

**Confirmed**



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Strategic Planning Committee** held in the Conference Room, Riverside, Lowestoft, on **Monday, 6 March 2023** at **10.30am**.

**Members of the Committee present:**

Councillor Paul Ashdown, Councillor Stuart Bird, Councillor Chris Blundell, Councillor Jenny Ceresa, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Andree Gee, Councillor Mark Newton, Councillor Malcolm Pitchers, Councillor Sarah Plummer, Councillor David Ritchie, Councillor Craig Rivett, Councillor Kay Yule

**Officers present:**

Martin Clarke (Licensing Manager & Housing Projects Lawyer), Chris King (Design Champion & Specialist Services Manager), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer (Regulatory)), Andrea McMillan (Planning Manager (Policy, Delivery and Specialist Services)), Phil Perkin (Principal Planner (Major Sites)), Bethany Rance (Planner (Energy Projects)), Philip Ridley (Head of Planning and Coastal Management), Katherine Scott (Technical Lead, Principal Planner (Development Management)), 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 Norman Brooks, Tony Cooper, Mike Deacon and Colin Hedgley.

**2 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

**3 Minutes**

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

**RESOLVED**

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 December 2022 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## Energy Projects Update

The Committee received a presentation on energy projects in East Suffolk from Councillor Craig Rivett, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economic Development.

Councillor Rivett summarised information on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) in East Suffolk, including new nuclear, offshore wind, interconnectors, and network reinforcement projects outside of the district.

Councillor Rivett noted that despite the Development Consent Order (DCO) for Sizewell C being granted in July 2022 there was still significant work for officers to complete. The Committee was informed that early works, consented under the Town and Country Planning Act, relating to ecological works had taken place along with early works consented under the DCO. Councillor Rivett confirmed the Judicial Review into the granting of a DCO for Sizewell C was ongoing, and was scheduled to be heard over 22 and 23 March 2023, having been rescheduled from December 2022.

Councillor Rivett outlined the NSIPs Reform Action Plan, published on 23 February 2023, which proposed making the NSIP process "better, faster, greener, fairer, and more resilient". Councillor Rivett noted the five key areas for reform and set out the government's proposed timetable for implementation.

Councillor Rivett noted the significant work undertaken in relation to NSIPs in East Suffolk, highlighting the Council's strategic engagement on energy projects/NSIPs and its contribution to the DCO examination processes for both Sizewell C and the East Anglia 1 North and East Anglia 2 offshore windfarms. Councillor Rivett praised the work of the Energy Projects team on these matters, highlighting that Naomi Goold, Energy Projects Manager, had been awarded both the Outstanding Leadership Award and Employee of the Year at the Council's recent 2022 Staff Awards ceremony.

The Chairman invited questions and comments to Councillor Rivett.

Councillor Ritchie reiterated Councillor Rivett's comments on the hard work of Council officers in respect of the DCO process for Sizewell C, highlighting the significant input going back as far as the initial pre-consultation stage. Councillor Ritchie considered that, despite the importance of the consultation process, it had perhaps been overzealous in respect of Sizewell C.

Councillor Bird echoed Councillor Ritchie's comments about the length of time taken to complete the DCO process for Sizewell C and asked if there was a timescale for the new nuclear power station to be constructed and brought on-stream. Councillor Rivett gave assurances that preliminary work on the site was already underway, as he had set out in his presentation.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Rivett for his presentation.

## Major Sites Update

The Committee received a presentation on major development sites in East Suffolk. Councillor David Ritchie, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, introduced the presentation and invited the Planning Manager (Development Management, Major Sites and Infrastructure) to address the Committee.

The Planning Manager noted that the Principal Planner (Major Sites) was present at the meeting; he reflected on the current status of strategic development sites in East Suffolk and provided updates on the following sites:

- Woods Meadow, Oulton
- Kirkley Waterfront and Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood
- South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood
- Brightwell Lakes
- North Felixstowe Garden Neighbourhood

The Chairman invited questions to Councillor Ritchie and the officers throughout the presentation.

The Committee was advised that the delivery of the link road at Woods Meadow would be dependent on the northern section of the site being developed, which would happen at phase four. The Principal Planner (Major Sites) noted the detail of the east-west cycle link being created across the site and how it would link into the wider area.

The Principal Planner noted that the trigger point to release the £1,000,000 bond for highways improvements in relation to Woods Meadow was set at 400 houses constructed in the Section 106 Agreement. The Committee was advised that the Highways Authority would identify the improvements required. Members asked that an update from the Highways Authority be sought on this issue.

In respect of plans to use potentially contaminated land at Woods Meadow for a play area, the Planning Manager confirmed that this was getting the upmost attention from the Council's Environmental Protection Team, particularly the review of mitigation works, and that an alternative play area provision may need to be sought.

The Planning Manager confirmed that officers regularly met with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) on the delivery of medical facilities on major sites, to highlight where Section 106 or Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding was available to construct such facilities. The Planning Manager highlighted that staffing of such facilities is a separate issue.

