

Confirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Strategic Planning Committee** held via Zoom, on **Monday, 8 March 2021** at **10:30am**

Members of the Committee present:

Councillor Melissa Allen, Councillor Paul Ashdown, Councillor Stuart Bird, Councillor Chris Blundell, Councillor Jocelyn Bond, Councillor Norman Brooks, Councillor Jenny Ceresa, Councillor Tony Cooper, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Mike Deacon, Councillor Graham Elliott, Councillor Tony Fryatt, Councillor Andree Gee, Councillor Colin Hedgley, Councillor Debbie McCallum, Councillor Malcolm Pitchers, Councillor David Ritchie, Councillor Craig Rivett, Councillor Kay Yule

Other Members present:

Councillor Peter Byatt, Councillor Rachel Smith-Lyte, Councillor Ed Thompson

Officers present:

Carolyn Barnes (Energy Projects Transport Lead), Liz Beighton (Planning Manager), Freya Carroll (Assistant Planner), Lisa Chandler (Energy Projects Manager), Nick Clow (Energy Projects Co-Ordinator), Sarah Davis (Democratic Services Officer), Naomi Goold (Senior Energy Projects Officer), Beth Hughes (Assistant Planner), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer), Bethany Rance (Graduate Town Planner - Energy Projects), Desi Reed (Planning Policy and Delivery Manager), Philip Ridley (Head of Planning and Coastal Management), Grahame Stutely (Senior Energy Projects Officer)

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

There were no apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Kay Yule declared a Local Non-Pecuniary Interest in item 7 of the agenda, specifically in relation to one of the appeal decisions detailed in the report. Councillor Yule advised that she was not able to disclose in what capacity she was declaring the interest; the Chairman sought advice from the Democratic Services Officer, and it was agreed that Councillor Yule would take no part in item 7 and leave the virtual room for its duration.

3a Minutes - December 2020

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 December 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3b Minutes - January 2021
RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 January 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects

The Committee received a presentation on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) within East Suffolk from Councillor Craig Rivett, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economic Development.

Councillor Rivett thanked officers for the ongoing work on the various NSIPs within East Suffolk and noted the significant work undertaken to compile the Council's responses to the Development Consent Orders (DCOs) for Sizewell C, East Anglia One North and East Anglia Two.

Councillor Rivett's presentation summarised current and forthcoming projects. The presentation also provided a more detailed update on the East Anglia One North and East Anglia Two including deadline dates and remaining hearings. An update on Sizewell C was also given, detailing the preliminary meeting and the provisional timetable published in the Rule 6 letter.

Councillor Rivett provided further detail on forthcoming projects including Nautilus and Eurolink, SCD1, Five Estuaries (formerly known as the Galloper extension) and North Falls (formerly known as the Greater Gabbard extension).

The Committee was shown visual illustrations of the Five Estuaries and North Falls wind farms.

Councillor Rivett outlined the National Grid's Network Options Assessment for East Anglia and its relation to East Suffolk and highlighted the need to increase the amount of electricity that could be "pushed through" the network.

Councillor Rivett summarised the Council's ongoing priorities to work with partner organisations, local councillors, local town and parish councils, and to lobby and engage with Government and the National Grid.

The Chairman invited questions to Councillor Rivett and the officers.

A member of the Committee, who was Ward Member for Aldeburgh and Leiston, thanked the officers for their hard work; she noted dissatisfaction in her Ward regarding the East Anglia One North and East Anglia Two proposals and asked if further consultation with the local community would be considered.

Councillor Rivett advised that it would be a challenge to engage in additional consultation, given the tight deadlines outlined in his presentation; he said that the Council would engage with the local community on specific areas of concern.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked Councillor Rivett and the

officers for the presentation and said he looked forward to seeing further updates on NSIPs at future meetings.

5 Planning Enforcement Report

The Committee received report **ES/0691** of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, which provided information on the performance of the Council's Planning Enforcement section.

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management. Councillor Ritchie explained that the report covered the period September 2020 to December 2020 inclusive and detailed the enforcement cases received and closed in that period, the time taken to close cases and the reasons for closure.

