

COUNCIL



30 MAY 2013 - 4:00PM

PRESENT: Councillor G G R Booth, Councillor D Broker, Councillor M G Bucknor, Councillor Mrs V M Bucknor, Councillor T R Butcher, Councillor J R Chambers, Councillor J F Clark, Councillor D W Connor, Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor M F J Cotterell, Councillor Mrs C R Cox, Councillor M J Curtis, Councillor J R Farmer, Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor S Garratt, Councillor D Hodgson, Councillor P Jolley, Councillor S J E King, Councillor K G Mayor, Councillor Mrs K F Mayor, Councillor A K Melton, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor Mrs F S Newell, Councillor D C Oliver, Councillor C C Owen, Councillor D R Patrick, Councillor T E W Quince, Councillor C J Seaton, Councillor R Skoulding, Councillor D Stebbing, Councillor W Sutton, Councillor G Swan, Councillor P A Tunley.

APOLOGIES: Councillor M I Archer, Councillor P Hatton, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor M J Humphrey, Councillor B M Keane, Councillor F H Yeulett

10/13 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUCEMENT

Armed Forces Day - Monday 24 June at 11am Fenland District Council will be hosting a flag raising and parade of standards in the front car park at Fenland Hall followed by refreshments in the Council Chamber. This will be in honour of all our armed forces currently serving and also all of our veterans.

The Chairman reminded Members this was an Extraordinary meeting of the Council and as such the only business to be discussed is that set out in the meeting summons.

11/13 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Chairman called upon Mr Maxey to pose his question in relation to the Core Strategy to Councillor Alan Melton, Leader of the Council.

Mr Maxey stated the following:

'Can you please explain in the light of all the background studies on housing need, demographics, housing land availability, criteria studies relating to specific sites and areas, how the proposal to amend the draft Core Strategy by deletion of part of the proposed allocation, thereby leaving proposals that are deficient in overall supply for the district as a whole and March in particular, leaves Fenland with a Planning Policy that the Council can claim is sound in their submissions to the EIP.

This is not about the specific site; it is about the issue of policy and principle, and ensuring transparency within planning. There have been lots of responses to the consultation and now the Council is seeking to single out one aspect; the Core Strategy should either be revisited as a whole or the original be kept as intended. If the revised policy is adopted then officers will be put in a position to say that policies that were originally sound are now not and that one area is being favoured which also has a knock on effect to the district as a whole. There is a need for effective delivery of housing therefore where would the extra housing appear. I suggest the Council should

follow what the Corporate Director stated twenty four hours before the Leader announced the proposed changes and that there should be no change, the Core Strategy should go to the Inspector and the decision be made by them. This is an issue of principle and will delay the process therefore it should stay as it is.'

Councillor Melton responded thanking Mr Maxey for his question, with the following:

If the motion succeeds, and the North East allocation is removed, some further adjustment to the plan will be made (as set out in the motion papers). The effect of these changes would mean the overall target for both March and Fenland would remain constant. These changes will be consulted upon for six weeks towards the end of June.

Councillor Melton made a further point stating that earlier it had been suggested that he and he alone had made this decision; this was not the case. When asked to look into this further by March Members he had thought it his duty as Leader to look into the issues; all March members, Corporate Management Team and planning were consulted before the press announcement was sent out; he also added that it was Members that made decisions and no one else.

The Chairman invited Mr Maxey to ask his further question in relation to the timescales for submitting questions to Council meetings from members of the public.

Mr Maxey asked the following:

Can you please advise, given the contents of the agenda reports for both cabinet and council meetings are not available to the general public until seven working days before the meeting, why the timescale for putting questions to Councillors is also seven working days, such that if a question is about an agenda item, it effectively prevents a question being phrased with the benefit of the information within the agenda report. Is this a deliberate ploy to avoid questions, and would it not be sensible to vary the timescale for questions to at least 24 hours after the agenda papers were available.

The Chairman responded:

The Public questions procedure was introduced by Council on 25 February 2010, prior to this there was no formal right for members of the public to directly address the Council or Cabinet on matters of interest to them. The changes proposed at that time came from a working group set up by the Leader the recommendation being that there would be a right introduced for members of the public to put questions to members directly in a public open forum.

