

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK COMMITTEE
29 SEPTEMBER 2008

Present :- Councillor Nick Cope (Chairman)
Councillors Robert Davidson, Christopher Garnett,
John Jowers, Kim Naish, Henry Spyvee and
Terry Sutton

Substitute Members :- councillor Barlow for Councillor Martin Goss

7. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 August 2008 were confirmed as a correct record.

Councillor Christopher Garnett (in respect of his membership of Langham Parish Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor John Jowers (in respect of his role as an Essex County Council Cabinet member for Localism and Planning, his membership of the East of England Regional Planning Panel and Rural Communities Councillor for Essex) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

8. Langham Village Design Statement - Proposed Planning Guidance Note

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration together with the draft Langham Village Design Statement produced by a panel, the members of which had been drawn from the Langham village community. It was proposed that the design statement be adopted as a Planning Guidance Note.

Beverley McClean, Coast and Countryside Planner, attended to assist the Committee in its deliberations.

Members of the Committee congratulated the panel on the design statement which was considered to be very clear and well laid out. A document such as this was a very useful tool because it had been developed by members of the community and covered issues that could arise at planning meetings. It was recognised that the whole village had been able to contribute to its development and all those who had an input were to be congratulated. It was held up as an example to the other parish councils and parish meetings in the borough.

Councillor Garnett, Langham and Dedham Ward, expressed his appreciation of the comments made which were gratefully received. He also thanked the members of the panel and borough council officers for their assistance.

RESOLVED that the Langham Village Design Statement be adopted as a Planning

Guidance Note.

Councillor John Jowers (in respect of his role as an Essex County Council Cabinet member for Localism and Planning and his membership of the East of England Regional Planning Panel) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

9. Supply of Flats in Colchester

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration on the supply of flats in Colchester together with comparisons with other UK towns and cities. Information on measures being considered by Ipswich to ensure high quality flatted developments was set out in the report.

Councillor Gamble attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Committee about the proliferation of large blocks of flats which have been and are being constructed. He referred to the current Government policy which allowed greater densities than our policies and this had driven the Colchester position. He referred to a previous situation whereby under crown immunity, government agencies were able to give themselves permission to build very large blocks of offices in the 1960s. He had become very concerned about the very large and dominant buildings being constructed in areas of regeneration and speculated about how future generations would view some of the buildings constructed in the early part of the 21st century. He acknowledged that there were some interesting high buildings in Rowhedge, on the Maldon Road/Lexden Road junction and along Southway. At riverside locations with large expanses of open space it seemed reasonable to have higher blocks such as the student premises, but he remained concerned about the very large blocks and asked that the Committee explore these issues.

Karen Syrett, Spatial Policy Manager, and Laura Chase, Planning Policy Officer, attended to assist the Committee in its deliberations.

Laura Chase, Planning Policy Officer, referred to the new system of criteria that could be used to judge proposals for all dwellings to provide high quality and infrastructure, and paragraph 4.4 of the report by the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration set out some elements of dwellings or housing schemes which Ipswich Borough Council had identified as possible criteria which could form the basis of a detailed policy, particularly for locations such as waterfronts. She explained that it was intended to present to the Committee at its next meeting a report on development policies in the Core Strategy and it was open to the Committee to request that a detailed policy on this matter be included.

Members of the Committee expressed a variety of views regarding blocks of flats. The report recognised that Colchester had fewer flats than other comparable towns, but given the housing target for Colchester and the national policy which required local authorities to make the best use of the available land, developments which included

flats were inevitable. The regeneration areas on the waterfront in Colchester tended to be on former industrial land which required expensive decontamination. Developers needed to make a profit which they obtained by increasing the densities, hence the scaled up buildings in those areas. It was recognised that to some extent the market would largely dictate the provision of flats and there was a view that there was a demand for flats from young people because of their affordability. The proliferation of flats was not just a Colchester phenomena but was countrywide. Members were aware that if developers were not able to build upwards they would need to build sideways which could lead to urban areas joining up.

A number of particular issues were raised which could be included when drawing up policies to ensure flatted developments were high quality:-

- the issue of balconies being included in the calculation for the provision of public open space which reduces the public open space provided at ground level. There were also similar concerns regarding roof gardens,
- the aspect of individual properties which may be governed by how the block fits in with the rest of the development rather than the best aspect for the flats,
- flexible units may be a positive element but there may be issues of noise and soundproofing,
- the danger of designing in problems rather than eliminating them was highlighted,
- design - the smaller the unit and the denser the development the better the design needs to be,
- the Urban Place Supplement prepared by Essex County Council provides useful guidance on design for higher density schemes in town centres,
- densities in general and densities in particular areas,
- parking provision for flatted developments including parking close to the dwelling and parking standards for flats,
- a desire to increase the percentage of affordable housing provision,
- the appropriate location of flats, i.e. in town centres rather than villages,
- the creation of good communities,
- mixed developments,
- safety for families,
- sustainability, energy generation, green efficiencies, etc.,
- a minimum floor area for flats which some developers are considering introducing.

Members acknowledged the need for policies in the planning process because applications could only be refused if there was a material consideration which was contrary to policy. There was support for using the Ipswich model as a starting point but it would need to be developed specifically for Colchester.

It was explained that in respect of car parking, revised standards will be circulated for consultation by Essex County Council in due course and the revision was anticipated to be a minimum instead of a maximum as is the current standard. This increase would require more land to be set aside for parking provision. The Committee would have the ability to comment on the consultation document and adopt the new standards. In respect of garden sizes and balconies, the current garden standard was 25sqm for flats and higher for houses which helped to control density. Balconies of a certain size could contribute to garden sizes but they would not replace them. Sustainability was

covered by other policies and was inherent across the whole strategy.

The following figures illustrating the provision of flats as a percentage of the housing stock were taken from 2001 census:- Ipswich and Luton were each 18%, Cambridge was 28%, Norwich was 31%, Southend on Sea was 32% and Peterborough was 13%. At 15% Colchester was quite low. 75% of the new dwellings built in Ipswich between 2001 and 2007 were flats. Colchester was producing a more balanced housing market stock.

It would be possible to develop a criteria about being appropriate to the context and it would be for a developer to prove that another approach was appropriate. There were policies in the Core Strategy to refuse a project which was out of context with the surroundings. Whilst Planning Policy would not wish to accept the Urban Place Supplement document wholesale, they would want to extract parts of it, for instance higher densities in town centres, lower densities in surrounding areas, together with a policy for context and doing appraisals. Development Policies were being prepared for consultation and next year it was planned to build on the general policies in the Core Strategy to provide more detail. The Planning Policy team were already looking at a full range of Development Policies and would be bringing them to the Committee's next meeting.

Karen Syrett, Spatial Policy Manager, thanked the Committee for their very useful comments particularly in terms of criteria which would feed into the development of policies. She confirmed that the Ipswich policy was a starting point and together with the Committee's comments would assist the team to consider how to progress a Colchester policy. A report would be submitted to the next meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and a report and draft policy be submitted to the next meeting.