

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9 October 2019 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Martin Kerin (Chair), John Allen (Vice-Chair) and Oliver Gerrish

**Apologies:** Councillors Alex Anderson and Andrew Jefferies

**In attendance:**

Andrew Millard, Interim Director of Place  
Leigh Nicholson, Interim Assistant Director of Planning,  
Transport and Public Protection  
Sean Nethercott, Strategic Lead of Strategic Services  
Wendy Le, Democratic Services Officer

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*(At 19.02, the Committee membership was inquorate so the Chair adjourned the meeting for 15 minutes to allow time for Committee Members to arrive.)*

*(The meeting resumed at 19.17.)*

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

### **6. Minutes**

The minutes of the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9 July 2019 was approved as a true and correct record.

### **7. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **8. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **9. Thurrock Local Plan Issues and Options (Stage 2) Report of Consultation**

The report was introduced by Andrew Millard and provided an update on Thurrock's Local Plan and set out the key messages identified from the Issues and Options (Stage 2) (IO2) Consultation Document that ran from 12 December 2018 to 8 March 2019. It must be noted that the IO2 Consultation was not a plan, but a consultation. A total of 17 events titled 'Your Place, Your

Voice' (YPYV) was held across the borough that engaged with residents of the borough in each ward during the consultation period.

The top 10 comments were identified through the IO2 Consultation which related to:

- The need for housing;
- Air quality concerns;
- More or better sporting facilities;
- Solutions for traffic congestion;
- Protection of natural landscapes for enjoyment and ecology;
- Better community facilities including GP services;
- The need for more police presence;
- Re-routing of HGVs away residential and village areas;
- Better walking and cycling paths; and
- Extra bus routes with more services and increased rail capacity.

Due to the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) proposal, there was a delay in forming a full Local Plan and in bringing it forward and the LTC was not expected to be finalised until 2021.

The next stage in the preparation of the Local Plan was the rollout of Design Charrettes which was resources that would be provided by the government and would bring together key stakeholders to collaborate on a place-making vision to guide the regeneration of the selected area.

Referring to page 18, the Chair noted the fourth bullet point in the introduction on the duty to co-operate with London and neighbouring South Essex authorities. He went on to say that he was keen for the plan to be Thurrock centric in that it was owned by Thurrock's communities and to ensure that unmet housing needs were still met to benefit Thurrock's residents. Sean Nethercott answered that there was a duty to cooperate and when the time came for the Local Plan to be examined, would show that Thurrock Council had consulted with neighbouring Local Authorities (LAs) on meeting cross boundary issues. It was clear that housing was a key issue and over the past few years, had been in consultations with South Essex authorities on technical work such as strategic housing assessment and the joint strategic plan which considered the scale of housing needs. He went on to explain that although the work was at an early stage, it had been suggested that it was necessary for Thurrock to meet unmet housing needs. However, it had not been evidenced yet as to why housing needs could not be met within the LAs' own boundaries and why Thurrock was the location to meet those housing needs.

The Chair questioned the criteria the service had in place to meet other unmet housing needs if needed and how it would benefit Thurrock's existing communities. He thought there should be key principles in place and asked what these were. In response, Sean Nethercott said the service had to look at what criteria Thurrock would use to judge acceptability on their own sites to

meet their own needs first. The set of criteria would include transport sustainability, impact on surround communities, impact on the Green Belt and environmental impact to enable for sites to be judged in a consistent manner. A list of available supplies of land would be considered against the set of criteria to meet Thurrock's housing needs first. If there was leftover land, it would only then be considered to decide whether additional sites was needed to support economic growth. If this was the case, then the additional sites would be allocated for development and through this, the housing needs of neighbouring authorities could then potentially be met.

Referring to page 35, the Chair mentioned one of the comments in response to the IO2 Consultation regarding an opportunity for a new sports centre. He went on to say that the Local Plan was an opportunity for old sports clubs such as the Grays Athlete Club to be refreshed and asked how the Local Plan could help in this. Andrew Millard answered that there had been discussions with the Grays Athlete Club over the years and there had been more than one representation made to bring the club back and up to date. The discussions were ongoing within the remit of the Local Plan and was a key issue to examine.

