

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL COUNCILS' LIAISON COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 28 November 2007 **Time:** 7.30 - 9.40 pm

Place: Council Chamber, Civic
Offices, High Street, Epping

**Members
Present:**

Representing Epping Forest District Council:

Councillors: Mrs C Pond (Chairman), J Knapman, R Morgan and
B Sandler

Other Councillors:

Councillors: Mrs D Collins, Mrs A Cooper and Ms S Stavrou

Representing Essex County Council:

County Councillors: T Finn, C Pond, T Spencer and M Tomkins

Representing Local Councils:

Councillor Mrs D Borton (Nazeing P C), Dr P Boshier (High Ongar
PC), Councillor Mrs J Bowerman (Matching P C), G Carter (Nazeing
PC), Councillor Ms G Castle (Nazeing PC), Ms S De Luca (North
Weald Bassett PC), Councillor J E Dolder (High Ongar P C),
Councillor C Hawkins (North Weald Bassett PC), Councillor Ms S
Jackman MBE (Ongar T C), Mr R James (Waltham Abbey T C),
Councillor B Murphy (Epping T C), Councillor Ms H Nicholas
(Roydon P C), Councillor R Pearce (Loughton T C), Councillor Mrs P
Price (Lambourne P C), Councillor R Russell (Stapleford Abbots P
C), Councillor J Salter (Abbess, Beauchamp and Berners Roding P
C), Councillor Mrs P Smith (Epping Upland P C) Councillor B Surtees
(Ongar T C) and Councillor Ms J Woods (Loughton T C)

Apologies: **Epping Forest District Council –**

Councillor: Mrs M Sartin

Essex County Council –

Councillors: G McEwen

Parish/Town Councils: -

Councillor J Collins and Mr C Thompson (Moreton, Bobbingworth
and the Lavers) and the Sheering P C representatives

**Officers
Present:**

D MacNab (Deputy Chief Executive), I Willett (Assistant to the Chief
Executive), P Sutton (Assistant Director of Planning Services), R
Wilson (Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)), S Hill (Senior
Democratic Services Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services
Officer), C Wiggins (Crime and Disorder Co-Ordinator) and M
Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

By Invitation:

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**14. MINUTES****RESOLVED:**

That the minutes for the meeting held on 13 June 2007 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a true record, subject to Mr P Boshier, Parish Clerk of High Ongar Parish Council, being recorded as a Councillor.

15. ISSUES RAISED BY LOCAL COUNCILS**(a) Quality Councils**

This item was raised by Councillor E Borton of Nazeing Parish Council. It concerned how the Quality Councils criteria affected local councils. The Leader of the District Council, Councillor Mrs D Collins, had been invited to the meeting to speak on this. The committee was informed that Essex had more Quality Councils than any other county in England. However despite the enhanced status that the Quality Councils' title gave, there were still substantial problems facing local councils. In particular was the public's perception of crime. Often residents did not feel safe, despite the District being a comparatively safe place to live. Therefore Councillors, particularly at Parish and District level, had an important role to play in being the eyes and ears of the community. They could report graffiti and rubbish and be an important point of contact for the public.

Councillor Mrs D Collins spoke of the Council's record on recycling, up by 42%, and, with the introduction of the new waste management contract with fortnightly collections, there should be a better waste collection service.

Members of the Committee were concerned whether being a Quality Council was meaningful. It was unclear as to how far it changed the way they worked and their involvement with the public. It was felt that there needed to be devolution of power to local councils. An example was given of streets having their names changed and local councils not being consulted. Mrs Collins advised that the District Council would consult local councillors in future if a street was having its name changed.

The Deputy Chief Executive, Derek MacNab, advised the Committee that further work was needed in clarifying the role of Quality Councils and the Government was currently reviewing the policy. A further progress report would be made at a future meeting of the Local Councils Liaison Committee.

RESOLVED:

That, a progress report concerning Quality Councils be made for a future meeting of the Local Council's Liaison Committee in 2008.

(b) Community Involvement in Section 106 Planning Gain Decisions on Applications

This item was brought to the Committee by Councillor Brian Surtees of Ongar Town Council. It concerned the level of community involvement in Section 106 planning

agreements. It was felt that opportunities were being missed if Section 106 Agreements were not discussed with Parish and Town Councils as they were in touch with local need. They asked to be consulted about the potential for an agreement. The Assistant Director of Planning Services, Paul Sutton, informed the Committee that the Section 106 agreements were a planning obligation and not simply a way of obtaining funding from developers. It was about making developments acceptable in planning terms. Any agreements drawn up needed to be relevant to planning, fair, reasonable and related in scale.

The County Council had set out its policy regarding development over a certain size and was aiming for similar objectives with planning agreements. Parish Councils played an important role during the agreement phase, as in some cases they had access to information that the District Council did not have.

