

Report to the Council

Subject: Planning Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor R Bassett

Date: 20 February 2014

Recommending:

That the report of the Planning Portfolio Holder be noted.

Local Plan

As you are aware we have made some decisions as a landowner on the future of North Weald Airfield. Following on from this a stakeholder workshop was held at North Weald Bassett by our consultants, Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners, in late January and was attended by some 80 people who made very helpful comments contributing to the masterplan for the whole North Weald area. A landowner workshop is to be held on 13 February.

Two meetings between leading councillors and senior officers of EFDC and Harlow District Council regarding the Duty to Co-operate have been held, and have been useful in identifying some future actions to be taken forward in order to support the Duty to Co-operate, including early sharing of formal reports.

A senior officer meeting is being held with the Strategic Housing Market Area partners (EFDC, Harlow, Uttlesford and East Herts, together with Broxbourne and Brentwood, who were part of the original SHMA grouping), in mid-February to discuss updating the SHMA with the recent population forecasting work carried out for EFDC. In the light of the Duty to Co-operate it is important that we include the wider partners in our invitation and we have also invited the GLA, who are currently consulting on Alterations to the London Plan which raise important issues for adjoining authorities.

Gypsy Roma and Traveller appeal decision – Sunnyside, Carthage Estate

I would like to draw attention to the recent appeal decisions in this case, not only because they concern a site in Nazeing, but because of the wider issues that the Secretary of State's decision raises. As Members will be aware, the Secretary of State has intervened last year to recover for his decision most cases involving Gypsies Roma and Travellers, in particular in the Green Belt.

A Planning Inspector had granted permission at appeal for one nearby site, and permission was subsequently granted by EFDC on two other sites, but the Area Committee was not persuaded to grant permission in this instance. The Inspector recommended that the planning appeal be allowed for a temporary period of four and a half years, but the Secretary of State disagreed, refused planning permission and upheld the enforcement notice.

The Secretary of State is plainly applying his mind to whether or not sufficient very special circumstances have been shown, and is increasingly finding in this and other such appeals that they have not.

Lee Valley Food Task Force

The Lea Valley Food Task Force met on 10 February at the Civic Offices. This group is continuing to gain momentum and since the last report we now also have representatives from East Herts, London Borough of Waltham Forest and Uttlesford plus representatives from the National Farmers Union. The Food Task Force currently involves the NFU, several representatives from the growers and pack houses, 6 local authorities (2 London, 1 Herts and 3 Essex) and the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority.

The task force is grappling with a number of issues of local and much wider significance. Its work is focusing around enabling the long term sustainability and growth of the glasshouse industry, developing food production opportunities right next to population centres, and ensuring greater employment dividends to local communities from an industry that had traditionally not sourced local labour. Other questions being addressed centre around: how the sector competes on an unfair playing field, growing food without any EU or national subsidy, how it might meet increasing national challenges, domestic food production, food security, and food miles. The team is looking at how it might help join up public policy to support the industry in the UK to respond effectively on our behalf to these challenges.

We are looking to hold a Summit in September which will look in detail at these challenges, as well as future opportunities and we would like a Minister to help set the context in which the conference could explore and understand these issues.

One of the main points to emerge through the partnerships discussions so far is concern that perhaps a more joined up approach is needed to kick start an effective response across government. It appears that the issues of technology, around new glass, irrigation, water use, energy use, together with plant technology is spread across a wide range of departments. The idea of a new National Institute for Food Security has been mooted to bring coherence and leadership. Obviously if such a body was established given the high concentration of commercial growing glass next to London, and the need to keep the research close to the areas of application mean the Lea Valley would be well placed to host such an institution.

Neighbourhood Plans

Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers have progressed their neighbourhood plan to the point where it has been sent to the Council for checking. Officers will deal with this under delegated powers, and are in discussion with the Parish Council regarding the formal Inspection of the Plan and subsequent potential referendum.

Meanwhile Chigwell Parish Council's request to be designated as a neighbourhood area will be considered by Cabinet in March, following a period of formal publicity.