

# Greater Norwich Development Partnership Board Meeting Minutes

**Date:** Wednesday 30 September 2020

**Time:** 9.30am

**Venue:** Hosted by video link

## **Board Members:**

### **Broadland District Council:**

Cllr Lana Hempsall, Cllr Shaun Vincent (Chairman)

### **Norwich City Council:**

Cllr Kevin Maguire, Cllr Mike Stonard, Cllr Alan Waters

### **South Norfolk Council:**

Cllr Florence Ellis, Cllr John Fuller, Cllr Lisa Neal

### **Norfolk County Council:**

Cllr Andrew Proctor, Cllr Barry Stone

**Officers in attendance:** Mike Burrell, Phil Courtier, Emily Egle, Stuart Guthrie, Trevor Holden, Helen Mellors, Graham Nelson, Marie-Pierre Tighe, Matt Tracey.

## **1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Chairman advised the meeting that through his consultancy Abzag, he was promoting, on behalf of the landowner, a site for residential development in Colney through the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP). When this site was under consideration he would declare a disclosable pecuniary interest and shall vacate the chair and leave the room.

In the interests of transparency, he also brought to the Board's attention, that his father, Malcolm Vincent, through his company Vincent Howes, was promoting, on behalf of the landowners, a site for residential development in Costessey/Bawburgh through the Greater Norwich Local Plan. In this case under the provisions of the Code of Conduct, there was no interest to declare which would prevent him from participating in the debate and chairing the meeting.

He added that he would be declaring the same interests when chairing Broadland District Council's Cabinet and at Council when GNLP matters were considered.

Cllr John Fuller advised the meeting that he owned some employment land in Seething.

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## 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received on behalf of Cllr Stuart Clancy, Cllr Melanie Vigo di Gallidoro and Cllr Martin Wilby.

## 3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

## 4. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

The following questions were submitted too late to be considered at the meeting, but it was agreed that they would be included in the Minutes of the meeting, along with the officer responses.

Questions submitted by Abby Gretton of Clayland Architects -

Question 1.

Following the current Covid situation and upsurge in demand for living in towns and villages, will the GNLP now recognise that people would rather live outside of the city, and give more weight in the Plan to strategic villages and towns?

*Response: The consequences of Covid on town and country planning policies are probably yet to be fully seen, with implications for all land uses like office and retail space as well as housing.*

*What the GNLP seeks to do is improve the sustainability of all settlements whether they be urban or rural. The draft GNLP places 31% of the housing growth currently anticipated for Greater Norwich in towns and villages, with 69% in the Norwich urban area. This is done using the standard planning approach of a settlement hierarchy. This focuses the majority of growth in and around existing built-up areas to make best use of brownfield land and accessible urban extensions. It also provides for housing growth in towns (14%), key service centres (8%) and village clusters (9%) to support our towns and to meet local needs and support local services. Based on the draft plan consultation and national planning policy, consideration is being given to the overall distribution of housing growth.*

Question 2.

How tied are the Board to the original assessment of Preferred Sites, and will the GNLP make reassessments based on the new information provided?

*Response: A purpose of consulting on the draft plan was to get feedback on evidence related to sites. All pre-existing and new evidence submitted through the consultation is being carefully considered in deciding on the sites to be included in the Regulation 19 version of the plan - which is the plan we will submit for examination. Where strong evidence is received to include or exclude sites in the GNLP this will be considered.*

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Question 3.

What weight will be given to local and parish preference for sites?

*Significant weight is always given to local and parish preferences for sites, but it is not the sole consideration. Weight is also given to the evidence provided about sites. Furthermore, the local plan has to be prepared in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework set by Government.*

## **5. OPTIONS FOR PROGRESSING PLAN-MAKING IN GREATER NORWICH**

Graham Nelson reminded Members that the timetable for the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) was agreed at the last Greater Norwich Development Partnership meeting on July 10 2020 and subsequently endorsed by the three councils.

