

LOCAL PLAN COMMITTEE

11 December 2023

<i>Present: -</i>	Councillors T. Young (Chair), Barber, Burrows, Dundas, Kirkby-Taylor, Pearson, Scordis, Smith, and Spindler
<i>Substitute Member: -</i>	Cllr Dundas for Cllr Sunnucks Cllr Pearson for Cllr Rippingale
<i>Also in Attendance: -</i>	Cllr Harris Cllr Lilley Cllr Smalls Cllr Warnes

287. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 24 May 2023 and 2 October 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

288. Have Your Say!

Councillor Michael Lilley addressed the Committee as a visiting Councillor. The Committee heard that the proposals for housing on Middlewick were contentious and that they were concerned by the latest statement from the Ministry of Defence (MOD) which had published a brochure for development with additional land shown for development outside of the Local Plan allocation. The Committee heard that they had changed their view on the site following this new information from the MOD and detailed that there was a need to remove Middlewick from the Local Plan and that they did not trust what the MOD were telling them. The Visiting Councillor detailed that there was a need to protect the grassland on site and that the extension of the site was moving towards a woodland which might have to be removed if development continued. The Committee heard that the site needed to be given to the people of Colchester as a nature reserve following the Councils climate emergency statement and that thousands of trees should be planted on the site. It was detailed that the homes that were proposed on site would not be affordable homes, and that even the affordable homes were no longer affordable, and would not be Council Houses. The speaker concluded by outlining that they did not trust the MOD, that the Middlewick allocation should be removed from the Local Plan and that the area should be protected from development.

Liz Austin addressed the Committee pursuant to provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5 (1). The Committee heard that the original Planning Application for the Riverside Development had been submitted in 2021, two days prior to the change in permitted development regulations and as such if it had been submitted later it would have been subject to far stricter regulations. The Committee heard that objections had been lodged with the Council by residents and Councillors detailing that there had been a long delay to start the work on site and that subsequently all work has stopped leaving building equipment across the site and insufficient security leading to vandalism and squatting. The Committee were asked to note that the company managing the site was facing bankruptcy and that they had a reputation for creating modern ghettos. The speaker concluded by requesting that the

Council find out if the owner of the site was able to complete the application and that those responsible for the site were held to account.

At the request of the Chair, Simon Cairns, Joint Head of Planning detailed that Officers were sympathetic to the issues that the Community was facing with the site and that the Council had undertaken a number of site visits with Community Safety, the Police and Building Control and confirmed that there were no actionable breaches on the site but that the site would be kept under review and that if an actionable breach did occur then the Council would investigate further. The Joint Head of Planning detailed that stalled sites were uncommon in Colchester but not elsewhere and that viability was becoming a more prevalent issue confirming that the Council did not have the resources to investigate further but would continue to monitor the site and confirmed that the details of the site had been passed to interested parties who may have an interest in developing the site.

Councillor Paul Smith Declared a non-registerable interest regarding the Riverside development as he had been quoted in a newspaper publication about the site.

Liz Austin and Fran Wagstaff responded to the points raised by the Joint Head of Planning that the route to the site had been cordoned off by the developers.

Sir Bob Russell addressed the Committee pursuant to provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5 (1). The Committee heard that they welcomed the comments from Councillor Lilley and that they wished to address the Committee regarding the Salary Brook allocation in the Tendring Colchester, Borders Garden Community Joint Committee (TCBGCJC). The speaker detailed that in the minutes of the meeting from February 2023 meeting had been signed off as a true record detailing the policy for salary brook which confirmed that the natural landscape would screen the development. The Committee heard that since the previous meeting a school had been proposed on the brow of the hill and that further to this a garden village consultation had taken place and the school had now been replaced with housing. The speaker raised concerns on who was running the project and whether it was Councillors, Officers or developers and outlined that it could not be right that elected Members had not made a decision on this and replaced the school and boundary with housing.

At the request of the Chair, The Place Strategy Manager, Sarah Scott, responded that they had not attended the meeting or reviewed the minutes but confirmed that and proposals put forward and agreed by the Committee would be subject to examination and that these would be subject to engagement and consultation.

