

ALVELEY AND ROMSLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the special meeting of the Planning Committee held on Tuesday 22nd September 2020, commencing at 7.30pm. This was a remote meeting using 'Zoom' software in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus)(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings)(England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

039. PRESENT

Cllr. Ms. P. M. Barker (Chairman of Parish Council), Cllr. Mr. R. J. Narburgh, Cllr. Mr. C. D. Noble, Cllr. Mrs. S. L. Potter, Cllr. Mr. J. R. Taylor and Cllr. Mr. F. D. Voysey.

040. IN ATTENDANCE

Mr. D. H. Rawlinson (Clerk).

041. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Cllr. Ms. Barker proposed that Cllr. Voysey be elected Chairman for the meeting. This was seconded by Cllr. Narburgh and **adopted** unanimously.

042. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It **was resolved** to accept apologies for absence from Cllr. Mrs. J. M. Hall (personal) and Cllr. Mr. K. R. Stanton (personal).

043. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY/PREJUDICIAL INTEREST

None

044. URGENT PLANNING MATTERS.

The Chairman advised that he has been alerted to a recent article in the Shropshire Star which indicated that there is a proposal for Alveley Industrial Estate to be sold by Shropshire Council. In response to a question, Cllr. Ms. Barker reported that she had contacted Cllr. Mrs. Woodward, our Shropshire Councillor, who confirmed that the matter is confidential and cannot be discussed at this time. The Chairman was concerned that the Parish Council has not yet been informed and considered that the it should be consulted before final decisions are taken. This was **agreed** by a majority of other Councillors and the Clerk was **instructed** to send a short letter to the Chief Executive of Shropshire Council to this effect.

045. GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS SET OUT IN THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT 'CHANGES TO THE CURRENT PLANNING SYSTEM'.

1. The Chairman explained that this document sets out interim proposals to improve the current planning system in advance of the major changes set out in the White Paper 'Planning for the Future'. He advised that the deadline for responding via the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) had passed and that a response direct to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government was required by 1st October. He referred to a briefing note which he had prepared

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which had been circulated to all Members. Section B dealt with the proposals in this consultation document.

2. A Member registered his objection to the suggestion in various parts of the consultation document that a shift to on-line data rather than documents would make the system more accessible to the public. He suggested that this was not necessarily the case, especially for older people.
3. Members then agreed with the Chairman's suggestion that the focus should be on the main issues, rather than the 35 detailed questions listed in the consultation document.
4. Discussion then focused on three key proposals:
 - (a) Temporarily lifting the small sites threshold below which developers do not need to contribute to affordable housing, to up to 40 or 50 units to support small/medium builders as the economy recovers from the impact of Covid-19; there was unanimous agreement that this would drastically reduce the supply of rural affordable homes, and should be opposed.
 - (b) Securing of First Homes, sold at a discount to market price for first time buyers, including key workers, through developer contributions in the short term until the transition to a new system; it was agreed by 5 votes with one abstention, to oppose this measure on the grounds that it would reduce the supply of rural exception sites in non-designated areas, and hence the ability to meet the full range of housing needs.
 - (c) Extending the current Permission in Principle to major development so landowners and developers now have a fast route to secure the principle of development for housing on sites without having to work up detailed plans first; it was agreed by three votes with three abstentions to oppose this measure because it will restrict the ability of local communities to engage meaningfully in the planning process.
5. It was **agreed** to instruct the Clerk to submit a response to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government by 1st October 2020 which reflected the above views.

046. WHITE PAPER 'PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE'.

1. The Chairman's suggestion to go through the 26 individual questions within the White Paper was supported. Members considered the proposed responses set out in the Chairman's briefing note and, after discussion, the following responses were agreed:

Question 1 - What three words do you associate most with the planning system in England?

Response - Complicated, unwieldy/slow and inconsistent.

Question 2 - Do you get involved with planning decisions in your local area?

Response - Yes.

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Question 3 - Our proposals will make it much easier to access plans and contribute your views to planning decisions. How would you like to find out about plans and planning proposals in the future?

Response - By e-mail from the Planning Authority to our Clerk plus weekly lists in local newspapers.

Question 4 - What are your top three priorities for planning in your local area?
[Building homes for young people / building homes for the homeless / Protection of green spaces / The environment, biodiversity and action on climate change / Increasing the affordability of housing / The design of new homes and places / Supporting the high street / Supporting the local economy / More or better local infrastructure / Protection of existing heritage buildings or areas / Other – please specify]

Response -

- * Providing sufficient number of well-designed affordable homes.
- * Protecting the Green Belt & countryside.
- * Better infrastructure

Question 5 - Do you agree that Local Plans should be simplified in line with our proposals?

Response - Agree that local plans should be simplified but do not support all the detailed proposals. The new regime will only be acceptable if Government supply adequate funds to meet changes and there is proper provision to challenge planning proposals.

Question 6 - Do you agree with our proposals for streamlining the development management content of Local Plans, and setting out general development management policies nationally?

Response - Generally, agree, but plans must be able to reflect local differences.

Question 7 –

- a) Do you agree with our proposals to replace existing legal and policy tests for Local Plans with a consolidated test of “sustainable development”, which would include consideration of environmental impact?

Response - Not sure that a consolidated test of “sustainable development” will create a fairness in decision-making and could be too broad based.

- b) How could strategic, cross-boundary issues be best planned for in the absence of a formal Duty to Cooperate?

Response - Not sure.

Question 8 –

- (a) Do you agree that a standard method for establishing housing requirements (that takes into account constraints) should be introduced?

