

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Notes of a Meeting of the Local Development Framework Panel held at Knowle, Sidmouth on Friday 29 January 2010

Present:

Councillors:

Graham Brown (Chairman)
Ray Franklin
Mike Green
David Key
Tony Reed

Officers:

Steve Belli, Development Manager
Matt Dickins, Principal Planning Officer
Karime Hassan, Corporate Director
Hannah Jarvis, Assistant Democratic Services Officer
Peter Jeffs, Corporate Director
John Maidment, Planning Policy Manager
James McMurdo, New Growth Point - Planning and Development
Manager

Also Present:

Councillors:

Vivienne Ash
Peter Bowden
Bob Buxton
Geoff Chamberlain
Graham Godbeer
Stuart Hughes
Frances Newth
Helen Parr
Philipp Skinner
Graham Troman

Richard Eley, Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce
Jeremy Roberts, Principal of Sidmouth College

Apologies from Panel Member:

Councillor:
Derek Button

Apologies from Non-Panel Members:

Councillors:
Paul Diviani
Jill Elson
Malcolm Florey
Steve Hall
Graham Liverton

Kate Little, Head of Planning and Countryside Services
Fliss Morey, New Growth Point Projects Director

The meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 12.15pm

84 Notes of the meeting held on 21 January 2010

The notes of the last meeting of the Local Development Framework Panel held on 9 December 2009 were agreed as a true record.

85 Sidmouth development issues – presentations and discussion

The Chairman welcomed and thanked those present for attending the meeting, particularly Mr Roberts, Mr Eley and the Sidmouth Ward Members in attendance. The aim of the meeting was to identify and discuss issues/themes, wider than planning, which would form the vision for Sidmouth; thought would then be given to how these could be addressed within the LDF.

Presentation by Sidmouth Sidford Ward Councillor, Stuart Hughes

(Councillor Frances Newth declared an interested in this item as she resides at Higher Woolbrook Park)

Councillor Hughes, DCC Cabinet Member for Highways, thanked the Panel for inviting him to attend the meeting and welcomed the opportunity to discuss the potential for park and ride provision in Sidmouth.

The provision of a park and ride for Sidmouth was a long standing issue, first raised fifteen years previous, when EDDC undertook a parking study to establish whether there was a shortfall of parking in the town. The parking study had identified a number of possible sites, although not all available today, for location of a park and ride, including land set aside for the relief road and the Woolbrook Road site. The park and ride would need to feature in the Local Transport Plan in order to gain funding.

Members heard that a Round Table had recently been formed, which included a number of representatives from DCC, EDDC, Sidmouth Town Council, Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce, the Police, Devon Fire and Rescue, Stagecoach and Vision For Sidmouth group. At its first meeting the representatives had been asked to identify three things they would like to see in Sidmouth and top of the list was a park and ride facility. Also included in the list was a modern recycling and transport hub, traffic management plan, impact assessment for emergency vehicle access in the town, better use of bus routes and improvements to the sustainability of the town.

It was felt that provision of a park and ride facility would unlock other issues within the town for discussion, such as partially (or completely) pedestrianisation of the town centre to improve the shopping experience, quality of life for those who live in the town and air quality and looking at a transport management plan for the town. At present there was no bus servicing the Knowle.

Members were advised that the northern piece of land, adjacent to the A3052, on the Woolbrook Road site owned by Persimmon Homes, was advised to be roughly 2 hectares which could accommodate a site for up to 500 vehicles. Cars could access the park and ride side from the A3052, with bus access from Woolbrook Road. The owners of land were advised to have recognised the need for a park and ride in their representation to the Local Plan. The Development Manager advised that there was an application on the site for a significant number of affordable houses, as well as open market housing; incorporating a park and ride facility on the site could reduce the affordable housing numbers proposed for the development. It was suggested that EDDC could approach Persimmon to enquire whether land to the South of Woolbrook Road could accommodate a park and ride facility; this land was advised to be sloping however EDDC's landscape architect could advise on the suitability of the site. Strategic planning was key to the delivery of a park and ride facility.

Alternative sites, suggested by a Member for consideration, were opposite the old railway Station and the lay-bys on the A3052 either side of The Bowd. It was commented that the park and ride should be situated on a brown field site.

Sidmouth development issues – presentations and discussion continued...

