



ENVIRONMENTAL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17th January 2007

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor I Beech (Chair) and Councillors Chalk, Dudley, Hunt, Pulsford and Taylor.

Non-members:

Councillors Anderson, Braley, Chance, Cookson, Field and Gandy.

Officers:

R Bamford, R Egan, A Grimmett and J Staniland.

Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer:

I Westmore.

42. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Enderby and Hicks.

43. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or of the Party Whip.

44. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Environmental Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 15th of November and 4th December 2006 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

45. REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY – PHASE TWO REVIEW

Councillor Jack Cookson, the Council's representative on the West Midlands Regional Assembly and West Midlands Local Government Association introduced this item, noting the original Regional Spatial Strategy had been agreed in 2004 but was undergoing revision due to central Government pressure to increase the housing stock nationally.

Councillor Cookson commented that the discussion taking place in other areas would have significance for Redditch as the greater the

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CHAIR

amount of new housing absorbed elsewhere in the region, the less would be potentially required in the remainder. However, it was noted that even the minimum requirement, based upon natural growth, would exceed the land presently designated for housing in the Borough.

Officers provided further detail on the current, partial review of the Regional Spatial Strategy, stating that the overall objectives of the strategy had not changed but that certain issues were being reviewed. The Committee then received a summary of the options set out in the consultation document for the period 2001-2026. These were set out under four headings, housing, employment, waste and transport.

Housing

There were three options set out within the consultation document for the proposed increase in the numbers of households for each of the major urban areas, counties and constituent districts.

Option One for Redditch comprised 4300 households which represented a continuation of the level of growth experienced in recent years. This was expected to accommodate a slight growth in the Borough's population and a continued decrease in the average household size. If the Borough were to build all houses already committed, on those reserve sites in Local Plan No. 3, on Potential Urban Capacity sites and within the Areas of Development Constraint (ADR), the Council could very nearly meet this first option.

Officers raised a number of points that were apparent from the overall Strategy. The Council was interested to note that other North Worcestershire districts did not appear to be bearing such a heavy burden of house building as Redditch despite their greater area. There was also the hope expressed that urban renaissance might slow the out-pouring of emigrants from major urban areas.

Option Two represented an increase of 8,200 in the numbers of households and Option Three represented an increase of 13,200 households. Officers provided illustrative examples of what these increases would entail by relating the proposals to the Brockhill Estate, Batchley. The Committee was informed that in addition to the potential house building sites already identified, Option Two would entail development of a scale of three new Brockhill Estates and Option Three of seven new Brockhill Estates. Given the extent of the proposed development, it was made clear that construction of part of the Redditch housing allocation outside of the Borough boundary was an option that would have to be considered. An earlier example under Local Plan No. 2 was highlighted for Members, this being the Ravensbank Business Park which was a Redditch Borough development constructed within Bromsgrove District.

Councillor Cookson added that of the ½ million new households proposed for the West Midlands, much would of necessity be directed to areas where the infrastructure was already in place. In a sense, local government boundaries were an artificial construct and it was probable that expansion of existing settlements, irrespective of boundaries, would occur.

Employment

One of the more significant features of the consultation options was in the removal of the link between the development of housing land and employment land, as the two had formerly increased according to a ratio under the former Worcestershire Structure Plan. This was said to be the result of an inability to establish a ratio that could be applied region-wide.

The proposed allocation of employment land for the Borough was similar under all three options and represented a much smaller area than allowed for under previous assessments of need. There was a concern expressed that sites currently within employment use could be used for housing should manufacturing decline and the need for housing land increase. Set against this was a recognition that growth sectors within the local and national economy were generally less space-hungry and other factors, such as working from home, would become increasingly significant over time.

Waste

It was made clear that the Council had only a partial responsibility within this heading as the County Council was the principal authority for waste disposal within Worcestershire. There was to be a county-wide meeting at the end of February at which the questions on the waste aspects of the consultation were to be dealt with and it was suggested that the Council could formally endorse these findings in due course.

Officers reported that colleagues from all of the relevant departments would be involved in coordinating the response from Redditch and that a whole range of Council policies would inform the position that was finally developed.

Transport

Officers informed the Committee that, at this stage, answers to the questions on transport had not been developed; the Council was using the expertise of Officers from the County Council Highways section to investigate the implications of the proposals contained within the consultation document.

It was noted that there was little apparent thought being given to a strategic approach to transport provision across the region, with a lack of consideration of the role of public transport within the consultation. The situation of Redditch and the existing road system was felt to set it apart in some regards in that there were a number of primary routes into the town and the town itself was in close proximity to the motorway network.

Over-arching Issues

Officers returned to what they considered to be the major issues to be addressed. There were several areas where the Council required a greater degree of clarity before a definitive response could be developed.

The Council wished to query a number of the assumptions that had been made in constructing the models were out for consultation from the Regional Assembly. The inclusion of neighbouring Districts within the housing strategy was an area that would require a large amount of additional study and there was little information available to the Council on possible development options. Officers proposed that a feasibility study be undertaken to establish how the higher housing targets might realistically be achieved. There was a general acknowledgement that any solution would have an impact on the green belt, either through rolling it back or by encroaching upon it. Studies would also need to encompass how natural growth should be met, the provision of employment and community facilities and the overall direction of growth.

It was suggested that the Council's Neighbourhood Groups be used as a platform through which public awareness might be increased; in addition, it was intended to contact all of the individuals and organisations on the planning database, providing a brief outline of what the Regional Assembly was proposing. Officers wished to be upfront on the issues and let local residents know what the likely implications were of the Strategy Review. Members supported the raising of awareness among the public although it was concluded that the most appropriate means of so doing was through a basic presentation of the facts as they were known, albeit highlighting the ownership by the Regional Assembly of the consultation document.

Officers were intending to prepare a public notice and press release on the matter and it was suggested that a public meeting might be held at the Town Hall. It was hoped that this would give local residents the opportunity to engage with representatives of the Regional Assembly, should they be available to attend, and would allow Officers to provide an outline of the proposals and the Council's view of these.

RESOLVED that

subject to the comments of Members, the actions outlined by Officers in connection with the preparation of the response to the consultation on the Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Review be noted.

46. PROGRESS ON EMERGING SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENTS (SPD'S)

Officers provided a brief update on a number of Supplementary Planning Documents that were ongoing at the moment. All were currently at the stage of being prepared for public consultation. It was proposed that the consultation on these be undertaken in part through the Council's Neighbourhood Groups. Certain Groups would be receiving a more detailed consultation opportunity should their wards encompass specific local SPD sites.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

47. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The programme of future work was noted by Members and it was determined that the provisional meeting date on 24th January would not be required.

It was reported that Officers wished to engage specialist retail consultants to progress the work on the proposed redevelopment of Church Hill District Centre and Members were asked to approve the use of the Committee's remaining budget for this activity. Officers stated that the overall cost of the consultant's fees might exceed the amount left in the Environmental Overview and Scrutiny Committee budget and Members agreed to make a recommendation to the Chairs' Steering Committee regarding the possible shortfall.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the remaining funds within the Environmental Overview and Scrutiny budget be utilised in the engagement of specialist retail consultants in connection with the ongoing work on the proposed redevelopment of the Church Hill District Centre; and**
- 2) the Chairs' Steering Committee be requested to make available sufficient funds from other Overview and Scrutiny budgets should there be a shortfall in the amount available in the budget of the Environmental Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

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COMMITTEE

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The meeting commenced at 7.00 p.m.
and closed at 9.40 p.m.

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CHAIR