

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL LOCAL COUNCILS' LIAISON COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Thursday 21 November 2024, 7.00 pm - 8.29 pm

Council Chamber - Civic Offices

Members Present:	Councillors L Burrows (Chairman), Cllr D Wixley (Vice-Chairman), J Lea, D Sunger, J H Whitehouse, Loughton Town Clerk, Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers Parish Clerk, North Weald Baseett Parish Clerk, Stanford Rivers Parish Clerk, Stapleford Abbots Parish Clerk and Waltham Abbey Town Clerk
Other Councillors and Clerks:	County: C Whitbread District: I Allgood, R Balcombe, W Kauffman, M Morris, S Heather, K Williamson Parish/Town: E Burn, C Davies Loughton Town Clerk, Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers Parish Clerk, North Weald Bassett Parish Clerk, Stanford Rivers Parish Clerk, Stapleford Abbots Parish Clerk and Waltham Abbey Town Clerk
Apologies:	Councillor(s) R Morgan, C C Pond, Buckhurst Hill Parish Clerk and Nazeing Parish Clerk
Officers In Attendance:	Nigel Richardson (Service Director (Planning Development)), Graham Courtney (Service Manager (Planning Development)), Paula Maginnis (Service Director (Corporate Services)), Dawn Baird (Interim Service Manager - Business Support), Rebecca Perrin (Senior Electoral Services Officer), Therese Larsen (Democratic Services Officer), Gary Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services) and Steven Mitchell (PR Website Editor)

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

13 WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

14 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN & VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED:

- 1) That District Cllr L Burrows, in his capacity as the Chairman of the District Council, be appointed as Chairman of the Local Councils Liaison Committee for the 2024/25 municipal year; and
- 2) That Cllr D Wixley, in his capacity as a Town Councillor, be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Local Councils Liaison Committee for the 2024/25 municipal year.

15 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Town Cllr Wixley had questions regarding minute item 11 b from last meeting; When will the money from S106 contributions get paid to Local Councils, and does the District Council retain the interest earned in the meantime?

N Richardson (Service Director) replied that the money was passed over to the Conservators of Epping Forest from the Air Quality and Recreation pressures S106 money collected, and that he would have to get back to the Committee with the exact figure collected, when it was/will be paid and whether it includes interest. The District Council still holds some of the Recreation Pressures money.

Cllr K Williamson confirmed later in the meeting that £ 434 987.64 was paid to the Conservators of Epping Forest 2023/24 and preceding years.

Post meeting update:

A statement was provided by N Richardson following the meeting:

As stated in Item 8 of the Cabinet agenda for 9 December 2024 (item 8 - Infrastructure Funding Statement), the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation - Recreational Pressure Contributions was £434,987.64 and the full balance has subsequently been transferred in the current financial year to the Epping Forest Conservators as the strategy delivery body. It also reported that Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation - Air Quality Contributions was £257,148.35. These funds will be utilised on an ongoing basis to support activities within the Interim Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy including air quality monitoring. There is no plan for Parish/Town Councils to act in the delivery of this.

Town Cllr Wixley also asked for an update on what was being done about damage to pavements etc by developers.

Post meeting update:

A statement was provided by N Richardson following the meeting:

In respect of the pavement, all planning permission approvals contain an informative of the decision letter as follows:

Applicants are advised not to store building materials on the highway and not to damage highway verges, so please avoid parking construction vehicles and machinery on verges. If any damage occurs, the Council will require verges to be restored at the applicant's expense. Please be aware that highway damage is easily reported through the Council's website and will be investigated by Essex County Council officers.

RESOLVED:

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 1 February 2024 be taken as a correct record.

16 ISSUES RAISED BY LOCAL COUNCILS

The Local Councils had submitted questions to the Council. The following answers were provided at the meeting.

1. (i) Can EFDC clarify what an 'outside body' means in relation to the Local Council Liaison committee, given that the committee is managed by EFDC Officers, and chaired by an elected representative of EFDC?

G Woodhall (Team Manager Democratic & Electoral Services) clarified that an outside body is a committee or panel where not all members are from the District Council.

- (ii) Will EFDC commit to providing an updated Parish and Town Council Charter, setting out how it sees the relationship between these layers of local government, and how communication between these two bodies works (from both political and practical perspectives)?

G Woodhall explained that a Charter from 2006 exists but is due a review. Mr Woodhall confirmed he would be willing to take part in a forum with Town and Parish Clerks to get this done. He will await an invite once the Town and Parish Forum has been established.

