

SEFTON AREA PARTNERSHIP OF LOCAL COUNCILS
Aintree Village-Formby-Hightown-Ince Blundell-Little Altcar
Lydiate-Maghull-Melling-Sefton-Thornton

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Area Partnership held on Thursday 11th December, 2014 at Maghull Town Hall

PRESENT:

Cllrs M.Coles (Chair, Formby), W.Honeyman (Aintree Village), G.Gaskin (Formby), T.Asbury (Hightown), D.Warren (Hightown), I.Cowell (Clerk, Ince Blundell), D.Russell (Lydiate), M.Byrne (Maghull), G.Lee (Melling), J.Duffy (Clerk, Sefton), M.Duffy (Sefton), A.McKeating (Sefton), W.Rushton (Sefton), C.White (Sefton), K.Hounsell (Thornton), D.Miles (Thornton), Steve Matthews (SMBC Planning)

OBSERVERS:-

A.McIntyre (Clerk, Maghull Town Council)
J.Perkins (Student, Maghull Town Council Placement)

APOLOGIES:

Cllrs S.Kermode (Maghull), R.Baker (Melling), T.Carr (Melling)

The Chair welcomed all present and thanked Steve Matthews for attending to provide an update on the Local Plan. He stated he was keen to gain an insight into the work to be undertaken in the next few weeks in relation to this.

Those present provided brief introductions.

1. GUEST SPEAKER

Steve Matthews – SMBC Planning Department

“Local Plan Update”

1.1 Purpose & Objectives of the Local Plan

The Localism Act, which was introduced in 2011 following the abolition of Regional Planning Structures, placed a legal duty on local planning authorities to engage constructively and actively, in order to strategically address cross-boundary matters in preparation of their Local Plan.

The Local Plan will provide a framework to help SMBC plan positively for the next 15 years, in order to help provide high quality housing, much needed jobs, leisure opportunities and the necessary infrastructure to support this, whilst making the most of the Borough’s resources and minimising harm. Consideration will also be given to environmental and coastal issues.

Sefton MBC has actively engaged with neighbouring districts and key organisations and Partners including the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Environment Agency throughout the preparation of their Local Plan on key strategic matters. This included the preparation of joint evidence and studies where necessary, and attending regular sub-regional meetings. Notably Neighbouring Boroughs are also having difficulties in meeting Government set targets for future housing which are based on future population, housing need, economic growth and market projections, so they too are having to consider the use of Green Belt land. SMBC are bound to follow Government set guidance for calculating their future housing need figure, but they have opted to go with the lowest possible figure they feel they can defend at the examination stage. It is projected that SMBC will need to provide 618 per annum to meet future housing need, which must incorporate

affordable housing to enable people to get a first step on the housing ladder. For the last 30 years SMBC have built just 470 homes per annum. There have been discussions with landowners, but there is no contingency in place should landowners decide against leasing their land. There is however a slight buffer should selected sites not achieve their density. SMBC can only sell the Plan to Central Government on the proviso that the majority of sites are available.

SMBC's Local Plan does not however include the Peel Holdings Switch Island submission, since preliminary studies have not yet been undertaken in relation to this. As such SMBC has committed to an early review of the Local Plan for this reason.

1.2 Progress & recommendations so far

- Local Plan & Media Report to Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee - 9/12/14
- Relevant background studies undertaken where necessary
- Discussions with relevant Landowners
- Previous Public Consultation exercises and meetings held

1.3 Neighbourhood Plans & their implication on the Local Plan

Neighbourhood Plans offer a means for communities to have their say on proposed developments within their area. Their function is to guide development rather than block it. However it is not known if Neighbourhood Plans will be voted forward effectively when they go to a Referendum. The problem being; if the Local Plan doesn't change materially, it could be that Neighbourhood Plans do not 'marry up'. It is the publication of the Local Plan, which is hindering the progress of Neighbourhood Plans.

Maghull Town Council currently have concerns about proposals for the development of the Moreton's Dairy site in neighbouring Lydiate. As Lydiate do not have a Neighbourhood Plan, Maghull Town Council fear the impact this proposed development could have on them due to the proximity of the proposed development. Interestingly SMBC would not support 1 site being split between 2 Neighbourhood Plans.

1.4 Consultation Process

Any comments made on the Local Plan during the 8 week Consultation period (30/1/15→8/3/15) will be collated by SMBC, who will also draw up a list of key issues, then forward these to the Secretary of State for consideration in April/May 2015.

Steve Matthews was keen to stress that any comments that have previously been submitted and considered would need to be resubmitted since the submission of the Revised Plan symbolises a fresh start. Parish and Town Councils are urged to evidence any relevant reasons should they disagree with aspects of the Revised Plan, and to make alternate suggestions.

Developers will also have the option to make representations during the examination stage. They can apply for a judicial review should the Inspector disregard their Appeal, but this is a costly process.

