



Buckinghamshire Council

Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GROWTH, INFRASTRUCTURE & HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2023 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 2.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 4.14 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

D Carroll (Chairman), T Hogg, A Baughan, S Chapple, I Darby, T Hunter-Watts, C Poll, D Town, S Wilson, P Brazier, P Cooper and L Smith BEM

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

R Stuchbury, C Harriss, R Matthews, P Strachan and M Winn, L Michelson, J Bromilow, D Eggleton, J Cheston, M Broadbent, S Ali, L Dowson, S Payne and R Dickinson

Agenda Item

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies had been received from Councillors Simon Rouse, Neil Marshall, Nic Brown, Carl Etholen and Qaser Chaudhry

Councillor Peter Brazier was present as substitute for Councillor Simon Rouse.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th July 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5 VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Rachael Matthews, Deputy Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration, Cllr Clive Harriss, Cabinet Member for Culture & Leisure, Cllr Peter Strachan, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration, Sophie Payne, Service Director, Culture, Sport & Leisure, Shabnam Ali, Head of Economic Growth, Matthew Broadbent, Senior Economic Development Officer, and Lucy Dowson, Tourism Development Manager for Visit Buckinghamshire, to the meeting.

The following points were highlighted from the presentation.

- The Visitor Economy produced large economic benefits for the county and would be supported further through the Visitor Economy Strategy. The final strategy would be ready by November 2023.
- Bucks domestic tourism had grown less than comparable counties (Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire and Hertfordshire) over the last decade. The County was mid-table in performance rankings for the Visitor Economy, sitting at 33rd nationally for tourism day visits.
- There were 7,772 visitor rooms in the county, 71% of these were in serviced operations, 19% non-service and 10% provided by campsites. There were 200 attractions in Bucks, with a 'traditional' asset base comprising historic properties and museums. These Hotels and attractions were generally clustered around the south of the county.
- Visitors for the Ridgeway and Waddesdon were compared. It was noted that Waddesdon tended to attract visitors that were relatively local, with Bucks and surrounding counties. The Ridgeway drew visitors from much further away, and across the country, reflecting its status as a National Trail.
- The consultation highlighted the residents and businesses perceptions of the visitor economy and tourism. Residents felt particularly positive about the benefits to the environment and local businesses, but they were concerned about the impact of litter. The response from businesses showed that 63% were smaller organisations with less than 10 employees, with 20% as registered charities.
- Three key themes for Buckinghamshire's visitor economy had been identified, these were Countryside, Walking & Cycling. Culture, Festival, Events & Film Industry. Local Food & Drink. Further large events held in Buckinghamshire would help improve the perception of the County as a place to visit.
- Current economic & financial pressures were negatively affecting the Visitor Economy. It was noted the Visitor Economy Strategy would not be revenue intensive for the Council.

During discussion, comments and questions raised by the Committee included.

- In response to a question regarding comparative local authorities, it was noted that Hertfordshire was particularly advanced in its approach to the Visitor Economy. They had chosen to outsource their Destination Management organisation as part of their strategy.
- Buckinghamshire was ideally located near to London with accessible train links. This represented an opportunity for Bucks and related to the key themes from the strategy - walk, cycle, take time out and relax. There was an opportunity for expansion of glamping sites, which were especially popular among younger generations.
- Cycle tracks were available from train stations to encourage visitors to access attractions. A particular challenge, compared to Oxford, was that attractions in Bucks tended to be spread across the county.
- Advertising in airports and train stations in London were typically not feasible due to expensive fees. However, flyers were distributed to key destinations and hotels in London to encourage tourists to visit bucks. Various options had been explored to ensure the best value for money.
- It was noted that Buckinghamshire was not necessarily associated with its notable tourist attractions. For example, Silverstone and Pinewood, while located in Buckinghamshire were not typically attributed to it. There was an opportunity to build on this as part of the Strategy.
- Data would be available on number of cyclists coming to the county for formal events, but not readily available for smaller clubs that go out informally. Cyclists positively contributed to the visitor economy and were likely to have visited coffee shops and food premises within the county.

- Online resources were typically used to research accommodation and attractions within Bucks. These were also cheaper for a businesses to develop than leaflets and advertisements at physical locations.
- The consultation was shared widely with Community Boards where it would've been further circulated to community and residents groups.

VISITOR ECONOMY PRESENTATION

VISITOR TYPES INFORMATION

6 LOCAL PLAN FOR BUCKINGHAMSHIRE UPDATE

The Committee received an update from Councillor Peter Strachan, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration, Darran Eggleton, Head of Planning Policy and Compliance and John Cheston, Planning Policy Manager.

The following points were highlighted from the report.

- There was a requirement that the Local Plan for Bucks (LP4B) be adopted by April 2025, however the council estimates that this will be adopted by the second quarter of 2027. This was due to the regularly changing national picture for planning, with the introduction of new legislation delayed, as well as the complexities around a county-wide local plan.
- LP4B was proceeding on schedule and within budget. The call for Brownfield sites remains open to maximise the possibility of developing brownfield sites over greenfield.

