

Minutes of the meeting of the HOUSING AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE held on THURSDAY 04 May 2017 at 7:00 PM in the COUNCIL CHAMBER, Civic Offices

Present: Councillor C Williams (Chair)
Councillors Ganatra, Geaney, P Geary, Hosking, Khan, Wallis and Webb

Officer: E Richardson (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

Apologies: Councillors Ferrans and D McCall

Also Present: A Turner (Senior Planning Officer) and J Williamson (Senior Planning Officer) and 7 Members of the public (representatives from the Fullers Slade and Tinkers Bridge Residents' Associations)

Disclosure of Interests: There were no Disclosures of Interests.

HAC45 MINUTES

RESOLVED -

That following the bullet point in Minute **HAC37** concerning the reduction time in dealing with void properties being amended as follows:

“Mears and YourMK had reduced the turn-around time for renovation works on voids from 15 to 8.7 days.”

the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2017 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

HAC46 PLAN:MK – CHAPTER 13 – HOMES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

Witnesses: A Turner (Senior Planning Officer) and J Williamson (Senior Planning Officer)

The Chair introduced Chapter 13 of Plan:MK which covered the future development of Homes and Neighbourhoods. A number of policies relating to Homes and Neighbourhoods were presented in Chapter 13, together with some supplementary questions, to which he invited the Committee to respond. He hoped to cover all the points raised in Chapter 13 at the meeting, but if that was not possible, an extra meeting of the Committee's Planning Group would be arranged to cover anything outstanding, with members of the Committee invited to submit any comments they might have in writing. The Planning Group, on behalf of the Committee, would then prepare a response to the consultation on Plan:MK, which it would circulate to the Committee for final comment before submission. The closing date of the consultation period was 9 June 2017.

The Council's Senior Planning Officers attending the meeting then gave a brief explanation of Plan:MK, what it was for, and how this would be achieved. Once the current consultation had closed, all the comments received would be analysed and, if appropriate, changes made to the proposals in Plan:MK. It was anticipated that an updated draft would be published for further consultation later in the year.

The Committee then scrutinised and discussed the policies relating to Homes and Neighbourhoods in Chapter 13 of Plan:MK.

HN1: Housing Mix and Density

The Committee was advised that under national development control policy 11 houses or more constituted the minimum size of development on which quotas for affordable housing could be applied. Milton Keynes Council currently worked on developments of 15 houses or more.

The Committee raised concerns as to whether policies on affordable housing could be too prescriptive, slowing the rate of development and causing problems further down the line as new houses were not being built fast enough as it was. Members of the Committee were also concerned that developers could either split what should be one large site into smaller plots in order to circumvent the minimum number of houses to meet the affordable housing requirement or else, on smaller plots, just build larger houses so that there was no room for the minimum requirement.

The Senior Planning Officer explained that national planning policy tried not to be too prescriptive so as not to hinder developers and the Council was trying to be as flexible as possible in order to facilitate the building of the new houses needed locally. With regard to planning applications there were constraints round each individual site, but local planning policy remained broad so that it could be adapted to each situation.

The Council also had an expectation that developers would make the most efficient use of the land. If it looked as if a proposed development was low density in order to get round the affordable housing threshold this would be discussed by the Development Control Committee, where the developer would really have to justify the viability of a lower than expected density development. The Council would also have grounds to refuse an application if it thought a developer was not making efficient use of the land.

HN2: Affordable Housing

The Committee noted that the percentages quoted in proposed policy HN2 were based on the information in the recently updated local Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA).

The Committee expressed concern about how much influence local Neighbourhood Plans would have on future development policy. The Senior Planning Officer confirmed that if the proposals in a Neighbourhood Plan were sound and backed up by evidence, then they would be upheld. Neighbourhood Plans had to prove viability as well as local need.

