

Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel  
21 April 2016

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the CABINET HOUSING AND PLANNING PANEL held on Thursday, 21st April, 2016 at 7.30 pm in the Cypress Room, Salvation House, 2 Sterling Court, Mundells, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL7 1FT

PRESENT: Councillors J Nicholls (Chairman)  
S Boulton (Vice-Chairman)

D Bell, H Bromley, M Cowan, M Perkins, P Shah,  
C Storer, A Thorpe and K Thorpe

ALSO  
PRESENT:

OFFICIALS C Haigh – Head of Planning  
PRESENT: S Hulks – Committee Manager

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74. SUBSTITUTIONS

None.

75. APOLOGIES

None.

76. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

77. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 9

None notified.

78. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest.

79. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME AND PETITIONS

A question was presented by Ms J Quinton.

Question:

Panshanger People have been made aware of a meeting, held behind closed doors, on Wed 16th March between leading councillors and council planners about the draft local plan and borough housing allocation. At this meeting we were told that they had DECIDED that the option of keeping an airfield at Panshanger would not be retained in the draft local plan. This meeting took place just 4 days after the owners (Mariposa) held their biased exhibition and way before any response could have come from that exercise. We have now been told that 78% of those leaving feedback at the exhibition wanted to retain an airfield in one form or another, which is contrary to the councillors decision.

Why are these self-selected councillors (who may not even be re-elected in May), making unilateral decisions on the local plan without discussion with all the councillors of the CH&PP committee and the relevant local councillors, both in Panshanger and Haldens wards. In addition, why was this decision made before any feedback was received from Mariposa, thereby consciously ignoring the residents views as well.

In addition, please could the council also tell us which Councillors and planning officers were involved in this decision and what else they decided amongst themselves?

Response:

*I would like to thank Ms Quinton for her comments, which are inaccurate and misleading.*

*No decisions have yet been made about what will be or will not be included in the proposed submission local plan.*

*Members meet with Officers regularly, as you would expect, to discuss the various options available including the advantages, disadvantages and any other aspects of business that may be relevant.*

*The meeting which Ms Quinton is referring to was a meeting of the whole Conservative Group at which Officers gave a full briefing to all the legitimately elected Conservative Councillors about the local plan, the position reached so far and the various options for moving forward.*

*I would remind Ms Quinton that these Councillors are not "self selected" – they have all been elected by the residents of Welwyn Hatfield to represent them.*

80. STARTER HOMES REGULATIONS

Members received a report which informed them of some of the proposals for regulations to deliver Starter Homes as part of housing sites.

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Members were invited to comment on various points from the consultation document and on the proposed responses to the consultation.

Issues highlighted were as follows:

- For every 100 Starter Homes built would result in between 56 and 71 fewer social rent or affordable rent homes being built.
- A new statutory framework was being proposed which included a definition, a general duty to promote the supply of Starter Homes and the ability to set a Starter Home requirement.
- Starter Homes were intended for first time buyers under 40 years old.
- The proposals suggest Starter Homes requirements should apply to sites of 10 or more units or 0.5 or more hectares.
- The proposal states 20% of homes on qualifying sites should be Starter Homes.
- There could be scope for off-site contributions in lieu of on-site provision.

Members noted that the proposals if adopted, would result in Starter Homes not remaining as such in perpetuity as there would be the opportunity to sell them after a period of years.

Members commented that the proposals were disappointing and did nothing to help vulnerable people keep a roof over their heads. Young people would not be able to afford mortgages even if they could raise a deposit.

They felt that the proposals would not deliver the developments and homes that were needed by local people.

Members felt that developers would welcome the opportunity to make off-site contributions but this would not be sustainable due to lack of space for development elsewhere.

They felt that the proposals would reduce the value of land, resulting in less building land being available.

They thought that the proposals would interfere with development and result in a windfall for a small number of people.

