

Local Plan Committee

Monday, 12 June 2023

Attendees: Councillor Lewis Barber, Councillor Michelle Burrows, Councillor Paul Dundas, Councillor Richard Kirkby-Taylor, Councillor Kayleigh Rippingale, Councillor Lee Scordis, Councillor Michael Spindler, Councillor William Sunnucks, Councillor Tim Young

Apologies: Councillor Paul Smith

Substitutes:

271 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 3 April 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

272 Have Your Say! (Hybrid Council meetings)

Nick Chilvers addressed the Committee pursuant to provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5 (1). The Committee heard that the Colchester needed to have a Masterplan and that questioned the scheme that had been put before the Committee and detailed that Members did not discuss what would happen next and raised concern about the overuse of technical language that was used in the consultation document. The speaker detailed that the Committee should have looked into this further in the previous meeting in April and queried how the preparation for the Consultation was going and what Councillors on the Committee thought of this.

Karen Syrett , Head of Planning, detailed that the consultation of the City Centre Masterplan had been was guided by the Statement of Community Involvement providing the minimum standards of consultation that the Council could undertake. The Head of Planning detailed that the Consultation would go beyond the minimum requirements and that they supported the speakers request for the use of plain English and that there were different ways to respond to the consultation.

Nick Chilvers responded to the points raised by the Head of Planning and detailed that there was more to life than heritage and art and expected the Council to understand that concluded that they would have like to have heard other Councillors views on this. The Chair responded that the Committee would be keeping a close eye on the consultation.

Sir Bob Russell addressed the Committee pursuant to provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5 (1). The Committee heard that they did not expect to have full answers to their questions but would expect one after the meeting. The speaker questioned who was running the consultation of the Trinity Churchyard and asked that a copy of the biodiversity statement for the works be provided to them. The speaker continued by detailing that their concern at the Council's request for the bingo club in

Osborne Street to move out as well as Iceland, Wilkinsons, the Samaritans, and the Salvation Army and whether any of these businesses and charities had been informed.

The Head of Planning detailed that they would look at the points raised around Holy Trinity Church and respond to the speaker and the Committee. The Committee heard that all the changes in the proposal were subject to the consultation and that nothing was set in stone and that there were no changes expected except for Wilkinsons where there were other points about the leases on the building.

Sir Bob Russell responded to the points raised and commented that it would have been courteous for the Council to inform the businesses and Charities before the information got into the public domain and that they should have been approached that they would be included in the proposed Masterplan.

273 Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document

Shelley Blackaby, Principal Planning Officer (Environment), presented the report to the Committee and detailed that the Draft Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document had been presented to the Committee and that approval had been given to go out to consultation. The Committee heard that the consultation took place between the 22 February 2023 until the 22 March 2023 from which nine organisations responded and that the draft document had been amended accordingly. The Senior Principal Planning Officer outlined that the Council was preparing other Supplementary Planning Documents in light of the Climate Emergency which were currently being worked upon and would subsequently guide the policies in the Colchester Local Plan. Members were asked to note that the Biodiversity Net Gain Supplementary Planning Document would support policy ENV1 which detailed the mitigation hierarchy as well as the enhancement of biodiversity. The Committee heard that further work was being looked into regarding the Biodiversity net gain which included a cross authority Supplementary Planning Document that could be used by other Councils following the requirement coming into effect.

The Senior Principal Planning Officer responded to questions from the Committee on issues including: that the proposal before the Committee did not include biodiversity net gain and that this would be looked at in a cross authority template but that this would include provisions that were on and off site, that there was an intention to make the document slightly smaller however this was not possible without compromising on the detail required for the subject area. The Senior Principal Planning Officer elaborated that the issue of maps and their accuracy had been brought up at a previous meeting and that these could be cross referenced with the most up to date versions to ensure accuracy when planning applications were put in.

Members debated the Supplementary Planning document on issues including the length of the document and whether it could be shorter and whether it would hinder development by adding another hurdle for applicants, that the proposal would help identify the areas within Colchester which included irreplaceable habitat and whether regenerative fields had been considered for the future.

