

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Climate Change, Economy and Development Transitional Committee

Meeting held 13 January 2022

PRESENT: Councillors Mark Jones (Chair), Barbara Masters (Deputy Chair), Tim Huggan, Dianne Hurst, Mazher Iqbal, Douglas Johnson, Chris Rosling-Josephs, Paul Turpin and Mike Levery (Substitute Member)

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Neale Gibson and Martin Smith, with Councillor Mike Levery attending as Councillor Smith's substitute.

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 There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10th November 2021, were approved as correct record and, arising therefrom, (a) the Chair reported that he had recently met with Councillor Douglas Johnson and relevant officers to discuss a work programme for the Committee, details of which would be shared with the Committee at a future meeting, and (b) the Policy and Improvement Officer (Alice Nicholson) reported that a document containing responses to all the public questions raised at the meeting had been circulated to the questioners.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 The Committee received questions from members of the public, and responses were provided as follows:-

5.2 Jenny Carpenter

As a member of South Yorkshire Climate Alliance, I am anxious to find out how successful the Council has been in rolling out Carbon Literacy Training to its Members and officers. The rapid reduction in carbon emissions that we need will only be achieved if each contemplated decision is taken with this as a priority.

I wish to put the question " Have all the Members of this Committee undergone Carbon Literacy training?

If not, will they do so as soon as possible to equip them better to serve in this capacity?

What steps are being taken to offer such training to all members and senior officers?"

- 5.2.1 In response, the Chair reported that online training on carbon literacy had been offered to all Council Members, and that refresher training would be offered on an annual basis. He added that a carbon literacy event had recently been organised for all Council employees.
- 5.2.2 Councillor Chris Rosling-Josephs reported that carbon literacy training had recently been provided by the South Yorkshire Pensions Authority for all its members.
- 5.2.3 Councillor Douglas Johnson reported that a carbon literacy training event had recently been held for all senior Council officers, at which around 120 had attended, and that the feedback in respect of the event had been very positive.
- 5.2.4 Councillor Dianne Hirst reported that any Council Members who had not been able to access the online training were able to view the material on the Members' online portal.
- 5.2.5 The Chair stated that the questions would be referred to Mark Whitworth (Sustainability and Climate Change Service Manager), with a request that he provides a detailed, written response to Mrs Carpenter, to include details of the content of the online training.

5.3 Anne Ashe

I'm involved with South Yorkshire Climate Alliance, which very much wants to see climate issues embedded fully in the Sheffield Local Plan: my question encompasses this topic.

I'd like to ask whether there has been any assessment of the contribution that each spatial option would make towards tackling climate change through:

- (i) supporting the Council's 2030 net-zero carbon target - eg using sustainable design;
- (ii) maintaining a net-zero situation after 2030 (and beyond the Local Plan horizon of 2039);
- (iii) facilitating renewable energy provision;
- (iv) enabling sustainable travel patterns;
- (v) reducing the impact of climate change and tackling its impact - eg maintaining a green cover to counter the urban heat island effect that is associated with rising temperatures (especially in the core urban area), protecting against extreme weather events, and ensuring a reduction in flood risk; and
- (vi) enhancing Sheffield's ecological status and achieving net biodiversity gain.

Related to this is the question of whether such assessments would form part of the site selection process for determining allocated sites once the spatial option has been chosen.

I agree with the Council's sequential approach for determining site allocations as set out in this useful paper and understand the difficulty of achieving the Government's revised and uplifted housing target for Sheffield. Has any assessment has been done on the option of increasing net densities so as to reduce the amount of land needed (so making the targets more achievable)? In terms of climate issues, this would have the advantage of supporting the development of walkable neighbourhoods, as advised in the (new) Essex Design Guide <https://www.essexdesignguide.co.uk/>

5.3.1 In response, Simon Vincent (Local Plan Service Manager) stated that the Local Plan would play an important role in reducing carbon emissions and responding to the climate emergency. The Local Plan could tackle such issues in two main ways, firstly regarding the spatial pattern of development, which related to where and how such development would take place. The second element would focus on sustainable design, and the option chosen today would be subject to policies around this, and which would be incorporated into the new Local Plan. The issues raised would be addressed through the site selection process. The Council would also be undertaking an Integrated Impact Assessment, which would look at the environment, equality and health impacts of the different development sites being proposed. In terms of density, all the five options in the report contained proposals with regard to intensification of development within the central area, though high densities were not appropriate everywhere, and consideration had to be given to the historic character of the area and the need to provide a mix of housing types. The new Local Plan would look to raise overall densities in other areas of the city, for example near District Centres and other locations with excellent accessibility by public transport. The Council would also consider the biodiversity of specific areas as part of the site selection process.

