

Minutes of a Meeting of the Planning Policy Committee held in the Hub, Mareham Road, Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 6PH on Thursday, 27th February, 2025 at 6.00 pm.

## PRESENT

Councillor Tom Ashton (Chairman)  
Councillor Terry Aldridge (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors Mark Dannatt, Roger Dawson, David Hall, Daniel McNally and Daniel Simpson.

Councillor Neil Jones attended the Meeting as a Substitute.

Councillor Stephen Eyre and Councillor Ruchira Yarsley attended the Meeting as Observers.

## OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Phil Norman      | - Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) |
| Abbie Marwood    | - Group Manager (Planning and Development)                   |
| Greg Macrdechian | - Interim Local Plan Lead                                    |
| Laura Allen      | - Democratic Services Officer                                |

## **16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:**

Apologies were received from Councillors Alex Hall, Travis Hesketh and Terry Taylor.

It was noted that, in accordance with Regulation 13 of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990, notice had been given that Councillor Neil Jones had been appointed to the Committee in place of Councillor Paul Rickett for this Meeting only.

## **17. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY):**

At this point in the Meeting, Members were invited to declare any relevant interests. None were received.

## **18. MINUTES:**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 October 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

## **19. ACTIONS:**

The actions were noted as complete or in hand.

Action No. 14 – ‘Figures to be provided on how much farmland had flooded since the beginning of 2024’, page 21 of the Agenda refers.

A Member highlighted the importance of receiving an update on the amount of farmland that had been flooded in East Lindsey district since 2024.

No further comments or questions were received.

## **20. GOVERNMENT REFORM OF THE PLANNING SYSTEM:**

The Chairman welcomed Phil Norman, Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) and Greg Macrdechian, Interim Local Plan Lead to the Meeting.

The Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) took the opportunity to introduce Abbie Marwood who had been appointed as the new Group Manager for Planning and Development across the Partnership.

The Interim Local Plan Lead presented Members with a report on Government Reform of the Planning System, pages 25 to 36 of the Agenda refer.

Members were advised that the purpose of the report was to provide an update on the Government Planning Reforms and impacts to East Lindsey District Council and the review of the East Lindsey Local Plan.

Members were provided with a presentation that highlighted the following areas:

- Background of Reforms
- New Nation Planning Policy Framework (PPF) Main Changes
- Impacts on Housing Delivery for the East Lindsey Local Plan
- Devolution White Paper Main Proposals
- Impacts on East Lindsey Local Plan Review
- Conclusions and Next Steps

A copy of the presentation is attached as Appendix A to the Minutes.

Members were invited to put their comments and questions forward.

- The Chairman highlighted concerns with progressing the Local Plan timetable alongside plans for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and commented that he was hopeful that the evidence gained from the work currently being undertaken would remain relevant.

- A Member queried whether the Council would be in a better position in the circumstances where the five-year housing supply figures were more accurate. In response, the Interim Local Plan Lead advised Members that the accuracy of the figures was significant, and that further clarification would be obtained from the Planning team.
- The Chairman highlighted the importance of undertaking evidence-based work and ensuring that the government was cooperative with examining the accuracy of the data.
- A Member queried the reasons why the response from the government in relation to inaccurate housing supply figures was unsatisfactory. In response, the Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) explained to Members that the government's response had not provided further clarification and had only stated that the figures had been sourced from the Office of National Statistics (ONS). The Interim Local Plan Lead further advised Members that the response received was a standardised approach rather than addressing specific queries raised by Councils.
- A Member queried whether there was any merit in pursuing the housing target with Local Government Reorganisation approaching. In response, the Interim Local Plan Lead advised Members that it was uncertain what devolution would look like and that until the process had been agreed, the Council was duty bound to continue the work and produce a Local Plan.
- A Member considered whether the new legislation would mandate solar panels and other energy saving technologies for new build houses.

The Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) explained to Members that the Government were in support of Local Plan development and that it had been unusual that a request had been made for every single authority to write to them directly with Local Plan proposals.

- The Chairman advised Members that further information on LGR was awaited and that when developing the Local Plan, it was not in the Council's interest to support unachievable housing figures if the evidence base was incorrect. In response, the Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) assured Members that further clarification from the government on the new legislation in relation to Local Plans and LGR was expected towards the end of 2025.

- The Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) further advised Members that a more realistic housing number in the region of 800 homes would still present challenges in reaching a five-year housing supply.
- A Member queried the timeframe for completion of work for progressing the coastal strategy. In response, the Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) advised Members that work was being undertaken in collaboration with officers across various organisations and that 2027 was a good estimate for completion of the work.
- A Member queried whether various partners including the S&ELCP, Lincolnshire County Council and the Internal Drainage Boards were fully collaborating. In response, the Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) confirmed that was correct.
- A Member queried the Council's plans for addressing the shortfall in housing numbers and the reliability of the figures provided. In response, the Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) assured Members that various scenarios were being considered and that it was not possible to move forward until the figures were known. The Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) further confirmed that coastal work was ongoing.
- A Member queried whether any locations had been considered for the proposed housing developments. In response, the Chairman advised Members that various options were being considered within the constraints of coastal flood risk areas and the Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB) and that it was proving difficult to support growing existing settlements of medium and large villages and towns as the only solution.
- A Member queried whether the East Lindsey Local Plan would become null and void with the plans for Local Government Reorganisation. In response, the Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) advised Members that the current Local Plan was five years old and was already becoming out of date. Members were advised that the Council would continue undertaking a review of the Local Plan and that in the circumstances where the Council could not demonstrate a 5-year housing supply, opportunities would be opened for speculative developments which the Council would assess on a case-by-case basis.

- A Member queried whether the Council should defer working on the Local Plan and the 5-year housing supply due to upcoming Local Government Reorganisation. In response, the Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) advised Members that questions on LGR in relation to Local Plans would be raised with the government and that the Council would continue gathering evidence until plans became clear.
- A Member highlighted that the Local Plan would become out of date in the circumstances where more housing sites were allocated than there was a demand to build them. In response, the Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) advised Members that the Council's position would be clarified over the next twelve months and that other Councils across the country were facing similar challenges with increased housing numbers being proposed.
- In reference to 3.3 'The tension between the coastal zone, the increased housing numbers and the likely inability of the market to deliver these mean that the most sensible way forward would be to engage with Government to seek support', a Member queried the context of Council seeking support, page 33 of the Agenda refers. In response, the Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) advised Members that various tensions existed between DEFRA and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and that standard methodologies being used did not benefit areas with constraints particularly in areas of flood risk.
- The Chairman advised Members that LGR was not expected to take shape until 2028 and until that time that the Council had the opportunity to do good work and leave a legacy before changes occurred.
- A Member queried the type of assistance needed as referred to by the Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) earlier in the Meeting. In response, the Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) explained to Members that further assistance was needed in the way of resources.
- The Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) further highlighted the current staffing structure across the Partnership for undertaking work on the Local Plan. The Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) explained to Members that the Council's approach was to secure the funding to produce a Local Plan by commissioning external studies whilst supporting a core team of staff. Members were further advised that the utilisation of shared officers through Section 113 of the Local Government Act 1972 was also being progressed to enable work to continue.

- At the indulgence of the Chairman, Councillor Ruchira Yarsley queried what process was envisioned for combining the Local Plans of multiple areas when a unitary authority came into being. In response, the Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) advised Members that each authority was currently required to produce a Local Plan and that until the areas of the unitary authorities had been agreed, the Local Plans of each individual Local Plans would still be in effect.
- At the indulgence of the Chairman, Councillor Ruchira Yarsley further highlighted whether Councils could have a separate segment for strategic development within the Local Plan and place work on hold until unitary authorities were formed.
- A Member queried whether the settlement score studies would still hold relevance to future plans. In response, the Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) advised Members that he was unable to provides a specific answer and the Council would react when further information was made available from the government. Members were further advised that the coastal study was a key area of work and that a programme of work would continue around reviewing the evidence base which would provide value to any future authority.
- A Member highlighted that the letter sent to the leaders of all the district councils from the government had stated that they wished to maintain district boundaries. In response, the Chairman advised Members that considerations for travel to work areas were important for the success of any proposed divisions of authority areas and the resulting split of Local Plans.
- Members discussed the responsibilities of past and present governments.
- A Member queried the origins of the error which had occurred for deriving housing figures and whether the inconsistencies were assumed to be from the ONS data. In response, the Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) and Interim Local Plan Lead advised Members that the government's response had mentioned ONS data and that it had been theorised within the team that the figures may have been distorted due to caravan counts, however this was yet to be confirmed and further clarification was being sought from the government.
- A Member further queried whether the effects on the statistics were as a result of the ONS Office changing definitions in their methodologies.

In response, the Interim Local Plan Lead advised Members that a change in definitions was a possible explanation and that other authorities were experiencing the same issue.

- At the indulgence of the Chairman, Councillor Ruchira Yarsley queried the number of Neighbourhood Plans that were in existence in East Lindsey and whether Neighbourhood Plans were standard policy across the country. In response, the Interim Local Plan Lead confirmed that there were four main Neighbourhood Plans in the district and advised Members that the number was considered low compared to the size of the authority.
- At the indulgence of the Chairman, Councillor Ruchira Yarsley queried the effects of Local Plan changes and LGR on villages currently working on Neighbourhood Plans. In response, the Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) advised Members that the new NPPF aimed to strengthen local communities developing Neighbourhood Plans and that early engagement with communities was essential.
- At the indulgence of the Chairman, Councillor Ruchira Yarsley queried the population required for a large village to be considered a town. In response, the Interim Local Plan Lead advised Members that there was no defined standard and that once the numbers had been established, settlements would undertake an urban capacity study to determine the amount of development that could be sustained.
- At the indulgence of the Chairman, Councillor Ruchira Yarsley queried whether the Council was already examining the sizes and classification of the villages that currently existed. In response, the Interim Local Plan Lead advised Members that settlement sizes would be considered as part of the Local Plan review.
- The Chairman highlighted his experiences with work on settlement scoring and the development of Neighbourhood Plans and supported that Skegness had been one of the best examples of Neighbourhood Plan development in East Lindsey district.
- A Member queried whether East Lindsey District Council was able to assist with development of neighbourhood plans. In response, the Chairman explained to Members that the Council could help with the process and offer advice.

- Members further discussed involvement with Neighbourhood Plans and highlighted the example of Holton Le Clay which took several years and significant work to reach completion.
- Members discussed the merits of villages that did not wish to be defined as towns.
- At the indulgence of the Chairman, Councillor Ruchira Yarsley queried whether a village should be considered a town when amenities and population became significant. In response, the Chairman confirmed there were various definitions of towns which included planning terms, political terms and personal preference.
- The Chairman concluded by emphasising the importance of ensuring that a Local Plan was brought forward that was not harmful to the district based on incorrect figures.
- A Member requested a copy of the presentation be circulated to Members following the Meeting. In response, the Interim Local Plan Lead acknowledged this would be provided.
- At the indulgence of the Chairman, Councillor Stephen Eyre (Chairman of the Planning Committee) advised Members that the March Planning Committee Meeting had been cancelled.

No further comments or questions were received.

The Chairman thanked Phil Norman, Assistant Director (Planning and Strategic Infrastructure) and Greg Macrdechian (Interim Local Plan Lead) for their report.

Following which it was,

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

**21. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:**

The date of the next Meeting was confirmed as Thursday 27 March 2025 commencing at 6.00pm.

The meeting closed at 7.23 pm.