

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Cabinet

held at 2.00 pm on Friday 16 March 2012
at Abbey House, Abingdon

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Matthew Barber (Chairman), Yvonne Constance, Roger Cox (Vice-Chair), Reg Waite and Elaine Ware

Non-participating members: Councillors Jim Halliday, Jenny Hannaby, Dudley Hoddinott, Sue Marchant and Richard Webber

Officers: Sarah Commins, Steve Culliford, Adrian Duffield, Andrew Maxted, Anna Robinson and Miles Thompson

Number of members of the public: 14

Ca.61 Apologies for absence

None

Ca.62 Declarations of interest

None

Ca.63 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None

Ca.64 Statements, petitions, and questions relating to matters affecting the Cabinet

The following members of the public and non-Cabinet members addressed the Cabinet on the interim housing supply policy:

- (1) Alan Divall of West Waddy Architects and Planners made a statement on behalf of Pye Homes. He believed that the interim housing supply policy should allow development in the large villages of Shrivenham, Watchfield, and Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor. These were the most sustainable villages in the district and their exclusion undermined the core strategy.

- (2) Andrew Wagstaff of Dandara property developers made a statement objecting to the approach taken in the interim housing supply policy not to allow development in Wantage. He believed that this one of the most sustainable locations in the district and would not see any development for many years if Wantage was excluded from this policy.
- (3) Cabinet received a question from an anonymous Vale resident known as 'Vale Citizen'. This read: "I understand that the interim housing supply policy consultation will recommend that no Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty sites will qualify for interim housing supply policy status. I would appreciate it if the Cabinet could consider the potential to include existing 'brown field' sites in the policy-screening phase, even if these sit within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, but otherwise meet the criteria. This would seem to give flexibility to the planners to make constructive use of sites and may relieve development pressure elsewhere."

The chairman asked the planning officer to respond to these statements and question. He replied that the council would take seriously the points raised by respondents to the consultation and those raised at this meeting. The officers would look at each point made and discuss them with the Cabinet member with responsibility for planning. If they considered a significant change was merited, they would report back to Cabinet before Council considered the policy on 16 May.

With regard to policy excluding the villages of Shrivenham, Watchfield, and Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor and other sites allocated for housing development in the core strategy, the council did not want to overlap the interim housing supply policy with the core strategy as this would pre-judge the outcome of the core strategy process. The planning officer pointed out that brownfield sites could still come forward under existing policies; there was no need to revise the interim housing supply policy to address that.

The chairman then invited the non-Cabinet councillors to address the meeting.

- (1) Councillor Jenny Hannaby asked how could parishes be confident that their voices would be heard? She cited an example where the Monks Farm site north of Grove was chosen in the core strategy ahead of the Stockham Farm site north of Wantage. This ignored local views. She questioned whether the reduction in the number of houses at the Crab Hill site north-east of Wantage would deliver enough funding for the Wantage relief road. She believed the council did not need to approve an interim housing supply policy and suggested that developers should be able to use the normal planning process. She also believed there should be further consultation on the interim policy.
- (2) Councillor Richard Webber raised three questions. Although the interim policy was aimed to avoid planning by appeal, did it not allow developers free reign, effectively the same as planning by appeal? Was the council introducing this interim policy as it was waiting for another council to legally test the government's requirement for a five year housing supply? Would adoption of the interim policy allow every land owner tempted to make a quick profit?
- (3) Councillor Dudley Hoddinott expressed concern at the officers' analysis of the consultation results. He suggested that the analysis had not taken into account that 70 of the 174 responses were from developers who would naturally want development policies relaxed. By removing these developer responses, the

analysis would have shown a different outcome. He asked if the officers would remove the developer responses from their analysis before carrying out detailed site screening so that local plan policies were relaxed as little as possible? He also asked that, with 2,000 people in the district on the housing list, how would the council ensure that the maximum number of affordable houses were contained with the 1,000 home interim housing supply policy objective?

- (4) Councillor Sue Marchant spoke as a district councillor for Grove and as a Grove resident. She questioned why the council had allocated more housing land at Monks Farm north of Grove when there was already large-scale planned development at Grove airfield? She believed Monks Farm was the most inappropriate site for housing. If the site had to be developed, it would be better if it were for employment use.
- (5) Councillor Jim Halliday asked the Cabinet member for planning if he was aware of other councils operating interim housing supply policies? Had the council sought counsel's opinion to ensure that this approach was watertight in matters such as protecting the Green Belt and the emerging core strategy? If the Cabinet member was unsure other councils had such a policy, would he instruct the officers to research examples elsewhere and take a legal opinion?

In response to some of the points raised, the chairman reported that there appeared to be some confusion between the core strategy and interim housing supply policy. The draft core strategy had been approved for consultation by the Cabinet on 9 March and it would consider the consultation responses later in the year. Cabinet would now look at the results of the interim housing supply policy consultation results.