Sir Bob Russell responded by detailing that the decision on this had been made on the site and that this should be changed and outlined that they needed to know who was making this decision and whether it was overruling the Committee and would raise their concerns at the next Committee meeting.

Dr Jeremy Dagley addressed the Committee pursuant to provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5 (1). The Committee heard that they were speaking as the Director of Conservation at the Essex Wildlife Trust and detailed that the enhancement of green networks and the ambition which linked in with the Colchester Local Plan Review proposed vision and engagement progress update as this relied on the designated site of Middlewick Ranges. The Committee heard that the Middlewick ranges site was an outstanding site for wildlife which encompassed tens of hectares of acid grassland and detailed that this asset had been underestimated and was of national importance. The Committee were asked to note that the UK was facing a biodiversity crisis and that the Trust's view was that the Wildlife on Middlewick Ranges was essential. The speaker concluded by detailing that they were

speaking for the Essex Wildlife Trust and Essex Ecology and requested and advised the Committee that the Middlewick Ranges be protected and removed from the Local Plan and that housing allocations are moved to alternate sites.

Richard Martin addressed the Committee pursuant to provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5 (1). The Committee heard that they had been sent a letter from the RSPB in relation to housing on Middlewick which related to the ecological evidence on a single case study based off of Minsmere in Suffolk and that mitigation of any harm from development must be effective and that the work in Minsmere should not undermine the Middlewick Biodiversity Value as they were not comparable. The Committee heard that the mitigation for the Middlewick Ranges was not a replacement for the sensitive nature of the site and species at Middlewick and that the decision to include the site in the Local Plan needed to be revisited.

Dougal Urquhart addressed the Committee pursuant to provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5 (1). The Committee heard that they were speaking as the Chair of the Colchester Natural History Society and detailed that they had been monitoring and surveying and outlined the response from the Essex Wildlife Trust insisting that Middlewick is taken out of the Local Plan and that the Council had been misinformed with the Stantec report which had been pulled apart by Members of the society. It was noted that some Members of the society had been allowed access to the site where they had found 1480 species of invertebrates as well as rare species finds and as well as double the species that had been found on site only 2 years previously. The speaker detailed that the ranges were one of the most ecologically important sites in the area and confirmed that Natural England had been informed of the findings from the group. The speaker concluded by detailing that the acid grassland on site could never be replicated.

Andrew Wilkinson addressed the Committee pursuant to provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5 (1). The Committee heard that they were speaking as a Member of the Save the Middlewick Campaign. The speaker detailed that the aforementioned letter from the RSPB was relevant and would be published and outlined that the Stantec report was out of date and used a biodiversity net gain metric that was not legal as they had made up their own one and now have to use the DEFRA metric. The speaker commented on the Councils Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and asked when the Climate Change SPD would be ready and whether this would be taken into account for all decisions. The speaker outlined that a number of Councillors had approached the group asking how they could get Middlewick removed from the Local Plan and the process and whether it would be possible to get the area into the Green and Blue network strategy and that they would talk directly to officers on this.

David Smith addressed the Committee pursuant to provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5 (1). The Committee heard that the speakers house backed onto the Middlewick Ranges and that they thanked Councillors who had changed their mind on Middlewick and detailed that the proposal to increase the number of homes on the site by the Ministry of Defence was not ok. The speaker detailed that they had concerns about the traffic in Colchester and accidents that had taken place on Abbots Road and Mersea Road and that the roads could not cope with the increased amount of traffic. It was noted that the current infrastructure could not cope and that any new development would put pressure on the sewage works in Haven Road. The speaker asked the Committee to remove the Middlewick Allocation from the Local Plan and that it should be preserved for future generations to enjoy.