5.3.2 The Chair requested that Mr Vincent sends a detailed, written response to Ms Ashe.

6. SHEFFIELD LOCAL PLAN SPATIAL OPTIONS

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Head of Planning (Michael Johnson) setting out the overall spatial options for meeting future development needs in Sheffield, in the period to 2039.

6.2 Also in attendance for this item was Simon Vincent (Local Plan Service Manager), who introduced the report, highlighting a number of key areas

6.3 The report contained information on the Local Plan process, a summary of comments following consultation on the Sheffield Plan issues and options, housing need and land supply, employment land needs and land supply, alterations to the Green Belt boundary and spatial options. The report also set out five spatial options for accommodating future development, based on the identification of land supply.

6.4 The report indicated that it was the intention for full Council to approve a draft Plan in September 2022, before further public consultation took place in

October/November 2022. The approved Plan would then be submitted to the Government for public examination by April 2023.

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

- If the preferred option chosen did not achieve the number of homes as prescribed by the Government, the Council would need to hold further discussions with the Government. The Council had passed a motion at its meeting on 8th September 2021, which had highlighted a number of the concerns raised as part of the workshops held to discuss the Local Plan, particularly regarding the uplift of 35% required by the Government. A letter setting out the concerns raised by Sheffield residents had been sent to the Government, and the Government had sent a very detailed response which, amongst other things, indicated that housing need figure (including the 35% uplift) was just the starting point for setting the housing requirement in the Local Plan. The Government accepted that not all areas would be able to meet their full housing need. The Council would be able to take account of its land supply and constraints, including Green Belt, prior to making a decision on the city's housing requirement.
- Weighing up all the options, particularly taking into account the need to provide a better supply of employment land, deliver more affordable homes and protect the environment where possible, officers believed that Option 4 offered the best way forward for the city. This would not result in large areas of the Green Belt being released. The Council would have to go through the site selection process to look at which sites would best meet the city's needs. Site specific exceptional circumstances would still be needed to justify taking land out of the Green Belt. There were significant risks/impacts with some of the other options. Current evidence showed that the Council could provide a housing requirement figure which supported the city's economic growth aspirations, and there would be no harm caused in setting a figure lower than that prescribed by the Government.
- With Option 4, officers did not anticipate the wholesale release of Green Belt land. It was more likely to be a limited number of sites where the overall benefits of development constituted exceptional circumstances. Regarding the possibility of Green Belt land being released to support the economic viability of reopening former railway lines, it was not anticipated that this would lead to a large number of sites being removed from the Green Belt. The risk of a railway line not being re-opened would have to be assessed as part of the consideration as to whether there were exceptional circumstances.
- The Green Belt includes fingers of open land that penetrate into the city's urban area, so some of these areas are relatively accessible by public transport and are close to jobs and services. Potential development sites in the Green Belt would be assessed on a site-by-site basis through the site selection process if the Council is minded to support Green Belt release. Officers envisaged that there would be a small number of sites where it could identify site specific exceptional circumstances. It would be preferable to

release a small number of strategic sites because it makes it easier to create sustainable new communities. There would be a limit to the number of homes that the private sector would deliver on each site annually, so development would be spread out over a long period of time. The majority of homes built each year would be on brownfield sites.

- The Council needed to follow the correct procedure in terms of choosing the spatial options, based on the city's land supply and constraints, prior to submitting the Local Plan to the Government for examination. As part of this process, during the examination process, the Planning Inspector could ask the Council to provide additional evidence, or even withdraw the Plan, if he/she felt it would be likely to be found unsound. In terms of opportunities to lever in funding from the Government, there was a clear Government agenda in terms of levelling up, as well as a desire for development on brownfield sites.

6.7 At the request of the Chair, Simon Vincent read out the letter received from the Government. Michael Johnson referred to the Government's willingness to listen to a different approach, and stated that it would be up to Members to decide exactly what that different approach would be.

6.8 Further questions were raised by members of the Committee, and the following responses were provided:-

- It was important to ensure that, when considering the options, the Council looked at what type of place and environment it would be creating. An inherent part of the process would be to look at the character of areas within the city, and select schemes, through the site selection process, which would not have any adverse effects on such areas.
- The whole principle represented a sequential-led approach, and it was essential that the Government sought to maximise opportunities within the city's urban areas before considering whether it was appropriate or not to release Green Belt land.
- As part of the previous consultation on the Local Plan in September/October 2020, there were three options, one focusing in the central area (Option A), the release of land for around 5000 homes in the Green Belt, with less development in the central area (Option B) and the release of land for around 10,000 homes in the Green Belt, with even less development in the central area (Option C). These three options did not directly correspond to the five options set out in the report now submitted, but there were overlaps in some areas. The Council would still be looking for a small number of strategic Green Belt sites where site specific circumstances would justify such a release, such as the need for older person's housing in a particular area of the city.
- It was clear that there were significant viability challenges around delivery on a lot of the city's brownfield sites. Conversations were currently being held with the Government around different types of relationships, predominantly strategic, long-term relationships, to deliver on large, spatial strategies. There was, however, a need for the Government to realise that things have got to

change in terms of providing support for certain areas, specifically with regard to strategic partnerships and relationships moving forward. There were resources available, through the Sheffield City Region's Brownfield Fund, with a number of schemes in South Yorkshire having benefitted from such funding.