During discussion, comments and questions raised by the Committee included.

- It was clarified that the Site Assessment referenced in 2.4D would establish availability of land for housing, economic development, and other uses. This feeds into the Housing and Economic Land availability Assessment (HELAA). The Housing and Economic development needs assessment looked at the need for housing over the plan period, as well as commercial development.
- The Employment and Retail land review was undertaken by consultants Lichfield. Furthermore, the Local Housing needs assessment would give a picture of housing and economic development over the Plan period.
- Members were advised the Green Belt doesn't necessarily need to be released for development. 68% of Buckinghamshire was not in the green belt, there could potentially be the scope to meet housing needs in the area without encroaching into the Green Belt. It was indicated Secretary of State, Michael Gove could introduce changes to the NPPF which would remove the requirement for planning authorities to use Green Belt to meet housing needs.
- There were no statutory sanctions in place should a local authority not have a Local Plan within 5 years of their vesting date. The Chief Executive of the Council has written to the Levelling up department for clarification but had not yet received a response. The LPB4 was being developed on schedule as set out in the report.
- An approved Local Plan would be the best defence against planning appeals in the Green Belt. The Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in the south of the county also offered some protection from unplanned and inappropriate development.
- Data Centres and Solar Farms are new areas of Planning Policy. In development of LP4B, the Council would look to include Policies to regulate their development. Policies in LP4B would encourage the use of renewable energy and sustainable development methods. The Planning team would be working alongside climate colleagues to ensure planning policies developed would go as far as they reasonably can to encourage adaption to climate change.
- SANGS are used to help protect the Chilterns Beechwoods area. A Mitigation strategy would go to Cabinet within a year. The Cabinet Member advised the Member to contact them to

ensure there's follow up.

7 HOUSING STANDARDS UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Mark Winn, Cabinet Member for Homelessness and Regulatory Services, Lisa Michelson, Service Director, Economic Growth and Regeneration and Jacqui Bromilow, Head of Environmental Health & Trading Standards to the committee meeting.

The following points were highlighted from the report:

- The tragic death of 2 year old Awaab Ishak and the Coroner's report published in November 2022 highlighted to the risk of damp and mould. The Cabinet Member pledged that the Council would do everything possible to minimise the risk of such a tragedy occurring in Buckinghamshire.
- A report came to the 2023 February meeting of the Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee detailing the measures taken by Buckinghamshire Council to combat damp and mould.
- In 2022/23 there were 211 service requests relating to excess cold, or damp & mould. This compared to the 99 requests received in 2021/22, demand increased twofold compared to the previous year.
- It was noted that many tenants fear eviction if they raise concerns about damp and mould, however there were legal protections in place to protect residents.
- In collaboration with Opportunity Bucks, which looked at the 10 most deprived areas in Bucks, a project was ongoing to raise awareness of damp & mould, as well as create a referral pathway for partners to pass on information to the Council quickly.
- A 2 phase communications plan was set to launch in early October focusing on prevention, and what actions people can take to manage damp and mould. The team would work closely with other teams to ensure messaging is consistent with energy efficiency messages. Later on in November/December, alongside winter messaging focused on cost of living and heating advice, further information would be disseminated on damp & mould and how to report it.

During discussion, comments and questions raised by the Committee included.

- Households were facing a lot of pressure with cost of living crisis, where necessary affected residents are signposted to the helping hand scheme, as well as suggesting contacting (where appropriate) their social housing provider for particular schemes they have in place.
- Of the 82 improvement notices issued in the previous year referenced in 2.7 of the report, 7 were served to social landlords, and the remainder were to private sector landlords. It is important to note that social and private landlords are not treated differently with respect to enforcement action. At times where a hazard has been identified that may require formal action the social landlord has matters in hand and therefore does not require a notice to be served to remedy the defect.
- Improvement Notices may have varied time lengths attached them. This would be dependent on the works required to be undertaken. Tenants are kept in properties where possible. If compliance isn't forthcoming, works may be commenced by the Council to fix the problem (recovering costs from the landlord afterwards), and a formal civil penalty pursued where appropriate.
- Members were reassured that the Council had a good working relationships with Social Housing Providers, and attended quarterly meetings with providers. Making every visit count was a scheme whereby visitors (e.g. trades people) would be bale to recognise signs of damp & mould and inform the resident/provider.
- As part of Opportunity Bucks programme, work was done with housing associations to ensure that improving standards for residents was addressed for all tenants within the

County. It was noted that when tenants left social housing, if carpets were in good condition, they could be 'gifted' to the next tenant, rather than ripped out. Historically, there had been reluctance to do so as this could indicate carpets were the landlords responsibility.

- The Energy Doctor scheme was highlighted. This scheme allowed eligible households to request a visit from a domestic resource efficiency officer (Energy Doctor) to advise on ways the household can reduce energy consumption. More information was available on the [Buckinghamshire Council website](#).

8 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the Work Programme. Members could contact the Scrutiny Officer for the committee with any additional topics they wished to be included in the Growth, Infrastructure and Housing work programme.

9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place 23rd November 2023 at 10.00 a.m.