The Senior Principal Planning Officer responded to the points raised in the debate and detailed that regenerative fields would be something that the Council would look into and possibly adopt in the future if the Council was minded to endorse this approach. Members concluded the debate with some Members expressing concern that the additional documents the Council was creating would create significant costs for developers.

RESOLVED (UNANIMOUSLY) that the Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document is adopted by the Local Plan Committee.

274 Neighbourhood Planning Update

Laura Goulding, Planning Policy Officer, presented the report on the Neighbourhood Planning Update detailing that there were currently 8 Neighbourhood Plans in Colchester which had been “made” and adopted by the Council. The Committee heard that the most recent one adopted was Tiptree in May 2023 following a confirmatory referendum. The Planning Policy Officer detailed that there was the anticipation that Copford and Easthorpe Neighbourhood Plan will be made and adopted later this year along with Myland and Braiswick review. The Committee were asked to note that Great Tey and Great Horkesley were at the evidence gathering stage and plan preparation and that Myland and Braiswick had commenced their review and had recently completed their regulation 16 consultation.

The Committee debated the update and noted the weight that was afforded to Neighbourhood Plans in the Planning Process. The Committee asked Officers to detail the main learning points that had been gained from the previous plans that had been supported and adopted by the Council.

Sandra Scott, Place Strategy Manager, detailed that a lot of points had been learnt since the introduction of Neighbourhood Plans and have been relaying this information into new groups and Parish Councils that have been starting the process. The Committee heard that when starting new plans the Council had involved authors of adopted plans to speak and give their experience of the time and commitment that was needed as well as what hurdles that they had to overcome. An example was given that representatives from Eight Ash Green Parish Council visited a community looking at starting a neighbourhood plan who fed back to officers that their input was invaluable.

The Committee discussed the effort that was required by Parish Councils and the routes that were available to other areas of the City where areas were not parished and how they could create Neighbourhood Plans as well. Members agreed that the creation of the plan was a large investment of time for all involved within the community and praised all the Communities that had made a Neighbourhood Plan and those working towards one.

The Neighbourhood Planning Update was noted by the Committee.

The Place Strategy Manager presented the report to the Committee which outlined the proposed future work on the Local Plan and what Members could expect to come before them. The Committee were asked to note that it was a statutory requirement to have a Local Plan and that additional Supplementary Planning Documents would be prepared for the Committee for approval. The Place Strategy Manager detailed that the Local Plan needed to be reviewed every five years and this would mean that Section 1 of the Local Plan would need to be reviewed in 2026. Members were asked to note that there was a significant amount of work around this including a large lead in time to complete the document on schedule. This would include the evidence gathering as well as consulting with residents and a call for sites.

In response to questions from the Committee the Place Strategy Manager and Head of Planning confirmed that the standard methodology that was applied previously would be higher in a new Local Plan and which would mean building approximately 1100 new dwellings per year but this would be linked with the monitoring of the current housing land supply, and the strategic housing land assessment.

Members raised concern on the status of Middlewick in the Local Plan and what its current status was and that the standard methodology could impact on Colchester's building record. In response to these points the Head of Planning Detailed that there was currently no news regarding Middlewick and that the provisions for the Middlewick site in the Local Plan were still valid. The Committee also heard that the current plan was due to last 15 years but that a review was required under law which would have to take into account new factors including the updated standard methodology from the Government. The Head of Planning explained that Colchester had previously benefitted from the standard methodology however this was not looking to the case going forward with the Council having to review housing numbers, employment sites and community infrastructure.

The Debate concluded with Members querying the impact of not having a plan and allocated sites in place and what consequences this would lead to if the targets were not met which was being discussed by the Government. The Head of Planning confirmed that where a Local Plan had been withdrawn and not adopted it did leave the local authority open to speculative development and that a Plan led approach, even with some unpopular sites, would be preferable to speculative proposals across the board. The Head of Planning concluded by detailing that as the proposals for amending Local Plans were only in a consultation phase they could not be taken into account.

The Colchester Local Plan – Update and Future work report was noted by the Committee.

