

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Planning Committee held at Council Chamber Blackdown House on 9 December 2019**

#### **Attendance list at end of document**

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.36 pm

In the absence of Councillor Hookway the Committee agreed to Councillor Howe being Vice Chairman for the meeting.

#### **31 Public speaking**

Three members of the public commented on item 36 – Delivery of the Axminster Urban Extension as follows:

Mrs Bernie Steadman speaking as a resident of Axminster and on behalf of other residents said that it would be unacceptable to go ahead with the development of some of the sections without the relief road. She questioned how 200 houses could be built in a space originally recommended for 70 and questioned how many of the houses would be affordable. 200 houses would lead to more vehicles using the B3261 road which the relief road was supposed to relieve and highlighted the difficulty of vehicles turning right at the junction would lead to more vehicles travelling through the town and questioned how this would relieve congestion. Mrs Steadman said the infrastructure in the town centre was barely coping and the failure of the masterplan must be addressed before the agreement to build new houses was made. Mrs Steadman said residents did not want poorly planned unsustainable developments in Axminster and said too many houses in too small spaces would equal problems not solutions.

Mrs Hilary Kirkcaldie speaking on behalf of Axminster Town Council supported the proposal as set out in the Local Plan with the relief road preferably being delivered ahead of housing and addressed the need for more affordable housing to maintain the viability of local services. She said it was a long term view of the Town Council to widen the service road through the housing area to act as a relief road to take traffic away from Stoney Lane which is the access road to the Primary and Secondary Schools to improve road safety. She also raised concerns that there was only one road out of Axminster to the north and if an accident were to happen would cause serious gridlock. Mrs Kirkcaldie said Axminster Town Council were aware of the problems with Weycroft Bridge and the Raymonds Hill A35 junction and said these were not reasons to reject a relief road. Mrs Kirkcaldie said the Town Council remained adamant that adequate land must be allocated for employment and if the development was not undertaken as set out in the Local Plan a severe disservice would be done to future generations of Axminster residents.

Mr Paul Hayward speaking on behalf of the joint Parish Councils of Chardstock and All Saints in his capacity as Parish Clerk reiterated the parish councils' earlier vehement opposition to the masterplan on 29 January 2019 which lacked merit, vision and ambition. The Parish Councils' said the masterplan failed to address Weycroft Bridge which divided Axminster from the northern parts of East Devon and raised concerns that if the bridge failed Axminster would be cut off. The masterplan failed to address that the residents of Chardstock, All Saints, Hawkchurch and Membury were wholly reliant on the services in Axminster and together with the strained infrastructure would be unable to cope with the rising population. The joint councils also wished to express their frustration and anger that their elected Ward Member had been excluded from discussions.

32 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee held on 22 October 2019 were confirmed as a true record.

33 **Declarations of interest**

Item 36. Delivery of the Axminster Urban Extension.  
Councillor Ian Hall, Personal, County Councillor for Axminster Division.

Item 36. Delivery of the Axminster Urban Extension.  
Councillor Paul Hayward, Personal, Clerk to Chardstock and All Saints Parish Councils.

Item 37. Draft Affordable Housing Supplementary Document.  
Councillor Sam Hawkins, Personal, Acquainted to some of the contributors through employment.

34 **Matters of urgency**

There were no matters of urgency discussed.

35 **Confidential/exempt item(s)**

There were no items that officers recommended should be dealt with requiring exclusion of the public or press.

36 **Delivery of the Axminster Urban Extension**

The Service Lead – Planning Strategy and Development Management presented an updated report on the Delivery of the Axminster Urban Extension following the endorsed masterplan by Members at Strategic Planning Committee on 29 January 2019 on the basis of receiving £10m Housing Infrastructure Funding from Homes England to help deliver the relief road. Members were advised that Homes England had declared the funding available was classed as recoverable grant funding and had to be repaid by the development to the council. Members noted that officers had fundamentally disagreed with the developments ability to repay that money on the basis of Homes England valuation of the land.

The report to Members considered the re-assessment of the options for the delivery of the Axminster Urban Extension in light of the HIF funding being withdrawn by Homes England and Members noted the masterplan was undeliverable in its current form.

Ward Members discussed the following:

- Councillor Hall said the masterplan which had been endorsed by members on 29 January 2019 with the forward delivery of the relief road was good for Axminster and East Devon and would make Axminster a resilient town and complimented Axminster through health, wellbeing and education. He raised concerns that Axminster needed to increase in population to remain resilient for the future and addressed concerns that the secondary school had already lost its sixth form due to the lack of foot fall and its primary school admissions were decreasing. He highlighted the importance of the relief road on the basis of the A303

improvements between Ilminster and Honiton had been put on hold which would result in an increase in traffic through Axminster and addressed that Highways England needed to look at the safety issues of the A35 road.

