

FULL COUNCIL

8TH DECEMBER 2020

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE, PLANNING & HOUSING

1. COUNCIL UPDATE REGARDING CLIMATE CHANGE, PLANNING & HOUSING PORTFOLIO

1.1 Purpose of Report

To advise Members that decision making sessions were held on 29th September, 26th October and 12th November 2020 covering CPH Climate Change, Planning & Housing.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 This report highlights some of those decisions which have been made, but not all. Members wishing to view all decisions made can find these at:
<http://eservices.solihull.gov.uk/mglInternet/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=654&Year=0>

1.3. Decision Session - 29th September 2020

1.3.1. Application to Redesignate the Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Forum

1.3.2. A report was presented seeking to formally redesignate the Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Forum to act for the Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Area. The redesignation process is required every 5 years in accordance with planning legislation. I agreed the recommendation meaning the group will be able to continue delivering and monitoring the Neighbourhood Plan. I would like to thank them for their hard work.

1.3.3. Changes to the Current Planning System

1.3.4 A proposed response to the Government's consultation on changes to the planning system was presented to the September meeting. Government consultation was launched on 6th August and ran until the 1st October 2020 and set out 4 proposals:

- Changes to the 'Standard Method' for assessing local housing need;
- Implementing 'First Homes' in the short term until the transition to a new planning system;
- Supporting SME builders by temporarily lifting the small sites threshold below which developers do not need to contribute to affordable housing;
- Extending the current 'Permission in Principle' to major development.

In summary the key aspects of the approved response were:

- Raising concerns about the appropriateness of the standard methodology, changes proposed and the outcomes for Solihull in terms of housing needs;
- A general recognition that First Homes provide an alternative housing tenure but recognising a need to continue providing other forms of affordable homes;
- Concerns regarding the proposed change to the affordable housing threshold and the loss of affordable housing contributions from smaller sites;

- In principle support for mechanisms that could help SME builders deliver more homes, but whether changes to the affordable housing threshold was the best mechanism;
- Concerns regarding an apparent move to national approaches to Development Management and highlighting the importance of local decision making;
- General support for the transitional arrangements identified.

1.3.5. Solihull Climate Change Commission

1.3.6. In the Council's 'Climate Emergency - Statement of Intent' we made a commitment to establish a Climate Change Commission for Solihull. I am pleased to announce that at the meeting on the 29th September, I approved the Terms of Reference for the Climate Change Commission, the appointment of Peter Rayson as its Chair and a resource to support its activity. The Commission will act as an independent advisory body to the Council and will play a key role in supporting the Borough's transition to a low carbon economy and furthering the aims of our Climate Change Prospectus.

1.3.7. Update on Single Use Plastic Strategy (SUP)

1.3.8. I received a report on the progress to deliver the Single-use Plastic Strategy (SUP) including the impact Covid-19 has had on its delivery. I am pleased to report that we are on track to meet the target of being SUP free, where feasible, by the end of 2020. I also approved the development of a 'Single-use Plastic Strategy - Statement of Activity' to aid the communication of progress and support wider engagement, which will be released in summer 2021.

1.3.9. Revenue & Capital Monitoring 20/21 as at 31st July 2020

1.3.10 I endorsed the 2020/21 Revenue and Capital financial monitoring forecast as at 31st July 2020 and noted the Portfolio's progress against the latest 3 year savings targets in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

1.4. Decision Session – 26th October 2020

1.4.1. Planning White Paper

1.4.2. A report was presented to an additional meeting, arranged specifically to consider the Council's response to the Government's Planning White Paper - 'Planning for the Future'. The Paper was published on 6 August and consultation ran until 30th October 2020. It set out plans for a fundamental overhaul of the planning system in England in addition to the proposed shorter-term changes to planning (referenced above).

1.4.3 Broadly speaking, the government intends that the reform will result in a more open, accessible, inclusive and faster planning system. To help achieve this, the White Paper was based on 'three pillars' with a number of proposals in each:

- Pillar One: 'Planning for Development'
- Pillar Two: 'Planning for Beautiful and Sustainable Places'
- Pillar Three: 'Planning for Infrastructure and Connected Places'.

1.4.4. In responding, the Council raised its concerns and recommendations about how the proposals need to change to better reflect sustainable development. This included:

- The importance of long-term policy protection for the Green Belt, especially areas such as the Meriden Gap;

- Concerns regarding an apparent move towards national approaches to Development Management policies;
- The importance of retaining cooperation between local authorities to manage cross boundary planning issues, whilst highlighting the importance of maintaining strong local plans that reflect local priorities and needs;
- Highlighting the importance of how planning needs to play a clear and stronger role in tackling climate change, ensuring this is a golden thread through any revised planning system and that it is clearly aligned with other relevant legislation such as Building Regulations;
- The need for further detail on a number of proposals outlined in the Paper.

