIELD PLAN**

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Interim Executive Director, Place, providing an update on progress in preparing the Sheffield Plan (the City's new statutory Local Plan).

6.2 Present for this item were Councillor Julie Grocutt (Cabinet Member for Transport and Development), Colin Walker (Interim Head of Planning) and Simon Vincent (Service Manager, Strategic Planning).

6.3 Colin Walker introduced the report, providing a background on the production of the Sheffield Plan, which had commenced in 2015, and referred to the timetable and process, the issues and options, consultation and the responses received as part of the consultation, details of which were both appended to the report. Mr Walker stated that considerable progress had been made in connection with the Plan since 2015, which had included simplifying both the document, following comments from Council Members and partners, and the process, by taking advice and guidance from the Government. The new Plan would be informed by a Central Area Residential Strategy, that would provide a framework for accelerating delivery of sustainable residential growth across the city centre and surrounding areas.

6.4 Simon Vincent reported that officers were currently processing the comments received as part of the issues and options consultation. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the consultation had been run wholly online, with a number of effective sessions being held with various groups and organisations, and that the Council had received 575 comments. In terms of timescales, he reported that it was hoped that a draft Plan would be submitted to the Cabinet in September 2021, then Full Council shortly after, for final approval.

6.5 Members of the Committee raised questions, and the following responses were provided:-

- The issue of a shortage of housing, particularly affordable housing, was a national issue. Compared with other areas in

the United Kingdom, Sheffield had a reasonably good record in terms of housing delivery. The Council had done the best it could particularly to working within the numerous Government restraints, and would often have to deal with challenges from developers regarding the provision of affordable homes. The Council would look to be more innovative in terms of requiring developers to provide more affordable housing, whilst working within existing Council policy and Government restraints.

- The Council planned to work more closely with partners and investors in looking at residential developments on a range of sites in the city, particularly with regard to freeing up those sites that had been approved for development, but where development had not yet commenced. The Council was aware that there were a number of such sites in the City that needed such intervention. The plan was to talk to potential investors, such as Homes England, on this issue.
- Details of the number of planning applications currently in the system, where permission had been granted, but where development had not yet commenced, would be forwarded to Members.
- Compulsory Purchase Orders and land-banking tended to occur more in suburban sites in the city, and not within the city centre area. A number of developers would acquire development sites, then control supply over a period of time, so as not to increase supply, which would affect the price. Land-banking was a national issue, and the Council was aware of a number of sites where development could be brought forward, although the processes for doing this were very difficult. The Council would continue to work closely with developers and landowners on this issue.
- Sheffield's rate of development in terms of new build was not particularly lower than in other comparable cities in the UK, apart from the South and South East. Whilst the 10 years and nature of other schemes may differ, Sheffield was not behind in terms of completion dates. The Council had actually achieved 110% of the Government's target for residential development over the last three years and 95% of units built over the last 10 years had been on brownfield sites.
- The Council had identified the fact that there was a high proportion of residential units for students in the city, and was looking to address this, both through the Local Plan, the Central Area Residential Strategy, as well as under any possible interim strategy which starts to address the location and types of tenures before the final adoption of the Local

Plan.

- The policy regarding standards of residential units and spaces was very difficult to implement, maintain and enforce, but the Council would continue to work closely with developers to ensure that the size, standard and type of units were suitable. In order to encourage demand in terms of people wanting to live in the city centre area, the Council needed to ensure that such standards were suitable. Planning was a semi judicial process, governed by a number of very strict rules and legislation and, at any stage, decisions on applications and the process was open to legal challenge. The Council needed to be very mindful that it was following due process at every stage. Officers had been asked to provide a report specifically on the process and progress regarding the Local Plan, and not on the merits of the options set out in the report.
- The process regarding local plans was lengthy and complex, and had been designed this way to ensure that it encompassed a number of public consultation stages. Every effort had been made to streamline the process where possible, but this would still mean that the Plan would not be formally adopted until 2023. It was proposed that the draft Plan would be submitted to the Cabinet in September 2021, and would give a very clear indication to the investment market, as well as to Sheffield residents, as to what the Plan would look like. As the Plan progressed further, it would gather further weight, and could start to be used to make decisions, meaning that the Council would not have to wait until the final adoption stage in 2023.
- Officers had worked very closely with colleagues in Central Government in presenting a clear view that the Council had a process which was in place, working effectively, and on track to be delivered on time. It was believed that the Council had a good relationship with the Government on the planning side, and that the Government was reasonably confident in the Council. It was hoped that this confidence would be reflected by Government agencies, such as Homes England, investing in the Council in connection with the future delivery of key development sites in the city.
- Until the Local Plan was finally adopted, there would always be a risk of challenge to both planning applications and the Local Plan process, thus highlighting the need for the Council to be very mindful as to how it dealt with the process. The Council regularly took legal advice and counsel advice in this regard, at the appropriate stages of the process. The Council could look at using interim policies and/or supplementary

planning documents. Whilst there was still a lack of clarity in terms of the contents of the Government's white paper, it was envisaged that there would be substantial changes to the planning process in the future. The Council was in a position where it could be flexible in terms of dealing with any changes set out in the white paper. It was expected that, as and when the Government introduced the new reforms, it would introduce some transitional arrangements for those local authorities which had reached, or was close to reaching, the point at which the Local Plan was to be submitted to the Government for public examination.

