

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 5 April 2022
Subject: Planning and Sustainability Portfolio
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Nigel Bedford

Recommending:

That the report of the Planning and Sustainability Portfolio Holder be noted.

1 Local Plan progress update

The emerging Local Plan is at an advanced stage in its Examination following the Main Modifications Consultation in Summer 2021 and the collated representations published online and provided to the Inspectors in October 2021.

The Inspectors' Final report had been expected in the first quarter of 2022, although we have been advised by the Planning Inspectorate that this is subject to delay and are urgently seeking a revised timetable. Following receipt of the Inspectors' report and providing it is determined the Plan is 'sound', it will be considered by the Council and can be adopted if it makes the Main Modifications recommended.

Volume 3 of the Council's Sustainability Guidance covering refurbishments and extensions was adopted at Cabinet in March 2022 to sit alongside the already published Volumes 1 and 2 relating to major and minor developments respectively. The Planning Policy Team is working with colleagues across the Council to ensure the guidance is appropriately publicised and applied moving forward.

The Implementation Team was successful in its bid for funding to produce a design code for the Latton Priory Strategic Masterplan Area. Under the Pathfinder Programme, DLUHC have awarded the Council £120,000 to produce the design code that should follow the National Model Design Code process, which has a strong emphasis on community and stakeholder engagement to empower communities to have their say on development. The design code and the delivery process should be exemplary and aspirational, with a focus on sustainable transport, green infrastructure, socio-economic wellbeing and high-quality placeshaping in line with District and HGGT Vision. The programme will run for a year with the intention that the design code is endorsed soon after.

A report was taken to the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 31 March 2022 to comment and make recommendations upon the adoption of a Partnership Agreement for the delivery of Site Access Management and Monitoring measures (SAMM) for the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation and the approach to securing contributions within the District for decision by Cabinet at its forthcoming meeting on 11 April 2022. The Agreement has been jointly developed by the Council with other competent authorities, Natural England and the Corporation of London as Delivery Body and will replace the 'Interim Approach to Managing Recreational

Pressure on the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation' adopted by the Council in October 2018.

North Weald Airfield Strategic Masterplan Framework was the subject of public consultation from December 2021 to January 2022. The Final Masterplan is to be presented to Cabinet hopefully in April to be formally endorsed by the Council.

2 Neighbourhood Planning

Neighbourhood Planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and deliver the sustainable development they need. Local Planning Authorities are required to facilitate Neighbourhood Planning and constructively engage with communities throughout the process.

Ongar Parish Council has submitted the Ongar Neighbourhood Plan to Epping Forest District Council. The Planning Policy Team has checked that the submitted Neighbourhood Plan has followed the proper legal process and that the legal requirements for consultation and publicity have been followed. The Council has undertaken a 6 week consultation (known as a Regulation 16 consultation) on the Plan (ending on Thursday 23 December 2021) and the Plan's examination has now commenced.

3 Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT)

The HGGT Work Programme aims to deliver the overarching objective of coordinating and enabling delivery of 16,000 homes by 2033, along with associated infrastructure, delivering the Garden Town Vision, principles and guidance that has been agreed by the 5 partner councils. 3,900 of these homes are allocated within Epping Forest District, making up over a third of the District's allocated housing.

The key priorities for the Garden Town for 2021/22 are:

- Delivering the Garden Town Vision of quality, beautiful and sustainable places
- Enabling the Infrastructure Foundations for Growth
- Maximising and Accelerating Delivery with a focus on outcomes by 2025
- Ensuring our Governance is Fit for the Future

A Memorandum of Understanding for the Rolling Infrastructure Fund (RIF) was agreed by EFDC Cabinet in December 2021, and across the HGGT partnership. The HGGT Transport Strategy, which sets out a clear Mode Share Objective and set of active and sustainable travel principles, was endorsed to have material planning weight by EFDC Cabinet in January 2022, with the HGGT Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) also noted as evidence base by Cabinet in January.

A Stage 1 report on Future Governance arrangements was taken to Cabinet in February 2022, which reported the recommendations made by the HGGT Governance task & finish group and the in-principle decision to consider the establishment of a 5 Council Joint Committee model. This recommendation was agreed by Cabinet, with the expectation that Stage 2, further detailed work on the constitutional and operational requirements for the Joint Committee, would return to Cabinet for approval.

