

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Local Development Framework Cabinet Committee **Date:** 15 March 2011

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.00 - 8.15 pm

Members Present: Mrs D Collins (Chairman), R Bassett, B Rolfe, Mrs M Sartin, Ms S Stavrou and Mrs L Wagland

Other Councillors: J Philip, Mrs C Pond, Mrs P Smith, D Stallan and C Whitbread

Apologies: None.

Officers Present: J Preston (Director of Planning and Economic Development), I White (Forward Planning Manager) and G J Woodhall (Democratic Services Officer)

54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

55. MINUTES

Resolved:

(1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2011 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

56. TERMS OF REFERENCE

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

57. STRATEGIC FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT

The Forward Planning Manager presented a report upon the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.

The Forward Planning Manager reported that a draft Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) had been prepared in-house for the Epping Forest and Harlow Districts in December 2010. It was essentially a technical document, which brought together information on all sources of flooding, and took into account the potential effects of climate change. It was therefore a tool to enable appropriate decisions to be made about suitable locations for new development at all stages of the planning process.

The Forward Planning Manager went through each chapter of the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for the benefit of the Cabinet Committee. After the introduction in

Chapter One, Chapter Two outlined the flood risks within both the Epping Forest and Harlow Districts. Chapter Three listed the current policy framework, which would probably have to be reviewed when Planning Policy Statement 25, Development and Flood Risk – Practice Guide, was revoked. It was confirmed that the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 superseded local planning policy U3B concerning sustainable drainage systems.

Chapter Four of the Assessment defined the main flood zones in the two Districts, including fluvial flooding, surface water, groundwater, sewer flooding and schemes undertaken by the Council. The sustainable drainage systems should be appropriate to the geological composition of the area, and that in areas at high risk of flooding, further development should be resisted rather than discouraged. It was highlighted that the District was probably better protected than at any point in the past. The Cabinet Committee commented upon the reduction of surface water drainage when urban areas were increased and the risk of underground water flows being diverted by development.

Chapter Five dealt with emergency planning and the location of critical infrastructure. The Cabinet Committee would be advised of the location of the Emergency Rest Centres in Flood Zone Three and why the River Roding was not included in the table listing the data sources for Flood Zone Two. Chapter Six gave guidance for Developers and reiterated that they were under an obligation to seek the most suitable Sustainable Drainage System solution for the site. Officers would examine whether the guidelines also applied to all types of flooding and not just fluvial flooding.

Finally, Chapter Seven contained the recommendations for Developers and Development Control staff when dealing with planning applications. In addition, there were also recommendations in relation to Emergency Planning and Monitoring of the Assessment. It was intended for the findings of the Assessment to be applied to all new development within the District, including infrastructure and roads. The Forward Planning Manager added that the draft of the Assessment had been examined by Harlow Council, Thames Water and the other bodies listed in the consultation section, with only minor amendments suggested to date. It was acknowledged that the addition of maps would have been useful but it would have been difficult to reproduce them within the document as several of the originals were very large because they contained a considerable amount of detail.

Resolved:

- (1) That, subject to the clarification of the points raised by the Cabinet Committee, the findings and recommendations of the Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment be agreed; and
- (2) That, subject to the clarification of the points raised by the Cabinet Committee, the Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment be agreed and added to the Evidence Base to support the preparation of the Local Development Framework, although it had been based upon and influenced by policies and targets which might not be applicable in the future and might necessitate a review of the report in due course.

58. ENDORSEMENT OF THE "OPPORTUNITY ESSEX - INTEGRATED COUNTY STRATEGY"

The Director of Planning & Economic Development presented a report requesting the endorsement of the "Opportunity Essex - Integrated County Strategy".

At the suggestion of the Essex Chief Executives' Association (ECEA), an Integrated County Strategy had been formulated to encourage further economic investment in the area defined as Greater Essex. The Strategy had three key points:

- (i) Low Carbon Energy;
- (ii) Key Towns; and
- (iii) The Thames Gateway South Essex.

Harlow had been identified as one of the key towns and the Strategy had led to the development of a broad vision for the West Essex sub-region, comprising Harlow, Uttlesford and Epping Forest District Councils: *"To create a sustainable and employment-led major growth point focused on the renaissance, revitalisation and transformation of Harlow as a leading regional centre, served by a world class international airport at Stansted Airport and improved transport links, and where there is a pattern of market towns and villages set within attractive undeveloped countryside containing high quality environmental assets, heritage and prosperous rural enterprises."* To deliver this broad vision for West Essex, the following seven transformational changes had been developed:

- (i) the major renaissance of Harlow;
- (ii) the major development and regeneration of Harlow town centre;
- (iii) choice and diversity of housing stock in Harlow;
- (iv) to raise employment rates and labour force qualifications in Harlow;
- (v) to expand and diversify Harlow's local employment base;
- (vi) to upgrade Harlow's transport and other infrastructure; and
- (vii) the provision of affordable housing within the Epping Forest and Uttlesford Districts.

The Director of Planning & Economic Development commented that, important as the regeneration of Harlow might be for the region and the possible benefits for the northern area of the District, the southern sector of the District was more London-centric and the proposed transformations would not be of any great benefit to this area. The lack of public consultation over the Strategy was highlighted, and it was acknowledged that this could be interpreted as a weakness when greater localism was being encouraged by the Government. This Council, together with all the other constituent Borough, District and Unitary Authorities within Greater Essex, had been requested to endorse the Strategy.

The Cabinet Committee had a number of concerns with the Strategy as it was currently drafted. Of the seven transformational changes listed for the West Essex region, six were directly related to the regeneration and development of Harlow as a key town. It was acknowledged that there would also be a benefit to the District from this and it was felt that the wording could be amended from Harlow to West Essex for the transformations concerning choice and diversity of housing stock, raising of employment rates and labour qualifications, expanding and diversifying housing stock, and upgrading the local transport and infrastructure.

The Cabinet Committee agreed that the Strategy had little relevance to the south of the District and that this had further accentuated the lack of public consultation over the proposals – particularly given the importance attached to the emerging concept of Localism by the Government. The Cabinet Committee also requested a clear indication about how the proposed Strategy related to other strategies in preparation, such as the Local Development Framework and the West Essex Local Investment Plan.

The Director of Planning & Economic Development undertook to write a letter to Essex County Council reflecting the concerns of the Cabinet Committee prior to the next scheduled meeting of the Cabinet on 18 April 2011. The focus of the Strategy was to economically promote south-west Essex and it would probably link to other documents such as the West Essex Local Investment Plan. Greater Essex was defined as the areas covered by Essex County Council, Thurrock Council and Southend-on-Sea Council, both of whom were unitary authorities. The Strategy had been presented to the Department for Communities and Local Government but no indication had yet been given of the Minister's views.

Recommended:

(1) That a letter be drafted by the Director of Planning & Economic Development to Essex County Council outlining the following concerns of the Cabinet Committee with the Strategy:

(a) to expand some of the transformational changes to include the greater West Essex area and not just Harlow;

(b) the lack of relevance to the more London-centric south of the District;

(c) the absence of any public consultation undertaken in developing the Strategy;
and

(d) the relationship of the Strategy to the Local Investment Plans and Local Development Frameworks currently being developed by the constituent Councils within Essex.

(2) That the endorsement of the "Opportunity Essex – Integrated County Strategy be recommended to the Council by the Cabinet, following consideration of any response to the Cabinet Committee's concerns by Essex County Council.

Reasons for Decision:

To inform the County Council of the Council's concerns with the Strategy as it was currently drafted.

To attract further economic investment within Essex and West Essex.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

- Not to endorse the Integrated County Strategy.
- To seek amendments to the Integrated County Strategy.

59. PPG17 OPEN SPACE ASSESSMENT

The Forward Planning Manager presented a report concerning the Open Space Assessment for Planning Policy Guidance Note 17.