The Panel expressed the hope that the House of Lords Committee who were currently considering the Housing and Planning Bill would be understanding of the needs of Hertfordshire and recognise that the proposals were not suitable for such an area.

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Members felt that adoption of the Bill in full or part would result in a bad outcome which would have a knock-on effect. They thought that, as they had the responsibility for agreeing the Local Plan, they should be allowed to do so without interference.

The Panel commented that they wished the response to the consultation to be worded as strongly as possible to reflect their comments and concerns.

#### RESOLVED

That the Head of Planning in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning agree the final response to the consultation.

#### 81. LOCAL PLANS EXPERT GROUP

Members received a report which informed them about the Local Plans Expert Group that had been established by the Government.

The Group had been established to consider how plan making could be more efficient and effective. The Group had made the following recommendations:

- Make it a statutory duty for local authorities to produce and maintain an up-to-date local plan.
- Emphasise that existing policies may be considered out-of-date where local authorities have not submitted a plan for examination by March 2017. The principle of 'saved policies' should be abandoned.
- A consistent methodology for defining the boundaries of and carrying out Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs). The lack of consistency leads to uncertainty and significant disagreement over housing numbers, which affects every stage of the process from consultation to examination.
- A consistent methodology for assessing the environmental capacity of an area, to determine how much development it can reasonably accommodate.
- A strengthened duty to co-operate which puts even more emphasis on local authorities to work together to meet their objective need for development. The Government should intervene by preparing joint local plan where authorities cannot co-ordinate themselves.
- Fewer and less frequent changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG).
- A tighter definition of the evidence needed to inform a local plan.

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- Clear advice on the preparation of Sustainability Statements which audit the local plan against the NPPF, to reduce the need for complex and expensive Sustainability Appraisals.
- A definitive approach to calculate five year housing land supply and a process for Annual Monitoring Reports to be signed off by an independent examiner to verify that calculation. This will stop the issue having to be debated/challenged at planning application and appeal stages.

Members commented that if accountability was delegated, it was inevitable that results would be different as each authority worked differently.

They wondered whether, if a Local Plan was submitted on time but subsequently turned down, this would be enough to avoid intervention.

There was some merit in working consistently to assess environmental capacity. They felt that this should not just include the “green stuff” but also consider infrastructure.

They thought that there appeared to be more work to be done to fill a simpler brief.

Members asked whether there was information available on the reasons for rejected Local Plans. Officers agreed to find this information.

Members commented that the work on the Local Plan had been ongoing for years and now at this late stage an Experts Group was formed to make the process more efficient and effective. Although they felt that the outcome would not be greater efficiency or effectiveness.

NOTED the report.

82. SUCH OTHER BUSINESS AS, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, IS OF SUCH URGENCY TO WARRANT IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION:

Before the meeting was closed, Councillor Boulton took the opportunity to say a few words about Councillor Nicholls, whose last meeting of CHPP this was.

He said that Councillor Nicholls had been Chairman of this Panel for many years and had chaired meetings, which often dealt with difficult subjects, with humour and fairness.

The Local Plan, a most difficult and trying topic had been handled well by Councillor Nicholls and he thanked him on behalf of the Panel for all of his hard work.

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Councillor Perkins then spoke and thanked Councillor Nicholls for his sound advice and support during her years as the Portfolio Holder. She extended her personal thanks and that of the Conservatives and Officers.

Councillor Cowan said that he felt Councillor Nicholls had performed his duties with a light touch and with humour. He had been an exemplary Chairman and a pleasure to work with.

Councillor Thorpe added that meetings had been held with no political argument and this was down to Councillor Nicholls. He thanked him for his handling of the Panel and also for the occasional lifts home!

Councillor Nicholls thanked everyone for their kind words and for their work on the Panel. He said that, even when there had been different viewpoints, these had been dealt with, with good humour, and he thanked everyone for making his job as Chairman easier.

83. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Meeting ended at 8.15pm  
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