

**Confirmed**



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Strategic Planning Committee** held in the Conference Room, Riverside, Lowestoft, on **Monday, 2 October 2023 at 10.30am.**

**Members of the Committee present:**

Councillor Paul Ashdown, Councillor Tom Daly, Councillor Mike Deacon, Councillor Julia Ewart, Councillor John Fisher, Councillor Andree Gee, Councillor Katie Graham, Councillor Toby Hammond, Councillor Colin Hedgley, Councillor Mike Ninnmey, Councillor Mark Packard, Councillor Malcolm Pitchers, Councillor Rosie Smithson, Councillor Geoff Wakeling, Councillor Kay Yule

**Other Members present:**

Councillor Rachel Smith-Lyte, Councillor Sarah Whitelock

**Officers present:**

Naomi Goold (Energy Projects Manager), Eloise Limmer (Senior Design and Conservation Officer), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer (Regulatory)), Andrea McMillan (Planning Manager (Planning Policy, Delivery and Specialist Services)), Bethany Rance (Senior Planner (Energy Projects)), Philip Ridley (Head of Planning and Coastal Management), Katherine Scott (Principal Planner (Development Management, Technical Lead)), Alli Stone (Democratic Services Officer (Governance)), Ben Woolnough (Planning Manager (Development Management, Major Sites and Infrastructure))

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**1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Paul Ashton, Debbie McCallum, Graham Parker and Sarah Plummer. Councillors Rachel Smith-Lyte and Sarah Whitelock attended the meeting as substitutes for Councillors Ashton and Plummer.

In the absence of Councillor Plummer the meeting was chaired by Councillor Mark Packard, Vice-Chair of the Committee.

**2 Declarations of Interest**

Councillors Katie Graham and Sarah Whitelock both declared a Non-Registerable Interest in item 9 of the agenda as ward member for Aldeburgh and Leiston.

### **3 Minutes**

On the proposition of Councillor Pitchers, seconded by Councillor Ashdown, it was by a unanimous vote

#### **RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2023 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**NOTE:** during this item, a query was made regarding the status of the changes to the scheme of delegation considered at the meeting held on 3 July 2023. Officers confirmed this issue would be considered by the Audit and Governance Committee at its next meeting.

### **4 Energy Projects Update**

The Committee received a presentation on energy projects in East Suffolk from Councillor Tom Daly, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Energy and Climate Change.

Councillor Daly summarised the motion on energy projects that had passed by the Full Council at its meeting of 27 September 2023, noting its impact on the Council's position relating to energy projects in the district.

Councillor Daly provided a summary update on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) in East Suffolk, providing updates on Sizewell C, East Anglia One North and East Anglia Two offshore wind farms, Sealink, North Falls, Five Estuaries, and the Norwich to Tilbury Grid Reinforcement project.

Councillor Daly summarised the proposed LionLink multipurpose interconnector and noted that alternative landfall and onshore cable corridor options were being considered. The Committee was advised that officers were reviewing the materials and would respond to the consultation.

Councillor Daly summarised how the Council was looking forward in respect of energy projects and encouraged Members to contact the Council's Energy Projects team with all NSIP queries.

The Chair invited questions to Councillor Daly. In response to a question from Councillor Hedgley on the impact of the proposed Energy Bill, Councillor Daly said it was unclear at this stage what the ramifications of the bill would be, but they could possibly be significant. Councillor Daly acknowledged the concerns regarding development and the government's suggestions to reopen gas and oil fields, and said that the Council needed to be in a position to make its feelings known on the impact of proposed changes on the district.

The Chair queried if the Council had sufficient resources in place to manage the NSIP work within the district; Councillor Daly said that the Energy Projects team was

performing to a high standard and presented factual information in a way that made his role much easier.

In terms of the team's ongoing position, Councillor Daly concurred that a lot of NSIP related work would be required by the team to fulfil the Council's statutory duties and its duty to the community, and highlighted that NSIP Development Consent Orders (DCOs) granted made provision for funds that the Council could draw down to ensure that it was fully resourced to accommodate the work generated by NSIPs in the district.