Ted Benton addressed the Committee pursuant to provisions of Meetings General Procedure

Rule 5 (1). The Committee heard that the speaker had viewed the advertising images for the sale of Middlewick Site and this emphasised further the reasons why the site shouldn't be destroyed as it was such a wonderful piece of landscape and that it was irreplaceable. The Committee heard that there was a strong sense of feeling against the site with over 1000 objections and detailed that Colchester had had a military presence since the Crimean War. The speaker detailed that the Stantec report for the Middlewick site was incorrect and that it was an irreplaceable habitat and detailed that the Council had been misled by an independent consultancy and that should be sufficient evidence to take it out of the Local Plan.

Lisa Cross addressed the Committee pursuant to provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5 (1). The speaker referenced those that had just addressed the Committee and that Middlewick should not be built on and detailed that the mitigation land earmarked for Middlewick formed part of the buffer zone for a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Committee were asked to note that the environment of Middlewick could not be translocated and that the expectation that species would migrate to smaller designated areas would be destructive and counterproductive. The speaker detailed that they had a statement from renowned entomologist Stephen Forke which detailed their concern that acid grassland could be created via artificial means and that any details of this should be treated with suspicion and that further information should be sought. The Committee heard that there were other viable options on housing that could boost the ecology on the site. The speaker concluded by detailing that the Save the Wick campaign were willing to work with Colchester City Council and invited all Councillors to come along to a naturalist led walk across the land to view what would be lost if development took place.

Councillor Dave Harris addressed the Committee as a visiting Councillor. The speaker thanked Cllr Lilley for his comments and detailed how they had campaigned the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to take the Middlewick off the table and detailed that they had written to Grant Shapps MP, Secretary of State for Defence. The Committee heard that the letter included details that there was a lack of infrastructure to support the allocation, and the impact on the biodiversity of the site. The speaker detailed that they received a response detailing that the MOD would continue with selling the surplus land. The speaker continued by outlining that adding an extension to the site was not in the Local Plan and that there was not enough infrastructure in the form of schools, dentists and the road network. The visiting Councillor detailed that they echoed the comments made by previous speakers on the biodiversity of the site and that the Council could not allow this to happen. It was noted that the review process was a factor here and that they had been disappointed by the response from their letter to Grant Shapps. The Committee heard that a review needed to take place with residents on side and that there needed to be further conversations but the Middlewick allocation in the Local Plan needed to be removed immediately.

Councillor Fay Smalls addressed the Committee as a visiting Councillor. The visiting Councillor thanked all the previous speakers who had brought up Middlewick and detailed that they had only been a Councillor since May 2023 and detailed that they were speaking to ask that Middlewick was removed as an allocation in the Local Plan and that it be turned into a nature reserve that could be preserved for future generations. The Committee heard that they had not been part of the original process but detailed that it was controversial from the beginning and that what was agreed was damage limitation but that there was an increasing consensus that this needed to change. The speaker outlined that the Council needed to protect areas of ecological importance and that the local plan stipulated that there needed to be a 44% biodiversity net gain and that they had long held concerns over the viability of the project. The speaker noted that they had heard the comments from the speakers noting the Middlewick site was unique and that if it was destroyed it could not be

made elsewhere, and that the loss of space would have a detrimental impact on the community as some flats in the area did not have gardens and used the open space at Middlewick.

Councillor Martyn Warnes addressed the Committee as a visiting Councillor. The Committee heard that the process for reviewing the Local Plan was currently underway but that there was a flaw in the planning process whereby the site had been put forward then the developer had to provide the housing and that this site had been put forward at the eleventh hour. It was noted that the MOD was now trying to increase the size of the site and that it undermined people's ability to take them at their word. The Committee were asked to note that there were two distinct parcels of land and that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) framework enhancement of sites criteria had a red flag on it and that it was now realised that it had significant ecological importance. The speaker detailed that the last decade of Planning Policy had pitted Councils against local communities and that they were looking forward to the new town legislation which would look at everything in a more strategic level and not just affordable housing. The speaker concluded by detailing that if this piece of land was used as a woodland buffer between the current training area and Middlewick there was a fear that the Council would be looking at this again with another parcel of land in the future.

