

Minutes of a meeting of the **SOUTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE JOINT STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE** held in the Boston Borough Council Offices, West Street, Boston, on Friday, 27 November 2015 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

R Gamba-Jones (Chairman)
P Bedford (Vice-Chairman)

B Alcock
P E Coupland

C Brotherton
D Brown

A Austin
M Brookes

Joint Policy Unit Manager (South Holland District Council), Deputy Joint Policy Unit Manager (Boston Borough Council), Senior Planning Policy Officer (South Holland District Council), Planning Policy Officer (South Holland District Council), Forward Planning Officers (Boston Borough Council), County Commissioner for Economy and Place (Lincolnshire County Council), Strategic Planning Manager (Breckland and South Holland District Councils), Head of Built Environment and Development (Boston Borough Council), Sustainable Places Planning Specialist (Environment Agency), Principal Housing Strategy Officer (Boston Borough Council) and Senior Member Services Officer (Boston Borough Council).

In Attendance: Councillors F Biggadike, C J T H Brewis and C N Worth.

Apologies for absence were received from or on behalf of Councillor C Davie.

16. **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

No interests were declared.

17. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the South East Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee meeting held on 11 September 2015 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

18. **SOUTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE LOCAL PLAN**

Consideration was given to the report of the South East Lincolnshire Joint Policy Unit Manager, which sought approval of the 'Draft Local Plan' for the purpose of public consultation.

At its last meeting, the South East Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee (the Joint Committee) had considered the first of two reports relating to the approval of the contents of the Draft Local Plan for the purpose of public consultation. The first report had dealt with the contents of the Policies Map Insets for all 75 settlements in the proposed South East Lincolnshire settlement hierarchy.

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Following approval of the Policies Map Insets with amendments, the primary purpose of this report was to seek approval of the contents of the Draft Local Plan written statement, which contained all the Draft Local Plan policies and formed Appendix A, for the purpose of public consultation.

As preparation of the written statement had taken longer than expected, the public consultation exercise relating to the full contents of the Draft Local Plan was now scheduled to commence on Friday 8th January 2016, and last for six weeks until Friday 19th February inclusive.

The written statement set out the vision for South East Lincolnshire, the strategic priorities for the area and 32 policies to guide the development and use of land within it. Most of the policies could be split into two categories: those providing strategic direction and those providing general guidance on day-to-day development-management matters. The remainder related to site-specific proposals for development.

Within the written statement, each policy was followed by the justification for it and the options considered were set out prior to each. The choice of preferred option had been informed by a process of sustainability appraisal and then a second sustainability appraisal process had been applied to the emerging policy to inform its final wording.

To support the written statement, a draft paper was attached at Appendix B to provide the justification for the Draft Local Plan **Policy 13: A sustainable urban extension for housing in Spalding**.

Members were asked to consider Appendices A and B and approve them in principle, with or without revisions, for public consultation and delegate authority to officers to make any necessary changes in respect of presentation or factual correction and updating.

The Joint Policy Unit Manager updated Members further. The Steering Group had considered the document at length on 30th October and the only issue outstanding related to two policies to be examined at the meeting. It had been hoped that the Draft local Plan would be informed by the Whole Plan Viability Assessment (WPVA), but this work was not yet finished; however, there had been recent discussions with developers and consultants and its preparation was now well advanced, hopefully to conclude early in the New Year. An interim indication of viability could be given.

Members discussed publicity. Councillor Gambba-Jones emphasised that it was important to get the message across to the public that its feedback on the development of the area over the next 20 years was crucial, but this was difficult. It was also difficult to get over to people that the issues were not predetermined; there were many options and this was the starting point. However, it was essential that people understood that they would have to give reasons for their views; for example, they would need to explain why development should not take place in a certain area

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and why it should be elsewhere, and to build a strong case in order to counter alternative arguments. There was a lot more land included in the proposals than would be needed and some would be taken out, but there needed to be planning reasons for the decisions made. It was suggested that there should be substantial advertising in the local press during the week before the public consultation began, along with the use of social media.

The Deputy Joint Policy Unit Manager hoped publicity would encourage the public to go along to the exhibitions where such matters could be explained clearly face-to-face. Additional exhibitions might be added as necessary. Posters and leaflets were to be circulated to parish councils to display on notice boards and in local shops.

The Joint Policy Unit Manager read out the locations of the 15 manned exhibitions to be held and explained that there would be deposit points at 8 local libraries and permanent exhibitions at the Council offices. There were to be articles in the January, February and March editions of *Simply Boston* and *Simply Spalding*, to be delivered from December onwards, articles in all the local newspapers and the Boston Bulletin and parish magazines, as well as advertising on Tulip Radio and Endeavour Radio and on Twitter and the South East Lincolnshire website. Officers were working with the Communications Officer of each authority and information would appear on the websites. The Highway Authority was also helping by sending out publicity material with its own newsletter to parish councils.

Members welcomed the idea of articles for parish magazines, but urged swift publication, as the parish councils tended to meet in the first two weeks of each month.

The Joint Committee then went through the wording of each policy. The Head of Built Environment and Development suggested that the introductory line of each policy be phrased positively, rather than negatively, because the aim was to encourage growth and investment. Other officers remarked that the normal wording of development control officers had been used, but this could be changed. After discussion, the Joint Committee agreed the introductory line of each policy be made positive, except where it applied to development the authorities did not want to encourage.

Policy 6: Developer Contributions

The County Commissioner for Economy and Place advised the Joint Committee that, although there was no need to change the wording, it should be noted that there had been a Government announcement the previous week regarding a change to the community infrastructure levy (CIL) regulations in the new year which could have an impact on the policy's approach. The County Council would look at this matter closely and make any necessary representations.

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The Deputy Joint Policy Unit Manager added that, presently, reference to infrastructure was generic; it could be prioritised and made more local. Where there were new development proposals, it could be stated that infrastructure capacity needed to be looked at through Local Plan work, Section 106 Agreements and planning conditions. It was important for the public to know that development would not be allowed to take place without the necessary improvements in physical infrastructure and services.

Policy 9: Spalding Rail-Freight Interchange

The Joint Policy Unit Manager explained that officers had been long aware of ongoing negotiations between the developer and landowner interests, but that there had been no new information on this matter to report for some time. Nevertheless, he understood that the developer interest in this project remained serious and that an announcement regarding progress was expected in the near future. He was still seeking to promote the development through the Local Plan process, but a decision would have to be made in the next few months as to whether there was sufficient additional evidence available, particularly in respect of delivery, to support the inclusion of this proposal in the next version of the Local Plan, which would be submitted to the Secretary of State. If such information was not made available then its inclusion could not be justified.

The Strategic Planning Manager advised the Joint Committee that the proposal's promoters would be encouraged to respond to the public consultation exercise.

Councillor Gambba-Jones felt that the Joint Committee should give a clear message on this matter for the sake of the people of Deeping St Nicholas, which was the community most affected by the proposed siting of the rail-freight interchange.

Councillor Worth stated that he believed discussions with landowner interests remained ongoing and that he expected an announcement by the developer interest to be made in the new year.

Councillor Brown expressed concerns about how useful the proposal would be in an area where the largest industry was agriculture, which did not use the railway for transport.

In response, Councillor Gambba-Jones pointed out that significant research had been undertaken prior to the publication of the original documentation promoting this proposal, and there was confidence that the rail-freight interchange facility would be used by existing businesses. It was also expected to increase the footprint of business across the Local Plan area by drawing in new commercial enterprises, mainly from the south.

Councillor Alcock pointed out that the recent upgrade of the 'Joint Line' railway meant that the proposal would occupy a strategic location between the north of the country and Felixstowe and, as a consequence, the benefits could be significant.

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The Joint Policy Unit Manager said Councillor Brown's concerns about the viability of this proposal had been well expressed by certain members of the public, claiming knowledge of the food transport industry, during the original public consultation on the identification of the preferred site for the rail-freight interchange in 2010, and on subsequent occasions. However, he noted that the developer interest in this project had not waned and this would not have been the situation without a sound business case for it.

Policy 12: Distribution of New Housing

The County Commissioner for Economy and Place reported that the County Council would review the housing growth agenda with respect to Holbeach and how it would tie in with other ambitions. This review would inform the County Council's response to the public consultation. In response to a question from Councillor Biggadike, he confirmed that the County Council was considering the promotion of a higher dwelling target for Holbeach rather than a reduction in the requirement. Councillor Alcock expressed concern about the possible impact of such an increase on the housing provision in other Main Service Centres.

The period covered by Policy 12 was then discussed. Officers confirmed that the target dwelling figures included the number of houses already built since 1st April 2011 (the beginning of the Local Plan period) plus existing commitments, in response to members' concern that much of the public was likely to believe that the figures referred to the dwellings that would be built from the date of the Local Plan's adoption. It was agreed that the situation should be made clear to the public, as it could significantly affect public reaction.

Accordingly, it was agreed that the Local Plan period should be clearly stated on the front cover of the document, and that Policy 12 should additionally state that dwelling requirements were inclusive of existing permissions and houses completed since 1st April 2011.

It was also agreed that further information in this regard should be provided at the public consultation exhibitions.

Policy 13: A Sustainable Urban Extension for housing in Spalding

The Joint Policy Unit Manager projected maps on screen in order to illustrate his comments on this policy.

He commenced his comments by referring to the 2013 'Preferred Options report' which had recognised the need for a second urban extension in Spalding to meet a significant part of its housing need and help fund the delivery of the Spalding Western Relief Road (SWRR); the first urban extension being the 2,250-dwelling Holland Park scheme to the south-west of the town, which had recently commenced construction. Furthermore, the Preferred Options report had identified 'Land to the north of the Vernatt's Drain' as the proposed location for accommodating the second urban

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extension for Spalding following the consideration of several options. He then noted that the rationale that had informed the evolution of the policy from that set out in the Preferred Options report to Policy 13 was explained in the background paper attached as Appendix B to the agenda: *A strategy for the delivery of a further phase of the Spalding Western Relief Road and major housing growth in Spalding.*

He explained the purpose of Policy 13, which was to set out a phased approach to the delivery of the proposed 'North Phase' of the SWRR and the Land to the north of the Vernatt's Drain urban extension. It had had regard to the local sensitivities surrounding any proposed development in the 'gap' of countryside between Pinchbeck and Spalding by proposing the safeguarding of an area straddling the Joint Line from development.

He added that the WPVA work would inform decisions on whether the funding of the SWRR element of the proposals set out in Policy 13 would be through the use of a CIL or Section 106 contributions.

The Joint Policy Unit Manager concluded by noting that Policy 13 involved the provision of some 4,000 dwellings and it was hoped to encourage the early development of the land to the east of the railway line (Phase 1), although this area was more complicated in respect of land-ownership issues. The completion of the remaining phases of this proposal could stretch well beyond the end of the Local Plan period in 2036.

In response to a question, the South East Lincolnshire Joint Policy Unit Manager confirmed that the proposal included a bridge crossing, rather than a level crossing, of the railway line, and that there would be a total of three bridges along the full length of the SWRR.

The Joint Policy Unit Manager then referred to the policy's final paragraph. In seeking to deliver Phase 2 of the urban extension and associated parts of the North Phase of the SWRR, he expressed concerns that it was possible there could be issues with respect to 'ransom strips', given the different parties involved. The proposed 'public interest organisation' could seek to take ownership of the land required for the North Phase of the SWRR in order to secure its timely development, with developer contributions providing funding for the road at a later stage.

The County Commissioner for Economy and Place advised the Joint Committee that the County Council was committed to bringing the whole SWRR scheme forward, but stressed that it would be very much a long-term project with some phases being delivered beyond the period of the Local Plan. There were risks associated with such a project and it would not be straightforward; but obstacles were common to all such schemes and there was confidence that all the interested parties could be brought together constructively. Work would be undertaken to ensure that Network Rail was fully 'on board' in helping to deliver the SWRR.

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Councillor Brewis requested assurance that Phase 1 of the SWRR, which formed part of the Holland Park urban extension, would be completed, otherwise there would be traffic implications for Spalding.

In response, the County Commissioner for Economy and Place confirmed that all interested parties were committed to Phase 1, but not all agreements were in place yet. The County Council had to prioritise and manage risks, but, in his view, Phase 1 would be delivered, although he could not say exactly when.

The County Commissioner for Economy and Place then advised the Joint Committee that, although the principles of the Policy 13 were satisfactory overall, he would need to liaise with the Joint Policy Unit Manager in order to slightly amend the wording with respect to the public interest company. The Joint Committee agreed that the amended wording be agreed in liaison with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

Policy 14: Providing a Mix of Housing

The County Commissioner for Economy and Place advised the Joint Committee that the percentages with respect to affordable housing changed frequently and these could be amended in the document.

Policy 31: Delivering a More Sustainable Transport Network

Boston Borough Council (BBC) Councillors strongly objected to the statement in paragraph 8.1.8 that 'a Boston Distributor Road is recognised as offering only marginal benefits in relieving traffic impact in Boston town centre' and asserted that this had to be changed, as it was considered that such a road would have a significant impact and enormous benefits for both Boston Borough and South Holland District.