The Committee was advised that in that period, 37 new enforcement cases had been received and 41 cases had been closed; 16 cases had been closed due to no breach of planning regulations, 17 had been closed as compliance had been achieved or the use in breach had ceased, 6 had been closed as planning permission had been granted, and 2 cases had been closed as it had not been expedient to pursue them.

Councillor Ritchie invited the Planning Manager to comment on the report. The Planning Manager had nothing further to add and said she was happy to answer any question the Committee might have.

There being no questions to Councillor Ritchie and the officers, the Chairman moved to the recommendation to note the report.

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

RESOLVED

That the report concerning Enforcement Team statistics be received.

6 Development Management Performance Report

The Committee received report **ES/0693** 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.

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, who noted that the service had met or exceeded both the national targets for approving planning applications as well as the local "stretched" targets that it set itself. Councillor Ritchie highlighted that despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the team was dealing with at least the usual number of applications it normally would be.

Councillor Ritchie invited the Planning Manager to comment on the report. The Planning Manager said that the performance of the service had increased compared to the previous year and noted the figures at paragraph 2.8 of the report in respect of the

rate of approval for major, minor and householder applications. The Planning Manager thanked the Development Management Team for its hard work, particularly during the challenging period of working remotely under COVID-19 restrictions.

The Chairman invited questions to Councillor Ritchie and the officers.

In response to a question on the "stretched" targets referred to in the report, the Planning Manager explained that these were targets laid out in the Council's service plan to meet internally; these targets were above what was required nationally, in order to increase performance.

The Planning Manager confirmed that there had been more minor applications than major ones of late and that the majority of these applications had been approved.

The Committee was advised that the Development Management Team was now fully staffed, with four new officers commencing employment with the Council in January 2021.

A member of the Committee raised concerns about the referral panel system, which directed whether applications should be determined by the Head of Planning and Coastal Management using his delegated authority or be determined by one of the Council's Planning Committees. The Member compared this process to the call-in process used for applications at the former Waveney District Council, which he considered gave Ward Members more of a say in how planning applications were determined, and considered that the public, as well as town and parish councils, were not confident in the Council's planning system.

In response, the Head of Planning and Coastal Management noted that the reports to the Strategic Planning Committee, presented on a quarterly basis, provided a wealth of evidence on how the Council's planning system was operating including feedback and complaints. The Head of Planning and Coastal Management added that the Council regularly engaged with town and parish councils through forum events and that complaints from these authorities were few and considered the Council's relationship with them on planning issues to be good.

The Head of Planning and Coastal Management was of the view that the referral panel process was working well and highlighted that Ward Members were able to observe referral panel meetings; he accepted that Ward Members would not always be happy with where the referral panel directed an application for determination but stated that the Council operated a plan-led system which was producing good results.

Councillor Ritchie added that a recent forum event with town and parish councils had provided positive feedback and disagreed with the suggestion that there was a decline in confidence from towns and parishes.

There was significant discussion on the referral panel process. Several Members were content with how the system currently worked and other Members raised concerns with the level of Ward Member involvement in the process and suggested that Ward Members should at least be able to speak at referral panel meetings, to provide factual information.

The Chairman encouraged Ward Members to attend and observe referral panel meetings and highlighted that more often than not, comments were not received from Ward Members during the consultation period on applications, which could be considered by the referral panel when directing applications for determination.

The Vice-Chairman echoed the comments of the Chairman and stressed that the referral panel was not a decision-making body; she was of the view that if Ward Members were allowed to speak at referral panel meetings then it could be considered that planning decisions were being taken in private.

The Head of Planning and Coastal Management advised the Committee that it was considering a report on the performance of the Development Management Team and not a review of the referral panel process. It was confirmed by both the Head of Planning and Coastal Management and the Democratic Services Officer that a report reviewing the referral panel procedure and process would be presented to the Committee at its next meeting on Monday 7 June 2021.

There being no further questions, the Chairman moved to the recommendation to note the report.

On the proposition of Councillor Ritchie, seconded by Councillor McCallum it was by a majority vote

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted.

