
SCRUTINY PANEL A
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 April 2014

Present: Councillors Burke (Chair), Claisse (Vice-Chair), L Harris, Lloyd, McEwing, Mintoff and Vinson

9. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS (INCLUDING MATTERS ARISING)**

RESOLVED

- (i) that the Minutes of the Inquiry Meeting held on 6th February 2014 be approved subject to the following amendment to the third paragraph on page 7:-
- “Chris Lyons stated that it was likely that a HMO may only need to prove” instead of “Chris Lyons confirmed that a HMO only needed to prove”.
- Amended sentence to read “Chris Lyons stated that it was likely that a HMO may only need to prove that it had been used as such for 4 years now.”; and
- (ii) that the Minutes of the Inquiry Meeting held on 6th March 2014 be approved and signed as a correct record.

10. **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS**

The Panel received a presentation from Deb Appleby, Development Manager from Locality.

The background to Locality and its role with regard to Neighbourhood Planning was outlined. With partners, Locality formed part of a nationwide network which delivered funding and support under the Department of Communities and Local Government's “Supporting Communities and Neighbourhoods in Planning” programme to help communities produce neighbourhood plans. Neighbourhood Planning came about due to changes to the Planning process arising from the Localism Act 2011.

Key points of the presentation and subsequent discussion included:-

- Neighbourhood Plans (NPs) were a legal document that could be used as a tool to empower communities to identify local issues / solutions and influence aspects of land use and development.
- NPs had to comply with European, national and local planning policies and strategies, be community led, evidence based and could not be used to stop growth.
- Government regulations required that a forum be set up to prepare, publicise and manage the process for creating a Neighbourhood Plan.
- Local planning authorities had a statutory obligation to support Neighbourhood Forums (NFs) with their NP.
- As Southampton had no town or parish councils (which could produce their own NP) they would have to be via Neighbourhood Forums which had to consist of at least 21 residents or workers and include a locally elected councillor.

- There were no specific boundaries for a NP/Forum – it could be based on an existing ward boundary, or predefined area chosen by communities and could encroach into other LA areas but the area did have to be designated by the LPA.
- There were three main stages to the process of producing a NP:
 - Designation – by the LPA
 - Independent examination (by a locally appointed examiner agreed by both the Local Planning Authority and Neighbourhood Forum). Examiners could be appointed from a national register; they could be local and should be suitably qualified. They could be used to provide guidance and ultimately would recommend whether or not the Plan should go forward to referendum, with or without modifications, and who should vote in the referendum.
 - Referendum - where 51% or higher vote of support meant the adoption of the NP. Referendums represented substantial cost for local authorities but funding could be drawn down for this and there was a limit on the number of referendums that could be held for any plan.
- There were approximately 1,000 NPs at varying stages of development with 17 plans at examination stage and seven having become part of their local development plan.
- It was felt that development pressure led to the popularity for NPs being higher in the South East than anywhere else in the country
- It was emphasised that there had to be strong local interest for the NP to succeed – where the community recognised the need for development and wished to shape it – it could also be used as a tool for regeneration in deprived areas.
- Several examples were cited including:-
 - rural Cumbria which had held the first referendum 12 months ago and whose focus had been using redundant buildings for housing purposes;
 - Exeter St James where the NP was already in place – this example was said to demonstrate amongst other things how costs could be saved by involving highly skilled volunteers in the Forum and was a relevant example for Southampton sharing many issues as a university city trying to create a balanced community.

It was highlighted that a number of case studies were available on the Locality website <mailto:info@locality.org.uk>.

- The timescale taken to develop a NP was proving to be around 12-18 months but could take considerably longer – three to four years in one example.
- It was reported that university towns and cities had demonstrated many creative and cross generational collaborations using a variety of communication tools.
- With regard to funding in particular, it was reported that:
 - Locality was currently helping over 500 groups and had awarded over £2.5m in grants.
 - Funding was available to assist groups to develop NPs (up to £7k) but groups can also access the Big Lottery scheme ‘Awards for All Scheme’ (up to £10k).
 - The local authority drew down from central government funding for the referendum which represented a substantial cost for the local authority - estimated at around £12k
 - The Designation stage was the trigger for a £5k grant to the LA.

- The best NPs had given consideration to what communities wanted for their area, thought longer term aims (eg - 15 years ahead) and included consideration of sustainable growth. They also sought advice from their LPA at an early stage.

Dr Chris Lyons, Planning and Development Manager, outlined the Council's approach to Neighbourhood Planning. Key points included:-

- Southampton had two up-and-coming Neighbourhood Plans: Bassett NP and the business led East Street NP; although the latter has currently stalled. Bassett NP had passed designation stage, was awaiting independent examination and it was likely the referendum would be towards the end of this year. Chris Lyons had attended a number of meetings.
- Although funding (of around £30k) was available to a local authority the legal advice had been that referendum costs could be twice the funding available.
- Advice was available from the Planning Team regarding existing policies in relation to what the forum / plan wanted to achieve, how they wanted to shape and influence development in the area.
- There was a difficulty in providing local (ward) information. For example the City had an overall target of 16,000 additional homes - 5,000 of which in the inner city whilst the remainder was not broken down into areas.
- There could be difficulties for SCC Planning Policies if an NP crossed with other LA boundaries, especially where Planning Policies conflicted.
- The Council website had useful information on NPs.
- Although the Planning Authority was happy to talk with the NF, the reality was that staffing cuts had left just three Planning Policy Officers. It was not possible for the team to be involved in any technical work which therefore needed to be community led.

Councillor Les Harris, Southampton City Council, and Chair of the Bassett Neighbourhood Forum, gave a verbal update on the Forum's progress and approach to Neighbourhood Planning.

It was reported that development of the Forum and its NP had started two years ago and was now in the designation stage prior to consultation and examination and hoping to move to a referendum by the end of the year.

A lot of consideration had been given to the area that the NP should cover which eventually was the whole of the Bassett Ward which included active residents' associations who became part of the Forum. In areas where there were no regular residents' associations there had been house to house canvassing by councillors on behalf of the forum. The Forum considered that it had ensured good representation in the area and drawn together the consultation responses and mini-plans developed by the residents' associations into one overall development plan that had community ownership.

The Panel were informed that the NP area had a very mixed population and that there was a wide variation of housing styles in the ward. The Forum's consultation with residents, land owners, local developers, businesses, Southampton University and the Hospital, had resulted in three key themes:-

- housing density (including loss of family housing to flats and the impact on the character of housing in the area);

- HMOs – the statistics given highlighted the feeling of residents that the balance between family housing to HMOs was at tipping point; and
- parking issues – parking problems were felt to affect every street in the area. Whilst it was recognised that parking issues were not planning issues and thus could not be dealt with as such in the NP; the Plan encouraged any new development to include adequate off street parking.

It was reported that the Forum would monitor the NP but also take up the issues raised from the consultation which could not be included in the Plan.

The Forum had recognised the need to have planning expertise within the membership of the Forum particularly with regard to understanding planning law. There had been regular contact with the Council's Planning Department and planning advice had been from Planning Aid England (Bristol).

Funding had been received from Locality (£7k) following designation of the NP in December 2013. Funding prior to this had been from the residents' groups.

Overall, it was felt to have been a worthwhile community project which had left most residents feeling they could have influence over their local environment.

Jerry Gillen (Highfield Residents' Association) was present and with the consent of the Chair, addressed the meeting.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to this enquiry and confirmed that the final meeting on 8th May would agree the draft report and recommendations.