In response to a question from Councillor Hammond relating to judicial reviews being brought against DCOs that had been granted, Councillor Daly said that those bringing the reviews were confident that there would be some degree of possible outcome. Councillor Daly considered that the judicial reviews, if they did not overturn the DCOs, could influence changes to certain elements of the NSIPs.

Councillor Ashdown referred to Councillor Daly's speech at the Full Council meeting of 27 September 2023, specifically on changing DCOs, and asked how this could be achieved. Councillor Daly stated that in his speech he had acknowledged that the DCOs had been granted by the Secretary of State and had highlighted that there would be opportunities to incentivise NSIP developers to improve elements such as connection sites.

Councillor Ewart noted the impact of Sizewell C highway developments in Kelsale and asked if any assurances had been received from Suffolk County Council (as highways authority) on roadways. The Energy Projects Manager, at Councillor Daly's invitation, advised that infrastructure for the development of Sizewell C would be coming forward and that local authorities were liaising with Sizewell C Ltd on the timing of this. The Energy Projects Manager assured the Committee that as soon as information on the progression of infrastructure was available it would be shared with all members of the Council; officers were party to discussions on highways infrastructure, but this element was being led by Suffolk County Council.

**NOTE:** Councillor Smith-Lyte arrived at this point of the meeting (10.52am).

Councillor Ninnmey questioned if there had been any consideration towards using Bradwell as a connector route. The Head of Planning and Coastal Management, at Councillor Daly's invitation, responded and advised that the connection infrastructure at Bradwell had been removed when the nuclear station stopped generating power, and that new connectors would be required; he advised that he could further update Members outside of the meeting.

There being no further questions, the Chair thanked Councillor Daly for his presentation.

## **5 Enforcement Performance Report - April to June 2023**

The Committee received report **ES/1667** of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, which provided information on the performance of the enforcement section of the Development Management team.

Councillor Yule introduced the report, which was taken as read, and invited officers to comment. The Planning Manager (Development Management, Major Sites and Infrastructure) referred to the action plan considered by the Committee earlier in the year, to enhance the efficiency and the abilities of the enforcement section; he reported that extra capacity had been achieved and that Mia Glass had been appointed to the role of Enforcement Officer, and that Ms Glass' previous post of Assistant Enforcement Officer had also been filled.

The Committee was advised that the enforcement section was now fully staffed and that work was being undertaken with colleagues in ICT to improve the document management system, with these changes expected in December 2023.

Councillor Yule thanked officers for their hard work to improve the enforcement section and increase its transparency.

There being no questions, Councillor Yule moved the recommendations in the report, which were seconded by Councillor Ashdown. The Chair invited the Committee to debate the proposals. Councillor Ashdown commented that the service of the enforcement section had improved tremendously and applauded officers for taking the action plan forward.

There being no further debate the Chair proceeded to the vote and it was unanimously

#### **RESOLVED**

That the contents of the report be noted.

### **6 Planning Performance Report – April to June 2023**

The Committee received report **ES/1668** of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, which provided an update on the planning performance of the Development Management team in terms of the timescales for determining planning applications.

Councillor Yule introduced the report, which was taken as read, and invited officers to comment. The Principal Planner (Development Management, Technical Lead) gave a presentation summarising the planning performance figures for the period 2021-2023 and highlighted that the Council had exceeded the government targets for determining both major and non-major applications.

The Chair invited questions to Councillor Yule. Councillor Pitchers noted that the Council had not met its stretch targets for determining major and non-major applications and asked what the consequences of this was. The Principal Planner, at Councillor Yule's invitation, noted that these stretch targets exceeded the ones set by government and that the Council had met the mandatory targets.

Councillor Hedgley sought clarification on the difference between a major and a non-major application. The Planning Manager explained that a major application was defined as being for development of at least 10 dwellings or over at least one hectare.

The Chair asked if the government targets were likely to be changed. The Planning Manager replied that this could happen when new planning fees were introduced in the near future, and that all Members would be updated as and when this occurred. Councillor Yule noted that the government was looking to change the planning system but reiterated that, at present, the Council was exceeding the current targets; she thanked officers for their hard work in achieving this.

Councillor Yule moved the recommendations in the report, which were seconded by Councillor Deacon. There being no debate, the Chair proceeded to the vote and it was unanimously

## **RESOLVED**

That the contents of the report be noted.

