

Planning Policy Scrutiny Committee



Date	18 June 2009
Venue	Town Hall, St Annes
Committee members	Kevin Eastham (Chairman) Ben Aitken (Vice-Chairman) John Bennett, Maxine Chew, Lyndsay Greening, Paul Rigby
Other Councillors	John Coombes, Fabian Craig- Wilson, Dr Trevor Fiddler, Linda Nulty, Elizabeth Oades
Officers	Philip Woodward, Paul Walker, Tony Donnelly, Paul Drinnan, Julie Glaister, Lyndsey Lacey
Members of the Public	Two members of the public

1. Declarations of interest

Members were reminded that any personal/prejudicial interests should be declared as required by the Council's Code of Conduct adopted in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000.

2. Confirmation of minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the Planning Policy Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 2 April 2009 as a correct record for signature by the chairman.

3. Substitute members

The following substitution was reported under council procedure rule 22.3:
Councillor Paul Rigby for Councillor Barbara Douglas

4. Fylde Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment

Tony Donnelly, Head of Planning (Policy) presented a comprehensive report on the work currently being undertaken on the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

Mr Donnelly reminded the Committee that the Assessment was one of the most significant parts of evidence base to inform the Core Strategy which the Portfolio Holder had identified as a priority.

The report detailed the background to the arrangements, the methodology being used (which was described in full as an appendix to the report) and the timetable for the project. Mr Donnelly explained that the work was being undertaken in-house and was been overseen by a steering group of eight external partners who would help to refine the methodology as the work progressed. It was anticipated that the work would be completed by October.

Mr Donnelly further reported that there was a broader Stakeholder Group which had also been invited to make comments on the methodology, the sites identified and their assessment by officers.

Mr Donnelly emphasised to the committee that it was important to understand the purpose of the exercise. For clarity, it was a technical exercise to identify all possible sites with the potential for housing. He added that the process itself involved three elementary stages: suitability, availability and achievability.

Stage 1 - Suitability (current stage) - to identify as many sites as possible which could be considered suitable for future housing development.

Stage 2 - Availability - of those suitable sites to determine which might be available to market

Stage 3 - Achievability - Of those suitable and available sites, to determine which might be achievable.

Mr Donnelly also outlined what the SHLAA is not - it is not a plan of future proposals; if a site appears in the SHLAA it does not necessarily mean that it will be allocated for future housing. Nor is it a mechanism for granting planning permission.

Mr Donnelly continued to state that it is a piece of evidence to enable the Council to select sites which may go into the Core Strategy, when that stage of the process is reached. It is a technical exercise to identify the potential for housing development from which Councillors will make their decisions in the future.

Mr Donnelly sought the views of the Committee on the methodology generally but also on four specific areas:

- Retention of existing Employment Land
- Independent Verification
- Public Consultation
- Viability Assessment

With regard to Employment Land, Mr Donnelly reported that a number of stakeholders had stressed the need to include currently allocated employment

land in the exercise. Mr Donnelly stated that because a shortage of employment land had been identified in the Borough by a recent needs and demand analysis, such areas, where they were protected by local plan policy, should be deemed unsuitable for future housing development purposes. Councillor Aitken and other members commented that there needed to be some flexibility in this arrangement as some currently underused employment sites could provide a very sustainable alternative as sites for future housing development.

In terms of the independent verification, Mr Donnelly suggested the use of independent consultants to audit and make recommendations for improvement of the process might improve the confidence of the various community groups in terms of the transparency and soundness of the assessment.

The Committee was also advised that it was proposed to undertake a viability assessment of the sites i.e. those sites which are perceived to be available. Mr Donnelly indicated that the view of the steering group was that an approach to viability using the expertise of the steering group with additional infrastructure providers was appropriate and asked the Committee to endorse this. The alternative would be to undertake viability calculations in respect of all the available sites. The latter option would involve the use of specialist valuation consultants and would have a cost implication.

With regard to the proposed public consultation, Mr Donnelly indicated that this was not a requirement in Government guidance. Also, any such consultation would likely to engender people's views on the appropriateness of the sites for housing development which is not essentially what the assessment is about. However, it was officers' intention circulate information and to write to the town and parish councils to inform them of the process and indicate what the SHLAA exercise was and what it was not. The town and parish councils may have factual information that would be valuable in the assessment.

Mr Donnelly stated that there was no closing date for suggestions or additions of other sites that could be added to the SHLAA list and as an example referred to the Dock road site by stating that if the current appeal was successful, then the site would be fed into the SHLAA process as a commitment.