He went on to explain that the proposal relating to the provision of 7% Shared Ownership (based on a range of 25%-40% equity share) as part of new developments was not currently contained in the Council's existing development policy, which needed to be revised accordingly whilst remaining flexible.

The Committee was also advised that across the whole of Milton Keynes, developers were currently delivering 28.5% of affordable housing. This included the 30% which was already being achieved in the developments in both the designated Eastern and Western Expansion Areas. The proposed figure for affordable housing in Plan:MK was 33% and the Council would need to work closely with developers to achieve this higher rate in the future.

Some members of the Committee were concerned that the Council did not seem to be enforcing the current 30% quota of affordable housing strictly enough as there never seemed to be an adequate supply of affordable housing. Although it was likely that the excuse given by developers that certain sites were unviable to provide 30% affordable housing should start to filter out as the housing market picked up, the Council needed to ensure that there were no loopholes around this in the future.

It was agreed that the Committee's response to the consultation would include a recommendation that appropriate measures be put into the local planning policy to make the necessity for developers to meet the minimum affordable housing quota as watertight as possible and that there was no slack around the viability of affordable housing quotas in the future.

Members of the public who were present were concerned that only 2 types of affordable housing had been mentioned in Plan:MK, ie shared ownership and rentals at 80% of market rent and wondered why it was not possible to just supply cheaper housing or starter homes.

The Committee was advised that what constituted "affordable housing" was specifically defined in the national planning policy and excluded low-cost housing and starter homes. It was possible for the Council to have a policy on the provision of starter homes if it wished, but this would have to be separate from its policy on affordable housing. The Council could carry out an assessment of how the provision of starter homes would work, but generally these were still not really affordable to those who needed affordable housing. Even with a 20% reduction in the in market value of starter homes they would still not be affordable to most people in housing need. However, some local authorities were starting to look at the possibility of new developments having to include 5-10% of starter homes on top of the 30% affordable housing quota.

The Committee agreed that the gap between shared ownership and market value housing was too big for many people to bridge and a step in the middle, such as starter homes, was needed. It would like to see the Council explore how that step could be made viable and would include this as a recommendation in its response to the consultation.

The Committee discussed whether HN2 needed to be split into 2 parts; it thought that the middle paragraph about new homes being required to meet accessible and adaptable homes standards would be better included in HN6 (Accessible and Adaptable Homes).

The Senior Planning Officer advised that the points in HN2 had been included together as they all related to the issue of 33% affordable housing in some form or another. Any proposals with regard to the

provision of starter homes would need to be developed as a separate policy.

HN3: Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding

The Committee did not consider this policy to be controversial as it was a niche area of development, providing diversity in the provision of housing mix and did not comment further.

HN4: Supported Housing

The Committee discussed whether or not supported housing could be classified as affordable and was advised that any proposals for supported housing would be considered at the planning application stage and, depending on the size of the development, would be subject to the 33% policy. Currently, very few new bungalows were being built as they tended to provide low density housing.

The Committee suggested that, if at all possible, the Council needed a policy to protect council bungalows from the Right to Buy option so that they remained available to house more elderly council tenants wanting to downsize into something more manageable and would recommend this in its response to the consultation.

The Committee also learnt that the need for 2-bedroom, affordable properties was greater than the supply; at market price levels, the greatest demand was for 3-4 bedroom properties.

HN5: Specialist Housing

The Committee took the view that this was an expression of need or an aspirational statement, rather than a defined policy, as there was no explanation of how this would be achieved. It also expressed concern as to how much communication had taken place between officers who were developing Plan:MK and colleagues in other departments, as the estimated number of residential care beds quoted in HN5 contradicted the information given to the Budget Scrutiny Committee in January 2017 by the Adult Social Care service, which was implementing a range of policies to reduce the need for residential care beds.