The Committee felt that officers could have been more forthright in developing Section 106 Agreements to the benefit of local residents. As well as this, local councils were not always being consulted about the agreements. A planning protocol was needed and Paul Sutton agreed that these points should be included in the planning process. Finally, it was requested that a draft policy should be circulated to Parish and Town Councils which should, at a later stage, be included in the Parish Charter.

RESOLVED:

That, a draft policy concerning community involvement in Section 106 agreements, be circulated to Parish and Town Councils for comment.

(c) Update on Proposed Return Visit of Councillor Norman Hume, Highways Portfolio Holder for Essex County Council

This item was raised by Councillor Brian Surtees of Ongar Town Council. It was agreed that Councillor Norman Hume be invited to the first Local Council's Liaison Committee in the new Council year.

RESOLVED:

That, Councillor Norman Hume of Essex County Council, be invited to the first Local Council's Liaison Committee in the new Council year.

(d) Police Liaison Issues

This item was raised by Councillor Brian Surtees of Ongar Town Council. The issue concerned liaison between the District Council, local councils, and the police. It was felt that local councils could provide important information to the police because they often received information from residents concerning local crime problems. They had a good local knowledge and therefore, should be kept up to date regarding police issues. It was argued that there was poor feedback from the police. For example the Neighbourhood Action Panels (NAPS) were not public meetings and were poorly attended by senior police figures. It was requested that an annual public meeting would help facilitate a useful dialogue between councillors and the police. It was felt that a regular update on crime statistics in the District was also needed.

The Community Wellbeing Portfolio Holder, Councillor Ms S Stavrou, had been invited to the meeting. She argued that local councillors were being provided with information by the District and currently they were better informed than ever before. The Safer Communities Co-Ordinator, Mrs C Wiggins, stated that from April 2008 a strategic assessment was being made annually as a result of the Police and Justice Act 2006.

The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership statistics were currently available and were only for the District as a whole and could not be broken down to parish level. Some Councillors complained that they could not get access to the Joint Action Group (JAG) minutes. Councils who wished to receive these minutes were advised to contact Mrs C Wiggins who would notify the JAG and they would put them on their emailing list, only electronic copies were available. Councillor Ms S Stavrou concluded by saying that the police had some resource issues within Essex. She also referred to the problem of younger criminals being more mobile due to free fares on public transport and the fact that the District bordered three London boroughs, thereby causing difficulties for the police.

16. CHOICE-BASED LETTINGS

The Assistant Director of Housing Service (Operations), Roger Wilson, gave a presentation on the operation of the Local Choice-Based Lettings Scheme. The implementation of the Choice-Based Lettings Scheme was necessary to meet Government requirements. The scheme allowed all vacant social rented properties to be advertised to applicants on the Housing Register in a two weekly publication website, and other media outlets, giving details of location, type, rent, service charge, council tax band and landlord of the accommodation. Applicants applied by expressing an interest in person, by post, telephone, text, email or by the internet. Limits to the number of "expressions" per applicant were in place which included restricting "expressions" for properties to those households which only had an assessed need for a particular property type.

Following the two weekly cycle, the Council would analyse the expressions of interest received and allocate each property. The property would be offered to the applicant in the highest band who had been registered the longest, and who had expressed an interest for the vacancy. The results of the expressions of interest on each property advertised was then published in the next periodic publication, which set out the number on each property, as well as the band and registration date of the successful applicant. Applicants could see how long the successful applicant had been waiting and gave greater transparency in the allocation of accommodation.

The Council had set up the Herts and Essex Housing Options Consortium (HEHOC) which had a partnership with the following authorities:

Brentwood Borough Council
Chelmsford Borough Council
Broxbourne District Council
Uttlesford District Council
East Herts District Council
Epping Forest District Council

Following the submission of a successful bid to the Government, HEHOC received a grant of £96,000. Around £60,000 of the grant was for funding a consultant to manage the implementation of the scheme, through an external Choice-Based Lettings Agency. The balance of the grant went towards the set up costs.

The scheme was developed in a way that took into account the needs of vulnerable groups, this involved liaison with social care and other partner agencies, ensuring that vulnerable people were able to participate fully in the scheme. The scheme became operational on 19 November 2007. The committee asked for an updating report in a year's time, reviewing the success or otherwise of the scheme.

RESOLVED:

That an updating report on Choice Based Lettings be brought back to this committee in a year's time.

