
BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

LOCAL PLAN WORKING GROUP

**Held on Tuesday, 3 December 2013 at 11.00 am in
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Dereham**

PRESENT

Mr M. A. Wassell (Chairman) Mrs L.S. Turner
Mr M.A. Kiddle-Morris

Also Present

Mr S.G. Bambridge Mr A.P. Joel
Mr T R Carter Mr K. Martin
Mr J.P. Cowen Mrs J A North
Mr P.J. Duigan Mr A.C. Stasiak

Mr Ciaran Gunne-Jones - Consultant (Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners)

In Attendance

Philip James - Planning Policy Team Leader*
Feng Li - Senior Planning Policy Officer*
Helen McAleer - Senior Committee Officer
Phil Mileham - Deputy Planning Manager
Martin Pendlebury - Director of Planning & Business Manager *
Sarah Robertson - Planning Policy Officer*
Jamie Smith - Environmental Planning Officer*
Iain Withington - Planning Policy Officer*

* Capita Symonds for Breckland Council

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29/07 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2013 were agreed as a correct record.

30/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (AGENDA ITEM 3)

Councillor Cowen made his usual declaration concerning his employment as an Architect in the district.

**31/07 NON MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING
(AGENDA ITEM 5)**

Councillors G Bambridge, T Carter, P Cowen, P Duigan, A Joel, K Martin, J North and A Stasiak were in attendance.

32/07 BRECKLAND EMPLOYMENT GROWTH STUDY (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Councillor Kiddle-Morris said that the previous Employment Land Review had been carried out in 2006 and was significantly out of date. Fresh evidence was needed for the Local Plan.

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The Planning Policy Officer introduced the report. The study had focussed on two areas; to demonstrate that the Council had an appropriate level of employment growth; and to identify broad locations within the District for potential economic growth. The study would supersede the previous Employment Land Review.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which had replaced old guidance, placed a high importance on employment growth. To be sound the Local Plan would have to demonstrate that the business needs and the economic market within the District and how it would change over the 20 years of the Plan were understood. The long term protection of sites which had failed to come forward for development needed to be avoided and the appropriateness of existing sites needed to be rechecked.

Before introducing Ciaran Gunne-Jones from Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners who was to give a presentation, the Planning Policy Officer advised Members that the Employment Growth Study went hand in hand with the next item on the Agenda, the Localised Housing Targets and both needed to be considered together.

Mr Gunne-Jones then gave a PowerPoint presentation on Appendix A to the report which had been issued as a Supplement to the Agenda.

The Study, which covered the period up to 2021, considered a range of sectors but particularly focused on the B Classes. It sought to establish the future floorspace/land requirements and where they should be located.

The methodology of the Study was split into three stages: 1) to take stock of existing economic trends and existing sites; 2) to assess future requirements; and 3) to draw the two together to assess the suitability of the sites to meet the identified needs.

Historically there had been strong levels of growth but the numbers of industrial jobs had remained steady with office based jobs increasing steadily. The main areas of decline were in agriculture.

The labour force had a below average skills profile with people employed in higher skilled jobs usually commuting out of the District. Breckland was a net exporter of labour but it also imported labour from adjacent areas. About 8% of people worked from home.

Breckland had the second largest employment space in the area after Kings Lynn & West Norfolk. That space was mostly located in key centres such as Attleborough, Dereham and Thetford. Rural areas were also an important source of small scale office and commercial employment areas.

Information gathered from interviews with property agents identified that greatest demand was for small to medium sized industrial and distribution space focussed on Thetford with the strongest demand along the A11 corridor. The dualling of the A11 was an important driver of future demand.

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The information from the agents had also identified issues with outdated stock due to lack of investment. The low rental levels were not conducive to delivering new employment space.

In conclusion the site assessment showed that there was a reasonable range of employment sites which were fit for purpose.

Moving on to future growth needs, it was pointed out that it was not an exact science. A range of approaches had been used to compare and contrast scenarios. Those figures were then benchmarked against past growth trends and all the scenarios predicted a lower level of growth. That might be because more muted growth was expected due to the uncertainty of recover coming out of the recession.