The Senior Planning Officer advised that the figure quoted in HN5 was based on the demographic trends in the SHMA and did not take into account any other council policies to manage down the demand for residential care beds. He also added that Plan:MK was a work in progress, any figures quoted should be considered as provisional at this stage, that across the plan there were still some policies which needed more work and which could be influenced by feedback from both the public consultation and discussions with colleagues in other departments.

HN6: Accessible and Adaptable Homes

The Committee noted that according to the evidence of the SHMA, the number of wheelchairs users living in affordable housing was double that living in market value housing.

The Committee also recommended that the paragraph on accessibility in HN2 should be moved to HN6 as a more appropriate proposal for this policy.

Q3: Targets for Wheelchair Accessible Dwellings

The Committee did not think that higher targets for Category M4(3) (wheelchair accessible) dwellings were necessary.

Q4: Temporary Accommodation

The Committee discussed whether the Council should have a policy on the provision of temporary accommodation and agreed that this was desirable. It noted that the Milton Keynes Homelessness Partnership was already working on a policy for the provision of temporary accommodation and the criteria for qualification and recommended that the team developing Plan:MK liaised with the Homelessness Partnership so as not to duplicate effort.

The Committee was advised that very few local authorities had definitive policies on the provision of temporary accommodation, although some were starting to emerge in the London Boroughs, particularly Barking and Dagenham, where 15 quick-build apartments were being erected as temporary accommodation. The complex included some small business units on the ground floor and would be in-use for 2-4 years, until the site was ready for permanent development.

It was also noted that YourMK had identified 5 sites suitable for up to 300 quick build, temporary accommodation units. The Council was in consultation with YourMK but their proposals had not been advanced enough to be included in the current draft of Plan:MK.

The Committee took the view that if the Council could get the provision of affordable housing right, the need for a large scale provision of temporary accommodation would be eradicated and a policy unnecessary. However, it did note that it would always be necessary to maintain a certain amount of temporary accommodation to provide emergency housing for when something happened to a property beyond the householder's control, such as a flood or lightning strike or for those having to flee domestic abuse.

HN7: Houses in Multiple Occupation (HiMOs)

As HN7 was rolling forward the existing policy on HiMOs into Plan:MK, the Committee had no strong views on this issue. However, members of the public attending the meeting were concerned. They felt that too many HiMOs in an area tended to have a negative effect on the social cohesion of an area. Badly managed or unregulated HiMOs caused a lot of misery to both occupants and neighbours, were highly detrimental to the reputation of an area and those present did not think that the proposals set out in HN7 would lead to any improvement in the future.

Residents cited the Woughton Neighbourhood Plan which had specific policies on HiMOs for the area, which they felt the Council was not upholding. The Senior Planning Officer confirmed that if the Woughton Neighbourhood Plan had been formally adopted by Milton Keynes Council, then its policies would be in conformity with the current Council Plan, including the number of permitted HiMOs.

It was agreed that the Overview and Scrutiny Officer would circulate a copy of the Council's "*Houses in Multiple Occupation Supplementary Planning Document*" to the members of the public present at the meeting.

HN8: Purpose Built Student Accommodation

The Committee agreed that the need for purpose built student accommodation would be demand led as and when a large scale university or higher education presence had been established in Milton Keynes. As this was a long term project, the need for such accommodation was not an immediate concern.

Q5: Houses in Multiple Occupation Exceptions

The Committee recommended that it be made clear in the plan that there was a difference between converting a large property into a HiMO, which would be occupied by a number of diverse "households" and student accommodation (either purpose built or a conversion), even though, technically, student accommodation buildings could be classed as being in multiple occupation.

