

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Local Councils' Liaison Committee **Date:** Thursday 1 February 2024

Place: Council Chamber - Civic Offices **Time:** 7.00 - 8.30 pm

Members Present: Councillors H Kane, J Lea, D Sunger, R Balcombe, J H Whitehouse, L Paine, D Wixley, Epping Upland Parish Clerk, Loughton Town Clerk, Nazeing Parish Clerk, Sheering Parish Clerk, Stapleford Abbots Parish Clerk and Waltham Abbey Town Clerk

Members Present (Virtually): Councillors

Other Councillors: Essex County Councillor Marshall Vance

Other Councillors (Virtual): Councillors

Apologies: R Bassett, R Morgan, Buckhurst Hill Parish Clerk, Epping Town Clerk, North Weald Baseett Parish Clerk and Theydon Bois Parish Clerk

Officers Present: N Richardson (Service Director (Planning Development)), G Blakemore (Chief Executive), P Seager (Chairman's Officer), T Larsen (Democratic Services Officer) and G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services)

Officers Present (Virtually):

8. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

9. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21 September 2023 be taken as a correct record.

10. CHAIRMAN OF QUALIS

Chairman of Qualis, Brian Johnson, introduced the Qualis team; Ben Johnson Manager of operations at Qualis Property Solutions, Simon Rutter Manager of Development of Qualis, Kath Worth Manager of Corporate Services and Jen Fry from Communications at Qualis Group.

Brian Johnson then made a brief introduction about the Qualis group objectives –

- 1) Generating income &
- 2) provide and grow services for Epping Forest District Council.
- 3) Support Epping Forest District Councils regeneration.

Brian Johnson went on to explain the governance of Qualis Group.

Brian Johnson handed over to Ben Johnson, Operations Manager, who gave the Committee a presentation regarding the Year End Performance and Business Update (attached).

The presentation on Qualis Property Solutions, covered four main points of interest;

- 1) Achievements
- 2) Challenges
- 3) End of Year Performance 2022/23 and
- 4) Business Plan & Next 12 Months.

Ben Johnson handed over to Simon Rutter who gave the Committee a short presentation on Qualis Commercial current building projects (attached).

Simon Rutter handed over to Kath Worth, Manager of Corporate Services, and Jen Fry, Communication, who spoke about Communications and the Qualis website being improved.

Following the presentations, the Committee asked the following questions:

- Has Qualis got any plans of applying for ISO9001 Quality Assurance? Ben Johnson said yes as Qualis develop this is something they will be consider.
- The budget quilter is out of sync with Parish Councils, could this be addressed?
- The grant system mentioned in presentation – the forms ask for some information not available to Parish Councils, so how can Parish Councils specify target audiences? What is the total amount of money available?
Ben Johnson replied - beneficiaries needs to be specified as this money is from HRA and therefore needs to benefit those tenants. Fund itself is £35 000, and each application can apply for up to £5000.
- Is the cinema and retail units planned for the Cottis Lane site still coming?
Simon Rutter replied – the cinema market is low at the moment, and the proposals are being marketed but are financially challenging. Be in position by summer to discuss next phase.
- Job opportunities – why is local employment not higher than 40%? How many apprentices? How many staff totally? Operatives outside versus internal staff? How many of the developments are truly affordable housing?
Ben Johnson replied - 45 % of employees are from the district. There are 150 employees across the whole Qualis group: 120 in maintenance and 75 to 80 internal operatives. Local employees are preferred; however some staff were tupe'ed from EFDC. There are currently 5 apprentices, but Qualis is hoping to grow that to 7 within 12 months. Affordable homes – out of the 342 homes with planning consent/or planning consent applied for, 52 are affordable.
- Can the funding information be sent to Parish Councillors.
Ben Johnson said yes that can be done. Jen Fry explained it has gone out as a press release to EFDC and is also available on Qualis' website.
- Can the Community fund be used for grounds maintenance, as a maintenance contract for Qualis? Ben Johnson replied – there must be a link to benefit HRA tenants. Decision making panel decides the applications.
- Some previous Council Tenants who still have council neighbours have problems with their fencing being broken from the Council Tenants side – can they claim for

repairs anywhere? Ben Johnson replied that that sounds like a Housing Management issue, and queries should be looked at individually by Housing Management. Qualis does not get involved with Housing Management.

