

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

MONDAY 23RD SEPTEMBER 2024, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors S. Ammar (Chairman), B. Kumar (Vice-Chairman), A. Bailes, R. Bailes, S. J. Baxter, J. Clarke, S. R. Colella, A. M. Dale, J. Elledge, S. M. Evans, D. J. A. Forsythe, E. M. S. Gray, R. J. Hunter, M. Marshall, K.J. May, P. M. McDonald, B. McEldowney, S. T. Nock, D. J. Nicholl, S. R. Peters, J. Robinson, S. A. Robinson, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke, J. D. Stanley, K. Taylor, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Mr P. Carpenter, Mr. G. Revans, Mrs. C. Felton, Mrs. R. Bamford, Mr. M. Dunphy, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Mrs J. Gresham

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TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E. Gray, D. Hopkins, C. Hotham, H. Jones and R. Lambert.

The Chairman took the opportunity to welcome Councillor J. Clarke as a member of the Council following his election as Ward Member for Sidemoor, at the recent by-election.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

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TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 17TH JULY 2024

The minutes from the Council meeting held on 17th July 2024 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 17th July 2024 be approved as a correct record.

RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSED REFORMS TO THE NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK AND OTHER CHANGES TO THE PLANNING SYSTEM

As the Response to Proposed Reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system was a highly technical report, it was proposed by Councillor B. Kumar that the Standing Orders be suspended until the close of this meeting in order to permit the Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager to speak during consideration of this report. This would provide the opportunity for the Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager to respond to any questions Members might have. This was seconded by Councillor K. May and approved by Members.

Councillor K. Taylor proposed the approval of the Response to the Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system report and this was seconded by Councillor K. May.

In presenting the report, Members were informed that the appendix to this report was Bromsgrove District Council's response to the proposals for the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The response had been reached following several consultations with all Members. As a result of these consultations, Members had provided detailed responses to all questions included in the consultation document provided by Central Government. These responses were to be provided to Government by 24th September 2024. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services thanked all Members for their engagement during this process. Members also took the opportunity to thank the Officers, the Assistant Director for Planning, Leisure and Culture Services and the Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager for all their hard work and technical expertise.

Members were reminded that should they wish to provide any further responses, either individually or on behalf of their political group, they were permitted to do so. However, these would not be included in the Council's response to the proposed reforms. It was suggested that should the Council not provide a response then this might lead Central Government to wrongly assume that Bromsgrove District Council agreed with all of the proposals, which it did not.

The response reflected several areas of concern with the proposed NPPF particularly in the areas of 'need' and 'affordability' and it was

highlighted that any reforms should not be considered 'as one size fits all'.

During the presentation of the report, it was noted that further commentary would be added to the document presented to Members at question nineteen within the response. This question was in respect of the number of houses that were to be built as part of the proposed reforms of the NPPF. It was hoped that the wording would strengthen the Council's response in respect of the dissatisfaction of the extra number of houses and future use of the Green Belt for the building of houses. The additional wording was reported as follows:

'With this in mind Bromsgrove District Council wishes to express significant concern and formally object to the outcomes of the new standard method. The addition of 318 dwellings per annum over the already challenging standard method numbers is not something the Council can support. Through the emerging Bromsgrove Local Plan, the Council are exploring options to provide some much needed new housing whilst also protecting the Green Belt as much as possible. We feel that the ability to now do this has been compromised, and the Green Belt will be much reduced as an outcome.'

It was stated that as Bromsgrove consisted of eighty-nine per cent Green Belt land, if the proposals of extra houses were to go ahead then this would affect the amount of Green Belt land used for house building in the future. It was noted that the proposals would almost certainly affect the Council's ability to implement its Local Plan.

Following the presentation of the report, Members debated the response to the proposals in detail and commented that the scale of reforms was unprecedented and if introduced, the landscape of Bromsgrove would change considerably and look fundamentally different. There was a robust debate on the location of any potential new developments should the proposals be introduced as suggested by the reforms. Some Members felt that the burden was likely to fall on Bromsgrove Town as historically that had been the case. However, some Members felt that other areas in the District would almost certainly feel some significant impact.

Members acknowledged that this had been a difficult exercise for Officers to undertake and that the consultation had included how Members could shape and consult on wider issues in respect of the proposed NPPF reforms. The resulting documentation had provided a comprehensive response, including transparency in respect of any

calculations and data, and clearly outlined to residents the rationale behind the Council's response.

Councillors raised and welcomed the Council's challenge of the housing number multiplier. This challenge had been included in the response document at question seventeen.

Although there was some discussion about the concerns in respect of the numbers of houses to be built, it was acknowledged by Members that affordable houses were needed within Bromsgrove, however these should be built in the most appropriate places without using all Green Belt land.

Affordable Housing was discussed in further detail. It was noted that there was a forty per cent target on all new housing developments and that Planning Officers tried to ensure that developers adhered to these targets. However, these targets were often not delivered. There needed to be a commitment to increasing the number of social houses in addition to more powers being given to Councils and social housing providers for them to build more affordable housing. It was thought that the proposed reforms did not permit this.

In terms of specific questions within the response document the following questions were highlighted:

Question 14 – Do you have any other suggestions relating to the proposals in this chapter?

Members were keen that the response to this question was strengthened in order to reduce the number of changes to conditions that developers made in respect of infrastructure changes as part of developments, particularly in cross-border infrastructure. Officers explained that the usual way to manage infrastructure issues would be through the development management process for breach of conditions. NPPF would only outline what infrastructure was secured to that development if it was appropriate for that development. It was suggested that the kind of detail suggested as above would not be included in the NPPF as it was too detailed.