Admittedly this will be a difficult thing to communicate to local people when population figures are falling. It is the reduction in household size, which has led to the need for more affordable housing. This is due to the fact people are living longer, or living alone, inward international migration and marriage breakups are also key factors too. The average household size is just 2.4 people. As such, future housing need is more related to household change as opposed population change.

Steve Matthews was keen to stress that the Public Meeting stage has long been concluded, and the Local Plan will be published on the SMBC website for perusal.

1.5 Timetable for Submission & Finalisation

- Submission of Revised Local Plan to Planning Committee - 7/1/15

- Approval of Revised Local Plan - **22/1/15**
- Publication of Revised Local Plan for Public Comment - **30/1/15→8/3/15**
- SMBC to forward any comments raised during Public Consultation to Secretary of State for consideration - **April/May 2015**
- Final copy of Revised Local Plan to Inspectorate for consideration - **May/June 2015**

1.6 Communication

The Revised Plan will be published on SMBC's website for perusal and comment during the 8 week Consultation period.

1.7 Questions/Comments

- (a) How has the SMBC future housing need figure been calculated?
This figure has been calculated based on 2008 (pre-recession) population and housing figures, and is based on a starting point, not an end point. The start point being 399, then 4.6% was added to this figure to account for vacant and 2nd homes, which then gave a figure of 562. Population, demographic and economic growth factors were then considered; similarly an additional 10% was then added to account for market factors (i.e. housing costs, unemployment, etc). All these factors considered led to the final future housing need projection figure of 618 new homes per annum.
- (b) It was queried whether the Local Plan would be produced in a hard copy, since not everybody is able to access a computer and a hard copy is often easier to refer to.
Steve admitted that this had not been considered. He sees no reason why Parish and Town Councils could not be provided with a hard copy of the Local Plan upon request.
- (c) Reference was made to the draft Local Plan, which suggests Neighbourhood characteristics should be considered when deciding upon 'housing type mix'.
Steve stressed that was merely a 'rule of thumb'. In considering 'housing type mix' the characteristics of individual sites, and also their economic viability would need to be considered.
- (d) The potential problem with the proposed timing for the release of the Local Plan in the run up to the Elections was raised.
The timing for releasing any important document is never good! Notably this process has been ongoing since the last Election in 2009, and significant changes have taken place at a national level since then.
- (e) As 30% of the proposed housing figure is for affordable housing, it was queried who will buy these houses in view of the difficulty of securing a mortgage given wages are not rising at the same rate as house prices? Also Developers prefer to build larger houses, which are more lucrative.
It is likely to be Housing Associations that build these smaller properties, which have the potential to be adapted at a later date should housing trends change.
- (f) The issue of infrastructure was raised.
*Developers will be asked to contribute towards the costs of providing the necessary infrastructure required to support the proposed development, i.e. sewerage, Schools, transport, local health care, etc. School populations are monitored annually by the Education Authority as per the **Infrastructure Delivery Plan**, which in turn would help identify exact infrastructure requirements. The Inspector will examine the Infrastructure Delivery Plan in considering the viability of proposed developments. Steve also stated that regular discussions are held with utility providers, Health Authorities, etc. The Chair was keen to stress this is a vital point which is very often neglected. He also raised his disappointment that Parish and Town Councils were seemingly deliberately excluded from the aforementioned discussions, as Jane Gowing did not consider it appropriate that we attend.*

- ⇒ *The closure of Schools in the Bootle and Thornton areas was raised, given many new housing developments have already been undertaken there, and further developments are proposed.*
- ⇒ *The matter of the continued flooding in the Melling area for the past 17 years resulting from new housing developments in the area was raised.*
- (g) Given Port II opens next year, and the potential impact this could have on traffic, it was queried whether there were any plans in place to deal with this?
SMBC are in agreement that it will be necessary to upgrade the access to the Port. There is a Port Access Study, which is due to be published in Spring 2015. This Study suggests improvements to Dunnings Bridge Road, amongst other road-based improvements. The Local Growth Fund has made £5.1 million available for improvements to Junction 1 of the M58 and for the A565 Derby Road.
The Chair stressed that our views regarding transport and infrastructure must be taken into consideration. He suggested a combined measured response to the published document, and representation from SMBC's Transport section at a future meeting.

1.8 Conclusion

The Chair thanked Steve Matthews for attending, and stressed that the comments and concerns raised at the meeting must be considered.

In conclusion Steve said although he accepts that SMBC have a job to do in implementing the Local Plan, he accepts all communities will not readily accept it. SMBC wish to avoid speculative applications for development of Greenbelt land, and are not unsympathetic towards this issue. Steve offered to discuss the implications of such development, and to guide our member Councils through the framework and process. A temporary replacement has been proposed to fill Jane Gowing's now vacant post, although as yet this post has not been approved to be filled on a permanent basis.

2. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next ordinary meeting will take place on **Thursday 15th January, 2015** in the Council Chamber at Maghull Town Hall commencing at 7.30pm.