- There had been two calls for sites undertaken, in 2014 and 2019, and whilst the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) had not been updated to include the 2014 sites, it now included the sites put forward in 2019. It was proposed that an updated HELAA would be published later in 2021, which would include all sites put forward.
- The planning process, through the relevant guidance provided within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), requires that the Council takes account of climate change in each planning application. Policy formulation was a key consideration for the Local Plan, which formed a key part of all the Council's options and choices in moving forward with the Local Plan. That would be a range of different measures and solutions depending on the nature of the development, with schemes on brownfield sites in the city centre area being more sustainable in terms of carbon footprint. The issue of climate change was being considered by all Council Services, as well as the Council's external partners, who were all required to operate within specific guidelines regarding carbon reduction requirements.
- As an example as to how the Council took climate change into account, as part of the planning process, using a development of 100 homes, an assessment would be undertaken as to whether the development was on a brownfield or greenfield site, with brownfield obviously being more favourable. The Council would also look at a number of other issues, including accessibility to transport, shops and other facilities, such as GP surgeries and education. In some cases, the Council would enter into negotiations with developers regarding a commuted sum in terms of the number of the likely increase in expected car journeys to and from the site, or a contribution towards the cost of public transport. The Council could only operate within existing legislation, meaning that, at the present time, it would be very difficult for the Council to be more punitive on developers in

terms of recouping some of the carbon costs. With regard to the impact of some building materials, officers believed that the Government could have gone much further in terms of requiring developers to comply to much stricter guidelines regarding carbon reduction/insulation.

- There was currently no process for measuring the total carbon cost of every development against a set of carbon reduction criteria. Whilst the Council tried to address the issue around supporting more carbon efficient developments, it did not measure or record information such as travel times to and from development sites. It was not likely that many local authorities would do this, but this was something the Council could look at in the future.
- There were currently around 15,000 homes within the city centre area.
- Now the Council was still at the options stage of the Local Plan process, there were no details as to the exact numbers of new homes proposed in the city centre area. Whilst there had been considerable preparatory work undertaken, the Council was still not in a position to confirm proposals in terms of such numbers. If the Council chose the option of providing 20,000 new homes in this area over the next 20 years, this would represent a major challenge, part of which would be having to ensure that there was a good offer in terms of the types of units, as well as ensuring that there were attractive areas and spaces in between such homes. The safety, accessibility and usability of such spaces would be very important to residents. There were plans to develop more definable neighbourhoods in the city centre area. The work undertaken under the Grey to Green Project within the city centre area had helped to enhance the appearance and character of the area, making it a more attractive place to live, and it was hoped that such work could be expanded on.
- The Council could set space standards if it chose to do so, but such standards would have to meet the current Government criteria.
- Employment land formed a very important aspect of the Local Plan in ensuring that sites continued to be available. There were a specific number of sites which, had not been included in the old Plan, but did feature in the new Plan. The city needed around 8-10 hectares of employment land a year, and the latest review had indicated that there was a 12/13 year supply of employment land currently identified. Additional sites would come forward through “churn” of land within

existing employment areas. The Council was confident that it could demonstrate sufficient employment land to the end of the Local Plan, in 2038. The Council was in discussion with neighbouring local authorities as to whether there were certain types of use, such as warehouses or distribution centres, which may be more appropriately provided within such neighbouring districts. Some areas were better located in terms of transport networks, as well as being more suitable for specific types of use.

- The Council was in line with other local authorities with regard to the timescales involved, and costs incurred, in the development of the Local Plan. Some local authorities had decided to pause development of their Plans in the light of the emerging Government legislation. It was appreciated that it had taken some time, but it had been considered that the work undertaken over the last few years had not been reflective of the changing circumstances in terms of changes in the housing market, as well as the Council being mindful of the emerging changes from the Government. Considerable progress had been made in terms of where the Council was two years ago, and it was believed that the Council was in a much stronger position to be able to produce a Plan which provided a confident, strategic and spatial vision for the city, and which had the potential to lever in billions of pounds of investment over the next 10 to 20 years.
- The Covid-19 pandemic had presented major issues for all Council staff and had resulted in delays in the development of the Local Plan. There were clear timescales set out in the report regarding the development of the Plan, and the Cabinet Member for Transport and Development, working with colleagues and officers, would make every effort to ensure that the Plan was delivered within these timescales, as well as ensuring that it meets the expectations of the public.
- Officers believed the city centre was a vibrant place to live, but the Council needed to do more to make the area an even more accessible, attractive and safer place to live. There was a need to influence demand so that more people would come to live in the area. More work was required in order to create more neighbourhoods within the city centre, by investing in key catalyst areas and sites. The Council was currently moving towards an over-arching strategy and strategic view that would connect all these various areas together, which would then hopefully attract further investment.
- There was a lack of clarity at the present time on the levels of re-purposing of existing buildings required in connection with

