

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Local Development Framework Cabinet Committee **Date:** Monday, 12 April 2010

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.00 - 8.30 pm

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

Other Councillors: Mrs A Grigg, Mrs C Pond, Mrs P Smith and D Stallan

Apologies: R Bassett, B Rolfe and Ms S Stavrou

Officers Present: K Polyzoides (Assistant Director (Policy & Conservation)), I White (Forward Planning Manager), S G Hill (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and G J Woodhall (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in attendance: M Fessey (Scott Wilson)

34. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman made a short address to remind all present that the meeting would be broadcast on the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(a) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor Mrs M Sartin declared a personal interest in agenda item 7, Sustainability Assessment Scoping Report – Consultation Arrangements, by virtue of being the Council's appointed representative on the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority. The Councillor had determined that her interest was not prejudicial and would remain in the meeting for the consideration of the issue.

36. MINUTES

The Cabinet Committee noted that the minutes of the last meeting had only been published that day in preparation for the Cabinet meeting the following week, and would be confirmed at the next meeting.

37. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Cabinet Committee noted its Terms of Reference, as agreed by the Council on 17 February 2009 (minute 113(a) refers).

38. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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

The Leader of the Council reported that the Gypsies and Travellers who had taken up residence at the former Golf Driving Range by North Weald Airfield had left the site the previous day, and that the legal action being prepared by the Council was now no longer required. The Officers involved in preparing the legal action were thanked for their efforts.

The Leader also reported that a response had been received from the Minister following a request to meet with him over the provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites within the District. This would be reported at the Council meeting scheduled for 20 April 2010, before which advice would be taken from Counsel.

39. SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL SCOPING REPORT - CONSULTATION ARRANGEMENTS

The Cabinet Committee received a presentation upon the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report from the Council's Consultants Scott Wilson. Following the presentation, the Leader of the Council introduced a report upon the consultation arrangements for the Scoping Report.

The Leader reported that Scott Wilson was jointly commissioned by Epping Forest, Harlow and East Herts District Councils in 2009 to carry out a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) for each of the three Council's Core Strategy documents to help inform their preparation. Each Council's Core Strategy would form a central part of their respective Local Development Frameworks. The Sustainability Appraisal would involve the identification and evaluation of the impacts of the Strategy upon the economy.

The Leader stated that in order to undertake the Sustainability Appraisal of the Core Strategy, it was first necessary to establish the scope of the appraisal, i.e. establish the issues that should and should not be a focus. The Council's Consultants had now completed the Scoping Report and it was being recommended for consultation with key stakeholders and the public.

The Cabinet Committee queried whether five weeks was a long enough period for this consultation; the Forward Planning Manager advised that the guidance recommended a five-week consultation period for the Scoping Report and a six-week minimum consultation period for the Sustainability Appraisal itself, although the Cabinet Committee could agree a longer period. The Cabinet Committee agreed that a five-week consultation period would be sufficient, and felt that a non-technical Executive Summary at the front of the document with a clear description of the function of the document would assist consultees in understanding it. The Assistant Director (Policy & Conservation) added that a series of Guidance Questions, to aid consultees in their responses, could be included as well as the Executive Summary; the Cabinet Committee concurred and requested that both the Executive Summary and Guidance Questions be informally agreed by the Cabinet Committee prior to publication.

The Forward Planning Manager added that the timetable for the preparation of the Local Development Framework was currently based upon commencing the "Issues and Options" consultation in October. The Consultant from Scott Wilson reported that different Councils had prepared different evidence based studies, but there were no obvious deficiencies in the Council's developing Evidence Base at the current time.

RECOMMENDED:

- (1) That the draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report be published for a five-

week period of public consultation between 17 May and 18 June 2010;

(2) That an Executive Summary of the Scoping Report be produced and published on the Council's website;

(3) That a set of Guidance Questions to assist with the completion of the consultation by stakeholders and the public be produced and published; and

(4) That the contents of the Executive Summary and Guidance Questions be confirmed informally by Members of the Cabinet Committee prior to publication.