- Councillor Jackson said her community felt deeply disenfranchised and that the masterplan had been the single biggest concern raised by the public since the local election and a fresh approach to the masterplan was needed. She said Axminster had accepted the development of houses on the promise of improved infrastructure, job opportunities and retail regeneration but so far this has not materialised. Affordable housing was already up for reduction even before the planning application had been approved and addressed the need for more affordable housing and questioned the current council house waiting list for Axminster. Cllr Jackson said Axminster residents were horrified on the prediction of major risks to affordable housing, employment space and the consideration of proceeding without the crucial infrastructure in place and also feel unheard with their environmental concerns. Finally Cllr Jackson said the masterplan had been missold to Axminster and residents were assured that the relief road was a priority but that the report shows the relief road was a smoke screen to deliver unwanted development in an already overdeveloped town.
- Councillor Moulding said the north south relief road was a key item of infrastructure and vital for the future of Axminster and that it was expected that the road was to be delivered upfront in its entirety. He addressed the importance for the north eastern urban extension of Axminster to support up to 800 new jobs for the area which was a vital component for the town to enable the schools to flourish and the potential to provide a wide range of health and wellbeing needs for Axminster. Cllr Moulding suggested that paragraph 4 in the report should have been more specific to inform Members that the proposed £10m housing infrastructure fund grant to the council would support the road when it had been repaid by the developers and that £10m would ultimately remain with the council for investment for the provision of affordable housing. Councillor Moulding suggested looking again at option 2 – Affordable Housing Discount which would allow work to proceed with the HIF funding and agreed with revisiting the masterplan as suggested in paragraph 14. He raised concerns with the suggested piece meal delivery of parts of the site. He said he recognised the need to protect the five year land supply but as Ward Member could not support this course of action.

Points raised during discussion of the delivery of the Axminster Urban Extension included:

- The need for Axminster to expand with the relief road.
- The £10m funding is vital for the delivery of the relief road.
- Concerns raised that if the five year land supply was lost this type of development could happen.
- Axminster needs a Neighbourhood Plan to help shape the design, needs and how it is done.
- East Devon has to maintain its housing supply across the district.
- Axminster has made a good case about why it needs a relief road and not delivering the road is critical and the need to get it right.
- Reference was made to recommendation 1 on land values and the report on section 9 addressing an independent valuation of the site. Concerns were raised that Members had not been provided with sight of the independent report. In response the Service Lead Planning Strategy and Development advised he had not quoted the valuation in the independent report but confirmed what the developers were paying was reasonable for the value of the site.

- Concerns raised about how Members can make informed decisions without seeing all the reports.
- It was acknowledged that out of the 68 responses received these were mostly objections.
- Members supported the comments from Axminster Ward Members.
- The need for a Housing Needs Survey to be carried out.
- The need for the masterplan to be looked at by a new consultant. In response the Chief Executive reminded Members that there were 3 live planning applications in relation to the area of land in the current version of the masterplan and reminded Members that officers were struggling to find sufficient funding to deliver the relief road and addressed the difficulties of engaging different consultants.

**RESOLVED:**

1. **That it is not going to be possible to progress with the Housing Infrastructure Fund bid as things stand and that the offer is likely to be withdrawn unless Homes England change their position on land values be accepted.**
2. **To re-engage the consultants for the Axminster Urban Extension Masterplan to review options to enable the forward delivery of the relief road in its entirety.**
3. **That a Housing Delivery Action Plan be produced to consider how to bolster the housing land supply position in the district and that this be considered by Strategic Planning Committee be agreed.**
4. **That a Members Advisory Panel be set up early in the New Year.**

37 **Draft Affordable Housing Supplementary Document**

The Service Lead Planning Strategy and Development Management presented the report which had been deferred by the Strategic Planning Committee on 22 October 2019. The report provided an update on the 22 responses received in the first round of public consultation on the Draft Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document and asked Members to consider a further round of public consultations to seek further feedback about expectations for affordable housing delivery in the district.

Discussion covered:

- It was suggested that the Council look at different ways of consulting with the public to get a true reflection from the community. Members noted only 22 responses had been received and the majority of these were from developers.

**RESOLVED:**

1. **That the comments received during the first round of public consultation on the Draft Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document be noted and the council response be endorsed.**
2. **That the Draft Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document for public consultation over a period of six weeks be agreed.**

38 **East Devon - Employment Land Review**

The Committee considered the Service Lead – Planning Strategy and Development Management report outlining the latest monitoring figures on employment land available within the district and outlining the latest figures of residents of East Devon in employment and job numbers in the district.

Members noted that employment numbers were growing and that government suggested 48,000 employee jobs currently exist in East Devon as of 2018.

Discussion covered:

- It was suggested the item be deferred due to the hyperlinks to background information not working. In response the Service Lead Planning Strategy and Development Management advised the hyperlink was working correctly on the internet.
- Clarification was sought on the one home / one job scenario and should this be revisited. In response the Service Lead Planning Strategy and Development Management advised it was an aspiration and not a requirement as a whole.
- It was suggested something should be put in place that measures the employment development that is coming forward with the housing stock to give a benchmark of what is needed in relation to development. In response the Chairman advised the Our Towns Study will be doing work on this.
- Clarification was sought on Skypark not delivering the large numbers. In response the Service Lead Planning Strategy and Development Management advised Skypark was not delivering at the rates hoped but this was partly because of issues over delivering an update instrument landing system at the airport which had been resolved and so land can now come forward to help increase delivery rates at Skypark

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the report be acknowledged.

**Attendance List**

**Councillors present:**

S Bond (Chairman)  
O Davey  
S Hawkins  
P Hayward  
M Howe  
F King  
D Ledger  
A Moulding  
G Pratt  
P Skinner

**Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)**

I Hall  
P Arnott  
S Jackson  
M Rixson

**Officers in attendance:**

Ed Freeman, Service Lead Strategic Planning and Development Management  
Mark Williams, Chief Executive  
Shirley Shaw, Planning Barrister  
Wendy Harris, Democratic Services Officer

**Councillor apologies:**

N Hookway  
M Allen

Chairman .....

Date: .....