Numbers were converted into land requirements showing a need for 2-9ha for offices and 25-65ha for industrial uses. Those figures were then compared to the current supply available.

The District currently had sufficient land supply with a significant surplus. The next questions to address were; was the land in the right place; was it attractive to the market; and would it come forward for development. The NPPF required a demonstration of deliverability.

Market feedback suggested that there was an important need to support investment and to upgrade existing facilities. It was known that some businesses had relocated outside of the District because they had been unable to find suitable space. Move-on space was needed, which was generally absent from the District.

Attleborough and Snetterton had sufficient land to meet future need. There was scope to rationalise sites in Dereham. Thetford had the largest supply and the greatest market demand. Swaffham and rural areas had scope for a reduction in the existing available land supply.

The implications and options were set out:

- 1) Rationalise supply – concentrate on key locations and seek to achieve critical mass
- 2) Adopt a more flexible approach to secure the delivery of B Class development; look at mixed use options to help viability
- 3) Release old / poor quality sites where market demand was weak. Constrained sites should be considered very carefully to ensure a new supply of land was available.
- 4) In the longer term there was scope for a new small to medium sized enterprise centre aimed at keeping firms from leaving the District
- 5) The role of smaller rural settlements and their employment requirements needed to be recognised. They provided a healthy base for the supply of workshop units, etc. The level of demand pointed to a need for a supportive policy framework to maintain rural vibrancy.

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Members were invited to ask questions.

Councillor Cowen raised the following points:

- Broadband – high quality speeds were needed. The lack of that might be a controlling factor in firms expanding and might explain why some left the District. That applied to employment and retail.
- House completions – looking at the numbers that had been delivered in the last ten years he could not see how the figure of 700+ houses per year could be justified.
- Lots of people were moving into lower priced areas in Thetford but continuing to commute out of the District to work.
- Fitness for purpose was a fundamental factor. A large number of units had been developed but income was reducing and it was a huge task encouraging people to stay.
- Energy need – there was not enough to meet current need in areas such as Snetterton. Growth could not be contemplated until that was sorted.
- Agriculture – although it was losing jobs it did not mean that it was reducing. Methodology was changing. Agriculture underpinned Breckland's economy. The District had free draining soil suitable for pigs, chickens etc. It could not grow arable without irrigation. There was a need for improved distribution and transport to support agriculture.

Councillor Duigan was concerned that planning policies did not support offices in town centres.

Councillor North noted that often planning applications for large housing estates had an element of employment land on their periphery, but that was not always a good location for it.

Councillor Joel asked whether migrant workers were impacting Breckland's employment areas.

Mr Gunne-Jones responded to the points raised.

- He agreed that access to Broadband was essential. It was the second most cited issue after the dualling of the A11 and it affected all sectors.
- The national trend was that agriculture was losing jobs and its increasing complexity drove other requirements, such as distribution and transport. It was important to have a flexible policy approach.
- Retail was important and would be considered in the planning for the future economy.
- In principle Planning Policy did allow for offices in town centres. An element of both town centre and edge of town space was required.
- With regard to the capability of delivering the number of houses / employment space / infrastructure required, there was a need to examine proposed developments for their deliverability. In recent examinations Inspectors had asked about land supply and suitability.
- The changes in the labour force had not been looked at in detail.

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The trend base for both past and future growth highlighted the skills gaps for supporting certain types of growth.

The Chairman asked about the travel to work data and it was confirmed that it would be updated when the 2011 census data was released in 2014.

Councillor Cowen expanded on employment opportunity drivers. An employer wanting to move into an area looked at land and workforce availability. That was linked to housing which in turn was affected by schools, health service and infrastructure. An employer requiring highly skilled people would need to know that their infrastructure needs could be met.

Councillor Kiddle-Morris noted the conclusions of the study. He thought that enterprise centres for business start-ups were a good idea and something which could be encouraged by putting them near to town centres. He asked whether allowing A Class uses on a site was being considered to provide a kick start to B Class development.

Mr Gunne-Jones advised that viability issues should be considered. Some sites might need to be subsidised. The general principle was that mixed use development brought employment sites forward. Residential, amenity and work uses could be accommodated together although maybe not B Class uses. The general point was that flexibility was needed and it was important to ensure that when mixed use was permitted the employment land part of the site was delivered.

