

West Suffolk Joint Growth Steering Group

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Suffolk Joint Growth Steering Group** held on **Tuesday 28 March 2017** at **10.00 am** at the **Conference Chamber (West), West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 3YU

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman David Bowman
Vice Chairman Alaric Pugh

Forest Heath District Council

Chris Barker
Ruth Bowman, J.P.
David Palmer
Reg Silvester

St Edmundsbury Borough Council

John Burns
Angela Rushen
David Roach
Peter Thompson
Jim Thorndyke

By Invitation:

John Bloodworth
Brian Harvey

Sara Mildmay-White
Susan Glossop
Andrew Smith
Julia Wakelam

48. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rona Burt (FHDC).

49. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes present at the meeting.

50. **Minutes**

The minutes from the meeting held on 21 February 2017 were received and confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

51. **Housing White Paper: 'Fixing our Broken Housing Market' (Presentation)**

(All Members of Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council had been invited to attend for the consideration of this item)

Following on from the meeting of the West Suffolk Joint Growth Steering Group held on 21 February 2017, the Service Manager (Planning Strategy) provided a further presentation centred around the main issues within the

White Paper. The initial Officer thoughts as to the effect for West Suffolk, were summarised below:

- **Chapter 1: Planning for the right homes in the right places**
(Better, more realistic plan making which faced up to housing need and made sure that more of the homes that people wanted to live in were planned for in the places that they wanted to live)
 - Getting Plans in Place
The considerable time and resources required to get a Plan in place, including evidence and policy uncertainty, was noted. A standardised approach to calculating housing need could streamline the plan-making process, reducing inefficiencies and providing certainty. It would be important for councils to be able to retain freedom in how to plan and meet the objectively assessed housing need. Co-operation across a wider area could identify sufficient land for housing. Measures to support wider strategic planning were encouraging. Statements of Common Ground were supported.
 - Making enough land available in the right places
The release of public sector land was a significant opportunity demonstrated by the One Public Estate Programme. The New Land Release Fund would help with this policy ambition. This should be pursued in a long term strategic plan to ensure delivery. The requirement of 10% of sites being at 0.5ha would be difficult to implement in practice and this target should be voluntary.
 - Strengthening Neighbourhood Planning and Design
Commitment to review current energy performance standards was supported. The commitment for further funding to neighbourhood planning groups should be taken further with a full review of the financial support provided to councils to meet their statutory duties in relation to neighbourhood planning. The West Suffolk Councils already sought to secure higher density housing, but it was important for councils to be able to retain local discretion to decide the right levels of density for new housing across the local area. However, caution was needed to ensure that high density did not result in a rush to build small properties.
- **Chapter 2: Building Homes Faster**
(Giving local authorities the tools which they needed to make sure plans which had been carefully developed in consultation with the community were implemented and putting in place the necessary infrastructure to support new homes)
 - Infrastructure and Skills for Housing
The West Suffolk Councils would contribute to the review on Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy, which needed to be robust, clear, transparent and simple. The Housing Infrastructure Fund would provide crucial opportunities for councils to deliver infrastructure-led housing.

