

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Planning & Regeneration Committee meeting held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 25 August 2015, in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Ashington, NE63 8RX

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Victor Bridges
Vicky Brown
Avril Chisholm
Stephen Fenwick
Mark Purvis
Pauline Thompson

Louis Brown
Marjorie Chambers
Glyn Davies
Lawrence Henderson
Wyn Stewart
Ely Turnbull

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mike Slaughter – Town Clerk
Sue Coulthard – Snr. Admin. Officer
Members of the Public – 5

P&R15/90 1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Nominations were formally invited for the position of Chair of the Planning & Regeneration Committee.

Resolved:

That Cllr. Mark Purvis be duly elected as Chair of the Planning & Regeneration Committee.

P&R15/91 2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Nominations were formally invited for the position of Vice-Chair of the Planning & Regeneration Committee.

Resolved:

That Cllr. Liam Lavery be duly elected as Vice-Chair of the Planning & Regeneration Committee.

P&R15/92 3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Les Alderson, Keith Chambers, Maggie Lang, Kris Lavery, Liam Lavery and Bob Walkinshaw.

P&R15/93 4. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of personal and prejudicial interest.

At this point in the meeting, the Chair agreed to take Agenda Items 7 and 8 for consideration and discussion, as members of the public with a specific interest in those items were in attendance.

P&R15/94 7. PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 15/02357/CCD : ASHINGTON SOLAR FARM

The Town Clerk informed members that a specific request had been made by Ashington Town Council for further information regarding the proposals to develop the Ashington Solar Farm.views.

The Chair informed members that members of the public were in attendance at the meeting and, in accordance with Standing Orders, would be given the opportunity to put questions and/or make comments to the meeting. The Chair informed members that a site visit had also been arranged for 26 August 2015 that two town councillors would be attending in addition to the Town Clerk.The Chair welcomed Peter Hatley (Northumberland County Council Business Support Manager) to the meeting and invited him to make his presentation regarding the County Council's proposals for the Ashington Solar Farm.

As an introduction to his presentation, Mr Hatley explained that APSE (the Association for Public Service Excellence) had facilitated a Local Authority Energy Collaboration and that Northumberland County Council was involved in this. The aims of the collaboration were:-

"To form an effective collaboration of a large number of local authorities to enable and facilitate the local municipalisation of energy services. By this we mean the public and community, as well as private, ownership and managerial control of local energy generation, distribution networks and delivery of energy efficiency

works. Local authorities working together in this way would have great influence and would be able to deliver economies of scale in green energy to promote economic growth and combat fuel poverty."

Mr Hately stated that the Ashington Solar Farm proposals was one of a number of County Council's "Invest to Save" initiatives and aimed to tackle "fuel poverty" at both domestic and corporate levels. Members were informed that steps already taken included the provision of solar photo voltaic panels in over half the county's schools, in over 100 NCC community buildings and in over 1,000 properties belonging to Homes for Northumberland.

Mr Hately proceeded to give his detailed presentation and invited questions from those present at any point during the presentation. A number of questions were raised around general themes of the proposal including potential negative impacts on the environment and wildlife, opportunities for ecological enhancements, impacts on biodiversity, community benefits from any development and planning conditions preventing any further extension of an agreed area.

The Chair thanked Mr Hately for his presentation and responding to Members' questions and concerns. Mr Hately left the meeting at this point.

During a lengthy discussion, the matter of Section 106 Community Benefits was raised. The Town Clerk confirmed that the development of schemes such as the Solar Farm usually resulted in monies being made available to town and parish councils for community benefit. It was also noted that the Solar Farm would be developed along the western boundary of Ashington Community Woods and that the majority of visitors used the entrance closest to the town centre.

Although disappointed about the area of woodland to be cleared in order for the Solar Farm to be developed, members recognised that at a time when austerity measures and cutbacks were taking place, it was not the Town Council's intention to oppose the planning application at this stage. The Leader of the Council stated that he believed that there would be a level of community benefit to be made available as a result of the Solar Farm development going ahead. The Leader also stated that assurances would be sought from the County Council that the area of the woods to be allocated for the Solar Farm would not be extended in the future.