The Chair mentioned that a sporting club would require land for its facilities and asked how the Local Plan would help to identify the right site. Andrew Millard replied that it was the responsibility of the developer to identify a suitable site through the Local Plan or through the planning process. The Local Plan would be able to help in identifying suitable land but it was for the sporting club to work alongside the service in this.

In terms of the YPYV events, the Chair questioned if the service had engaged with community groups such as the forums or established resident groups. Sean Nethercott confirmed that the service had attended a number of community forums but the challenge had been timing because some of the events did not fit in with the meeting times of the community forums. The process of engagement had started and would continue throughout the Local Plan process and the plan could not go ahead without the support of the community who were the key stakeholders. The Chair agreed and mentioned that during the Tops Club project, there had been a good community engagement with the Seabrooke Rise Residents Group who had supported the project.

Adding to this, Andrew Millard said that the YPYV events had been successful and that the Design Charrettes would encourage further engagement with the community and resident groups.

The Vice-Chair commented that housing was one of the biggest issues in Thurrock and that there was less than 10,000 homes in supply for social housing. He went on to say that demand for housing was high with 8,218 people on the waiting list and sought the service's opinion on what was deemed to be a good number of social housing that Thurrock Council could deliver on.

In response, Andrew Millard said that hidden behind the numbers was a wide range of housing needs that included the size of properties, form of construction and tenure amongst other factors. Social housing was driven by that demand in the figure that the Vice-Chair had stated and the current number for affordable housing stood at 35% but the number may need reassessing as part of the Local Plan process as well as the type of social housing needed. Assessment would need to be undertaken on how the social homes would be delivered whether it would be through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) or through Thurrock Regeneration Limited (TRL) and there may also be a need to work more closely with the private sector.

Andrew Millard went on to say that the service had consulted with Ward Councillors on the types of housing needed within their respective wards. He mentioned one comment from a Ward Councillor in relation to care leavers who needed suitable accommodation during their leaving care pathway and he reiterated his point about creating the right types of housing in the right places.

The Vice-Chair noted an earlier point made regarding environmental impact and said that there was consideration of more housing in areas that were already densely populated. He stated that homes should be sustainable and mentioned that Gravesham Council had input solar panels in most of their social houses. He questioned whether the service should consider the use of solar panel in their social houses to ensure these were sustainable.

Andrew Millard confirmed that social housing had to be considered in terms of construction, quality and energy efficiency. Regarding densely populated areas, there was a need to consider parking in those areas and there should be consideration of building homes around stations where there would be more choices of transport modes to potentially encourage less use of cars. The idea was to not exacerbate those densely populated areas in terms of air quality and consideration had to be given on how places would work with the environmental factors in mind.

Andrew Millard went on to mention a comment made from an agent regarding the whole of South Essex and its obsession with the car which needed to be reduced and that imagination was needed on how areas could work with the transport methods that was currently in place. He pointed out that Thurrock had a good amount of railway stations for its size thus enabling a good choice of sustainable transport.

Suggesting that the Council could borrow money at an attractive rate, the Vice-Chair went on to say that it would be good if the Council was the main stakeholder for the affordable homes needed in Thurrock. Regarding the number of 32,000 homes needed in Thurrock, the Vice-Chair questioned whether it was possible for Thurrock to acquire the 35% needed for affordable housing. Andrew Millard replied that 35% was the identified figure needed for affordable housing through the Local Plan and that there was a history of this figure not being achieved across some sites due to various reasons including the lack of site opportunities and low land value which was not economically

viable. However, some advantages of a plan led approach was that it enabled the service to look at different approaches which led the Council to be in a great position where there were more identified potential sites for affordable housing than needed. The Council's approach to the Local Plan enabled the service to reach the identified figure and higher for affordable housing.

Calculating the 35% of affordable homes needed from the 32,000 homes needed in Thurrock, the Vice-Chair thought the figure would be around 11,000 and would need to include an eclectic mix of various types of housing for different needs. He went on to say that he had mentioned modular homes in the past as there would be more value for money from this type of housing build which could be used in Tilbury. The sustainability and longevity of modular build homes was estimated to be around 50 years and the Vice-Chair thought that the housing supply would be resolved by then. Andrew Millard replied that there had been an interest in the borough revolving around modular homes which was being considered.