- Local Authority and Developer Accountability for Building Homes
Supported councils to make greater use of Compulsory Purchase Powers to unlock stalled sites, although this may not speed up build-out rates. Similarly, whilst measures requiring starts within two years of being granted permission, would be a step in the right direction, it did not ensure that homes were completed at a reasonable rate. House building was generally complex and risky, involving a wide range of partners. Councils were committed to building homes where they were needed, but did not have all the planning powers to ensure it. This must be recognised by the proposal to apply delivery test and requiring action from councils when housing delivery had not met forecast need and the measures put in place to reduce the risk of reverting to presumption, in favour of sustainable development.
- **Chapter 3: Diversifying the Market**
(Opening up the market to smaller and medium sized builders, boosting productivity and innovation by encouraging modern methods of construction and attracting investors into development of homes for rent, as well as for sale)
 - Council and Housing Association House Building
Need to await the publication of additional details, in particular, implications of extending right-to-buy on alternative delivery vehicles.
 - Diversification of Private House Builders
The strategy for supporting the diversification of the private market would take time to deliver and was unlikely on its own to build all the housing the communities needed. In the short-term, it was critical to enable councils to build more affordable homes where the market had undelivered. There was a good opportunity to stimulate additional supply through institutional investment in Build-to-Rent products, which councils were keen to enable as part of the wider housing mix. Three-year tenancies on Build-to-Rent properties were welcomed, but would likely form a very small proportion of the overall housing stock. The West Suffolk Councils were also interested to understand more about a new affordable private rented product.
 - Future Role of the Homes and Communities Agency
A reformed role for the Homes and Communities Agency, working with local partners, could play an important role in supporting local areas to enable house building locally. The West Suffolk Councils would work with Homes England to support councils and their local partners to build more homes.
- **Chapter 4: Helping People Now**
(Doing all we can to support households now by tackling some of the impacts of the housing shortage on ordinary households, given that it would take time to feel the impact of the long-term solution of building more homes)

- Starter Homes
Supported local flexibility in delivering starter homes alongside the mix of other affordable housing products that meet the locally assessed need, including affordable homes for rent.
- Helping people afford a home
It was still not clear how the extension of the Right-to-Buy would be funded in the longer term. Councils were still facing uncertainty over the prospect of a forced sale of their assets to fund the extended Right-to-Buy, not relevant to West Suffolk as both Councils were non-stockholding. There were potential negative implications on rural exception sites.
- Government Funding for Affordable Housing
The West Suffolk Councils would continue to ensure that funding for affordable housing was delivered effectively by Housing Associations, with councils as a key partner. Councils and Housing Associations would be able to deliver more homes if given flexibilities, eg, to combine grants with Right-to-Buy receipts and to deliver more social rented properties and more affordable lower-income households. There were helpful measures, but did not tackle the underlying challenges arising from a legal and regulatory system that was out-of-date and required reform to make the pace of the reality of the current private rented housing market.
- Making the Best Use of Existing Homes
It was important to make use of existing homes, although this would not solve problems with supply. The West Suffolk Councils were pleased that the Government recognised the contribution that local government had made to bringing down the number of empty homes.
- Housing for Older People
- Preventing Homelessness
There was an acute need to integrate housing with health and social care further and in ways that improved well-being and reduced demand on care services. This meant building more attractive and suitable homes for older people and adapting existing housing to better support ageing in ways that reduced pressures on health and social care services. To deliver, councils needed tools in their viability negotiations with developers to ensure they delivered more accessible homes.

Officers concluded the presentation by stating that, as outlined above, consideration had started on the impact of the White Paper and other relevant publications and how this would impact on the strategic and operational work in West Suffolk. A programme/Action Plan would also be prepared which listed the proposals and actions within the White Paper and when they were planned for implementation.

The West Suffolk Councils would also be working with its partners to prepare a Suffolk wide/East of England response, along with a separate West Suffolk response, for submission by the deadline of 2 May 2017.

Members then discussed the content of the White Paper, including the proposed initial West Suffolk Officer responses summarised above and made the following further comments:

- The White Paper had missed the opportunity to outline the benefits of master planning and so would support amendments to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to require Masterplans in the plan making/delivery process.
- Supported the enhanced and simplified Compulsory Purchase power process.
- Supported the increase in the Neighbourhood Plan Grant for Parish/Town Councils.
- Questioned whether the 'Duty-to-Cooperate' worked in practice.
- Supported the standardised Objectively Assessed Housing Need and the fixing five year land supply for one year and extending that for long term sites.
- To await further advice on the Community Infrastructure Levy reform to take forward the Government's new approach in late 2017.
- Concerned with the proposals to increase the density of developments, which may result in more planning appeals.
- Concerned with the proposals to extend Right-to-Buy to private companies and impact which this may have on Barley Homes.
- Concerned that the 'starter home' affordable housing product would not be workable within West Suffolk, as Central Government was 'out-of-touch' with the average household income.
- Concerned about the widening the definition of affordable homes.
- Sustainable development should be the driving factor when delivering homes.
- Considered that the White Paper was not sufficient with regards to the consideration of design and space, so would like to see the development of a West Suffolk Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for residential design to include lifetime homes and space requirement standards.

