

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 3 November 2015

Subject: Planning Policy

Portfolio Holder: Councillor R Bassett

Recommending:

That the report of the Planning Policy Portfolio Holder be noted

1) Update on key evidence work

Strategic Housing Market Assessment, Economic and Employment evidence:

The work has now been completed on this key piece of technical evidence producing an update Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) in conjunction with the other authorities within our Housing Market Area: East Herts, Harlow and Uttlesford. The final SHMA was formally considered by the SHMA partners at the Cooperation for Sustainable Development Board meeting on 22nd September and was then subsequently added as part of the Local Plan evidence base together with the related economic and employment evidence following consideration at the 8th October Cabinet meeting.

What the SHMA provides us with is figures for Objectively Assessed Housing Need (OAHN) for Epping Forest District and the other three Districts named above. Whilst important to understand that the OAHN is not the housing target for the District, it does however represent an important milestone towards establishing our housing target. Having now established the housing need we now have to take account of any constraints such as green belt, flood plains which indicate that development should be restricted. Subsequent meetings of the Co-op Member Board will need to discuss how the objectively assessed need could be met by the wider SHMA area if the evidence indicates that our need cannot be met in Epping Forest District.

An Economic Evidence report for West Essex and East Herts commissioned jointly by EFDC and East Herts, Harlow and Uttlesford Councils has also now been finalised. Local Plan Inspectors pay particular attention to the need for jobs and housing requirements to be aligned. Therefore, this study was commissioned on the same basis as the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, to cover the four authorities and to inform all four Local Plans across the 'Functional Economic Market Area'. A second more detailed report covering 'Economic and Employment Evidence to Support the Local Plan and Economic Development Strategy' has also been completed for EFDC alone. It provides a detailed analysis of the assessed economic need, in terms of employment floorspace and type to be provided through the EFDC Local Plan. This document provides the floorspace breakdown of what this need might be in order to inform the new Local Plan.

Green Belt Review:

It is important to remember that the outcome of the Green Belt Review is only one, albeit an extremely important, piece of the evidence base that will inform the Council's future plan-making decisions. Following completion of stage 1 of the Green Belt Review for the District, external consultants have now been appointed and over the autumn will be undertaking a more detailed assessment of the broad locations identified in stage 1. It will confirm at a more detailed level:

- The areas where the Green Belt policy designation should remain;
- Any historic anomalies in the existing boundaries or locations where development has taken place, which may therefore suggest minor amendments to the Green Belt boundaries are required;
- Areas that may be least harmful in Green Belt terms for potential development purposes.

If a parcel or part of the parcel is appraised as part of the more detailed work this does not mean necessarily that the parcel should or will be allocated for development in the emerging Local Plan or that the Council would look favourably on a planning application. This work should be completed next February time and will, along with the raft of other evidence base work, be used to inform the Draft Plan- Preferred Approach upon which we will be consulting next summer.

Settlement Capacity Work

We are undertaking a settlement capacity analysis of the 10 largest settlements in the District, namely Epping, Theydon Bois, Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell, Loughton/Debden, Waltham Abbey, North Weald Bassett, Chipping Ongar, Lower Nazeing and Roydon. The purpose of the work is to ensure that the District can address as much of its housing requirement as possible within our existing settlements, and so minimise the potential need to utilise Green Belt land for development.

This work is being undertaken by Fregonese Associates, who are utilising specialist urban analysis software to assess the number, suitability and capacity of potential brownfield sites. Like stage 2 of the Green Belt Review, the results of this work will be used to inform, and published alongside, the consultation Draft Plan Preferred Approach.

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment:

An updated Stage1 SFRA has now been completed and added to the Local Plan evidence base. This work helped inform the sieve undertaken as part of the first phase of the Green Belt Review.

Transport

Officers have also been involved in transport work being undertaken by the London Borough of Enfield, opposing reference to construction of a new access road in the North East Enfield Area Action Plan and keeping a watching brief on wider transport work being undertaken as part of Enfield's Northern Gateway Access Package.

I was recently invited to a public meeting called by the local MP for the area Rt Hon. Joan Ryan. At a well-attended meeting of concerned local residents living in the Bullsmoor Lane area of north East Enfield I was asked to explain EFDC's position and the reasons for this Council's continued objection to the construction of a new link road onto the M25 linking onto the A121. Whilst sympathetic to the congestion and associated problems this causes, I explained that construction of such a link road is highly unlikely to solve the problem but rather simply transfer the problems across the boundary into our District thereby exacerbating our existing traffic problems. I did however commit to continued working with Enfield Council and other partners to try to reach agreement on a package of transport measures acceptable to all parties.