RESOLVED that the consultant's report, together with NLP's presentation and Members' comments, be accepted as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan.

33/07 SETTING LOCALISED HOUSING TARGET (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Planning Policy Officer introduced the report and advised that the NPPF required the Local Planning Authority to meet the need for affordable housing in full. The paper had been produced to set local housing targets using a range of interim figures and different scenarios and demographic projections.

The Senior Planning Policy Officer pointed out a mistake on the addendum sheet which had been tabled. In the penultimate column (Scenario G) the figure for Jobs should read 6168 (not +380). He then gave a short presentation.

The two key elements for strategy setting were growth and housing. The NPPF included a requirement to set housing targets. The current target of 780 per annum was not being delivered and the Council only had a 2.8 year housing land supply.

The report had been prepared in stages. Evidence had been gathered and a baseline set. Then demographic modelling had been used. The next stage had looked at demand side issues, not influenced by other factors, to provide an objective assessment of housing need and supply factors including housing land availability

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and environmental constraints including infrastructure needs in the future.

The outcome of the various scenarios tested was that between 634 and 770 dwellings were needed. Guidance suggested that the higher figure should be adopted.

The next stage would be to investigate further supply side evidence by undertaking wider stakeholder involvement, addressing cross boundary issues and seeking Members' views. A visioning session would be arranged to receive Member input and then an issues and options strategy would be set out.

The Chairman thanked the officers for a fascinating report. He noted that according to the graph on page 38 most inward migration to the District was from within the UK.

Councillor Kiddle-Morris was concerned about formulating policies. The report said that housing provision should match job requirements but many people commuted out of the District for work. He also wanted new housing to be where people wanted it which was in rural areas, not in large conurbations. Finally he was concerned about the duty to co-operate with neighbouring authorities. Breckland was ahead of the game and no-one else was ready to discuss their plans. A cohesive cross-border plan was needed.

Councillor Cowen referred to the upper and lower limits and said that the table on page 49 showed the number of completions. There were in excess of 2000 extant permissions and it would be interesting to know how many would be delivered. It seemed there were only windfall sites coming forward. Allocated sites were not being delivered because people did not want to live in the allocated areas. He was concerned about how the Council would deliver any new housing – let alone 700 per annum for the next 20 years.

With regard to the number of new jobs per annum he asked whether the numbers might be affected by people moving to the area to retire. There were lots of issues and the figures needed to be understood. If the figures were tied to employment it was like mixing apples with pears. There were lots of people already commuting out of the District and with improved train services to Cambridge and the dualling of the A11 which would reduce travelling times, that was likely to increase. The houses would not generate employment. The visioning session was vital and a 'no holds barred' approach was needed to form policies.

The Deputy Planning Manager said that the completions issue was interesting as there was a very low lapse rate for planning permissions. However, recent schemes had not progressed due to market forces. The previous Core Strategy had looked at large allocations of growth on strategic sites and they took time to come forward. Need had to be assessed and then it had to be determined how it could be delivered. There was a lot to consider.

Councillor Kiddle-Morris noted that only 328 dwellings had been

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delivered the previous year. To meet the targets in the LDF would require more than 1000 houses to be built each year. When he looked at the projections he was concerned. People could not be told where or how to live their lives. They would use cars as there was not enough public transport. More constraints were not needed with a largely rural population. Further work would continue on stage three of the report.

RESOLVED that subject to the comments made the report be accepted for the purpose of preparing the Local Plan.

34/07 ATTLEBOROUGH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (STANDING ITEM)

The Deputy Planning Manager informed Members that there had been no further meetings concerning the Attleborough Neighbourhood Plan since the last LPWG. The next meeting would be in the New Year and feedback would be provided.

For information, he advised Members that he had received an application from Croxton Parish for a designated Neighbourhood Plan that morning.

Councillor Kiddle-Morris noted that a large part of the Thetford Sustainable Urban Extension was in Croxton.

The meeting closed at 12.30 pm

CHAIRMAN