The Officer agreed for these comments to be fed into the Suffolk wide response. This draft response would be made available to Members from 21 April 2017 and would be signed-off by the Portfolio Holders for Planning and Growth and for Housing, prior to submission. Any specific comments which related to West Suffolk would be submitted as a separate response.

With there being no decision required, the Steering Group **noted** the presentation and proposed course of action.

52. **Britain's Industrial Strategy Green Paper (Presentation)**

(All Members of Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council had been invited to attend for the consideration of this item)

The Service Manager (Economic Development and Growth) provided a presentation which explained that on 23 January 2017, the Government had published 'Britain's Industrial Strategy'. This Green Paper set out the Government's plans and strategy for supporting Britain's industrial sectors, improving productivity, driving growth across the country and making British business more competitive.

The Strategy was made up of 10 pillars which drew together, in one place, a range of new and existing policy and related funding:

1. Investing in science, research and innovation.
2. Upgrading infrastructure (including digital, energy, transport, water and flood defences).
3. Improving procurement.
4. Delivering affordable energy and clean growth.
5. Driving growth across the whole country.
6. Developing skills.
7. Supporting businesses to start and grow.
8. Encouraging trade and inward investment.
9. Cultivating world-leading sectors.
10. Creating the right local institutions.

The Government had launched a public consultation on this Strategy to which the West Suffolk Councils were considering the submission of a response. The Government was asking for comments on the approach and ideas set out, in order to make the Strategy effective in delivering an economy that worked for everyone.

Responses were to be submitted by no later than 17 April 2017 and a Suffolk wide response was being prepared as an evidence based submission that demonstrated Suffolk's economic assets and ambition and to also set the framework for areas of future work with the Government and any related deals. As with the Housing White Paper, it was also the intention to submit a separate specific West Suffolk response which would centre on its uniqueness, the relationship and influence of Cambridge and its key sectors and specialisms (eg Newmarket).

Both the draft Suffolk and the West Suffolk response would be made available to Members for comment and would be signed-off by the Portfolio Holders for Planning and Growth, prior to submission by the deadline of 17 April 2017.

Members then discussed the content of the presentation and asked questions of the Officer, in which responses were duly provided.

With there being no decision required, the Steering Group **noted** the presentation and proposed course of action.

53. **Monitoring Delivery of the West Suffolk Six Point Plan for Jobs and Growth (Presentation)**

The Service Manager (Economic Development and Growth) and the Principal Growth Officer provided a presentation to the Steering Group on the review which had been undertaken on the Six Point Plan for Jobs and Growth.

The Plan had been developed in 2015 as increasing the opportunities for economic growth was a top priority in West Suffolk. This was a living document which was subject to regular modifications and contained a two year plan of action for jobs and growth under six key themes. There was now the opportunity to re-imagine the Plan on the light of new thinking and revised internal structures, along with external factors which could also affect the Councils priorities moving forward.

As part of this review, the following achievements were identified:

1. Meeting and Understanding West Suffolk Businesses

Achievements included:

- Targeted approach to meeting businesses
- Chamber of Commerce Service Level Agreement (SLA) (including six Forum events per annum)
- West Suffolk Business Forum (held twice yearly)
- West Suffolk Business Festival/Awards
- Working with the new Anglia LEP and Local Authority partners (Customer Relationship Management system and company database)
- Joint support with DiT (UKTI) to overseas owned companies
- Two events with the Hong Kong Trade Development Council
- Targeted growing and declining companies
- Working with both Growth Hubs (Greater Cambridge/Greater Peterborough LEP and the New Anglia LEP)
- Shopfront grant (11 businesses in Forest Heath and 11 businesses in St Edmundsbury had benefitted from the grant)
- Start-up grants (20 grants in Forest Heath; 27 grants in St Edmundsbury since 2014)
- Brecks and Wool Town Leader work to promote rural businesses

