

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MEETING MINUTES

Monday 18 March 2024, 7.00 pm - 7.55 pm

Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping

Members Present:	Councillors C Whitbread (Chairman), N Bedford (Vice-Chairman), R Balcombe, S Patel, J Philip, H Whitbread and K Williamson
Other Councillors:	Councillors I Allgood and R Brookes
Other Councillors (Virtually):	Councillors S Heap and D Wixley
Apologies:	None
Officers In Attendance:	Surjit Balu (Interim Housing and Property Director), Tom Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager), Jennifer Gould (Strategic Director and Chief Operating Officer), Vivienne Messenger (Democratic Services Officer), Nigel Richardson (Service Director (Planning Development)), Richard Schunemann (Principal Planning Officer), Krishma Shah (Senior Urban Design Officer), Andrew Small (Strategic Director, Corporate and Section 151 Officer), Mandy Thompson (Service Director - Regulatory Services) and James Warwick (Service Director (Contracts, Partnerships and Procurement))
Officers In Attendance (Virtually):	Laura Kirman (Democratic Services Officer)

[A RECORDING OF THIS MEETING IS AVAILABLE FOR REPEATED VIEWING](#)

109 WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Leader of Council made a short address to remind everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the internet, and would be capable of repeated viewing, which could infringe their human and data protection rights.

110 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct.

111 MINUTES

That the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 5 February 2024 be taken as read and signed by the Leader as a correct record.

112 REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

(a) Housing and Strategic Health Partnerships Portfolio

Councillor H Whitbread was pleased to report that two new housing developments were opened on at the beginning of March as part of the Council's housebuilding programme. Fitch

House in Waltham Abbey was named after Mick Fitch the former, late Waltham Abbey Mayor, and Brokenshire Court in Buckhurst Hill was named after the late Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP.

(b) Finance and Economic Development Portfolio

Councillor J Philip reported on the successful Meet the Construction Buyer event on 14 March at the Civic Offices Conference Centre. It was very well attended by businesses and representatives who could deliver significant support for new businesses. Representatives from three further education colleges, New City College, Harlow College and Hertfordshire College, also attended. The feedback on the event had been very positive for us as an economic development organisation and good connections had been made.

(c) Community Health and Wellbeing Portfolio

Councillor S Patel reported that the recent Stay Safe and Well event in Ongar attended by residents went really well.

(d) Leader Portfolio

Councillor C Whitbread observed that members had also visited ground maintenance teams around the estates, which had been very useful.

113 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE CABINET

The Cabinet noted that no public questions or requests to address the Cabinet had been received for consideration at the meeting.

114 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Councillor D Wixley (Chairman) had nothing further to report to the Cabinet as there had been no recent meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, except to announce that members of the newly elected Youth Council would be giving a presentation to the Committee at the next meeting on 23 April 2024.

115 PAY POLICY STATEMENT

The Leader advised the Council was required under the Localism Act 2011, Section 38 (1), to produce a Pay Policy Statement for each financial year that set out details of its remuneration policy. Specifically, it should include the Council's approach to its highest and lowest paid employees and was published annually on the Council's website.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

As no questions were raised by other Cabinet members or councillors present at the meeting, the Cabinet agreed to recommend the Pay Policy Statement to Council for approval without any amendments.

Decision:

That the Cabinet recommended the Pay Policy Statement to Council for approval without any amendments.

116 CONDENSATION, DAMP AND MOULD POLICY

The Housing and Strategic Health Partnerships Portfolio Holder explained the Council had a duty to get rid of damp and mould in council housing stock. The policy would ensure how we dealt with this and it had been scrutinised by the Communities Scrutiny Committee.

The Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder remarked that the scrutiny comments had been very positive and were included in the report.

Councillor I Allgood was concerned that private leaseholders were not allowed to buy new replacement windows under the Council's existing policy which resulted in the following observations:

- Councillor N Bedford – the Council had to be careful what it allowed because under the new Fire Safety Act windows must be fire retardant and requests for replacement windows needed to go through Housing.
- Councillor K Williamson – other local authorities had a list of suppliers that leaseholders could use.
- Councillor D Wixley – replacement windows needed to match other windows in the block.

Councillor H Whitbread remarked this was a good point to raise. The Interim Director of Housing and Property, S Balu, replied that the Council would look at these requests on a case-by-case basis.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

Decision:

That the Cabinet adopted the Condensation, Damp and Mould Policy.

