

REPORT OF THE LEAD MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

The Lead Member for Transport and Environment met on 20 September 2021. Attendances:-

Councillor Claire Dowling (Lead Member)

Councillors Chris Collier, Godfrey Daniel, Roy Galley, Wendy Maples and Paul Redstone

1 Notice of Motion – Community involvement in planning

1.1 The following Notice of Motion was submitted by Councillor Daniel, and seconded by Councillor Collier:

“East Sussex County Council believes planning works best when developers and the local community work together to shape local areas and deliver necessary new homes and facilities; and therefore calls on the Government to protect the right of communities to object to individual planning decisions.”

1.2 In line with County Council practice, the matter was been referred by the Chairman to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment for consideration to provide information and inform debate on the Motion.

1.3 In August 2020, the Government published the Planning for the Future White Paper, which proposed a series of reforms to the English planning system, covering plan-making, development management, development contributions, and other related policy proposals. Following a report to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment on 19 October 2020, the County Council submitted a response to the consultation on the White Paper. Within this response, concern was raised that the reforms, on the face of it, seemingly erode the democratic accountability that currently exists within the planning system. Our response also welcomed the proposals for further digitisation of the planning system, which the White Paper was particularly promoting as a way to facilitate more effective community engagement in the planning system.

1.4 The Queen’s Speech, provided on the 11 May 2021, set out the Government’s proposal to introduce a Planning Bill that will “create a simpler, faster and more modern planning system to replace the current one that dates back to 1947”. It is anticipated that this Bill will be introduced towards the end of this year and that it will build upon many of the reforms proposed in the Planning for the Future White Paper.

1.5 On the 21 June, Parliament debated the motion that has been proposed by Cllr Daniel (although rather than being specific to East Sussex County Council, it was specific to the House). The motion was voted on, with 231 MP’s in favour and none against.

1.6 Whilst there have been concerns expressed that the reforms to the planning system may stymie the ability for communities to influence planning decisions in their area, it is acknowledged by most that the planning system is often difficult to meaningfully engage with. With this in mind, it should be welcomed that the Queen’s Speech sets out one of the benefits of the Bill to be “digitising a [planning] system to make it more visual and easier for local people to meaningfully engage with”.

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1.7 In light of the above, whilst the motion put forward should be supported, particularly in light of the comments the County Council has already made on the White Paper, it is recommended that it is expanded upon to acknowledge that the use of digital technology should be utilised to make the planning system easier to navigate for those who genuinely wish to influence development in their local area. It should also be noted however, that not everyone has access to digital options and that alternatives should still be used so the process remains inclusive. In addition, given the high level of take-up of neighbourhood planning in many areas of East Sussex, it is recommended that the motion seeks to ensure the continuation of this level of plan-making as an effective way of achieving community involvement in planning decisions.

1.8 The County Council recognises that a planning system that sees local communities work with developers to plan and deliver new homes and related infrastructure is to the benefit of all. However, it is also recognised that there will be occasions when communities wish to oppose proposed new developments for laudable and sound planning reasons – a right to do this needs to be maintained.

1.9 The proposer and seconder agreed with the amended wording at the meeting of the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

1.10 The Lead Member for Transport and Environment recommends the County Council to:

✧ (1) approve the amended Notice of Motion:

"This Council believes planning works best for residents when developers and the local community work together to shape local areas and deliver necessary new homes and related infrastructure; it therefore supports the right of communities to be able to engage easily in the planning process including: through the full use of digital technology; participation in the making of neighbourhood plans; and calls on the Government to protect the right to object to individual planning applications."

20 September 2021

COUNCILLOR CLAIRE DOWLING
(Lead Member)