Councillor Gerrish asked if the service could breakdown the details in the number of businesses, organisations and resident groups that had responded to the YPYV. In response, Sean Nethercott said that breakdown could be provided separately but would take a while for the service to filter the results specifically as these had been collected through paper forms and online. There had been around an estimated 3,000 responses to the YPYV events and about 400 of those had been from organisations.

Councillor Gerrish felt it was important to draw the distinction between the responses given as the viewpoint from a developer might give a different insight. Referring to the consultation comments provided within the report, he noted that these reflected some of the concerns that Thurrock residents had raised.

Referring to Andrew Millard's earlier comment on an agent's comment regarding South Essex's obsession with the car, Councillor Gerrish felt caution had to be taken when delivering schemes to ensure that enough car parking spaces were provided to avoid the problem of parking congestion. He went on to question how the Local Plan would now go forward following the IO2 consultation.

Answering Councillor Gerrish's comment on parking, Andrew Millard confirmed that schemes would still ensure enough parking spaces were incorporated. Designed a place with little to no parking spaces was a 'recipe for disaster' but the idea of building near railway stations was to provide a wider choice of transport modes to reduce air pollution. There were other mechanisms to consider such as car pools and parking had to be considered in an integrated manner. Regarding consultation responses, Andrew Millard said that Thurrock's infrastructure would be drawn out through these alongside evidence based work and other consultation exercises.

Councillor Gerrish commented that reducing air pollution could also be undertaken through the encouragement of using electric cars which would

also need more charging points. On the Local Plan process and its timeline, he felt the timeline had moved back and queried when the next decision would be made in regards to the next steps of the Local Plan.

Andrew Millard explained that the next steps would be in 16 – 18 months' time which would be the 'Preferred Option' stage where the service would work closely with developers. Following on from this stage, after another 16 – 18 months, the service would then look to hold discussions with the Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government (MCHLG) regarding the LTC timeline to decide when the Local Plan could be brought forward. If the Local Plan could be moved forward, then a significant amount of work would be required along with the needed resources.

On the delivery of the schemes through the Local Plan process, Councillor Gerrish questioned how reactive versus proactive the service's methods would be. He went on to mention that the service would need to build upon the consultation responses from residents to bring together a similar vision and plan that was well supported as seen with the Purfleet Regeneration scheme. He stated that social housing had to play a central role in the Local Plan process and the challenge was on how developers could participate in the process. He suggested that the delivery of the plan could be done outside of the Local Plan and through the Council's company, TRL as all available resources should be considered.

In response, Andrew Millard said that the Purfleet Regeneration scheme was underpinned by a master plan and infrastructure so had worked well. In addition, principles had to be pinned to a master plan. With the 32,000 homes needed, a range of potential sites had to be identified for these.

On the earlier discussions regarding sports facilities, Councillor Gerrish agreed that there was need for sports facilities but added that open spaces in the borough also need to be protected to ensure these spaces did not become 'concrete jungles' or spaces for development. Andrew Millard explained that open spaces had to be considered in terms of whether these were fulfilling its intended purpose and whether there was evidence that there was a betterment for the surrounding community if the open space was put to other uses. To ensure the health and wellbeing of a community, it was important that better places were generated for people to meet and play and this lay in creating great urban spaces where needed.

Regarding air quality, the Vice-Chair stated that this was also effected by other factors and not just Particle Matters (PM) from transport vehicles. He mentioned dust from industrial buildings in Tilbury and felt that this needed to be monitored. He asked how the Council was protecting Tilbury from the dust that was believed to be arising from the Tilbury docks. Andrew Millard explained that the biggest issue identified within air quality was the PMs which had to be tackled and was more prominent in congestion spots as monitored through the Air Quality Monitoring Assessment (AQMA) systems. The service had been looking into how certain industrial buildings could be 'lifted and

shifted' to another location within the borough away from residential areas to reduce factors such as noise and dust to those areas.

Noting the consultation responses from residents within the Tilbury ward, the Vice-Chair sought more detail on the steps to be taken within that ward. Andrew Millard explained that each geographical area of Thurrock was different and that the Design Charettes would help to identify what was needed within each community through community engagement. The suggestion of shops and restaurants within Tilbury had to be assessed through whether there was demand for these and had to be rationalised with space availability. Thurrock's town centres came with a lot of floor space that could be utilised and solutions needed commercial realism thus tying needs and design in with how realistic it would be to reshape an area.

