

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF STRONGER PLACE SELECT COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 29 SEPTEMBER 2020
IN VIRTUAL MEETING ON ZOOM
AT 7.00 - 8.35 PM**

Members Present:	R Bassett (Member) (Chairman), S Heather (Vice-Chairman), I Hadley, S Heap, J Jennings, S Jones, C McCredie, J Mclvor and R Morgan
Other members present:	N Avey, N Bedford, R Brookes, S Murray, A Patel, J Philip, M Sartin, H Whitbread and J H Whitehouse
Apologies for Absence:	L Burrows
Officers Present	N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), M Anil (Projects Officer), A Blom-Cooper (Interim Assistant Director (Planning Policy)), T Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager), D Fenton (Service Manager ((Housing Management & Home Ownership), V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer), N Richardson (Service Director (Planning Services)), A Small (Strategic Director), L Wade (Service Manager (Strategy, Delivery & Performance)) and G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services)

14. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman made a short address to remind all present that the virtual meeting would be broadcast on the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

15. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitutes reported at the meeting.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- (a) Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor J Mclvor declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 8, Covid-19 Recovery Update, by virtue of owning a shop in Epping High Street.

17. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the last meeting of the Stronger Place Select Committee held on 9 July 2020 be agreed as a correct record, subject to the correction of Councillor Heap's initial to, 'S' at Min no 12, paragraph 4, to read: "Councillor S Heap commented that in respect of the planning performance agreements..."

18. TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME

The Select Committee noted its Terms of Reference and work programme.

19. STRONGER PLACE SELECT COMMITTEE - CORPORATE PROGRAMME GOVERNANCE

L Wade, Service Manager (Strategy, Delivery and Performance), explained that the report enabled the select committees to undertake and deliver their programmes to be scrutinised, and better aligned the Stronger ambition objectives to the relevant select committee. There would be additional projects coming along and those aligned to the Covid-19 recovery. Thus, Stronger Place had a clear project brief which would be used for the performance management accounting that went to Stronger Council. This internal governance would allow management to focus the work alignment of the individual employee, which is on the road map of the people programme. The opportunity to add additional areas of scrutiny within the work programme delivery was also an option open to members.

There were six corporate programmes for Stronger Place – economic development, District sustainability, community health and wellbeing, town centre development, planning development and improvement and council housebuilding.

The Chairman, Councillor R Bassett, was pleased with this internal governance report and that the lead officers of the corporate programmes were also identified.

Councillor J H Whitehouse said that the number of corporate work programmes for the select committees was unbalanced, as Stronger Place had six, while Stronger Council and Stronger Communities had three each. Could the number of topics be more fairly distributed among the select committees? The Chairman commented that council housebuilding was allocated to Stronger Place - the place part. Councillor J H Whitehouse said this was particularly in relation to the sheltered housing review. The Service Manager replied that she believed this decision was made last year and that maybe this was a question for the project owners themselves.

Councillor J Jennings asked why Loughton was not mentioned under the town centre development programme? N Dawe, Chief Operating Officer, replied that this was an omission as this was a draft but this should have included each of the town centres and each of the population centres. An updated version of these project plans was due to be considered by Cabinet at its next meeting in October.

Councillor S Heap asked what SLT meant, to which the Service Manager replied was a reference to senior leadership team.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee noted the internal governance that has been established to manage and deliver the programmes of work aligned to the Stronger Place ambitions in 2020/21; and
- (2) That the committee could identify any additional areas for scrutiny within the work programme delivery.

20. COVID-19 RECOVERY UPDATE

A Small, Strategic Director, reported that there were three phases to the Covid-19 pandemic – the Council's initial response, restoration and the longer-term recovery. However, with the continued national coronavirus resurgence that was also being seen in the Epping Forest District, the Council might be moving back to a response phase if asked to by the Public Health lead at Essex County Council.

