

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL COUNCILS' LIAISON COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 18 November 2009 **Time:** 7.30 - 9.25 pm

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

**Members
Present:**

Representing Epping Forest District Council:

Councillor(s): Mrs P Smith (Chairman), Mrs A Grigg and R Morgan

Other Councillors:

Councillor(s): B Rolfe

Representing Essex County Council:

County Councillor(s): J Knapman

Representing Local Councils:

R Balcombe (Fyfield Parish Council), Mrs D Borton (Nazeing Parish Council), Councillor Ms J Bowerman (Matching Parish Council), Mrs N Bridge (Fyfield Parish Council), Mrs K Canning (Chigwell Parish Council), Mrs A Cooper (Nazeing Parish Council), S Crone (Theydon Bois Parish Council), E Culling (Nazeing Parish Council), O Dunseath (Epping Town Council), Councillor J Filby (Epping Town Council), Councillor Mrs D Harris (Sheering Parish Council), Mrs S Jones (Theydon Bois Parish Council), B Miller (Epping Upland Parish Council), Miss H Nicholas (Roydon Parish Council), R Northwood (Sheering Parish Council), A Pegrum (Epping Upland Parish Council), J Philip (Theydon Bois Parish Council), C Pond (Loughton Central), Mrs P Richardson (Loughton Town Council), Mrs K Richmond (Waltham Abbey Town Council), R E Russell (Stapleford Abbots Parish Council), Councillor J Salter (Abbess, Beauchamp and Berners Roding Parish Council) and C Thompson (Moreton Bobbingworth and The Lavers Parish Council)

Apologies:

Epping Forest District Council –

Councillor(s): Mrs A Haigh and Mrs J H Whitehouse

Essex County Council –

Councillor(s): G McEwen

Parish/Town Councils: -

Mrs S De Luca (North Weald Bassett Parish Council), V Evans (Epping Upland Parish Council), C Hawkins (North Weald Parish Council), Ms J Hedges (Epping Town Council), Mrs S Jackman (Ongar Town Council), B Sandler (Chigwell Parish Council) and Mrs E Walsh (Loughton Town Council)

Officers Present: D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), C Neilan (Conservation Officer), J Houston (Local Strategic Partnership Manager) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

By Invitation:

9. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 15 July 2009 be agreed subject to the following amendment:

“That the Deputy Chief Executive would urge Cabinet and Full Council to review the constitution of the Local Highways Panel at its first opportunity so that there will be four representatives from the Local Councils all with voting rights.”

10. "ONE EPPING FOREST" PRESENTATION

The Local Strategic Partnership Manager, Mr J Houston, delivered a presentation to the Committee regarding the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The LSP was a partnership of partnerships in which the District Council played a key role. There were representatives on the partnership from the District Council, local colleges and businesses. The LSP consisted of J Houston and one admin post. It was funded by grants of £68,000 of which £45,000 came from the County Council and £10,000 from Epping Forest District Council, the rest came from Essex Police and the Primary Care Trust.

The following points were made:

- The LSP had a key role to play in being an advocate for the District
- The LSP had secured £455,000 performance reward grant from the Essex Local Area Agreement which is being used for local projects
- The LSP had produced a District Profile and was creating ward profiles where the public could see every ward, obtaining a picture of various aspects of where they lived
- All of the LSP's Board meetings were webcast and information published on its website www.oneepping.org.uk
- The work of the LSP was guided by local community priorities
- The LSP had recently undertaken a review of how to best deal with the Credit Crunch.

J Houston confirmed that ward profiles were being piloted in Epping Hemnall first but other wards would receive them on request.

The Committee agreed that there was great value in achieving better co-ordination between organisations in the District. The Chairman referred to the recent Waltham Abbey Safer Communities Event as a good example.

11. CORRECT TELEPHONE NUMBER FOR WASTE RELATED CALLS

It was noted that the correct telephone number for District Council waste related calls was 01992 56 4608.

12. ISSUES RAISED BY LOCAL COUNCILS**(a) Planning Enforcement Cases**

Mr C Neilan, Landscape Officer and Arboriculturist, presented planning enforcement statistics.

As of 9 November 2009, over the past year, there had been 711 investigations of planning enforcement started, 630 investigations were completed in that period with 437 investigations on hand at the current time. As of 9 November 2009 there were 130 investigations completed on resolution of a breach of planning control.

C Neilan advised that local councils sometimes made duplicate complaints about the same breach. C Neilan could not confirm how many had been successful or how many cases there had been as they overlapped year on year. Members felt that some enforcement cases seemed prolonged. They also indicated that they would like an interim report on the situation of any particular action at any one time. C Neilan said that these were normally produced if requested.