- The Government wanted the city to meet its 35% uplift in terms of housing development in the city centre, on brownfield sites. From the work undertaken through the Central Area Strategy and the City Centre Vision, the city was now able to accommodate around 20,000 homes in the central area, which was double the amount envisaged three years ago. Problems had arisen as a result of the Government changing the methodology in December 2020, and had failed to consult with those areas required to achieve the 35% uplift target, which meant there had been no analysis undertaken in terms of the implications of the uplift. The increase from 40,000 to 53,000 homes would be a major issue for the city.
- Whichever option was chosen, it was accepted that there would be developers and landowners who would argue their sites were better than the sites being put forward by the Council. There was therefore a need for the Council to have robust evidence in terms of the sites it put forward, and officers were confident that the Council could make a strategic and site-specific case for certain sites, regarding the regeneration of site-specific benefits that certain sites would offer. It was accepted that there would be risks in connection with opening the door for the release of Green Belt land more widely.
- There could be potential conflict with the Neighbourhood Plans, but the Local Plan, when adopted, would take precedence. It would be up to the Neighbourhood Groups to update their plans to fit in with the Local Plan, if necessary. The two approved Neighbourhood Plans, and others currently being developed, were moving forward on the basic principle set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, and as the same principles could be followed in the Local Plan, the Council would not anticipate any significant conflict between the principles set out in the two documents.
- Neither of the two Neighbourhood Plans allocated any land for development. The role of the Local Plan was to set out the amount of development that a Neighbourhood Plan should take, and it was then the role of the Neighbourhood Plan to state where and how such development should take place. If the Local Plan was proposing a development site in one of the Neighbourhood Plan areas, it was important for the Council to work with the groups to look at how and where development could take place.
- Most of the housing sites allocated in the former Unitary Development Plan had now been developed. Local Plans became outdated over time, hence the reason why Government required local authorities to update their Plans at least every five years. It was important that the new Local Plan safeguards land for employment use, both within the central area and in other parts of the city. Once the Local Plan had been adopted, planning decisions on planning applications should normally be taken in accordance with the Plan.

- The impact of the Local Plan on the city would be significant, and this would become evident as the Plan progressed over the next few months.
- The Council was confident in the report produced by the consultants, Icen Planning, which had enabled the Council to look at what housing range it needed to meet its economic aspirations. There would be an opportunity to revise policies and alter overall growth requirements when the plan is reviewed. As part of any review, the Council could look at its evidence base and delivery to see if it had got things right or not.
- The Council would look at the ecological and social value of sites put forward. Appendix 1 to the report set out the maximum number of homes which could be delivered under each of the five options. As a result of the site selection process, it was unlikely that the maximum number of homes could be achieved as some of the sites could have been removed, such as those that had significant biodiversity value due to rewilding. Option 4 provided the flexibility to look at some of the sites which were less valuable in ecological and social terms through the site selection process. The most environmentally valuable sites would be excluded as part of the process. It was very likely that the figures in Appendix 1 would be lower, given the site selection criteria.
- The Council would have the ability to put forward a different approach as long as it provided logical reasons for doing so, and as long as it followed the guidelines set out in the report now submitted.
- Every year that passed, the city would lose approximately 2000 homes from its supply as brownfield sites are developed. Consequently, time was very important as the pressure to find places to put those homes increased. There were risks in terms of failing to meet the Government's targets, and the Planning Inspector would always have the opportunity of requesting the Council to reconsider its plans. Once the Local Plan had been submitted, the Council would meet the Planning Inspector after they had received the evidence. If the Inspector had any serious concerns, these would be highlighted at this stage.
- The first four options represented a capacity-led approach and every effort should be made to get as close to the Government's target as possible. The Council needed to determine the city's capacity, then weigh up all the pros and cons at each stage.
- Climate change would be one of the main elements included in the Local Plan. In terms of getting the process right, the first aim would be to get a Local Plan in place, and this would represent the tool by which future standards could be set. In addition, there was a need for a genuine strategic direction and identity about what the city wanted.
- There was no intention to build on all urban land in the city. There were approximately 3,000 units that could, in theory, be built on previously undeveloped land that has been put forward for development, but it was not envisaged that the final figure would be anywhere near this following the site

selection process.