117 HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2024-2029 UPDATE

The Housing and Strategic Health Partnerships Portfolio Holder stated that this was a good comprehensive strategy that had been scrutinised by the Communities Scrutiny Committee members and their comments had been included in the report. People had to have lived in the District for seven years to register for council housing. The report listed the drivers for change and the challenges which included improving the customer experience and looking at the condition and desirability of the housing stock. The Interim Director of Housing and Property continued that an annual delivery plan would form part of the policy every year and good data had been collated on the condition of the housing stock.

Councillor J Philip commended the work done on this. The Council was looking to see if it could improve on its working relationship with Qualis to deliver better value for money, as detailed in the strategy.

Councillor H Whitbread emphasised the importance of the partnership between EFDC and Qualis and to always provide as much council housing as possible.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

Decision:

That the Cabinet approved the outline EFDC 2024-2029 Housing Asset Management Strategy.

118 TREE POLICY (UPDATED) 2024 - 2029

The Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor K Williamson, outlined the updated Tree Policy for the next five years, which defined the approach to the management of trees owned by the District Council and the publicly owned highway trees under the stewardship of Essex County Council. Place Scrutiny Committee had also reviewed this policy on 27 February 2024.

Councillor J Philip was pleased by the significant number of new trees that had been planted, which was good for the environment, and the importance of not allowing green belt land to be built on.

Councillor D Wixley queried why EFDC would not undertake works on trees that interfered with telephone lines or television or satellite reception. What would happen and would the Council take action if, for example, a street tree with a TPO on it interfered with a telephone line? The Regulatory Services Director, M Thompson, replied that in such instances, this was usually dealt with on a case-by-case basis, but she would clarify this after the meeting with Councillor Wixley.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

Decision:

That the Cabinet adopted the proposed updated overarching tree policy for a 5-year period.

119 ENDORSEMENT OF THE LATTON PRIORY STRATEGIC DESIGN CODE

The Place Portfolio Holder, Councillor N Bedford, outlined the development of the Latton Priory design code that responded to its allocation in SP4 (Garden Communities) in EFDC's Adopted Local Plan and followed on from the endorsement of the site promoters' strategic masterplan framework for the site in July 2023. The Latton Priory site was one of seven strategic masterplan areas in the district and one of three new Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) communities in, or partially in, the district. A minimum of 1,050 homes, primary and secondary schools, employment land, five traveller pitches, a local centre, community facilities and significant green space including a SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) were allocated within this master plan. Under the Local Plan, all masterplan sites required a design code as part of the masterplanning process. The design code set out site-wide strategies and key design requirements that aimed to secure a high quality, healthy and vibrant public realm. Developed in collaboration with key HGGT partners, the Quality Review Panel had reviewed it twice. A formal public and stakeholder consultation was also organised between October and December last year.

The Leader commended the significant consultation that had been undertaken but no questions were raised by other Cabinet members or councillors present at the meeting.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

Decision:

- (1) That the Cabinet noted the process undertaken and the outputs from the public consultation on the Draft Latton Priory Strategic Design Code undertaken between October 2023 and January 2024.
- (2) That the Cabinet formally endorsed the Draft Latton Priory Strategic Design Code (Appendix A of Agenda report) in order for it to be taken into account as an important material consideration in the determination of future planning applications, and to inform pre-application advice, assessing planning and any other development management and implementation related purposes relating to the site.
- (3) That the Cabinet agreed the Planning Services Director, in consultation with the Place Portfolio Holder, be authorised to make minor amendments to the Latton Priory Strategic Design Code prior to publication.

120 ENDORSEMENT - EAST OF HARLOW MASTERPLANNING GUIDANCE SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

The Leader announced that the report would be deferred to a future Cabinet meeting as further work was necessary.

Decision:

That the Cabinet agreed to defer this item to a future Cabinet meeting.