(b) Complaints against Parish Councillors

At the last meeting of the Committee it was suggested that in relation to complaints made by town and parish councillors against other members, joint working between the Standards Committee and the Epping Forest Association of Local Councils could lead to resolution of these problems as an alternative to the formal complaints procedure. This was raised at the Epping Forest Association of local councils and was generally felt that it was unnecessary adding another tier to the complaints procedure.

RESOLVED:

That D Macnab advise the District Council's Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer of this conclusion.

(c) Functionality of the Iplan System

At the last meeting of the committee the members had resolved that dialogue was required between the Director of Planning and Economic Development, key ICT officers and local council representatives. To this end, a meeting had been arranged for 12 November 2009. The members had requested that paper copies of plans should still be used for local councils, as well as the electronic scanned version. There was also concern that paper files were going to be destroyed, the Cabinet at its meeting on 16 November had discussed this particular issue. They had concluded that file destruction was considered a proportionate response once they had been electronically scanned. Councillor C Pond advised that it would be good practice to liaise with Essex County Record Office regarding best practice on archiving.

RESOLVED:

That Planning and Economic Development officers liaise with Essex County Record Office regarding advice on archiving of planning files.

(d) Recycling**(i) Waste from Village Halls**

The Cabinet at its meeting in April 2009 considered a report from the Environment Portfolio Holder on the arrangements for the collection of household waste from schools, religious establishments and charitable institutions. Village halls were not expressly mentioned, although they were within the same collection regime. The matter was discussed at the Local Council's Liaison Committee in July 2009.

As the Council developed its budgetary framework for 2010/11 it was intended that a report should be submitted as part of the normal fees and charges consideration and the views of the Committee that a charge for village halls was inappropriate would be put before the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Panel and the Cabinet Committee. It was intended that a full service proposal should be in place for village halls from April 2010. Members advised that some village halls were administered by a Management Committee and were not owned by the local council, subsequently the village hall paid rates. Mr J Gilbert, Director of Environment and Street Scene, said that the Cabinet would need to make an individual decision with regards to village halls. J Gilbert could not confirm the rates for 2010/11 as they had not yet been decided.

(ii) Food and Garden Wheeled Bins

The Committee was informed that there had been unfortunate delays in providing new food and garden waste wheeled bins to some residents. It was felt that problems such as this were inevitable. However officers were disappointed that in some cases delays had been significant and there remained some residents who did not have the correct container. Additional resources had been made available with 2 crews from Sita employed full time to deal with the backlog. The new scheme was already demonstrating a high level of performance, with recycling levels exceeding 60% for the first 3 weeks of the scheme. It was hoped that, assuming the level of participation continued, the 2009/10 outturn would be in the region of 50%.

(e) Local Highways Panel

Mr J Gilbert advised that at the last meeting of the Committee, concerns were raised regarding the abilities of either the District Council, using its planning enforcement role, or the County Council as Highways Authority, to deal with damage to highway surfaces from developers. It was suggested that the matter was referred to the Local Highways Panel on 24 November.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor C Pond advised the Committee that under the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 roads could be closed for certain public events, it was cost effective for District Councils to undertake this as opposed to the County Council as they used different legislative processes. Members were advised the issue would be referred to the Local Highways Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the issue of road closures be referred to the Local Highways Panel.

Councillor Mrs A Cooper advised the Committee of a "national policy statement" she had been made aware of which had indicated that planning decisions would be made without

consulting the residents effected. It was believed that in these instances the public could refer to "Planning Aid," a private concern, for assistance. D Macnab said that liaison with Planning Services was required to advise on this.

14. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that the next programmed meeting of the Local Council's Liaison Committee was Wednesday 17 March 2010 at 7.30p.m.

CHAIRMAN

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LOCAL COUNCILS' LIAISON COMMITTEE
Special Meeting on Access to iPlan and Related Issues

Minutes

Date: Thursday 12th November 2009

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

Present:

Name	Organisation
Chris Neilan (CN)	EFDC
David Newton (DN)	EFDC
Darius Vara'ee (DV)	EFDC
Victoria James (VJ)	EFDC
Vivienne Messenger (VM)	Loughton Town Council
Chris Pond (CP)	Loughton Town Council
Irene Sullivan (IS)	Buckhurst Hill Parish Council
Janice Curd (JC)	Buckhurst Hill Parish Council
Kay Canning (KC)	Chigwell Parish Council
Joan Bowerman (JB)	Matching Parish Council
Richard Morgan (RM)	Matching Parish Council
Ernie Fenwick (EF)	Matching and Willingale Parish Council
Pat Smith (PS)	Stapleford Abbots Parish Council
Ray Russell (RR)	Stapleford Abbots Parish Council
Bob Whittome (BW)	Epping Town Council
Ann Pegrum (AP)	Epping Upland Parish Council
Val Evans (VE)	Epping Upland Parish Council
Penny Smith (PS)	Epping Upland Parish Council and LCLC Chaiman.
Jason Salter (JS)	Abbess Beauchamp & Berners Roding Parish Council
Sue Jones (SJ)	Theydon Bois Parish Council
Sally Crone (SC)	Theydon Bois Parish Council

Apologies:

John Preston (JP)	EFDC
Aimi Middlehurst (AM)	High Ongar Parish Council
Janet Whitehouse (JW)	Ward Councillor – Epping Hemnall

Aims of the meeting (CN)

To allow concerns and issues surrounding iPlan to be raised by Local Councils, and addressed.

To discuss and decide on a way forward.

Response to issues raised at LCLC

- **Timetable for implementation of government's e-planning agenda in Epping Forest district (CN/DN/DV)**

EFDC are continuing with the implementation of iPlan. At some point the government's e-planning portal will take over. iPlan should work along the same lines as the e-planning portal so hopefully the technical difficulties being experienced with iPlan should be sorted out and allow for a smoother transition when the e-planning portal is brought in. We are looking on a timescale of years before the full implementation of the e-planning portal.

Problems identified so far are due to technical difficulties in the linkage between Anite and iPlan, leading to a delay in the time taken for scanned documents to be transferred from Anite to iPlan.

- **Assistance for Local Councils with continued provision of paper copies of documents (CN/DN/DV)**

The major issue raised by the Local Councils was how long paper documents would still be available. With all the technical issues being experienced they feel paper copies are still necessary.

CN assured everyone that it would be wrong for any local council to be disenfranchised, therefore paper copies are essential until all complications, including broadband provision are sorted out. Although the future is in e-planning and paper copies will eventually become redundant, they won't be stopped in the immediate future.

CP discussed the difficulties of using iPlan in a more populous Parish (eg Loughton). With so many applications to discuss it is difficult and very time consuming to compile presentations for the planning committees, particularly for large applications. They have also experienced difficulties in comparing plans.

JS addressed the difficulties of using iPlan in a small parish (Matching) where they have no parish office, no computer equipment and no facilities to project plans. It is easier for them to use paper plans. RR (Stapleford Abbots) expressed similar thoughts. At present planning applications are discussed at Parish Council meetings but the plans are on view to the public at an 'open forum' beforehand. He is concerned that the use of iPlan would mean that transparency with the public might be lost as they would only get to see the plans in the middle of the meeting and not before.

BW put forward some of the beneficial points of iPlan. It allows people to look at applications before planning meetings and it works well for simple applications. The difficulty comes with larger, more complex applications.

The general view is that iPlan is "clunky", often giving too much information. It would help if the documents were more clearly labelled to make navigating around the system easier. There are issues with the scale on plans and the inability to print off any plans above A3 size. It is also proving difficult to be able to compare plans.

DV explained that with the appointment of the new Business Manager (Peter Milward) the streamlining of the iPlan system should happen more quickly and the problems noted above should be sorted out, including either a scaling tool or stickers for each plan indicating scale.

Issues were raised on the presentation of plans. It would be easier if there was a uniform way of submitting the plans. It seems as if EFDC are trying to make applications fit an electronic system – it would be better if the drawings were done in a way that would comply with what can be easily scanned and downloaded. CN will pass on the request to planning officers.

If anyone has any examples of other Council websites that are working well please make CN aware.

CN undertook to report all issues back to JP including the feeling that even a fully functioning iPlan system will not be able to completely replace paper copies. Local people like to come into the Parish Office to view plans, regardless of government requirements.

A suggestion was made that the cost of providing an extra copy of plans for Parish Councils could be passed on to the applicant.

There was a general consensus that a major problem with iPlan is being able to get a large volume of documents into a workable format for committee presentations and that more help should be available:

- contact DV or CN if any help/ training is needed, and the need can be addressed;
- is there any software that would make it easier to transfer plans from iPlan into a PowerPoint presentation/ could EFDC provide plans in PowerPoint format? DN will look into it.

- **Assistance for local councils with information on help available for access/ equipment (CN/DN/DV)**

Half the Parish Councils have computer facilities and internet access, half don't.

