

MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 19 JULY 2012 2.30 PM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Kelham Cooke
Councillor Breda Griffin
Councillor John Nicholson (Chairman)

Councillor Mrs Jean Taylor
Councillor Jeff Thompson (Vice-
Chairman)
Councillor Raymond Wooten

OFFICERS

Strategic Director (Ian Yates)
Interim Head of Housing and
Neighbourhoods (Ian Richardson)
Planning Policy and Partnerships Service
Manager (Karen Sinclair)
Community Engagement and Policy
Development Officer (Carol Drury)
Principal Democracy Officer (Jo Toomey)

PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Councillor Mrs Frances Cartwright (Grow
the Economy/Economic Development)

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Michael King
Councillor Rosemary H Woolley

11. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A member of the public, Mr Otter, talked to the PDG in respect of the wind energy supplementary planning document. He supported the document produced by Lincolnshire County Council and said he would favour a similar document for South Kesteven District Council. He expressed concern that districts without clear policies could be more attractive to developers. Mr Otter also highlighted his concerns about the impact of wind turbines on heritage assets and visual amenity. These sentiments were reaffirmed by another member of the public who was present.

A district councillor and parish clerk stated she had received a letter from the company consulting on the wind energy Supplementary Planning Document on behalf of the district council and expressed concern on the time it provided for parish clerks to respond.

12. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from the Portfolio Holder for Green, Healthy and Arts and the Portfolio Holder for Good Housing.

13. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

No disclosures of interest were made.

14. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 17 MAY 2012

The action notes from the meeting held on 17 May 2012 were agreed as a correct record and noted.

15. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

- An update on rural broadband was included on the agenda for this meeting.
- The PDG's work programme was included on the agenda for this meeting.
- The PDG's recommendation at minute number 6 in respect of right to buy sales receipts was taken into account by the Portfolio Holder for Good Housing in a non-key decision made on 25 June 2012.

16. WIND ENERGY SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

The Strategic Director, Mr Yates, gave a presentation which provided background information to help the PDG make recommendations relating to the production of a wind energy supplementary planning document. The briefing incorporated background information, the reasoning behind producing a supplementary planning document, the process that would need to be followed and key considerations.

Planning policies EN1 (protection and enhancement of the character of the district) and EN3 (renewable energy generation) were both cited as criteria by which to judge planning applications for wind turbines on their own merits. The presentation included a table summarising the number of applications made between 2007 and 2012, the sizes of the turbine and whether planning permission was granted or refused.

Government policy did not provide statutory limits on the proximity of wind farms to houses. Both Scotland and Wales had guidance on separation distances (2km and 500m respectively), however there was no guidance for England.

The National Planning Policy Framework included brief guidance on renewable energy applications and stated local authorities should have a positive strategy to promote energy from renewable and low carbon sources and design policies

to maximise renewable energy while ensuring adverse impacts were addressed, including cumulative landscape and visual impacts. A supplementary planning document would provide additional guidance to development plan policies.

Mr Yates explained that there were a number of approaches that the Council could take:

- Providing general guidance, which would allow for consideration of site specific circumstances and the discretion to make value judgements on competing issues
- A prescriptive approach which sets out specific fixed criteria to assess development proposals with no discretion to make value judgements
- A balanced approach, which combines elements of general guidance and prescriptive approaches

The Lincolnshire County Council position statement, which was based on information from Scotland and Fenland, took a prescriptive approach, providing definitive distances from existing turbines, housing and areas of natural beauty. It also provided detail on the acceptable heights of wind turbines. It was noted that the document produced by Lincolnshire County Council was not a policy, rather a political statement of what they believed the criteria should be. PDG members were also advised that this document had not been subject to public consultation.

The presentation also included a summary of appeal decisions. The outcome of these planning appeals will be used as a source of evidence in support of any policy produced by the Council.

Informal consultation had been completed. Feedback from this would be used to produce the draft SPD, which needed to be based on sound reasoning and evidence so that it could be defended if legally challenged. The draft policy would be presented to Cabinet who would consider whether it should go forward for a six-week period of formal public consultation.

The PDG discussed the presentation and possible contents for the draft SPD. Councillor King was also invited to participate in discussions because of his expertise in planning.