the target of providing 20,000 more homes in the city centre area. There was a mixture in terms of the quality of conversions to residential property in the city centre, so it was likely to be a mix of re-purposing and new development. The Council needed to work with developers to ensure that, within existing guidelines, new developments offered a degree of flexibility in terms of the reconfiguration of the internal layout.

- Officers worked very closely with colleagues at the Sheffield City Region, at all levels, and met with them on a regular basis to discuss progress on the respective local authorities' Local Plans and cross-boundary issues. The local authorities had published a statement of common ground, which set out a number of agreed positions on planning issues across the region. Sheffield would also have to produce a similar statement as part of producing the Local Plan, setting out details of any cross-boundary issues.
- There was little likelihood of the Government stepping in at the present time to take over the preparation of the Local Plan, as had been the case in the past. This had not yet happened in any local authorities' areas, although the Government had required a number of local authorities to produce action plans to show how they intended to progress their Local Plans. In 2019, the Government was very keen that the Council set up a Local Development Scheme, which had been completed in November 2019, and this had satisfied the Government in terms of the Council meeting its criteria. Officers were working very closely with the Planning Advisory Service (a body appointed by the Government to support local authorities on planning matters), and considered that the Council had a good working relationship with the Government's advisors.
- A considerable amount of work had been undertaken on the Central Area Residential Strategy, and the information regarding the evidential base for the development of the 20,000 new homes in the City Centre area was available on the Council website. A further piece of work would then be commissioned, in order to produce an investment prospectus, focusing on which sites could be identified for development, which would then produce a strategy for a specific area and would guide development.
- The Council, as with all other Councils in the UK, was constrained by strict planning legislation, and if it did not abide by such legislation, its Local Plan was likely to fail. Developers would look for every opportunity to challenge the process.



6.6 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the comments now made and the responses to the questions raised;
- (b) thanks Colin Walker, Simon Vincent and Councillor Julie Grocutt for attending the meeting and responding to the questions raised; and
- (c) requests the Interim Executive Director, Place, submits (i) a report to a meeting to be held in summer 2021, containing a further update on progress in preparing the Sheffield Plan and (ii) an update on the Central Area Residential Strategy.

(NOTE 1: The votes on the resolution were ordered to be recorded, and were as follows:-

For the resolution (9) - Councillors Denise Fox, Neale Gibson, Dianne Hurst, Abdul Khayum, Ben Miskell, Moya O'Rourke, Sioned-Mair Richards, Chris Rosling-Josephs and Paul Turpin

Against the resolution (5) - Councillors Ian Auckland, Alan Hooper, Mohammed Mahroof, Barbara Masters and Martin Smith.)

(NOTE 2: Prior to the passing of the above resolution, an amendment moved by Councillor Ian Auckland, and seconded by Councillor Martin Smith, to replace paragraphs (a) and (b) with the following, was put to the vote and negatived:-

- (a) notes the report now submitted, and thanks officers for their presentation;
- (b) requests officers to consider the issues raised together with the comments made and responses to questions at this meeting;
- (c) calls on Central Government to abandon those planning "reforms" set out in the White Paper 'Planning of the Future' which will effectively cut out local Councillors and communities from deciding many individual planning applications;
- (d) is concerned that the Council, as the local planning authority, may not have up to date policy in place to resist unwelcome developments or combat the climate

emergency;

- (e) condemns the slow rate of progress made in completing the 'Sheffield Plan' and the waste of resources implicit in this and is concerned about the possibility of Government intervention if the present timetable is not met; and
- (f) calls for officers to submit written bi-monthly progress reports to this Committee.)

(NOTE 3: The votes on the amendment were ordered to be recorded, and were as follows:-

For the amendment - Councillors Ian Auckland, Alan Hooper,  
(6) Mohammed Mahroof, Barbara Masters,  
Martin Smith and Paul Turpin

Against the - Councillors Denise Fox, Neale Gibson,  
amendment (8) Dianne Hurst, Abdul Khayum, Ben  
Miskell, Moya O'Rourke, Sioned-Mair  
Richards and Chris Rosling-Josephs.)

## **7. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21**

- 7.1 The Committee received and noted a report of the Policy and Improvement Officer (Deborah Glen) containing the draft Work Programme for 2020/21.
- 7.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes and agrees the draft Work Programme for 2020/21 now submitted.

## **8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 8.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Tuesday, 23rd February 2021, at 4 30 pm.