A statement from Councillor Martin Goss was read out by the Democratic Services Officer as follows:

"I am unable to attend tonight due to a pre-arranged Santa run in Mile End with the Round table. However, I appreciate the committee allowing this statement to be read out.

Middlewick Ranges has caused much distress and controversy since being mooted for sale by the MOD. It has also been used as a political football which of course doesn't resolve the worries or concerns of residents locally or more widely in Colchester The MOD have now decided to sell even more land which opens the risk to even more housing on the site – roughly another 700 at least.

It is time to take a fresh look at Middlewick and see whether the whole site can be removed legally from the local plan – or amendments are made to ensure all of the remaining land not designated for housing is added as a Country Park or protected Wildlife area only. This would afford the majority of the site protection in perpetuity including any new land for sale.

Ultimately no housing on the site would be the ideal goal but as a minimum we must protect the whole of the site and ensure it is added as protected land in the local plan. The local plan is there to protect areas we do not wish to be developed via the back door and now we can start to consider a review of the local plan within the 5 year period, removing Middlewick should be our ideal goal with a fall back position of ultimate protection for the majority of the site.

This will stop the MOD or future developer trying to come back with another desire for 2500 houses as opposed to 1000 or adding a further 700 to the newly included land.

Time is to act now!"

A statement from Councillor Andrea Luxford-Vaughan, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Environment and Sustainability was read out by the Democratic Services Officer as follows:

"Update on Middlewick

Some of you may be aware that the Ministry of Defence has recently put the site at Middlewick up for sale, and a sales brochure is now in the public domain.

In this brochure the allocation is bigger than the land that is shown in our local plan and therefore what is covered by local plan policy. Obviously, the MOD are entitled to sell whatever land they wish, and we have no control over that. But to be clear, there has not been any dialogue with the MOD regarding the marketing of the site or the inclusion of the additional land beyond that of the allocated site in the local plan. Officers have had meetings post the adoption of Section 2, to encourage the MOD to revise the allocation in order to best safeguard the area of greatest ecological value, but these discussions were unsuccessful. The council also has no influence over who the developer will be, or what the time scales involved in developing the plot will be.

The Local Plan allocation and Policy Requirements set out in Policy SC2 will continue to apply to any proposal at the present time despite the increased land area being marketed.

We do have a robust policy linked to a very strict land allocation (shown on the policies map) and any deviation from this would not be successful unless a developer provided conclusive evidence that a scheme could meet the strict ecological requirements set out in the plan. Therefore, we should be reassured that if it doesn't meet policy, it won't get built regardless of what is in the sales brochure.

Although I fully accept the limitations of mitigation and I personally think net biodiversity legislation is not fit for purpose, we are no worse off than when council first adopted the plan. Any developer will need to negotiate a legal agreement for both of these policy determined elements, and we control that process by being able to refuse planning permission. It is worth pointing out though that the exact location of any mitigation site is not set in policy.

The local plan review could take account of any new evidence submitted and therefore the council has agreed and budgeted to appoint an independent ecological specialist to do further work on the site. The brief was drafted following advice from Natural England, and in response to feedback from ecologists it was amended to extend the survey period. We also asked the Colchester Natural History Society to recommend suitably qualified ecologists. We have now requested that the survey area is increased to align with the site area now being marketed for disposal.

This work will involve information gathering throughout the seasons and is anticipated to supersede previous studies that were criticized at the section 2 hearings. It is also relevant that ecological survey data is time limited which for most if not all species updates from the earlier evidence will be required in any event. This evidence will then make the policy, via the local plan review, stronger in safeguarding ecology. The appointment has been delayed slightly because of discussions on budget allocations but someone is engaged with a view to commencing work in the very near future. At this point in time, I'm unable to confirm who that is because those unsuccessful in the tender process have not yet been informed.

The ecological work will feed into the policy requirement for master planning for the site. This work can't take place until a developer has engaged with the council so I can't give a time scale to that either but the policy requires a masterplan to be agreed with the Council prior to submission of an application. Officers are committed to working positively with members of the local community and elected members and an engagement plan will be prepared.

