

Scrutiny Committee - 15 January 2019

Present: Councillor S Coles (Chairman)

Councillors F Smith-Roberts, N Cavill, W Coombes, A Gunner, T Hall, R Lees, L Lisgo, S Martin-Scott, N Townsend, D Webber, S Lees (In place of R Henley) and R Ryan

Officers: Tim Burton, Marcus Prouse and Clare Rendell

Also Present: Councillors P Berry and J Warmington and Mr B James from Persimmon Homes.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

41. Apologies.

Apologies were received from Councillors J Blatchford and E Gaines.

The Chair expressed sorrow on behalf of the Committee on the recent passing of Scrutiny Member Councillor Tom Davies.

42. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 12 December 2018, with amendments, were taken as read and were signed.

43. Declarations of Interest.

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Member or Clerk of County, Parish or Town Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Cavill	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr W Coombes	All Items	Stoke St Mary	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Townsend	All Items	Kingston St Mary	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Webber	All Items	Cheddon Fitzpaine	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Warmington	All Items	Bishops Lydeard & Cothelstone	Personal	Spoke

44. Public Question Time.

Mrs J Calcroft spoke on Agenda Item 6 – Monkton Heathfield Urban Extension Policy Update.

I refer to agenda item 6 and would like to draw Councillors attention to page 21 of the report and in particular to sections 4.10, 4.11 and 4.21.

The Council's Core Strategy drawn up in 2012 was an employment led policy. In April 2016 we were told 'The Core Strategy review had commenced, whilst the Adopted Core Strategy remained current and in place, the review process would access new data that would update the Strategy'. It was almost 3 years since the review started. It must have been completed by now. She appreciated that some aspects of the Council's amended, new Local Plan could leave them vulnerable to challenge from developers because of recent changes in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). But hopefully the data used to inform the new Core Strategy would place them in a more robust position with regard to the sustainability of Monkton Heathfield and later on with Staplegrove and Comeytrowe (the Garden Town trio in the Council's proposals referred to in paragraph 4.13). The Council needed more pro-active, robust policies to withstand challenges from developers. They should have irrefutable evidence to show the need for more employment to accompany increased housing. Increasing density requirements to cram in more houses, without the much needed road infrastructure which Councillors and the public recognised was needed but somehow eluded officers and Somerset County Council (SCC) Highways Authority was quite honestly crazy and inexcusable yet The Leader and his Executive colleagues 'complained' that others talk Taunton down! The officers report stated that employment land could now be considered for 'more appropriate' uses including houses. 'Quite frankly I'm getting tired of the Council's lack of teeth and its lack of carefully considered and well informed forward planning'. Way back last year when the NPPF consultation was underway, the Council should have better anticipated how proposals, if they went through, would make them more vulnerable at the hands of developers. Those proposals did not come out of the blue. It was known in advance that they could and indeed were likely to happen. Surely it would have been better for our Council to have reviewed aspects of certain policies in advance which would robustly stand up to scrutiny and demonstrate the need for an employment led local strategy rather than walk us blindly into most likely becoming a dormitory town for commuters who work and spend their monies elsewhere. So now we face the loss of some employment land. What next? Reading paragraphs 4.10 and 4.11 in the report raised concerns. Was the size of the Green Wedge the next to be compromised?

Mrs Calcroft's questions were:-

Where could members of the public access Taunton Deane Borough Council's reviewed Core Strategy?

How did the Council propose to ensure that new housing developments were truly sustainable if on-site local employment areas, which would include local shops as well as other 'jobs', were reduced and more residents of the new houses forced to travel further for their groceries and work?

Was cramming more houses on a site with less local employment opportunities not contradictory to paragraph 4.10 where the intention was to recognise a means to reduce CO2 emissions?

The Assistant Director for Planning and Environment gave the following response:-

The Core Strategy work had been carried out but they hadn't yet compiled a draft report or sent out for consultation. Some of the work had been guided by the Task and Finish Group that had recently carried out work on use of employment land. The calculations used had changed since 2012 when the Strategy was first compiled. Employment land had been highlighted.

Originally high density developments were used to minimise the need for green space developments. However, now the density had lessened, employment land could be used, even if it had previously been allocated.

45. **Call-in, by Councillors Libby Lisgo and Richard Lees, of the decision made by Executive Councillor Jane Warmington to agree to the appointment of Somerset Community Foundation to manage the processing of the TDBC Partnerships Grants Fund through a variation of the existing services contract.**

Considered report previously circulated, that detailed a Call-in, by Councillors Libby Lisgo and Richard Lees, of the decision made by Executive Councillor Jane Warmington to agree to the appointment of Somerset Community Foundation (SCF) to manage the processing of the TDBC Partnerships Grants Fund through a variation of the existing services contract.