Response - Don't agree that, when applied to local area circumstances, the standard method will produce equitable results. The focus seems to be on getting the 'right' national total.

- (b) Do you agree that affordability and the extent of existing urban areas are appropriate indicators of the quantity of development to be accommodated?

Response - No comment

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Question 9 -

- (a) Do you agree that there should be automatic outline permission for areas for substantial development (Growth areas) with faster routes for detailed consent?

Response - No - this provides too easy an access for developers, and prevents local community engagement.

- (b) Do you agree with our proposals above for the consent arrangements for Renewal and Protected areas?

Response - No comment

- (c) Do you think there is a case for allowing new settlements to be brought forward under the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects regime?

Response - No comment

Question 10 - Do you agree with our proposals to make decision-making faster and more certain?

Response - Yes, as long as there is a willingness to adapt them in the light of practical experience.

Question 11 - Do you agree with our proposals for accessible, web-based Local Plans?

Response - Yes, but there must also be access to paper versions for those who are not web-enabled.

Question 12 - Do you agree with our proposals for a 30 month statutory timescale for the production of Local Plans?

Response - Yes.

Question 13 -

- (a) Do you agree that Neighbourhood Plans should be retained in the reformed planning system?

Response - Yes – they will be very important in the new system and should be given appropriate status.

- (b) How can the neighbourhood planning process be developed to meet our objectives, such as in the use of digital tools and reflecting community preferences about design?

Response - No comment.

Question 14 - Do you agree there should be a stronger emphasis on the build out of developments? And if so, what further measures would you support?

Response - No.

Question 15 - What do you think about the design of new development that has happened recently in your area? [Not sure or indifferent / Beautiful and/or well-designed / Ugly and/or poorly-designed / There hasn't been any / Other – please specify]

Response - The design of new developments has been generally satisfactory, but a few developments have left something to be desired.

Question 16 - Sustainability is at the heart of our proposals. What is your priority for sustainability in your area? [Less reliance on cars / More green and open spaces / Energy efficiency of new buildings / More trees / Other – please specify]

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Response - There needs to be greater determination to protect the Green Belt and countryside and more focus on using Brown Field sites. High priority should also be given to energy efficiency and sustainable infrastructure to help the community to move towards zero-carbon.

Question 17 - Do you agree with our proposals for improving the production and use of design guides and codes?

Response - Yes, but these need to be intelligible or to have supporting statements which are accessible by members of the public

Question 18 - Do you agree that we should establish a new body to support design coding and building better places, and that each authority should have a chief officer for design and place-making?

Response - Not sure.

Question 19 - Do you agree with our proposal to consider how design might be given greater emphasis in the strategic objectives for Homes England?

Response - Not sure.

Question 20 - Do you agree with our proposals for implementing a fast-track for beauty?

Response - Yes. However, 'beauty' is a subjective term and cannot be applied uniformly across all areas/sites. A development which blends well with its natural surroundings might well be considered beautiful in a rural location, but a striking design might be preferred in an urban situation. This must be allowed for.

Question 21 - When new development happens in your area, what is your priority for what comes with it? [More affordable housing / More or better infrastructure (such as transport, schools, health provision) / Design of new buildings / More shops and/or employment space / Green space/ Don't know / Other – please specify]

Response - More affordable homes and better infrastructure.

Question 22

(a) Should the Government replace the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 planning obligations with a new consolidated Infrastructure Levy, which is charged as a fixed proportion of development value above a set threshold?

Response - Not sure. We would support a simpler system, but only if it delivered more resources locally.

(b) Should the Infrastructure Levy rates be set nationally at a single rate, set nationally at an area-specific rate, or set locally? [Nationally at a single rate / Nationally at an area-specific rate / Locally]

Response -Not sure.

(c) Should the Infrastructure Levy aim to capture the same amount of value overall, or more value, to support greater investment in infrastructure, affordable housing and local communities? [Same amount overall / More value / Less value / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Response - More value. This is necessary because the current system does not deliver sufficient resources.

(d) Should we allow local authorities to borrow against the Infrastructure Levy, to support infrastructure delivery in their area?

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Response - Yes in order to increase spending on long-term projects e.g. highways, drainage.

Question 23 - Do you agree that the scope of the reformed Infrastructure Levy should capture changes of use through permitted development rights?

Response - Different scheme needed- at specific rate with certain procedures.

Question 24

(a) Do you agree that we should aim to secure at least the same amount of affordable housing under the Infrastructure Levy, and as much on-site affordable provision, as at present?

Response - Yes. However, we can see no prospect under the revised scheme of more affordable homes and the likelihood is that there will be fewer.

(b) Should affordable housing be secured as in-kind payment towards the Infrastructure Levy, or as a 'right to purchase' at discounted rates for local authorities?

Response - No comment

(c) If an in-kind delivery approach is taken, should we mitigate against local authority overpayment risk?

Response - No comment

(d) If an in-kind delivery approach is taken, are there additional steps that would need to be taken to support affordable housing quality?

Response - No comment

Question 25 - Should local authorities have fewer restrictions over how they spend the Infrastructure Levy? If yes, should an affordable housing 'ring-fence' be developed?

Response - Yes- there should be ring -fenced funds for affordable housing which are sufficient to meet local demand.

Question 26 - Do you have any views on the potential impact of the proposals raised in this consultation on people with protected characteristics as defined in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010?

Response - We are concerned that there is little or no reference in the White Paper to practices or measures that will support the most vulnerable groups, especially the elderly and those with disabilities or learning difficulties.

2. It was **agreed** to instruct the Clerk to prepare a draft submission to NALC on this basis and to circulate it for comment.

The meeting closed at 20.50.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance.