

**JOINT PLANNING COMMITTEE FOR
NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

**Meeting held virtually via Zoom on
2nd March 2021**

Present: Councillor Anthony Dady (Chair)
Councillor Ray Beeby
Councillor David Brackenbury
Councillor Martin Griffiths
Councillor David Jenney
Councillor Matt Keane
Councillor Andy Mercer
Councillor Steven North
Councillor Jan O'Hara
Councillor Andrew Scarborough
Councillor Mike Tebbutt
Councillor Malcolm Waters

Also Present: Andrew Longley (North Northamptonshire Joint Planning and
Delivery Unit (NNJPDU)
Rob Harbour (Borough of Wellingborough, Kettering Borough and
East Northamptonshire
District Councils)
Simon James (NNJPDU)
Samuel Humphries (NNJPDU)
Natalie Oates (NNJPDU)
Paul Woods (NNJPDU)
Simon Richardson (Kettering Borough Council)
Anne Ireson (Kettering Borough Council)
Richard Palmer (East Northamptonshire District Council)

15/20 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED that Councillor Anthony Dady be elected Chairman of the
Joint Planning Committee until 31st March 2021.

16/20 **ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED that Councillor Malcolm Waters be elected Vice Chairman
of the Joint Planning Committee until 31st March 2021.

17/20 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr Julie Brookfield (NCC) and Cllr Tim Allebone (Wellingborough)

18/20 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

19/20 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 28th October 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

20/20 **PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK**

A report was submitted which considered the proposed amendments of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and which sought to agree the basis of the Joint Planning Committee's response.

It was noted that the government was consulting on draft revisions to the NPPF to implement policy changes in response to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission (BBBCC) report "Living with Beauty". The deadline for responses was 27th March 2021.

In discussion on the proposed changes and responses as set out in the report, members commented as summarised below:-

Transport Modes

A genuine choice of transport modes was welcomed, but it was felt that there must be consideration of the times of day people used different modes of transport, how it was accessed and whether it was commercially viable. North Northamptonshire is of a semi-rural nature and whilst it was recognised there was an issue around transport choice in rural areas, it was imperative that an alternative choice to car travel was provided. It was felt there was a need to take account of people living in rural areas for whom cars were essential, which it was felt could potentially be against government policy.

It was noted that the Joint Core Strategy encouraged a range of travel choices, in particular cycling and walking, but members had always made the point, that in practical terms North Northamptonshire residents would need to have cars. A choice of transport was easier in larger developments and urban areas, but difficult in more remote rural areas. Members were reminded of the England's Economic Heartland (EEH) Transport Strategy, which specifically covered rural connectivity. As the

Transport Strategy moved forward, there would be an opportunity to work with EEH regarding transport choices.

The Concept of Beauty

The view was expressed that the term “beautiful” and the concept of beauty was subjective and there was a lack of clarity about what it meant. It was felt to be an aesthetic issue, whereas place-making had lots of layers and aspects. Members agreed that the term needed to be much stronger in terms of definition of what was acceptable and what was unacceptable, and that the Government needed to clarify the concept of beauty and issue some guidelines.

National and Local Policy

It was felt that much of the proposed response was conflated with the Planning for the Future White Paper which contained implications for democratic decision-making and permitted development rights. The Joint Planning Committee’s response to the White Paper was supported and welcomed.

The view was expressed that, overall, to beautify buildings was superficial and did not give any additional weight to planning guidance. There was concern that national guidance would give a blanket design guide across the country and different areas would lose their local distinctiveness. Conflicting terminology regarding national and local policies made local decision-making difficult, and this needed to be addressed. It was clear there was more national emphasis on design quality and national policy, and the effects of this would be seen as appeal decisions mounted up. The NPPF had weight and inspectors would have to take account of it. Local policies should be locally-distinctive and involve local people in determining what was in keeping with local area.

It was noted that the government was proposing a suite of design policies which would take from national generic policy and then drive down into locally specific policies.

Building Healthy Homes and Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities

The emphasis on access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activities was welcomed.

It was stressed that, after the Covid-19 pandemic, Building for a Healthy Life would become even more important. It would be essential for North Northamptonshire Council to ensure it worked closely across portfolio areas, because health, wellbeing and building healthy homes was crucial for North Northamptonshire residents.

