**BOROUGH OF KETTERING**

**PLANNING POLICY COMMITTEE**

**Meeting held: 4th November 2015**

**Present:** Councillor Mike Tebbutt (Chair)

Councillors Lloyd Bunday, Ash Davies, Terry Freer, Ruth Groome, Jim Hakewill, Alan Mills, Cliff Moreton and Mark Rowley.

**15.PP.13 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bain.

It was noted that Councillor Davies was acting as a substitute for Councillor Bain.

**15.PP.14 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2nd September 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Updates arising from the minutes were noted as follows:-

15.PP.10: The Settlement Boundary Background Paper would be brought back to the committee as soon as possible when the whole document was ready for consultation.

15.PP.11: The updated Historically and Visually Important Open Space Background Paper and accompanying draft policy had now gone out to consultation, with a closing date in mid December.

15.PP.12: Finalised designs for the Northampton Road/Sheep Street junction were not yet available.

**15.PP.15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Hakewill declared a personal interest in any discussions arising in respect of an area of land in Braybrooke.

Councillor Tebbutt declared a personal interest in any discussions involving the Revitalise Project in Desborough.

**15.PP.16 BIODIVERSITY SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT FOR NORTHAMPTONSHIRE - ADOPTION**

A report was submitted which informed Members of the results of the public consultation on the draft Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Northamptonshire and recommended that the document be forwarded to Full Council for adoption.

Kettering Borough Council's comments on the draft document had been noted by Northamptonshire County Council and minor revisions to make the document more legible and error-free had, in the main, been taken on board. However, the request to include references to local projects in Kettering Borough had not been included, as the document's coverage was at a county scale and smaller, local projects had not been included in the final document.

Councillor Pat Scouse addressed the Committee on behalf of Broughton Parish Council and welcomed the approach taken in the document. However, Broughton Parish Council had expressed concern at the extent the onus would shift towards the applicant, the wording of the questionnaire and checklist, which did not include all species. In addition, the Parish Council felt that 21 days was insufficient time in which to respond to consultation. Broughton Parish Council also recommended that sufficient local weight should be given to planning applications.

In response, it was noted that the SPD would be used by developers before a planning application was submitted for a particular site, and as such the document formed a fundamental part of the early process so that schemes could be designed to protect or enhance biodiversity.

Should evidence or concerns about a particular species, for example Owls or Bats, come to light during consideration of a planning application, it could be put on hold whilst investigations were carried out, or even refused if insufficient information was not forthcoming. Planning permission conditions would ensure that details agreed to mitigate against loss of biodiversity were followed through.

Discussion was held on the 21 day consultation period for town and parish councils to respond to planning applications, and it was noted that this was the standard consultation period for all planning applications. If credible local knowledge was available, it would be given sufficient weight in the planning process.

In response to a question on the hierarchical importance of SPDs, it was noted that Biodiversity was one of a number of considerations to be taken into account. However, with all other considerations being equal, then a site with less ecological value would be preferred for development.

Some concern was expressed regarding the objectivity and impartiality of developers in completing an assessment. However, it was noted that checks would be carried out by suitably qualified experts, and the local planning authority would ascertain if further investigation was needed. The Council worked closely with Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust in this respect. In addition, all sites were visited by Planning officers and there were a number of safeguards to prevent initial assessments by developers to be taken at face value.

It was noted that the River Welland and its tributaries had not been shown in the map reproduced in the draft document, as this map referred only to the Nene Valley Nature Improvement Area. It was agreed that a more legible copy of the map should be included in the final document, and the annex to the document reproduced with the SPD as one document.

**RESOLVED** that the Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document and all annexes be recommended to Full Council for adoption.

**15.PP.17 KETTERING TOWN CENTRE AREA ACTION PLAN – MONITORING UPDATE**

A report was submitted which informed Members of the results of the fourth Monitoring Report of the Kettering Town Centre Area Action Plan.

Consideration was given to each of the seven objectives and the following comments were made:-

* The increase in commercial and flea-market bookings on Kettering Market Place was welcomed
* The increase in retail floorspace on the Rushden Lakes out of town retail development in East Northamptonshire was due to the Garden Centre element no longer being part of the scheme
* Relaxation of permitted development rights in respect of residential accommodattion above shops had not impacted on the Borough as much as in other areas, eg London
* There was a lack of superfast broadband in the area around the Railway Station, which could jeopardise the letting of commercial units in this area. It was agreed that this should be flagged up as it was an essential requirement for business growth
* Some disappointment had been reported over the new bus shelters in Newland Street. Seating was reported as being too low and the shelters provided little protection from rain
* The Yards area was making a positive contribution to Kettering Town Centre
* There was no reference to the reduction of parking charges in the town centre and any subsequent increase in use of town centre car parks.
* Potential existed to improve and increase biodiversity along the route of the Slade Brook through the town centre and this could link in with the Local Pollinator Task and Finish Group work
* Improvements to junctions at Barton Road/London Road/Pytchley Road and Windmill Avenue/Barton Road should be completed as soon as possible as this was the route to the East Kettering development from the town centre. Improvements were also required at the Gypsy Lane/Crematorium junction.

In respect of the Slade Brook, it was noted that a strategic flood risk assessment had been undertaken, and that AECOM had been commissioned to assess surface water risk. The capacity survey would have an influence on development potential and could bring improvements and benefits to enhance specific locations. Once a technical understanding was gained, it would be possible to formulate designs and bid for government funding or secure Section 106 agreements to deliver improvements to the green infrastructure in the town centre.

The Chair of the East Kettering Liaison Forum reported that he had received information from Northamptonshire County Council that a scheme was being considered which would increase the width of Barton Road at the entrance to Wicksteed Park. This would help ease congestion in that location. Design work was also currently being undertaken on junction improvements at Barton Road/Pytchley Road/London Road and Barton Road/Windmill Avenue.

It was agreed that a letter would be sent to BT regarding superfast broadband in Kettering Town Centre, and it was felt that this was key to increasing office employment space.

**RESOLVED** that it be noted that:-

* overall vacancy rates have decreased by 1% to 9%;
* the opening of Kino Lounge has had a positive impact in terms of reduced vacancy rates and increased vibrancy in the Restaurant Quarter;
* the opening of The Yards has introduced a new focus for independent retail and aims to increase the number of visitors to the town; it has also increased floorspace;
* improvements to the public realm, including the rising bollards, have made the town centre a more pedestrian friendly area; and
* progress is being made at the design stage to improve junctions in and around the town centre.

**15.PP.18 FUTURE ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION**

A report was submitted which advised the Committee of two new reports to be presented for consideration at future meetings of the Committee. These were:-

* Borough-wide Renewables Fund
* Renewable Energy – Solar Panels on Roofs of Buildings

The Chair of the Rural Forum advised that at its last meeting the Forum had expressed concern about the proliferation of field-based solar farms and had referred its concerns to the Council’s Executive. The Executive had now referred the matter to the Planning Policy Committee.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

*(The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.40 pm)*

*Signed ……………………………………………….*

*Chair*

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