Members concluded that there was enough evidence to suggest that there should be provision of a park and ride facility in Sidmouth, particularly to aid tourism by improving the town centre and serve any new employment sites. Deliverability required 'joined-up thinking'; any affordable housing in the town or surrounding area required the transport infrastructure to support it. Timing was crucial to ensure that suitable, well positioned land was not developed. It was considered important that the facility was close to the area it would serve. The shuttle bus used from the Knowle car park at weekends was reported to be very popular.

Corporate Director, Peter Jeffs advised that consideration needed to be given to whether the 'ride' part of the facility would be sustainable. Investigative work would be required into the revenue costs and practicalities of keeping the buses on the road.

The A3052 was the main artery to the Jurassic Coast and coastal towns/villages of East Devon and provided those that lived in the Coastal towns/villages access to the rest of the district; it was suggested that small carparks be placed along the A3052 to allow people to park their car and catch buses for example into Exeter.

The Chairman advised that specific sites were not required at this stage; however it was clear from Members' discussion that there was a clear need for a park and ride facility in Sidmouth and therefore should be included in the vision for Sidmouth.

Corporate Director, Karime Hassan advised that provision of a park and ride for Sidmouth would be fed into the Local Transport Plan. It was currently anticipated that Sidmouth would have modest growth of approximately 300 houses; this put EDDC in a negotiating position. If the Woolbrook Road site was considered to be the most appropriate position for a park and ride facility, the Head of Planning and Countryside Services could approach Persimmons to enquire where in the scheme the facility could be delivered and await a response.

RECOMMENDED: that the Head of Planning and Countryside Services and Development Manager approach Persimmon about the deliverability of a park and ride facility on the Woolbrook Road site.

Presentation by Jeremy Roberts, Principal of Sidmouth Community College

(Declarations of interest: Councillor Frances Newth – Governor of St Nicholas Junior School, Councillor Stuart Hughes – Children attend St Nicholas Junior School and Sidmouth Community College, Mr Eley – owner of land in The Byes)

Mr Roberts thanked the Panel for inviting him to present to the meeting, following his conversations with Corporate Director, Karime Hassan regarding capacity at Sidmouth Community College. 878 students currently attended the Community College, and this figure was predicted to rise to 905 in 2011, and to 930 in 2012; these figures were advised to be over the planned admission numbers.

The present site offered little room for expansion other than to extend upwards, however it was extremely unlikely this would be acceptable to the residential areas surrounding the college. The existing green space used for the playing field was advised to be under the provision required for the size of college and therefore building on this area was not an option.

As part of the Building Schools for the Future Scheme, the Government was to rebuild or refurbish every secondary school/college in the country. However Sidmouth Community College may have to wait until 2020 before it would benefit from the scheme. This was considered to be too late due to the projected increase in secondary school student numbers.

Sidmouth development issues – presentations and discussion continued...

Oversubscribed primary schools in the surrounding area also had little or no options for expansion within their existing sites.

Mr Roberts advised that world class education could not be delivered on the existing site and increased pupil numbers would add to the existing pressures. Access to the site was also reported to be very poor.

Mr Roberts suggested to Members that the way forward could be to develop an education campus in the Sid valley to accommodate both the primary schools and secondary school on one site. Advantages to this provision of education included:

- Flexible arrangements in management;
- Sustainable in the right location;
- Allows the opportunity to respond to young people needs – development rather than age boundaries;
- Cost effective – reduces the number schools with very few students;
- Reduces the need for private finance from expanding on existing site;
- Release of the current site for housing.

Members discussed the suggestion of an education campus. Comments included:

- Agreement that young people should be taught by development stage rather than age;
- Other towns in East Devon will have similar issues with capacity;
- Cannot lose small village schools – part of community and rural life;
- Support for campus site – however need to maintain identities within the large site;
- Examples show that federations were not cost effective – needs to be investigated further;
- May infringe on other policies considering as part of the LDF, for example sustainable communities;
- Campus would overcome the issue of lack of green space in Sidmouth primary schools;
- Existing site no longer viable;
- A campus outside Sidmouth could create transport issues;
- May be possibilities of accommodating a larger building on the footprint of the existing site;
- Existing site strategically well placed;
- Consider taking leisure/green space into the Byes.

The Chairman thanked Mr Roberts for outlining the issues facing the College and primary schools in the area; these were issues which were likely to be repeated across the district.

The Corporate Director, Karime Hassan reminded Members of population figures and background trends used by DCC for education which were set out in the Infrastructure Study document; further testing of the suggestion and conversations with DCC were required.