The County Commissioner for Economy and Place said that, in relation to traffic in the town centre, the modelling information showed that it would not relieve the existing routes into town. Therefore, the evidence did not support the assertion that it would result in 'significant' benefits.

However, Councillor Austin claimed that this was due to a flawed approach to the surveys, in that they did not account for traffic travelling beyond the town; to the hospital, for example. The Boston Distributor Road (BDR) should be given the same status as the SWRR, or there would be innumerable objections from Boston residents. The rail-freight proposal would be equally affected.

Councillor Bedford expressed agreement with Councillor Austin's view and was of the opinion that half of the traffic did not go into the town centre and included HGVs etc. The BDR was extremely important with respect to the A16 and the difference it would make needed to be stressed or it would not be built. The MP had expressed support for the BDR and it was hoped he would help obtain funding for it.

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Councillor Gambba-Jones queried whether there needed to be reference to the town centre in this context. If the aim of the BDR was to divert traffic away from the vicinity of the town centre, there could be an implication for traffic getting in and out of Boston.

Councillor Brookes reiterated the view that the BDR could not fail to make an enormous difference to traffic going in and out of the town, and the public would not understand the current wording of the Local Plan text relating to it.

The County Commissioner for Economy and Place assured the Councillors that he had taken their views on board and would review the text after speaking to the modellers, as any rewording would have to be supported by evidence, and he would bring the rewording back to them. Also, even if the benefits of the BDR were to be evidenced, the County Council would not be in a position to help fund its construction.

Councillor Austin expressed concern about the viability of Boston and public confidence; the local economy needed to be buoyant or people would go elsewhere and things would worsen. The BDR would allow traffic to use alternative routes, avoid unsuitable roads and prevent bottlenecks.

Councillor Brown pointed out that tourism was also affected, as many people travelling to Skegness had difficulties getting through Boston. The BDR needed to go west in order to relieve congestion.

Councillor Gambba-Jones considered that it was not difficult to get around Boston town centre once it was accessed, and parking was satisfactory. Therefore, the real issue was getting the traffic that was going elsewhere to flow around Boston. All traffic travelling to Skegness, Louth and the north all went through Boston. He thought that this was the point to get across, and that the town centre should not be mentioned.

BBC Councillors added that the BDR would also benefit traffic going to the hospital and the major supermarkets, which were not considered as through traffic, and this was why the surveys were flawed.

In response to a question, the Deputy Joint Policy Unit Manager confirmed that a 'corridor' would appear on the Policies Map Inset for Boston within which the proposed route of the BDR would be identified at some point.

In response to further questions, the Deputy Joint Policy Unit Manager confirmed that it would not be possible to include sites, promoted for development via recently-received SHLAA forms, in the Policies Map Insets to be considered in the public consultation exercise due to the printer's deadline. He added that, at the exhibitions, officers could advise people how the required additional housing numbers had changed in light of recent residential permissions.

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The Joint Policy Unit Manager explained that officers had encouraged the submission of further suggestions for development sites, and he expected more submissions during the public consultation, and all would be considered.

At the end of the meeting officers were commended for their hard work.

DECISION:

1. That the contents of the report and the attached Appendices A and B be noted;
 2. That the contents of Appendices A and B be approved with the following revisions:
 - the negative introductory line of each policy be changed to a positive, except where development should not be encouraged;
 - the table of new housing figures in Policy 12 should clearly explain, in plain language, that the figures included completions since April 2011 and existing permissions that should be deducted to indicate the number of proposed new houses and this be reiterated in the text;
 - the wording of Policy 13 with respect to the 'public interest company' be amended to the satisfaction of the County Commissioner for Economy and Place in liaison with the Joint Policy Unit Manager, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman; and
 - the wording of paragraph 8.1.8, regarding the benefits of the Boston Distributor Road in relieving traffic impact in Boston town centre be amended by the County Commissioner for Economy and Place in liaison with BBC Councillors and the Chairman;
 3. That authority be delegated to officers to make any necessary changes to the content of Appendix A in respect of matters relating to presentation or factual correction or updating; and
 4. That the final version of Appendix B form part of the published supporting documentation accompanying subsequent stages of Local Plan preparation.
19. **ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT.**

There was none.

(The meeting ended at 12.00 pm)

(End of minutes)