

**Minutes of the Future Council Scrutiny Committee
Wednesday, 6th October, 2021 at 6.00 pm
In the Town Hall, St James's Road, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor E Lawrence (Vice-Chair in the Chair)
Councillors S Ali, P Atkins, C Barnett, R Collins, D Corfield, J Cowell, P Dobb, J Foster,
Z Islam, M Rogers and S Saleem.

Officers:

H Martin (Director of Regeneration and Enterprise), C Mellor (Planning Manager), P Parker
(Head of Communications and Public Affairs), C Marshall (Senior Account Manager),
P Mountford (Head of Planning and Regeneration), V Popplewell (Principal Planning Officer),
K Lowe (Principal Planning Officer) and S Griffiths (Democratic Services Manager)

Also in Attendance:

Councillor P Harley – Leader of the Council
Councillor S Phipps - Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise
Councillor Q Zada – Leader of the Opposition Group
Councillor C Bayton – Shadow Cabinet Member for West Midlands Combined Authority
Councillor K Ahmed – Shadow Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise
P Griffiths (Head of Housing Assets and Development), D Hubbard (Project Engineer),
S Howells (Strategic Estates and Development Manager) (NHS Black Country and West
Birmingham CCG), R Sadlier (Intelligence Analyst), S Everton (Black Country Director of
Transport)

28 Members of the Public

32 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors A Davies, A Lees and
J Roberts.

33 **Appointment of Substitute Members**

Councillors P Atkins and R Collins had been appointed as substitute Members for
Councillors A Davies and J Roberts respectively, for this meeting of the Committee
only.

34 **Declarations of Interest**

No member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

35 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meetings held on 1st and 8th September, 2021, be approved as a correct record and signed.

36 **Update on the Black Country Plan Consultation and Engagement Process**

The Head of Communications and Public Affairs gave a presentation on an overview of marketing and communications for the Draft Black Country Plan consultation. The role and objective of the marketing activity was to direct people towards the Black Country Plan website and pick up points including libraries and reception areas to encourage people to take part in the consultation.

It was recognised that a two tiered approach was needed with Dudley leading on communicating the Black Country Plan consultation on behalf of the Black Country authorities. Each Local Authority was taking responsibility at a local level with advice and guidance from Dudley to ensure a consistent approach. It was noted that communication plans were agreed by all Local Authorities which also included a member engagement process.

Each Local Authority had utilised their own methods of communication to residents, including social media, e-bulletins and media relations. To maximise the opportunity to communicate with as many residents as possible, funding was allocated for a layer of communication to support local level activity. A breakdown of the combined budget for communication materials and channels totalling £50,000 was outlined at the meeting.

The multi-channel approach of printed materials together with online digital information was an effective mix to reach a wide range of people, providing information and encouraging participation.

Promotional material had been displayed on 100 buses from all main Black Country depots, together with articles in the Express and Star, media releases and social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, which had seen a significant amount of usage. The Committee was informed that Black Country Radio had been commissioned to broadcast 12 adverts per day, Monday to Friday, for the duration of the consultation.



The Head of Communications and Public Affairs confirmed that £15,000 had been allocated towards printed materials including summary documents, hard copy comments forms and associated documents.

Dudley Council had issued four e-bulletins, which had been opened 20,189 times with an average open rate of 37%. An article in 'your borough, your home' magazine had been delivered in August, 2021 to 123,000 properties, and the Communications and Public Affairs Team (CAPA) had proactively issued 11 news releases and processed 16 media enquiries.

It was noted that, at this time, Dudley was the only Council in the Black Country that had undertaken a scrutiny process in relation to the Black Country Plan. Following discussions held at a previous Scrutiny Committee, the navigation through the Black Country Plan website had been significantly improved enabling a simplified comment form. 27,000 additional comments forms were printed to fulfil requests from members of the public, elected members and distributed at meetings and drop-in events, together with a direct mail flyer produced for all borough residents and delivered through Royal Mail week commencing 27th September, 2021. It was reported that face to face drop-in sessions and five public meetings had been undertaken and supported by planning officers.

The Head of Communications and Public Affairs reiterated that the main objective of the communication plan was to direct people towards the website and engage in consultation. It was considered that the number of visits to the website was positive and this continued to increase.

