

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF LEADER MEDIA BRIEFING
HELD ON MONDAY, 26 JUNE 2006
IN LEADERS ROOM, CIVIC OFFICES, EPPING
AT 2.30 PM**

These are the notes of the latest media briefing given by Councillor Diana Collins, Leader of Epping Forest District Council. Whilst every effort is made to accurately record the views of the Leader, the notes are not intended to be taken as a verbatim account of the briefing and may contain mistakes or omissions.

- Present:** Mrs D Collins (Leader and Leaders Portfolio Holder), Mrs A Grigg (Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder) and Mrs M Sartin (Environmental Protection Portfolio Holder)
- Note Taker:** J Scott (Joint Chief Executive), J Preston (Head of Planning and Economic Development), T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer) and Maurice Richmond (Public Relations Work Experience Trainee)
- Also in attendance:** Alison Jackson (Ongar and North Weald Gazette), J Pudney (Harlow Star) and Paul Welstead (West Essex Guardian)
-

1. EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC - EAST OF ENGLAND PLAN

- 1.1 Councillor Mrs Diana Collins welcomed reporters to the briefing. She began by explaining that in view of the publication of the Examination in Public Panel report on the East of England Plan, this would form the basis of the briefing. The previously signalled intention to introduce members of the Cabinet at each briefing had therefore been temporarily suspended in view of the significance of this item.
- 1.2 'A Curate's Egg – good in parts' was the term used by Councillor Mrs Collins to describe the EiP report. She was 'very pleased' that the Council's arguments had prevailed in reducing the original allocation of housing for the district from 18,500 to 11,000 and now 6,500. This was 'great news' and Mrs Collins extended her thanks to everyone who had helped to achieve such success. Councillor Mrs Collins felt that particular credit should go to Councillor John Knapman and former District Councillor Robert Glozier for their hard work supported by most members of the Council.
- 1.3 'For the last two years we have been adamant and the drop from 18,500 to 6,500 is a great success. At North Weald there are now no plans for housing at all – this is extremely good news,' said Councillor Mrs Collins. She also referred to Councillor Mrs Anne Grigg who was similarly pleased.
- 1.4 However, Mrs Collins then went on to say that 'not such good news' was also contained within the EiP report. The report recommended that Harlow should not expand to the North on the 'Ropemakers' site and there was not likely to be a 'northern relief' road. There was no suggestion of how to deal with the development of Harlow, a southern link road or infrastructure but of the 13,500 extra houses allocated to Harlow, the Panel was recommending that

3,000 be built in Epping Forest District affecting areas such as Jacks Hatch, Roydon and Broadley Common.

- 1.5 The Panel recommendations would have serious implications for the Green Belt. Councillor Mrs Collins said that the proposals 'break all the Green Belt rules – pushing it out'. She felt this was not something people wanted and reiterated the Council position of protecting the Green Belt.
- 1.6 Councillor Mrs Collins signalled the Council's intention to work with Harlow District Council for the benefit of both communities. She felt that the 'destiny' of the districts should remain in the hands of the Councils and not a Government-appointed Development Corporation. It was therefore important to come to an accommodation with Harlow District Council – ensuring that the two Councils work together in the right spirit at a local level.
- 1.7 Returning to her 'very mixed feelings' about the EiP report, Councillor Mrs Collins reiterated her concern for the protection of the Green Belt. At one time, she noted that Epping Forest District had been in a 'Growth Area' and that had held out the possibility of the whole District being built on in years to come but that was no longer the case. She now had hopes that the District as a whole would not be swallowed up in what could otherwise be an urban environment stretching from London to Peterborough. The reduction in the number of new dwellings to 6,500, a third of the original proposal and the removal of North Weald from the proposals were very pleasing and Epping Forest District Council would work with Harlow District Council to the best of its ability.
- 1.8 In response to a question about the degree of control Epping Forest District Council might have on the location of new housing, Councillor Mrs Collins said that if a Development Corporation was not imposed, the Council would have some power to locate housing in areas 'of least damage to the Green Belt'. John Scott added that the EiP said that the 3,000 dwellings allocated as part of Harlow expansion would be on the fringes of the town but the 3,500 allocated to Epping Forest District could be located more generally across the District.
- 1.9 Councillor Mrs Collins pointed out that the final decisions (on the East of England Plan) had still not been made. The EiP recommendations would now go to Ruth Kelly MP (Secretary of State) and that it was therefore still possible for elements of the plans to be overturned. John Preston confirmed that the Government would consider the recommendations of the EiP and a further 12-week consultation period. When the Secretary of State looked at the proposals she might have different views to the EiP Panel.
- 1.10 In response to a question about the number of houses the Council would have wanted, Councillor Mrs Collins responded that the Council would have wanted enough for the needs of its own residents but 'certainly Harlow would not have been in our plan'.
- 1.11 In response to a question about the speed of development, John Preston said that phasing would be sensible and helping to provide infrastructure. He also felt that limiting the number of new build dwellings at any one time would make the process easier for existing communities and avoid some of the potential 'friction' caused by large developments.

- 1.12 It was noted that the 'market' would want the build quickly but the Council was concerned to balance development against Green Belt preservation.
- 1.13 Councillor Mrs Collins added that infrastructure such as water supply, education and health facilities were a very important issue that must be addressed as part of any house building programme. It would be 'nonsense to build houses without it.'
- 1.14 In response to a question comparing the report recommendations for investment in Harlow and Epping Forest District, Councillor Mrs Collins identified Harlow as a commercial centre providing job opportunities as well as a potential source of workers for other areas such as Stansted Airport. While the East of England Plan was mainly about housing in relation to Epping Forest District she noted that it was about housing and jobs for Harlow.
- 1.15 Councillor Mrs Anne Grigg responded to a question about the feelings of people living in North Weald towards the EiP report. Mrs Grigg felt that the reaction should be cautious. The report still made references to North Weald making contributions in later years but was delighted that the EiP Panel seemed to have acknowledged the case put forward by the Council. The role of flying and the historic significance of the Airfield seemed to have been acknowledged. Mrs Grigg was pleased but remained cautious while waiting for the reaction of the Secretary of State. She congratulated residents and Airfield users for their 'significant' contributions to the debate.
- 1.16 In response to a question about the reaction in Roydon to issues such as housing and a potential by-pass, Councillor Mrs Mary Sartin said that she was very uncomfortable but that the news was not totally unexpected. She had real concerns that small settlements would be engulfed by Harlow and it was small comfort to think that a southern by-pass was a possibility.
- 1.17 Councillor Mrs Collins reminded the reporters that the area of concern was Green Belt and that the EiP report was a 'snapshot' of what 'may or may not be the final outcome'.

2. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 2.1 Councillor Mrs Collins indicated that Parking Enforcement was a likely topic for discussion at the next briefing.

3. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 3.3 Monday 3 July 2006