The Head of Planning and Coastal Management advised that the Council was in regular conversation with the different landowners at Kirkley Waterfront to review the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the site and to look to develop the site in a constructive way.

In response to questions relating to the Brightwell Lakes site, the Planning Manager acknowledged there would be impact on neighbours from the night-time works taking place to make highways changes and confirmed there was a Construction Management Plan (CMP) for the whole site, and that the Highways Authority approved the Section 278 Agreement for off-site highways works.

The Planning Manager noted concerns about tree-felling and shredding during unsociable hours and that changes had been made so this work was done during the day and away from residential areas. The Planning Manager said that there was ongoing dialogue between residents, the site developer and the Highways Authority to manage issues arising.

The Planning Manager noted the concerns raised by Councillor Blundell about the layby adjacent to the Brightwell Lakes site and that this had been a concern of some residents since the outline planning application in 2017. The Committee was advised that the layby was not covered by the site's planning permission and that the Police were not content for its removal due to its need for highway safety. The Planning Manager advised that future concerns could be directed to the Highways Authority and the Police.

In respect of medical facilities at Brightwell Lakes, the Planning Manager set out that the Section 106 Agreement for the development makes provision for either on-site delivery of a new medical centre, or £750,000 of developer contributions to expand existing medical facilities in Martlesham, Kesgrave and Woodbridge. The Planning Manager said there was no recent update from the ICB on its intentions at Brightwell Lakes and the trigger point for this requirement in the Section 106 Agreement was the occupation of 500 homes on the site.

Councillor Yule raised concerns that existing medical facilities near to Brightwell Lakes were already not coping and was of the view that a new facility should be delivered on the site. The Planning Manager concurred with Councillor Yule's point and explained that the challenge was that at the outline planning stage, NHS England had been clear it did not consider the development was enough of an increase in population to justify a new facility. Councillor Ritchie highlighted that it was not in the Council's power, as the Local Planning Authority, to force NHS England to staff any facilities constructed.

The Planning Manager confirmed that the expectation for industrial land in the North Lowestoft Garden Village was set at eight hectares and that officers had been communicating with Suffolk County Council as the site promoter to set up meeting with Anglian Water to address issues on the site; a recent meeting regarding mitigation had recently taken place.

Councillor Bird addressed rumours of delays to the delivery of new leisure centre provision at the North Felixstowe Garden Neighbourhood and sought timescales for the delivery. The Planning Manager explained that the Council had significant ambition to deliver new leisure provision in Felixstowe and the biggest influence on this would be the completion of a masterplan for North Felixstowe Garden Neighbourhood, as the provision could not come forward in isolation.

The Committee was advised that the masterplan was being worked on by the Council alongside Trinity College to ensure the leisure provision was integrated into the site. Councillor Bird expressed concern that the public was perceiving that a lot of houses were being constructed in Felixstowe without the needed amenities coming forward.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Ritchie and the Planning Manager for the presentation and suggested that a further update be brought to the first meeting of the Committee following the May 2023 elections.

## **6 Planning Performance Report - October to December 2022**

The Committee received report **ES/1464** 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 Ritchie introduced the report and noted that the Council had met national targets in the most recent period but had just missed out on its own stretched targets. Councillor Ritchie commended the work of the Planning service, noting that it was still carrying several vacancies.

The Chairman invited questions and comments. In respect of a question on vacancies, Councillor Ritchie invited the Head of Planning and Coastal Management to comment. The Head of Planning and Coastal Management confirmed that the Planning service was carrying six to seven vacancies that were currently being advertised; he noted the national position as a result of shortage of planning professionals and that both the public and private sectors were struggling to recruit.

The Head of Planning and Coastal Management considered the Council to be in a better position than other authorities but that filling its vacancies would alleviate the pressure on the Planning service.

On the proposition of Councillor Ritchie, seconded by Councillor Yule, it was by a unanimous vote

### **RESOLVED**

That the content of the report be noted.

## **7 Enforcement Performance Report - October to December 2022**

The Committee received report **ES/1465** 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 Ritchie introduced the reports and highlighted the improvements made to Planning Enforcement since the introduction of the action plan previously considered by the Committee, noting that statistical analysis showed that improvements had already been made. Councillor Ritchie highlighted that more cases had been opened

than closed in the most recent monitoring period and underlined that several cases were closed shortly after being opened, acknowledging that some cases were being unavoidably delayed.

The Chairman invited questions and comments. In response to a question on enforcement cases with the Council's Legal Department, the Licensing Manager and Housing Lead Lawyer explained that two cases were currently before the High Court, with several injunction applications due to be heard by the High Court in May 2023. The Licensing Manager and Housing Lead Lawyer added that an application for a warrant to claim land costs was required. The Planning Manager (Development Management, Major Sites and Infrastructure) suggested that further detail on these cases be provided to the Planning Committees North and South at their next meetings.

On the proposition of Councillor Ritchie, seconded by Councillor Coulam, it was by a unanimous vote

## **RESOLVED**

That the content of the report be noted.

