

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-113-2007/08.

Date of meeting: 10 March 2008.



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Planning and Economic Development.

Subject: Sites in St. John's Road, Epping – Development and Design Brief.

Responsible Officer: Paul Sutton (01992-564119).

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992-564470).

Recommendations:

- (1) To agree that a Development and Design Brief be prepared to guide the future redevelopment and reuse of several sites and buildings in St. John's Road, Epping;**
- (2) To agree that, partly because of urgency, partly because of internal capacity and partly to bring specialist knowledge, Consultants be appointed to produce the Development and Design Brief;**
- (3) To agree that at least 50% of the required funding to prepare the Brief be sought from Essex County Council;**
- (4) To agree that the Council's proportion of the cost of the Brief be met from existing Local Development Framework DDF budget provision; and,**
- (5) That delegated authority be given to the following Portfolio Holders to agree the scoping report and list of consultants:**
 - (a) Leader of the Council;**
 - (b) Planning and Economic Development;**
 - (c) Housing; and**
 - (d) Finance, Performance Management and Corporate Support Services.**

Report:

1. There are currently a number of sites in the vicinity of the south-east end of St. John's Road, Epping, close to its junction with the High Street, that are likely to be the subject of significant development proposals in the near future. They include: the Epping Junior School site; the Epping Centre Point building; and the District Council depot site at 115 High Street.
2. In addition, there are a number of smaller sites on the north side of St. John's Road, adjacent to the library and registry office building, that may also be developed in the near future. They include: the church hall site and the former rectory adjacent to the church of St. John the Baptist; the garages and car park to the rear of the library and registry office; and the car parking area to the rear of Barclays Bank (183 High Street).
3. All the above sites are shown on the plan, showing the likely study area, included with this report.
4. The area around this part of St. John's Road is a sensitive one as it falls within the

Epping Conservation Area (currently the subject of a "character appraisal" which has identified several of the sites as in need of improvement). There are also a number of prominent listed buildings in the area (St. John the Baptist Church and the row of cottages Nos.5-17 St. John's Road), as well as several locally listed buildings, including the Epping Centre Point building and adjacent cottages (Nos.19 & 21 St. John's Road), and the Methodist Church (119 High Street).

5. The Governing Bodies of the Epping Infant School and the Epping Junior School approved the amalgamation of the two schools to create a new primary school in November 2006. This new school will be constructed on the site of the Epping Infant School in Coronation Hill (at the end of St. John's Road). Pending the completion of the new school, the Epping Centre Point building in St. John's Road is currently being used to temporarily accommodate the Epping Infant School. Once the new primary school is completed, the Junior and Infant schools will move into that building in Summer 2009. It is ECC practice in respect of surplus premises to sell in advance of vacant possession and leaseback for between 6 and 9 months. This will mean that the Epping Junior School site, Epping Centre Point building and adjacent buildings, will be disposed of by the County Council in late 2008.

6. Following a recent discussion with the County Council at officer level, it was suggested that the preparation of a Development and Design Brief for all the sites in this part of St. John's Road that may become available for development in the near future, might be the best way forward. The purpose of the Development and Design Brief would be to provide an indicative physical structure of the public spaces, streets, buildings, servicing and parking areas for all potential development sites, and explain how this structure will enhance the public realm and the conservation area, and improve linkages and routes within and into/out of the area. It would also indicate the range of proposed uses and where necessary, the phasing of all development sites. The development and design brief is intended to:

- (i) ensure an integrated planned approach;
- (ii) clarify the land use and planning policy requirements affecting the area as a whole and its context in the wider area;
- (iii) clarify the development constraints to inform investment decisions about development sites, land disposals, acquisitions and lease arrangements;
- (iv) stimulate interest among land owners, developers and prospective occupiers so as to bring sites forward for development whilst at the same time explaining development constraints and expectations they will have to resolve; and
- (v) provide guidance to Council officers and Members to assist in the determination of future planning applications.

7. In terms of planning policy, it is considered that mixed community and commercial uses should predominate in any development proposals for the area, and adopted Local Plan Policy CF12 supports this. It is also considered that the locally listed buildings within the Conservation Area should be retained and converted to new uses, as they form an important aspect of the character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area.

8. In order to move matters forward and secure meaningful local consultation on development proposals for the area, it is recommended that a Development and Design Brief should be prepared. While there is internal capacity to manage and guide that process, if Members wish to see early progress, it is suggested that consultants should be engaged to take this work forward quickly, given the County Council's timetable for the school sites. The County Council will be asked to consider joint funding of the Brief.

9. There will need to be a scoping report containing guidance for the consultancy work, and in order to hasten its production, it is proposed that delegated authority be given to the Leader of the Council, Planning and Economic Development, Housing and Finance,

Performance Management and Corporate Support Services Portfolio Holders to agree the scoping report.

10. A shortlist of specialist consultants was drawn up for the preparation of a Development and Design Brief for the Loughton Broadway area, and it is suggested that this list be used to seek fee proposals for the St. John's Road Development Brief. For comparison, Members may wish to note that the cost of the Loughton Broadway Brief will be approximately £50,000.

Statement in Support of Recommended Action:

11. To move matters forward in a positive way through the preparation of a Development and Design Brief is considered to be the best practical response, rather than merely reacting to a variety of development proposals in an uncoordinated and piecemeal fashion. A Brief would also ensure that the best possible community gains and environmental enhancement of the area are achieved, and provide useful guidance to Council officers and Members to assist in the determination of future planning applications.

Other Options for Action:

12. Doing nothing will not produce the benefits or achieve the uses and developments that Members may wish to see for this important part of Epping. There is the prospect of development that can improve and enhance facilities for local residents, and reinforce the social and economic vibrancy of this part of the town centre, including facilities owned by the Council. There is also the prospect of new community and commercial uses, as well as social housing.

Consultation Undertaken:

13. None, other than through recent meetings with ECC Property Services concerning the school site and Epping Centre Point Building in St. John's Road, and indirectly on some of the car park sites, at the rear of the library, through the Epping Conservation Area Character Appraisal.

Resource Implications:

Budget Provision: Consultants costs will have to be met, although these would not be expected to exceed £50,000, and at least 50% of this cost will be sought from Essex County Council. The District Council's proportion of the cost would have to be met from the existing Local Development Framework DDF budget provision.

Personnel: From within existing staff resources.

Land: The study area for the Brief would include a number of sites, the largest owned by Essex County Council, and others owned by EFDC, the Church Commissioners, Epping Town Council and other private bodies.

Council Plan 2006-10/BVPP Reference: EP3.

Relevant Statutory Powers: None.

Background Papers: Notes of meeting with ECC Property Services. Epping Conservation Area Character Appraisal.

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: N/A.

Key Decision Reference (if required): Not yet a Key Decision.