

# **Report to the North Weald Airfield Strategy Cabinet Committee**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Date of meeting:** 28 July 2008

**Portfolio:** Planning and Economic Development

**Subject:** North Weald Airfield Planning Context

**Responsible Officer:** Ian White (01992–564066).

**Democratic Services Officer:** Gary Woodhall (01992–564470)

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That the possible implications for the Airfield as a result of the need to identify sites for housing and employment for the adopted East of England Plan be noted.**

## **Executive Summary:**

The report outlines the implications of the housing and employment targets of the East of England Plan for the period up to 2021. The “roll forward” to 2031 is also considered in the context of preparation of the Core Strategy.

## **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

It is far too early in the process for preparing the Core Strategy to come to any rigid conclusions regarding future uses on the Airfield.

## **Other Options for Action:**

There are none at this stage.

## **Report:**

### **Adoption and Review of East of England Plan**

1. The East of England Plan (EEP) was adopted on 12 May 2008. There are no policies which refer directly to future uses for the Airfield. The Plan makes provision for urban extensions to Harlow, some of which will inevitably extend into the district, and sets a target of 3,500 new houses elsewhere in the district by 2021. This figure is to be treated as a minimum, and councils are being encouraged to make greater provision. As the period of the Plan runs from 2001, houses built, or granted permission, since that time should be subtracted from the total. This theoretically reduces the district's figure to about 500.

2. A group of seven authorities, collectively called the “Rest of Essex” has to make provision for 56,000 new jobs in the same period, although the Plan acknowledges that more detailed work for Local Development Frameworks may challenge that figure. This District and Harlow are part of that group.

3. A review of the EEP is already underway to roll the Plan forward to 2031, and it is hoped that the revised Plan will be adopted by 2011. The Government has indicated that it wants annual housebuilding rates to increase significantly in the period 2021 to 2031. There is no equivalent advice about growth in employment.

## Core Strategy

4. The Core Strategy (the key document of the Local Development Framework) will have at least a 15 year time span from date of adoption, and it seems sensible to match the end date with that of the reviewed EEP. In looking over 20 years ahead, it is obviously impossible to predict some issues or changes which may arise, the current very sudden economic slowdown being a good example. The Core Strategy will therefore have to be flexible and include contingencies or alternative options which could still deliver the objectives or targets.

5. Work on identifying sites for the housing and employment growth targets of the EEP is only just starting. A "Call for Sites" consultation was sent out in early June and most replies should be returned by the middle of July. Portfolio Holders are also involved and their returns are expected in August. All of these sites, and others which may be identified by officers, will have to be assessed on a consistent basis. An initial report will be published listing the assessment criteria and summarising the responses to the consultation. This will be followed up by an "Issues and Options" public consultation early next year for the Core Strategy. Officers will be proceeding more or less concurrently with a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment – another requirement of the new planning system, which attempts to identify a 15-year supply of housing land.

6. Making provision for (a minimum of) about 500 houses up to 2021 is not a particularly difficult job, and it is perfectly feasible that capacity could be found within existing settlements without requiring any change to Green Belt designation. However, if the Core Strategy is aimed at addressing housing (and employment) needs up to 2031, this will obviously require the identification of more potential sites, which in turn will probably mean a review to some Green Belt boundaries. All the towns and (at least) the larger villages will have to be included in the assessment. North Weald and the Airfield will be part of this study.

7. It is perhaps dangerous to attempt to come to conclusions at this very early stage, but it may be worth considering the following:

(a) although by far the biggest settlement in the district, Loughton/Buckhurst Hill is significantly constrained against further expansion, with Epping Forest to the west, the Roding floodplain to the east, and a relatively narrow green wedge to the north separating the town from Theydon Bois; if, therefore, this area is going to make some provision to the EEP targets, this is likely to be restricted to redevelopment; the potential capacity is not yet known;

(b) while it is one of the District's larger villages, North Weald does not support a particularly wide range of services – it is likely for instance that most weekly shopping is carried out in Harlow or Epping; two of the objectives of the EEP are to (i) locate development so as to reduce the need to travel; and (ii) effect a major shift in travel away from car use to public transport, walking and cycling; in the context of these criteria, neither North Weald nor the Airfield appear to be appropriate locations for major new development as residents and employees will generally need to use cars for the majority of journeys;

(c) Harlow is identified as a "Key Centre for Development and Change" in the EEP, and regeneration of its town centre and industrial areas are key to this; significant employment growth on the Airfield could threaten the success of the regeneration.

8. While it is very early in the process, and given the above, officers believe that the greatest potential for meeting the EEP targets lies with the settlements that provide the greatest range and frequency of services and facilities.

## **Implications for North Weald Airfield**

9. Subject to the outcome of the Call for Sites consultation, and the assessment of the results, it is possible that some potential for small-scale residential and commercial development in the village and the Airfield will be identified. In the context of the EEP objectives and in the interests of achieving sustainable development (however that is defined), North Weald and the Airfield do not seem to be appropriate locations for major development, at least in the period up to 2031.

### **Resource Implications:**

The Council is a major landowner in the area, so decisions on future land uses will affect budgets.

### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

The Core Strategy must be in general conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy, and must not conflict with national planning policy.

### **Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

No implications at this stage.

### **Consultation Undertaken:**

None

### **Background Papers:**

East of England Plan 2008; Report to Cabinet Committee 31 July 2007.

### **Impact Assessments:**

None required at this stage, but these would be included in the preparation of the Core Strategy.