

Minutes of the Meeting of the Local Development Plan Task Force held on 19 July 2021 at 7.00 pm

Present:	Councillors Alex Anderson, Gary Collins, Martin Kerin, Joycelyn Redsell, James Thandi and Lee Watson
Apologies:	None
In attendance:	Leigh Nicholson, Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection Sean Nethercott, Strategic Lead of Strategic Services Stephen Haines, David Lock Associates Limited Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being live streamed to the Council's website channel.

1. Nomination of Chair

Councillor Redsell was nominated and voted as Chair of the Local Development Plan Task Force for the 2021/22 municipal year.

2. Nomination of Vice-Chair

Councillor Kerin was nominated and voted as Vice Chair of the Local Development Plan Task Force for the 2021/22 municipal year.

3. Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference were agreed.

4. Minutes

The minutes from the Local Development Plan Task Force meeting held on 8 March 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

5. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

6. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

7. Thurrock Town Centres Study

Stephen Haines, David Lock Associates, provided members with a presentation on the Thurrock Town Centre Study. This presentation can be viewed from the following link:

<https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/b18445/Item 8 - Thurrock Town Centres Presentation 19th-Jul-2021 19.00 Local Development Plan Task Force.pdf?T=9>

Councillor Redsell thanked Stephen Haines for the presentation and commented that however much we want to get cars off the roads this was not going to happen. That most people going to Lakeside, particularly to the Lakeside Basin, would not go by bus as going by car was easy and had free parking. Councillor Redsell had reservations about the houses in the middle of the Lakeside Basin and questioned the pollution levels. Councillor Redsell questioned the closure of Village Road in Aveley Town Centre and stated that shutting that road off and to get traffic to travel away from that small area there was not much more that could be done. Stephen Haines stated there were discussions taking place with the planning department for a new link road that would take away a large number of HGVs. That a detailed design would need to be done that would take traffic out or to restrict the traffic and could have the opportunity to enhance the area without having to close Aveley High Street. Stephen Haines agreed that the Lakeside Basin was not the most appropriate for residential but a retail model would need to be undertaken over the next five years to look at future plans for Lakeside, discussions on how the area could be future proofed, have discussions with developers and landowners, look at how retail worked and the mix of users, to look at public transport strategy and to include the walking and cycling networks.

Councillor Redsell stated that accidents at Lakeside caused nightmares for drivers and closed Thurrock down. She commented that the bus transport to Lakeside was good but questioned how many people used it and commented that she did not agree that people would cycle to Lakeside. Stephen Haines stated the local plan would address sustainable modes of public transport.

Councillor Watson questioned what was in the plan to ensure Members and residents that road infrastructures were underway. Stephen Haines stated that consultations were being held with officers, a consultation on transport modes was being undertaken and stated that future plans could not be supported if the infrastructure was not in place.

Councillor Kerin asked for some clarification that the report was not just about housing in town centres. Stephen Haines stated this was the methodology on how the work would be undertaken by looking at potential sites, opportunities and regeneration areas. That another consultation would be appointed to look at health and retail functions. That this was an opportunity for development and for the retail functions and was mindful not to just replace empty retail space with houses but to keep this retail space as well and look how this could be linked into regeneration.

Councillors Collins questioned the meaning of GIS - A geographic information system that creates, manages maps and data. Urban Air Space – property over railway bridges or over network rail land, commercial space with residential above that space.

Councillor Collins agreed that green spaces and open area spaces were a definite and had to understand what people wanted and to improve access to existing spaces.

Councillor Collins referred to brown field sites and that nothing had been indicated on where people would work or how they would commute to work. That this was an opportunity of building industrial estates which we do not seem to be doing but just piling on housing estates and not caring much about the community. Stephen Haines stated that brown field land was an important criteria and from the methodology used, and once that information was available from the Brown Field Register there would be an opportunity to look at those sites and see how they could be redeveloped to ensure houses were built in the right location so that people could live and work in those places where it would be convenient and where they would not need to use their cars and use public transport. That work would be undertaken with Thurrock officers and their wider consultancy teams that where recommendations were made would be in the most connected locations.

Councillors Collins referred to some of examples of the how best a mix of housing and industry had worked and recommended these be used as a model.

Councillor Redsell stated that Thurrock did not want high rise developments as these were not good for communities.