### **7 Appeals Performance Report – 22 May 2023 to 11 September 2023**

The Committee received report **ES/1669** of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, which provided an update on the planning performance of the Development Management Team in terms of the quality and quantity of appeal decisions received from the Planning Inspectorate following refusal of planning permission by East Suffolk Council.

Councillor Yule introduced the report, which was taken as read, and invited officers to comment.

The Principal Planner (Development Management, Technical Lead) highlighted the summaries of each decision in Appendix A to the report and noted the specific reasons given for grounds to appeal. The Principal Planner highlighted two appeal decisions, where the appeal had been refused, where an appellant could not demonstrate the need for rural worker housing and two other appeals where the Newbourne specific policy in the Local Plan relating to cluster development in the countryside had been engaged.

The Head of Planning and Coastal Management considered the appeals decisions received demonstrated the importance of the Local Plan in decision-making and highlighted the robust defences that could be mounted with a plan in place. Councillor Yule added that there was a positive financial impact from very few appeals being upheld, given the cost implications to the Council when that happened.

The Chair invited questions to Councillor Yule. In response to a question from the Chair it was noted that the number of appeals had increased since the previous meeting of the Committee held in July 2023.

Councillor Ashdown expressed his pleasure to see that the appeal at Tingdene North Denes Caravan Site, Lowestoft had been dismissed and asked how quickly enforcement action on the site could be progressed; he also noted that the appeal at Land at The Paddock, 4 The Street, Lound had been dismissed and asked if the four-month timescale for restoration ordered could be met. The Head of Planning and Coastal

Management advised that he would brief Councillor Ashdown fully on both matters after the meeting.

Councillor Pitchers referred to appeal dismissal at 26 Highland Drive, Worlingham and queried why there were no learning points or actions. The Planning Manager, at Councillor Yule's invitation, noted that learning from the reason the appeal was upheld, that the fence was in keeping with the character of the area, was being applied to similar cases in the Worlingham area.

Councillor Yule moved the recommendations in the report, which were seconded by Councillor Ashdown. The Chair invited the Committee to debate the proposals. Councillor Hedgley congratulated officers on the successful defence of the appeal relating to Marchwood, Martlesham Road, Little Bealings and was of the view it set a benchmark for the future.

There being no further debate the Chair proceeded to the vote and it was unanimously

### **RESOLVED**

That the contents of the report be noted.

## **8 Planning Policy and Delivery Update**

The Committee received report **ES/1670** of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, which provided an update on key elements of the current work programme, including the preparation of Supplementary Planning Documents and supporting Neighbourhood Plan preparations, and on housing delivery. Updates were also included, as appropriate, for Specialist Services (Design and Conservation, Arboriculture and Landscape (including Rights of Way) and Ecology) that form part of the Planning Policy and Delivery Team, along with an update on the delivery of infrastructure to support growth through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

Councillor Yule introduced the report, which was taken as read, and invited officers to comment. The Head of Planning and Coastal Management updated the Committee that the national implementation of mandatory biodiversity net gain was to be delayed and that all Members would be notified when further information was made available by the government. The Planning Manager (Policy, Delivery and Specialist Services) added that this delay was likely to be to January 2024 and that the Council's Principal Ecologist continued to prepare for its implementation.

The Chair invited questions to Councillor Yule. Councillor Graham asked if officers were aware of the views from Suffolk Wildlife Trust ecologists that the proposed 10% biodiversity net gain was insufficient and would work with them to set a more ambitious target of 20%. The Planning Manager, at Councillor Yule's invitation, confirmed she was aware of this position but that the mandatory requirement would be 10% and a higher percentage could not be required without it being reflected in the Local Plan; she confirmed that officers were engaging with Suffolk Wildlife Trust around its ambitions.

In response, the Chair sought clarification on the ability for the Council to impose a higher requirement. The Head of Planning and Coastal Management advised that tier one (county and unitary) authorities were producing local nature recovery strategies and that the Suffolk strategy would provide an evidence base for the countywide position.

The Committee was advised that it would be premature to review the relevant policies of the Local Plan until this process was complete and it was known if there was an evidence base to do so; the Head of Planning and Coastal Management added that the Council was able to encourage developers to uplift biodiversity net gain targets where there was evidence they could do so.

