

## **COUNCIL MEETING – 24 FEBRUARY 2015**

### **REPORT OF THE SERVICES COMMITTEE**

2 February 2015

Present: Councillors Morrall (Chairman), Carr (Vice-Chairman), Ainge, Allebone, Dholakia, Graves, Gough, G Lawman, M Patel, Raymond, Simmons, V Waters and Watts.

Also present: Mrs B Lawrence, Head of Resources, Miss J Thomas, Head of Planning and Local Development, Mrs J Bell, Project Co-ordinator, Mrs V Phillipson, Principal Planning Policy and Regeneration Manager, Mrs V Jessop, Principal Housing Manager, Mrs S Bateman, Senior Planning Officer and Mrs C A Mundy, Democratic Services Officer.

(Councillors Bell and Scarborough attended as observers.)

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

**RESOLVED** to note that apologies for absence were received from Councillors Blackwell and Elliott.

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**RESOLVED** to note that no declarations were made.

#### **3. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 DECEMBER 2014.**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Services Committee held on 15 December 2014 be approved.

#### **4. PETITION AGAINST BADGER CULLING IN WELLINGBOROUGH**

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received on the findings following the submission of a petition to full council on 9 December 2014.

The petition to 'save Wellingborough Council's badgers from culling' contained 1,584 signatures against the badger culling proposed by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The petition was referred by the council meeting to the Services Committee to clarify the council's position in this regard.

The council owns 164.37 acres of agricultural land within the borough, which is arable farming land and therefore does not have cattle on it. The council has not received a request to cull and is not aware that this is an issue. Officers would monitor the situation and report back to committee if anything changed.

**RESOLVED** that officers monitor the situation and report back if there are any material changes to the risks in the area.

**5. COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER - 31-32 CHURCH STREET, WELLINGBOROUGH**

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received on the options available to resolve the issues that have arisen at 31-32 Church Street, Wellingborough and seek approval on how to proceed with this property.

The poor structural condition of the building was brought to the council's attention in 2006 and in 2010 when the existing scaffolding was erected. The report detailed what had happened with the building during this time. Since 2010 the property had been monitored by building control officers.

In April 2014 one of the property owners was contacted to request permission for council officers to enter the building with a structural engineer to ascertain whether there had been any change in the structural status of the property since the last inspection in August 2013. A further inspection was conducted on 13 November 2014 and the existing scaffolding system was confirmed as being sufficient to stabilise the building.

The responsibility of the property lies with the owners and a formal charge of £43,924.52 had been placed on the land registry title against the property, being the recoverable cost for works carried out to date by the council to stabilise and inspect the building.

It is considered that the building will continue to deteriorate and become a greater risk to the public if action is not taken. Demolition of the property is seen as the only option for the future of the building.

The report detailed four options for members to consider as follows:

1. Enter into negotiations with the current owner.
2. Compulsory purchase order.
3. Force an auction sale.
4. Do nothing.

Members discussed the options with all concurring that the building was an eyesore and a potential health and safety issue and that the officer should initially enter into negotiations with the owners.

Councillor Lawman proposed an amendment to option 1 'that officers enter into negotiations with the landowner to transfer the property into the council's ownership within a month'. The chairman agreed that it would be useful to include a timescale of four weeks in the recommendation to encourage the landowner to respond.

Councillor Lawman also suggested a further amendment that if a forced sale at auction was agreed, officers could attend the auction with a view to purchasing the property. This was not seconded.

**R1 RECOMMEND that:**

- (i) Officers enter into negotiations (option1) with the landowner to transfer the property into the council's ownership within four weeks;
- (ii) If the above fails that officers' use the council's purchase powers (option 2) under Section 226(1)(a) of the Town and Planning Act 1990 (as amended) to acquire all estates and interests in the land shown outlined in red on the drawing at Appendix 2, subject to appropriate attempts to explore options with the property owner which would resolve the matter without the need for the council to invoke its compulsory purchase power.

**6. DEVELOPMENT OF THE MULTI -STOREY CAR PARK**

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Resources was received on the proposal to redevelop the multi-storey car park, converting part of it into a cinema and restaurant complex.

The council had been approached with a proposal to develop the multi-storey car park (MSCP). A decision, in principle, was requested from members to allow officers to continue negotiations as the proposal relates to town centre planning, council services (car parking) and property/finance.

Discussions had been held with various parties over the past year, and one firm proposal had been put forward by a company interested in building a leisure complex with a cinema and restaurants on top of the MSCP and expanding this into 20 Sheep Street. The proposal would retain lower floors of the MSCP as a car park.

For some years 20 Sheep Street has been used as council offices, but was no longer required. The building is listed and development of the kind proposed would be an opportunity to retain the features of the building as part of an interesting development in the town, possibly by using it as a restaurant.

There would be no planning objections in principle to the redevelopment of this part of the town centre, but details, including the effects upon heritage would need to be considered as part of a planning application. Leisure and restaurant uses were acceptable town centre use in planning policy terms. Redevelopment could act as a catalyst to regeneration, especially given the proximity of The Castle. Many of these issues would be considered as part of the Plan for the Borough of Wellingborough local plan review which would deal with town centre uses and their locations.

Members discussed this proposal and considered that it was innovative and a welcome addition to the night time economy. Assurance was sought that the freehold would be retained, along with free car parking. It was considered that

a cinema would be a wonderful addition to the town. It would bring jobs, cultural diversity and was an opportunity not to be missed.

The Head of Resources noted members' comments and confirmed that professional advice was being sought to ensure that the best possible development would be put forward for consideration.

**RESOLVED** to recommend to Resources Committee that the council agree in principle to the redevelopment of the multi-storey car park and any related council premises, subject to appropriate consultation with partners and due diligence in respect of finances.

## **7. HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY**

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received on the proposed amendments to the housing allocation policy.

Appended to the report was the proposed amendment in relation to local connections in rural settlements – parish council areas.

Members sought assurance from the Principal Housing Manager that anyone from a parish would be given priority rather than those from a neighbouring parish. It was confirmed that if a person had a housing need that would be the case and that all immediate connections would be exhausted before going further afield. Assurance was also sought over whether those in employment were treated the same as those not in employment. The Principal Housing Manager confirmed that allocations were based on housing need.

**RESOLVED** that approval be given to the amendments to the housing allocations policy with effect from 8 February 2015.

## **8. THE UPPER NENE VALLEY GRAVEL PITS SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT**

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received in relation to the supplementary planning document (SPD) for the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Special Protection Area.

A draft SPD had been produced to help local planning authorities, developers and others to ensure that development had no significant effect on the Upper Nene Valley gravel pits special protection area in accordance with the legal requirements of the Habitats Regulations. Appended to the report was the SPD which was recommended for consultation.

Members made a number of comments which were responded to by the Senior Planning Officer who explained the purpose of the SPD.

**RESOLVED** that public consultation take place on the draft Upper Nene Valley gravel pits special protection area supplementary planning document.

## **9. NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT CORE STRATEGY REVIEW**

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received to provide an overview of the pre-submission plan for the joint core strategy review and agree the council's response at this stage.

Appended to the report was the North Northamptonshire joint core strategy, pre-submission plan and suggested comments on the North Northamptonshire joint core strategy.

Members made a number of comments and raised particular concern over the development at Kettering south, junction 9 of the A14, which was located near to Isham and deemed 'the gateway to Kettering'. Whilst it was understood that originally a smaller development had been considered this new proposal was extremely large and members asked if this concern could be highlighted.

The Senior Planning Officer noted the comments made.

**RESOLVED** that the progress made on the joint core strategy review be noted and the timely delivery of the plan continue to be supported and the suggested comments be forwarded to the Joint Planning Unit.

## **10. THE RURAL SERVICES NETWORK**

The annexed circulated report of the Chief Executive was received on the Rural Services Network (RSN).

The report detailed the background of how the RSN had taken over the work of the Local Government Association's Urban and Rural Commission following their disbandment and which now operated as a special interest group within the LGA's structure.

The council's member representative at the Rural Commission was Councillor Graves who would continue to be the link to the network until the next Annual Council meeting in May 2015.

The revised constitution of the RSN was appended to the report for member's comments and to authorise the Chief Executive to cast the council's vote.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (i) the council's membership of the Rural Services Network be noted;
- (ii) the revised constitution of the Rural Services Network be noted;
- (iii) the Chief Executive cast the council's vote in favour of the revised constitution.

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 8pm.