Member Briefings and Workshops

Dates during November have now been set and advertised for holding a series of all Member, (including Town and Parish Council representation), evening briefing and workshop sessions. The first of these on 2nd November will look at the Historic Environment, the Natural Environment

and Green Networks. The purpose of these workshops are to inform members of emerging key issues that the draft Local Plan will need to cover, and to ensure that Member views and concerns are aired at this formative stage so that they might be taken account of in the policy drafting.

As space is limited, and to enable officers to plan to ensure that these sessions are productive and run effectively, it is particularly important that all members indicate in advance whether they will be attending.

2) Duty to cooperate

Officers (and Members) continue to meet regularly with the appropriate authorities to consider a wide range of cross boundary issues. In addition to the SHMA, Employment and Green Belt Review work reported above, the Lea Valley Food taskforce continues to develop a programme for growth around one of the District's historic and still key sectors.

The programme to review and assess new planning responses to the industry both within the district and the Lea Valley more generally was discussed at a specially convened workshop on 13 October at the Olympic White Water centre. The workshop, chaired by the Chairman of Vibrant partnerships, formerly Lee Valley Trust, was attended by planning officers from London, Hertfordshire and Essex, industry representatives and other local partners. A paper prepared by the taskforce, looking at issues and opportunities was discussed with partners agreeing to review the document in their own organisations and reconvene in a month to look at a potential joint approach.

Work is continuing on the new Glass house qualification as a part of the skills agenda. Led by Epping Forest College with funding from Essex County Council. Discussions are also ongoing around the possibility of establishing a skills academy based within the greenhouse industry.

The SELEP Rural Board discussed and agreed in principle a joint proposal from the taskforce and its partner organisation 'Produced in Kent' to develop a new horticulture strategy to provide greater direction and coordination in this sector. Partners have been asked to develop this to contract stage.

The Taskforce has been able to establish a consortium to fund the feasibility study into establishment of an Institute for food security, which will now also look at the potential links between the industry and public health England following the announcement of its transfer to a site in Harlow.

The London Stansted Cambridge Consortium (LSCC) has asked the Taskforce to help deliver a major Food Symposium in the next few months, with key academic and industry bodies concerned with research, development and production. It will review the Agritech Study the Taskforce commissioned on behalf of the consortium and look at opportunities across the corridor area.

3) Neighbourhood Plans:

Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers have finalised their draft Plan which now goes forward to independent examination.

There are seven other Parish and Town Councils that have applied to designate neighbourhood planning areas for their areas which have been approved (Chigwell, Epping, Buckhurst Hill, Theydon Bois, Loughton, North Weald Bassett and Epping Upland). With the exception of North Weald Bassett and Epping Upland Parishes the areas approved cover the entire parish. Given the location of North Weald Bassett and Epping Upland Parishes, immediately adjacent to Harlow's administrative boundary, a number of important strategic cross boundary matters were identified that are not within the remit of a Neighbourhood Plan to address. The Council therefore decided

that the northern edges of these parishes bordering Harlow should be excluded from the Neighbourhood Area designation.

4) Housing Bill

The Housing & Planning Bill was published on the 13 October 2015. The Bill makes clear that the Government is serious about increasing housing and improving the housing regime in general. Measures have been included to streamline the planning process; to facilitate starter homes, self builds and building on brownfield land. It is proposed that more powers are given to the Secretary of State to take over plan making, decision taking and effectively impose financial penalties on local authorities with high-value vacant buildings.

Comprising of eight parts, the main planning changes included in part 6 of the Bill, include:

- Neighbourhood planning - concerned that the neighbourhood planning process is too slow, Government has introduced changes which it hopes will combat this delay.
- Local planning - changes to local planning are included to give the Secretary of State more power to intervene if local plans are not delivered effectively.
- Local registers of brownfield land and permission in principle – a key element of the Bill is the creation of a new "permission in principle" provision which provides that planning permission in principle may be granted for development of land in England.
- Planning permission - changes under this heading relate to the grant of planning permission by permitted development rights and by the Secretary of State when a local planning authority is deemed to be underperforming.
- Nationally significant infrastructure projects - as another means of boosting housing supply, the Bill provides the Secretary of State with a new power to grant development consent for housing which is linked to an application for a nationally significant infrastructure project.

Changes to the compulsory purchase regime are also included in part 7 of the Bill and are aimed at making compulsory purchase "clearer, fairer and faster".

The Bill will need to pass through three readings in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords and obtain Royal Assent before being enacted. This process is expected to take between 12 and 18 months. It seems likely that most of the planning provisions would subsequently require secondary legislation in the form of regulations to bring into effect.