

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the
Joint Climate & Environment and Economic & Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Held in the Council Chamber, Woodgreen, Witney at 2.30 pm on **Monday, 14 March 2022**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Alaa Al-Yousuf, Jill Bull, Mike Cahill, Andrew Coles, Julian Cooper, Rupert Dent, Harry Eaglestone, Ted Fenton, Andy Goodwin, Andy Graham, Mark Johnson, Nick Leverton, Martin McBride, Lysette Nicholls, Elizabeth Poskitt, Alex Postan, Andrew Prosser, Carl Rylett, Harry St John and Dean Temple.

Also present: Councillor Haine, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning.

Officers: Chris Hargraves (Planning Policy Manager) and Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Democratic Services Manager).

1 Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jake Acock, Owen Collins, Maxine Crossland and Ben Woodruff.

Councillor Dean Temple substituted for Councillor Alex Wilson, and Councillor Julian Cooper substituted for Councillor Liz Leffman.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Beaney declared a personal interest because he taught the children of one of the developers present.

3 Participation of the Public

David Knight, Vice Chairman of Eynsham Parish Council addressed the meeting, stating that the Parish Council were very disappointed with the consultation process carried out. He noted that there had been a community event held in December but felt this document was flawed as various community groups had not been consulted including 'EPIC' and Green TEA. Mr Knight referred to the lack of detail with regard to ecology and the climate emergency and the potential need to retrofit properties. Concerns were raised about the lack of confidence in relation to Biodiversity Net Gain, no reference to active community groups in Eynsham, the lack of provision for custom and self build properties and the need for additional burial space. Mr Knight also referred to the County Council's concern, shared by residents, of construction traffic using Thornbury Green.

Councillor Cooper queried the reference to the community group 'EPIC' and was advised that this was the Eynsham Planning Improvement Committee.

Daniel Lampard and Niamh Hession addressed the meeting on behalf of the developers, advising that the report was comprehensive in detail. They advised that any future planning applications would come before the Local Authority and in producing the Masterplan, a dedicated liaison group had been set up. The group consisted of Oxfordshire County Council, West Oxfordshire District Council, EPIC and Green TEA. Developers had produced a newsletter, created a dedicated website in November 2021 and had held face to face meetings. Mr Lampard advised that this document was a stepping stone and was not the end of the process.

Ms Hession advised that the Masterplan was designed to set out what could be delivered. It would also establish where development could be delivered, advise on transport, ecology and

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highways and would deliver 1,000 new homes. The process had identified challenges and had shaped strategies to respond to these. In addition, place making had been built into the Masterplan along with the enhancement of green spaces and ecology.

Following a question from Councillor Dent, officers advised the sewage concerns and details would be dealt with at the planning permission stage.

Councillor Levy addressed Members as one of the Ward Members for Eynsham. He advised that Eynsham had been at the centre of a flurry of major projects and this development needed to be as good as it possibly could be. He felt the document contained a lot of thoughtful information but residents had struggled to get the developers to talk in any great detail. He highlighted various areas of concern including a lack of detail on Active Travel and green space, the separation of the school and shops and the potential need to retrofit properties. Councillor Levy thanked the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Councillor Harvey for his letter to the developers regarding the climate emergency. He went on to express concerns about construction traffic using Thornbury Green, lifting of the 7 and half tonne limit, the potential loss of the bridleway and the lack of detail in relation to flood mitigation. Councillor Levy highlighted that there was no binding contract between the four separate landowners which would result in four separate planning applications, S106 funding arrangements and the phasing of works. He therefore requested that the Committee recommend that Cabinet did not adopt the Masterplan until the gaps in the document had been rectified.

4 West Eynsham Strategic Development Area (SDA) Masterplan

The Committee received a report from the Planning Policy Manager which asked them to consider the masterplan document which had been prepared on behalf of the main landowners/developers to guide the future development of the West Eynsham Strategic Development Area (SDA).

The Committee were being asked to scrutinise the report and recommend that Cabinet agree the document at their meeting on 16 March 2022.

The Planning Policy Manager, Chris Hargraves outlined the report and reminded Members of the process and decisions taken up to this point. Members noted that whilst this meeting was close to the Cabinet consideration date, officers had only received the masterplan on 25 February leaving relatively little time to compile the report.

