



Chichester City Council

PLANNING AND CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PLANNING AND CONSERVATION COMMITTEE TO BE HELD
IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER AT 4.00PM ON WEDNESDAY 8 MAY 2024**

Minutes

Date Wednesday 8 May 2024

Time 4.00pm – 5.12 pm

Location The Council Chamber - The Council House • North Street • Chichester • West Sussex • PO19 1LQ

PRESENT: Councillor Ann Butler (Chairman), Councillor James Vivian (Vice-Chairman), and Councillors Judy Gershater, McHale and Squire

EX-OFFICIO:

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Cllrs Quail, Chant, Loxton, Town Clerk, Planning Adviser, Civic and Council Support Officer, Mr Ash Pal, John Pegg and Mr Greg Fielder (Chichester Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group)

150. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

To receive and approve apologies and reasons for absence from members of the Committee.

Councillor C. Gershater
Councillor Hitchman

151. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE IN MATTERS ON THE AGENDA FOR THIS MEETING**

None

152. **CHICHESTER NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

The Chair introduced the item and explained that its purpose was to discuss the response received from the Chichester Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and agree a way forward. The Chair then invited members of the Steering Group to speak.

John Pegg spoke about his work on the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) to date and then talked through a paper that he had prepared for the committee (attached) outlining the issues as he viewed them and potential ways forward.

Councillor McHale asked if the Steering Group (SG) was representative of the geographical spread of the City from all wards, or was it a small group of individuals with specific interests and agendas.

Mr Pegg responded that at present the SG was a small group, essentially the 'last men standing', so it was not as representative as it could be.

Councillor McHale then queried if the current initial ideas and proposals had come forward from the wider community or from the SG membership.

Mr Pegg recognised that at the moment many of the ideas and proposals have come forward from the SG members, not necessarily from the community and they recognise that engagement has not been as good as it could have been. At present the SG are trying to put forward ideas to test with the public to ascertain what is acceptable. Mr Pegg felt it was important to try and plan on a landscape scale for how the land in the City will be used in future.

Councillor McHale asked if the SG was happy with the level of community input and involvement in the plan development? He also asked what had been done to communicate their work and keep the community up to date on progress?

Mr Pegg said he personally would prefer to have more engagement and community involvement.

Ash Pal (Steering Group Chair) added that COVID had caused a hiatus, followed by delays waiting for the Local Plan to coalesce, which had exacerbated delays and hindered progress.

Councillor McHale queried why the SG had declined the offer of external project management resource to help them develop and move the plan forward.

Mr Pegg felt that the SG had lost any trust in the City Council (CC) and did not feel that they wished to work with them at that time. The SG also did not believe that CC would appoint a suitable consultant. The SG felt they now have a clear idea of what they want to achieve and so are in a better position to move forward.

The Chair asked if the NP was striving to do too much and this might be why it is struggling to move forwards. She asked whether it might be better to focus on a more modest and less ambitious plan that is deliverable.

Mr Pegg said the problems are partly due to the different layers of plans in the City (e.g. NP, Vision, Local Plan, Regeneration Strategy, etc). It makes it difficult to bring everything together and The Vision for the future of the City is the tricky part to get right.

The Chair asked if it would be better to focus on issues that are not related to housing and if development site allocations could be left to CDC and the plan proceed without them?

Mr Pegg said that part of the NP is looking at open spaces and linkages rather than development sites. They are interested in building green networks as a part of the process e.g. creating pocket/wall parks.

Councillor McHale was concerned that a lot of the ideas going into the plan are SG driven rather than coming from the community. For example, he has not seen evidence that the community are bringing forward ideas such as the Terminus Road proposals or the River Lavant redirection.

Mr Pal said the SG are trying to work from the ground up and test the attitudes of residents towards radical changes or concepts.

Councillor Chant ask what is the make-up of the SG and the groups it has consulted with? How are you making efforts to engage with the hard-to-reach areas? What work has been done in those areas? What have you done in the areas where there are no residents associations? What outreach have you done to consult with larger stakeholders such as the Chichester College, University, Chichester Festival Theatre, etc?

Mr Pal said that the people who have engaged have tended to be well educated, wealthy, etc. The SG had worked with Councillor Sharp to engage with harder to reach groups in the South Ward. Engagement had also taken place through the Collaboration Forum to address specific needs and protected characteristics. With regard to community organisations, they have had presentations from Chichester Festival Theatre and New Park Centre, etc.

Mr Pegg gave some background into the wall parks proposal which had come from the original SG. He had been commissioned as a consultant to prepare a report on the concept of incorporating wall parks and the river into the plan. It had been identified as an opportunity for communities to create shared spaces and resources across the City.

Community engagement has always been an issue and the SG are aware that they are not democratically elected, and they have needed Councillor attendance and buy-in to ensure that they are representing the community.

Councillor McHale said he was still concerned that we are in a situation where the plan is not being developed from the ground up and is being too driven from the top down by members of the SG.

Mr Pegg said that the SG needs to remain open to ideas and present them to the community, so there will always be an element where certain proposals are put before residents.

Mr Pal mentioned that the original document from 2019 included too many ideas that were out of scope for a neighbourhood plan (e.g. hotels, night clubs, etc). This time they wish to test ideas as they go along.

The Chair asked whether this work would be more achievable if they had a consultant to help with things? The SG said it would depend upon what the proposal and the offer was.

Mr Pal said the SG do not want a project manager overseeing the whole process. They wish to buy in subject matter expertise and assistance with communications. They want the oversight of the delivery to stay with the SG.

Councillor McHale mentioned that fundamentally, the information should be shared between the NPSG and the CC. There should be transparency and oversight between the two organisations.

Mr Pal said that they have no evidence of a Council driven NP in the UK. Mr Pal complained that various past Councillors did not deliver what they needed and did not keep promises.

Councillor Chant ask the SG why they doubt a City Council driven project would carry weight if they employed a consultant?

Mr Pal said that they would need to show that the community has been consulted and involved to pass examination. The risk is that if the process is driven by the Council, it can be seen to be driven from the top down, not the bottom up.

Councillor McHale then proposed that the delegated authority to the plan be removed from the SG and all the data be evaluated by an independent consultant so that a view of the remaining work can be undertaken and subsequently a new city-wide SG be formed with current SG members invited to join in.

Councillor Vivian seconded the proposal.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to remove the delegated authority to prepare the Neighbourhood Plan on behalf of the City Council from the SG. All NP materials to be passed over to the City Council for assessment by an independent consultant with a new city-wide steering group to be formed following the report from the consultant.

The Chair thanked the SG members for their attendance and time.

Meeting closed at 5:12 pm

153. **DATE OF NEXT ORDINARY MEETING**

DATE OF NEXT ORDINARY MEETING: Thursday 23 May 2024