

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF PLANNING SERVICES SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL
HELD ON THURSDAY, 12 FEBRUARY 2009
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT TIMES NOT SPECIFIED**

Members Present:	Mrs L Wagland (Chairman), K Chana (Vice-Chairman), K Angold-Stephens, M Colling, Mrs A Cooper, R Frankel, Mrs A Haigh and H Ulkun
Other members present:	Mrs A Grigg
Apologies for Absence:	A Boyce, J Hart, Mrs C Pond and P Spencer
Officers Present	S G Hill (Senior Democratic Services Officer), D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive) and J Preston (Director of Planning and Economic Development)

Also in attendance:

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of Interest were made pursuant to the Code of Conduct.

34. NOTES FROM THE LAST MEETING - 18.11.08

The notes of the last meeting were agreed as a correct record subject to the alteration of the 'fought' to 'sought' on page 5 paragraph 6.

35. MATTERS ARISING

(a) Crooked Mile (note 28)

It was noted that the Portfolio Holder had met with Councillor Hume (ECC) and had raised members concerns about the Crooked Mile directly. It was understood that County Officers were currently working on proposals for the road which would be published in April 2009.

Councillor Cooper stated that concerns about the road had been raised with ECC three years previously and nothing had been done. It was anticipated that the Safer Cleaner Greener Panel would receive the report.

36. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor Haigh was substituting for Councillor Spencer and Councillor Angold-Stephens for Councillor Pond.

37. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Terms of reference were noted.

38. WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel considered its work programme. The following actions were agreed for incorporation:

(1) EoEP and LDF

The Panel noted the current position on the Gypsy and Traveller consultation, work being undertaken on the proposed division of sites within the region, proposals coming to Council at its next meeting about a new LDF Cabinet Committee, work being done to extend regional strategies to 2031

Agreed: That an LDF timeline to be presented to Panel showing the key milestones to aid scrutiny of the process.

(3) Value for Money – Service based reviews

Agreed: That a scoping report be prepared for the next meeting for the Enforcement review

(8) Feedback from Development Control Chairmen and Vice Chairmen

Noted that meeting would be held on 26 February 2009. The Chairman of the Panel would attend to feedback to the Panel at its next meeting. Members requested a regular Development Control feedback item on future agendas.

Agreed: That the Chairmen and Vice Chairmen be asked to consider:

- (i) How appeals and costs can be improved; and
- (ii) How to improve the involvement of other statutory agencies (i.e. Highways)

(10) Gypsy and Traveller consultation

Agreed: Next Gypsy and Traveller consultation update to March meeting.

(11) Performance at Appeals.

Agreed: Report to come to 18 June meeting. The Panel requested that the report on probity in planning be considered again at that time.

39. PRESENTATION ON THE PLANNING PORTAL

The Panel received a presentation on the Planning Portal from Stephen Bacon, Planning Services.

The following issues were raised:

- (i) Having the Pinpoint technology made available at the Planning subcommittee meetings with links to the planning system being put in the agenda documents - This would be looked at;
- (ii) Considering the use of Multimap as the base mapping programme for the pinpoint system – The current system used Google mapping.

(iii) Security of the system – it was noted that a recent third party check on system security had given the system a clean bill of health.

(iv) Future compatibility – All images were in standard TIFF format and data within text files that could be exported to any future system.

(v) Scheme Evaluation – it was proposed that once the e-Consultation system was up and running then a review would be undertaken

(vi) Future system costs – It was noted that pinpoint was currently free as the Council were helping in the development of the system. The future cost of the mapping system had been built into the original systems costings.

(vii) How were service users without internet access being catered for? Planning Services had a list of users with no access and they were provided with hard copies. At present Parish Council were on a dual system but could opt out of hard copies.

(viii) How did the Council know who had responded electronically? The Council acknowledged all submissions and the new system would have a registration process.

The Panel also considered that formal training session should organised for members on the use of the system. Mr Bacon was thanked for his presentation.

Agreed: Member training to be organised.

40. UPDATE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE - REVISED ESTIMATE 2008/09 AND ESTIMATE FOR 2009/10

The Panel received a position statement on the Planning Services budget and noted that development control income was on or near budget for the year. It was proposed to increase Building Control charges by 8% to achieve the break-even requirement over a three year rolling programme.