Resolved:

That the Town Clerk write to Northumberland County Council advising them that:-

- (i) The Town Council is broadly supportive of the application when measured alongside the “Invest to Save“ agenda but would strongly make the point that the business case and benefits, including direct local community benefits, would need to be clear and proven for the development, if approved, to commence,**
- (ii) At this point, it is not the Town Council’s view that the business case is certain and it is understood that there are a number of national policy changes that will also potentially impact. While this point may not be considered a material planning matter, it is very much a material factor that needs to be clearly understood and considered before any development, if so approved, is undertaken,**
- (iii) It is noted that the site will also be naturally screened by retaining a belt of existing trees and vegetation around the site and that the solar farm will have limited visual impact. The Town Council’s broad support for the scheme at this stage is predicated only on the fact that 90% of the Community Woodland will remain unaltered in perpetuity and will potentially also receive benefits of further opportunity for ecological enhancements and site management; and that**
- (iv) It is stated that a full ecological survey and assessment will be undertaken of the proposed site and measures put in place to mitigate any adverse impacts and to maximise opportunities for ecological enhancements. The Town Council notes that local objections to the scheme are rightly centred around the issues of environmental protection and loss of woodland; it is important therefore that these factors are not overridden by the renewable energy agenda and that any planning decision is only made when in possession of full and thorough advance knowledge and reports.**

P&R15/95 8. PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 15/1926/FUL: LAND ON STATION ROAD, NORTH OF KINGDOM HALL

The Town Clerk explained that he had been asked by Cllr. Marjorie Chambers to place this item on the agenda following discussions with Mr D Wilson of 192 Station Road. Members were informed that the planning application proposed the erection of two semi-detached houses on land north of Kingdom Hall on Station Road. To date, three objections had been made by residents living in properties in the immediate location.

The Town Clerk confirmed that a covering letter had been submitted with the planning application by the applicant outlining the business case behind the proposal. Members were informed that revenue raised by the housing proposal would be used to provide twelve "travel lodge" type accommodation units to the rear of the Portland as part of the business expansion process. The Town Clerk confirmed that this was unrelated to the planning application and should not be considered when discussing the matter.

Cllr. Chambers reported that she had been approached by Mr D Wilson of 192 Station Road and that Mr Wilson was in attendance and wished to address the Committee. The Chair invited Mr Wilson to address the Committee.

Mr Wilson explained that he lived in the property (192 Station Road) immediately adjacent to the proposed development. He stated that the proposed building work was to take place within 6ft of his house, blocking the light from three windows on his property's side elevation. Mr Wilson further stated that the area of land where the development was proposed had been a green space for many years and had at one time been maintained by the local council with public seating.

Mr Wilson informed members that there were currently seven trees on this piece of land and the proposals included the destruction and removal of two of those trees. Cllr. Chambers indicated that she had been informed by NCC that all seven trees were the subject of a preservation order. The Chair thanked Mr Wilson for his contribution to the meeting.

The Town Clerk advised members that Ashington Town Council needed to consider its response to the matter and decide whether it wished to support the objections made by local residents. However, he stressed that any response in support of the objections should be underpinned by valid planning reasons. After a lengthy discussion it was agreed that, following discussions with the

appropriate Planning Officer, the Town Council would support the objections submitted by residents.

P&R15/96 5. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Planning & Regeneration Committee meeting held on 14 April 2015 were agreed and signed as a true record.

P&R15/97 6. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

P&R15/98 9. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

The Town Clerk informed members that Arch had issued a press release with an update regarding the proposals for the Ashington Investment Plan. Members were informed that a public information display was to take place on 3rd, 7th and 8th September 2015, as part of the ongoing consultation process. Members were encouraged to visit the exhibition and to also seek to encourage residents to attend and make their views known.

P&R15/99 10. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

To be agreed.

The meeting closed at 8.15pm.