We have asked the MOD for an interim meeting to find out what they think the time scales of the sale may be. They are yet to respond to us."

At the request of the Chair the Place Strategy Manager responded to the points raised by the Have Your Say speakers. The Committee heard that the Council had started its review of the Local Plan and that a later item on the agenda referenced the approach that was being used to look at sites going forward including those that were currently allocated. The Place Strategy Manager detailed that that it was premature to consider the sites as all sites would be considered for review and that any sites in the Local Plan will need to be considered at the appropriate time as the Council could not simply roll forward unimplemented sites. It was noted that there would be an implement-ability test which included Middlewick which would be re-assessed and considered as part of the bigger picture for Colchester and if removed something else would need to take its place. The Committee heard that the marketing material for the Middlewick area did not change the allocation in the Local Plan or the rigorous policies that were in place and any development on site would need to accord with these. The Place Strategy Manager outlined their understanding of the alarm within the local community following the publication of the marketing material but confirmed that the only element that had any status was the site that had been allocated. The Committee heard that the comments raised regarding ecology and their merits were not a matter for discussion as they had been examined by the Planning Inspector when confirming the allocation of the site as were all other aspects including infrastructure which was set out in the Local Plan policies. It was confirmed that the Council was looking to commission some further ecological surveys that would be carried out by an independent ecologist and that officers were engaging with the Colchester Natural History Society on who to appoint but who this was could not be confirmed at the meeting.

At the request of the Chair, The Joint Head of Planning added to the response from the Place Strategy Manager that the site allocation policy for Middlewick was very detailed and that any proposal on site would need to meet this criteria. It was detailed that all allocations would need to be reviewed and that the evidence base would need to be refreshed including the ecological evidence which was out of date.

289. Approach to the Colchester Local Plan Review proposed Vision Engagement and Progress Update

The Place Strategy Manager presented the report to the Committee outlining that this report detailed how work was progressing with the review of the Local Plan in accordance with the iterative approach with a consultation starting on the Green and Blue Infrastructure. It was noted that the work needed to be appropriate and specific and a Member Workshop was held with the feedback from this contained within the report. A similar session was undertaken with Planning Officers in a Member / Officer Workshop. The Committee heard that from these discussions it was recommended that the consultation would be online and all would be invited to answer the questions within the report and appendices which would look up to 2041 with engagement beginning in the new year. The Place Strategy Manager concluded by asking that the Committee agree to public engagement in early 2024 to inform a vision for the Local Plan Review and to note progress made on the Local Plan Review.

In response to a question from the Committee regarding the practicalities of removing Middlewick from the Local Plan and liabilities associated therein the Committee heard that the review of the local plan would mean that all sites would be required to be evidence based including any decisions to remove and include any other allocations and would need to be examined by the Planning Inspectorate where all parties can make representations. It was detailed that reviewing Middlewick independently did not have any justification and needed to be looked at within the wider strategy of the Local Plan. The Place Strategy Manager

concluded by detailing that there was no advantage to reviewing Middlewick separately now as the review of the Local Plan had already started and that this would be the appropriate approach to review with an up-to-date evidence basis.

Members debated the report on issues including: that the Ministry of Defence had jumped the gun with the Middlewick and marketing of the site and that some Members felt that Middlewick should be at the top of the review process noting that any potential buyer of the site would be undertaking this at their own peril. Some Members added that the reasoning behind the proposal was due to treasury driven motives and that they felt from what had already been said that this was a unique site that should be preserved as a nature reserve and that further guidance should be taken.

Members raised questions on the scope of the consultation and how hard to reach groups would be included and what consultation would be undertaken with Parish and Community Councils.

In response to Members questions the Place Strategy Manager detailed that the consultation was very focussed on engagement and that they were trying to maximise engagement with all bodies including Parish Councils.

Members continued to debate the item noting that some other Councils had a public realm access group which were included in consultations and queried whether there were any groups like this in Colchester. The Place Strategy Manager responded that they were not aware of a group such as this in Colchester and that any such group would be included within the consultation and confirmed that the residents panel were included within the consultation.