The report set out the Council's response to the initial outbreak in March 2020 that was largely supportive of those shielding and its impact on business and relief. The Council was reorganised to focus on its Covid-19 response. As a consequence, a much better infrastructure was in place with better support lined up. Although the restoration was at the end of June / beginning of July, Council services, as well as the hospitality and high street business sectors, were moving to a more restricted phase to facilitate safe access for individuals in high streets. Community wellbeing was being monitored. Cabinet considered a report in July 2020 on the Council's actions taken, with a longer-term outlook for local high streets. There would be a further update to Cabinet on the ongoing progress of the schemes.

Councillor R Bassett acknowledged that most Council services were online but were housing repairs being done for residents and was this working satisfactorily? D Fenton, Service Manager (Housing Management & Home Ownership) replied that repairs were continuing. Staff had PPE and additional measures were being taken, such as residents were being asked to move to a different room so that repairs could be carried out. The Council was not undertaking replacement kitchens or bathrooms, but day-to-day repairs were going ahead.

Councillor R Bassett said that some people were good at preventing risks, but others weren't, so was enforcement being used? The Strategic Director replied that this was being discussed by the Covid recovery team. The Council had powers to ensure compliance in licensed premises. Also, by using penalty notices. Some people were still not wearing face coverings, but the Council had limited authority on this, whereas the Police could enforce this.

Councillor R Brookes commented that the Civic Offices reception had not been reopened and with this second coronavirus wave it would be foolish to do this now. However, there had been a 30 per cent increase in calls to the Council and she had experienced a long wait on some occasions. Looking forwards, what were the plans to reopen the reception, perhaps by March 2021 if the coronavirus numbers were down? The Strategic Director replied that the Council would try and meet its requirements to residents positively. There would always be groups of customers that needed to have face-to-face contact, and Housing officers were doing this now. The Council would be responsive and might do things in different ways but would not leave customers behind and rather cater for all.

Councillor S Heap acknowledged that the Council's response had been brilliant but queried the European Economic Community bid that had been submitted for European funds earmarked for returning high streets safely, as the UK was in the process of leaving the EEC. The Strategic Director replied that if the Council had the opportunity to bid for grants it would and use the funding for the benefit of the residents of Epping Forest District. In terms of the lasting effects of Covid-19 on the economy, these were difficult to fully understand currently but would impact on the Council and Qualis business plans. Longer term sustainability of the local economy and retail market sectors was being monitored closely. The second Qualis business plan should be submitted to the Council in the next two months and provide information on the initial Covid-19 impact on its business and future. N Dawe, Chief Operating Officer, continued that the Housing repairs team had transferred to Qualis this week, 28 September 2020, and was continuing as planned. In terms of the high streets, Covid-19 had accelerated changes rather than these being new ones and was providing opportunities and challenges. Overall the situation was neutral and would have a slightly positive effect on the development potential locally. Councillor S Heap added that Centric Parade in Loughton was to have an increase in business rates. The Chief Operating Officer replied that there was the business rental part and

the residential potential above the shops. The residential market sector was holding up better in the Covid-19 situation.

Councillor S Murray said he was very positive about the Council's response to Covid-19 but was concerned that even though Loughton High Road was much larger than Epping High Street, the social spacing in the main shopping centres had been left much the same with just had a few social distancing stickers on the pavements. It was difficult at times to maintain social distancing. It would be helpful if ECC changed the signals for pedestrians by St Marys' Church near the Wimpey premises. There was also no priority for pedestrians at the Valley Hill, Roding Road and Oakwood Hill crossings. Likewise, the two crossings in Chigwell Lane for the retail park and at Landmark House, as New City College was in full swing. The Chief Operating Officer replied that Loughton had appeared on a list that ECC had considered, but ECC had only chosen one proposal per district and Epping was the High Street picked. The Strategic Director replied that the sequencing of traffic lights was a series of issues that the Council hoped to receive a response from ECC on soon.

