

## **EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES**

**Committee:** Stronger Place Select Committee      **Date:** Monday, 29 March 2021

**Place:** Virtual Meeting on Zoom      **Time:** 7.00 - 8.05 pm

**Members Present:** Councillors S Heather (Chairman), R Morgan (Vice-Chairman), R Bassett, L Burrows, I Hadley, J Jennings, H Kauffman, C McCredie J Mclvor and Cllr Neville.

**Other Councillors:**

**Apologies:** S Heap

**Officers Present:** A Blom-Cooper (Interim Assistant Director (Planning Policy)), A Marx (Development Manager Service Manager (Planning)), N Richardson (Service Director (Planning Services)), L Kirman (Democratic Services Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and R Moreton (Corporate Communications Officer)

### **37. Webcasting Introduction**

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

### **38. Substitute Members**

The following substitutions were reported:

Cllr Neville was substituting for Cllr Heap.

### **39. Declarations of Interest**

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

### **40. Notes of Previous Meeting**

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the notes of the last meeting of the Stronger Place Select Committee held on 12 January 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

### **41. Terms of Reference & Work Programme**

The Select Committee noted the terms of reference and work programme.

### **42. Sheltered Housing**

The Director of HRA Functions, D Fenton, detailed a scheme to lease furniture from Buckingham Interiors, a specialist provider and part of the social enterprise FRC Group. The scheme would be piloted in Frank Bretton House after extensive

consultation with the residents. The furniture would be leased for 5 years when ownership of the furniture could be taken, or further refurbishment agreed. There would be no capital outlay and the scheme would be financed through a new component of the service charge, there would be no financial detriment to current residents. This leasing scheme had been effective with other local councils and social housing providers. The effectiveness of the pilot would be assessed and if successful the scheme could be rolled out across the remaining sheltered housing schemes.

Cllr Bassett requested specific financial costs and Cllr Kauffman sought reassurance that financial due diligence would take place. D Fenton advised that this was at a preliminary stage, the specific costs and financial detail would be detailed and included in the Cabinet report. The organisation involved was included in a framework agreement and as such would have met key due diligence requirements. Cllr Murray queried the aesthetics of the furniture and was reassured that the residents would select their preferred style and design. Cllr Whitehouse asked if other companies could provide the service, D Fenton advised of the specialist nature of this provision and would confirm if there were any alternative providers within the framework.

The Director of HRA Functions detailed the key elements of the action plan related to the review of the Council's sheltered housing team. The warden call system needed to be upgraded from analogue to digital by 2025, the tender process would begin in due course and this would be reported to Cabinet. The impact of reducing the minimum age to the schemes would be considered after the schemes had been upgraded and a scope of works had been produced for the redevelopment of smaller second lounges into accessible accommodation, which required a review of yr accessibility of entry doors. Cllr Whitehouse had queried item 2.1 of the action plan this was corrected and the consultation would be delayed until after scheme improvements and had been completed.

Cllr Murray queried item 1:1 of the action plan, the installation of WIFI and raised the importance of digital connectivity in the schemes. D Fenton advised that WIFI was not currently viable at the schemes but remained on the action plan to assess the potential inclusion of WIFI as part of the digital warden call system.

Cllr Whitehouse asked who would be involved in the review of the allocation criteria as detailed at item 4.1b of the action plan and asked if the review would come back for scrutiny. D Fenton advised that this would be a large project with a range of stakeholders including residents, customers, officers and members and this would be presented to a future select committee.

**Resolved:**

That the Committee:

- I. Noted the progress of the Older Persons Housing work programme.
- II. Supported the proposed furniture leasing scheme with Buckingham Interiors and recommended the scheme to Cabinet for approval.

**43. Local Enforcement Plan**

The Development Manager Service Manager, A Marx, advised on the changes to Local Enforcement Plan (LEP) which had been adopted by Council in 2013 and reviewed in 2018. The enforcement categories had changed to:

- Category 1 an allegation of a case that requires immediate attention, site inspection within 7 working hours.
- Category 1A an allegation of ongoing works, site inspection within 3 working days.
- Category 2 an allegation of ongoing significant works to buildings that are not yet complete, site inspection within 10 working days.
- Category 3 an allegation covering all other cases that do not cause significant harm to amenity, site visit within 15 working days.

A performance monitoring process had been introduced for the management of enforcement cases. The LEP provided a single reference point for all interested parties involved in enforcement and a service charter had been published on the website.

