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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 4 JUNE 2024, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor (Chairman/Leader)
Councillors B Crystall, M Goldspink,
J Dumont, V Glover-Ward, S Hopewell,
T Hoskin and C Wilson.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors S Bull and C Redfern.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Katie Mogan	- Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Richard Cassidy	- Chief Executive
James Ellis	- Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Jenny Foster	- Principal Sustainability Officer
Laura Guy	- Principal Planning Officer
Steven Linnett	- Head of Strategic Finance and Property
Sara Saunders	- Head of Planning and Building Control

33 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Brittain and Councillor Daar.

34 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded them to use the microphones to be heard on the webcast.

35 MINUTES - 26 MARCH 2024

Councillor Goldspink proposed, and Councillor Hopewell seconded a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2024 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Leader. On being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

36 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

37 HERTFORDSHIRE DEVELOPMENT QUALITY CHARTER

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the Hertfordshire Development Quality Charter which had been launched by the Herts Growth Board in 2023. She said the Charter would raise standards on construction within Hertfordshire with seven pledges on design and sustainability. Seven local authorities and two developers had endorsed or formally agreed the Charter as a material planning consideration.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that the Charter did not seek to replace the current regulations but encouraged developers to be more ambitious to demonstrate excellence in design and sustainability. She said that it was voluntary to sign up and it would encourage joint working and shared views across the district and county neighbours. She said it was important

to ensure the council employed as many tools as possible to secure the highest development standard.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Hoskin seconded the proposal.

Councillor Wilson said that the Charter would be a material planning consideration, but it was not mandatory to sign up. He asked how that worked.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that the Charter was not compulsory to sign up to and it was entirely voluntary. She said that the council would be looking to update the District Plan soon and alongside that, the council would be producing a district design code that would be mandatory for developers. She said that a timeframe was being discussed and Members would be made aware soon.

The Head of Planning said that by making it a material consideration, it would have to be given weight in the decision-making process. She said that applications had to be made in accordance with the District Plan unless considerations said otherwise. She said that the council were working with other Hertfordshire authorities who were at different stages of their Local Plans to implement the Charter as a benchmark across the county.

Councillor Crystall asked what level of weight the Charter would be given in the decision-making process.

The Head of Planning said that there was not a set weight given. She said that the District Plan had the most weight afforded to it because it had gone through a structured process and had been examined. She said that Supplementary Planning Documents hung off the District Plan policies.

Councillor Goldspink said that she welcomed this Charter and said it was a good step in the right direction. She said

that more sustainable buildings should be encouraged and was pleased to see that measures to achieve this had been mentioned in the document.

Councillor Redfern read a statement out on behalf of the Labour group (this can be found at Appendix A).

Councillor Glover-Ward said that she would take the points raised into consideration but as this had been agreed by Hertfordshire local authorities, she did not think it could be added in at this late stage. She said that the points could be picked up at the District Plan review.

The Head of Planning said that the Charter was not designed to be detailed. Discussions with developers had determined the Charter was a good starting point for the whole of Hertfordshire.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - to recommend to Council that (A) the Hertfordshire Development Quality Charter, as detailed at Appendix A, be agreed as a material consideration for Development Management purposes; and

B) Developers, landowners and housing associations in the district be encouraged to voluntarily sign and commit to the design and sustainability pledges set out in the Quality Charter.

37 APPENDIX A - LABOUR STATEMENT ON
HERTFORDSHIRE DEVELOPMENT QUALITY CHARTER

38 WALKERN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN FIRST REVISION -
ADOPTION

The Leader of the Council said that the recommendation needed to be amended to say 'To recommend to Council'.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the report. She said that the existing Neighbourhood Plan was adopted in 2018 and that this was the first revision of the plan. Walkern Parish Council have undertaken the revision to take into account the adoption of the District Plan (2018) and the impact of growth on the east of Stevenage. The revised plan seeks to protect the character of the village and the local environment. It defined a countryside gap, allocates two new local green spaces and sets out a tree charter to protect important trees. The Executive Member said that an Independent Planning Examiner had reviewed the plan and said that the changes proposed were not sufficient to require a referendum.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Goldspink seconded the proposal.

Councillor Crystall welcomed the plan and said it was a positive step for the community.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – to recommend to Council that (A) the recommendations and modifications made by the Independent Examiner of the Walkern Neighbourhood Plan First Revision, as detailed in Appendix A to this report, be received and considered;

B) the Walkern Neighbourhood Plan First Revision 2021- 2033, as detailed in Appendix B to this report, be formally made.

39 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.20 pm

Chairman
Date

Minute Item 37a

We support, but there are disappointing flaws in the charter we would like the Council to take up with Herts Growth Board:

Page 3 'Growth Agenda' states that HCC are 'planning to build 100,000 homes' etc, but fails to make any reference to the Local Planning Authorities in Herts – which have the responsibility for planning, and work with developers. The Charter is largely intended for LPAs so this is a serious omission.

The Charter fails to mention Herts own Design Review Panel which is critical to a charter.

There are only two pages on 'Design'.

The first paragraph about what 'high quality design' means is utterly inadequate – it does not amplify what is meant by 'how the development works as a place' – which should refer to access for all, connections with facilities, safety, sociability, play, community services, the mixture of business and residential, robust buildings, adaptable buildings, attractiveness, managing parking and waste.

It does not explain what is expected in a masterplanning or urban design process.

It says – 'Developers may also have their own in-house design standards' – yes, but developers' standards are inadequate to ensure long term place-quality. Developers' standards are driven by cost, customers and construction, and standard inflexible house types.

The charter does not refer to the National Design Guide – a key document. The National Model Design Code is not the key reference. This is a serious omission.

The need to submit a Design and Access statement is already covered by NPPF requirements – this is a superfluous requirement.

The most important part of the design pages is as follows:

Major sites will be informed by community engagement and a design review panel as part of the pre-application and planning application process.

Major sites must explain the long-term stewardship strategy for their development.

There should be much more about good-practice community engagement to amplify this.

A pre-application design review panel is a critical requirement and is almost lost in this text.

The Hertfordshire Design Review Panel is set up for this purpose, there are other panels that can be used and none of this is mentioned.

'Long term stewardship' needs amplifying with guidance.

The report to executive

The report has been written by the sustainability officer – it lack urban design explanation.

The report keeps putting greenhouse gases and energy first. It This charter is about quality of development in the round.

The report does not discuss design, nor the concept of place quality. It does not refer to the District Plan references to quality. It should refer to the fact we use the Hertfordshire Design Review Panel, and that developers do not adequately address the independent advice provided.

It accords with EHC planning policy. But the Charter should help to change the way that schemes are conceived and negotiated before planning application.

The report should mention the Cambridgeshire Charter which is a model of a cultural change in development.

Before the report goes to full council, the report should be amended to cover these points.

The recommendation needs to be stronger – not just ‘a material consideration for LPA’, but to help a culture change in development processes.

The encouragement to developers to commit should be much more direct, without stressing ‘voluntarily’.