
LOCAL PLAN SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Of a virtual meeting held on Monday 6 June 2022 from 7.00pm to 8.15pm

Members of the Local Plan Sub-Committee:

Councillors:	Rue Grewal
Stephen Giles-Medhurst (Chair)	Philip Hearn
Matthew Bedford (Vice Chair)	Reena Ranger
Sarah Nelmes	Jon Tankard
Stephen Cox	Phil Williams

Councillors also in attendance:

Chris Lloyd and Chris Mitchell

Officers in attendance:

Geof Muggeridge, Director of Community and Environmental Services
Sujeet Sharma, Interim Senior Planning Officer
Sarah Haythorpe, Principal Committee Manager

Other attendees:

Chris Outtersides, South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan
Laura Wood, South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan

LPSC 01/22 APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIR OF SUB-COMMITTEE

Councillor Sarah Nelmes moved, duly seconded, that Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst be nominated as Chair of the Local Plan sub-committee.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst be appointed Chair of the sub-committee for the Local Government Year 2022/23.

LPSC 02/22 APPOINTMENT OF THE VICE-CHAIR OF SUB-COMMITTEE

Councillor Sarah Nelmes moved, duly seconded, that Councillor Matthew Bedford be nominated as Vice-Chair of the Local Plan sub-committee.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Matthew Bedford be appointed Vice-Chair of the sub-committee for the Local Government Year 2022/23.

LPSC 03/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

LPSC 04/22 MINUTES

It was confirmed that the Minutes of the Local Plan sub-committee meeting held on 17 March 2022 were a correct record and would be signed by the Chair.

LPSC 05/22 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

LPSC 06/22 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None received.

LPSC 07/22 TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON THE RESOURCES IN THE LOCAL PLAN TEAM AND MOVING FORWARD WITH THE LOCAL PLAN

The Director of Community and Environmental Services provided an update on Resources in the Local Plan team and moving forward with the Council's Local Plan. It was noted that some of the schedule had been impacted by the departure of key members of staff. A new permanent Head of the Local Plans team had been appointed and would commence the role in mid-July, and two interim Senior Planning Officers had also been recruited, although their remit entailed more than just working on the Local Plan. The further two sub-committee meetings scheduled for June were being cancelled but the meeting in July would be going ahead along with a meeting to be organised in August so that the Council can continue to progress the Local Plan to the published timetable.

There continued to be a lack of clarity from the Government regarding housing targets relating to the Levelling Up agenda, and in the absence of any formal statements or guidance concerning a reduction in housing targets then statements from Ministers or Junior Ministers had little or no weight and local authorities were required to continue with the targets provided.

The first Regulation 18 consultation had taken place last year, with the first reports now due to come forward in July and August to the sub-committee. A second Regulation 18 consultation would be undertaken to review any changes to sites proposed within the first consultation e.g. deemed to be undeliverable, as well as any new sites that were not part of the first Regulation 18 consultation. The second consultation would also include any changes to the policies. A Regulation 19 consultation would be the final one to be undertaken, but before this there was time for things to change. Any formal changes to Government policy could still be taken on board. Although the Local Plan was not up to date, major planning applications would continue to be considered on a site-by-site basis. It was important to note that Three Rivers was not alone in not having an up-to-date Local Plan, a position shared with other Districts and Boroughs in Hertfordshire and elsewhere. Work had recently been stopped on Hertsmere's Plan.

In response to a question that some Councillors had individually requested removal of a site/sites from the consultation process, the Director of Community and Environmental Services said that was not possible. The opportunity to do so would be when the Regulation 18 consultation responses are presented to the sub-committee before presentation to the Policy and Resources Committee.

The next item on the agenda, relating to the JSP, would in normal circumstances be accompanied by a couple of reports for Members to approve (or otherwise), but due to the two day Bank Holiday and the resourcing issues, the reports had not been made available in time but will be circulated tomorrow, once signed off by the Chief Executive and the Director of Community and Environmental Services.

POST MEETING NOTE: This happened with the publication of the Policy and Resources Committee Agenda.

The Chair explained, for the benefit of new Members and members of the public, that the meeting was not a decision-making one and as such could be held virtually. The sub-committee meetings enabled discussions to take place with recommendations that would then be passed to the Policy and Resources Committee and in some cases to Full Council. Meetings that required the making of decisions had to take place as face to face meetings.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 35(b) a Member of the public spoke on this item in regard to moving forward with the Local Plan.

A Member stated that it was hoped the Council was in possession of all the information from the Government that the Joint Residents Association had, and that any future dialogue with them would involve the entire sub-committee. They referred to the resources in the team and asked whether it would be feasible to have an officer working exclusively on the Local Plan, given its importance. In addition they asked what the revised date was by which the Local Plan was expected to be ready for publication, were there indications that the absence of a current Local Plan was impacting matters such as appeal decisions, and is the Council making itself vulnerable to legal challenges from landowners whose land had not been included. How do we reassure the public that the decisions made regarding the Local Plan are the correct ones?

The Chair responded that the timeline for publication of the Local Plan had not changed.

The Director of Community and Environmental Services reiterated that there had been contact with Government Ministers over the housing numbers as he had already mentioned, and echoed the Chair's willingness to meet with the Residents Association. As far as resources were concerned, the Local Plan team would be adequately resourced once all the new appointees were in place. There had been difficulty filling the permanent Senior Planner position due to a serious shortage of suitably qualified people and it was not just Three Rivers who were experiencing problems recruiting staff in this area.

There were no major planning appeals in the pipeline of a significant scale that were affected by the timeline, and once the department was fully resourced work would be undertaken on looking at housing delivery over the last 10-15 years and projecting future needs, although the increase in the Government target from 180 properties per annum a few years ago to over 600 now emphasised the difficulties involved.

Responsibility for providing residents with confidence that decisions were made for the right reasons sat with Officers and Members alike.

A Member asked about sites covered in a previous consultation and which had since been withdrawn from the Local Plan, and when would such information be

available. The Director of Community and Environmental Services replied that details would be available in future meetings of the sub-committee, and that interpreting the results of over 3,000 consultation responses was a lengthy process.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the Local Plan and the Local Plan Team be noted.

The Chair of the sub-committee and the Director would make contact with the Residents Association representative in due course..

LPSC 08/22 TO RECEIVE A PRESENTATION ON THE JOINT STRATEGIC PLAN

Chris Outtersides delivered a presentation on the South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan, which comprised the five Districts/Boroughs of Dacorum, Hertsmere, St Albans, Three Rivers and Watford.

The presentation depicted a shared vision until 2050 which comprised climate change, strategic infrastructure, growth opportunities, economic opportunities and housing challenges, and emphasised that the JSP work was being undertaken in tandem with the Local Plans but did not replace them.

The Chair said it was important that during the consultation it was made very clear that the JSP was different from the Local Plan as there would otherwise be much confusion, with the focus on the wrong issues, specifically site allocations.

A Member raised questions relating to the proposed JSP consultation and the format to be used. It was advised that a multi-choice format would be used but free text would be invited in order to avoid an overly generic response.

Numerous social media platforms would be used to promote the consultation, not just Facebook, and it was expected that social media influencers would be used.

By extending the consultation it was expected that it would be available to those who would be on holiday during the summer.

Hard copies of the consultation would be available at local libraries for people who did not have access to the online consultation or social media.

A Member asked whether the JSP was the same in all five districts, to which the reply was affirmative. The Member asked what the approval process entailed, the answer being that it was down to each authority, which at Three Rivers meant sign-off by Policy and Resources Committee and then Full Council.

The Chair said the JSP was currently aspirational and cited the depiction of rapid transit system imagery without suggestions of funding or costs thereof. Mr Outtersides said it was necessary to start thinking about such issues now in order to be ready to approach the Government for support.

The Director of Community and Environmental Services clarified that future issues relating to the JSP would come initially to this sub-committee for discussion, after which it would go to Policy and Resources for the decision-making process.

The Chair moved, duly seconded, that it be recommended to the Policy and Resources Committee to:

approve the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) 2022 for the SW Herts Joint Strategic Plan for adoption,

approve the reg.18 documents:

- a) South West Hertfordshire 2050 – ‘Realising our Potential,’ Issues and Options document (Appendix 1); and
- b) Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (Appendix 2).

Any further minor amendments to the documents to be agreed by the Director of Community and Environmental Services in consultation with the Lead Member for Infrastructure and Planning Policy.

RESOLVED:

That it be recommended to Policy and Resources Committee to:

approve the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) 2022 for the SW Herts Joint Strategic Plan for adoption,

approve the reg.18 documents:

- a) South West Hertfordshire 2050 – ‘Realising our Potential,’ Issues and Options document (Appendix 1); and
- b) Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (Appendix 2).

Any further minor amendments to the documents to be agreed by the Director of Community and Environmental Services in consultation with the Lead Member for Infrastructure and Planning Policy.

LPSC 09/22 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

CHAIR