The Chair signposted Members to paragraph 5.2 of the report which explained the position relating to policy requirements and a new revised local plan. Following a question from Councillor Leverton, Mr Hargraves advised that the document would be a material consideration at any future planning stage and contained a proportionate level of detail.

Councillor Graham felt there were inconsistencies within the masterplan and a lack of detail in certain areas. Councillor Rylett expressed his concern that this was no longer a Council led document and could have repercussions for the area. In response, Mr Hargraves explained that Cabinet agreed to update the Local Development Scheme last May resulting in this situation. He also highlighted that the Local Plan did not mention a supplementary planning document but did refer to the preparation of an agreed masterplan for the site.

Other concerns and queries raised by Councillors included the existence of a landowner consortium agreement and the repercussions the lack of one could have and the type of

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communication undertaken with landowners. The impact on flooding and flood assessments were also discussed along with whether an upper limit on the number of homes could be included. Officers advised that it would be inappropriate to specify a maximum ceiling on housing numbers. However, following further discussion it was agreed that this should be captured in the comments to Cabinet.

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Councillor Haine addressed the meeting and clarified the position with regard to housing numbers in the Local Plan, the constraints of the site, natural limitations and the flood zones. It was noted that many of the queries raised by Members were for discussion at the planning stage, when the more detailed proposals would come forward.

Further concerns were raised about the layout of the school and a lack of consultation with the County Council. The access point to the site was also discussed as some felt it was inaccurate.

In relation to Green Amenity and Leisure, the provision of a burial site was raised and discussions were had around the current lack of capacity in the Eynsham area.

Councillor Graham queried what play space provision was being made for teenagers and in response, Mr Hargraves advised that a variety of areas was being proposed. Councillor Prosser noted that any football playing fields should be within walking and cycling distance with suitable provision provided for this. Other issues raised included dog walking areas and the provision of play parks for residents or visitors with a disability.

Members highlighted a number of areas that needed further clarification and thought in relation to drainage including information on foul drainage, the cumulative impact and the need for robust strategies. Councillors Graham, Prosser, St John and Rylett all felt strongly that detailed drainage plans that had been robustly tested needed to be in place as Thames Water were felt to be unreliable and the infrastructure was not adequate to deal with the increased capacity.

Councillor Rylett did not feel that the infrastructure was moving forwards and suggested that the Council undertake work on an Infrastructure Delivery Phasing Plan to address this. Officers did not feel that it would be possible to commit to a further piece of work at this time. In response, Councillor Rylett reiterated that this was an important issue and should be considered for the whole area, with detail of phasing and trigger points for investments.

With regard to Ecology, Councillors requested the use of pollinators, hedgehog highways at development stage and the need for Biodiversity Net Gain across the whole site.

Councillor Coles advised that the document incorrectly detailed the bus routes and this needed amending. Further discussions were had relating to the A40 access and plans, a potential subway and the park and ride system. Officers confirmed that there would be a signalised junction, not a roundabout and it was agreed that construction traffic should not be directed through the village. Members felt strongly that no construction traffic should go through Thornbury Close, which was now treated as a through road. In addition, it was noted that the bridleway should be preserved as it was the only access to the countryside.

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Following comments relating to the use of the car in rural areas and the potential for the access to become a 'rat run', Councillor Poskitt queried how the issue would be tackled as the masterplan did not address this.

Councillor Graham spoke to the Parking Strategy which he felt was lacking, ambiguous and not definitive. It was noted that the document referred to plans for electric vehicle charging points which weren't in place yet. Councillor Beaney felt the document had focused on parking for the top part of the development with none for the bottom. It was also highlighted that the masterplan should reflect the guidance from Thames Valley Police in relation to cycle parking.

In relation to the proposed Primary School, Councillor Poskitt queried the form entry and officers signposted Members to the addendum which included a recommendation from the County Council. However, reference to form entry was inconsistent throughout the document.

Councillor Poskitt raised concerns about the Building Heights Strategy and felt that density related to height. She received clarification on the height of three storey dwellings.

Councillor Rylett was disappointed with the lack of detail on self-build which he felt was a missed opportunity. He felt that greater certainty should be provided in relation to areas of proposed self-build within the site. It was also felt that a mix of affordable housing should be evenly distributed throughout the development.

In relation to the Sustainability Charter, some of the Committee felt this offered nothing, was mis-information and should be deleted. However, Members noted and welcomed the recommendations put to the developer from Councillor Harvey as Cabinet Member but there was a feeling that the masterplan needed to include an ambition to achieve greater sustainability levels.

