

Confirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Strategic Planning Committee** held in the Conference Room at Riverside, Lowestoft on **Monday 7 June 2021 at 10:30 am**

Members of the Committee present:

Councillor Paul Ashdown, Councillor Stuart Bird, Councillor Chris Blundell, Councillor Tony Cooper, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Andree Gee, Councillor Colin Hedgley, Councillor Debbie McCallum, Councillor Mark Newton, Councillor Malcolm Pitchers, Councillor David Ritchie, Councillor Craig Rivett, Councillor Kay Yule

Officers present: Katherine Abbott (Democratic Services -Clerk), Liz Beighton (Planning Development Manager), Sarah Carter (Democratic Services -Host), Matt Makin (Democratic Services - Co-host), Bethany Rance (Graduate Planner, Energy Projects), Desi Reed (Planning Policy and Delivery Manager), Philip Ridley (Head of Planning and Coastal Management), Ben Woolnough (Planning Development Manager).

1 Election of a Chairman

The Clerk sought nominations for the election of a Chairman for the Municipal Year.

Councillor McCallum was nominated by Councillor Ashdown and this nomination was seconded by Councillor Ritchie. There being no other nominees, it was duly

RESOLVED

That Councillor McCallum be elected as Chairman of the Strategic Planning Committee for the 2021/22 Municipal Year

2 Election of a Vice-Chairman

The Chairman sought nominations for a Vice Chairman for the Municipal Year.

Councillor Ashdown was nominated by Councillor McCallum and this nomination was seconded by Councillor Ritchie. There being no other nominees, it was duly

RESOLVED

That Councillor Ashdown be elected as Vice Chairman of the Strategic Planning Committee for the 2021/22 Municipal Year

3 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Brooks, Councillor Deacon and Councillor Fryatt. Councillor Craig acted as Substitute for Councillor Deacon.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

5 Minutes

By consensus, it was

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 March 2021 be confirmed as a correct record

6 Energy Projects Update

The Committee received a presentation by Councillor Rivett as the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economic Development on Energy Projects within East Suffolk.

In summary, the presentation outlined the status (constructed, pre-construction, examination, pre-application, option assessment) of current and forthcoming energy projects, including East Anglia One, Two, Three, and One North; Sizewell C; Nautilus; Eurolink; SCD1; Five Estuaries, and North Falls.

The Committee was advised that the Nautilus and Eurolink projects were National Grid Ventures, reclassified as multi-purpose interconnectors, and a non-statutory consultation would be undertaken in late Summer on the connection offer to Friston (not yet consented) with a formal consultation anticipated towards the end of the year. The DC submission for the Nautilus project was expected in quarter two of 2023. The Committee was reminded that Councillors had received a briefing on the projects in February and that National Grid Ventures had held a webinar for town and parish councils in March.

With regard to SCD1, Councillor Rivett said this was an interconnector project by National Grid Ventures between Kent and Suffolk. A formal consultation was anticipated later this year or early next and the earliest service date was 2029.

The Committee was informed that the Five Estuaries, formally known as the Galloper extension, had had a connection offer previously identified to the substation at Friston (not yet consented), but this might alter. It was stressed that this was at a very early stage and connection was not anticipated until 2030.

With regard to North Falls, Councillor Rivett said this had previously been called the Greater Gabbard extension; a connection offer had been made but the location was not yet identified. Again this project was at a very early stage and connection was not anticipated until 2030.

The Committee was updated on the examination of East Anglia One North and East Anglia Two which had been extended by three months until 6 July 2021. The full details of the remaining deadlines, recently heard hearings etc. was available on the Planning Inspectorate's website.

With regard to the examination of Sizewell C, the Committee was informed that this had commenced in April 2021 and would conclude in October 2021. Open floor hearings had been held in the week commencing 18 May 2021, local impact reports had been submitted and responses to the Examiner's questions provided. Issue-specific hearings would commence on 6 July 2021, accompanied site visits would take place in June and again all details were available on the Planning Inspectorate's website.