Members continued to debate the proposals with some Members welcoming the views of Middlewick being removed from the Local Plan however there was concern raised from the statement from the Portfolio Holder for Planning Environment, and Sustainability on whether there could be two parallel strains of work that were not aligning. At the request of Chair, the Place Strategy Manager detailed the portfolio holder had been briefed ahead of the meeting and that this could be picked up after the meeting.

Members debated the proposal on issues regarding an online survey and whether this would catch all people and how people without access to the internet would take part in the consultation. Discussion continued with Members outlining that the debate on Middlewick showed the value of a Local Plan as developers would be on the site already with a presumption in favour of development if the Local Plan had not been adopted. It was added that focussing on one element only would undermine the plan and that the Council needed to be consistent with assessing evidence and queried whether the site could become a SSSI.

At the request of the Chair, the Place Strategy Manager responded that the responsibility of SSSI designation resided with Natural England and noted that they had received requests to designate the site but confirmed that this was not within the Committee's remit.

Members continued to debate the proposal with some Councillors commenting that the congestion and poor public transport links to Middlewick needed to be considered and that there should be a drop-in session for Members of the public and that there was a need to highlight the unparished areas.

RESOLVED (UNANIMOUSLY) That the Local Plan Committee note the progress made on the Local Plan Review and that the Committee approved the proposal for public engagement in early 2024 to inform a vision for the Local Plan Review.

A short break was taken between the previous item and the following item.

290. Colchester Local Plan Review – Call for sites and Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology

Bethany Jones, Principal Planning Policy Officer presented the Report to the Committee and assisted them in their deliberations. The Committee heard that the Draft Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) Methodology had been subject to a consultation between the 20 October 2023 and 17 November 2023 in which time 12 representations were received which had been summarised in the officer report. The Committee heard that these responses had informed changes to the SLAA Methodology which included removing ambiguity, and using a RAG approach for each question of the assessment rather than a rating. The Principal Planning Policy Officer concluded by detailing that the evidence base from the SLAA would be used to make a spatial strategy and asked that the Committee agree the methodology as proposed.

In response to questions from the Committee the Principal Planning Policy Officer detailed that existing green spaces had been included as not all of the SLAA would be focussing on residential development but would also be looking at open space areas that had not been designated previously.

Members discussed the inclusion of Green and Blue infrastructure and it was confirmed that these would be reviewed in conjunction with the Settlement Boundary Review question within the SLAA. Members raised further points regarding the provision of Doctors surgeries and schools and whether only those that had capacity for students/ patients should be included. The Joint Head of Planning, Simon Cairns, responded that developer contributions to expansion should be considered as a mitigation but noted that this was not possible in all locations.

Members debated the role of utilities including concerns regarding the deliverability of services from Anglian Water including foul water and queried how much scrutiny could be applied to this. The Joint Head of Planning detailed that the servicing of foul water was a statutory duty which required them to connect a property to the network and provide foul water treatment.

A Member noted that it was projected that there would be a decline of 12% for primary education in the next 10 years.

RESOLVED (UNANIMOUSLY) that the Local plan Committee noted the summary of consultation responses and agreed the Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology.

291. Adoption of Active Travel and Climate Change Supplementary Planning Documents

Shelley Blackaby, Planning Policy Officer (Environment) presented the report to the Committee outlining that the two Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) before the Committee were the last in the series looking to address the Climate Emergency. The Committee heard that the SPDs had been updated following consultation. The Planning Policy Officer concluded by detailing the contents of SPDs which were appended to the

report and asked the Committee to approve the SPDs and revoke the existing Cycling Delivery Strategy SPD.

The Committee debated the SPDs on issues including: that the Active Travel SPD did not contain a lot of information on inter-urban transportation and noted that the City area contained a large amount of rural areas and inter-urban travel was barely mentioned in the strategy. The Committee queried the use of EV strategy as it was an ever-growing problem that not all people had access to a charge point which was not helped by the fact that on many developments parking was not always adjacent to the house. In response to the points raised by the Committee the Planning Policy Officer (Environment) confirmed that the details of the EV Charging points locations could be reviewed during the Local Plan Design Review.