1.5 Decision Session – 12th November 2020

1.5.1 Solihull Electric Vehicle Charge Points

1.5.2. I approved three recommendations within the Electric Vehicle Charge Point Tariff Options paper. These rates will be applied to the nine chargepoints to be re-commissioned in north Solihull and 17 charge points targeted for installation under the On-street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS).

1.5.3. Revenue & Capital Monitoring 20/21 as at 30th September 2020

1.5.4. I endorsed the 2020/21 Revenue and Capital financial monitoring forecast as at 30th September 2020; and noted the Portfolio's progress against the latest 3 year savings targets in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as at 30th September 2020.

1.6. Good News and Issues of Interest

1.6.1. Draft Local Plan Update

1.6.2. The draft Local Plan was formally published for a period of representations on the 30th October. This will run to 14th December 2020. The representations stage is supported by an extensive engagement strategy, including a dedicated website, videos to support making representations, live online webinars, meetings for Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Groups, updated FAQ's, targeted email and letter correspondence, letters to properties adjoining proposed site allocations, site notices next to proposed site allocations and a dedicated duty officer to support enquiries.

1.6.3. Proposed Inland Border Facility – Birmingham Airport

1.6.4. On the 16th October, HMRC commenced consultation relating to a proposed Inland Border Facility (IBF) at Car Park 6 at Birmingham Airport, adjacent to the A45.

1.6.5. The IBF will operate as an inland customs facility to process inbound and outbound HGVs, providing additional capacity to locations around the nation's ports. The proposal is for a facility operating for 2 years from the 1st January 2021.

1.6.6. The proposal is in accordance with a special Government Development Order to support Brexit arrangements. The decision on the IBF sits with the Secretary of State for MHCLG. The Council as Local Planning Authority and Local Highways Authority is a statutory consultee.

1.6.7. Officers provided technical responses on behalf of the Council. The proposal was approved on Friday 20th November by the Secretary of State.

1.6.8 Government consultation on raising accessibility standards for new homes

1.6.9 The Government published the above consultation on the 8th September with consultation to 1st December. This is a technical consultation and an officer response is being provided, with input from Social Care, Planning and Housing areas..

1.7.0 The consultation considers how to raise accessibility standards, recognising the importance of suitable homes for older and disabled people. In particular, it considers how the existing optional 'accessible and adaptable standard' for homes and the 'wheelchair user' standard are used and whether government should mandate a higher standard or reconsider the way the existing optional standards are used. I welcome this consultation as it is consistent with Policy 4E in the Draft Local Plan, which promotes higher accessibility standards.

1.7.1 Street Lighting

I'm pleased to inform that street lighting in Solihull has gone zero carbon after a move to a green, zero carbon energy tariff. This eliminates street lighting's 1,500t of carbon emissions per year. Since 2014/15, investment in LED technology has seen annual energy use almost halve (from 12m kWh and associated carbon emissions fall from 6,500t).

1.7.2 Net Zero Action Plan Councillors Workshop

Thank you to the 30 Members who attended the workshop on the 17th November. I hope you found it interesting and your feedback will be a core aspect of the development of the discussion paper. The level of ambition supported by Members was generally very high. There were 3 areas where the level of ambition was particularly high:

- Transport and Modal Shift
- Waste reduction
- Heating; Electrification / moving away from gas

Officers are amalgamating the evidence base to inform the next phase of consultation. The next formal opportunity for Members to be involved will be consultation on the discussion paper.

1.7.3. Heat Network

1.7.4 Following successfully securing £6,590,500 grant funding from the government's Heat Networks Investment Project (HNIP), alongside funding already secured from WMCA, the project has now moved forward with contractor market engagement.

1.7.5. In order to raise market awareness of the intention to publish a procurement notice for the Design, Build, Operate and Maintain (DBOM) opportunity for the first phase of the heat network we have published an OJEU compliant Prior Information Notice (PIN). We have also held a market engagement day with over 12 potential suppliers, with all expressing an interest in the project.

1.7.6 A planning application for the energy centre that will house the heat generation plant and supply out to the network is in development. I currently anticipate a planning application being submitted in the New Year.

1.8 Future Decisions

At my future decision making sessions, I will be considering the following:

- A technical update to the Local Development Scheme to reflect the submission timetable for the Local Plan and a programme of updated Supplementary Planning Documents.
- An annual update of the Solihull Brownfield Land Register to reflect any changes in brownfield development opportunities across the Borough.