RESOLVED:

That the Select Committee noted the report update.

21. LOCAL ECONOMIC BUSINESS RECOVERY

The Chief Operating Officer apologised for this verbal report but officers were mostly focussing their time on providing detailed updates on project briefs for the Cabinet meeting in a fortnight. Dynamic plans were being prepared, for the high street areas, including Loughton, and for other economic recovery issues, such as building on the Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) initiative and having a better digital communications platform. This item would be picked up at the next Stronger Place Select Committee meeting in January 2021 when members could look forward to receiving the Cabinet reports.

22. PLANNING DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

(a) Progress on the emerging Local Plan

The Interim Assistant Director (Planning Policy and Implementation), A Blom-Cooper, had provided the short report to update members on the progress of the emerging Local Plan. The Council's response to the Inspector in April 2020 set out the high-level programme for progressing to the Main Modifications (MMs) consultation and the adoption of the Local Plan. This detailed the Council's approach to matters that related to the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and updated the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and viability documents supporting the Local Plan. The Council submitted the third tranche of MMs in June 2020 and the final tranche in mid-September 2020 for the Inspector to consider and consultation on the MMs was anticipated to start from the end of October 2020.

Further information submitted to the Inspector included the revised mapping in relation to changes of the Local Plan and the draft green and blue infrastructure strategy. The Council submitted further information last week and the sustainability appraisal was also due to go to the Inspector. An updated Habitats Regulations Assessment and Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy was being finalised to take account of initial comments received from Natural England and the Conservators of Epping Forest that would be part of the MM consultation later this year. The Council was expecting the Inspector's timetable next week. However, the schedule for the main

plan documentation was some 300 pages, and other documents also numbered over 300 pages.

(b) Government White Paper: Planning for the Future

The Government published this White Paper on 6 August 2020. A report on the Council's proposed response would be considered by Cabinet on 19 October 2020. It would significantly change the current planning system for both the nature and content of Local Plans, and the operation of the development management process. If implemented, the White Paper would introduce new planning legislation into the system to streamline the plan making process. The White Paper was proposing a zonal system where local plans designate land into three categories of land to be identified as growth areas (suitable for development in new settlements and urban extensions); renewal areas (urban and brownfield sites); and protected areas (restricted areas in the green belt, conservation areas and wildlife sites etc). Local plans should state clear rules rather than general development policies, provide for greater public engagement in plan making, be subject to a single statutory "sustainable development" test and a statutory 30-month timetable for the production of local plans for local authorities and the planning inspectorate. A standard methodology for housing figures was proposed but there was also a separate consultation to amend the existing one to include affordability changes over time. Green belt constraint would be factored in but it was difficult to know how this would be mitigated.

Councillor R Bassett asked about the Office of National Statistics housing numbers and was there any difference? The Interim Assistant Director replied that the Inspector had written to the Council about its household projections and their impact on the merging Local Plan. This had resulted in an additional work project being commissioned to provide an update, but the numbers were giving 858 compared to 518 in our Local Plan. When all the other factors and issues were taken into account, the work concluded that there was no meaningful change in the projection and it was also published on the Council's website.

Councillor R Bassett asked if there would be a member briefing on the White Paper? The Planning and Sustainability Portfolio Holder, Councillor N Bedford, suggested members read the White Paper and send in any comments to the Planning Policy and Implementation Team to collate. The Interim Assistant Director also said that the Cabinet report was very detailed.

Councillor S Heap asked how many MMs were there? It was also too soon to have a briefing on the White Paper. Also, what we should be trying to encourage in terms of land banking was to grant a developer an option not the land an option to develop and that would encourage developers to either develop the land in three years or not because their revenue would diminish quite dramatically.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the progress report on the emerging Local Plan.