Following a formal proposal and vote, it was agreed that a specific recommendation be passed to Cabinet that the sustainability pages in the masterplan be rejected and a requirement that the 2025 future homes standard be met from day one of development.

It was agreed that the phasing of the development should be implemented as per the recommendation from the County Council and that the developer should be asked to look at an Infrastructure Phasing Delivery Plan. Members felt there was a lack of detail on the Infrastructure Requirements and suggested that any gaps in the plan could be funded or commissioned by the Council. Councillor Graham highlighted that it was too late to bring in community infrastructure at Phase 5 and the community needs had to be addressed earlier.

Mr Hargraves gave an overview of the risk assessment, with the main risk being the housing land supply. He reminded the meeting that the Local Plan was reliant on strategic sites coming forward in the second half of the plan period and that two tranches of land within the West Eynsham SDA already have planning permission.

Councillor Graham felt that there was too much onus on the developer led masterplan which gave the developer the upper hand but it was noted that this was due to the decision taken by Cabinet in May last year.

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Overall, whilst Members recognised the reasons that this document was now developer led, some felt the masterplan was lacking in ambition and detail.

Resolved that the following comments be provided to Cabinet prior to their meeting:

- 1) The number of houses referred to is described as 'about 1000 houses' – Members would like this to be a more finite number following experiences in Carterton / Brize Norton where development had vastly exceeded initial understandings;
- 2) Concerns were raised regarding the layout of the school and associated access points – can these be checked by Cabinet? It was also noted that OCC should be consulted on this;
- 3) It was noted that no reference had been made to the provision of a burial site – Cabinet are asked to consider future provision or at least reference to a contribution in Appendix I;
- 4) Drainage
 - a) It is noted that there will be 4 separate landowners and applications - strategies need to be in place that are robust and tested;
 - b) There is no information regarding foul drainage so further indication is required as to how this will be managed;
 - c) The drainage needs to be looked at as a cumulative impact & the Council needs to find ways to get Thames Water to invest, looking at the site as a whole rather than piecemeal;
- 5) There should be an ambitious net gain in biodiversity across the whole site, with developers aiming for 10% as a minimum – a request for pollinators and hedgehog highways to be incorporated from the beginning. Please can Cabinet look to the incoming Environment Act for guidance?;
- 6) The bus routes detailed in the masterplan are incorrect and need amending;
- 7) Construction traffic should not be directed through the village and Members support the comments made by OCC. Cabinet are requested to insist that there is no construction via Thornbury Road and alternative routes are detailed;
- 8) The Chill Bridge bridleway needs to be preserved and remain as existing, because it is the only access to countryside;
- 9) The parking strategy is lacking, ambiguous and not definitive. Whilst the EVCP proposals were ambitious, it was not tested against capacity to deliver. The document was not clear if it was aiming to deliver lower car usage;
- 10) Cabinet to ensure the Masterplan blends with the guidance from Thames Valley Police relating to cycle stores / parking as it was felt this contradicted their security advice;
- 11) Primary school – the references to form entry need to be consistent throughout document and should reflect the comments from OCC;

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- 12) There needs to be more detail about self build provision, in line with Council policy as the 5% requirement is not prescribed in the document;
- 13) Sustainability – whilst Members noted and welcomed the recommendations put to the developer from Cllr Harvey there was a feeling that the masterplan needs to include an ambition to achieve greater sustainability levels;
- 14) Formal recommendation that the sustainability pages in the masterplan are rejected and there should be a requirement that the 2025 future homes standard is met from day 1 of development;
- 15) The phasing should be implemented as per the recommendations made by OCC;
- 16) Request that the developer looks at an Infrastructure Phasing Delivery Plan and more information should be given around the bullet points on page 123. It was felt that any gaps in the plan could be funded / commissioned by Council officers as per the Garden Village AAP; and
- 17) It was felt that phase 5 was too late to be bringing in community infrastructure and the local centre needed to be developed earlier in the scheme to encourage community cohesion.

Note: Whilst Members recognised the reasons that this was a developer led document, following the decision made by Cabinet in May 2021, there was some feeling that this had been a retrograde step, resulting in a Masterplan that was lacking in ambition and detail.

The Meeting closed at 5.40 pm

CHAIR