- (iii) Parish and Town Council Clerks would like an improved mechanism by which they can contact officers at EFDC to resolve problems, issues, or ask questions. Will EFDC commit to:
 - a. providing a dedicated Parish / Town Council contact at EFDC responsible for dealing with Parish Council issues on a day-to-day basis; and
 - b. providing an electronic list of direct contact details for officers and heads of departments at EFDC and their responsibilities?

G Woodhall confirmed that:

- a. **EFDC does not have a dedicated Parish and Town Councillor contact, but will look at this, and**
- b. **A list of contact details for Executive Directors and Service Directors can be provided.**

- (iv) Will the Leader of the Council agree to meet with Parish and Town Council Clerks at least three times per year, to discuss issues or concerns of an operational nature?

ClIr C Whitbread confirmed he was happy to meet with Parish and Town Council Clerks on a regular basis.

- (v) What measures will EFDC put in place to improve communication between the District and Parish / Town Councils, and ensure this contact is maintained?

G Woodhall explained that this would be one of the items to be outlined within the new Charter.

- (vi) By what methods will EFDC accept questions to be placed on the Local Council Liaison Committee agenda (Individual Councils? Individual Councillors? One nominated person? Etc).

G Woodhall outlined a preference for the new Town and Parish Committee to meet about a month before the next Local Council Liaison Committee, and then forward their most important issues to the Council at least two weeks before the meeting; giving officers a fair chance to prepare responses for the Town and Parish councillors.

- 2. Can EFDC to provide an overview of the changes to planning system implemented at EFDC, and the relevant processes that go with these changes?

Covered in Agenda item 7

3. What is EFDCs response regarding written representations at appeal and personnel provided for Information Hearings?

N Richardson asked for clarification on the question before G Courtney explaining that EFDC has moved away from single officer hearings as well as now getting support from legal officers. Cost was a major contribution to why more officers could not be involved. He encouraged support from Town and Parish Councillors at hearings. Regarding central government funding he explained that the extra funding being spoken about would likely be for apprentices not for planners with years of experience and would not cover a whole post for each authority. He re-iterated that Town and Parish councillors should attend hearings to support the authority. N Richardson were hopeful that the new Planning Committee set up would reduce appeals.

17 EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL'S REVIEW OF POLLING PLACES AND STATIONS COMPLETED - JANUARY 2025

D Baird (Interim Service Manager) updated the committee on the Review of Polling Places and Stations.

The Committee asked questions:

- Please expand on the accessibility issues.

R Perrin (Senior Electoral Services Officer) explained that the accessibility comments related to the previous Parliamentary Election, where electors had been moved to another Polling Station because of renovation works. The renovations had now been completed and those electors had been reallocated back at their original polling station.

- Please explain the issues surrounding Whitebridge not being used as a Polling Station in the future.

R Perrin explained that ward members were consulted and said there had been accessibility issues due to it being a school, and there being children around. Where possible Electoral Services try to avoid using schools as polling stations due to safeguarding of the children.

18 NEW PLANNING COMMITTEES AT EFDC - PROCEDURES AND PROTOCOLS

G Courtney (Planning Service Manager) presented the new Planning Committee at EFDC - procedures and protocol. He shared a document on the new Planning Committee, referred the Committee to a document also shared in the Agenda, as well as the Planning Committee pages in the Constitution.

N Richardson (Service Director) added that the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) were invited to make suggestions as EFDCs Planning Department were not functioning very well, and EFDC wanted to avoid going into special measures. Their advice went through a long process within the Council, with officers as well as Councillors, and although still early days the Planning Department feels the new process works very well. The new procedures will be reviewed in 2025.

The Committee commented and asked questions:

- Cllr K Williamson commented that EFDCs procedures were now in line with most other authorities.

- What will EFDC do about enforcement? Town and Parish councillors felt they were not being listened to when they flagged problem developments. Some large applications go on and officers do not go to view the site. Local councillors have a lot of local knowledge but are not being heard.

N Richardson replied that he strongly disagreed with the statement that enforcement officers do not visit sites. He asked for a meeting with Loughton Town Council as Enforcement was not a topic at this meeting.

- Cllr W Kauffman shared that he felt the recent Plans B meeting went well, although some Councillors felt under pressure from officers. Future meetings where several Councillors may have to step down might be interesting.

G Courtney reminded Councillors that substitutions could be made for Councillors when they needed to step down on certain applications. This would ensure quorum and that decisions could be made at the meeting.