Cllr Neville queried the increased response time for most urgent cases from 3 to 7 hours. A Marx advised that all allegations made would be investigated as soon as possible, the change allowed reports made late in the working day to be investigated first thing the next day.

Cllr Bassett challenged the wording of Para 3.2.1 in relation to retrospective planning permission, para 3.27 “seek to persuade” and asked if drones could be used to gain access to land (para 6.1). A Marx advised he would revisit these sections and detailed the Council had access to drone flying capacity and this would be included in the relevant section.

Cllr Kauffman suggested that the wording in the LEP could be stronger and asked if a charge or a tougher approach could be taken in relation to retrospective planning applications. A Marx advised that no penalties were available for retrospective planning applications and the determination of a retrospective application must be objective and work that had taken place could not be taken into consideration.

Cllr Whitehouse commented that the Council was fortunate to have an enforcement service, suggested that the wording of paragraph 2.6 was unclear and needed clarifying, that there should be a non-digital way of contacting the service, and proposed that clearer advice on what needed planning permission was required to reduce the need for retrospective planning applications.

A Marx advised that the wording of para 2.6 reflected that in good guidance and Government documents, the contact centre would provide a non-digital mechanism to contact the service and that links to the Planning Portal, a valuable resource for planning requirements, would be included in the LEP.

#### **Resolved:**

The committee agreed:

- i) To recommend the adoption of the Local Enforcement Plan, pending agreed amendments, to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Sustainability.

#### **44. The Green Infrastructure Strategy**

The Interim Assistant Director, Planning Policy and Implementation, A Blom-Cooper detailed the Green Infrastructure Strategy (GIS) report. The Council’s emerging Local Plan set out policies in relation to the provision and enhancement of Green and Blue Infrastructure, the protection of the District’s ecological assets and achieving high quality design. To support these policies and address the requirement to provide suitable avoidance or mitigation measures to manage any potential impacts of growth

on protected sites, including the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the Council had developed a Green Infrastructure Strategy ('the Strategy'). The Strategy would ensure that high quality Green and Blue Infrastructure, including the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG) and Infrastructure Enhancement Projects, would be delivered alongside the growth proposed in the District as part of the emerging Local Plan.

The principle purpose of the Strategy was to act as a practical guide in the design, development management and implementation processes to ensure the creation of a sustainable network of high-quality, multifunctional spaces that provide greater connections between existing and new communities, other amenity spaces and the local countryside

There had been over 900 responses to the consultation on the draft Strategy carried out in June and July 2020. Details of the comments and how they had been dealt with formed an appendix to the report. In response to the consultation and the quality review panel, the structure of the document had changed and new information for site specific enhancements was detailed in part 4 of the Strategy.

The Strategy proposed for adoption had the following five parts:

- Primer: Introducing Green and Blue Infrastructure
- Part 1: Implementation – Enhancing Our Existing Network (focus for community, Town and Parish Councils, authority officers)
- Part 2: Implementation – Landscape Led Design (focus for planning applicants, designers and authority officers)
- Part 3: Implementation – Strategic Allocations and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) (focus for strategic site developers, designers, authority officers and policy makers)
- Part 4: Implementation – Infrastructure Enhancement Projects (focus on projects in Debden, Loughton, Theydon Bois and Buckhurst Hill to mitigate the effects of development on the Epping Forest SAC).

The strategy would provide the Council's response to the Local Plan Inspector's Advice in relation to mitigating the effects of recreational pressure upon the Epping Forest SAC.

Cllr Bassett acknowledged the amount of consultation that had taken place and suggested that the Strategy put the Council in a good place to start from.

Cllr McCredie welcomed the green initiative, commented on wildlife enhancements and whilst outside of the scope of the report asked about future school provision. A. Blom-Cooper advised that the updated Infrastructure Delivery Plan set out the education provision required to be delivered to meet the proposed growth in the District.

Cllr Mclvor queried if information on recreational visitors to the forest could be used in the future. A Blom-Cooper advised that visitor surveys had been carried out and a future survey would be carried out. Cllr Bassett advised that Economic Board, Tourist Group received information on where visitors were coming from and Cllr Bedford advised that Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) data also detailed where visitors had come from and that visitor numbers had increased through the lockdown. ANPR data and visitor numbers would be monitored in the future.

The Chairman acknowledged the amount of work in the report.

**Resolved.**

The Committee recommended the report to Cabinet

**45. Dates of Future Meetings**

The Committee noted that the date of the next meeting would be held on 22 June 2021.

**CHAIRMAN**

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