Councillor Kerin referred to the redesigning of town centres and that time needed to be given to assess the future of our high streets to which Stephen Haines agreed that this should not be an immediate reaction but as part of the identifying the high streets needs which would form part of the assessment going forward in terms of retail, commercial role and heritage and what the role and function of those town centres were. This would be part of the process and to also look at sites that had been vacant for a number of years, look at future proofing and this would come from expert advice from consultancies in the retail and commercial prospective.

Councillor Kerin stated that green space was an absolutely premium and going forward there had to be a blanket approach to not build on green spaces within our urban centres. That a more imaginative use of brown field had to be addressed and creating more green spaces in the urban centres. That green space should always be safe and was precious to residents as COVID had highlighted the importance of such green spaces.

Councillor Redsell requested that Members as well as officer would need to be involved as part of the engagement process.

Councillor Watson questioned the estate renewable schemes and where there had been high rises that were in a bad state could these be taken down and reconfigured for estate renewal instead of building on new foot prints. Stephen Haines stated as part of the commission would be to look at new development and would be looking for Officers to map out the regeneration projects and urged Members to highlight any areas but it was not part of this commission to look at detailed estate regeneration. Councillor Watson asked if the Council had an estate renewal programme and questioned whether this had been taken into account into the local plan. Leigh Nicholson stated this piece of work would be built on evidence base and then plans would be put forward to the planning inspectorate. There would be a need to demonstrate how the plans was deliverable and had the evidence available to support this. There would be a need to demonstrate that both green and urban areas had been looked into and that estate renewal would play a part in that but was not part of this commission. Sean Nethercott stated that one of the biggest problems with state renewal was the decanting of people. To allow you to remodel or redevelop you would then need land to replace the housing lost and there were constraints in terms of brown field sites. That when looking at green belt this may have some benefits for example the Flowers Estate, where land around the estate may come forward for development which would enable you to move some people off to re-provide them with better quality housing and then look at remodelling the estate for those people who wished to remain and that this approach needed to happen across the borough and would form part of the bigger regeneration development approach. That in respect of assets the Council owned and had to look at how those sites could be used to help deliver on priorities and how town centres could be used to make them relevant to the town's communities.

Councillor Anderson raised a point on parking and the effect on local businesses that if you increase residential properties in and around town centres the effects of this in 10 years' time if residents are not using public transport may mean that residents would start to park in town centre car parks and would have a real impact on local trade and local businesses. Councillor Anderson acknowledged that the town centres study was in its early stages but noted that he would not want to see any new developments without sufficient parking as this may, further down the line, have a real impact and a negative consequence on small businesses. Stephen Haines agreed that the last thing we wanted to do was to take parking away from those businesses and absolutely mindful of that and to plan intelligently on parking for residential areas. Members all agreed that people liked to have a car and could not see that in five to ten years' time people would rather jump on a tram or a bus. Councillor Redsell stated that Thurrock was not like London.

Councillor Redsell stated there was no mention of the use of river and river taxis and that would take a lot of people off the road including freight and needed to get to that stage swiftly to ensure people had the opportunity to use the river. Stephen Haines stated we had to get the systems and infrastructure in place that would give future generations the choice on what mode of transport they used to commute to work or socially. That the importance of

having a car was still being recognised and this was the opportunity to put those infrastructures in place.

Councillor Redsell reiterated that it was vital the infrastructure was put in place first before any more building as it was the poor infrastructure that closed Thurrock down due to the traffic gridlocks. Stephen Haines stated these were the challenges of the local plan and it was incumbent of them to show what the infrastructure plan would be to put this in place otherwise it would not be deliverable, the challenge to show what infrastructure was needed and how that would support the growth.

8. Thurrock Local Plan - Next Steps

Councillor Redsell thanked Officer for the report in the agenda and stated as part of the key local plan deliverable for 2021 was affordable housing and this was only affordable if residents were able to afford it. Councillor Redsell stated there was no reference to bungalows being built in Thurrock in the report as bungalows could free up those big four bedroom homes that have only one person living in them. Councillor Redsell also stated that the river should be included into the transport needs as this could be a great opportunity for the borough. Sean Nethercott said that bungalows were part of the housing mix and would need to make sure that the Council was delivering different types of housing. In regards to the river there was an approach that would be taken forward which was the managing the growth and there would be an opportunity for significant development and to create open spaces for recreational needs.

Councillor Redsell questioned whether Grangewaters could remain and build two storey flats around the area so residents could continue to enjoy the area. Sean Nethercott stated that Grangewaters would be looked at as a whole to be used as a recreational area and would form part of the local plan process and would be reporting back to the committee later in the year in terms of the options under design.