The Chair thought that realistically, shops such as the butchers and fishmongers could not be brought back to the 21<sup>st</sup> century as there was little demand for these now. In addition, with changes such as Amazon, it was not possible to go back to a time of more shops on the High Street as most items could be bought online. He went on to question how Thurrock Council could help wards within Thurrock to adapt to the future of retail.

Andrew Millard explained that the High Street hierarchy had changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and it was now online shopping sites that stood at the top. With this in mind, town centres had to adapt to become the local supermarket for the local community. He went on to say that the town centres in Thurrock needed to be refreshed and reimaged to attract the locals instead of competing with the internet or even Thurrock's shopping centre, Lakeside. Shops could provide services such as a coffee shop or hairdressers, a service that could not be bought online. Imagination needed to be less of retail and more on meeting immediate local needs.

In response, the Vice-Chair said that the Port of Tilbury was receiving more ships that were bigger in size which would be bringing more people in to the area. He thought that having more restaurants or even hotel accommodation could cater to these people's needs but Tilbury currently had little to offer and the Port of Tilbury was trying to promote cruises. Andrew Millard replied that the service would need to work with the Port of Tilbury to find a solution to drive prosperity but consideration had to be given on whether there was a market for certain facilities.

The Vice-Chair felt that if Tilbury was improved to attract more people to the area, then there could be more demand for facilities in the area. Andrew Millard answered that the issue was the same for Grays and Purfleet as it was also by the riverfront which was not being utilised. The service had worked with the Tilbury Two project on reconnecting Tilbury back to the river but there needed to be an attracter and the scheme had to be economically viable.

Councillor Gerrish felt that there was a need to address climate change as well, specifically regarding the CO2 emissions and other broader concerns. He sought reassurance that the Local Plan would not contribute to climate

changes. Andrew Millard reassured the Committee that consideration would be given to climate change and was incorporated into areas of geography, transport modes and sustainable forms of construction within the Local Plan.

The Vice-Chair questioned what the Council's stance was on the LTC and other potential crossings in Thurrock. Andrew Millard confirmed that the Council was still opposing the LTC and other potential crossings. The Council was pushing the MCHLG to remove the LTC's proposal to enable the Local Plan to come forward.

Councillor Gerrish mentioned that councils in other parts of Essex had succeeded in bring a plan forward without reducing their hospital provision. He sought clarification on whether a general hospital would be a part of the Local Plan and if there were discussions held with health partners on this. Andrew Millard confirmed that a general hospital was included in the Local Plan and said the Council would need to work with a whole range of stakeholders that included health providers on the Local Plan.

Following up, the Vice-Chair said that Thurrock was the third largest authority without its own hospital and would increase when more homes were built. He thought the population of Thurrock was large and should have a hospital in place as the closest one was Basildon Hospital which had issues in the past. Andrew Millard was unable to confirm as he was not experienced in the health sector but he had had wider discussions with health partners to plan for health facilities within Thurrock.

The Committee was satisfied with the broad principles of the Local Plan discussed and the number of issues that had been raised and considered.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee provided comment on the contents of the report and the approach to preparing a new Local Plan.**

**10. Work Programme**

Noting the number of 'to be confirmed' reports, Councillor Gerrish asked that these be assigned to a meeting date. Andrew Millard replied that he would look at each report and assign to a date. He suggested that the Mode of Transport – Trends and Changes report could be assigned to the 17 March 2020 meeting date.

The Chair mentioned that at the last Full Council meeting, the Portfolio Holder for Housing had mentioned a report regarding new homes that would be heard at Overview and Scrutiny. He sought clarification on which scrutiny committee the report would go to. Andrew Millard confirmed that the report would fall under the remit of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee but understood that there was overlap in some committees on reports. He suggested that he would provide a verbal update to the 21 January 2020

meeting on the related reports from Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Vice-Chair asked that the Parking Strategy report cover the topic of enforcement. Andrew Millard explained that parking enforcement issues were covered under the remit of Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**The meeting finished at 9.00 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**