

**(SPECIAL) ENVIRONMENT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**13 June 2006
10am – 10.55am

PRESENT: Councillors Ward (Chair), Bailey, Baker, Durrant, Holland, Holness, Newbold and Shah.

ALSO PRESENT: Executive Councillor Cllr Reid (Planning and Transport)

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**06/ENV/33 Apologies For Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Herbert.

06/ENV/34 Declarations Of Interest

None.

06/ENV/35 Public Questions

None.

06/ENV/36 Adoption of the Cambridge Local Plan

The Director of Environment & Planning and the Head of Policy & Projects introduced the report and marked the fact that the Council faced a level of growth not seen for more than sixty years. Providing a high quality of life for all residents in an accessible and sustainable way would be a considerable challenge.

The Head of Policy & Projects said that a letter had been sent to GoEast about the Green Belt Issues.

Members made the following points:

Councillor Durrant said there was much to be welcomed in the new Local Plan and his critical comments should be seen in that context. He was concerned about the Inspector's recommendation of 50% Affordable Housing rather than the 70% wished for. The Inspector's Report contained more detail about the reasons behind this decision and Councillor Durrant asked whether the Inspector's Report would be a material consideration in future planning applications.

The Head of Policy & Projects said that the Local Plan was the main guide but that the Report was a key document. As such it could be used in any appeals against planning decisions. The same had been true with the previous Local Plan and the inspector's Report.

Councillor Durrant followed up this point by commenting on the absence of knowledge about the implications of the "40% or more affordable housing" mentioned

by the Inspector. What did the Council need to do next to establish a knowledge base so that it knew more than the developers about these implications. He noted that the University had devoted considerable research funds to produce some evidence in this regard. The difference between 40% and 50% was equivalent to roughly 1000 dwellings.

The Head of Policy & Projects acknowledged that this was a critical point and that the “or more” was the difficult part. Financial viability would be a key element in negotiations with developers. The Council did have a model which worked best on small developments and Cambridgeshire Horizons were doing work on one for major developments. Additional resources would be required to address this issue either by changing the work roles of some existing staff or by using some of the planning delivery grant funds or by creating new posts (which Oxford had done). This would be addressed in the Service Plan process in the period November 06- January 07. However, applications would be coming forward for new large developments on the Southern Fringe and those could not wait until next year.

As a consequence, consideration would have to be given to a forum where members addressed the issues of how to divide up the S106 funds gained from developers as between affordable housing and other desirables such as open space and community facilities.

Councillor Bradnack quoted from the Inspector’s Report at paragraph 5.11.10 which said “the Council has not provided any evidence to show that a target of 50% across the Plan area would be realistic or achievable” and asked for more information about the reasons for this.

The Head of Policy & Projects said that it was difficult to be clear about the site conditions of different sites. For example, the Southern Fringe was a greenfield site while Cambridge East and the North West Fringe were brownfield sites which imposed different constraints. He emphasised that any evidence that had been produced at the Inquiry was based on huge assumptions. The whole matter was an inexact science.

The Director of Environment & Planning emphasised that the interplay between the different aspects to be funded from the S106 agreements would only become clear once an actual application had been received. Each application also had to be considered against the background of the Master Plan for the Area. He told members that all Heads of Service in all departments of the Council were currently working on reviewing the requirements of their service in relation to the unprecedented future growth of the City.

Councillor Durrant then asked about Traffic Modelling assumptions and expressed concern that transport requirements would be dealt with when it was too late. He used the example of the problems with Newmarket Road now and the likely impact if Cambridge East were to be developed in the future. Cambridge Futures had done some work on such modelling including identifying the need for a Southern Relief Road.

The Executive Councillor for Planning & Transport said that land use planning should go together with transport planning. She quoted from the previous Local Plan which

stated that housing should be close to transport. She said that the first meeting of the North West Fringe Member Reference Group would be considering a draft transport strategy for the area which was the result of learning from experience.

She thanked the Head of Policy & Projects and the Planning Policy Manager and his team of officers for their excellent and detailed work which had led to the Local Plan which was now being considered.

She expressed disappointment that the Inspector had made caveats about the use of sustainable energy sources and said that local communities should be able to set their own standards in this regard and not have to follow national guidelines. She planned to move forward on this aspect as well as the issues concerning affordable housing. This would necessitate Council departments working together for example Community Services with Development Control. She emphasised that all learning from this experience would be used when working on the next Local Plan which would have to start within the year.

Councillors Bradnack and Durrant reiterated their concerns and emphasised the importance of putting resources into research.

The Director of Environment & Planning reminded members that the Local Plan could not contain the level of detail they might wish when dealing with the scale of growth envisaged. The working relationship with South Cambridgeshire District Council and the need to continue to lobby the Government through Cambridgeshire Horizons were also key aspects.

The Head of Policy & Projects said that an Annual Local Plan Monitoring Report was a statutory requirement and this would be presented at the November meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee. That was another opportunity for members to monitor how the Plan was being implemented in practice.

The Scrutiny Committee agreed (by 5 votes to 0) the recommendation that the Executive Councillor recommends that Council adopt the new Cambridge Local Plan on 20th July, when notice of adoption should be published.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendation.

CHAIR