Consideration was given at that time as to whether or not this would be a right to address the specific agenda items or an overall freestanding right. The groups view was that there should not be a limitation on the public to just those items on the agenda; instead members of the public can ask a question on any issue to do with the Council's functions at any time. The deadline for questions to be submitted was therefore deliberately set to enable these to be placed on the agenda should any be submitted; rather than it being set later and being a right to address members on a specific agenda item once the agenda was published.

The Chairman called upon Mr Watson to pose his question in relation to the Core Strategy to Councillor Alan Melton, Leader of the Council.

Mr Watson asked the following stating:

He was a long term resident of March speaking on behalf of 700 members of the public who had objected due to the traffic congestion at Station Road railway crossing. Train movements will

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increase within the next 20 years from 100 to 240 and freight trains which are presently 24 a day will increase to 48 starting this year due to railway improvements in the Midlands. Even without building any extra housing the traffic congestion will get worse at this junction and therefore seems illogical to propose any extra housing north of the crossing. The prison is also located the north side of the crossing whilst the emergency services are situated on the south side.

The field should remain as it would be a public disgrace to commit the playing field to bricks and concrete and therefore supports the motion to delete this from the Core Strategy.

Why did the District Council allocate 80 acres of land for housing development when there were so many objections from residents who presented sound planning reasons why the area was unsuitable?

Councillor Melton responded stating:

The Council is in the process of preparing a Core Strategy for Fenland which must identify land for new development for the next 20 years. A large number of possible sites were carefully considered across the district. These were consulted upon and sites were chosen based on a wide range of evidence. This evidence included careful consideration of the views of residents. The following item will specifically re-look at the allocation and it is recommended that the allocation be deleted.

The Chairman invited Mr Watson to pose his further question in relation to the Core Strategy.

Mr Watson stated:

The Council had not taken into account the traffic problems to accommodate the level of proposed housing as this would generate many more cars to which the Transport Strategy contains no proposals to address and schools are already at capacity. More housing is needed but has to be within constraints and at little cost to the council tax payer; this allocation will severely affect the quality of life for March residents and therefore request that Fenland considers reducing the housing growth.

Why is the District Council proposing to allocate land for a minimum of 4200 houses in the town when there are so many constraints to such large scale development?

Councillor Melton responded stating:

The Council is required by government policy to identify what its housing need is for the next 20 years and identify new land for development accordingly. March, as a key Market Town in the district is well placed to take its share of that growth across Fenland. Following a consultation with a wide range of infrastructure providers (such as the Environment Agency, the Highways Authority and many more) there is no overriding reason why March cannot accommodate the level of proposed new homes.

The Council will make it clear to developers and those that have an interest that development will not be allowed without the necessary infrastructure being put in place as there is a need to ensure that March grows on par with other market towns within Cambridgeshire as a whole.

At a recent district council network meeting he had been informed that the Inspector was concerned at the speed and quality of Core Strategies but where councils had reduced the number of proposed houses, the Inspector had returned them and asked councils to rethink them. There is a danger that the Inspector will add back any housing taken out and increase the figure, but Fenland's proposal is for sustained development for the future.

Councillor Melton thanked Mr Watson for his questions.

12/13 FENLAND CORE STRATEGY – MOTION SUBMITTED TO COUNCIL

Councillor Melton presented the Fenland Core Strategy - Motion submitted to Council report, formally reading and proposing the motion; this was seconded by Councillor Seaton.

Councillor Booth asked for an amendment to the Motion proposed by Councillor Melton; proposing the following change to definitions to the Core Strategy under Policy CS3 to replace the current definitions for the areas:

Limited Growth Villages - In these settlements a small amount of development and new service provision will be encouraged and permitted in order to support their continued sustainability, but less than would be appropriate in a Growth Village. Such development may be appropriate as a small village extension of up to nine dwellings (or twelve if it includes affordable housing units) as well as other forms of development of a similar scale - Coates, Elm, Friday Bridge, Leverington and Parson Drove.