This decision had now been called in by Councillors Libby Lisgo and Richard Lees for the reasons set out below:-

- 1) A lack of detailed information and concern about the unintended consequences of the change which was felt deserved a public explanation,
- 2) A lack of discussion over the principle of using an external organisation for this, concerns around transparency and reporting back to Members. More detail was required on how this would be reported back to the Council and how it ensured any funds were equitably distributed?
- 3) How the overall picture of the utilisation of this and the other funds managed by Somerset Community Foundation were managed across the area.

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Members thanked Executive Councillor Jane Warmington for the extra information presented at the meeting.
- Members suggested that when an Executive Decision was circulated, detailed information should be included especially if the item had not been discussed through the Scrutiny Committee.
- Members requested that an annual Grants Update Report was presented at the Scrutiny Committee.
The Governance and Democracy Specialist would add the item to the Scrutiny Work Programme.
- Concern was raised that the grant outcomes used to be published in the Weekly Bulletin, which no longer existed.
The SCF produced a regular report with the grant outcomes included, it was suggested that that report could be distributed to all Councillors.
- Members queried how the SCF set their fees.
The Executive Councillor was not sure but believed it was not proportional and might be based on hours spent on projects.

- Members queried what monitoring processes were in place and carried out by the SCF to show that the funds granted were spent in the manner applied for.
The monitoring forms included the application form showed how the checks were made for each grant.
- Members queried whether the SCF contract was renewed annually.
The funding agreement was set up to replace the old service level agreements and would be subject to review.

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee decided to take no further action, in which case the decision of the Executive Councillor Warmington of 7 December 2018 would stand.

46. **Monkton Heathfield Urban Extension Policy Update.**

Considered report previously circulated, which identified the factual changes to Policy SS1 and other material considerations since the Core Strategy was adopted and sought Members approval for an approach to the delivery of employment land that was not strictly in accordance with Policy SS1 with regards to employment land delivery at Monkton Heathfield.

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Members highlighted with the formation of the New Council, it would take time to compile a new joint Local Plan and queried how long that would take.
The creation of a new Local Plan was a good aspiration and officers could have pushed out consultations for the TDBC Local Plan but they were aware that it would not have been adopted in time and would then fall under the New Council. WSC had adopted their Local Plan two years ago, with an early review date which would fall within the formation of the Local Plan for the New Council. Members were given an approximate time frame of 18 months between a review and adoption of a new Local Plan.
- Concern was also raised on how much of West Somerset was covered by Exmoor National Park and whether the New Council would meet the necessary housing requirements.
Exmoor National Park was a separate Planning Authority with their own requirements to provide new housing which was separate to that of WSC. WSC did not receive the same amount of larger and controversial applications as TDBC.
- Members queried whether the new Park and Ride was still on track and where it would be located.
The Park and Ride scheme was a specific requirement of the proposed development and was believed to be part of the 106 Agreement. It was due to be located at the Walford Cross end of the development.
- Members requested clarification on what employment land was.
Clarification was given and ideally employment land would be located on the peripheral of the development.
- An officer from the developers was present and advised the Committee that he had been working in partnership with all parties and they hoped to be able to submit a planning application by the end of March 2019.

The Assistant Director for Planning advised that they would prefer not to receive a planning application prior to the adoption of the Master Plan because the Plan guided all decisions made on planning applications.

- Members agreed the Master Plan was an important document.
- Concern was raised that residents urged the developers to complete the work they had already started prior to the start of the next phase. Some of the roads and public areas had not yet been adopted.
- Members queried what public input would be fed into the types of dwellings that would be built on the site.

Master Planning guided the decision on what types of dwellings were built. Those decisions were made at a higher level than individual applications.

- Members requested that community event details were circulated to all Councillors for the Taunton Deane area.
- Members requested that social housing should be built first .
The Master Plan should look at phased completion of social housing. The Housing Enabling Officer probably wouldn't want all social housing to be built first and that it needed to be done in stages to keep a balance of tenure on the site.

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report and supported, in principle, the release of a part of employment land south of Langaller Lane as set out in the report.

47. **Scrutiny Work Programme.**

Considered the Scrutiny Work Programme previously circulated.

The Governance and Democracy Specialist highlighted that two items that had not been included on the Work Programme:-

- The Brewhouse Update; and
- The Voluntary Grant Update.

Members were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance and Democracy Specialist.

Resolved that the content of the Work Programme be noted.

(The Meeting ended at 8.10 pm)