Ca.65 Interim housing land supply policy

Cabinet considered report 83/11 of the head of planning. The report informed Cabinet of the consultation responses on the draft interim housing supply policy. Cabinet was asked to agree a response to the main issues and to consider whether and how to progress the policy.

The Cabinet member for planning reported that the council did not have a five-year housing land supply as required by the government. Therefore, the council had to approve an interim housing supply policy to ensure it had enough housing land to achieve a five-year supply; there was no alternative. Without such a policy, the council would be vulnerable to planning by appeal. Therefore, he had approved a draft policy for consultation. The consultation results were now available for Cabinet to consider. He noted that most comments were on the suitability of housing sites suggested by land owners, not on the suitability of the policy. The consultation results would allow the officers to carry out a detailed analysis of possible housing sites under this policy and to inform district councillors and the parish councils of the substantive issues.

Other Cabinet members supported this approach. Compared with other areas, the district had relatively low unemployment. This caused problems for employers to find skilled staff. The underlying cause was the lack of affordable housing to allow people to move to or for local families to stay in this area. Cabinet was assured that the interim policy approach was lawful and at every step the officers would ensure the council was operating lawfully.

Cabinet considered the responses, the statements made at the meeting, and the officers' recommendations, and agreed that the council should:

- (a) progress the interim housing supply policy, with amendments, and report it in final form to full council on 16 May 2012 for formal adoption;
- (b) retain the interim housing supply policy presumption against bringing forward (in whole or part) preferred or alternative core strategy strategic housing sites being considered through the core strategy process, except as a last resort where and if necessary to achieve the interim housing supply policy housing supply objective, this to be established through the site screening process;
- (c) clarify that the primary role of the proportionate growth guideline would help manage the scale of development in individual settlements, especially in the 'smaller' and 'other' villages where it should not be significantly exceeded. Realisation of the proportionate growth guideline should be subject to the availability (or provision e.g. by the developer) of sufficient local infrastructure capacity and services, and that adequate demonstration of this a requirement at planning application stage;
- (d) reiterate and cross reference the updated interim housing supply policy to local plan policy guidelines on provision of infrastructure, housing mix, including affordable housing, and community benefits;
- (e) confirm that the interim housing supply policy might be withdrawn early or amended if (1) the target number of 1,000 homes is reached, (2) the core strategy is adopted and its housing sites are in place, or (3) there is a material change in national planning policy guidance for five year housing land supply;
- (f) set out how the interim housing supply policy fits within, complements and helps to deliver the council's emerging core strategy housing supply approach, in accordance with the revised spatial strategy of 'building on our strengths'; and
- (g) confirm to town and parish councils that this council has invited views on sites within their localities as part of the screening process, and that the council would attach significant weight to bringing forward sites they support. Cabinet saw this as a 'localism' opportunity to negotiate with site promoters and influence the form and location of development, and any associated community benefits.

Cabinet asked officers to begin the screening process, looking at all sites put forward for housing under the interim policy and take into account the proportionate growth guidelines. Cabinet asked that communities (including parish councils and local district councillors) and site promoters were advised of the outcomes as soon as possible. Cabinet also recommended amendments to the interim housing supply policy:

- not to apply any policy relaxations in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or the Green Belt;
- to consider Wantage and Grove together for proportionate growth assessment, in keeping with the approach to identify preferred strategic housing sites through the core strategy (resulting in a large negative, i.e. nil capacity for interim housing supply across both settlements). To make any other minor adjustments necessary to proportionate growth guideline figures;
- that achievement of the 1,000 home interim policy objective shall take into account all homes granted planning permission from 1 April 2012, but exclude homes permitted on sites already allocated for housing in the Local Plan 2011. This would apply to individual settlements so that when their proportional growth figure was reached, no more development would be allowed in that settlement;
- that in making up the total 1,000 homes sought, to look first to the larger villages not being considered for strategic housing allocation, but also to bring forward a small proportion of the homes sought on suitable sites in smaller and other villages. To

look next and if necessary, at sites within the large villages identified for potential strategic housing allocation through the core strategy internal review (Shrivenham, Watchfield, and Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor). Throughout this process, to give priority to suitable sites that had support from the relevant parish council, and to sites suitable for development that were within the settlement boundary.

RESOLVED: To

- (a) note the key issues from public consultation on the draft interim housing supply policy and agree the responses set out on pages 19-26 of the consultation statement at Annex A to report 83/11;
- (b) agree that the interim housing supply policy be finalised and reported in final form to full council on 16 May 2012 to be considered for formal adoption; and
- (c) authorise the head of planning, in consultation with the cabinet member with responsibility for planning, to finalise the amendments to the interim housing supply policy, including those in paragraph nine of report 83/11, for submission to full council.

Exempt information under section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972

None

The meeting closed at 3.00 pm