Reasons for Decision:

The Sustainability Appraisal was a statutory requirement for Core Strategies under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Section 39(2) of the Act stated that when preparing new or revised Development Plan Documents and Supplementary Planning Documents, Local Planning Authorities had to provide an accompanying Sustainability Appraisal. It should also be noted that the Sustainability Appraisal would incorporate a Strategic Environmental Assessment, which was a closely related process required under European Union legislation.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

To not approve the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report for public consultation at this stage. However, to ensure that a sound Core Strategy was achieved, the Sustainability Appraisal was required.

Undertaking the public consultation at this stage would help achieve the coordinated working envisaged by the East of England Plan to deliver the regeneration and growth of Harlow. It was currently anticipated that all three authorities would undertake consultation on the "Issues and Options" document of the Core Strategy during the summer and Autumn of 2010.

40. EVIDENCE BASE - CONSIDERATION OF CORE STRATEGIES

The Leader of the Council presented a report upon the consideration of the Evidence Base reports for the Local Development Framework.

At the previous meeting, the Cabinet Committee had felt strongly that as the Local Development Framework was an important piece of work, all the information and reports should be made available to Members to enable informed decisions to be made. It was emphasised that the studies were not actual policy documents, but their contents and conclusions would be used to identify issues and options for the initial consultation on the Core Strategy. The Evidence Base would eventually comprise seventeen different documents, and three options were presented to the Cabinet Committee for consideration:

(i) To select from the schedule of reports those that the Cabinet Committee wished to consider in detail and to accept synopses of the other reports;

(ii) To receive author briefings on all the reports at additional meetings of the Cabinet Committee throughout May, June and July, with a final meeting to 'sign off' all the reports; or

(iii) As option (ii) above, but with a two week period after each meeting for further comments to be made before the reports were assumed to have been accepted.

It was highlighted that there would be an unbudgeted cost implication of approximately £500 per report if consultant briefings of all seventeen reports were requested. Possible dates for additional meetings had been prepared by Officers. The Leader added that all Members had the opportunity to read the studies in full if they desired, and if the Cabinet Committee was particularly interested in a report then it could be examined in more detail. It was suggested that three or four reports could be considered at each additional meeting of the Cabinet Committee over the early to mid Summer. The Forward Planning Manager added that most of the documents were available electronically, and suggested that a display could be erected in the Members' Room for the Landscape Sensitivity Study as it contained a large number of maps.

The Cabinet Committee felt that briefings on each report from the consultant involved was more than was required. It would be acceptable for Officers to prepare Executive Summaries for each report, in plain English, but in more detail than was provided at the previous meeting. Each of the additional meetings – on dates to be agreed with the Chairman of the Cabinet Committee - would then consider a number of the reports, with a final meeting to 'sign off' all the reports to ensure that any cross references between reports had been considered. One printed copy of each full report should be placed in the Members' Room, with further access for Members to electronic copies. The Cabinet Committee felt that it was important for the same methodology to be used when considering each of the reports comprising the Evidence Base.

In respect of the reports prepared by Harlow and East Herts District Councils, the Forward Planning Manager advised that as the Council worked closely with its two neighbouring authorities, Officers would have access to the documents. The Cabinet Committee felt that these reports should be treated in a similar manner to the evidence reports, with an Executive Summary, and considered at the additional meetings of the Cabinet Committee when they became available.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Evidence Base reports and the studies commissioned separately by Harlow and East Herts District Councils be considered in the following manner:
 - (a) Additional meetings of the Cabinet Committee to be organised over the Summer, on dates to be agreed by the Chairman of the Cabinet Committee, for the consideration of the reports comprising the Evidence Base;
 - (b) Members to have access to electronic copies of the full reports;
 - (c) One printed copy of each report to be placed in the Members' Room;
 - (d) Officers to produce an Executive Summary for each report, including page number references to the full report if required, to be made available to Members before each additional meeting of the Cabinet Committee;
 - (e) The Cabinet Committee to provisionally 'sign-off' the reports considered at each meeting;
 - (f) All reports to be finally 'signed off' at the last meeting to ensure that any cross-references were not missed; and

(g) The same methodology, as detailed above, to be used for the consideration of each report;

Reasons for Decision:

To ensure that the Council was in a position to commence its “Issues and Options” consultation at approximately the same time as Harlow and East Herts District Councils.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

For the Cabinet Committee to consider some or all of the reports comprising the Evidence Base in full, with briefings provided by the relevant consultant, however, this approach was considered both too time-consuming and costly.

CHAIRMAN