Since then, the publication of the 'Planning for the Future' White Paper and the 'Changes to the Planning System' paper had proposed such significant changes to the standard methodology for assessing housing need in local plans that the agreed timetable for the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) needed to be reconsidered.

The White Paper was seeking to develop a simpler rules-based planning system, with local plans which were far less detailed and focused on site specifics and the allocation of sufficient land for development.

Key aspects of the proposals in the White Paper were:

Simplified local plans would be rules-based, with zoning of all land into one of the three following zones:

- Growth areas – areas for substantial development in which outline approval for development would be given automatically;
- Renewal areas – suitable for some development and densification, supported by a presumption in favour of development;
- Protected areas in which development would be restricted.

A new standard methodology for housing requirements, would be introduced.

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 agreements were to be scrapped and replaced by a nationally set Infrastructure Levy (IL).

The White Paper made it clear that new style local plans were expected to be in place by the end of the current Parliament. This suggests that the primary and secondary legislation would be in force by the summer of 2022, approximately 30 months before the end of the current Parliament in 2024. A further year was proposed to be given to authorities that had only recently adopted local plans

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under previous legislation.

The new standard methodology for housing requirements proposed in 'Changes to the Planning System' could be introduced under current regulations and could be in force by the New Year or even the end of this year.

Both documents had indicated that there would be transitional arrangements put in place to allow authorities which were close to publishing the Reg. 19 version of their plan three months from the publication of the interim standard methodology guidance to publish their Reg. 19 plan and a further six months to submit it. If this deadline could not be achieved the Plan would have to be redrafted under the new regime, which could dramatically increase the scale of housing to be provided in Greater Norwich.

The new formula, would require a 62.5% increase from just over 40,000 homes to 65,120 homes for the period from 2018 to 2038. The work carried out under the current plan-making process could not bridge this gap and there was seen to be no prospect of identifying sufficient sites for the amount of growth required being delivered by 2038.

This situation had created unpalatable choices for the way forward for plan-making for Greater Norwich, for which three possible options had been identified:

**Option 1**, to accelerate plan-production, making use of the transitional arrangements provided by government, based on the draft GNLP already consulted on;

**Option 2**, to extend the existing timetable, planning for the higher housing numbers proposed by Government. This option was not considered tenable;

**Option 3**, to cease production of the GNLP and to work on emerging issues flagged up by Government in the White Paper, including improving our digital plan-making capacity, new settlements and focusing on the design codes needed to provide locally distinctive, high quality development.

Officers considered that option 1 represented the best chance of getting the current plan adopted. This would make best use of the considerable amount of work carried out to date and would provide certainty to the development industry, whilst allowing the Planning Authorities to retain control of development. This would involve certain risks, but the officer view was that there would be ways to mitigate against these risks.

It was also suggested that alongside Option 1 the following elements of Option 3 be taken forward:

- Examining best practice and building design skills in order to prepare for public sector-led master planning and design codes that were very likely to be required for growth areas.
  - Work could be done on the possible location for one or more new settlement(s), including understanding associated infrastructure
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requirements and delivery challenges;

- Preparation for the '*radical, digital-first approach*' to plan-making that was proposed in the White Paper.

This would have resource implications, but much of this would be mitigated by the probable abolition of CIL, which would make a CIL Review unnecessary and free up officer resources.

The proposed recommendation in the report was, therefore, for a hybrid of Option 1, with preparatory work for a further Local Plan after the transitory arrangements ended.

The Chairman suggested that it would be premature to consider ceasing work on the GNLP and restarting when the new regime was implemented, as there was not enough detail available about the content in the final legislation.

He also expressed concern about the five-year land supply, if the existing Plan was not brought forward to the Reg.19 stage.

A Member noted that delayed delivery, rather than plan making had been the main issue being faced in Greater Norwich. He noted that the new system of plan making and Infrastructure Levy would be a radical departure, but it would not be a waste of effort to continue with the existing Plan, with the hybrid option proposed, whilst keeping the position under close review. He confirmed that the County Council, therefore, supported the recommendations, as set out in the report.