121 NORTH WEALD BASSETT STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN FRAMEWORK (RESIDENTIAL)

The Place Portfolio Holder reported that the development of the Strategic Masterplan Framework (SMF) responded to the adopted Local Plan allocation policy P6 (North Weald Bassett). As one of the allocated strategic masterplan sites, the need for a SMF had been identified. The North Weald Bassett masterplan site was allocated for a minimum of 1,050 homes, a local centre including retail, community and sporting facilities, the appropriate provision of health facilities, education provision (early years and primary school places), as well as above requirement levels of public open space including a SANG. Developed collaboratively, the SMF had been reviewed by the Local Planning Authority and Essex officers as part of the Planning Performance Agreement process. Also, the Quality Review Panel had reviewed it three times. Extensive informal public consultation had been undertaken between 2018 to the summer of 2023 culminating in a formal consultation between November 2023 and January 2024 with the public and statutory consultees, which had resulted in the SMF being updated to reflect these comments as appropriate.

The Leader remarked that the Council had been very open with the consultation process. By endorsing the SMF, it would become enshrined within the masterplan site as an important material consideration in the determination of future planning applications, pre-application advice and other development management purposes relating to the site. The Leader emphasised the airfield was only a small part of it and that aviation operations would continue.

Councillor J Philip stated that the development of the North Weald Airfield was designed so it could continue as this was critical to the whole district. He was impressed with the amount of consultation and the significant number of benefits to be provided on the masterplan site. The protection of the listed assets, SANG and enhancements to public rights of way were clear examples of improvements to North Weald Bassett and the district.

Councillor N Bedford commented on the circular bus routes that had been designed as well as the bus routes that joined up North Weald with the airfield. He commended the officers for their work on these detailed reports.

Councillor R Brookes asked why the primary school had been opposed to the idea. Councillor N Bedford replied he thought it was because the school was in an isolated position, but the masterplan specified how the school would be encouraged to develop further and that there must be an additional facility for educational needs.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

Decision:

- (1) That the Cabinet noted the process undertaken and the outputs from the public consultation on the Draft North Weald Bassett Strategic Masterplan Framework undertaken between November 2023 and January 2024.
- (2) That the Cabinet formally endorsed the North Weald Bassett Strategic Masterplan Framework in order for it to be taken into account as an important material consideration in the determination of future planning applications, and to inform pre-application advice, assessing planning and any other development management and implementation related purposes relating to the site.
- (3) That the Cabinet agreed the Planning Services Director, in consultation with the Place Portfolio Holder, be authorised to make minor amendments to the North Weald Bassett Strategic Masterplan Framework, including any document accessibility requirements, prior to publication.

122 FIT FOR THE FUTURE TRANSFORMATION PORTFOLIO, GOVERNANCE

The Leader reported that the fortunate sale of land to Google had been beneficial to the Council's Budget. The portfolio of transformation activity over the next 4 years would ensure the Council continued to operate within its financial means and to deliver services that residents and businesses needed, as the Council knew it would have to find substantial savings in the future. EFDC was working closely with a number of other local authorities in North Essex. Shared services were going well, principally with Braintree and Colchester councils, as well as the collaboration with Essex colleagues on the procurement collaborative and other various projects. A governance structure was required to enable us to move forward with this transformation and a further report on Fit for the Future would be going to the next Cabinet meeting on 28 May 2024.

Councillor J Philip remarked that working collaboratively was definitely the right direction to go. He clarified that when the budget was approved by Council on 20 February 2024, the full £3 million was not included but we had a strategy to facilitate this. The Council was expecting a significant return and confirmed there was no danger of the Council moving into a S114 situation.

The Leader reiterated this was a sound Council. Transformation was part of the process as it would help us build for the future to drive our revenue streams, savings and efficiencies to deliver more for residents and businesses.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

Decision:

That the Cabinet agreed the proposed governance structure for the Fit for the Future Transformation Portfolio, as laid out within the agenda report and Appendix F.

123 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that there was no other urgent business for consideration by the Cabinet.

124 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was agreed that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the item of business set out below on grounds that they would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the following paragraph(s) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended) or are confidential under Section 100(A)(2):

Agenda Item No	Subject	Exempt Information Paragraph Number
18	Epping Forest Operations Hub	3

125 EPPING FOREST OPERATIONS HUB

It was noted this item was considered in private session. The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

Decision:

- (1) That the Cabinet approved the appointment of Barnes Construction for the design and build of the Operations Hub at North Weald Airfield.
- (2) That the Cabinet recommended to Council the inclusion of a maximum additional £1,733,000 allocation within the capital programme for construction of Operations Hub at North Weald Airfield.

CHAIRMAN