Members asked questions, made comments and responses were given where appropriate as follows: -

- The Chair commented positively on the presentation and expressed thanks to officers for incorporating comments and suggestions made at previous Scrutiny Committees.
- A Member queried whether a quote had been obtained for the production and delivery of a letter to each household within the Borough in relation to the Black Country Plan, and if so, an explanation was required as to why this was not pursued by the Council.

The Head of Communications and Public Affairs confirmed that the cost for the production and delivery of a letter to the whole Black Country would have been in excess of the allocated budget, and concerns were raised that this would have created a single opportunity for communicating to residents.



- In responding to a question raised by a Member in relation to unique website impressions, the Head of Communications and Public Affairs confirmed that although data was constantly changing, statistical data could be corroborated once the consultation had concluded. It was suggested however that to date the number of unique visits to the website by individuals was approximately 10,000.
- It was noted that some residents had reported that they had not received any leaflets, and in responding the Head of Communications and Public Affairs confirmed that Royal Mail had been commissioned to deliver 140,000 leaflets to households. He requested that Members provide specific details of those affected and Royal Mail would be informed accordingly.
- The importance of engaging at ward level for residents to participate in the consultation was mentioned.
- It was confirmed that approximately 700 members of the public had attended four public meetings, with a further meeting scheduled for Thursday 7th October, 2021 in Stourbridge Town Hall. 99 members of the public had attended face to face drop-in sessions and 26 people had joined a virtual question and answer session.
- Concerns were raised as to why the presentation had not been included in the agenda documents to allow sufficient time for Members to review the information and undertake research if needed. The Chair indicated that statistical information was constantly changing, and it was important for the Committee to have the latest data at this meeting.
- The Shadow Cabinet Member for West Midlands Combined Authority referred to comments made by a number of residents indicating that the website was not user friendly or fit for purpose and raised a question in relation to the individual unique visits to the website as mentioned earlier in the meeting.

The Head of Communications and Public Affairs commented on the complexity of analysing website impressions and confirmed that the 43,000 web visits was accumulated by the number of clicks on the page by an individual. The difficulties in utilising the Planning Portal was acknowledged, however, measures had been taken to simplify the Black Country Plan website.

- It was noted that the statistics presented included data across the Black Country, and that further analysis could be undertaken once the consultation had concluded on statistics and comments received according to locality.



- A Member considered that the £13,000 funding applied to bus advertising should have been utilised in the production and delivery of a letter to each household which would have been more detailed and personal. In responding to a question raised by the Member, the Head of Communications and Public Affairs clarified that the promotional ‘paid for’ associated costs were used for the Black Country region, and the presentation slides that highlighted localised data specifically related to Dudley.
- It was also confirmed that the expenditure used in the production and delivery of the direct mail flyer for all households through Royal Mail was £18,000.
- Reference was made to the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 1st September, 2021 which had highlighted areas for development in particular on the Local Authority’s consultation and public participation processes. A Member shared her disappointment at the comments made that members of the public still considered the website not fit for purpose. Following a suggestion made by the Member, the Chair agreed to consider including an item in relation to a review of the Council’s consultation processes to a future scrutiny programme, in consultation with Communications and Public Affairs team and Public Health.
- It was acknowledged that as lessons had been learnt during the scrutiny process and it was essential that the Local Authority incorporated those to develop a clear and improved blueprint to ensure good practice for future consultations.

Resolved

- (1) That the presentation on an overview of marketing and communications for the Draft Black Country Plan consultation, be noted.
- (2) That consideration be given to including a review of the Council’s consultation processes in the future scrutiny programme, following consultation with the Communications and Public Affairs and Public Health teams.

37 **Public Forum**

The Committee heard representations from several members of the public concerning the Black Country Plan, as summarised below:



- A resident of Stourbridge referred to the complex nature of the Black Country Plan whilst balancing the need for new affordable housing and concerns raised in relation to quality of life and environmental challenges. The importance of considering other areas including the Black Country's infrastructure and value of urban greenspaces was highlighted. The resident stated that greenspaces provided a vital space for relaxation and protection of those spaces was non-negotiable. He welcomed the policies contained within the Black Country Plan that protected urban greenspace, in particular the proposed designation of Corbett Meadow as a local greenspace.
- A resident of Kingswinford commented on the projections assessed by the Office of National Statistics for national growth and net international migration and considered them to be unrealistic and presented a worsening case which led to the requested development of additional housing on green land. The Black Country Plan predicted that the net international migration would represent 84% of growth population in the Borough over the period of the plan. It was reported however that prior to the United Kingdom's referendum, approximately 200,000 people migrated each year which had decreased to an average of 50,000 per year following the referendum. This had made a significant impact and suggested that fewer dwellings may be needed. The Local Authority was encouraged to consider these factors going forward and undertake further investigation prior to a decision being made of the Plan.