Presentation by Richard Eley, Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce

The Chairman of Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce, Mr Eley, thanked the Panel for the invitation to attend the meeting.

Mr Eley welcomed the opportunity to raise and discuss issues/options for developing Sidmouth as a place of excellence. The current Local Plan was felt to be very restrictive; there was a need to widen the built up area boundary to allow for services/facilities that were lacking in the town, for example if the sole petrol station closed where would a new one be provided? Importance should be placed on the inter-relationship between the hotels and the

Sidmouth development issues – presentations and discussion continued...

shopping experience in the town; it was felt with that continuation of the current Local Plan would result in a decline in hotels.

Port Royal and Alexandria Industrial Estate were considered to prime areas to be addressed. With regard to the Byes a decision needed to be taken as to whether the land was utilised for School/leisure facilities or a green area of untouchable land.

As mentioned earlier in the meeting, joined up thinking was required for addressing parking within the town; there were a number of sites suitable for a park and ride facility.

In response to a question regarding the changing demographics of Sidmouth, it was advised that due to the shortage of employment opportunities available to College leavers in Sidmouth, young people left the area to find work. Mr Roberts advised he would be very keen to work with the Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce to investigate ways of addressing the issue. Mr Eley reported that the last census had shown that the number of young people residing in the town had increased. Sidmouth was now seen to be more 'trendy' and it was considered to be an important economic factor to ensure this continued without becoming artificial.

The Alexandria Industrial Estate had the potential to site a number of businesses which would improve the economy within the town; however there was concern regarding business rates.

Corporate Director, Karime Hassan advised members that having heard the issues for Sidmouth, decisions now had to be taken with regard to the level of detail to be included in the Core Strategy; a higher level of detail could delay the progress of the Core Strategy. A delivery mechanism was key to ensuring that the vision for Sidmouth, and the rest of East Devon was achieved.

The Chairman thanked, Councillor Hughes, Mr Roberts and Mr Eley for presenting to Members. Members commented on the enthusiasm and positive thinking of the speakers who attended the meeting and encouraged that like-minded speakers be invited to attend future meetings of the LDF.

RESOLVED: that the presentations received by Councillor Stuart Hughes, the Principal of Sidmouth Community College and Chairman of Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce be noted.

86 Rural Manifesto

Corporate Director, Peter Jeffs reported that the Council was likely to adopt the Rural Services Network's (RSN) 'Rural Services Manifesto', which had recently been presented to the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as a policy. When the final version of the policy was adopted it could be used inform the LDF policies. There were a number of considerations mentioned within the Manifesto that had a potential spatial planning aspect; these were detailed in the circulated paper to Members.

It was highlighted that a number of the considerations listed had been raised within the LDF Panel meetings, for example resisting closure of local schools. It was suggested that two separate policies may be required for rural and urban schools.

Rural Manifesto continued...

Members discussed the considerations highlighted and possible additions to those listed. Comments included:

- The need to understand the inter-relationship between rural communities and town hubs;
- the need to retain and maximise usage village halls and churches;
- maintaining and enhancing public transport network – important for the rural community;
- modern schemes of insulating building not appropriate for all properties – should be recognised;
- inclusion of sustainable building construction – code of sustainable homes applied to all buildings;
- re-using brown field sites, rather than green field sites for food security;
- digital infrastructure key, however concentrate on community hubs as opposed to internet hub – risk of technology moving forward and internet hubs no longer being required;
- improved working relationships required to ensure deliverability;
- set delivery framework that encouraged delivery - however delivery doesn't always have to be by EDDC;
- flood defence not mentioned – only an issue for Exmouth.

Members were advised that they needed to consider how the matters highlighted from the Manifesto could be translated into local policy, which could then be translated into land use/development criteria.

A number of the points listed were not about development and were about conservation and addressing the needs of those living in the communities. The current planning system was felt to disadvantage rural areas; rural centres were denied the opportunity to respond to changing circumstances, creating unbalanced and unsustainable villages.

RESOLVED: that the recommendations drawn from the Rural Services Manifesto, plus additional suggestions from Members be interpreted into what they mean spatially for the communities of East Devon.

87 Date of the next meeting

Members were reminded of the special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating meeting to discuss the Local Development Framework, to be held on Tuesday 2 February 2010. All Members were encouraged to attend the meeting.

The next meeting of the Local Development Framework Panel was scheduled for Thursday 11 February 2010, at 10.00am in the Council Chamber.