HGGT was delighted to be successful in a bid to the DLUHC PropTech Digital Engagement Fund, to deliver Garden Town-wide digital social value mapping and quality monitoring framework. The fund supports the widespread adoption of digital citizen engagement tools and services within the planning process, with the aim to increase the use of digital engagement.

The PropTech project seeks to co-create a digital map with local and neighbouring residents to identify what local people need and value in their area, by gathering information relating to social value and quality of life. By building a clear picture of what people currently value and need, a long-term approach can be taken to support masterplanning and stewardship arrangements, and to monitor the changes to quality of life and social value particular in relation to current and future planned growth, and help to inform a stewardship model of community building.

A HGGT Green Infrastructure Strategy has been commissioned, due to complete in 2023. This GI framework strategy will sit as an endorsed strategy by the Garden Town Board and the 3 District Councils, holding material planning consideration, within the suite of HGGT Core Documents.

The HGGT team submitted a Capacity Fund Bid to Homes England, the outcome is still awaited.

4 Development Management

Planning Applications

The Special Area of Conservation (SAC) backlog consisted of about 260 planning applications where decisions had not been issued, which were split into three separate tranches to reflect the agreed sequence for release in the approved protocol of the Interim Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy (APMS). The agreed sequence was firstly, cases that had been previously reported to Planning Committees, secondly the Local Plan allocated/designated sites and thirdly, all remaining applications in date order of their validation.

To date, 152 planning permissions have been successfully released equating to 217 dwellings (which includes living accommodation for nursery workers). 14 applications have been withdrawn and five have been refused planning permission. The St Thomas More site in Debden (allocated site LOU.R16) will be issued as soon as the necessary signed legal agreement has been returned by the applicant, which will add a further 26 dwellings to the housing stock – the development includes a new community centre.

Initial estimations were that the release sequence for applications would be completed by the end of April 2022. However, the programme is slightly behind as the Authority made a commitment to re-consult on all applications. At present completion of the release project is planned for the end of July 2022. The Authority is now working with an external legal service provider to ensure sufficient resources are available to secure the expedited signing and completion of legal obligations, and this has contributed to the increased pace of release.

Planning Enforcement

The updated Local Enforcement Plan will be published on 1 April 2022. The plan commits the Service to amended priority categories for specific types of enforcement complaints and associated initial site visit deadlines, as well as performance monitoring of initial site visits and completion of the initial stage of the enforcement investigation within one calendar month.

5 Climate Change

Climate Change Action Plan

A report on the outcomes of the Climate Change Action Plan Consultation, which took place between 12th October and 26th November 2021, has been agreed to go to Overview and Scrutiny on 31st March with the updated Action Plan then going to Cabinet on 11th April.

Home Energy Efficiency

EFDC were allocated approximately £361k for the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Phase 2 (GHGLAD2), this a scheme to fund energy efficiency and renewables in low efficiency, low income housing. The amount of funding is expected to upgrade 35-40 homes. Working with the private housing team, the communities and wellbeing team and our managing agent 38 referrals have been generated to date with the referral window open until the end of March. Installations are to be complete by the end of June.

The Sustainable Warmth scheme will follow on from GHGLAD2 with any extra referrals carried over. The Sustainable Warmth programme incorporates GHGLAD Phase 3 for on grid properties and the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) for off grid properties.

EFDC have been allocated £1.3m following a successful consortium bid, this funding is to be spent by the end of March 2023.

Tree planting

Volunteers from the local community, Limes Farm Community Group, Councillors, Parish Council, St Winifred's Church, Limes Farm Primary and Junior Schools and Officers from across the Council came together at the Limes Farm Estate to plant 501 trees in Chigwell.

A mixture of native species were planted as part of the Local Authorities Treescapes Fund grant allocation. 3 apple trees were also planted as part of the Queen's Jubilee Canopy to commemorate Majesty's Platinum Jubilee. Two of the apple trees were kindly donated by Chigwell Parish Council.

Further trees are to be planted before the end of March at Jessel Green and Rochford Green, Loughton.