7 Planning Appeals Report

Note: Councillor Kay Yule left the meeting for the duration of this item

The Committee received report **ES/0690** of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, which provided an update on all appeals received from the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) between 1 December 2020 and 12 February 2021.

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, who noted that 75% of all appeals in this period had been successfully defended; this rate was stated to be above the national average.

Councillor Ritchie highlighted that the report detailed the outcomes of each appeal and suggested that Members study this information, particularly where appeals had been upheld.

The Chairman invited the Planning Manager to comment on the report. The Planning Manager noted the reasons for appeals that had been allowed at paragraphs 2.8, 2.9 and 2.10 of the report.

There being no questions to Councillor Ritchie and the officers, the Chairman moved to the recommendation to note the report.

On the proposition of Councillor Ritchie, seconded by Councillor Cooper it was by a majority vote

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted.

Note: Councillor Kay Yule returned to the meeting following the conclusion of this item.

8 Planning Policy and Delivery Update

The Committee received report **ES/0692** of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, which provided an update on key elements of the current work programme including progress on Neighbourhood Plans and housing delivery.

The report was introduced by Councillor Ritchie, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, who noted the heavy workload of the Planning Policy and Delivery Team with the various supplementary planning documents being produced to support the two Local Plans covering East Suffolk.

The Chairman invited the Planning Policy and Delivery Manager to comment on the report. The Planning Policy and Delivery Manager summarised section two of the report and highlighted the progress made on several documents including the Statement of Community Involvement and the Cycling and Walking Strategy.

The Planning Policy and Delivery Manager considered that her team took pride in making documents and consultations as user-friendly as possible and considered the 800 responses received digitally on the Cycling and Walking Strategy as testament to this.

The Committee was advised that the Council consulted the public on documents, i.e. the Statement of Community Involvement, even when it was not a statutory requirement as it was considered the right thing to do.

It was noted that the Annual Monitoring Report 2019/20, considered by the Committee at its meeting on 14 December 2020, had been published on the East Suffolk Council website alongside an interactive summary of its key findings. The Council had also recently published its first Infrastructure Funding Statement.

The Planning Policy and Delivery Manager explained that several key documents would be progressed over the coming months and presented to the Cabinet for adoption, and further consultations would take place including one on the new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charging schedule. The Committee was also advised that the next CIL bidding window would open on 1 April 2021.

The development of several Neighbourhood Plans was being supported by the Planning Policy and Delivery Team and a number of these would be subject to referenda being held on 6 May 2021. Other Neighbourhood Plans in development were making good progress but, in some instances, had been delayed due to the impact of COVID-19

restrictions on consultation events.

The Planning Policy and Delivery Manager said that advice had been given to Neighbourhood Plan Working Groups to delay the Regulation 14 stage of consultation for their plans in some cases, but that these groups continued to be supported where they chose to continue.

It was noted that housing delivery completions would be lower for 2020/21 due to the impact of COVID-19. The Planning Policy and Delivery Manager advised that a questionnaire had been distributed to developers to seek their views on construction and delivery issues and this feedback would inform the Housing Action Plan.

The Chairman invited questions to Councillor Ritchie and the officers.

A member of the Committee asked if there was any update on the reforms proposed in the Government's Planning White Paper. The Planning Policy and Delivery Manager advised that the consultation had elicited a huge response and confirmation was still pending on how and when this White Paper would be progressed into legislation; Councillor Ritchie added that this particular White Paper had been more like a consultation and was at a very early stage.

The Chairman thanked officers for the support they were providing to the development of a Neighbourhood Plan in his Ward.

There being no further questions, the Chairman moved to the recommendation to note and endorse the report.

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

RESOLVED

That the content of the report be noted and endorsed.

9 Strategic Planning Committee's Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its Forward Work Programme.

It was agreed that there would be a standing item for the the 2021/22 Municipal Year to receive verbal updates on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economic Development, and that there would be an item on the agenda for the Committee's 7 June 2021 meeting to receive feedback gathered from the Town and Parish Forum events.

The meeting concluded at 11:43am

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Chairman