

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 15th December 2015

Subject: Planning Policy

Portfolio Holder: Councillor R Bassett

Recommending:

That the report of the Planning Policy Portfolio Holder be noted

1) Local Plan Member Workshops

Thank you to all District and Town and Parish Council representatives who came to the three recent Local Plan workshops. The purpose of these workshops was 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. Workshops held during November considered in turn: The Historic Environment, the Natural Environment and Green Networks, the economic strategy (including food production, glasshouse industry, tourism and live/work and affordable housing / housing for an ageing population.

As Members will appreciate, many of the issues that our Local Plan needs to address are by their nature quite complex and technical; therefore, handling discussion of them in topic based bite size chunks seems the most sensible approach. I am pleased to say that all three evenings were very well attended with plenty of discussion and views expressed regarding what the policy approach should be. The feedback that officers and I have had indicates that most Members found that the format worked well having officers first explain the issues, national policy and what the evidence says before then having the opportunity to debate possible policy options.

Officers now tasked with drafting the relevant sections of the Local Plan advise that invaluable information was recorded that they will be taken account of alongside all the technical evidence. I am assured that summary write ups capturing views expressed at these three workshops will be produced and distributed before the Christmas break to all District Council members. The summaries will also be sent to Parish and Town Council clerks.

We are therefore committing to continue in this vein and a further series of Local Plan Member workshops will be held in the New Year. Members will of course be notified in January of the dates, arrangements and topics to be considered.

2) Update on key evidence work

Green Belt Review:

Work on the Green Belt Review Stage 2 has started although there has been some slippage following the decision taken by Cabinet in September that Stage 2 should not be procured with Harlow. This led to the need to undertake a further stage in the procurement process and delayed the appointment of consultants. Meetings have now been held with the appointed consultants LUC to discuss and agree the proposed methodology prior to commencing the fieldwork and analysis in December.

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 and reported to Cabinet in September, Stage 2 will provide, a more detailed assessment of the broad locations identified in stage 1. This will provide evidence 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.

A Member and Parish/Town council workshop will be arranged in the New Year, at which the consultants will explain the methodology and report on the progress that they have made. Once the stage 2 study has been completed, together with the other evidence base work, the outcome of the Green Belt Review will be used to inform the Draft Plan- Preferred Approach upon which we will be consulting next year.

Transport

To help inform the housing target for the District further transport modelling work is being undertaken by Essex County Council to consider how the growth will be distributed across the Housing Market Area and the outputs will then be considered by the four authorities at the Cooperation for Sustainable Development Board. This work is being progressed using support from ATLAS and facilitated by AECOM to assess the impact of strategic options in the four authorities to meet the overall OAN figure for the SHMA area.

3) Duty to Cooperate:

Officers and Members continue to meet regularly with appropriate authorities, principally through the Cooperation for Sustainable Development officer group and Member Board, to consider a wide range of cross boundary issues that have included the SHMA, economic and employment work, transportation matters and Green Belt Reviews.

Lea Valley Food Taskforce

The Lea Valley Food Taskforce continues to meet and progress activity around supporting the long term growth and viability of the industry both within and outside the District. A key area for work is understanding and where possible addressing the planning issues constraining viability and growth. The Taskforce recently convened a Planning workshop which was well attended by councils from London, Hertfordshire and Essex, and Chaired by 'Vibrant Partnerships' which has taken over operation of Olympic assets of the Lea Valley Regional Park. The workshop looked at raising the issues of the industry, potential benefits to host areas and barriers to growth that have a planning source.

This forum will help shape the Glasshouse policies in the Local Plan which will also be discussed at the Co-operation for Sustainable Development Board. There was consensus around the opportunity for economic value, jobs investment and research and development linked to an expanding food sector. Partners agreed to hold discussions in their organisations and report back to a reconvened session in January which would like at how future policy could be reshaped to

enable and support the food industry across the Lea Valley. A decision on the judicial review around glasshouse development is expected in January, this will underpin further work on the approach of the glasshouse industry.