2. Promoting the West Suffolk Economic Region

Achievements included:

- West Suffolk Business Fact Pack
- West Suffolk Business Festival
- Business Awards (including the Newmarket and the Haverhill Chambers of Commerce)
- Inward investment (working with the Hong Kong Trade Development Council on Mandarin Fact Packs; countywide Inward Investment Group; MIPIM 2016 (London))
- Enterprise Zones at Haverhill Research Park and Suffolk Business Park

3. Supporting our Market Towns

Achievements included:

- Haverhill Town Centre Masterplan (Supplementary Planning Document adopted by SEBC Council in September 2015)
- Implementation of projects within the Haverhill Town Centre Masterplan now underway
- Currently preparing the Bury St Edmunds Town Centre Masterplan (due for completed by end of 2017)
- Support to OurBuryStEdmunds and Newmarket BIDs
- Newmarket Vision
- Mildenhall Hub
- Regular events on the five West Suffolk Markets
- Building links with local schools and colleges
- New farmers market in Bury St Edmunds and community market in Newmarket
- Working with Parish/Town Councils and retailers to investigate bringing new markets and special events to West Suffolk market towns
- Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre (improved and reviewed)
- Haverhill Christmas Market

- Encouragement of start-up businesses by offering incentives, stalls and offers on all our markets.

4. Ensuring the Right Conditions for Growth

Achievements included:

- Suffolk Business Park
- Eastern Relief Road commenced and first 'deal done' on the Enterprise Zone
- Collective Local Authority working to create the Cambridge/Norwich Technology Corridor
- Extension of MENTA's small business workspace
- Early stage feasibility work for an extension to the Mildenhall Industrial Estate
- Haverhill Lorry park investigation
- Enterprise Zones at Haverhill Research Park and Suffolk Business Park (which included Business Rates discount and simplified planning processes)
- USAFE Mildenhall and economic impacts Study
- Haverhill Research Park and Epicentre
- Campaigning for highway improvements and funding from the Road Investment Strategy (RIS2)
- A1307 campaign and development of business case for improvements
- Ipswich to Cambridge twice hourly rail services
- Saxham Business Park Summit

5. Developing Skills and Increasing Employment Opportunities for All

Achievements included:

- Working with partner organisations to promote opportunities (including Suffolk County Council, Signpost2Skills, New Anglia LEP, West Suffolk College)
- West Suffolk Skills Survey
- Opportunities for young people through markets
- Young enterprise
- Promoting apprenticeships (including leading by example)
- Understanding the role of West Suffolk going forward

6. Capitalising Upon Our Key Sectors

Achievements included:

- Bury St Edmunds Destination Management Organisation (DMO)
- Discover Newmarket
- Enterprise Zones aimed at delivering growth in line with the LEP sector priorities (technology/advanced manufacturing)
- Cambridge/Norwich Technology Corridor
- TechEast support
- Screen Suffolk
- Newmarket Hill Gallops

Members then discussed the content of the presentation and asked questions of the Officers, in which responses were duly provided.

With there being no decision required, the Steering Group **noted** the review of the Six Point Plan for Jobs and Growth.

(Councillor Angela Rushen left the meeting at 11.45 am, during the discussion of this item)

54. Suffolk Skills and Employment Programme (Presentation)

The Growth Officer provided an update to the Steering Group which followed on from the presentation made by Judith Mobbs, Assistant Director Inclusion and Skills, Suffolk County Council at the meeting of the Steering Group on 21 February 2017.