There had been an increase in the budget for direct services which included allocations for the LDF. Additionally, revised estimates for the year included further sums for design briefs for Loughton Broadway and Epping.

The full budget for 2009/10 would be presented to Council on 17 February 2009.

J Preston also indicated that copy charges were being reviewed. In terms of the budget overall, he commented that LLC income was down as not as many people were buying or selling houses, building control workloads mirrored this. Changes in the permitted development rules meant that some applications no longer needed permission but some that previous had not, now did. Income was currently up on profile but it was a complex picture to understand and predict.

The Panel asked how it was proposed to address the current downturn. J Preston responded that this was a corporate issue to address but that Planning and Economic Development did have a Economic Development Officer and a Town Centre Officer.

The Panel asked that these officers come to a future meeting to discuss how the Council can address local issues in current downturn.

Agreed: Economic Development Officer and a Town Centre Officer to attend a future meeting.

41. SCRUTINY REVIEW REQUEST - COUNCILLOR A. COOPER

The Panel noted that a request for scrutiny had been referred to the Committee at its last meeting. The request was from Councillor Mrs Cooper and contained a series of questions about the planning application/appeals process.

The Head of Planning and Economic Development presented a report which contained answers to the questions together with advice about the process.

The Panel considered that the responses could be developed into FAQ style advice for members. Panel members discussed how the Council could improve advice from third party consultees particularly Highways. It was agreed that this issue should be raised with the Development Control Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen and with the Portfolio Holder.

Agreed:

- (i) That the response be agreed and reported back to OSC;
- (ii) That the Head of Planning and Economic Development seek to develop the responses into a FAQ sheet for members;
- (iii) That the issue of attendance of highways officers at planning meetings (and other statutory bodies) if presenting objections to be raised with ECC thro PFH and at DC Chairs/Vice Chairs meeting on 26 February 2009 to include how consideration of how contentious applications can flagged in the weekly planning list.

42. PLANNING COMMITTEE 3 WEEK CYCLE

The Panel received a report which outlined the effect of the change to the 4-week planning committee cycle to a 3-week cycle. The change had begun effectively after the 21 May 2008 committee. The effect of the change had been to increase the proportion of cases considered by committee and within the eight week deadline to 55. This figure would have been 19 under the old four week cycle. This increase in performance was higher than had been anticipated.

The Council, however was still not in the top quartile and it was noted that issues such as increased delegation and Councillor call-in could be looked at.

The Panel noted that a full review of Council meetings was envisaged in time for the Meetings Calendar for 2010/11 at which time Planning Meetings would be reviewed.

43. REVIEW OF PLANNING PROTOCOL

The Epping Forest District Standards Committee was undertaking one of its regular reviews of the Council's Planning Protocol and was consulting members of the Council, planning officers, legal staff, planning agents and local councils to ascertain whether they had any new issues which should be covered in the Protocol or whether any existing provisions needed revision. This review was scheduled for completion by July.

The Standards Committee had itself already identified some aspects of the Protocol. In addition, the Panel highlighted the following matters as requiring consideration:

- (i) Sections 21.9-2.11 – Interests relating to campaigning on local issues that might fetter discretion. (Angold Stephens)
- (ii) What could be done by Parish/Town Council's at their meetings to make the position of dual hated members clear to those attending – could we issue advice? (Haigh)
- (iii) Sections 2.10 and 5.2 (a) and (b) conflict (Wagland)
- (iv) Section 5.2 (b) (second part) – Could a process be developed that the Chairman gives a general declaration at planning meetings (Wagland)
- (v) Section 8 – Clearer advice as to property related employments (Ulkun) and could we do more to tell applicants about this? (Wagland)
- (vi) Could advice be given about the membership of clubs where you area regular attender? Eg Football clubs?
- (vii) Advice about where a Councillor stands when addressing the Committee when he/she had a prejudicial interest (Wagland)

Agreed: Preceding matters to be referred back to the Standards Committee for consideration as part of the review.

(Councillor Cooper declared a personal interest in this item but remained in the meeting for duration of the item.

44. STAFFING UPDATE

The current staffing position was noted.

45. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Noted that the Improvement Plan would be considered in more detail at the Panels March meeting.

46. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Next meeting 12 March 2009.