

Minutes of the Sustainable Development Select Committee Thursday, 4 March 2021 at 7.00 Pm

Present: Councillors Liam Curran (Chair), Louise Krupski (Vice-Chair), Obajimi Adefiranye, Suzannah Clarke, Eva Stamirowski and James-J Walsh and Bill Brown

Also present: Councillor Mark Ingleby, Councillor Paul Bell (Cabinet Member for Housing & Planning), Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager), Tom Atkinson (Growth and Place Manager), David Syme (Strategic Planning Manager) and Emma Talbot (Director of Planning)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2021

1.1 Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January be agreed as an accurate record.

2. Declarations of interest

2.1 Councillor Ingleby declared an interest in relation to item four as a Director of Lewisham Homes.

2.2 Councillor Krupski declared an interest as a member of Lewisham Cyclists.

3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

3.1 Resolved: that the response from Mayor and Cabinet be noted.

4. Small sites supplementary planning document

4.1 David Syme (Strategic Planning Manager) introduced the report and set out the background and rationale for the development of the supplementary planning document (SPD) - the following key points were noted:

- The Committee is asked to make comments on the draft SPD before a decision by Mayor and Cabinet on publicly consulting on the document.
- The development of the SPD is being carried out in response to policy in the London Plan – which directs boroughs to develop well designed new homes on small sites in order to meet housing targets.
- Once the SPD is adopted it will be a material consideration for planning decisions.
- It is hoped that the development of the SPD will lead to a number of benefits – specifically in terms of meeting the borough’s housing targets and in spreading development more evenly across the borough – whilst setting out clear expectations for developers/builders and enabling effective planning control.
- Consideration had been given to sustainability and the potential impact on conservation areas.
- The SPD would not enable the development of back gardens – but there are provisions to develop underutilised sites at the rear of properties where it is considered they can make a positive contribution to the streetscape.

4.2 David Syme and Emma Talbot (Director of Planning) and Tom Atkinson (Growth and Place Manager) responded to questions from the Committee – the following key points were noted:

- During the development of the SPD work had been carried out to explore the barriers to developing small sites. It is intended that the SPD will make it clear what is required to enable development.
- Viability assessment had been considered as part of the local plan review process.
- Contributions to affordable housing were dependent on a number of factors – including the size of the site being developed. It was hoped that local developers and builders would respond to the consultation.
- There are costs associated with pre-application advice – but it is intended the SPD will make it as clear as possible about the standards required to gain planning approval.
- There is an assumption against including security gates on new developments or creating ‘gated communities’.
- It is intended that the SPD should reflect the high quality of the existing work being carried out by officers – including close collaboration with Lewisham Homes. Work had also been carried out with other housing providers in the borough to ensure it supported the delivery of affordable homes.
- It is hoped that the SPD could be adopted (depending on the consultation and decision making process) in the autumn.
- Training could be carried out for councillors on the implications of the SPD.
- A wide range of information (including recent refusals and approvals for planning applications) had been considered as part of the development of the SPD.
- The importance of quality in new developments should be constantly restated.
- Planning is not a perfect system. Nonetheless, the Council is working proactively with developers to ensure that new developments are well designed and sensitively delivered (rather than developers bypassing the Council and gaining permission through appeals).
- Paved over front gardens reduce the availability of on street parking and limit sustainable drainage.
- The SPD cannot not set a new policy position – but in the new local plan it is being proposed that developments of fewer than nine units may need to make a contribution to affordable housing.
- Officers have worked collaboratively with colleagues in other boroughs to learn about successes and failures in existing small sites SPDs.
- Trees should be seen as an asset to a development – rather than a liability. Consideration would be given to the biodiversity impact of new development on sites of special nature conservation.

4.3 In the Committee discussion the following key points were also noted:

- Members welcomed the information provided in the report defining the comparative proportions of the land being discussed as well as the design and layout of the documents.
- Examples were given of some historic developments in the borough which members felt were inappropriate or unsympathetic to conservation areas.
- That solar panels and green roofs work well in combination.
- That consideration should be given to the contribution of smaller schemes to delivering affordable housing.

