

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: North Weald Airfield Strategy **Date:** 28 July 2008
Cabinet Committee

Place: Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, **Time:** 6.05 - 7.45 pm
High Street, Epping

Members Present: Mrs A Grigg (Chairman), M Cohen, Mrs D Collins, Mrs M Sartin and D Stallan

Other Councillors: None

Apologies: C Whitbread

Officers Present: D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), I White (Forward Planning Manager) and G J Woodhall (Democratic Services Officer)

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 July 2007 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Cabinet Committee noted its Terms of Reference.

4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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

5. NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD PLANNING CONTEXT

The Forward Planning Manager presented a report regarding the possible implications for the Airfield of the housing and employment targets set by the East of England Plan. The Cabinet Committee were reminded that the adopted East of England Plan had set a minimum target of 3,500 new homes for the District by 2021, with the Council encouraged to make greater provision. The District's figure had been theoretically reduced to approximately 500 through the subtraction of the number of houses built since 2001, the Plan's nominal start date. In addition, the Plan had stipulated that a group of seven authorities, collectively referred to as the 'Rest of

Essex', had to make provision for 56,000 new jobs in total during the same period. A review had already begun to roll the Plan forward to 2031, with the Government indicating that they wanted annual housebuilding rates to increase significantly in the period 2021 to 2031.

The Forward Planning Manager stated that in making provision for an additional 500 houses within the District before 2021, it was possible that capacity could be found within the existing settlements. However, in order to address perceived housing needs up to 2031, the identification of further potential sites would be required with a possible review of green belt boundaries. All the towns and the larger villages within the District would be included in the assessment, including North Weald and the Airfield. It was possible that some potential for small-scale residential and commercial development in North Weald and the Airfield would be identified. However, in the context of the East of England Plan and the achievement of sustainable development, North Weald and the Airfield did not appear to be suitable locations for major development in the period up to 2031.

The Leader of the Council added that East Herts District Council was not prepared to engage in dialogue with the Council and Harlow District Council until the forthcoming judicial review of the East of England Plan, initiated by Hertfordshire County Council, was complete. The judicial decision was expected in either September or October this year, and therefore discussions concerning the proposed expansion of Harlow to the north, including East Herts District Council, were on hold. The Forward Planning Manager remarked that the East of England Plan did not specify the types of jobs to be created, and that aviation related jobs would be acceptable.

RESOLVED:

That, as a result of the need to identify potential sites for housing and employment for the adopted East of England Plan, the possible implications for North Weald Airfield be noted.

6. NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD - FUTURE OPTIONS

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report concerning the possible future options for North Weald Airfield based upon a previous study produced ten years ago. The Cabinet Committee was reminded that this report had been published by Property and Valuation Consultants Drivers Jones with a brief to review the potential options for North Weald Airfield. After a thorough examination of the alternatives, including transport and infrastructure studies, the following six potential options were identified:

- (i) do nothing/incremental development;
- (ii) disposal of airfield;
- (iii) develop airfield for aviation and other commercial uses;
- (iv) consolidate aviation use and develop other uses;
- (v) close airfield and develop mixed site use; and
- (vi) develop airfield with the adjoining land.

The Deputy Chief Executive added that the study had been subject to a public consultation and a new popular option had emerged, promoted by the existing airfield

tenants, namely Business Aviation development. Due to the development of the East of England Plan, the Council did not proceed with any of the options identified by either Drivers Jones or the public consultation, however following the publication of the East of England Plan, there was now an opportunity to review the long-term future of the airfield. The Cabinet Committee were reminded that the Council currently did not have the necessary expertise or capacity to undertake such a review, and that consultants would be required for which no budgetary provision had been made. It was highlighted that any additional resources agreed would actually need to be allocated from the District Development Fund (DDF), not the Continuing Services Budget as stated in the report.

The Chairman agreed that a strategic plan was required for the Airfield, however her preference was for incremental development. As a ward member for North Weald Bassett, the Chairman also stated that residents had consistently supported aviation use in the past and had been keener on further aviation use than major housing developments. The Chairman felt that residents might resent any further large-scale developments at the Airfield by the Council and as such would not support further business or major housing developments at the Airfield.

The Leader of the Council maintained that the Council needed a plan for the future development of the Airfield that examined all the possible future options, otherwise there was a risk that its future use would be determined by the Government rather than local people. This plan should examine the feasibility of general employment, aviation and housing developments at the Airfield, although the Leader acknowledged that the Airfield's proximity to Stansted could preclude certain commercial aviation uses.

The Housing Portfolio Holder, also a ward member for North Weald Bassett, reminded the Cabinet Committee that the Council originally purchased the Airfield for leisure purposes and that the lack of a strategic plan for the Airfield had almost led to it being designated as a major housing development site by the East of England Plan. The Portfolio Holder felt that a plan was required to show that the Council supported aviation use for the Airfield alongside other development, and therefore would support further aviation use for the Airfield with possible incremental development. Only such housing development should be permitted as would retain aviation use at the Airfield. The Portfolio Holder reiterated that the residents of North Weald had always supported the position expressed during the previous consultation over the past ten years.

The Corporate Support & ICT Services Portfolio Holder expressed the opinion that the Council should commission the production of a broader based report that examined all the options for development at North Weald Airfield, including increased aviation use plus housing and commercial developments.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised the Cabinet Committee that there had been no significant increase in aircraft movements over the last ten years at the Airfield, whilst the Director of Environment & Street Scene added that major housing development would probably not be permitted so close to a working airfield for health and safety reasons. The Cabinet Committee was advised of the potential of further aviation led developments such as aircraft maintenance, with any other business development ancillary to the current aviation uses at the Airfield.

RECOMMENDED:

- (1) That, in order to proceed with further strategic feasibility work, a scoping report and brief be developed to examine the intensification of aviation use with

business or other uses as required to make it economically viable, and expressions of interest be sought from suitably qualified consultants to undertake the work; and

(2) That, in order to cover the costs of undertaking any such study, a suitable District Development Fund supplementary estimate be recommended to the Council for approval.

7. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED:

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the items of business set out below on the grounds that they would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:

<u>Agenda Item No.</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Exempt Information Paragraph Number</u>
8	North Weald Airfield – Extensions of Existing Leases and Licences.	3
9	North Weald Airfield – Contact with Interested Parties/Developers.	3
11	North Weald Airfield – Terms of Leases and Licences.	3

8. NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD - EXTENSIONS OF EXISTING LEASES AND LICENCES

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report concerning the extension of existing leases and licences at North Weald Airfield. The Cabinet Committee were advised that the majority of the leases without security of tenure on renewal were due to expire in 2010. The tenants were now generally aware that the Airfield had not been included in the East of England Plan as a site for potential major development and were concerned that they had no legal right to remain on the airfield after 2010. In addition, some of the tenants wished to carry out some developments or improvements to their sites, and were actively seeking lease extensions which would enable them to obtain a return on their investment. Thus, it was felt that there was a need in the short-term to grant a number of new leases with break clauses as appropriate pending any longer term plans that the Council might implement for the Airfield.

RECOMMENDED:

That, for those tenants with leases without security of tenure on renewal at North Weald Airfield which are largely due to terminate in 2010, new ten-year leases be offered with five years guaranteed, annual landlord break clauses only thereafter, and such a lease to ensure no future guaranteed tenure under the relevant Landlord and Tenants Act.

9. NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD - CONTACT WITH INTERESTED PARTIES/DEVELOPERS

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report relating to the unsolicited contact made by interested parties and developers for North Weald Airfield and tabled a list of such approaches made since February 2000. The Cabinet Committee was informed that, following the publication of the East of England Plan, the Council had received further unsolicited approaches, predominantly from companies in the Business Aviation industry, expressing an interest in the future development or management of North Weald Airfield. These inquiries had been handled in the manner agreed by the North Weald Airfield Working Party and Policy and Coordinating Committee in 2000, namely that the details had been recorded by the Director of Planning & Economic Development and that the interested parties were advised that it was premature to enter into detailed discussions regarding possible proposals. Details of individual inquiries were available from the Estates section, and the Cabinet Committee were asked to reaffirm the current approach until such time as a decision had been made regarding the long-term future of the Airfield.

RECOMMENDED:

That, with respect to contact with interested parties and developers, the Council's current policy be continued until such time as it may be amended to reflect changed circumstances.

10. NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD - TERMS OF LEASES AND LICENCES

The Cabinet Committee noted the terms of the existing leases and licences currently in operation at North Weald Airfield.

CHAIRMAN