- Option 4 provided the Council with the option of maximising its flexibility around housing and employment sites. It also provided the Council with discretion for key, strategic opportunities, such as better employment sites and having a better geographical spread of homes, and delivering a mix of homes, across the city.
- In isolation, Sheffield residents would not want development on Green Belt sites, but many respondents to the issues and options consultation also wanted more affordable housing to be provided. Providing more housing land would increase the supply of affordable homes, but this would create some difficult choices for the Council in terms of providing homes and protecting the environment.
- In terms of the developers'/agents' feedback, as part of these issues and options consultation, they were favouring development on Green Belt sites in order to meet housing need and to support economic growth. Also, deliverability on brownfield sites created viability and practicality issues.

6.9 Following the responses to the questions raised, and the comments now made, Members were asked to state a preferred option and provide brief reasons for their choice, as follows:-

6.9.1 Councillor Barbara Masters - Option 3

Concerned that there's not enough protection for our Green Belt under Option 4. If brownfield sites are not attractive to developers because of problems such as contamination, we should make an attempt to address that. Some greenfield sites having low biodiversity should not be used as an excuse for their development as this can be changed. Option 3 will allow us to focus on improving land in the city, not just for housing, but also employment. Otherwise, developers will put pressure on further development in the Green Belt.

6.9.2 Councillor Mazher Iqbal - Option 1

At this moment Option 1 and want to go back and speak to Government. It is important to have a conversation with Government, and it is needed soon. The impact of the Covid Pandemic has highlighted the need for space outside and inside, which has not been reflected in the Government methodology/design requirements. We should reconvene after a conversation with the Government. This moment in time it is Option 1, but could change once we have agreement with the Government. We have until October 2022 before consultation is due to take place on the Draft Plan (in accordance with the Local Development Scheme).

6.9.3 Councillor Douglas Johnson - Option 4

Important to grasp nettle now. Option 4 gives most flexibility on sites, this needs to come with safeguards that we really need for sites e.g. ecological significance or lack of infrastructure now or likelihood in future.

6.9.4 Councillor Mike Levery - Option 3

This is the perfect clean up opportunity for Sheffield, to clean up our industrial heritage, so that we have the framework for development management on sites that work for the city overall. This will also ensure we develop all our brownfield sites with a target at the upper end of the predicted growth for the city.

6.9.5 Councillor Tim Huggan - Option 3

Concerns about Green Belt makes this the better option, and believe we have a strong case to argue with the Government for an alternative approach for sustainable growth.

6.9.2 Councillor Paul Turpin - Option 4

Bearing in mind we won't hit maximum number of homes each year for each option, we need to protect land of highest ecological and social value. This is the option with most flexibility; look forward to contributing to site selection criteria development.

6.9.7 Councillor Dianne Hurst – Abstained

Unable to choose between Option 3 or 4, as Co-chair of the Planning and Highways Committee, I see the urgent need for agreed Local Plan and that officers have very little to manage the refusal of inappropriate development because there's no framework. Option 5 is the only one we can choose to meet the Government targets, but we need the least harm option to proceed to consultation, doing what we can to protect, build sustainable communities, and give officers the framework.

6.9.8 Councillor Chris Rosling-Josephs - Option 3

Unsure which is best – want more reassurance from the Government that their methodology is correct. Things have changed in the last 18 months/2 years that we can't factor into their methodology. We need a conversation with the Government, for people within city to have reassurance we are getting the best sustainable option for the city – Option 3 is more sustainable.

6.9.9 Councillor Mark Jones - Option 3

Thought about what I thought Sheffield is and where I want Sheffield to be. It is dangerous to build on just brownfield land. I want to see social justice, good quality affordable housing, that is genuinely affordable, and I don't believe this will be delivered on greenfield. I am cautious about opening the door and allowing unscrupulous developers to come into Sheffield and try and deliver housing on our Green Belt sites. I want to see high liveability as the goal, homes fit for people to live in. Need safeguards, but do not trust holding back the wedge, err on side of Option 3. I want this outcome from this Committee shared with the Government, and want that conversation, and for DLUHC ministers to come back with a

sensible head on.

6.10 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the information contained in the report now submitted, the information now reported and the responses to the questions raised;
- (b) thanks Michael Johnson and Simon Vincent for attending the meeting, and responding to the questions raised; and
- (c) requests that the preferences now made, together with the reasons for the preferences, be referred for consideration by the Co-operative Executive at its meeting to be held on 19th January 2022.

7. RESPONSES TO PUBLIC QUESTIONS RAISED AT THE MEETING HELD ON 10TH NOVEMBER 2021

7.1 The Committee received and noted a schedule produced by the Policy and Improvement Officer (Alice Nicholson) setting out the responses to the public questions raised at its meeting held on 10th November 2021.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday, 10th February 2022, at 10.00 am in the Town Hall.