

Co-operative Scrutiny Board

Friday 27 February 2015

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs Aspinall, Vice Chair in the Chair.

Councillor Mrs Beer, Vice Chair.

Councillors Bowie, Mrs Bowyer (substitute for Councillor Jordan), Philippa Davey, Michael Leaves (substitute for Councillor Sam Leave), Dr Mahony (substitute for Councillor Darcy), Murphy, Parker-Delaz-Ajete, Ricketts (substitute for Councillor James) and Kate Taylor.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Darcy, James, Jordan and Sam Leaves.

Also in attendance: Councillor James, Councillor Lowry (Cabinet Member for Finance), Councillor Nicholson, Councillor Dr Slater and Paul Barnard (Assistant Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure), Nick Carter (Housing Delivery Manager), Alison Critchfield (Senior Lawyer), David Draffan (Assistant Director for Economic Development), Ross Jago (Performance and Research Officer), James Watt (Head of Land and Property) and Helen Wright (Democratic Support Officer)

The meeting started at 4.00 pm and finished at 5.15 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

129. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR**

The Board agreed to appoint Councillor Mrs Beer as Vice Chair for this particular meeting.

130. **DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Councillors in accordance with the code of conduct.

131. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

132. **CALL-IN - APPROVAL TO PROCEED WITH DISPOSAL OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACES FOLLOWING CONSIDERATION OF OBJECTIONS RECEIVED FOLLOWING NOTICE OF THE INTENTION TO DISPOSE OF LAND**

The Co-operative Scrutiny Board considered the call-in of the Cabinet Member's decision relating to the approval to proceed with the disposal of public open spaces following considered of objections received following notice of the intention to dispose of land.

The Co-operative Scrutiny Board heard that –

(a) Councillors Nicholson, James and Dr Salter had called the decision in for the following reasons –

- the aspiration of the City Council to grow the Plymouth population, as recommended by David Mackay, had been promoted through the planning policies contained in the Local Plan First Deposit, the Local Development Framework and now the emerging 'Plymouth Plan'. The updated housing needs assessment had influenced the housing growth target contained in the Plymouth Plan Part I agreed by Cabinet on 9 December 2014 for public consultation; site specific proposals for housing would be published in the summer/autumn 2015 and land owners had been requested to submit proposed sites to the Head of Development Planning for consideration and future consultation;

despite this straight forward process, which all other land owners had to comply with, Sections 12 and 13 of the Executive Decision did not refer to any consultation with Councillor Vincent who had responsibility for the Plymouth Plan and strategic planning. Similarly Councillor Vincent did not appear to have been consulted over the Surplus Property Declaration Minor Property Interest Pro-forma No: 278 in respect of Land at Hemerdon Heights, Plympton. As the Cabinet Member for the Environment with responsibility for Parks and Open Spaces, Councillor Vincent had not indicated his justification for agreeing to the loss of public open space by declaring the site 'surplus property';

- Plympton Councillors had been fully engaged with the Directorate for Place in proposing alternative housing sites in Plympton where development could take place on previously developed sites with a far higher provision of housing and accommodating different housing tenures including affordable housing;

no evidence had been provided in the decision documentation that representations in respect of the use of the former Imerys Site, Coypool, Matchroom Site, Colebrook and the former Plympton Hospital site, Market Road had been considered by Councillor Lowry or by the Land and Property team;

we considered that the City Council must be 'joined-up' in the development of our City and that dialogue between the Land and Property Department and Development Planning was essential in ensuring our City was properly developed;

on this basis alone, the decision should be referred back for further consideration with all relevant departments of the City Council;

- Councillor Lowry was also considering the disposal of other land in Plympton at Chaddlewood and Newnham with both sites projected to be suitable for up to 800 homes. Given the cumulative impact of housing development on infrastructure such as schools, roads, public open space and health facilities, Councillor Lowry should publish all his proposals simultaneously so all the impacts can be assessed. To release individual sites as was being proposed, would create greater infrastructure issues for the Council which might cost the Council more in the medium term;