23. DRAFT SUSTAINABILITY GUIDANCE FOR THE DISTRICT AND HARLOW AND GILSTON GARDEN TOWN

A presentation was received from the Planning Policy Implementation Team Projects Officer, M Anil. The sustainability guidance was supported by several policies of the emerging Local Plan. It followed EFDC's climate emergency declaration in

September 2019 to become carbon zero by 2030, as data from 2017 showed that on road vehicles and residential housing contributed to some 80 per cent of all carbon emissions across the District. The draft guidance also expanded on the work done for the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) and aligned with other key documents, such as the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Green Infrastructure Strategy. The document was split into two sections environmental sustainability and socio-economic sustainability. Its purpose was to support planning proposal considerations and provide practical and technical guidance on how relevant sustainability indicators and policies in the Local Plan would be applied to new residential and non-residential developments across the District. A suite of three sustainability documents covered Major Developments (10+ units), Minor Developments (1-9 units) and Extensions and Refurbishments. The Major Developments document was similar to HGGT, but there were changes to case studies, reference to specific policies and documents, air quality and its impact on the Epping Forest special area of conservation (SAC) as well as socio-economic sustainability, which was key for EFDC. Whilst the HGGT document focused on integration of new development with existing communities, key goals for EFDC were community resilience and social equity, especially in terms of access to facilities, health and wellbeing, public health etc.

Members had been briefed at a workshop in August, and the draft sustainability guidance would be submitted to Cabinet in October 2020 for approval for more formal public consultation. The six-week public consultation should be completed in November 2020. The final guidance draft for endorsement for material planning consideration (1) and the sustainability guidance for Extensions and Refurbishments (3) would be submitted to Cabinet by early 2021.

The Interim Assistant Director said that this was a good explanation of the work the Implementation Team had undertaken to produce the guidance and more information was given in the appendices. The report was waiting for Cabinet approval to agree formal consultation at the October meeting.

Councillor R Bassett commented that this was a very useful presentation, but a lot of technical terminology was used that needed experts to understand it and that a glossary might be helpful. Also, looking at the checklists, he wondered how developers, particularly small developers, would be able to answer all the questions.

Councillor S Heap said this was a good report. Working with heat pumps was good, delivery points for Amazon to avoid delivering to every house, more buses were required and a dedicated bus for Latton Priory was definitely needed. In the Quality Review Panel report regarding photovoltaics that solar panels would not provide enough benefit, but they would be a big enough benefit if every house had them and everyone worked together. Regarding a community park for the people and that the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park was an example of this, a pub could also provide a community space. On the long-term delivery of sites for 25 to 30 years at the HGGT, was EFDC delivering 1000 homes by 2030? Lastly with reference to splitting up the information, yes, but all the information has to be available to everyone.

The Interim Assistant Director said that a glossary was a good idea and we should add this. There were 4,000 houses in EFDC in the plan period up to 2023 but a total of 23,000 in and around the HGGT. The Quality Review Panel was specifically reviewing the HGGT guidance and reference to HGGT developments. EFDC was looking to develop 11,400 homes over the plan period. In the EFDC part of Latton Priory, it was for 1,000 homes to be developed up to 2033, which was around 50 – 100 houses per year. Councillor R Bassett said that it was important that the infrastructure was in place at the start of the building especially in relation to the

climate emergency and this guidance would give developers information on what the Council wanted.

Councillor N Bedford referred to bricks and how they could be reused when crushed to utilise in building foundations. It was about thinking 'outside the box' as developers would have to supply a list of the building materials that would be used or reused from the start of their building projects. Keeping a register of the building materials used could provide valuable information at a later date, if this was required, for example if legislation changed.

Councillor M Sartin remarked that the two documents had been produced side by side but wanted to confirm that there would not be any conflict between the two documents for the Latton Bush and Water Lane areas, which were in EFDC but within the HGGT? The Interim Assistant Director replied that was correct and that EFDC had used the HGGT version to give a bespoke approach for the District but a lot of it for the strategic sites was very similar to the Garden Town guidance. Councillor Sartin added that the bespoke areas would be around the air quality and the SAC.