Can EFDC provide any help/ any equipment? CN: not possible to give financial or resource assistance but can continue to give advice on sources of grants and training on using the systems.

JS reminded everyone that £1000 was given by Lord Hanningfield to each Parish Council for IT use. If Parishes still have some left this could be used to improve computer facilities.

PS asked if there was Wi-Fi access in the Civic Offices. DN confirmed that it is available in the Council Chambers at the moment – speak to DN for access.

- **Technical issues/ difficulties in accessing iPlan**

DN explained how a lot of work has recently been done on improving the iPlan system. Timing out issues have been resolved, wording, links, the search screen and overall display have all been improved.

All feedback on the system is welcomed as it helps to improve it and is necessary to rectify any problems. We are not in overall control of the product but will do as much as possible to make it work for everyone.

General opinion from the Parish Councils is that now the 'time out' function has been resolved iPlan is working much better and now we are only dealing with minor problems. Darius Vara'ee will be the first point of contact for technical issues.

Darius Vara'ee: **01992 564 482** dvaraee@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

VE asked if the link from the Weekly List to individual planning applications was now working. DN will look into this.

Some Parish Councils receive an electronic form of the Weekly List, others don't. Could this be e-mailed to everyone?

At the request of the Council Chairman CP will give a brief summary of the current situation regarding iPlan at the next Local Councils' Liaison Committee meeting.

- **Incomplete nature of information on iPlan**

When looking up some old applications there are often 'no documents available'.

Many older applications (from the 1970s and also some in the 1990s) are on microfiche. These can be viewed at planning reception or if details are provided of what exactly is required they can be scanned and sent out.

80% of the back-scanning has been completed but there are still a few gaps. With the new Business Manager in place this should hopefully be brought up to date in the near future.

Need for further meetings

It was agreed that with the assurance of no immediate loss of paper copies and as long as EFDC continue to monitor iPlan and sort out any technical problems that crop up, there is no need to have a further meeting of this group.

It was suggested that input from Parish Councils might be useful in the development of iPlan, so it was proposed that a small working party be set up with the particular remit of liaison with EFDC officers as to the performance and accessibility of iPlan. DN agreed; he felt that it will be important to establish whether the system is working properly and is providing the necessary information. Improvements can only be made if the problems are known.

CN thanked everyone as the meeting was very helpful in clarifying the overall situation with iPlan, especially on the issue of paper copies. CN will report back to JP regarding the proposed working group.

AOB

The current situation regarding e-consultation:

- This will not be rolled out until all technical issues have been resolved.

Planning Enforcement Performance Indicators – 1/01/2006 to 9/11/2009:

Turnover of Investigations:

Year	Investigations started	Investigations completed	Investigations on hand at end of year
2006	1111 (incl c/f cases)	718	393
2007	761	773	381
2008	719	744	356
To 9 Nov. 2009	711	630	437 on hand to date

Investigations completed on resolution of a breach of planning control:

2006	147	(20% of total for year)
2007	136	(18% of total for year)
2008	145	(19% of total for year)

To 9 Nov. 2009	130	(21% of total for year to date)
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Notices Issued: (Note – Planning Contravention Notices (PCN's) are requests for information)

	Notices other Than PCN's	number not yet complied with	PCN's
2006	23	3	20
2007	29	6	31
2008	27	12	16
To 9 Nov. 2009	17	10	19

Awaiting issue:	0
Pending authorisation:	5
Total awaiting compliance:	31

Appeals against enforcement notices received:

2006	8	(2 inquiries, 4 hearings, 2 written representations	2 allowed)
2007	20	(9 inquiries, 4 hearings, 7 written representations	2 allowed)
2008	10	(2 inquiries, 8 written representations	0 allowed but decision pending on 1 appeal)
To 9 Nov. 2009	5	(1 inquiry, 3 written representations	1 allowed and decision pending on 1 appeal)

Prosecutions started:

2006	15
2007	9
2008	11

To 9 Nov. 2009	3
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Injunctions sought:

2006	1
2007	0
2008	1

To 9 Nov. 2009	0
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Direct Action:

2006	0
2007	1
2008	0

To 9 Nov. 2009	1
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Note: The Councils' Planning Enforcement Team is part of the Development Control Group of the Planning and Economic Development Directorate and is made up of 7 permanent posts. That comprises a Principal Planning Officer, Senior Enforcement Officer, 3 Enforcement Officers, a Compliance Officer and a dedicated administrative officer. The Compliance Officer post is a part time post that is currently vacant. It has been held vacant since February 2009 pending decision on whether to replace that post with a full time Senior Officer post.