Members stressed the need to get a Strategy in place at the earliest opportunity.

Councillor Bennett indicated that it would be preferable if the committee could identify preferred sites at this stage rather than having to go through the lengthy process. Mr Donnelly responded by stating that it was a requirement to carry out the SHLAA exercise as planned and that the political element of choosing sites for development would be undertaken by members at a future stage.

Councillor Chew enquired why members of the committee were not involved in the work of the steering group. Tony Donnelly stated that government expectation in terms of transparency was that local councils would work in partnership through Steering Groups and that members of the steering group that had been established in Fylde had expertise in certain areas. He added that the minutes of the steering group meetings would be circulated to all members in due course.

Councillor Chew also enquired about areas detailed in the exercise relating to Singleton.

Various members commented on the housing figures anticipated to be delivered in Fylde by the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and in particular, made reference to the expectation to deliver significant numbers of affordable housing. Councillor Fiddler responded to this point.

Councillor Aitken made reference to the classification and examination of farmland. He felt that farmland and areas of SSSI/ Biodiversity should be removed from the exercise.

Councillor Fiddler reminded members that Local Plan policy stated that development should be within settlement boundaries if possible but made reference to the potential of the M55 hub as an opportunity to deliver a substantial proportion of the Council's future housing required by the RSS.

Councillor Nulty made reference to proposals for development in Wesham and stated that the public could misinterpret/misunderstand the SHLAA exercise. Mr Donnelly acknowledged the risks but indicated that there was a requirement to undertake the work. He confirmed that only a small proportion of the identified sites would be likely to be required for development. It was essential that when it came to selecting sites for development (by members) the selection process was based upon the widest possible choice of sites.

Councillor Oades commented on some of the car parking areas in Kirkham highlighted in the exercise and the inappropriateness of using these for housing. She also stated that members should take a pragmatic view on employment land as had been suggested by other members.

Councillor Chew enquired whether flats above shops could be included in the exercise. Mr Donnelly confirmed that if such homes did become available these would be added to the housing supply figure.

Following detailed consideration of this matter the Committee RECOMMENDED to the Portfolio Holder and Cabinet the following:

1. To safeguard existing employment sites for the time being. (although officers could make assessments of potential housing capacity on such sites for information)
2. To take no action with regard to the engagement of consultants at this stage on the issue of independent verification.

3. To take no action on the public consultation exercise but recommend that further information be provided to the town and parish councils on the SHLAA process.

4. To carry out a round table approach to the proposed viability assessment of the various sites to include assessment by main infrastructure providers and the Steering Group.

5. To provide all members of the Council with copies of the minutes of meetings of the SHLAA Steering Group.

5. Regeneration Framework

Paul Walker (Director of Strategic Development) and Paul Drinnan, Head of Planning (Regeneration) presented the committee with a comprehensive report on the regeneration agenda at Fylde and the proposed framework to guide future investment priorities.

In brief, the report set out the background to the Council's engagement with regeneration activity across the borough. It highlighted previous initiatives and presented a snapshot of the various schemes and projects that were at various stages of development. In addition, it highlighted the potential for future funding sources and made recommendations as to how a framework could be devised to guide and prioritise future regeneration activity. The report also identified the potential for planning gain contributions to achieve the ambition for regeneration across the borough.

Members commented on the planning obligation opportunities and sought an assurance that the contributions would be ring fenced to the area where there was a declared scheme. Mr Walker and Drinnan confirmed this to be the case.

The Committee RESOLVED:

1. To note the report and recommend the production of a regeneration framework

2. To establish a Task and Finish group comprising the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Committee and Councillor Linda Nulty to assist in the production of a regeneration framework with its remit being:

- Consideration of socio-economic indicators and other data on for example vitality and viability of town centres to identify the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities for Fylde as a whole and each settlement in particular.
- Consideration of a draft spatial 'vision' for Fylde and identify regeneration ambitions.
- Identify the opportunities and priorities for regeneration investment and outline broad environmental proposals for each location.

- Summarise the draft regeneration framework.
 - Consult with partners e.g. LSP, Regeneration Bodies, Developers etc
3. To consider the draft regeneration framework at a future meeting of the Planning Policy Scrutiny Committee with recommendations to Cabinet.
 4. To commence application of the regeneration framework
 5. To authorise officers to commission detailed urban design and other proposals (resources permitting) for priority areas to bring about the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan.
 6. To identify the appropriate means of implementing the Action Plan on the basis of attributing contributions from particular sites to the particular regeneration scheme/project.
 7. To report the outcome of this work and make recommendation to a future Cabinet meeting.