The Planning Manager, although acknowledging comments made in relation to projections data and the potential reduction in the number of homes to be developed, emphasised the Local Authority's requirement of utilising Office of National Statistics data in order to achieve the singular target of developing 76,000 homes.

It was reported that the Leaders of the four Black Country Councils had collectively submitted their concerns and representations to Central Government, and Members queried whether a response had been received. In responding, the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise confirmed that a response had not been received and that the Local Authority was still required to work to the same projections in accordance with the national methodology.

A Member raised concerns that the assessments had been undertaken using immaterial data and suggested that officers should investigate localised data in consultation with Public Health specifically for Dudley, to enable the Committee to effectively compose recommendations for consideration.

- A resident of Severn Drive, Pensnett raised a question as to why Severn Drive had been removed from the original plan and subsequently reinstated. Given that Dudley Council promoted itself as a child-friendly borough, it was queried why the Council was proposing the removal of vital greenspace from the area. The resident also referred to the Red, Amber, Green (RAG) Rating document that suggested three alternative recreational areas for children within the vicinity and addressed the unsuitability of those areas.



The Planning Manager reiterated that the Black Country Plan document was in the initial stages of development and incorporated recommendations of potential sites. In responding specifically on Severn Drive, Pensnett, it was confirmed that the site had been withdrawn and reinstated by the Local Authority following an open space assessment. All sites had been assessed on quality and value to ensure a comprehensive check of all land available. The Planning Manager reported that the RAG rating had been undertaken by officers to filter out sites and other areas within the vicinity were referenced within the document to evidence that there were amenity spaces within walking distance.

The Chair encouraged all residents to formally submit their representations during the consultation period for consideration.

- A resident of Bryce Road, Pensnett referred to the proposed site located on Bryce Road Field, in particular that the RAG Rating assessment indicated that there were no known bio-diversity or geo-diversity on the site, and queried how that had been determined given the wide range of wildlife present, and confirmed established Badger sites on the area. The resident also requested that an assessment be undertaken on the mature trees on the site and sought clarification as to whether the site had already been designated as a recreational space. The site was well used by people exercising and dog walking together with football clubs for children who had confirmed that there was a formal agreement with Dudley for that purpose.

The resident also referred to discussions held at previous community meetings in relation to transport infrastructure, and raised concerns about the possibility of developers not investing in alternate entrances and exit points to the site at Bryce Road as currently there was only one access to and from the site. The resident asked whether the site would be withdrawn from the plan if there were no assurances from the developers in addressing the road infrastructure around the site.

The resident also queried whether there had been any planning applications submitted in relation to Bryce Road Field and if so, what were the reasons for the rejection or withdrawal of any application. The RAG Rating assessment noted that Bryce Road Field was a poor connection for cycling routes therefore walking would be the only option for exercise for users. In concluding, the resident also requested clarification on the process for protecting sites permanently.



In responding, the Planning Manager stated that the information relating to bio-diversity may not have been included due to it not being formally designated, and urged all residents that any evidence of bio-diversity or requests for protecting sites be included in the consultation comments form. During consideration of sites, it was expected that additional surveys would be needed, and further research required on specific elements within the assessment. The Planning Manager confirmed that there would be no development on any of the sites without a planning application, and in cases where there were road infrastructure concerns, there would be a requirement on the developer to undertake any necessary works to enable the scheme to move forward. The Planning Manager agreed to provide supplementary information on the number of planning applications submitted for Bryce Road Field to the resident.

In responding to a Member's concern in relation to the assessments used in supporting the Black Country Plan given the points raised by residents, the Planning Manager confirmed that officers had assessed a significant amount of sites within the Plan, however it would be impossible to undertake detailed assessments of each site individually at this time. Additional information or evidence submitted would be considered as to whether it was a disqualifying measure or other mitigation could be used to address the issue.

Following a request by a Member, the Planning Manager confirmed that as part of the consultation, the Local Authority was responsible in responding to comments received and demonstrating how they were considered and actioned if appropriate.