In conclusion, Councillor Rivett highlighted current energy project priorities, in particular, the close partnership working with the County Council, Natural England, Historic England, Suffolk Coasts and Heaths AONB, Environment Agency, Suffolk Constabulary and Suffolk's clinical commissioning groups. In addition, he said, the Council continued to work with local councillors, town and parish councils, and local groups. Lastly, the Council continued to lobby Government, to take part in the Offshore Network Transmission Review and to interact with the Crown Estate.

There were no questions on the presentation. The Chairman thanked Councillor Rivett for a clear and comprehensive presentation.

7 Annual Review of The Planning Referral Panel Procedure and Processes

The Committee received report **ES/0781** which provided a summary of the applications presented to the Referral Panel in respect of the volume of traffic, level of Ward Member comment and statistics of the route of determination of all applications so presented. Councillor Ritchie, as the Cabinet Member for Planning & Coastal Management, introduced the report. In his introduction, Councillor Ritchie said that, as the responsible Cabinet Member, he had no cause for concern about the effectiveness of the referral panel and its processes. He added that he considered the referral panel to be efficient and effective in its role.

Councillor Cooper, as the Assistant Cabinet Member for Planning, praised what he described as the first class work of the referral panel. He said Councillors were encouraged to attend to see the work for themselves and reminded the Committee that Ward Members could submit comments for consideration by the panel, by email, up to the day before it met.

Councillor McCallum said that more Councillors had been able to attend the referral panel while it had been held remotely which was very welcome.

There being no questions and at the request of the Chairman, the recommendation was proposed by Councillor Ashdown and seconded by Councillor Cooper. The Chairman invited debate.

Councillor Hedgley stated that he would like Ward Members to be allowed to speak in person at the referral panels. He referred to sometimes inaccurate comments made by the panel which the Ward Member with their local knowledge would be able to correct. He noted that it was possible to send comments in to the panel in advance but that was not helpful, he said, in addressing inaccuracies on the day of the meeting. Councillor Hedgley said the presence of the Ward Member would enhance the democratic process. He noted that the Cabinet Member and Assistant Cabinet Member were pleased with the panel's work but suggested that constituents were not and that there was a need to make the decision-making process more transparent.

Councillor Ashdown reminded the Committee that comments could be provided up to the evening before the referral panel sat. He added that if every Ward Member attended to comment on applications in their ward the referral panel meeting would be too long.

Councillor Coulam said that if Ward Members commented at referral panel this might lead to debate which was not, she suggested, the purpose of the meeting. She added that she did not consider any changes were necessary.

Councillor Yule stated that she agreed with Councillor Hedgley. She warned that the public perception of the referral panel was not being considered and that as planning was always contentious it would be better to have the Ward Member present and able to comment on what the panel discuss. She added that sending an email in advance when the Ward Member did not know what might come up at the meeting was not helpful and did not allow the possibility to counter remarks made. Councillor Yule emphasised the need for the public to have confidence in the robust consideration of applications and that the perceived in-balance towards the referral panel as opposed to the public Planning Committees needed to be addressed.

Councillor Ritchie said that the referral panel was not meant to be a Planning Committee and reiterated its role as a means of "routing" applications. Councillor McCallum said that if Ward Members were allowed to speak it might necessitate the need to invite objectors, agents, developers etc. to the referral panel.

Councillor Cooper noted that of the 230 applications considered by the referral panel, 18 had been accompanied by pre-submitted comments by Ward Members; he suggested that this indicated that Ward Members were content with the current arrangements. Councillor Cooper also cautioned against the perception of pre-determination.

In response, Councillor Hedgley emphasised that he did not wish the referral panel to become a 'debating chamber'; rather he sought the ability to speak at the referral panel to comment on remarks or inaccuracies with the benefit of local knowledge. He stated that it was not possible to predict the making of such comments and so the advance email was ineffective in isolation and would be strengthened by the ability to speak too. In response to Councillor Cooper's point, Councillor Hedgley suggested that

perhaps Ward Members did not attend the referral panel because they were not allowed to speak.

