



Member Notes

Place Panel – all-Member meeting to discuss the constrained Local Plan

Notes of meeting held on 7 October 2022 in the New Council Chamber

Those present:

Councillors: John Crockford-Hawley (Chairman), Peter Crew (Vice-chairman), Mike Bell, Mike Bird, Steve Bridger, Mark Canniford, John Cato, Karin Haverson, Steve Hogg, Stuart McQuillan, Phil Neve, Ian Parker, Bridget Petty, Terry Porter, Geoff Richardson, Tim Snaden, Mike Solomon, James Tonkin, Richard Westwood.

Officers: Nicholas Brain, Richard Kent, Michael Reep, Claire Courtois, Natalie Richards, Paul Paton, Marcus Hewlett, Ellena Fletcher, Philippa Penney, Brent Cross.

1 Chairman's Introduction

The chairman welcomed Members, officers and the public to the meeting, and reminded Members that the reason for meeting was for the Panel to input into the Executive Committee resolution that a revised local plan is developed that recognises the constrained nature of North Somerset and identifies an appropriate scale and location of development to offer greater protection to the Green Belt and other sensitive sites.

2 Presentation

Officers presented on the Local Plan context and national policy advice. In terms of a constrained approach, NPPF paragraph 11, footnote 7 identifies the principal national constraints which might provide a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area. North Somerset has a significant number of these constraints which when taken together affect about 85% of the land area. These constraints will be assessed and weighed differently when considering development opportunities. The two main areas where there was scope to review the approach was in respect of Green Belt and land at risk of flooding.

3 Discussion

In discussion, the following views were expressed by Members:

- The scale of housing which would be appropriate if we were simply meeting our 'organic' growth.
- The implications for development in Nailsea if the proposed Green Belt allocation to the East of Backwell is deleted and the rail crossing is not delivered.
- The level of speculative planning applications if no Local Plan was in place.
- The amount of consultation there had been with ward councillors.
- Concerns with how the affordability element of the Standard Method is calculated.
- A sound Local Plan would give the ability to resist unwanted development.

- The situation is not black and white – speculative applications will come forward in any case.
- The definition of ‘exceptional circumstances’ for development in the Green Belt needs to be more clear.
- Whether a delay in publication of the Local Plan would allow officers and members to take stock of similar challenges in other authorities.
- Whether the numbers of empty or second homes in North Somerset were relevant and been taken into account.
- Plan-led development was preferable to developer-led as it allowed for infrastructure provision in association with new development.
- The risk that removing land from the Green Belt through the local plan would encourage speculative planning applications for development elsewhere in the Green Belt.
- That the Local Plan was important to help combat the Climate Emergency
- Must consider risks and consequences of avoiding development in the Green Belt, particularly if this leads to more dispersed development.
- Housing is needed for future generations.
- Once the Local Plan was adopted, the Green Belt would be fixed and any further development would have to demonstrate exceptional circumstances.
- The financial implications of any change of approach.

Members then met in closed session to reflect on how they might respond to the Executive. The discussion focussed on the pros and cons of a constrained approach, the risks involved, development at villages and the effects on the timetable of the Local Plan. Members were, in principle, broadly in favour of some development in the Green Belt, and against development on land at risk of flooding where this could not be mitigated. There was concern that ruling out development in the Green Belt would impact other less sustainable areas outside the Green Belt as well as the Climate Emergency objectives.

Members were reminded of the chairman’s introductory remarks about not challenging the standard method number, but rather challenging whether or not that number could be met in North Somerset.

4 Summary

The following points would be taken back to the Executive:

- That whilst not seeking to challenge the standard method number it was acknowledged that members are challenging whether we can meet it and there was concern that the numbers could not be met as insufficient suitable sites were available.
- National reforms are expected which could amend the number of homes the Council is required to plan for.
- That it should be recognised that the Preferred Options had already taken into account the constraints.
- There was generally support for avoiding development in the flood zone.
- General agreement that some incursion into the Green Belt was appropriate, although the Panel had no discussion about where or how this might be achieved.
- That ruling out development in the Green Belt entirely would add to pressure for development in other unconstrained areas outside the Green Belt and

would put at risk infrastructure delivery which could unlock other sites outside the Green Belt.

- The timetable is already challenging and a change in approach would exacerbate this.