Another Member agreed that the proposed recommendations were the best way forward and noted that this would be consistent with the position expected by Government that local planning authorities should continue with the production of local plans, rather than stopping and switching to the new system. He also suggested that if the transition system was used it would be a service to democracy as the public had had an input into the existing local plan and by not going with the proposal it might leave the planning authorities open to speculative planning applications.

However, another Member suggested going forward with the Reg.19 should not be an end in itself: the important thing was that it should be found to be sound.

He voiced concern about the number of dwellings that would be put forward for the Reg.19 and questioned if it would be the number in the existing Plan or whether there would be a safety margin included and, if so, what that figure would be.

In response, the Chairman confirmed that the intention was to proceed with the existing numbers set out in the Plan and he noted that this had not included windfall sites, so there would be additional capacity for more housing to be included in this number.

It was emphasised that the paper before Members concerned the timetable of the Plan preparation, rather than the content of it, which would be the subject of

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further discussion once the timetable was agreed.

Members were also asked to note that one mitigation of risk might be to increase the housing numbers in the Plan, but an informed assessment would only be possible once the analysis of the Reg.18 consultation had taken place and the responses assessed and the sites proposed were considered. These issues would be the subject for Members to debate going forward.

A Member suggested that it should be made clear that the housing numbers in the Plan could increase significantly and there were a number of risks that were material to the decisions that the Board would be making, which could lead to the Plan being found unsound at the Reg.19 stage. He went on to say that the Reg.18 had not been sufficiently assessed and there were a whole range of studies that had not been carried out to allow the Plan to progress to the Reg.19 stage; these included work on the Western Link. He questioned whether all of these could be accomplished in eight weeks and he suggested that the mitigation of these risks should be addressed as a matter of urgency. He added that the increase in housing numbers proposed would be so significant that it could only be accommodated by a new settlement and that this would need to be given thorough consideration, which could not be done within this timescale.

In response, the Chairman advised the meeting that the Board had received a high-level summary of the Reg.18 consultation at its meeting in July and officers had been working on this since then. Conflicting legal advice had been received regarding the inclusion or not of the Western Link in the Plan. He emphasised that the Board's role was not to look at the fine detail of the consultation, but to steer it at a strategic level.

A Member suggested that the best way forward would be to agree to the proposals in the report and noted that the Government would not want the work that had already been undertaken on the Plan to be wasted and that it was likely that some compromise would be reached on the numbers as the Plan progressed. She emphasised the importance of maintaining dialogue with the Government and keeping the housing numbers under review.

In response to a query regarding the transition period the Board was advised that there was considerable uncertainty over the triggering of the three month period from the publication of the standard methodology guidance, as it was only a consultation proposal. However officers remained optimistic that if the Reg.19 could be completed by 30 November the transitional arrangements could be utilised.

The Board was also advised that officers were confident that they could gather the evidence to bring forward the Plan by this date, but would only put it forward to Members for approval if they were certain that it would meet the test of soundness. The key benefit of this would be maintaining development control over Greater Norwich for the next four to five years.

It was noted that a number of informal meetings would be required before 30 November 2020 to monitor the management of the risks and the content of the Reg.19 Plan and that a formal meeting of the Board would also be arranged for

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late October.

**RESOLVED**

to

- Agree the revised timetable for plan preparation set out in paragraph 48 of this paper and recommends member councils to update the LDSs to reflect this;
- Instruct officers to prepare a Regulation 19 pre-submission version of the Plan for consideration by the GNDP Board in December 2020 and arrange an additional meeting of the Board in late October 2020;
- Agree the budget position summarised in paragraphs 49 to 51;
- Cease all work on the previously agreed CIL review;
- Keep the position under close review. Further information is likely to be available in the New Year on the level of housing need resulting from the standard methodology, the timing of the introduction of the new legislation and the detail of the transitional arrangements.

The meeting closed at 10.32am

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