

Barnet Civic Network

11 November 2009

“The Core Strategy - Shaping Barnet as a Place”

Councillor Daniel Thomas

Cabinet Member for Policy & Performance

Councillor Thomas thanked everyone for attending and explained the Civic Network terms of reference and code of conduct. He then introduced a short session on public sector communication, where attendees were asked to comment on leaflets and website screen shots from a variety of public sector organisations.

Councillor Melvin Cohen

Cabinet Member for Planning & Environmental Protection

Councillor Cohen set out the programme for the evening which would focus on Barnet's Local Development Framework Core Strategy. The programme would comprise two presentations, one on why we have to produce Local Development Frameworks (LDF), and one on what Barnet is doing with its LDF. He stated that the Core Strategy forms the most important document in the LDF and sets out policies which provide for future development over the next 15 years.

Councillor Cohen stated that following the presentations there would be an opportunity for a short Q and A session followed by the evening's workshops which focused on 4 strategic themes:

- Suburbs and housing growth
- Beneficial use of community facilities
- Protecting our open spaces
- Economic advancement and town centres.

Councillor Cohen then introduced the guest speaker, Dr Ben Clifford, a 'Lecturer in Spatial Planning and Government' within the Bartlett School of Planning at University College London (UCL). Ben's work focuses on how local authorities are reacting to reforms of the planning system. He worked for the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and was a

policy advisor on the Killian Pretty Review, a national review of the planning application process.

Dr Ben Clifford

University College London

Ben opened by saying that many might be wondering why a new plan was being introduced when adoption of the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) only happened recently. The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 was significant as it produced radical changes to the planning system.

Ben discussed the origins of the new Local Development Framework (LDF) and outlined the reasons for its inception, mainly the difference in quality of existing plans across local authorities.

The LDF looks at the issue of spatial planning. Councils who were close to completing their UDP under the old planning procedures were allowed to continue, following the 2004 Act, and Barnet adopted its Unitary Development Plan in 2006.

Ben outlined the benefits of the LDF. He placed emphasis on the need for a supporting evidence base and the importance of deliverability of social, physical and green infrastructure, as the LDF is meant to be about setting clear objectives and achieving them and not just about providing a plan. The Core Strategy is the key document as all other plans must conform to what is contained within the Core Strategy. Every local authority must produce one and set out how their area and places within it will develop. The Core Strategy should look at least 15 years in the future and focus on key issues and challenges for the area.

By March 2008 just 22 out of 396 local authorities had Local Development Frameworks in place with three out of 33 London Boroughs having Core Strategies in place. Some procedural changes were introduced in June 2008 to simplify the stages needed to adopt the Development Plan Document.

Overall, Ben described the process as difficult but worthy and hoped that it will lead to a more concerted and consolidated approach.

Councillor Melvin Cohen

Cabinet Member for Planning & Environmental Protection

Councillor Cohen said the evening would be focusing on Barnet's Core Strategy, which was released for consultation on 9 November 2009.

The Core Strategy will detail where, when and how change will take place up to 2026 and will provide strategic hooks for other documents; which will provide more detailed policy for subsequent decision making.

Councillor Cohen mentioned the Mill Hill East Area Action Plan, which is already in place with an application in for a large development in the area. The Colindale Area Action Plan was to have an examination in public the following week and the council expects it to be adopted in early 2010. We also expect adoption of the North London Waste Plan in 2011.

The 'Core Strategy – Direction of Travel' is the new name for 'preferred options'. There would be an opportunity for further comment on this next summer when it reaches the Publication Stage. The Direction of Travel emphasises the Three Strand Approach:

- **Protection** of Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and other valued open space from inappropriate development.
- **Enhancement** and protection of suburbs, town centres and historic areas.
- **Growth** that is sustainable to deliver successful regeneration and high quality.

Councillor Cohen informed the group that 23,000 comments had been received from 462 respondents on the earlier version of the Core Strategy known as Issues and Options. By and large these comments focused on Barnet's growth and the delivery of physical, social and green infrastructure to accompany it. The concerns commonly related to the distinctive character of Barnet in having large houses and abundant green spaces.

He then commented on the key findings of the LDF evidence base including:

- the Characterisation Study which looked at distinctive suburban places at risk from growth and worthy of protection,
- the work on Town Centres which highlighted future demand for food retail in north and east Barnet,
- the assessment of open spaces which emphasised the need to improve the quality of open spaces and not just look at quantity.

