

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL AND TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL
JOINT PLANNING POLICY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of The North Devon Council and Torridge District Council Joint Planning Policy Committee held at Bideford Town Hall - Bideford on Friday, 8th December, 2023 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Councillors:

North Devon Council:
Councillors Bell, Denton, Lane, R Knight, Prowse (Vice-Chair),
Walker, and Worden

Torridge District Council: Councillors Cottle-Hunkin, Hackett, Hames,
Councillor Hicks (Chair), Hodson and James.

Officers:

North Devon Council: Head of Place, Property and Regeneration,
Senior Planning Policy Officer, Planning Policy Officer, Planning
Policy Officer and Chartered Legal Executive

Torridge District Council: Planning and Economy Manager, Planning
Manager, Solicitor and Senior Planning Policy Officer

Also Present:

Councillor Smith (TDC Elected Member)

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:

Torridge District Council – Councillor Lock (Councillor Leather substituting)

North Devon Council – Councillor Roome (Councillor Denton substituting)
Councillor Crabb (Councillor R Knight substituting)

**12. TO AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD
ON 13TH OCTOBER 2023**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held 13 October 2023 be approved as a correct record.

13. FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan was noted.

14. TO AGREE THE AGENDA BETWEEN PART 'A' AND PART 'B' (CONFIDENTIAL RESTRICTED INFORMATION).

There were no Part II items.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair reminded Members that declarations of interest should be made when the specific agenda item to which they related was under discussion.

16. ITEMS BROUGHT FORWARD WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR SHOULD BE CONSIDERED BY THE MEETING AS A MATTER OF URGENCY.

There were no items brought forward for consideration.

17. FIVE YEAR LAND SUPPLY UPDATE

The report was presented by the Planning Policy Officer (TDC). The purpose of the report was to give an update on the North Devon and Torridge Housing Five Year Housing Land Supply.

The Committee had considered the report which had previously been circulated.

The Planning Policy Officers (TDC and NDC) responded to questions raised.

These included:

A concern that the five-year housing land supply equivalent to 5.18 years was not much of a margin and what sort of variants would be expected year on year. In response the Planning Policy Officer (NDC) advised there is a 20% buffer applied to the requirements. In terms of going forward the way the calculation works is the back log needed to be addressed and is spread over the plan period - as the period gets shorter it will become more difficult.

The Senior Planning Policy Officer (TDC) responded to a concern raised in relation to the number, going forward, of new dwellings in a five year period because of having to make up the backlog. The Committee were advised that it would get increasingly more challenging to demonstrate a five year housing land supply due to the backlog needing to be met over an increasingly short period. There is a need to support housing delivery and to investigate and unblock all barriers to the delivery of housing, with an aim to ensure delivery is above the required number of new dwellings (862) each year, hence reducing the backlog over time. This is challenging because a Local Planning Authority does not have the tools to impose or enforce the delivery of that housing.

Emphasis was made on the need to continue to be proactive to support the delivery of sites. He outlined the problems with getting a Registered Provider on board for

smaller developments, with issues around finance for Registered Providers and going forward for the Committee to give consideration on how to get more affordable housing into the system.

The Committee asked if the changes to planning set out in the Government's consultation document 12 months ago, had been received. The Senior Planning Policy Officer advised the planning reforms are ongoing, with a new interim version of NPPF expected to be out next week with a further planning reforms coming out next year (2024).

Additional comments made by the Committee included:

- Limited control over delivery of housing.
- Developers not building on sites.
- New dwellings not selling – financial side means they need to sell to be able to build affordable housing.

It was proposed by Councillor Worden, seconded by Councillor Bell – That the confirmation of the current five-year housing land supply position and the intention to publish future statements on an annual basis be noted.

(Vote: For – Unanimous)

18. PLANNING FOR TRAVELLER SITES

The Committee considered the report, the purpose of which was to inform Members of the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan policies relating to gypsies and travellers, evidence that has been prepared on this matter and the future provision of traveller sites.

The Senior Planning Policy Officer (NDC) presented this item and highlighted to Members the key elements within the report.

During the discussion the following points/concerns were raised:

A lack of site capacity in terms of transit provision.

The Report states no direct resource implications. This statement questioned if there is a need to commission a Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment. It was confirmed that this would form part of the work to support the new local plan and that it is needed to confirm the level of needs now in comparison to 2015. There is a need to ensure adequate resources are allocated to ensure the Assessment is done swiftly. It was cited that due to unauthorised encampments there are financial implications.

Councillor Hodson agreed with bringing forward for discussion the Assessment earlier than the Local Plan. The issue of access to services, such as being near to a school, when considering sites was highlighted. It was acknowledged that Travellers

have the same rights as settled communities and that from an equality perspective this needs to be recognised.

Difficulties in planning for 15 pitches over 20 years. The challenge is that no sites in sustainable locations have been historically identified, which is a matter both Councils will need to consider.

Members discussed the possibility of the laybys on the Link Road being used as transit sites. Councillor Hicks identified that Devon County Council (the owner) had previously been approached but they had indicated that they have alternative uses for the sites.

It was proposed by Councillor Worden, seconded by Councillor Walker that the report be noted.

(Vote: For – Unanimous)

It was proposed by Councillor Worden, seconded by Councillor Hackett that the Committee approach Devon County Council in relation to the potential for the layby sites on the Link Road to be used as transit sites.

(Vote: For – Unanimous)

19. LEVELLING-UP AND REGENERATION ACT 2023

The purpose of the report was to ensure Members are kept apprised of on-going reforms to the planning system and the potential implications for North Devon and Torridge.

The Senior Planning Policy Officer (TDC) presented the report, which gave an overview of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 which received Royal Assent in October 2023. It was important for Members to note that the report can only provide an overview of the provisions because many will require associated secondary legislation, in the form of Regulations, yet to be published.

During the discussion the Senior Planning Policy Officer (TDC) responded to questions/concerns raised by the Committee.

Councillor Prowse asked what action should be taken going forward and suggested that work should start on the Neighbourhood Priority Statements. There was discussion around the potential for neighbourhood priority statements to be a good alternative to preparing neighbourhood plans for some communities, recognising that preparing a neighbourhood plan can be extremely challenging. It was suggested that working with communities on these statements could be a good use of time over the coming months.

Further discussion included:

The importance of working together to plan for the future of northern Devon.

Self-Build - A need for the new Local Plan to support the delivery of self-build, with clarification on self-build given by the Senior Planning Policy Officer, including the recognition that there is already a significant element of self-build that comes forward in northern Devon but that there could potentially be other ways of bringing forward more.

Should explore the potential to fairly quickly move to develop Design Codes for northern Devon, potentially delivering in-house or commissioning as necessary.

It was proposed by Councillor Hicks, seconded by Councillor Leather that the report be noted.

(Vote: For – Unanimous)

20. LOCAL PLAN UPDATE - NEXT STEPS

The Head of Place, Property and Regeneration (NDC) and the Planning Manager (TDC) gave a detailed and informative joint slide presentation updating on the Local Plan and the next steps going forward.

The slide presentation comprised of the following:

Comprehensive details on the New Plan-making Process and Timeframes Questions to prompt discussion on the proposed Plan preparation process, when to start the process, how much preparation work to do in advance of that start date, Visioning and Engagement.

The questions are listed below:

- What are Members ambitions in terms of the speed of plan preparation?
- Is there an acceptance of risk with completing early work?
- What are Members thoughts on being a front-runner?
- Do we seek to lobby around the transitional arrangements?
- How do we set up Governance and meaningful Member involvement in the process?
- Would Members welcome thematic Working Groups?

The presentation given by the Planning Manager (TDC) related to the first four points set out above.

The Senior Planning Policy Officer (TDC) explained the term “front-runner” and the benefits and risks linked to that. The Government has indicated that from November 2024, 10 Authorities could act as front-runners to be the first Authorities to drive forward a new Plan and would benefit from support from Central Government.

During the discussion the Senior Planning Policy Officer (TDC) responded to questions/concerns raised by the Committee.

Councillor Leather asked if any of the work could commence straight away on the new Plan, even if not a front-runner and how soon will we be told we can start the new Plan? Members were advised that there was an expectation that expressions of interest to be a front-runner would be invited in the Spring. It had been indicated that a letter will be sent to all Councils inviting them to put themselves forward as a front-runner, but the timing of that needs to sit with Policy or guidance coming out confirming that process. It was highlighted to Members that there would potentially be value in lobbying, not only around being a front-runner but also transitional arrangements. A discussion around the work we can and should be getting on with in advance of the formal commencement of the new plan making system to be brought back to this Committee.

Further comments made included:

Opportunities for Social and Affordable Housing – would there be any scope in the new Local Plan to be more prescriptive for smaller houses, shared housing etc. The Planning Policy Officer (TDC) advised there is scope to be more forceful, Officers have been successful in negotiating smaller units on sites, but it is more challenging for the smaller sites with 5 dwellings or less. This is a matter to be looked at and how we best deliver for communities.

The Planning Manager (TDC) said Officers would welcome direction from the Committee as to what is needed to be brought forward to the March meeting or whether an intervening meeting is required.

Councillor Prowse gave his support to moving forward as quickly as possible because the issues faced are not dependant on the shape of the Local Plan. He stated there was a need for a new vision in terms of development for North Devon. All Councillors need to be involved from the start of this exercise.

Councillor Walker mentioned how important it is to look at housing mix and agreed for work to start immediately.

Following further discussion, it was proposed by Councillor James, seconded by Councillor Hackett that the item be noted. No vote was taken at this stage.

The Planning Manager (TDC) presented the final two points listed above. Governance has already been set up and there is a signed Agreement on how the Committee will function. The Committee were asked to give their views on whether they would prefer thematic Working Groups to deal with a particular individual themes.

Councillor Knight referred to Sustainable Development which he said does impact on the aspirations to be carbon zero by 2050. He suggested that each Councils Climate Working Group meet as soon as possible prior to the next meeting because it is vitally important to concentrate on being carbon zero by 2050.

The preference expressed by the Committee was for Thematic Working Groups to be set up as soon as possible.

The Head of Place, Property and Regeneration (NDC) presented a slide entitled Visioning and gave comprehensive details on the following questions:

- How would Members like to go about visioning?
- Do Members recognise the need to revisit the previous visioning work?
- What did you like about the previous approach(es) to visioning? What would you do differently?
- How would you like to go about it this time around?
- How do we ensure that we derive a vision for norther Devon that is aspirational, transformational and locally distinctive?

The Committee were in agreement for visioning events and for all Members of both Councils to be included.

The Head of Place, Property and Regeneration advised that Workshops will be held with all Members being invited, following which to then look at setting up Working Groups for certain issues.

The final slide presented was in relation to Engagement. The questions were as follows:

- When and where do we (re)launch the plan-making project to communities and stakeholders?
- Do we retain the People and Place Branding? Or does it need a refresh or a re-brand?
- What are Member's perspectives on early community and stakeholder engagement?
- At what stage do we start to engage with individual local communities?
- How do we engage and align with other frameworks such as One Northern Devon and other strategies such as the Cultural Strategy?
- How do we ensure that there is corporate buy-in and that the plan both reflects and shapes Council priorities?

The Head of Place, Property and Regeneration (NDC) explained that the purpose of the slide was to get feedback from Members on:

- How they would like Officers to engage with communities and stakeholders and at what stage.
- Whether to retain the People and Place Branding or to revisit.

Further comments received from the Committee included:

- That the People and Place Branding be retained.
- Recognition of the importance of community engagement but the challenge of apathy and a sense that views are not considered. Importance of managing expectations given that the plan is at an early stage.

- The importance of involving organisations such as One Northern Devon and other such Groups.
- Whether there is the scope for a Citizens Assembly.

It was proposed by Councillor Hicks, seconded by Councillor Lane that –

- The report be noted.
- There is support for carrying out consultation.
- Individual Working Groups to be set up for important themes.

(Vote: For – Unanimous)

21. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND TO AGREE FUTURE MEETING DATES

It was proposed and seconded that the following future meeting dates be agreed:

Next meeting date 15 March 2024

14 June 2024 – 10am
20 September 2024 – 10am
6 December 2024 – 10am

14 March 2025
16 May 2025

(Vote: For – Unanimous)

Chairman

The meeting ended at 12.50 pm