The Cabinet Committee was informed that Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) required all Local Authorities to undertake an “assessment of local need” in order to ensure that there was adequate provision of accessible, high quality open spaces, sport and recreation facilities within each Local Authority to meet the needs of local communities and visitors. The Forward Planning team had begun work on the Council’s own PPG17 ‘Open Space Assessment’, which would be used to inform the Council’s approach when considering preparation of the Local Development Framework and planning applications. The Assessment would examine the likely demand for access to and use of open space, sport and recreation facilities from new residential development; and for the development of open space within the District, whether it was in public or private ownership.

The Forward Planning Manager stated that progress with the Council’s ‘Open Space Assessment’ had now reached a critical stage. The first stage of the process, auditing the existing provision within the District, had been completed but a large amount of work for the study still needed to be completed whilst the Forward Planning team had to also contend with the strict timetable now in place for the production of the Council’s Core Strategy. It was therefore proposed that the next three stages of the process – identifying local need, setting provision standards and applying the provision standards – should be completed by a suitably qualified and experienced external organisation, which would be paid for from the Local Development Framework budget.

The Cabinet Committee highlighted the involvement of all 24 Town and Parish Councils in identifying the number and location of sites to be included in the assessment, and felt that the importance of open spaces within the District should be emphasised to the consultants when they were appointed. The Forward Planning Manager added that the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority had been consulted but that the Forest Conservators had not needed to be involved in the process so far.

Resolved:

- (1) That the initial work completed towards the Council’s Open Space Assessment auditing the existing provision within the District, as required by Planning Policy Guidance 17, be noted; and
- (2) That the remainder of the Council’s Open Space Assessment – identifying the local need, setting provision standards and applying the provision standards – be undertaken externally by consultants.

60. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK - BUDGET UPDATE

The Forward Planning Manager presented a budget update report for the Local Development Framework.

The Forward Planning Manager stated that the planning system was being reformed by the Coalition Government. The New Homes Bonus had been introduced. Regional Spatial Strategies with all their housing and employment land targets would be abolished when the Localism Bill had received its royal assent. Other provisions of the Bill needed to be further clarified, however, it was clear that Local Development Frameworks would remain the key local planning policy documents for the foreseeable future, with local authorities being urged and encouraged to continue their preparation.

The Cabinet Committee was informed that invitations to tender for a study of the Lea Valley Glasshouse Industry had been sent out and it was hoped to appoint consultants in April. Significant work had also been continuing on the preparation of the Evidence Base to support the preparation of the Core Planning Strategy. A total of £83,684 had been spent from the Local Development Framework Budget in the current financial year to date, with a further £47,773 committed for the remainder of the 2010/11 financial year. It was estimated that the preparation of the Development Management Development Plan Document (DPD) would cost £164,700, the preparation of the Site Allocations DPD would cost £263,600 and the preparation of Area Action Plans would cost £157,600.

The Forward Planning Manager added that the Assistant Director (Policy & Conservation) was investigating the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy, but was encountering some difficulty. With no housing or employment targets yet set for the District, it was problematical to forecast the infrastructure requirements and costs. The Assistant Director intended to meet with and obtain data from other Councils.

The Forward Planning Manager informed the Cabinet Committee that the Issues & Options consultation was scheduled to start in the late summer of 2011. A large number of public responses was expected and it was felt that the Preferred Options consultation would not take place for a further year afterwards. The Core Planning Strategy could not be produced before 2014 if the Planning System was not further reformed in the meantime, although the process was very complex.

The Forward Planning Manager reminded the Cabinet Committee that the figures within the report were estimates and would be finalised in due course. Further and regular progress reports would be submitted for the Cabinet Committee to monitor the on-going situation. The Director of Planning & Economic Development added that, whilst some estimates had increased since the original budget had been drawn up other estimates had been reduced, primarily through working in partnership with other Councils where possible.

Resolved:

- (1) That progress on the Local Development Framework be noted; and
- (2) That the expenditure incurred on preparing the Local Development Framework in the current financial year, and the estimates for further expenditure in future financial years, be noted.

61. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

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

CHAIRMAN