The presentation set out the issues which specifically related to West Suffolk with regards to skills and employment. It was important to understand the specific needs of West Suffolk as there were differences in the demographics to Ipswich and East Suffolk. To assist with this a West Suffolk Skills Survey was being undertaken with businesses and young people to understand their needs and aspirations until 31 March 2017.

The presentation also set out the future actions for West Suffolk which would explore the specific needs of young people and businesses, along with the further understanding of other 'off the radar' demographic (eg mothers returning to work; work at home/sole traders; re-training opportunities).

Members then discussed the content of the presentation and asked questions of the Officer, in which responses were duly provided.

With there being no decision required, the Steering Group **noted** the presentation, along with the future actions.

55. Local Economic Partnerships: Strategic Economic Plan Reviews (Presentation)

The Service Manager (Economic Development and Growth) provided an update on the progress with the review of the New Anglia LEP and the Greater Cambridge/Greater Peterborough Strategic Economic Plans (SEPs).

In 2013, the Government had asked LEPs to negotiate a 'Growth Deal' to drive forward economic growth in their areas, having set aside £2 billion a year, for six years from 2015/2016 to 2020/2021, in a Local Growth Fund. To guide these negotiations, the Government asked each LEP to express its offer through a Strategic Economic Plan (SEP). Since 2014, the New Anglia LEP had been awarded £290m in Growth Deal Funding and the Greater Cambridge/Greater Peterborough LEP had been awarded £148m.

In terms of reviewing their SEPs, the following had been undertaken by each LEP:

- New Anglia LEP
 - Started work on its 'Economic Strategy for the East'. This was not a replacement of the SEP but:
 - It aimed to build on the SEP
 - Would take into account recent changes
 - Would address some of the elements of the SEP that were behind target
 - A tender had been issued for some of the data and intelligence work.

- A business consultation meeting had been held on 21 March 2017 and further consultation was planned.
 - The review would be completed in Autumn 2017.
 - Action Plans would follow the SEP.
- Greater Cambridge/Greater Peterborough LEP
 - Had commissioned LDA Associates and Cambridge University.
 - One-to-one meetings had been arranged with the District Councils during February/March 2017.
 - Draft issues would be presented to the Greater Cambridge/Greater Peterborough LEP Board in March 2017.
 - The final SEP would be presented in July 2017.
 - This work would then be used to establish sector/place based strategies in November 2017.

Members then discussed the content of the presentation and asked questions of the Officer, in which responses were duly provided.

With there being no decision required, the Steering Group **noted** the progress with the SEP reviews.

56. **Work Programme 2017/2018 (Report No: JGG/JT/17/001)**

The Steering Group received this report which set out their current Work Programme for 2017/2018 (as set out in Appendix 1). The Steering Group were able to make suggestions on items for consideration and if accepted, would be timetabled to report to a future meeting.

During the discussion of the Work Programme, the following item was suggested for future consideration:

- *Developer relationships: Viability of sites and 'The Open Book Appraisal'*

Members **noted** the current status of the Work Programme for 2017/2018, along with the inclusion of the above item.

During the discussion of this item, the Chairman also asked as to how the Group would wish to report onto Cabinet. Formal recommendations for a decision to be made would be reported from the Group to Cabinet in the normal manner, via a referrals report. However, the Group whether they would also wish to provide a brief summary to Cabinet of the outcomes from the Group (which had not resulted in formal recommendations).

Members **agreed** that a brief summary of the outcomes from the Group to also be reported to the next available Cabinet meeting, following each meeting of the Steering Group.

57. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The dates of future meetings of the Steering Group were **noted** as follows (all to be held on Tuesdays at 10.00 am):

Tuesday 6 June 2017	District Offices, Mildenhall
Tuesday 31 October 2017	West Suffolk House, Bury St Edmunds

Tuesday 20 February 2018 District Offices, Mildenhall

Additional meetings of the Steering Group could also be arranged, as and when deemed required.

(At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chairman also wished to express his thanks to those who had made presentations to the Steering Group during the meeting)

The Meeting concluded at 12.20 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