RESOLVED:

That the following four recommendations in this report to Cabinet were noted and agreed:

- (1) To agree that the Draft EFDC Sustainability Guidance documents (Major Developments and Minor Developments) and Draft HGGT Sustainability Guidance and Checklist (Strategic Sites) be approved for public consultation for a six-week period, and;
- (2) To agree that the Planning Services Director, in consultation with the Planning and Sustainability Portfolio Holder be authorised to make minor amendments to the Draft EFDC Sustainability Guidance (Major Developments and Minor Developments) prior to the public consultation;
- (3) To note that, following consultation, and any subsequent revisions to the documents, it is intended that the final EFDC Sustainability Guidance and Checklists (Major Developments and Minor Developments), will be considered by Cabinet for endorsement as a material planning consideration for the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes within the District.
- (4) To note that, following consultation, and any subsequent revisions to the documents, it is intended that the final HGGT Sustainability Guidance and Checklist, will be agreed as a material planning consideration for the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes within the Harlow & Gilston Garden Town.

24. UPDATE ON REVIEW OF SERVICE CHARGES

The Service Manager (Housing Management & Home Ownership), D Fenton, explained that these charges were for additional tenant services, such as maintenance of lifts and cleaning etc, which were charged separately to the rent, and

were taking place across the District. However, this had become challenging as some costs had risen above the rate of CPI. A recent cost analysis had revealed that the Council was in deficit to around £600,000 for 2019/20 through the under recovery of service charges. A report to Cabinet in July 2020 had recommended a review of these service charges. Housing now had a comprehensive list of these additional services and the service charges. Also, the regulations clearly stated that social housing providers needed to charge for services in a fair and consistent way that could be accounted for. This equated to charging the actual cost for the services broken down to each individual property. A final report on the options available to the Council would go to Cabinet in December 2020.

In July 2020, Cabinet recommended the Council's proposed scheme 'more than bricks and mortar' moved to the development stage. This scheme was proposing that additional income raised in the first four years was ringfenced to pay for estate improvements, which would help achieve its mission to 'create great places where people wanted to live'.

Councillor R Bassett thought that the Council should monitor and phase in the new charges. Taking into account that the Council could have a shortfall of income this financial year of some £4 million because of Covid-19, if additional income was ringfenced for four years this could amount to quite a lot of money. Also, some premises had private owners while others had Council tenants, so this needed to be addressed as the Council should not be subsidising private tenants. The Service Manager replied that the deficit was in the general fund not the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), which was ringfenced for Housing functions. It was a lot of money. However, people should go and look at our estates in relation to places where we want people to live, which would require a huge investment. It was a challenging time to create the right environment for tenants. Regarding leaseholders, this was a huge concern. Although they did pay the actual cost of the service charges, the Council could not charge any additional service charges to leaseholders. For example, if the Council had a block of flats where there was no cleaning service but wanted to introduce cleaning, the Council could not do this for the leaseholders, as the lease did not allow the Council to do this.

Councillor S Heap said that with some leaseholders who were subject to the same charges, the Council might need to think of charging for these services in a 'pooling' way and work out what this might be.

Councillor S Murray said it was unfortunate that the service charges review had coincided with the current economic climate on our estates, which had a very mixed tenure. He was a bit concerned that the charges would fall disproportionately on Council tenants rather than private owners, but the biggest concern was the idea of spending the surplus for the next four years on improving the general environment. Once the Council started improving the general environment from the HRA, how would the bulk of the housing stock be included, particularly houses, as most were privately owned? How would the homeowners be included? They would be benefitting from any improvements but how would they be contributing? Was the Council considering a mechanism to charge private owners to also make a financial contribution towards a community environment improvement, which he would like to see? The Service Manager replied that Councillor Murray was right, but the Council could not apportion costs to house owners. Community based projects were the way to go. Some of the Council's estates did need investment, which would improve the whole area, which was ok, because the Council was not just about specific places but stronger places for all the community. The charges would be subject to the universal credit and housing benefit payments. To help people not receiving these