The joint bid to the EU Interreg Fund was unsuccessful but partners have been asked to reapply in May 2016 with guidance supplied on areas where additional elements are required. The new glasshouse qualification programme is progressing with support from Lantra and is being led by Epping Forest College, the course and qualification is scheduled for launch in January. Discussions between the task force, its sister organisation 'Produced in Kent' and SELEP are continuing to unlock LEP funding for future development work for the food sector and horticulture in particular.

Transportation Issues

In addition to the Lea Valley glass house industry the Enfield, Essex and Hertfordshire Border Liaison Group Member meeting held on 29 October 2015 also received presentations on Crossrail 2 and the Hertfordshire Transport Vision, both of which are the subject of public consultation.

As I have previously reported, at both officer and Member level we continue to seek close involvement 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. Whilst updates of the NGAP transport work are provided at Border Liaison Group Meetings, the Chief Executive and I are also endeavouring to ensure that these discussions are also properly aired and shared with the wider group of authorities and organisations who attend the Co-op officer and Member Board and also Waltham Abbey and Loughton Town Councils.

3) Neighbourhood Planning:

Once finalised and advertised for 6 weeks, the neighbourhood plan for Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers will go 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). In addition, Waltham Abbey has recently applied for neighbourhood area designation.

4) Housing & Planning Bill 2015, Joint Spending Review and Autumn Statement

The Housing & Planning Bill published in October makes clear that the Government is serious about increasing housing supply. 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.

The Chancellor's Autumn Statement and Spending Review (25 November) committed the Government to a new target for affordable housing starts (400,000 units by 2021) and further reforms to the planning system which included a proposal to allow previously developed brownfield sites in the green belt to be developed in the same way as other brownfield land. The Statement also promised measures to accelerate the release of public land for housing and ensure the release of unused and previously undeveloped commercial, retail, and industrial land for 'Starter Homes'.

Given below is more detail on some of the key planning related matters arising from the Joint Spending Review.

- **Green belt relaxation may present opportunities in areas that previously faced constraints** The Government says that it will accelerate housing supply by "supporting the regeneration of previously developed brownfield sites in the green belt by allowing them to be developed in the same way as other brownfield land, providing it contributes to Starter Homes, and subject to local consultation ... such as through neighbourhood plans."
- **Standardised viability model could resolve development disputes** The Spending Review document says that the Government will bring forward proposals for a "more standardised approach to viability assessments, and extend the ability to appeal against unviable section 106 agreements to 2018". Proposals for a more standardised approach to viability assessments are being proposed as a way of solving some of the disagreements between local authorities and developers arising from development viability assessments.
- **Delivery test for local authorities.** A proposal to establish a new delivery test on local authorities, to ensure delivery against the number of homes set out in local plans, represents a further potential 'stick' for under-performing authorities alongside the implications of failing to identify a five-year supply of deliverable land. It is aimed at increasing the supply of smaller sites and helping to ensure the planning system is delivering an adequate supply of housing land.
- **Commercial re-designation 'creates presumption in favour of residential development'**. A pledge in the Spending Review document to release land for Starter Homes which has been allocated for retail or commercial uses but has not been developed. Commentators speculate that this could see councils' local plans overruled by virtue of effectively creating a presumption in favour of residential development, as long as that land contributes to Starter Homes. It is suggested that the implication could be that this measure would overrule a local authority's local plan, meaning that if a council has not been able to attract investment for retail or employment then it opens the door to residential development.
- **Affordable housing investment switches to homes to buy** The chancellor pledged that the government will deliver 400,000 affordable housing starts across various tenures by 2020/21, with a focus on low-cost home ownership. The homes include 200,000 Starter Homes for first-time buyer and 135,000 "Help to Buy: Shared Ownership homes, which will allow more people to buy a share in their home and buy more shares over time, as they can afford to." The Spending Review also pledged 10,000 homes "that will allow a tenant to save for a deposit while they rent" and at least 8,000 specialist homes for older people and people with disabilities. It said that this will be "in addition to 50,000 affordable homes from existing commitments".