17. AREA PLANS SUB COMMITTEES - THREE WEEK CYCLE

The Assistant to the Chief Executive, Ian Willett, presented a report to the Committee regarding the proposed change to the Area Plans Sub-Committees' Cycle. The District Council wished to consult local councils regarding changes to the cycle of Area Plans Sub-Committee meetings. The number of Area Sub-Committees had been reduced from 4 to 3, but the four week cycle had not changed, resulting in a meeting in three weeks out of every four. The Council's Constitutional Affairs Standing Scrutiny Panel had decided to recommending that the "fallow" week should be discontinued from the new Council year and a three week cycle adopted.

This change would assist in achieving top quartile performance in dealing with planning applications which was the District Council's stated objective. The proposal had been initiated by the Director of Planning and Economic Development and was supported by the Panel. The recommendation was being considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13 December 2007 and a final decision was being made at the Council meeting on 18 December 2007.

The Committee members felt that not enough time had been provided for the local councils to discuss this. Their meetings were not part of the District Council's cycle of meetings therefore the proposed change was likely to cause problems to their own arrangements for meetings. The committee was informed that under the proposed scheme the local councils would have to meet once a week to go through future planning applications which did not leave them adequate time to pursue errors on applications with planning officers. It was argued that the "fallow" week gave councils sufficient time in preparing for other meetings. It was observed that the status of being in the top quartile did not raise more funding for the Council.

Ian Willett assured members that a copy of the proposals would go to every Parish Clerk in the District.

RESOLVED:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be asked to consider postponing consideration of the recommendation that Area Plans Sub-Committees be on a three week cycle until its January 2008 meeting in order to allow more time for Parish and Town Councils to consider the issue.

18. PARISH AND TOWN COUNCIL REMUNERATION SCHEMES - REVIEW

The Assistant to the Chief Executive, Ian Willett, had written to Parish and Town Council Clerks on 30 October 2007 regarding the need to review their remuneration schemes where these had been in operation. The recruitment of an independent person to a vacancy on the independent panel was currently in progress. The committee was advised that replies were needed by the end of the year.

19. YOUTH COUNCIL

The Deputy Chief Executive Derek MacNab, informed the committee about the Youth Council. Currently 20 applications had been received for nominations and a further 5 had been received from students who lived in the District but did not attend a school or college within the Epping Forest locality. The Deputy Chief Executive told the committee

that the students were having an opportunity to take control of the Youth Council and shape it. They could have their own Constitution, minute their own meetings and make bids via external agencies for financial support. The Chairman and members of the committee wished the Youth Council all the best for the future. Local council representatives raised liaison between the Youth Council and Town and Parish Councils. Derek MacNab stated that was something that would be addressed once the Youth Council was in being.

20. UPDATE ON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (LDS) AND GYPSY AND TRAVELLER DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT (DPD)

The Council had been directed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to amend the Local Development Scheme (LDS), submitted to GO East in October 2006. The direction required the Council to produce a separate Development Plan Document (DPD) on "Gypsy and Traveller Site Provision." The document was being submitted for examination by 30 September 2009. The matter had been considered by the Cabinet on 12 November 2007 and the amended LDS was agreed. This had been re-submitted to GO East for their approval.

The Committee felt that some of the local councils had been left out of discussions regarding the allocation of Gypsy and Traveller sites. There had been a public inquiry regarding one such site which had ended on its first day. However Paul Sutton of Planning Services advised the committee that they may have an obligation to take on more sites in the future. He would consult adjoining authorities but warned the Committee that difficult decisions would have to be made.

21. UPDATE ON "FIFTY FAVOURITE TREES" PROJECT

The committee received an update on County Care's "Fifty Favourite Trees" Project. The purpose of the project was to determine fifty favourite trees within the District via nominations from people and organisations within the District. There was currently an exhibition about the trees taking place at Waltham Abbey District Museum, ending on 8 January 2008. Paul Sutton advised the committee that a poster was available for each Parish and Town Council.

22. VETERAN TREE HUNT PROJECT

Paul Sutton advised the committee that the Veteran Tree Hunt Project was receiving £40,000 from GreenArc. The hunt was going on until the end of March 2008.

23. EPPING CONSERVATION AREA - DRAFT CHARACTER APPRAISAL - PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Paul Sutton had advised the committee that there had been a consultation meeting on 27 November 2007. Local Councils were advised to consult the District Council's website for details. Local Councils asked whether a programme had been devised for dealing with appraisals for each Parish area. Paul Sutton explained that the order of appraisals would be determined by resources in the Planning and Economic Development Directorate and priorities in terms of development pressures. For this reason Roydon and Nazeing might be the next appraisals to be undertaken.

24. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman of Council informed the Committee that the Christmas Carol Concert was on Friday 7 December 2007. The Chairman requested that cards were sent back as

soon as possible and that only one nomination for the Citizen of the Year Awards had been received.

25. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The committee were advised that the next meeting was on 26 March 2008.

CHAIRMAN