(b) Councillors Nicholson, James and Dr Salter considered that -

- it was disappointing that Plympton Ward Councillors had to call in the decision, following extensive consultations which had taken place over a two year period;
- whilst supporting the aspirations of the Council to grow the population of the City, this should be achieved through using the appropriate planning policies;
- decisions on the disposal of public open spaces for housing development schemes within the Plympton Ward were being taken on an uncoordinated basis; two sites (Longwood Drive and Hemerdon Heights) had been identified within this decision with a further decision on the disposal of land at Redwood Drive pending;
- the relevant departments across the Council were not working in a joined up manner (there was no reference in the Surplus Property Declaration that the Parks Department had either been consulted or had agreed to the disposal of public open space);
- there was no reference made in the decision as to whether Councillor Vincent, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for strategic planning and parks and open spaces had been consulted or whether he had agreed to the disposal of these sites;
- there was a lack of public consultation information in the decision, in particular, the survey conducted by the Plympton Ward Councillors regarding the proposed housing development at Hemerdon Heights; 63 responses had been received (60 against and three in favour);

- the scrutiny process had two main roles, one to hold the executive to account, the other to consult and involve local people, the latter of which had not occurred on this occasion;
 - the proposed housing development would have a significant impact on the community infrastructure, as well as impacting on the budget; currently there was a lack of primary school places and GP facilities; primary school places were over-subscribed which had led to children being transported out of the area to attend school;
 - the proposed housing developments in Plympton would have little impact on the Council's Plan for Homes initiative (to build 1000 homes per year for the next five years);
- (c) Councillor Lowry (Cabinet Member for Finance), Paul Barnard (Assistant Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure), David Draffan (Assistant Director for Development), James Watt (Head of Land and Property), Nick Carter (Housing Delivery Manager) and Alison Critchfield (Senior Lawyer) responded that –
- community consultation had clearly been undertaken, as responses were contained within the report specifically relating to Hemerdon Heights and Longwood Close;
 - Councillor Vincent (Cabinet Member for Environment) had been fully engaged and was in support of the decision (this could be evidenced through the notes of the portfolio holder's meeting); it was acknowledged that this had been an oversight not to include this information in the decision;
 - Councillor Vincent was not required to be consulted as part of the Surplus Property Declaration process;
 - the aim of the proposed housing development scheme was to provide a mixed tenure of housing across the City (self-build properties offered people the most cost effective method of building their own homes); this was not a fund raising exercise;
 - wider consultation had taken place on the Get Plymouth Building and Plan for Homes initiatives; all Ward Members had been afforded the opportunity to meet with the relevant officers, in order to put their views forward; the comments received had been duly considered by Councillor Lowry (Cabinet Member for Finance) so he was able to make an informed decision;
 - the strategic land review had identified over 800 sites which following consideration had been reduced to 40 sites; Councillor Lowry had agreed to proceed with just 17 out of the 40 sites;

- Plymouth was a green City with 40% being classified as green space; it was not the intention of Councillor Lowry to blanket Plymouth with housing;
- all the necessary information had been received in order for Councillor Lowry to make an informed decision;
- the Plymouth Plan was a strategic long term plan which looked ahead to 2031; the Plan would set out future housing sites for consideration which had been identified by land owners and/or the Council; sites brought forward for development would be assessed in line with the planning policy framework to ensure that development was feasible.

In response to a question raised the exact details of what development would be put on the site was not known, this would form part of the planning process.

The main points arising from the board debating the call-in included –

- (d) the two specific sites identified within this decision (Hemerdon Heights and Longwood Close) would not have a significant impact on the overall number of houses required to meet the current target;
- (e) it was a matter for the individual Councillors wishing to call-in the decision as to how they presented their reasons for call-in at the meeting;
- (f) a review of all the housing development sites (not owned by the Council) had been undertaken; either the land owner or the developer had been contacted to ascertain if there was any help that the Council could provide, in order to commence building; (these sites were constantly reviewed); as these sites were not owned by the Council it had no jurisdiction over them;
- (g) there was a statutory duty when disposing of public open spaces which needed to be complied with; this process had to be undertaken prior to the completion of the sale of the land;
- (h) a total of 250 properties had been included in the survey conducted by the Plympton Ward Councillors, relating to the disposal of land and Hemerdon Heights; (63 responses had been received, 60 against the proposal and 3 in favour);
- (i) the sites in Plympton had been identified for self-build developments;
- (j) the Plympton Ward Councillors had notified the residents of Hemerdon Heights by letter of the proposed disposal of land; the letter had asked whether they were in favour or against the proposed development;

- (k) as part of the Plymouth Plan work would be undertaken to look at infrastructure planning such as the pressures generated by new developments on school places and GP facilities;
- (l) the responsibility for the disposal of public open spaces was the remit of the Cabinet Member for Finance and not the Cabinet Member for Environment;

The Board agreed to confirm that the decision should be implemented.

133. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.