

Merseyside Civic Society

Presentation by Mike Eccles

of Liverpool City Planning Department

at the Quaker Meeting House, 18th October 2016

Jean Grant, MCS vice Chair opened the meeting, saying that Mike's presentation would be followed by time for discussion, and then time to arrive at some conclusions. Conclusions would be communicated to the 'Echo' and also form the basis for a further meeting with City Councillors and local MPs.

Presentation

Mike explained that the new Local Plan will be a statutory document informing planning decisions up to 2033 and identifying growth needs. It is a Government requirement that the Local Plan is updated by early 2017. Otherwise, developers will win appeals, and Liverpool will lose control over what is built and where it is built.

On homes: The draft plan allows for 29,600 net new homes between 2013 and 2033. These could be delivered, but now it has been stated that a further 9,000 new households will have to be accommodated. A City-Region-wide study will clarify how these extra homes will be provided.

On employment: A further 120 Hectares of land is needed, but there is likely to be a 'supply-side deficit' in quantity and quality. This will also need a City-Region study.

On 'retail and leisure': There will be a 'surplus' of 'convenience' space until 2032, and a surplus of 'comparison' space until 2025.

On open space: The assessment and strategy report is nearing completion, and the Mayoral Green Space Review has been published.

On infrastructure: There are 'no known critical infrastructure issues'.

Mike then went on to ask 'What should the consultation tell us':

Have we got the right policies? Have we got all the policies we need for Liverpool, or have we got too many? Do they cover the relevant and important issues? Do they ask

too much?

There are [already] 81 policies in 10 chapters; the majority are for 'dealing with' planning applications.

Are the housing sites and district and local centre designations right? Where policies identify development sites or geographical areas, these will be shown on a Policy Map.

The City Centre chapter will include 'character areas' and heritage designations.

There will be chapters on housing, shopping centres, employment, green areas and heritage.

How to respond

Mike then talked about 'how to respond', and said that representations, either in support or objection, must be made in writing. He showed a screenshot of the 'consultation portal' [which was difficult to read and looked a bit intimidating]. He explained that the key things are: [1] Are you objecting or supporting, [2] Please explain why, [3] And, if objecting, what change would enable you to withdraw your objection? [4] Any other comments.

He quoted an interesting example, in which someone suggested that new development shouldn't just 'reflect' the existing context, but should 'improve' it [thus raising the sort of issues about 'quality' and 'design' that often concern the MCS].

He then went on to 'what happens after this consultation?' as follows:

A final version will be ready by December 2016. The representations will be assessed, and account taken of the Employment, Open Space and Green Space Reviews. There will be a re-run of appraisals and assessments, then a 'Cabinet Report process'. The 'Publication and Consultation of the proposed Local Plan' will be in May 2017, to be followed by 'Submission and Examination' [to and by Government], then 'Adoption', allowing a final six-week period for possible legal challenge.

Question time

At this stage, the meeting was opened to questions from the floor. A number of written questions had been raised by MCS in advance and these had been circulated as a broad agenda for this stage of the evening.

Q. Would there be a conflict with a 'City-Region Local Plan'?

A. Difficult to answer at the moment, but the City-Region won't [be able to] deal with the same level of detail.

Q [Chrissie Byrne]. Does more homes mean [a requirement for] more green space?
A. We may have to use space more efficiently and intensively.

Q. [also on Green Space] There is widespread suspicion of the Council's motives towards green space. One question was 'The UDP policies were [constantly] circumvented – why should it be any different this time?'

A. There was applause, then a short inconclusive discussion, including the following:

Q. [Margaret Harvey] There are worries about the balance between 'brown fields' and 'green fields' in different parts of the city. Some areas with brown field sites have a need for green areas [should there be a re-balancing?].

[Chair moved discussion on to housing issues, pointing out that time was restricted]



Q [Jeff Gibbons]. The MCS has strongly opposed the way in which housing renewal has been attempted in the city, and it is clear that the growth of the inner-city population remains slower than in other cities in England. What principles are the Council using as part of the Local Plan to rebuild the inner-city population? Also, the MCS has advocated the development of terraced housing in particular – Will the Local Plan contain any design proposals or planning guidance to encourage more efficient and sustainable housing?

