

Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel
17 October 2024

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

* Reporting to Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL held on Thursday 17 October 2024 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors R.Platt (Chair)
L.Gilbert (Vice-Chairman)

K.Thorpe, S.Bonfante, S.Goldwater, T.Kingsbury,
L.Musk, S.Thusu, P.Shah, J.Quinton, M.Short and
J.Weston

OFFICIALS

PRESENT: C Carter, Assistant Director (Planning)
M.Pyecroft, Principal Planner (Implementation)
C.Matthews, Senior Planner
M.Wilson, Planning & Policy Implementation Manager
R.Misir, Senior Democratic Services Officer
N.Vohra, Governance Services Apprentice

134. APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Michaelides for whom Cllr Short attended as a substitute and from Cllr Hobbs for whom Cllr Weston attended as a substitute.

135. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

136. NOTIFICATION OR URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 8

There were no items of urgent business.

137. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Cllrs Kingsbury and Thusu declared they were members of Hertfordshire County Council.

138. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME AND PETITIONS

There were no public questions or petitions.

139. SUSTAINABILITY SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD) FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Senior Planning Officer and the Principal Planner (Implementation) introduced this item and took the Panel through a presentation which set out the Draft Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the Panel's consideration and onward recommendation for approval to consult by Cabinet.

Members commented as follows:

- A member noted that climate change caused excess rain which could result in flooding given existing infrastructure issues, and building more developments was likely to make flooding worse. Officers responded that the role of the SPD was to try and provide tools to address such issues; the section in the report on flood and drainage had been contributed to by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) as the local flood authority which would have the final say on drainage matters in planning applications. The SPD sought to direct developers to look towards best practice. The member asked when a Welwyn Hatfield planning application had been refused due to HCC saying it was a flood risk or due to infrastructure issues. Officers said they negotiated on applications and if a proposed scheme was unacceptable in terms of flood risk, then the role of the planning officer was to negotiate in conjunction with specialists to the point that the scheme could be supported. The SPD was not a panacea but sought to engender change in the quality of applications that came forward.
- A member felt it would be helpful to reference onsite electricity storage at 3.4 of the SPD and that the 'Energy Efficiency and Carbon' section should reference post-occupancy evaluations on buildings to evaluate predicted energy consumption as a 'could.' She also proposed moving some of the 'could' items such as onsite renewables requiring solar panels and low carbon heat generation to 'should.' Additionally with respect to EV charging, it was proposed that the charge rate be matched to the dwell time so that charges in shopping centres would have a higher charge rate than overnight charges. Officers confirmed they would consider this as part of the consultation process.
- The Chair asked whether the SPD was likely to be superseded by forthcoming legislation given there was a new government and a potential new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Officers advised the document was a consultation draft which would come back to the Panel for adoption in the new year and which would be amended if the situation changed in the interim. When it was being considered for adoption, officers would seek delegated authority for minor updates should legislation change.

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- Referencing whether proposals 'must, could or should,' the Chair asked how much material weight a 'should' would have in determining an application. Officers advised this depended on the application and would be considered on a case by case basis although generally more ambitious proposals would be looked on more positively.
- The Chair asked whether there could be a summary document when the SPD went out to consultation and officers agreed that each chapter would be summarised on the website. Consultation responses would be summarised in the SPD that came to the Panel for adoption.

RESOLVED:

The Panel recommended to Cabinet that:

- (A) The Draft Sustainability SPD (Appendix A) be subject to public consultation for a period of six weeks;
- (B) The associated SEA/HRA Screening Report is consulted upon with the consultation bodies/nature conservation body for a period of six weeks; and
- (C) That any subsequent minor amendments and editing changes, arising from this meeting or engagement with Climate Change Panel, that do not materially affect the content prior to consultation be delegated to Assistant Director (Planning) in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning.

140. NORTH WEST HATFIELD MASTERPLAN SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

The Planning Policy and Implementation Manager introduced the report as set out in the agenda. Members commented as follows:

- The Chair noted the area contained a lot of arable land and farmland and asked how biodiversity net gain (BNG) could be achieved when something green was to be turned into something built. Officers advised they would expect BNG to be accounted for onsite on locations such as North West Hatfield which was a very large site; it was agricultural land and the starting point for BNG was relatively low as a result.
- The Chair asked where hard copies of the consultation would be sited. Officers said suitable locations were typically libraries etc; they would be resting heavily on the Council's consultation portal and would also write to all residents within the garden village and the immediate location signposting them to where hard copies would be.
- A member asked if hard copies would have Welwyn Hatfield branding; officers agreed to establish the answer to this after the meeting.
- A member noted the final version of the SPD would come back to the Panel and would then go to Cabinet and asked why Development Management Committee (DMC) was not involved in the process. Officers advised that the Panel was the forum set out in the Council's constitution that considered policy issues, whereas DMC made

decisions about planning applications. The decision as to whether to adopt the SPD would be made by full Council.

- Officers responded to a member question about BNG and explained the way the metric worked: the value of the land was assessed at a starting point and agricultural land generally had a low ecological value due to chemicals used on it, so the opportunities afforded were significant; it was likely the 10% minimum BNG could be exceeded across the development as a whole.
- A member noted some sections of the SPD ended with 'Future work' and asked if that work would be included in the final version of the document. Officers said the SPD moved work forward from the Local Plan as it enshrined a set of principles and identified some key issues. A lot of technical work had been looked at by the landowner which had in part been updated to support this masterplan and SPD, and much more detail would be required. However the work carried out was sufficient for the current stage which was why the landowner had been asked to identify where future work would need to be, although they were unlikely to need to do further work between now and when the SPD was considered at Council.
- A member asked whether Gascoyne Cecil was proposing to hold an exhibition for residents around the garden village. Officers said their understanding was the estate wished to supplement the Council's consultation with an event that would probably take place in the school.
- A member commented that it was unclear in the 'transport and movement' section which paths were for pedestrians or for cyclists and officers agreed this would be clarified.
- A member reflected on the fact that the public could think the Council was using its own land and had extensive resources whereas this was not the case; the Council did not have a blank slate and was not the landowner.
- A member requested that links of ongoing consultations be sent to councillors with details of when they were closing. Officers agreed and said the two substantive items considered by the Panel at this meeting were working to the same timetable.

RESOLVED

The Panel recommended to Cabinet that the North West Hatfield Masterplan as detailed in Appendix A of the report be taken forward for public consultation for a period of six weeks.

Meeting ended at 8.19 pm