In response to a query from Councillor Daly, the Head of Planning and Coastal Management confirmed the Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Strategy would hold weight. Following some discussion, it was suggested that a briefing for all members of the Council on this subject be held following the conclusion of the Committee's next meeting in January 2024.

Councillor Yule moved the recommendations in the report, which were seconded by Councillor Pitchers. There being no debate, the Chair proceeded to the vote and it was unanimously

#### **RESOLVED**

That the contents of the report be noted.

#### **9 Designation of three extensions to the existing Aldeburgh Conservation Area and adoption of a 2023 Supplement to the existing 2013 Aldeburgh Conservation Area Appraisal; Designation of a new Conservation Area at Aldeburgh Park and adoption of a 2023 Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan**

The Committee received report **ES/1671** of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, which asked it to consider proposals to extend the existing Conservation Area in Aldeburgh and adopt a Supplement to the existing Appraisal for the extensions; and to consider a proposal to designate a new Conservation Area named Aldeburgh Park in Aldeburgh and adopt an Appraisal and Management Plan for it.

Councillor Yule introduced the report and explained that this had been a significant piece of work; she expressed surprise that the areas proposed to be included in both the existing and new conservation areas were not already protected.

The Chair invited questions to Councillor Yule. Councillor Hedgley sought confirmation that there had been no major objections to the proposals. The Senior Design and Conservation Officer, at Councillor Yule's invitation, highlighted the summary of consultation responses contained within the report and noted that although there had been some objections from independent householders, all main bodies consulted had been in favour of the proposals.

Councillor Yule moved the recommendations in the report, which were seconded by Councillor Whitelock. The Chair invited the Committee to debate the proposals. There was broad support of the proposals across the Committee, with several Members complimenting officers for the hard work in producing them. Members of the Committee expressed a desire that heritage assets across the district be protected; Councillor Ninmeyer suggested that a district-wide strategy was needed.

Councillor Hedgley highlighted the importance of including Non Designated Heritage Assets (NDHAs) in neighbourhood plans. Councillor Gee, commending the proposals, noted the number of heritage assets lost in Lowestoft over the years.

Councillor Yule said that she would discuss with the Design and Conservation Team whether work could be undertaken with all members of the Council to identify heritage assets in their wards, so that the Council can be more aware of what needs to be conserved within the district.

The Planning Manager (Policy, Delivery and Specialist Services), at Councillor Yule's invitation, remarked that several neighbourhood plans being prepared were taking the opportunity to identify NDHAs and noted that although this status does not provide the same protection as inclusion on the National Heritage List for England, it gives a degree of protection in planning terms.

There being no further debate the Chair proceeded to the vote and it was unanimously

#### **RESOLVED**

1. That the designation of three extensions to the existing Aldeburgh Conservation Area as shown in the maps attached at Appendix A and including those properties and land included in the schedule attached at Appendix B be agreed.
2. That the adoption of the Extension of the Aldeburgh Conservation Area Supplement to Conservation Area Appraisal (October 2023) to the existing Aldeburgh Conservation Area Appraisal (2013) as included at Appendix C be agreed.
3. That the designation of a new Conservation Area to be named Aldeburgh Park as shown in the map attached at Appendix D and including those properties and land included in the schedule attached at Appendix E be agreed.
4. That the adoption of the Aldeburgh Park Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan (October 2023) as included at Appendix F be agreed.
5. That the Head of Planning and Coastal Management, in consultation with the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, be authorised to make any presentational or typographical amendments to the Extension of the Aldeburgh Conservation Area Supplement to Conservation Area Appraisal, and Aldeburgh Park Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan, prior to them being published.
6. That it be agreed that the designation date of the proposed Conservation Area extensions and new Aldeburgh Park Conservation Area will be Friday, 6 October 2023



to allow time – without prejudging the committee’s decisions – to publish all necessary statutory notices and advertising, and to write to all affected owners/occupiers.

**10 Strategic Planning Committee's Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its forward work programme. Following discussion, there was a consensus that an all-member briefing on logistics transport infrastructure should be arranged. The Clerk advised that Democratic Services would liaise with Planning officers to arrange the briefing.

The meeting concluded at 11.55am.

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Chair