A. If you don't think the plan does enough, make representation – 'maybe we need two or three extra policies'. Mike said that, up to 2012, some 70% of the new housing was in central areas, and that figure had since risen to 80%. One of the biggest contributions in the future would be the Liverpool Waters site.

Q. No mention of 'affordable housing'?

A. We don't need to provide 'affordable housing through the Planning system' [the audience was evidently surprised by this]. But reference was made to the Mayor's 'Rent to Buy for 10,000 homes' policy – 'we're still to see how it plays out.'

Q. What is the effect of all the new student housing?

A. An assumption of some 'migration' from the 'terraced house stock' [making more of that available], with five student beds being roughly equivalent to one traditional house.

Q. How will Neighbourhood Plans relate to the Local Plan?

A. They are like local versions of the plan. Subject to examination within the neighbourhood, and ultimately a referendum with a simple majority, the 'plan is made' and will over-ride city-wide policy for that area, until re-made. The Government is keen for Neighbourhood Plans to have a greater role – and developers are beginning to pick up on this [there may be unforeseen consequences].

Q [Jeff Gibbons and John Davies]. Are the findings of the Mayor's Review to be used to inform the final Plan or is other work to be undertaken? In the meantime, can we assume that no 'further erosion' of green space will occur? The City Council may consider that there can be over-riding reasons why development might be appropriate on areas or edges of green space. What design principles would apply in these circumstances? Will the Local Plan contain details of the requirement to provide design assessments and appropriate masterplans if such proposals are submitted?

A. If [you feel that] additional words are needed [or words 'not tight enough'], send them through.

Q [Rob MacDonald]. Talking about design, ways of doing design... there is no notion of design within the document. No vision - [not your fault, but] it's just not there; we don't know what your vision of Liverpool is. There is [so much] knowledge in this room, knowledge of buildings no longer there – parts that have been 'wiped out'. To say there's no land to build on – that's a nonsense; compare Berlin and Amsterdam, how they occupy [make use of] small sites. The plan doesn't show us anything of [such possibilities]? [applause]

A. Vision and urban design section; if this doesn't 'pass muster', then [put something forward]. The Regional Spatial Strategy was abolished three years ago; that was 'incredibly powerful'.... Now with less power, we're doing our best. In terms of ['visionary' projects and] strategic infrastructure, such as HS2, it's not something we can 'react' to in this plan; we could end up 'blighting' sites.

Q [Chrissie Byrne]. Isn't there an easier way for consultation [material] to be put out? Put in libraries? Simplified? – some people are not online [and can't access 'legal brains'].

A. There is a paper questionnaire [he held it up – plenty of copies available].

Q [Jonathan Brown]. There is only a page and a half on heritage. Are you comfortable with this? What about further Conservation Areas? – for example, the County Road area would surely be covered in other cities.

A. There will be much more in the actual Plan, written by the Conservation Officers [as in the current Unitary Development Plan]. You could 'set out an aspiration'. Further suggestions can be made [and considered during the life of the Plan].

At this point, from the Chair, Jean Grant noted the concern of the MCS at the cuts apparently being made in the Planning Department [including accredited Conservation staff]. How can the World Heritage Site continue to be supported? How can monitoring [of listed buildings] continue with such a small [inadequate] number of staff?

A few conclusions

An attempt was made to draw conclusions from the long discussion, with a view to inviting participants back to another meeting. Key points were raised as follows:

Mike explained that we have an opportunity, as residents, to tell the Council what we think and want. The MCS will help people to make their comments on the Plan.

A lot of people are worried by a [perceived] lack of respect for green policies.

We need to have a greater understanding of the meaning of the word 'flexible', when used in this context.

Returning to the theme of 'design', Rob MacDonald raised the example of LUDCAP [the City's former design review body – Liverpool Urban Design and Conservation Advisory Panel] to illustrate how residents and professionals [without vested interest] could contribute to the process, making use of models, both physical and digital.

The MCS supports the principles of Design Review, based on timely assessments of projects by multi-disciplinary peer-groups, in support of both developers and the planning process. MCS envisages review focussing on objective urban design and sustainability criteria as well as more subjective issues of design quality.