HN9: Loss and Conversion of Residential

This proposed policy was of great concern to the representatives of the Residents' Associations who attended the meeting. It was explained to the Committee that, following the announcement by YourMK on 26 April that the first estate scheduled for planned regeneration was Fullers Slade, the residents there were now terrified that their houses would be demolished and raised the following questions:

- How would smaller houses, providing a higher density population, aid regeneration of an area?
- Where did YourMK fit into the proposals in Plan:MK?
- How many of the proposed new 6,500 homes would be squeezed into the earmarked regeneration areas?
- Would 2 people currently living a 3-bedroom house be forcibly downsized?
- Would those renting from the private sector in these areas end up becoming homeless?
- Would whole estates, such as Tinkers Bridge, be flattened, creating, it was rumoured, a £80-100m profit for developers?
- What would be the maximum value of compulsory purchase of privately owned properties, as anyone put in this position was

unlikely to be able to afford an equivalent property of the same size at local market rates?

The residents further commented that they thought that any area where there was 20% or more private ownership should not be subject to regeneration and that as deprived areas seemed to have a higher proportion of disabled people, did this contribute to the lower life expectancy in that area and therefore wondered if the regeneration plans discriminated against the disabled?

They were also concerned that lodgers would have no automatic right to re-housing, even if their landlord qualified, which could lead to a significant increase in the homelessness problem.

Residents had not been re-assured by what YourMK had said so far and thought that proposal A(i) of HN9 appeared to support regeneration proposals to demolish whole estates, giving permission to YourMK to do what it liked. They considered it to be phrased in “planning language” which could be interpreted by developers in a dramatic way.

The Committee discussed HN9 in detail and concluded that some of it was very woolly and bit of a mish-mash, as it appeared to be trying to address a lot of things in one policy. It needed to be split up in order to make sense. The Policy needed to be clear that it was nothing to do with the current regeneration programme, which should be the subject of a separate policy, but was about how the Council dealt with the need to demolish seriously dilapidated, individual, or a small group of properties. Proposal A(i) needed to be clear that it did not apply to the large scale demolition of whole estates. A(ii) was considered reasonable if it could be demonstrated that individual properties were derelict and beyond economic repair.

The Committee agreed that Part B, concerning a reduction in the number of authorised pitches for gypsies and travellers, was totally out of place as part of HN9 and should be included in HN11 (Gypsies and Travellers).

The Senior Planning Officers confirmed that the team working on Plan:MK would probably have come to the same conclusion about the content of HN9 and agreed that it needed splitting up as suggested by the Committee, in order to make sense.

They further confirmed that the 6,500 extra houses needed did not relate to the wholesale demolition of existing estates. The new houses were planned for the empty spaces in Milton Keynes previously allocated for residential use, but not yet developed and existing brownfield sites which were already vacant. There was still more to do and the Council would continue to discuss proposals with YourMK as it was the Council’s policy to protect existing communities. The wording of HN9 had been a timing issue – it had not been based on any regeneration plans and the clarifications suggested by the Committee made sense.

HN10: Rural Exception Sites

The Committee did not discuss this in detail due to time constraints, but agreed to recommend in its response that the use of Rural Exception Sites

for residential development should be ruled out unless they had been taken into account in an approved Local Neighbourhood Plan.

HN11: Gypsies and Travellers

The Committee recommended that Part B of HN9 be added to this policy for the sake of clarity and cohesion of proposals.

RESOLVED -

1. That the Senior Planning Officers, James Williamson and Andrew Turner, be thanked for their attendance at the meeting, their time and patience in answering questions from both the Committee and the public, providing clarification of the text when required and their positive contribution to the Committee's discussions.
2.
 - a) That the Chair and Vice-Chairs, on behalf of the Committee, prepare a draft response on Chapter 13 of Plan:MK;
 - b) That the draft response be circulated to the Committee for final comment before being submitted as part of the current consultation on Plan:MK;
 - c) That members of the Committee forward any comments they may have on policies **HN10** (Rural Exception Sites), **HN11** (Gypsies and Travellers) and Policy **HN12** (Travelling Showpeople) to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer for inclusion in the Committee's response;
3. That a copy of the Council's "*Houses in Multiple Occupation Supplementary Planning Document*" be circulated to members of the public who attended the meeting.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 9.40 PM