- When will work start on the Roundhills estate? With Qualis now being on Facebook, can this be used to pre-empt issues? Simon Rutter replied to the Roundhills question, saying that tenders have been returned for Roundhills and within 2 to 3 months announcements will be made. Brian Johnson replied to the communications question, saying Qualis have had supply chain issues and being up front and open about that would be good.
- The Community benefit fund, is has to benefit Council Tenants, but some applications might benefit whole community. Please clarify the scope. Ben Johnson replied, if there are HRA tenants within that community, then that is within scope – it does not need to be 100% HRA tenants.
- When homes are built, people are concerned about infrastructure that needs to be around them. What Section 106 money are coming your way, and what work is done with that money to make sure infrastructure is in place? Chairman replied that will be answered in Agenda item 5. Simon Rutter said – Qualis' Section 106 contributions for the three sites in Epping amounts to £2.4 mill, will be across a broad range of facilities such as education, library, healthcare, open space and play areas. Part of the remit is to ensure that facilities provided by County is provided sooner.
- Will Qualis contribute to Section 106? Simon Rutter confirmed Qualis contribute to Section 106.

11. ISSUES RAISED BY LOCAL COUNCILS

a) Review of Terms of Reference

Democratic Services Manager Gary Woodhall updated the Committee that the review has not been undertaken fully. Local Councils Liaison Committee is an outside body, and it is therefore not in Epping Forest District Councils constitution. However, District and Local Council Charter has previously been reviewed, and members can at the next meeting take a view if a separate term of reference is needed or if the charter can be used.

Local Council Liaison Committee is a liaison committee to discuss items of mutual interest, it is not a decision-making committee, and this will be reflected in the terms of reference.

The Chairman pointed out that although no terms of Reference is available at this time Local Councils can still ask for issues to be raised.

The Committee asked the following question:

- Is it the role of Essex Association of Local Councils to look at the Terms of Reference? Gary Woodhall confirmed that currently there is no secretary appointed to the Essex Association of Local Councils, and therefore there is no single point of contact. If the Epping Forest branch of the Essex Association of Local Councils wants to take on that role, Gary Woodhall would be happy to provide guidance.

Action:

Woodhall will report back to the Local Council Liaisons Committee at the next meeting and the Committee can then decide whether to adopt the Terms of Reference.

B) Section 106 legal agreement funding

Service Director Nigel Richardson presented on Section 106 Legal Agreement Process (attached), explaining when Section 106 is needed, how it can be done and what they will cover.

Here are some links to relevant documents mentioned in the presentation;

[Infrastructure Delivery Fund](#)

[Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy](#)

[Annual Infrastructure Statement](#)

The Committee asked the following questions:

- How can Councillors influence the Section 106 conversations with their local knowledge? Nigel Richardson replied, there has been a lot of consultations, however this needs to be captured at pre-planning application stage, and this will be looked at.
- There is no mention of Highways, Epping is congested – is any Section 106 money going to Highway improvements? Nigel Richardson said he cannot comment on individual applications, however confirmed that Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) does consult Essex County Council and they do comment on applications and can ask for S38 and S278 Highway contributions.
- The Parishes ask for small amounts of money compared to the sums in the development. Local Councillors have a hard time explaining that there is no money even for small aids like high visibility vests for Community Speed Watch or for Village Gates. The Chairman advised the Parish Councillors to speak to their County Councillor.
- The area where the construction and development are done should be the area that benefits from the Section 106 money. Nigel Richardson explained that the Section 106 contributions should be spent where relevant and necessary i.e. the local area the development is in. Cllr Sam Kane confirmed that Essex County Councils education contribution may however be pooled and used outside the immediate area of development. County Councillor Marshall Vance informed the Committee that Corporate Scrutiny at Essex County Council is asking the same question.
- Regarding the Section 106 money paid for the forest in respect of the recreation pressures and air quality. Is the money currently being used? If so, how is the money used? Nigel Richardson replied: we are still collecting money. Cabinet on 4th December 2023 states how much money has been collected.
- Whilst the Section 106 money is being collected is it held by EDFD, or passed to City of London? Nigel Richardson said EFDC holds the money.
- How and when are you going to progress Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Regarding affordable homes – why is there a difference between what Nigel Richardson says and what Qualis said earlier? Nigel Richardson replied that it is still very early days, however it is Essex County Council looking to support EFDC on the delivery of the SAC. The 40% affordable homes, is the goal, however this is not always viable.
- At what stage does the developer pay? Nigel Richardson confirmed that this varies - some prior to commencement, others after a proportion of the development being built, and yet others a proportion once finished.
- Is it possible thought Section 106 or through planning applications – that bonds can be put on the builder to repair pavement damage? Nigel Richardson explained the

difficulty of proving who caused the damage, and then enforcing this. It would be a legal agreement for every single application, and for smaller applications EFDC does not have the staff or resource to do this, we might be able to look into this for larger developments. Cllr S Kane suggested a small per-home levy to repair damage.

Action

- County Councillor Marshall Vance will invite someone from Essex County Council to present on where the money goes and the reasons behind the decisions.
- Nigel Richardson will find out how the Section 106 contributions are being spent in respect of recreation pressures and air quality in Epping Forest.
- Nigel Richardson to look into adding a bond/levy to larger applications – to fix damage caused to pavements etc.

12. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted that its next meeting would be held on 26 September 2024 at 7.00pm.

CHAIRMAN