Climate Change

Members recognised that there was a need for more work to be done on delivering developments that took account of climate impacts, and this must be central to all North Northamptonshire policies; however, it was acknowledged that this was being taken into account. The proposals for improving design quality that took account of the effects of the development on climate change were welcomed, with it being made clear that development that was not well designed and contrary to relevant planning policies on design, should be refused and solid, sensible and well-designed developments being welcomed.

In summing up the debate, officers were thanked for their report and the response to the White Paper.

It was agreed that the wording of the response should be strengthened, in accordance with the views expressed at the meeting, in the following respects:-

- Modes of Transport in semi-rural areas such as North Northamptonshire
- The definition of the concept of beauty

It was proposed by Cllr Brackenbury, seconded by Cllr Griffiths, and subsequently unanimously.

RESOLVED that the proposed response to the NPPF changes as set out in this report be agreed and the Head of the Joint Planning and Delivery Unit, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, be delegated authority to finalise the Joint Planning Committee's consultation response.

21/20

NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE LOCAL DESIGN GUIDANCE

A report was submitted which updated the Joint Planning Committee on progress with preparing local design guidance in North Northamptonshire. The report sought endorsement of the following recommendations to North Northamptonshire Council:-

- (a) the immediate use of Building for a Healthy Life, a key tool for shaping and assessing development proposals in line with the policies of the JCS; and
- (b) the early adoption of a Design Charter setting out the Council's ambition for place-shaping and the processes through which this will be achieved.

In discussion, members welcomed the progress that had been made since the Committee was updated on the changing national context in relation to design in September 2020. The diversity of communities in North Northamptonshire was highlighted. It was acknowledged that it would be important to engage with the development industry and stakeholders to produce a coherent and consistent set of requirements that would be applied in North Northamptonshire to ensure certain standards of development that met local and national design standards.

The way the Joint Planning Committee had brought through space standards in the Joint Core Strategy was highlighted, as were the recent changes to the Building Regulations, and the hope was expressed that issues such as road widths and car parking policies would be maintained. It was felt that it was important for policies to be interpreted, without compromise, in planning management.

Members noted that details such as car parking were likely to come forward through a Supplementary Planning Document which would look to maintain or improve standards. The next stage would look at cycling and walking, and the steer from government is that individual local authorities would need to provide their own policies, with issues such as car parking and road widths being high on the agenda. The team approach to local policy making would be strengthened in the new Council because Highways would now be part of the same authority. Planning management would be included in the development of policies, with support from both officers and members.

The work would be highly technical, but it was important that it was widely understood by members. It was felt that member training would be advantageous.

In continuing the debate, members felt that, in some cases, viability issues affected the quality of development in planning applications that came before Planning Committees. The value of Supplementary Planning Documents was questioned, as evidenced through appeals where planning inspectors did not always take them into account. The Building for a Healthy Life (BHL) guidance was not yet adopted by the government. Unless the government endorsed these ideas, and made BHL government policy, NNC would not be able to use the concepts in development management, because at the present time it was merely advisory and not defensible in planning law.

It was noted that the BHL guidance had been endorsed by Homes England and the NHS and helped to form and inform policy. The government was intending to reference BHL in the NPPF revision. BHL is a recognised industry standard tool, and its principles contained more detail and allowed planning officers to quantify development. Its predecessor, Building for Life 12, was also referenced within national policy and provided the foundation of policy 8 in the JCS. The national approach through the proposed revisions to the NPPF captured policies

contained in the JCS and would strengthen the implementation of local policies in the weight planning inspectors gave to these.

It was felt that criteria in relation to open space SPDs was required to be refreshed, as open spaces needed to be pulled together into one SPD. Issues around the provision of, adoption and ongoing maintenance of open spaces on new estates was raised, and it was noted that in some cases new owners were required to pay for ongoing maintenance, which had not been the case in the past. It was requested that this issue be looked at, and a full report be brought to the North Northamptonshire Council in due course, as there was an opportunity to harmonise the approach to open spaces. This had been flagged up in Appendix 1 to Item 7 on the agenda in terms of the strategic plan.