## **8 Appeals Performance Report**

The Committee received report **ES/1466** 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 Ritchie introduced the report and noted that of the 15 appeals received within the period set out in the report, 13 had been dismissed. The Committee was advised that of the two appeals on major sites, one had been dismissed and one had been allowed.

Councillor Ritchie noted that the appeal allowed, for outline planning permission for 35 houses on a site in Ringsfield, had originally been recommended for approval by officers, was deferred by Planning Committee North and then recommended for refusal when considered again by the Committee. Councillor Ritchie said that the appeal decision demonstrated that there was more than one way to view this scheme and thanked the Planning Inspectorate for the clarity provided.

Councillor Ritchie invited the Planning Manager (Development Management, Major Sites and Infrastructure) to comment on the report. The Planning Manager said that the key learning points from the allowed appeal at Ringsfield related to the fact that the policy referred to the number of dwellings, the density and site area. The Committee was informed that the appeal decision did not prevent the Council looking at the quality of the proposals at the reserved matters stage.

The Planning Manager highlighted the reasons the appeal for Yarmouth Road, Melton, had been dismissed, highlighting the weighting the Planning Inspector had given to protecting a plan-based system.

The Chairman invited questions and comments. The Planning Manager said that the appeal decision for Yarmouth Road, Melton meant it was likely further application to develop the site in the future would not go ahead.

Councillor Ashdown expressed concern about the future development of the Ringsfield site and considered that it required close scrutiny at later stages of decision making.

On the proposition of Councillor Ritchie, seconded by Councillor Rivett, it was by a unanimous vote

## **RESOLVED**

That the content of the report be noted.

## **9 Planning Policy and Delivery Update**

The Committee received report **ES/1467** 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 Neighbourhood Plans, and on housing delivery.

Updates, as appropriate, were also included 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 Ritchie introduced the report and stressed the importance of the team, highlighting the significant work towards a Coastal Adaptation Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and the review of Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans. Councillor Ritchie added the resources put towards the CIL Charging Schedule currently undergoing examination and neighbourhood plans coming forward, noting the importance of the latter as material planning considerations.

The Committee was informed that both the Oulton and Halesworth Neighbourhood Plans had been made at the meeting of East Suffolk Council held on 22 February 2023, following successful referenda.

Councillor Ritchie invited the Planning Manager (Policy, Delivery and Specialist Services) to comment on the report. The Planning Manager highlighted the work programme continued to implement the two Local Plans covering the East Suffolk district along with other work, such as the Conservation Area Appraisals. The Planning Manager noted the CIL Charging Schedule, detailed at paragraph 2.3 of the report, and that officers had now prepared and submitted additional evidence as part of the examination process. The Examiner was presently consulting with other parties specifically on Beccles and Worlingham Garden Neighbourhood, and it was anticipated the examination would be concluded shortly following this additional consultation.

The Chairman invited questions and comments. In response to a question on housing land supply, the Planning Manager outlined the requirement for the Council to regularly review its housing land supply on an annual basis and confirmed that as of Autumn 2022 East Suffolk had a 5-year housing land supply and new sites coming forward would contribute to maintaining this.

Councillor Plummer asked, in reference to the CIL Charging Schedule, if Beccles Town Council and Worlingham Parish Council would be kept updated. Councillor Ritchie said that both councils had been strong representatives on this element of the Schedule and the examiner had asked for additional evidence; the Planning Manager said that both councils would receive direct notifications as appropriate.

On the proposition of Councillor Ritchie, seconded by Councillor Blundell, it was by a unanimous vote

## **RESOLVED**

That the content of the report be noted.

## **10 Design Skills Audit**

The Committee received report **ES/14734** of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, which presented the Design Skills Audit for the East Suffolk Council Planning Service and outlined the process associated with undertaking the audit and presented the outputs and the opportunities identified.

Councillor Ritchie introduced the report and explained that the Council was committed to get the best design from all planning applications, stressing the importance of undertaking the audit to understand officers' approaches and awareness of design elements associated with planning applications.

Councillor Ritchie invited the Design Champion and Specialist Services Manager to comment on the report and give a short presentation on the Design Skills Audit. The Design Champion and Specialist Services Manager highlighted his background in landscape, architectural and urban design and his role as Design Champion to embed and celebrate design in East Suffolk.

The Committee was advised that the Design Champion and Specialist Services Manager had worked with various teams to see where his work was best placed and received an overview of the formation of his team, which had been commended for improvement and innovation at the recent East Suffolk Council Staff Awards.

The Committee received a short presentation on the Design Skills Audit which outlined the current challenges at national, local and service levels, the audit's approach, its results, and the opportunities identified.

The Chairman invited questions and comments. Members hoped that the results of the Design Skills Audit would have an input on major developments in East Suffolk.



On the proposition of Councillor Ritchie, seconded by Councillor Coulam, it was by a unanimous vote

**RESOLVED**

That the content of the report be noted.

**11      Draft Forward Work Programme for 2023/24**

The Committee received a draft Forward Work Programme for the 2023/24 Municipal Year. No amendments were made.

The meeting concluded at 12.10pm.

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Chairman