

**Minutes of Meeting of Planning Committee of Mid Ulster District Council held on Monday 1 December 2014 at 7 pm, in Cookstown District Council Offices**

<b>Members Present:</b>	In the Chair, Councillor Kearney (Chair)  Councillors Bell, Clarke, Cuthbertson, Gildernew, Glasgow, McKinney, Mallaghan, Mullen, T Quinn, Reid, Robinson
<b>Officers in Attendance:</b>	Mr Tohill, Chief Executive Mr Boomer, Area Planning Manager Mr O'Hagan, ICT Manager Mrs Grogan, Committee Services/ Senior Admin Officer (D&STBC)
<b>Others in Attendance:</b>	Ms Hilda Clements, Senior Planning Officer Ms Sinead McEvoy, Principal Planning Officer

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm.

**P26/14      Apologies**

Councillors McEldowney and McPeake.

**P27/14      Declarations of Interest**

The Chair reminded members of their responsibility with regard to declarations of interest.

**Matters for Decision**

**P28/14      Receive and Confirm Minutes of the Planning Committee Meeting held on Monday 3 November 2014**

Proposed by Councillor Cuthbertson  
Seconded by Councillor T Quinn and

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Planning Committee held on Monday 3 November 2014, (P19/14 – P25/14) were considered and signed as accurate and correct.

**P29/14      Transfer of Planning Accommodation and Related Costs**

The ICT Manager presented a report on the cost of transferring planning functions and sought approval to procure the necessary ICT equipment in line with Planning Service requirements. The Officer stated that planning is transferring little or no ICT equipment as their current equipment is owned by IT Assist.

The ICT Officer added that Council will be required to provide Planning Officers with fit for purpose equipment and resources to deliver the planning function for Mid Ulster. This will include computers and associated equipment for staff to logon to council

network as of April 2015. It is proposed to build the new infrastructure in the New Year and test the same in conjunction with planning staff to avoid disruption to service on transfer. The process will tease out anomalies and all the requirements for Council to deliver planning from an ICT perspective.

The cost of accommodating and making the necessary provision for planning within the Magherafelt Offices is estimated to be £100,000.

Councillor Gildernew enquired if this took into account equipment for Dungannon and Cookstown offices.

Councillor Mallaghan enquired how much financial assistance DOE would be giving.

The ICT Manager stated that once installed operators will be able to access programmes from any Council site.

Councillor T Quinn advised that he would be meeting the Minister for the Environment tomorrow and, if the opportunity arises, would bring up the questions raised.

Councillor Reid enquired if funding was being ring-fenced from the ICT Convergence expenditure.

The Chief Executive advised that DOE would provide some support for the setting up of offices, but this would most likely be a minimal amount and that the £100,000 is additional to the £760,000 leaving it a total of £860,000 for ICT overall. The Chief Executive stated that a request for a meeting to discuss funding is with the Minister and officers will continue to lobby for a meeting. The recommendation was for consideration at this stage, but a decision would need to be made by the 15<sup>th</sup> December.

Councillor Glasgow asked it to be recorded that himself, Councillors McKinney and Reid were totally against this cost and that the Ulster Unionist Party would be sticking by their decision of opposing such costs.

Proposed by Councillor Mallaghan  
Seconded by Councillor Gildernew

Resolved That it is recommended to the Council to grant approval to procure, through a competitive process, the necessary ICT resources for the delivery of the planning function.

The proposal was put to the meeting 9 (nine) members voted in favour and 3 (three) members voted against.

The Chair declared the proposal carried.

The ICT Manager left the meeting at 7.20 pm.

**P30/14 Paper on Housing Provision Requirements to inform Mid Ulster Local Development Plan Preparations**

Ms Clements presented a paper which provided an overview of the current housing situation in Mid Ulster Council area and to consider the housing requirements to 2030.

The paper provided:

- (i) the regional policy context for formulating Local Development Plan housing strategies and policies;
- (ii) a profile of the housing stock of Mid Ulster;
- (iii) an overview of the Housing Growth Indicators and how these can be notionally allocated; and
- (iv) an understanding of housing allocations, existing housing supply and the need for additional zoning.

The Area Planning Manager updated the Committee on affordability of housing and what best suits individuals. It was added that due to the economic downturn, particularly in the construction sector, people are finding it harder to get onto the property ladder.

The Area Planning Manager advised that in relation to tenure, type, affordability, occupancy and unfitness it can be concluded that:

- there is a need to provide a mix of housing types to meet the needs of smaller households (1-2 persons) as well as families;
- the private rented sector is primarily outside the scope of planning intervention other than through the control of Houses of Multiple Occupation;
- social housing can be addressed through the development management process provided there is a strategic policy on the development plan to facilitate this; and
- unfitness can be addressed through the provision of policies on renovation and improvement of dwellings.

Councillor Reid stated that there is a huge problem with zero hour contracts which is currently affecting a lot of people.