- Cllr Wixley thanked G Courtney for the helpful presentations and asked when the document could be sent out, he also asked for it to be attached to the Minutes of the meeting.
- Cllr Wixley asked for a clarification on how sites visits will be decided. And added questions regarding site visits for householder applications, and whether a ward member would have any influence if they felt a site visit should apply?

G Courtney explained that the default would be that every application should have a site visit, unless the Chairman determines that a site visit would not be needed. The agenda now comes out 3 weeks before the meeting, the Chairmans Briefing, where the decision would be made on site visits would be held a few days later. For householder applications to come to Planning Committee, the Portfolio-holder would first need to decide the application needed to be heard by the Committee. Once it's decided that a householder application would be heard by Committee, the same rules apply; the default would be that a site visit would be arranged, unless the Chairman decided it was not needed.

If a ward member feels a site visit would be needed, they should raise this.

- Cllr J Lea asked if transport would be arranged, as site visits can now be across the whole district, not just in the local area as with the old Planning Committee system.

N Richardson replied (later in the meeting) that maybe the local councillors might be able to help each other out with transportation.

- Cllr D Sunger expressed that the new system works. The system now lets Councillors speak to, listen to and take residents' concerns aboard, and to support them more. He encouraged Town and Parish councillors to engage more with District Councillors.
- Town and Parish councillors felt disenfranchised with the new system. Could it be explained what it means in monetary terms, what it means if the powers were taken away from EFDC. Why were we in this situation?

N Richardson explained that EFDC got into this situation because the performance on major application were poor. EFDC were close to the 10% threshold when PAS were asked to help. EFDC are now at about 13%. The new system will take some time to improve the statistics. In monetary terms, if we stayed over 10% and went into special measures, the planning applications would not come to EFDC but would go to the

Planning Inspectorate. The planning fee would go to the Planning Inspectorate, and they would make the decisions without input from the Councillors, however the EFDC Planning officers would still have to do a lot of the work on the applications. For one of the large applications recently the planning fee was about £200 000. EFDC would not get this money if placed in special measures.

- Cllr W Kauffman asked if the Chairmans Briefing could be expanded as it is restricting site visits for applications where the Chairman and Vice-Chair has to step down. Can more members be involved?
- Cllr I Allgood also commented about site visit, can we where substitutions are being made, think ahead in order for the substitute to be invited to the site visits.

N Richardson replied that these were good points, and this would be looked into.

- Cllr I Allgood asked if there could be a system put in place for Town and Parish councillors to be notified sooner of decisions made by officers. This way District Councillors could call in decisions sooner.
- Cllr K Williams commented on site visits, that there were never very many District Councillors attending, but that the new procedures could and would be improved.
- A question was asked about substitutions, do they happen to avoid going below quorate.
- Can Town and Parish councillors be consulted when the new Planning Committees are being reviewed?

G Courtney replied that quorum was a concern as there are less members on the Committee now. The new procedure of site visits being earlier ahead of the meeting date should allow for substitutes to be arranged in time for the substitute to attend the site visit. There should be no issue with regards to Town and Parish Councillors being consulted before/during the review process.

- A clarification was made that the document G Courtney shared showed when it is an Officer decision and when it is not, as well as what Councillors need to do when they want an application to go to Committee.
- Gratitude was expressed that the different types of applications are now included in the weekly list.
- In one document it says Major applications can be called in by Members within four weeks of them being published in the Members Bulletin, on another it says Weekly List. Which one is correct?

N Richardson confirmed the Weekly List would be the correct list. He also expressed gratitude that Town and Parish Councillors chose which applications to call in and does not abuse that system.

- The Planning training that has been promised to Councillors, can Town and Parish councillors be invited along to this?

G Courtney confirmed the first session is in a few weeks' time. Planning Committee members should have been invited. Town and Parish Councillors are also invited along. The training will be held in the Council

Chamber, with a recording being available to view afterwards.

- Cllr W Kauffman asked - when an officer has made a recommendation to turn down an application based on planning reasons, and a ward member calls in the decision, why is it being discussed at committee if there are technical reasons for the refusal?

G Courtney explained that the Constitution states that a ward member can call in officers' decisions. Officers do check with the Ward Councillors once the refusal reasons have been set out, if they still want to call the decision in.

- Is it right that any councillor could speak on an application? Should it not be just ward councillors?

G Woodhall explained that other Councillors with a wider connection to the area could speak.

19 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

P Maginnis (Service Director) reminded all councillors that an invite had gone out for the Corporate Communications Review, and that Town and Parish councillors attendance would be welcomed.

20 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted that the date of the next meeting would be on the 20th March 2025 at 7pm.