Councillor Rivett and Councillor Ritchie asked Councillor Hedgley to provide, outside of the meeting, an example of when the inability to speak at referral panel had created an issue. Councillor Rivett endorsed the contents of the report and agreed that the referral panel provided a good routing service for applications. He agreed that public perception was important but suggested that it was beholden on district Councillors to explain the process and why it existed

It was proposed, seconded and by majority vote

RESOLVED

That having received, questioned and discussed the report its contents be noted.

11.10am The meeting was adjourned briefly and reconvened at 11.20am. Councillor Gee left the meeting.

8 Enforcement Performance Report – January to March 2021

The Committee received report **ES/0782** which provided information on the performance of the enforcement section of the Development Management Team. Councillor Ritchie, as Cabinet Member for Planning and Coastal Management, introduced the report.

There being no questions or matters raised for debate, it was proposed by Councillor Ritchie, seconded by Councillor Hedgley, and by unanimous vote

RESOLVED

That having received the report its contents be noted

9 Planning Performance Report – January to March 2021

The Committee received report **ES/0783** which provided an update on the planning performance of the Development Management Team in terms of the timescales for determining planning applications. The report was introduced by Councillor Ritchie as Cabinet Member for Planning and Coastal Management. Councillor Ritchie emphasised the excellent performance overall and said the Council had successfully met all local and national targets.

There being no questions or matters raised for debate, it was proposed by Councillor Ashdown, seconded by Councillor Cooper and by unanimous vote

RESOLVED

That having received the report its contents be noted

10 Appeals Performance Report – January to 12 May 2021

The Committee received report **ES/0784** which provide 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, as Cabinet Member for Planning and Coastal Management, introduced the report. He stated that 16 appeals had been made and 14 had been dismissed - this he said was a success rate of 88% which was better than the national average and reflected the soundness of the Council's planning decisions.

There being no questions, the recommendation was proposed by Councillor Yule and seconded by Councillor Bird. The Chairman invited debate. Councillor Rivett said he would like to formally, through Councillor Ritchie, thank the Planning Team for an excellent performance result against a national benchmark. There being nothing further raised for debate, the Chairman sought a vote on the recommendation; it was by unanimous vote

RESOLVED

That having received and discussed the report its contents be noted

11 Planning Policy and Delivery Update

The Committee received report **ES/0786** which provided an update on key elements of the current work programme, including preparing Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), strategies on specific topics such as cycling and walking, the delivery of infrastructure to support growth through CIL collection and spend, Neighbourhood Plans, and housing delivery. Councillor Ritchie as Cabinet Member for Planning and Coastal Management introduced the report and referred the Committee to the key milestones met since the last meeting in March and detailed in section 2 of the report, and forthcoming key milestones for the next 3/4 months in section 3.

He added that, in the last few days, the Council had been selected by the Government to be a pathfinder authority to see how the Government's proposals set down in last year's Planning White Paper might work in reality for the digitisation of Local Plans.

The Planning Policy and Delivery Manager said the selection of the Council to be a pathfinder authority was extremely pleasing but would mean an intensive period of work up to mid August given the current work programme. The status did include some funding for resources.

In response to a question by Councillor Blundell about draft development briefs, the Cabinet Member confirmed that this was a new initiative for specific development sites within the Local Plans. Councillor Blundell asked if these briefs would also be available for commercial developments or just housing developments. The Planning Policy and Delivery Manager confirmed that only development briefs for housing sites were currently programmed but the need to prepare briefs for employment sites as well would be considered.

Councillor Ashdown asked if the work as a pathfinder authority would be brought to the Local Plan Working Group (LPWG). The Planning Policy and Delivery Manager confirmed that the Government regarded this as a confidential project and so what could be imparted to the LPWG would need to be carefully considered. The Cabinet Member emphasised that the Council's views on the Planning White Paper were extensively documented in its response to Government.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Pitchers, seconded by Councillor Coulam and there being no matters raised for debate it was by unanimous vote

RESOLVED

That having received and questioned the report its contents be noted

12 Strategic Planning Committee's Forward Work Programme

The Committee reviewed its Forward Work Programme. It was suggested by Councillor Blundell that the Committee receive future housing and commercial development briefings (as at paragraph 2.7 of the report).

There were no exempt or confidential items of business.

The meeting concluded at 11.40am

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Chairman