Small Villages - In these settlements, development will be of a very limited nature, and will be limited in scale to infilling of single or a group of no more than three dwellings (or four if it includes affordable housing units) or a small business opportunity - Benwick, Christchurch, Eastrea, Gorefield, Guyhirn, Murrow, Newton, Turves and Tydd St Giles.

The Chairman asked for nine seconders for the motion to be carried; two seconders voted therefore the amendment to the motion fell.

Councillor Booth proposed a second amendment to the motion:

That the Council develops a policy that allows for local lettings to be agreed for developments within the rural villages. This will incorporate the principle of hierarchy of suitability of local lettings as previously set out in the exceptions policy. This will enable people to remain within the villages they have lived and which will promote community cohesion and deliver economic benefits.

The Chairman asked for nine seconders for the motion to be carried; three seconders voted therefore the amendment to the motion fell.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Booth for his two amendments to the motion and then opened the motion for debate.

Councillor Melton commented on Councillor Booth's proposed amendments stating he was fully aware of looking for exception sites in rural areas and had asked both Councillors Jolley and Cotterell to look at the Council's land holdings, particularly within the villages, that could be brought forward as extension sites which are inbuilt within the criteria; villages should grow organically and be determined by local issues and needs.

Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked for an explanation with regard to the question posed by Mr Maxey about the timescales for submitting questions to Council stating that this should be looked at again as it gives no time at all. Councillor Melton stated this was a good point and that the constitution was about to be looked at again and if Councillor Mrs Bucknor wished to feed into that, then her points would be considered.

Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated she would have like to have seen a map showing where the proposed areas were with regard to the extra housing that would be generated from the deletion of the North East March allocation. Councillor Melton explained this consideration had been looked

at and if proposed areas were not put forward then there was a danger the Inspector would override the decision. Councillor Melton stated he had been assured that there was capacity for the areas allocated and potential growth and Fenland would be doubling its efforts to find exception sites.

Councillor Tunley stated he was pleased the motion had been put forward as he had fought long and hard for the removal of the allocation. He stated it was suggested in the report that if the motion was to be defeated then the Council will find the allocation at a public hearing but there is no similar comment if the motion succeeded and therefore asked for confirmation of support. Councillor Melton gave his assurance that if the motion was adopted today then it would become council policy. Councillor Tunley thanked Councillor Melton for the assurance and asked if the Inspector was duty bound to be on the side of the council to which Councillor Melton confirmed this was correct. Councillor Tunley stated that the grounds to support the motion were suitable to which Councillor Melton stated he agreed.

Councillor Booth stated he supported the motion, to which he had first raised concerns about at Overview and Scrutiny Committee and that there were clear planning reasons that this allocation was not appropriate; he urged Members to support the Motion. Councillor Melton thanked Councillor Booth for his support and stated he realised that that Councillor Booth had previously raised concerns and hoped this demonstrated true localism.

Councillor Mrs French welcomed the proposal that showed Fenland did listen to the people of March and stated that she would have like to have seen the 450 totally reallocated but realised this could not be done; she fully supported the Motion and thanked the Leader for listening to the people of March.

Councillor Farmer stated it was an interesting situation and inevitable as a result of the planning process. Allocation is needed as the population is expanding and if Fenland do not make a decision as to where this will be then the Inspector will make the decision resulting in the loss of localism and allocations could become unpopular. Previously allocations have been on the edge of towns resulting in growth in layers which can swallow up valued areas of land; as explained by Mr Watson the Estover Playing Fields are valuable and this would not be the correct area of allocation as the town would lose a valuable facility. There is a need to search for allocation areas further afield; therefore Councillor Farmer stated he supported the motion as he believed it was the correct decision to be made.

Councillor Melton thanked Councillor Farmer and agreed that too much building had taken place at the extremities of the town centres and therefore he had asked for areas to be identified to increase the rate of building nearer to the town centres as more footfall is needed within them. Councillor Melton stated he did not want to see a development on the edge of a village either and therefore the rural communities need to be protected.

Councillor Booth asked for clarification as to whether the sites to be brought forward within towns would include commercial or social housing to which Councillor Melton stated it would include all sites, even looking at former commercial premises to convert and shops that have stood empty for years.

It was DECIDED that the Motion is carried.

(It was recorded that Councillor Owen abstained from voting on this item.)