- A resident of Kingswinford repeated comments made on the need for localised, refreshed data which should be holistic and include birth and death rates. The resident considered that there had been a heavy reliance on digital information during the consultation process and minimal dialogue by the Local Authority, which had been fulfilled by community organisations. A different approach was needed to consult geographically and improved engagement with local communities at the initial stages of the process.

Residents of Kingswinford considered that focus had been given particularly to Holbeache and The Triangle sites, however smaller areas of greenspace throughout the Borough had been overlooked. In concluding, the resident expressed thanks to officers for their time and responsiveness to questions asked that were timely and informative.

The Chair referred to the announcement of South Staffordshire Council's preferred sites and options and it was confirmed that these did not fall adjacent to the border with Kingswinford. The confirmed sites highlighted the effectiveness of representations by community groups which had been considered by the Council.



A Member welcomed comments made in relation to smaller greenspaces and reiterated concerns that a number of residents had not been engaged and informed of the consultation. The Chair commented on the positive campaign work undertaken by Ward Members with local residents.

A Member concurred with comments made in relation to the consultation process and, although the excellent work undertaken by community groups was acknowledged, she considered that the Local Authority should have actively engaged with members of the public at the commencement of the process.

The Shadow Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise considered the work requested in evaluating localised data on growth population for Dudley to be essential, and suggested that if the projection figures utilised in supporting the Black Country Plan were incorrect and subsequently reduced the number of additional housing required, then pressure was needed by Council Leaders and Members of Parliament to clarify the position and to raise their concerns accordingly.

At this juncture, the Chair, on behalf of the Committee, agreed to recommend that Public Health be requested to undertake an evaluation of localised data for Dudley on growth population, and if there were resource implications, consideration be given to the procurement of the work as needed.

- In responding to a question raised by a resident of Kingswinford concerning the next stages of the process once the consultation had concluded, the Planning Manager confirmed that all comments would be collated and a formal response published in accordance with the Black Country Plan timescales. The Local Authority would continue to undertake further work and gather evidence whilst considering comments made by residents and other interested parties. It was confirmed that the next stage of the process would require Cabinet-level approval from the four Black Country authorities, and if approved, a second public consultation exercise would be undertaken prior to final submission in 2023 with adoption in 2024.

The Shadow Cabinet Member for West Midlands Combined Authority requested clarification as to whether a system had been implemented for representations by larger organisations and developers, which would assist in the decision-making process as to what was included and withdrawn from the Black Country Plan. The Planning Manager stated that consideration would be given to material planning reasons and the objections submitted, therefore equal weight would be given to that reason against a developer or landowner. He also confirmed that there were gateway constraints within the RAG rating assessment where fundamental issues would prohibit taking a site forward.

In responding to a question by a Member, the Planning Manager confirmed that the deadline for comments to the consultation was 5pm on Monday, 11th October, 2021. Any information from various parties or identified by the Local Authority received over the proceeding months would be considered when formulating future recommendations.



- A resident of Kingswinford referred to a map of the Dudley Borough included within the summary document that was unclear and requested clarification on the amount of greenspace used of the proposed sites of DUH221 (Standhills Road) and DUH203 (Ketley Quarry Development). Concerns were raised on the proposed development and loss of greenspace and the potential impact on mental health. It was noted that a petition had been circulated on the protection of greenbelt and greenspaces.

The Planning Manager apologised for the lack of clarity of the map and confirmed that a hard copy could be provided if requested.

- A resident that lived within the vicinity of Worcester Lane, Stourbridge commented on the impact to residents of Hagley located within the Bromsgrove area, and queried why the consultation had not been extended to include residents from neighbouring authorities.

The Planning Manager although acknowledging the points made reiterated that Dudley residents were the priority and that Bromsgrove Council would submit their representations of the Black Country Plan on behalf of their residents. There were no restrictions on the consultation process and all members of the public were invited to submit their representations.

- A resident of Pedmore echoed comments made in relation to Hagley residents, and considered that a new housing development in Worcester Lane, Stourbridge would significantly impact existing overstretched facilities including Doctor Surgeries and Schools. Reference was made to the transport difficulties faced by Dudley residents that had resulted in people travelling further for employment, and the resident believed that Dudley Council had sufficient resources and budget available to accommodate issues raised if managed appropriately.

The Intelligence Analyst stated that according to the size and development in Worcester Lane, Stourbridge, it was anticipated that there would be an additional 32 primary aged pupils and 17 secondary aged pupils, which equated to 5 primary aged and 3 secondary aged pupils per year group respectively. It was noted that the birth rates were currently decreasing therefore spare capacity within primary sectors was anticipated. The Intelligence Analyst confirmed that expansions to existing schools could be considered should numbers increase during the period of the Black Country Plan.

- A resident of Severn Drive, Pensnett queried whether the Local Authority had considered plans in relation to the infrastructure of the roads surrounding the proposed sites.



The Project Engineer confirmed that the Local Authority had commissioned work that modelled the transport network to identify impacts of all developments. The work would be processed in three stages namely, reviewing current networks of all developments and committed developments going forward, validating the data and inspecting existing infrastructure, and finally all developments would then be reviewed taking into consideration the impacts and comments made in the consultation. It was suggested that the impact to some sites could be deemed too severe or wider mitigations required, which could necessitate the need for additional capital.

- A resident of Wall Heath requested a breakdown of the quote procured for the production and delivery of a letter to each household through the Royal Mail, the cost of the management of the website and any associated ongoing costs. It was reported that the Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority had announced that additional funding would be made available to regenerate brownfield sites, and the resident asked what measures Dudley had taken to secure some of this funding to save the greenbelt. He further commented that if the brownfield sites that were categorised as unviable in the Black Country Plan were utilised, this had the potential to deliver in excess of the number of homes proposed for the Holbeache and The Triangle sites.

The Planning Manager confirmed that the Dudley website was managed internally and therefore there were no additional paid costs involved. The Black Country Plan website was developed for the four Black Country Councils who contributed equally and undertook to provide further information to Members. Regarding the viability of brownfield sites, it was confirmed that 2,600 homes were potentially unviable, with 2,450 of proposed homes still included in the supply and therefore not discounted.

The Head of Communications and Public Affairs agreed to provide a breakdown of the costs associated with the delivery of a letter to each household throughout the Black Country as requested to Members.

- A Member presented a statement on behalf of a resident in Wollaston in relation to the Wollaston Farm Grazing Fields and comments made during a Black Country Radio Interview by the Leader of the Council indicating that the Grazing Fields would not be developed. She noted that additional resources had been made available, particularly comments sheets and availability of meetings in areas such as Kingswinford, Wall Heath and Stourbridge.

The Leader of the Council expressed his thanks for the constructive comments made by Community Groups in attendance at the meeting, and reiterated that the Black Country Plan was a draft document, and if there were justifiable reasons to save sites then the document could be changed. The importance in not pre-determining the outcome and following the process outlined was highlighted.



In responding to comments made, the Head of Communications and Public Affairs confirmed that an additional 27,000 comments forms had been printed following requests made by elected Members, community groups and individuals.

The Planning Manager commented that during consideration of the Communications Strategy, officers were assessing the requirements and public health guidance associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. This had resulted in the late introduction of drop-in sessions. A series of public meetings had been arranged by Members and Community Groups and were attended by a Planning Officer if invited.

The Chair on behalf of the Committee expressed his thanks to all members of the public in attendance and representations made.

Resolved

- (1) That a recommendation be formulated requesting the Director of Public Health to undertake an evaluation of localised data for Dudley on growth population, and if there are additional resource implications, consideration be given to the procurement of the work as needed.
- (2) That the Head of Communications and Public Affairs be requested to provide a breakdown to Members of the costs associated with the delivery of a letter to each household throughout the Black Country
- (3) That the Planning Manager be requested to provide a breakdown on the costs associated with the management of the Black Country Plan website.

38 **Black Country Plan**

Members of the Scrutiny Committee were invited to make representations and ask questions concerning the Black Country Plan, as summarised below:

- A Member referred to two public meetings in the Kingswinford North and Wall Heath area, one of which had been attended by the Leader of the Council, where residents expressed their passion for protecting the greenbelt, and queried why two greenbelt spaces had been identified within that ward.

The Leader of the Council acknowledged comments made and reiterated that a process must be followed in considering the proposed sites within the Black Country Plan which could potentially identify and protect some greenbelt sites for future developments. In responding to a request by the Member, the Leader of the Council provided an overview of his role and involvement with a local company of which he was a named Director.



Following comments made earlier in the meeting, the Member referred to a review of population estimates and projections undertaken by the Office of National Statistics in May 2021, that identified an over inflation for local data in Coventry, and it was anticipated that Sandwell could follow a similar pattern. In responding to a question asked by the Member as to what work was being undertaken at a local level to address this issue, the Planning Manager suggested that this area could be considered as part of the investigation requested by Members.

A question was asked as to how the Council would protect residents from a range of pollution issues that would arise from concentrated building developments proposed for Kingswinford North and Wall Heath. It was confirmed that the Black Country Plan included a specific air quality policy which would require mitigation measures for development. Dudley Council had also adopted a policy within the existing Black Country Core Strategy that ensured developments were not exacerbating pollution for residents, considered ventilation, and promoted electric vehicle charging facilities.

Concerns were raised about a recent political newsletter, which had been distributed throughout the Kingswinford North and Wall Heath area, which was alleged to be misleading with information excluded on the consultation process and deadline. It was stated that certain Members and activists had been proactively working with residents of Kingswinford North and other communities. The role of the Council was to engage effectively with residents, and this was being undertaken by some Councillors.

- A Member requested further clarification in relation to the additional pupil numbers anticipated and the opportunity to extend existing schools, which could result in oversizing concerns within classrooms. Reference was also made on the significant work undertaken in relation to transport, and the importance of accurate data and projections being used in assessments.

The Intelligence Analyst referred to the reduction in birth rates since 2010/11, and it was confirmed that there were levels of spare capacity in different year groups in schools. The difficulties in considering the long-term impact of housing developments given the nature of the data was mentioned, however indicative data for 2019/20 suggested a further reduction. It was expected that there would be sufficient spare capacity in the primary sector and subsequently the secondary sector going forward within the Stourbridge area.

- A Member referred to concerns raised by residents that lived in private rented housing, and it was evident that Dudley required more social housing for affordable and secure tenancies.



The Head of Housing Assets and Development confirmed that the requirement for social housing throughout the Black Country was 15%. Dudley Council adopted a modest affordable homes delivery programme for new council housing and had delivered 400 new homes over the last 10 years, 300 of which had been built in the last 6 years. The affordable homes delivery programme also considered the wider and diverse housing need for affordable housing including sheltered accommodation. A budget of £95m had been allocated to deliver this 5-year programme.

In responding, the Member shared his disappointment that only 15% had been allocated for social housing.

The Member referred specifically to the proposed site DUH038 (Boundary by Heath Road, Copse Road and Lea Bank Road - Dudley Wood), in particular the greenspace that had been allotted as part of housing development, and had previously been used as a recreational space. Local residents had requested that garages be developed on the site, however, this was refused by the Council as the area had been designated as a park for residents. The Member raised concerns that the site had been included within the Black Country Plan for the development of 24 homes and listed as a brownfield site. The Planning Manager undertook to provide a response.

- A Member requested whether the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) had been consulted and responded to the Black Country Plan and referred to the existing pressures of General Practitioners within the Kingswinford North and Wall Heath ward. The Member queried whether the Clinical Commissioning Group were confident that the care of residents would not be impacted should there be an increase of patients on the primary care services given the proposed development of 850 houses in that area.

The Strategic Estates and Development Manager confirmed that the CCG had been consulted and actively engaged with neighbouring Councils and CCGs and committed a considerable amount of time in responding to the consultation. In responding to comments made, it was noted that the projections were being reviewed alongside NHS England and the CCG had commenced a recruitment drive for clinical staff in practices for both primary and secondary care. It was confirmed that all sites within the plan had been considered together with options available. Further information on gap analysis on estates and staff levels required within surgeries would be available once the consultation process had concluded and validated by NHS England.

As part of the consultation process the CCG had prepared a comprehensive response. Reference was made to the Primary Care Clinical Strategy that was currently being developed and could be shared if requested once formally approved.



- A Member raised concerns of the process and structure of the meeting in particular that a list of themes had been identified that needed to be explored further, a number of questions that related to a previous report remained unanswered, and independent and professional witnesses were not in attendance to respond to questions raised.
- A Member queried whether the Local Authority had the power to refuse planning applications that would generate a requirement for funding for health or education facilities, or in cases where developers were unable to finance the facilities, how these would be funded.

In responding the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise confirmed that all planning applications received would be considered against current supplementary planning documents. Should the application generate a requirement which the developer could not finance, the local planning authority and committee could assess whether the reasons stipulated were viable and either reduce or remove those obligations or the application could be refused on the grounds of not being able to provide that infrastructure. The Director of Regeneration and Enterprise assured the Committee that each case would be considered on its own merit.