The following issues were highlighted during discussion:

- Once planning permission had been granted, turbines could be moved by 50m. The power of their motors could also be changed
- To assess the visual impact of a development, requiring a visual rendering of a scheme was suggested. To ensure an accurate portrayal of any scheme, requirements for any imaging could be prescribed
- While there was no national policy on separation distances, there was nothing that would prevent district councils from adopting separation distances

- The SPD should be prescriptive. It should also be criteria based and not show geographical areas where wind turbines would and would not be acceptable
- For any sizable application, officers would go out and assess sites and the relevant facts
- With all applications for wind turbines there was a requirement for the installation of transmission lines, which were not incorporated into the planning application.
- Without an SPD on wind energy, developers and local residents would rely on the Core Strategy and the broad principles in the NPPF
- Current policies did not incorporate arrangements for the decommissioning and removal of wind turbines at the end of their useful life or when they had to be decommissioned by energy suppliers.

Recommendations:

- 1. That the draft Wind Energy Supplementary Planning Document should be prescriptive, including separation distances.***
- 2. Costs, proposals and a programme for decommissioning of wind turbines at the end of their useful life should be a requirement as part of any application for the installation of a wind turbine. It should also be at the expense of the party who erected the turbines.***
- 3. All applications for wind turbines should include visual rendering to demonstrate their impact on the environment.***
- 4. The positioning of transmission lines should be clearly shown at the time an application for a development involving wind turbines is submitted.***

16:20 to 16:30 – the meeting adjourned.

17. HOUSING PROGRAMME OF WORK

Ian Richardson, the Interim Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods gave a presentation on the Housing Work Programme for 2012/13. Aspects of this programme of work could be included as part of the PDG's work programme. Key pieces of work included:

- Tenancy strategy – required by provisions in the Localism Act to produce an appropriate framework would include affordable rents, whether to move away from secure tenancies to fixed-term tenancies and sustainable communities.
- Allocations policy review – for the council's own housing stock to manage the process more effectively and being clearer to the public. Work already completed has had a positive impact on the void rate.
- Private sector assistance policy – the duty for this rested with the

environmental health function encouraging owners of private sector properties to return empty properties to use and ensuring quality. Work was also underway to support private sector landlords meet the needs of an aging population.

- Asset management review – addressing maintenance and improvements needs of the council’s housing stock and making decisions on further investment.
- Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan – a 30-year business plan, which would include opportunities for investment and development of the council’s housing stock and the potential to develop new council housing.
- Tenant involvement – changes to the regulatory framework required the council to do more to involve its tenants. A tenants’ scrutiny body would be set up and this group would feed into the steering board with an overview of housing in the district.
- Housing strategy – this would underpin all housing work.

Mr Richardson answered questions on the areas included in the presentation. Any changes to tenancy status would not affect existing council tenants. Fixed term tenancies would give the council an opportunity to assess the continuing needs of tenants.

Ongoing work was being undertaken to support the needs of an aging population. The Council was also working closely with partner agencies like the police to help residents who live in mixed communities feel safer.

Ex-service personnel were entitled to the same level of help finding housing as other members of the community, which was based on an assessment of need. There was a community covenant in place that meant they were not disadvantaged by having a nomadic lifestyle. Council officers were working closely with local military bases.

Officers hoped that providing an incentive (like learning new skills and building capacity) would encourage tenants to participate in forums. Tenants who participated in these forums would be able to help influence and direct service improvements.

The programme of work included opportunities for councillors to determine the local offer in respect of standards of housing. Decent Homes Standard was the minimum, but the Council could choose to approve its own higher standard in respect of improvements and the building of new properties.

Action point

The PDG asked to receive regular progress updates against the programme of work.

18. RURAL BROADBAND

A briefing note on rural broadband had been circulated with the agenda. Mr Otter was a local broadband champion and was working with Community Lincs. He explained that the district was receiving investment from BT, which would include the key towns and villages in their locale. Mr Otter's village, Tallington, was not included in the upgrade of BT technologies, so it submitted a bid to DEFRA to upgrade their broadband infrastructure. The village was working with communities outside the district and with RAF Wittering to deliver the project.

19. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ACT

A briefing note on the Sustainable Communities Act was circulated for the information of PDG members.

20. WORK PROGRAMME

The PDG noted the draft work programme, which was circulated at the meeting. The draft document would be updated to reflect the contents of the Housing Programme of Work.

Action point

Update the draft PDG work programme to include components of the Housing Programme of Work.

21. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting was closed at 17:16.