Question 59 - Do you agree with the proposals to retain references to well-designed buildings and places, but remove references to 'beauty' and 'beautiful' and to amend paragraph 138 of the existing Framework?

It was noted that included within the Council's response was the reference to 'beauty' and 'beautiful' being removed from the existing Framework. Members requested that some commentary be included in the response regarding increased engagement of residents early in the development of the Local Plan. This would result in gaining an accurate understanding of what residents wanted particularly in respect of the numbers of new houses being built in an area. It was thought that this would be of particular use for the future. Officers explained that question fifty-nine (as detailed above) did not deal with public consultation on the Local Plan. This was set out in a statement of Public engagement in respect of the Local Plan. Officers further explained that it was hard to quantify what 'beauty' and 'beautiful' meant in terms of design. However, when engagement and consultation took place with residents in respect of the Local Plan these areas would be covered regarding any new design policies the Council proposed.

During the discussion of this item, it was requested that further clarification be given in respect of the multiplier used at Question seventeen of the response documents. It was explained that some Members of the had expressed some concern in respect of the proposed multiplier. Currently the NPPF used the multiplier of 0.25 per cent, however by increasing the multiplier to six percent, as per the proposals, it would result in a much higher number of houses projected as being needed in Bromsgrove District. The new six per cent multiplier was queried as included in the response to the proposed reforms.

Further clarification was requested on how a multiplier was reached. The Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager explained that the multiplier looked at the relationship between housing affordability and earnings. Affordability of housing was calculated using the ratio between what people earned and house prices. It was explained that when house prices were high in an area and the earnings were low then the affordability ratio was considerable. In Bromsgrove, house prices were high, however residents within the District were not necessarily working in Bromsgrove and were working in other areas where wages were higher e.g. Birmingham. This meant that those who lived and worked in Bromsgrove tended to earn less than those who lived in Bromsgrove but did not work there. This resulted in those who lived and worked within Bromsgrove finding it more difficult to access the housing market within the District. It was suggested within the response that a data set more appropriate for Bromsgrove should be applied when using the multiplier.

Following clarification from Officers, Members were keen to express their significant concerns in respect of the proposed increase in numbers of houses to be built and the impact on the District and Green Belt. It was also raised that investment for infrastructure linked to any increase in housing numbers such as transport links, schools and access to healthcare including hospitals, must be included when looking at the increase in numbers of housing and scaled accordingly. This would help to mitigate the impact on the District where transport in particular was already difficult.

It was also raised that that engagement with residents should be undertaken for any proposed future large developments within the District, in order to help understand the areas of potential infrastructure needs in these areas. During the discussions it was also noted that there needed to be a clear vision when looking at planning in the future which included not only the above areas of infrastructure but aspirations and upskilling of residents to help decrease unemployment levels and to provide those who already lived within the District with adequate and affordable homes.

There was a robust discussion regarding the necessity for holding an Extraordinary Council meeting in respect of this matter, particularly in light of the large number of cross-party Strategic Planning Steering Group (SPSG) meetings that had already taken place. Responses to the proposed reforms had been discussed in great detail at the SPSG meetings. Some Members expressed the view that it was important to inform the public about the Council's response to ensure transparency. However, it was suggested that it might have been more appropriate to hold an Extraordinary Council meeting at the start of the consultation period rather than at the end. Clarification was requested from the Monitoring Officer regarding the timeline and process when calling an Extraordinary Council meeting. It was explained that the Extraordinary Council meeting had been called in accordance with the Council's Procedure Rules including rules in relation to holding meetings during the pre-election period.

Members highlighted projections in population growth within the District, which was reported as being three point five per cent. If nine thousand houses were to be built, this would result in a disproportionate number of houses versus the growth in population.

The impact on building on the Green Belt was once again raised and the potential that this might cause irreversible and significant environmental impacts in the future. It was noted that the reclassification of Green Belt

to Grey Belt blurred the lines between protected areas and areas that were more appropriate for development. This would leave residents within the District with less access to green spaces in the future.

Some Members expressed concerns that it was difficult for young people to get onto the property ladder within Bromsgrove and that this was likely to become more difficult in the future. Although it was acknowledged that there was a need to build more housing, the Government needed to ensure that the reforms would result in tackling the housing crisis in an appropriate way. Such as providing Councils with powers and funding to build more affordable housing which met the specific needs of residents of each area.

Reference was made to some historic work undertaken in 2018 by Officers and consultants in respect of the challenges faced within Bromsgrove if more houses were not built. As part of this work, it had been reported that if these houses were not built it would impact greatly on the cost of housing in future years. It was noted that this had now come to fruition as the average cost to buy a house within the District had risen significantly.

Members stated that there were over one million properties with planning permission in place due to be built currently across the UK and it was up to developers to ensure that these houses were delivered effectively rather than looking to build even more homes.

During the course of the Council meeting, Councillor J. Clarke was welcomed by a number of Members following his recent election as the new Member for Sidemoor Ward. Good wishes were also extended to Mr. D. G. Stewart, former Ward Member for Sidemoor who had recently resigned due to ill-health.

Members were keen to thank Officers for their work on the Council's response to the proposed reforms to the NPPF. It was reiterated that the Council's response had been a detailed piece of work and as a result the Council's position in respect of the proposed reforms was clear and well-considered.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Standing Orders be suspended until the close of this Council meeting to permit the Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager to speak on the Response to Proposed Reforms to the

National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system report.

- 2) the response to the 'Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system' at Appendix A be submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) including the additional wording as detailed in the preamble above.

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TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE HEAD OF LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC AND PROPERTY SERVICES PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING AND WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING

There was no Urgent Business on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 7.11 p.m.

Chairman