(Councillor Jan O'Hara joined the meeting at 8.50 pm)

Debate ensued on the need to connect new and existing habitats together in a way that promoted health and well-being, although it was acknowledged this may affect viability for housebuilders. The message needed to be that a well-designed development scheme had longevity and added value. It was felt to be imperative that planning inspectors took good design into account over issues of viability when determining appeals, as viability couldn't be used as a means for refusing a planning application. It was noted that strong policies and guidance provided a good platform for negotiation and compromise to try and raise the bar with developers. North Northamptonshire was under huge development pressure and it was felt that, unless the whole Council agreed with local policies, there was a danger of a silo mentality and in this respect good leadership would be crucial.

(Councillor Griffiths left the meeting at 9.07 pm)

In conclusion to the debate, it was agreed that the Committee urge the government to publicly endorse and adopt the BHL document. It was noted that the best way to do this would be to include some wording within the NPPF document.

In response to a question on purdah and planning enforcement during April 2021, it was agreed that officers would come back to the Committee separately.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the approach to local design guidance set out in the report be endorsed and recommended to North Northamptonshire Council, in particular:-
 - (a) the immediate use of Building for a Healthy Life, a key tool for shaping and assessing development proposals in line with the policies of the JCS; and

- (b) the early adoption by North Northamptonshire Council of a Design Charter setting out the Council's ambition for place-shaping and the processes through which this will be achieved.
- (ii) it be noted that the delivery of high-quality design across North Northamptonshire required enhanced capacity in urban design and access to expertise in other built and natural environmental disciplines.

22/20

STRATEGIC PLANNING UPDATE

A report was submitted which updated the Joint Planning Committee on the Oxford-Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework and recommended to the North Northamptonshire Council a draft scope and timetable for the North Northamptonshire Strategic Plan.

It was noted that the North Northamptonshire Strategic Plan (NNSP) would be a key strategic document for the North Northamptonshire Council, and work would begin on preparation of the NNSP later this year, aligned with the programme for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework (ASF).

During discussion on the report, some concern was expressed by members that the ASF document seemed to be "top down", and should not just be about planning, but also the economy and environment. There was a fear that this could reduce local choice and freedom to deliver what was best for the residents of North Northamptonshire in relation to place-shaping.

Although the JCS issues identified in the report for a strengthened approach were agreed, it was felt by members that housing needs surveys are not gathered from speaking with local residents but done by an outside consultant. There was no mention of involving local communities in para 4.4. Long term growth of Northampton and Bedford was outlined in Appendix 1, but there was no mention of Peterborough. It was also felt that there was a conflict between commuting and "churn" in the effort to regenerate town centres, High Streets and shopping centres, which required "churn". Railway stations encouraged commuting to London, but not for people to come to North Northamptonshire and there was no indication in para 1.8 of Appendix 1 re plan development of the weight it will carry.

The view was also expressed by members that the ASF document placed too much responsibility in the hands of politicians and senior civil servants and did not include enough information on how it would be independently examined. There was a need to ensure that the interests of North Northamptonshire were pushed forward. Planning in the Arc

should not cut across local aspirations in North Northamptonshire. The timetable on page 35 was welcomed although it was suggested it may be optimistic. Although it was acknowledged that lots of good work had been done, work must now be prioritised towards developing the NNSP.

It was noted that engagement was important and critical, and the timescale for the ASF shouldn't be at the price of proper testing of strategy and engagement going forward. The points raised about Peterborough would be referenced. The Strategic plan would gather weight as it progressed and would ultimately become part of the development plan. There was a clear need for North Northamptonshire to be in a position of influence in the Arc and therefore should be represented and involved in key groups going forward.

RESOLVED that the draft scope of the North Northamptonshire Strategic Plan and potential timetable set out in Appendix 1 to the report be endorsed and recommended to North Northamptonshire Council for inclusion in the North Northamptonshire Local Development Scheme.

23/20

FINAL MEETING OF THE JOINT PLANNING COMMITTEE

As this was the final meeting of the Joint Planning Committee, a vote of thanks was proposed to past and present members of the Committee and officers for their support over the last 16 years.

(The meeting started at 7.30 pm and ended at 9.45 pm)

Signed
Chair

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