benefits, the Council would be tapering these charges over four years. The improvements would be decided in partnership with officers and as the Council progressed with these improvements hopefully, residents would see that they were getting value for money. These projects would be unique for these communities to help make a difference. Councillor S Murray continued that in some of the Council estates it might be the more articulate people that would be voicing what they wanted, and they might be the people who were not contributing towards them. The Service Manager replied that any scheme proposed would be overseen by the residents committee and she encouraged Councillor Murray to look at the Cabinet paper to see how they were going to be managed.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the update on the ongoing review of services charges across the District was noted; and
- (2) That the development of the Council's new scheme 'more than bricks and mortar' EFDC Creating great places where people want to live' was noted.

25. COUNCIL HOUSEBUILDING PROGRESS REPORT AND THE FUTURE APPROACH TO SITE SELECTION

The Service Manager (Housing Management & Home Ownership) reported on the progress made across phases 3 and 4 of the Housebuilding programme that had either been completed, were on-site and were currently being procured, as well as its approach to phase 5. Future housing delivery within phase 4 stood at 84 units up to 2021/22, subject to the necessary planning consents. The Council's retained consultant (Metaplan) was reviewing two additional sites. One was a partnership arrangement with St John the Baptist Church, Epping, that comprised 9-10 residential units for key workers and a community building, subject to planning consent. The other was an opportunity to purchase some land at below market value in Waltham Abbey to provide up to 10 affordable units, subject to planning consent.

Phases 1 to 4 had largely been located on garage sites where there had been anti-social behaviour and they were not economically viable to continue with. There were also some other large garage sites that Housing would be looking at. In phase 5, a different approach was being taken in terms of what local members and local residents wanted. This would include additional environmental options and how the area could be improved for the community, such as planting schemes, or how to reconfigure parking to benefit the residents. The Council was looking to adopt the 'Passivhaus' standard, 'Fabric First' as a minimum, to make them as efficient as possible, for example by installing heat pumps. A further report would go to Cabinet in December 2020 on how the Council would be using housing receipts. These sites would be presented at the next Cabinet to recommend progressing to full planning and the allocation of capital funding. Housing would continue to work with Finance to develop a more robust finance reporting system especially around cashflow.

Councillor R Bassett was very impressed with the number of new houses being built and the Council was one of the few councils building council house. Would target dates be impacted by social distancing at work and would Housing be invoking late work penalties? The Service Manager replied that the Queens Road, Buckhurst Hill, site was some 8 – 10 weeks behind schedule but was not going to add a late penalty. She continued that with the other phase 4 works, the Council was at the stage when

the contracts were being finalised as the pandemic started, which had not impacted on the contracts.

Councillor R Morgan was pleased local residents and the parish council would be consulted because Matching had a garage site.

Councillor S Murray said he did not disagree with the Chairman's comments, but the Council's housebuilding programme barely scratched the surface and did not really reflect the need for social housing in the District. There had been 13,000 local authority housing units when he had started at the Council. The right to buy was a positive aspect, but the Council was desperately short of housing stock. He welcomed the community consultative approach to phase 5 and would have welcomed this approach of a wider range of issues at the Council. There had been a number of projects in Loughton that had been not been consulted on like this, but he approved of Housing's different consultative approach for phase 5.

Councillor S Heap thought Housing's approach taken thus far was very good and although increased design costs were anticipated by adopting the 'Passivhaus' standard building standard, there would be long-term savings.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the contents of this progress report on phases 3 and 4 and the approach to site selection of phase 5, of the Council Housebuilding Programme be noted.

26. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that the next meeting of the Select Committee would be held on 12 January 2021 at 7.00pm.