

EAST HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Planning Policy Committee held on 6 July 2021

Present

Councillor: A Glass (Chairman)

Councillors: D Evans (Vice-Chairman), K Budden, G Hill, S Hunt, M Johnson, C Louisson, S Pond, A Williams and E Woodard

6 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

7 Chairman's Announcements

There were no chairman's announcements.

8 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

9 East Hampshire District Local Plan: Spatial Strategy Preferred Option

The Acting Planning Policy Manager introduced the item and gave a background to the Local Plan.

In January 2021, Full Council approved that a hybrid approach to the progressing of the Local Plan would be taken which involved the extension of the plan period by two years up to 2038 to ensure that there would be a minimum of 15 years from the date of adoption which was the national requirement. This inevitably meant that more homes would be required to meet development needs.

The next formal stage of the Local Plan was a Regulation 19 consultation which was a consultation on EHDC's preferred plan before it was submitted for examination which was scheduled for April 2022. It was considered that a preferred spatial strategy should be agreed beforehand to give clarity on the sites chosen to form development allocations. Having sites in the public domain early in the Local Plan process would allow more detailed work to be undertaken in regard to the sites. It would allow design workshops with various stakeholders, including parish and town councils to commence to develop site specific policies. It was important for local residents to shape development of the local sites in order to achieve the best outcomes.

Also, identifying a preferred spatial strategy may also assist with decisions on planning applications submitted ahead of this milestone. The Council could currently demonstrate in excess of five years' worth of deliverable housing, but

this had to be monitored annually and needed to be considered when assessing applications.

The core elements to the options being presented to the committee represented approximately 2,600 homes. As well as the reduction in the quantum at Whitehill & Bordon, there had been a number of other changes to the context of the local plan. Of these, most significant was that the Government had proposed significant changes to the planning system through its planning White Paper with a renewed focus on delivering net gain in built and natural environments. In addition, the Covid 19 pandemic had created a focus on dealing with economic and social recovery, whilst the climate change emergency declared by EHDC and other public bodies was also significant. In terms of biodiversity, nutrient neutrality was now sought from development in the southern parishes and the Itchen and Meon catchments. Also, the delays to the Local Plan in regard to the national policy requirements required an extension to the plan period to 2038. Taking all of this into account, the four reasonable alternatives consisted of 2,600 dwellings on core sites, plus one of the following sites or collection of sites:

Option 1 was incremental growth – a selection of other sites, namely White Dirt Farm in Horndean, Land at Five Heads Road in Horndean, White Down Lane in Alton and Land East of Old Odiham Road. This would be up to approximately 400 dwellings across the selection of sites.

Option 2 consisted of land at Chawton Park Farm in Alton for up to 1,200 dwellings.

Option 3 – Land at Neatham Down, approximately 500/600 homes.

Option 4 – Two of the South Medstead large development sites which would be approximately 1,000 dwellings across the two large sites.

Although all reasonable alternatives would meet the identified local housing needs, it was considered Option 2 would best address these needs in the most sustainable and flexible manner. This could total up to 3,600 new homes. The Acting Planning Policy Manager outlined the reasons why the other options were considered weaker.

The Chairman reminded members that the Planning Policy Committee was a strategic committee responsible for overseeing policy strategy. It was important that the EHDC Draft Local Plan moved forward and the committee this evening was part of that process. EHDC had to produce a Local Plan which must be sound, particularly when it came to examination, in order to have planned development. Without a sound local plan, development would come forward without the infrastructure that was required to provide sustainable communities within the district.

The Chairman invited councillors to ask questions of officers and debate the application.

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Following on from consultation, Northbrook Park appeared to be a preferable option but had not been included in the list, whereas the number of objections raised against Chawton Park Farm gave a clear indication as to how the public felt. The officer advised that the good response to the large sites had aided officers; however, they had to consider the environmental constraints associated with large development sites that had been identified by organisations such as Natural England.