Councillor Kerin referred to the references in the report on “Green Spaces” and how COVID had demonstrated that green spaces were important and questioned what more could the local plan do to protect those urban green spaces. Sean Nethercott agreed that urban green areas needed to be protected with development needs being met elsewhere and this was the opportunity to remodel, refurbish and improve existing areas that would contribute to meeting the needs of local communities. That connections to the wider green spaces could be created along the urban fringe where significant opportunities would enable this to happen as part of the planning process. All members agreed that green spaces were important and should be protected and agreed that brown field sites should be looked at imaginatively to see what could be achieved. Councillor Kerin referred to the “Return to Offices needed” on page 22 of the report and stated this would not be a council decision but that of those businesses but questioned what could the Council do to support businesses and communities that would be affected from the lack of footfall from people not returning of offices. Sean Nethercott agreed

and stated that this should have formed part of a question in the report. That this was a factor that would need to be taken on board and when planning spaces were created they are adaptable and flexible that could be converted to different uses going forward. That the local plan had to be seen as the first step in that journey to deliver something better for Thurrock.

Councillor Redsell referred to new housing development planning applications that go to Planning Committee should include conditions that green spaces would be finished off. Leigh Nicholson stated that more control over developments would be delivered as part of this scheme.

Councillor Watson stated there were no reference to social housing and agreed there should be especially when considering decanting into social housing to undertake estate renewal. Councillor Watson was pleased to hear that green spaces would be kept but not particularly pleased to hear that Grangewaters would be taken. That the amount of HGV traffic in South Ockendon was unbelievable and that infrastructure could not cope. All members agreed that it was important that investments were made to infrastructure. Councillor Watson referred to the green space that was used at the Culver Centre that would now be lost and gone forever and that should not happen in other areas of green space. Sean Nethercott stated that Grangewaters would not be taken away if it would harm the assets that were there already and would not look to take forward developments in any location across the borough unless the infrastructure could be funded by the development or be funded by a combination of funding from Government or Government agencies. The local plan would also not be signed off by an inspector unless it was deliverable and could be evidenced. That this was a real opportunity to be clear on the development of the borough and what the communities needed.

Councillor Watson stated that social housing and the Thurrock fairness panel should be included into the local plan.

Councillor Kerin stated that the type and quality of housing needed to be considered and questioned whether there was any progress since the last comment made on the 8 March to identify the type of housing. Sean Nethercott stated that the South Essex Strategy Housing Market Assessment study was the top mechanism and technical work to identifying the mix of housing types and housing needs. This work would take up to the Autumn when numbers would be available for the overall housing needs and affordable housing, which would then be broken down into different market segments. Alongside this a piece of work would be undertaken on site assessment to look at all the sites that had been promoted through the local plan process.

Councillor Collins raised several questions on housing allocations, provisions in place for Thurrock residents, building of council houses and whether houses could be set aside to which the chair requested that an item be added to the work programme "Model of Housing" with the appropriate officers attending to present the item.

Councillor Collins then raised several questions on flooding, drainage and power to which the chair requested that an item be added to the work programme “Flooding, Drainage and Power” with the appropriate officers attending to present the item. Councillor Redsell also raised the question as to whether schools were using wind turbines or whether these could be used by schools to which Leigh Nicholson stated that through the local plan these questions could be asked for this plan and in the next plan period and how these initiatives could be involved to future proof the plan.

Councillor Redsell thanked all members for their contribution this evening.

9. Work Programme

Members discussed the work programme and requested an update on when the three “to be confirmed” reports (Update on Sustainable Travel, The Impact of VOCID-19 on the Local Plan and Number of Homes to be delivered) would be presented.

Members requested an item on “Model of Housing” to be added to the work programme. A detailed report to look at the different models and types of new houses, the housing strategy as part of the local plan, clarification on the difference between affordable and specialist housing. Members requested that officers, the estate officer, director of housing and the portfolio holder for housing be invited to attend.

Councillor Collins requested an item on “Flood, Drainage and Power” be added to the work programme. A detailed report on how flood could be prevented on new developments and how power could be generated to accommodate these new developments. Councillor Collins also requested that a specialist be invited to attend.

Councillor Kerin requested an item on “Green Spaces” be added to the work programme. A detailed report to look at the green space strategy and identify what green spaces were currently used for.

The meeting finished at 8.56 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