Members continued to debate the proposal on issues including: the referencing of other Local Government bodies and queries on the accuracy of their data, the number of representations received in the consultation, and how the policies would be reviewed to ensure that they were being complied to by developers and how they would be enforced.

At the request of the Chair, the Planning Policy Officer (Environment) detailed that the references contained within the SPD were government reports and Essex County Council (ECC) and confirmed that they were all based on further guidance from the Adopted Local Plan and its evidence base. Further to this the Committee heard that ECC were doing research on the Climate Emergency and were drafting model policies which were being added to the Essex Design Guide Website. Members heard that the responses to the consultation were low but detailed that Council had carried out a 4-week consultation and confirmed that Officers had proactively contacted the RSPB and Wildlife Trust. With regards to ensuring compliance the Committee heard that a checklist had been created and if adopted it could be finalised and used as part of planning applications to show how the documents had been complied to.

RESOLVED (UNANIMOUSLY) that the Local Plan Committee adopted the Active Travel SPD and revoke the existing Cycling Delivery Strategy SPD with wording amendment as detailed in the Amendment Sheet

RESOLVED (NINE votes FOR, ZERO votes AGAINST, with ONE ABSTENTION) that the Local Plan Committee adopted the Climate Change SPD.

292. Infrastructure Funding Statement

Simon Cairns, Joint Head of Planning presented the report to the Committee outlining that the Council had received funds of £3.6 million and spent £4.8 million on projects within the City confirming that all details were contained within the report and that the item was for information only.

Members discussed the report with some Members noting that it was disappointing that such a low number of affordable homes had been built with a question being raised whether it met the 30% Affordable Housing target as well as whether the Council could ask for more contributions on developments.

At the request of the Chair, the Joint Head of Planning detailed that the purpose of the developer contributions was to mitigate growth and was not there to remedy existing deficiencies and confirmed that the Council maintained a list of potential projects and that officers asked for project suggestions. It was noted that the monies detailed are contained within the reports to the Planning Committee.

Members continued to discuss the information with some Members raising concern that there was a large amount of money unallocated whilst there were very deprived areas of the City with additional concerns raised that there was not a sound process to ensure that it was spent efficiently. Members requested that a session be held for Members regarding Section 106 training and the Joint Head of Planning confirmed that they would look at how to improve liaison between officers and Councillors regarding Section 106 proposals.

The discussion concluded with some Members questioning the large allocation of funding that was given to leisure facilities and asked whether a further breakdown could be provided regarding the spend on leisure facilities.

293. Authority Monitoring Report

Bethany Jones, Principal Planning Policy Officer presented the report to the Committee noting that the key findings were that the Council had achieved City Status, that the number of planning applications submitted had decreased slightly from the previous year and confirmed that the number of applications did not include the discharge of conditions. It was confirmed that the number of dwellings built was below the Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) and that this was because the completion of student accommodation was delayed. The Committee heard that further progression had taken place with regard to Neighbourhood Planning with Great Horkesley designating their Neighbourhood Plan Area, Tiptree Neighbourhood Plan being made in 2023 as well as Myland and Braiswick which did not need a referendum and was approved in October 2023. The Planning Policy Officer concluded by detailing that the recommendation for the Committee was to approve the 2023 Authority Monitoring Report for publication on the Council's website.

Members discussed the report noting that there were 26,000 Economically inactive people in the City and that there was a concern regarding the number of empty properties with Members asking for further details on the breakdown of these figures by ward. The Joint Head of Planning confirmed that they would look into these figures and provide them to the Committee outside of the meeting.

Members continued to discuss the increase in people who were over 65 people which had increased by 7% and what the breakdown would be for the need for different types of accommodation and for those getting onto the housing ladder.

RESOLVED (UNANIMOUSLY) that the Local Plan Committee approve the 2023 Authority Monitoring Report for publication on the Council's website.