Councillor Cohen highlighted that this was an opportunity to help shape what Barnet will look like in 2026 and encouraged the Network to let the council know, as part of the consultation process on the Direction of Travel, what they liked, disliked, wanted changed or considered was missing. He then briefly listed the four main areas the Network was to discuss during the workshops:

- **Suburbs & Housing Growth**

The council wants to provide new family homes as well as protect suburban houses wherever possible and to avoid garden grabbing.

- **Beneficial Use of Community Facilities**

In responding to the economic downturn and its effect upon development the council published a guidance note, bringing flexibility to Section 106 agreements and securing funding for schools and libraries. He said that Barnet is progressing well along the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and Primary Schools Capital Investment Programme (PSCIP) programmes.

- **Protecting our Open Spaces**

The demand on open spaces is changing and there is now a greater emphasis on quality. Our open spaces are not close to where the majority of people are living.

- **Economic Advancement and Town Centres**

Barnet has the most town centres of any London Borough. Changing patterns in the way people shop and the recession are all affecting our town centres. There is no one size fits all strategy. The council is progressing with development frameworks for the 6 largest town centres and promoting Brent Cross as a metropolitan town centre. Most jobs in Barnet are from small to medium sized businesses.

January 4th 2010 marked the close of comments for this stage. The programme for next stages was listed:

- **Nov 2009 - Jan 2010** - Direction of Travel (Consultation)
- **Summer 2010** - Publication (Consultation) and Submission to Planning Inspectorate
- **Late 2010** - Examination in Public
- **Early 2011** - Inspector's Report
- **April 2011** - Adoption of Core Strategy

Question & Answer session

Q: Can any improvements be made to make the response forms to the published document more user-friendly? Particularly regarding the issues and questions stage, will the council accept letters as well?

A: Letters will be accepted but please structure the questions around particular issues so that we can easily collate subjects together.

Q: You said Barnet is promoting family home development. What about efforts to promote inclusion in development? Why not also promote wheelchair access homes?

A: We have to incorporate these issues in any development we deliver and we will consider this issue in our future policy development.

Q: The document is too disparate, and requires reading many other documents in conjunction. We would like something simpler.

A: The older style of plans generate a false sense of security. We have always had to take other policies into account. It may seem more complicated but it is hoped to be better for managing future development. This is a more bespoke system which allows plans to be more responsive to local needs. Moreover, we want to move away from the one size fits all approach, which therefore requires us to produce more detailed documents.

Q: Environmental protection is a concern. Can we have an undertaking in the open spaces review that the Wildlife & Countryside Act will not be

ignored? When there is a consultation will we get any feedback?

Secondly, can you comment on the Barnet Trees Report?

A: Biodiversity is taken into account in the LDF and we need to comply with the Act. Feedback has been provided on the consultation on earlier stages of the Core Strategy. Furthermore, Overview and Scrutiny have looked at the issue of trees. It found that Barnet has a rich supply of trees and tree protection measures are important to protect the character of the borough.

Q: The Conservative manifesto claimed it wished to halt the destruction of family homes. However, policy CS2 suggests promoting areas for infill development. Is it the policy to develop main roads with flats like Hendon Lane?

A: We have a strong emphasis on protecting areas of the borough for large, family houses with gardens. However, this has to be balanced against the need for housing growth, as we are preparing documents in the context of the London Plan and national policy. Along the A5 corridor quality needs improving and development applications to create new housing are needed. We want to manage growth setting out broad principles for suitable places. You are encouraged to get involved and comment on the documents as where these developments will be is part of the process.

Q: We need more time to respond as the consultation covers Christmas.

A : This is the mid-point in the development of the Core Strategy and there will be a further opportunity to comment in 2010. However, we will accept responses up to January 11th 2010.

Workshop

Each table was given one of the four themes mentioned above to work on, with help from council officers as facilitators.

The facilitators then each provided brief feedback from the tables. All feedback and discussions were noted by officers to feed into consultation.

Councillor Cohen thanked Dr Ben Clifford for speaking and the Network for attending the meeting. He reiterated that the formal closing date for comments on the Core Strategy was 4 Jan 2010 but that submissions would be accepted for a short period after that date.

Councillor Daniel Thomas

Cabinet Member for Policy & Performance

Councillor Thomas thanked the Network. He said that he and the officers had found the discussions and feedback helpful. He also thanked council staff for managing the event.