Concern was expressed with regard to the access to Chawton Park Farm. Whilst the officer acknowledged that one of the biggest issues with this site was around transport, in particular the bridge; Planning Policy had held high level discussions with HCC in regard to all of the large sites and by selecting sites now, it would allow more detailed discussion going forward. Officers did not envisage it being an overriding constraint but now needed to find the best solution which would come out from their further work.

In response to a question raised as to whether what the committee was being asked to approve was premature, the officers confirmed that a lot of work had already been undertaken with regard to the sites and the two consultations had provided enormous feedback and allowed information to be gathered. The stage at which the local authority was currently at was talking about a broad strategy based on the principle of development on the sites before the committee in order that officers could engage with consultees in the public domain and specifically in partnership with town/parish councils who had a keen understanding of their area.

It was felt that the possibility of Northbrook Park should be explored again in order to act as a safety net, in case any of the preferred sites could not proceed. In reply, officers had concluded that Option 2, Chawton Park Farm, was the most appropriate, sustainable, and flexible option to take forward and there were no overriding constraints based on the technical work undertaken through the Sustainability Appraisal process and other assessments. Officers felt that they were in a good position and as confident as they could be at this point, without having gone into the details which they would look to do on the basis of the committee's agreement with the recommendation outlined in the report. Northbrook Park had been discounted due to flood risk affecting areas to the South of the A31 and the resulting impacts this could have on development capacity. Due to the climate emergency, flooding was a growing risk. Unfortunately, it was considered there was no more additional work that could be undertaken that would give a different conclusion for Northbrook Park in terms of national policies for plan-making.

Some concerns remained and it was commented that the housing need should be looked at again, especially given the scale of the proposals before the committee. However, other members noted that the Council had already undertaken a large sites assessment, the results of which had been presented to the Local Plan Working Group. Further work had been carried out in more detail since that time and whilst it was acknowledged that more work needed to be done on the recommended site, the committee's purpose was to make a strategic decision to move the Local Plan process forward in order that there

would be a robust Local Plan in place by 2023. This would enhance the district, have good spatial awareness and identify where it could be expected that development would take place in order to protect East Hampshire from aggressive development.

Cllr Hunt proposed that the committee deferred the decision until after the next Local Plan Working Group at which he requested detailed discussions with officers about which options may be open to produce a local calculation for housing need as opposed to the standard formula. He felt that it may be decided that an alternative option, as opposed to Option 2 may be more appropriate.

This was seconded by Cllr Woodard.

Comments from the committee were that it was felt that looking at the housing numbers could be carried out in parallel with continuing the work on the local plan and would therefore not require a delay. However, the Acting Planning Policy Manager did not feel it would be pragmatic to further explore deviations of something that had been well established. The standard methodology had come into force in 2018 and everything that had gone through the emerging local plan since work had started on it in 2018 had gone through the Local Plan Working Group and the various committees to date, all of that had been very much focused around the standard methodology. Officers felt that a bespoke approach was a high-risk approach and that the NPPF was clear that as well as local planning authorities meeting their own derived housing needs, they should also meet any unmet needs from neighbouring areas. In the case of East Hampshire, this included meeting the needs of those part of the district that fell within the South Downs National Park, in which the environmental constraints reduced the National Park Authority's ability to meet its own housing needs.

Following the vote, the proposal for deferral was declared **LOST**, 2 Councillors voting **FOR** deferral, 8 Councillors voting **AGAINST** deferral and no Councillors **ABSTAINING** from voting.

Cllr Glass, Chairman of the Planning Policy Committee proposed the recommendation which was that the Committee were requested to **RECOMMEND** to Council that:

Members note the different spatial options for the EHDC Local Plan 2017-2038 and approve the preferred option (Option 2) for the spatial strategy to feature in the emerging East Hampshire Local Plan.

This motion was duly seconded by Cllr Evans.

Following the vote, the recommendation was declared **CARRIED**, 8 Councillors voting **FOR**, 1 Councillor voting **AGAINST** and 1 Councillor **ABSTAINING** from voting.

The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and concluded at 8.22 pm

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