Councillor Clarke stated that in the rural area, when new builds and farmhouses were being constructed, it was usually family members in the construction trade that carried out the work which made homes more affordable. Over the years occupancy has dropped dramatically due to the economic downturn.

The Area Planning Manager advised that since 2008 there has been a dramatic decrease in people gaining employment with a high number migrating to try and get work across the water.

Councillor Gildernew expressed concern about how PPS21 has resulted in rural families having no option but to move into towns. He added that members of rural families cannot avail of sites being offered to them.

Councillor Bell felt it was encouraging to hear that there is room for scope as things can change. This Council needs to take into consideration social housing or areas for social housing, which in turn could result in the revival of the construction industry.

Councillor Mallaghan left the meeting at 7.45 pm.

The Chief Executive left the meeting at 7.45 pm and returned at 7.48 pm.

Ms Clements referred to the section on Accommodating Housing Growth and advised the allocation of housing growth to specific locations in a district is a matter for decision through the development plan process. In the allocation process, account must be taken of the roles and functions of each settlement, hubs should be given the primary focus for growth, the need to sustain rural communities living in smaller settlements and the open countryside should be recognised and small towns and villages should be consolidated and revitalised in their role as local service centres.

Councillor Bell referred to the demographics of Mid Ulster and the approach to date has been pushing rural communities to live in towns. PPS21 has failed the rural community who would need to be given the same respect as people living in towns.

Councillor Clarke agreed with Councillor Bell, the rural community will not be able to maintain schools, shops, post offices etc. Rural schools are being closed as people are not able to build in the rural area. The member further stated that during the building boom, people from urban areas built houses in the countryside but did not contribute to the rural way of living as they still sent their children to town schools and shopped in urban areas. Any policy being developed needs to look at and address such issues.

Councillor Robinson stated that there were a lot of facts and figures, really surprising that 50% of households only have 1 or 2 occupants therefore there should be flexibility, with smaller dwellings being built to accommodate everyone's needs. Councillor Robinson highlighted the attraction of people going to live where employment opportunities were coupled with better transport facilities.

The Area Planning Manager advised that there is a lot of zoned land in Dungannon, which has still yet to be utilised which will be very useful if the need for land arises.

Councillor Cuthbertson stated that developers are having problems building houses in villages due to the lack of investment in infrastructure such as water and sewerage.

Councillor Reid advised that people are downsizing through no fault of their own with some still living in the family home because they cannot get onto the property ladder. He added that smaller constructed houses would be an opportunity for such people. There is a need for a balance between rural and urban areas.

Councillor T Quinn stated that there was still 2,100 people waiting on social housing over the three areas and this issue needs to be addressed. The Member continued to say that it was most welcome that 58 new town houses were being constructed as social housing in Cookstown, but this was only a drop in the ocean as more needed to be done in urban and rural areas.

Councillor Bell advised that social housing needs to be in the same league as private developments as we do not want differences to be made.

Councillor T Quinn left the meeting at 8.30 pm.

In response to a query about statistics from NISRA, it was

Proposed by Councillor Bell  
Seconded by Councillor Reid and

**Resolved** That it be recommended to the Council that the Chief Executive liaise with the Chief Executive of NISRA on gaining up to date figures on Population statistics.

The Area Planning Manager advised that he would get a general consensus from Council members before it was finalised.

#### **P31/14 Planning Visit to Ayrshire Council**

The Area Planning Manager updated members on Planning visit to North Ayrshire Council and advised that it was very productive, even though in his opinion the DOE were equally as good.

The Area Planning Manager advised that he was very impressed with the paperless office as everything was approved online and felt that work completed by paper leads to endless errors and that he would like to investigate some options for the paperless office and bring back to a future Planning Committee.

Councillor Reid stated that he found the trip very beneficial and to experience the way members conduct planning in North Ayrshire was very impressive. He was disappointed by the bad publicity in the Belfast Telegraph relating to the trip and stressed that a message should be sent back to the Belfast Telegraph for publication on how productive the whole experience was.

The Chief Executive advised that a strong letter had been drafted and issued to the Editor of the Belfast Telegraph from the Chair.

Members asked that the Committee be kept informed of any outcome.

Councillor Glasgow wanted to pass on his thanks to the staff who arranged the successful study visit and members agreed that credit be issued to all staff involved.

#### **P32/14 Open Consultation List – Planning Reform and Transfer to Local Government – Proposals for Subordinate Legislation Phase 2: Closes on 31 December 2014**

The Chief Executive advised that after careful consideration, he was satisfied that no response be issued.

#### **P33/14 Co-operational Ireland – All Island Local Authority Forum Spatial Planning – Capacity Building Visit to Leitrim County Council 12<sup>th</sup> December 2014**

The Chief Executive advised that an invitation had been received from Leitrim County Council for 10 members to attend the capacity building event on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2014.

It was agreed that Louise Hall, Business Support Officer would seek availability of members to attend and in their absence another member could be nominated from their party.

**P33/14      Duration of Meeting**

The meeting was called for 7.00 pm and ended at 9.00 pm.

CHAIR \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_