4.4 Resolved: that the Committee would refer its views to Mayor and Cabinet as follows –

1. The Committee welcomes the creation of the Small Sites Supplementary Planning Document and commends officers for the quality of the work they have delivered.

2. The Committee recommends that greater consideration should be given to the amount of community infrastructure levy funds are paid by small builders - as excessive charges will deter them from considering building in the first place.
3. The need for contributions from developers/builders towards affordable housing should be balanced with the urgent need for the Council to develop infill sites. The Committee believes that this is key to ensuring the success of the SPD.
4. The Committee recommends that the officers should actively seek the views of local small builders' on affordability and ease of applications in general.
5. The Committee recommends that planning councillors should be thoroughly trained on the SPD before it becomes policy.
6. The Committee also recommends that the planning team should announce when the SPD carries planning weight so that planning committees are clear when they can quote from it.

4.5 The Committee also made a number of additional comments about specific details within the report:

7. That all pictures in the document reflect should reflect policies outlined in the SPD. For example – amending pictures with sites featuring: lots of bins; non permeable surfaces or without trees, for example.
8. In Appendix 2 (at 14.3 and 14.6) a linkage between increased efficacy of photo voltaic solar panels and living roofs should be highlighted, given the frequent misunderstanding that you cannot have one with the other.
9. In Appendix 2 (at 6.4.2) – in relation to sites of importance for nature conservation - further consideration should be given to the detrimental impacts on biodiversity and ecology.
10. In Appendix 2 (at 30.2) 'Guidance for Vertical Development', the Committee would welcome more guidance around subterranean/basement development.
11. That Appendix 3 should be updated to reflect the new agreed ward boundaries that will become active from 2022.
12. That detailed maps, particularly borough wide ones, should be repeated at full page size at the end of the document to increase clarity for readers.
13. That the Committee welcomes the statement in appendix 2 (point 16.9) which highlights a preference of on street parking for small site developments - rather than the loss of front gardens, particularly when there is no net gain in on street parking due to the cross over taking up street space to enable this.
14. That the preparing of sites by removing trees in advance for development should be discouraged; that mitigation on site specified in planning permissions should account for the loss of trees – and that any replacements should provide a similar amenity as those removed. The Committee believes that this should also give consideration to trees on neighbouring development sites and sites of importance for nature conservation.
15. That any policy on rainwater collection must prioritise safety - as small children can drown in water collection points.
16. That consideration should be given to the impact of overshadowing of walls close to/opposite bedroom windows – in recognition that bedrooms are becoming equally important living spaces as living rooms.

5. A21 development strategy

- 5.1 David Syme introduced an update on the development of the A21 strategy – he noted the termination of the contract for the development of the strategy with the consultants and the next steps that would be taken to progress with the management of development and public realm improvements along the A21 corridor.

5.2 David Syme and Emma Talbot responded to questions from the Committee – the following key points were noted:

- Both developer community infrastructure levy contributions and direct development agreements could be used to deliver infrastructure.
- Officers were facilitating the sharing of information between the previous and new consultants on the scheme – particularly in relation to the consultation work that had already been carried out.
- It is possible that the delay in producing the strategy may have an impact on the development of dedicated cycle routes along the A21 corridor – particularly at the intersection with the south circular in Catford. It was not anticipated that there would be further knock on effects to the Catford programme from the delay to the A21 strategy.
- There were no issues with the principle of creating a dedicated cycle lane along the A21 corridor.
- It is intended that the new programme should move quickly but it would take time to transfer information between parties and develop the scheme. It was hoped that an update could be provided to the Committee in three or four months.
- Officers would work collaboratively with colleagues in the Council’s transport team to prioritise the development of cycling infrastructure in the borough.

6. Select Committee work programme

6.1 The Committee agreed that it would consider the Catford masterplan in advance of Mayor and Cabinet on 19 May. Members also made suggestions for the Committee’s 2021-22 work programme as follows:

- Pedestrian and cycling provision
- Schools streets and low traffic neighbourhoods
- The Bakerloo line
- Busses and bus routes
- Emergency planning
- The climate crisis

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm

Chair:

Date:
