

Report to the Council

Subject: Planning Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor R Bassett

Date: 5 November 2013

Recommending:

That the report of the Planning Portfolio Holder be noted.

Local Plan

Since the last Council meeting we have held members' Workshop 4 in our series covering issues in the development of the Local Plan. The latest workshop focussed on population and housing issues, and featured a detailed presentation on the population forecasting work carried out for Epping Forest District Council by Edge Analytics. This work, using Census data from 2011, demonstrates a lower forecast growth than the Office for National Statistics forecast for the district which was based on earlier 2008 and 2010 data, and it also demonstrates that we were right to query the national forecasts as applied to our district. The many questions raised at the workshop are being written up, together with the answers, and will be circulated to invitees shortly.

The report by Edge will be reported to Cabinet in December for inclusion in the Plan's evidence base, together with the update of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment which unfortunately is not based on the newer 2011 Census data. Both these reports, together with other information, will be important in establishing our objectively assessed housing need, and it is clear that members want to take more time to consider this.

I also am looking at providing an update session for members on the legal issues and the interdependencies of reports and the weight that needs to be given to the reports. This will be in November. Whilst it is important to continue to make good progress with the Local Plan, it is also important that members understand the issues behind the important decisions to be made. This will require some amendments to the Local Plan Project Plan, and officers are currently considering the implications of this and the subject and timing of further member workshops.

I attended a meeting with the East Herts Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning and officers, under the duty to co-operate and further meetings will be planned. Officers have also had productive meetings with the City of London Corporation and English Nature, and both of these bodies are obviously extremely important in view of our obligations towards the Forest, and our residents' concerns about it. I am pleased to report that progress continues to be made towards a formal Memorandum of Understanding which would enable councils potentially affected by development around Harlow to work together to mitigate the impacts of this. However, in view of recent press coverage, which has been wide of the mark in some cases, I would like to stress that no decision has been taken on the distribution of development around the district, and none is yet scheduled.

Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment

The Essex-wide Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment, which will feed into our Local Plan, has not yet been published. This delay is because a recent appeal decision by a Planning Inspector in Bedfordshire has given rise to queries over the way need is calculated over time. It would be unwise to finalise the report until we have more clarity on the way forward.

Gypsy and Traveller incursion at Birchfield, Stapleford Tawney

Members are most probably aware of the recent breach of planning control at a site known as Birch Field, Epping Lane, Stapleford Tawney. This involved the unauthorised use of the land as a travellers' caravan site, contrary to the requirements of an existing Enforcement Notice and in breach of the terms of an Injunction which we obtained in 2006 for the site.

It was agreed that for completeness we took a report to the September 18 meeting of Plans East and asked them to approve that the Director of Corporate Support Services be authorised to commence criminal and/or civil proceedings to secure compliance with the enforcement notice as varied by the Secretary of State in his decision letter dated 13 May 2004. On 29 October we served legal documents on the occupants of the site today relating to the forthcoming hearing at the High Court which will be on the 13 November. The decision on whether to enforce the terms of the live injunction will rest with the Judge who hears the case.

County Councillor Bentley - Tour of key sites

I am sure Councillor Anne Grigg will also mention this but on 18 October we took the Essex Portfolio Holder for Economic Development on a tour of the district visiting several businesses and attractions. The object was to talk about developments and opportunities within the district and how it is relevant to wider work by SELEP and Essex on Economic Development.

Lee Valley Food Task Force

The Lea Valley Food Task Force, which I chair, has been established with senior representation from the growing industry and the three main councils covering the old Lea Valley, Epping Forest District Council, Broxbourne Borough Council and the London Borough of Enfield. We are looking in detail at how food production might be supported and expanded in this area building on its historic role as a key breadbasket to the capital and how the benefits of this might be better managed and coordinated.

As such we are working with the private sector, groups such as the London Stansted Cambridge Corridor Consortium to support the retention and growth of the industry which is an important local employer and provides much of the salad foods for the UK. It is believed that there is the potential to do more to serve London and South-East's food needs which could be more sustainable in terms of reducing 'food miles'.

This is a very good example of where Duty to Cooperate is having positive outcomes.

RTPI Politicians in Planning Network (PIPA) Conference 2013

On October 25, I attended the above conference in Milton Keynes. The PIPA Conference is for local planning councillors. The keynote speaker was Nick Boles MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government. There were several other keynote speakers from

the LGA, POS & RTPI who covered areas from Neighbourhood planning to changes in the law and experience of submitting plans.

In the afternoon we had a series of smaller workshops which covered another range of topics and I will place some information in the Member's Room.