Following comments made in relation to affordable housing, reference was made to information previously reported, where it was suggested that 32.7% of affordable housing was required over the planned period. Clarification was sought given that the target of a minimum requirement on sites was between 10% and 30%, which was below the 32.7% mentioned.

It was noted that references to affordable housing related to social rent and affordable rent which was approximately 15% as identified in the strategic housing market assessment in 2021. Statistical information was provided that included the requirement of affordable shared ownership and first homes that were below market value, which equated to 32% affordable housing across the Black Country. The adoption of an affordable housing policy was proposed based on geographical areas across the Black Country in terms of housing market areas and low and medium market areas. It was also confirmed that the target of 32.7% was for the Black Country.

The Member also referred to electric vehicle charging points in particular the challenges faced in providing facilities to existing infrastructures in areas with Council housing stock and the implications for people with disabilities.

The Black Country Director of Transport confirmed that funding had been secured for street residential charging at a regional and national level with regard to wider residential points, and that a dedicated team had been established across the four local authorities to review details going forward.



- A Member considered that the Black Country Plan apportioned sites that had previously been approved for development and sites brought forward for the first time and queried how residents and elected Members could clearly identify the difference.

In responding, the Principal Planning Officer indicated that the tables contained within the plan highlighted areas where planning applications had been carried forward and currently adopted. It was noted that if there was no information contained in the second column of the table this would indicate a new site or Strategic Housing and Land Availability Assessment site that had been identified suitable for housing based on a positive pre-application or application. The Strategic Housing and Land Availability Assessment was updated each year and captured Dudley's land supply.

- Following comments made, the Leader of the Opposition Group repeated concerns of the use of inaccurate data during the decision-making process, and the inability of witnesses in attendance to be able to fully respond to questions asked. In his role as Leader of the Opposition Group he opposed the proposed use of greenspace and greenbelt and emphasised the need for the local authority to provide accurate information and undertake a meaningful consultation with sufficient deadlines to assist public participation.
- A Member reiterated the purpose of the public and scrutiny meetings was to provide the opportunity to consider the appropriate inclusion and withdrawal of areas highlighted within the Black Country Plan. Reference was also made to the decreasing life expectancy both nationally and locally and the disparity identified between Dudley North and Dudley South of 7-8 years. It was considered that the loss of greenspaces would greatly impact those with mental health conditions, and the local authority was implored to assess contributing factors and mitigation to ensure that mental health was treated appropriately with resources made available including retaining greenspaces.
- A Member referred to the existing pressures for residents obtaining basic health care and the potential implications arising from the proposed development of 1,000 homes in the Wordsley area, and queried whether there was a set criteria on the number of residents to necessitate the building of an additional General Practitioner Surgery.

The Strategic Estates and Development Manager confirmed that the Estate Strategy included housing and population growth, and that the Wordsley area was a strategic priority and consideration had been given to a number of schemes for the Black Country to accommodate existing and future pressures. This also included developing General Practitioners by introducing hubs to provide better and improved services.



The Member also referred to comments made in relation to the anticipated number of additional pupils in schools which could be significantly higher than the projected 80 children on the two proposed sites in Wordsley. The Intelligence Analyst confirmed that in relation to housing developments, it was estimated that 27 primary aged pupils and 14 secondary aged pupils would be expected for every 100 units. At Primary level there was the option of expansions to existing Primary Schools in the area and/or the creation of a new Primary School on land set aside from the developments dependent on circumstances. It was also considered that the sites referred to would not necessitate the building of another Secondary School based on the estimates mentioned.

The Member commented positively on the passion displayed by local residents and echoed comments made regarding the importance of protecting local smaller greenspaces.

Resolved

That the Planning Manager be requested to provide a written response to comments raised in relation to DUH038 (Boundary by Heath Road, Copse Road and Lea Bank Road - Dudley Wood).

39 **Future Meetings**

The Chair proposed that an agenda item be included on the next Scrutiny Committee to consider the initial response to the consultation process and the scheduling of future meetings as required.

Members repeated concerns raised on the structure and conduct of the meeting, and referred to a list of experts that had been suggested in order to give their view on the Black Country Plan and respond to questions asked by the Committee. The Committee would consider the format and conduct of future meetings along with a timeframe.

The Chair considered that this meeting had been productive and acknowledged that a range of questions had been asked and responded to.

Resolved

That an item be included on the agenda for the next meeting of the Future Council Scrutiny Committee to consider the initial response to the consultation and the scheduling of future meetings.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm



CHAIR

