

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL COUNCILS' LIAISON COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 11 June 2008 **Time:** 7.30 - 10.03 pm

Place: Council Chamber, Civic
Offices, High Street, Epping

**Members
Present:**

Representing Epping Forest District Council:

Councillor(s): R Morgan, Mrs M Sartin and Mrs P Smith (Chairman)

Other Councillors:

Councillor(s): Mrs J H Whitehouse

Representing Essex County Council:

County Councillor(s): G McEwen and M Tomkins

Representing Local Councils:

Mrs H Harding (Sheering PC), Mrs A Cooper (Nazeing PC), D Bateman (Chigwell PC), R Bassett, Church (Buckhurst Hill Parish Council), Mrs D Collins (Theydon Garnon), Mrs K Canning (Chigwell Parish Council), Jones (Epping Upland PC), Raven (Lambourne Parish Council), Pewsey (Loughton Town Council), C Thompson (Moreton, Bobbingworth and Lavers PC), Councillor Ms G Castle (Nazeing Parish Council), Mrs D Borton (Nazeing Parish Council), Councillor C Hawkins (North Weald Bassett Parish Council), Mrs J Ballard (Roydon Parish Council), Ms H Nicholas (Roydon Parish Council), Philip (Theydon Bois Parish Council), Councillor Ms S Jones (Theydon Bois Parish Council), R James (Waltham Abbey Town Council) and Pryde (Waltham Abbey Town Council)

Apologies: Epping Forest District Council –

Councillor(s): J Knapman and B Sandler

Essex County Council –

Councillor(s): C Finn and C Pond

Parish/Town Councils: -

S Jackman (Ongar Town Council), Councillor J Salter (Abbess, Beauchamp and Berners Roding Parish Council) and Ms S Stavrou (Waltham Abbet Town Council)

**Officers
Present:**

J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), A Hall (Director of Housing), P Sutton (Assistant Director Policy & Conservation) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

By Invitation: J Lefever (Hastoe Housing Association), Ms U Maccariello (Hastoe Housing Association), Councillor N Hume (Essex County Council) and D Forkin (Essex County Council)

1. CHAIRMAN FOR THE MEETING

In the absence of the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the meeting and with the agreement of the Committee, the Vice Chairman of the District Council, Councillor Mrs Penny Smith took the Chairmanship of the meeting. To aid her, Councillor Richard Morgan was appointed the Vice Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

2. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED:

- (1) That District Councillor J Knapman be appointed as the Chairman of the Committee for the Civic year;
- (2) That Parish Councillor J Salter be appointed as Vice – Chairman of the Committee for the Civic Year.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

- That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2008 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:
- that Councillors Mrs D Borton, Mrs Castle and B Surtees were in attendance at that meeting.

4. PRESENTATION ON RURAL HOUSING SCHEMES

The Director of Housing introduced a presentation on rural housing schemes, which consider the need for affordable housing in rural areas. The need for affordable housing sprang from the increased rise in property prices. Rural areas are more attractive and can attract higher prices than urban areas. This meant that local people were unable to buy properties in their village, and would have to move away. There were also limited affordable properties to rent which could mean that local workers were unable to live locally and would thus have to travel some distance. There was also a lack of designated land for housing.

To help alleviate this, a Planning Exceptions Policy was established by the District Council. This is detailed in EFDC's Local Plan and acknowledges the need for affordable housing in rural areas. This enables the Council to grant permission on sites for affordable housing, where normal market housing would be refused. But, certain conditions must be met:

- This could only be applied in smaller settlements that have a recognisable community,
- it must be small scale development (less than 15 properties),
- the settlement must be too small to offer housing to meet local needs (population under 3,000),
- there must be a demonstrable local housing need that cannot be met, and
- it must be supported by the Parish Council.

Any scheme must not be detrimental to the character of the village and have no highways or planning objections. It must also provide affordable housing in perpetuity. Sites should not be identified in the Local Plan and applicants must live in the village or have some connection to that village.

For rented properties, applicants must be on EFDC's Housing Register and express interest for vacancies via the Home-Options Scheme. Nominations are then made to the Housing Association.

The district has so far completed three schemes, one at Manns Yard, Willingale (six rented houses/bungalows), one in Houchin Drive, Fyfield (six rented houses) and Harlow Road, Matching Tye (four rented houses and four shared ownership houses). Hastoe Housing Association is the Council's "Preferred Housing Association Partner" to undertake such rural schemes and has successfully completed the most recent two schemes and are currently working on a further two (one in Horsecroft, Abbess Roding and one in Moreton).

EFDC have five Preferred Registered Social Landlords (RSL) for affordable housing developments in the District. Hastoe Housing Association being the rural specialist for the district. The Director of Housing then introduced the representatives from Hastoe Housing, John Lefever (Regional Head of Development) and Ulrike Maccariello (Senior Development Officer) who gave an outline of Hastoe HA and how Hastoe undertakes rural developments.

Hastoe is a small Housing Association who is a specialist in rural housing. They operate across East Anglia, South and South West England. They are based in Essex. So far they have completed over 1000 new properties in villages. They use one Development Officer per scheme so that they see a scheme through from start to finish. Development Officers are specialists in rural exception sites and place a high emphasis on community liaison and communication. They work in liaison with Parish Councils who want to address their local housing needs. The land values would be above agricultural value but a lot lower than open market value. The ideal site would be greenfield, outside but adjoining the village boundary with vehicular and pedestrian access. They would carry out a Housing Needs Survey following discussions with Parish Councils, and the results discussed with them. Once the "Housing Needs" are established they would identify the mix and tenure in conjunction with the Parish and District Authority.

Preliminary designs will be discussed with the Parish Council and the District's Planning Department and amended where necessary. They will then carry out pre-planning application public consultation events and amend where necessary and feasible.

Finished projects will either have rented housing or shared ownership ('New Build Homebuy').

Hastoe is willing to give a presentation to Parish Councils and could organise independent advice from the Essex Rural Housing Enabler and undertake site evaluations all with no obligations to the Parish Council.

The Chairman thanked the Hastoe officers for their presentation and asked for any questions from the meeting.

County Councillor G McEwen was encouraged by their comments on working with Parish Councils for the local people, but could see people from other areas wanting to come to these local developments. How would Hastoe ensure that they do not go in front of local people?

The Director of Housing answered that Hastoe do not decide who moved into the properties, nominations are made by the District Council. If the applicant is not connected to the village then they will not be considered.

District Councillor Mrs Sartin asked if the proposed developments would stand alone or as part of another development.

Ulrike Maccariello replied that they were stand alone developments as any other developments would not be exclusively for local needs.

A Nazeing Councillor commented that if a person got work in a village and obtained a tenancy, what would happen if they lost that job? Would they still be able to stay in their house?

John Lefever explained that they would have an assured tenancy, (effectively a "home for life") and that they would not lose the tenancy if they changed jobs.

Councillor Knapman asked about selling on a property, if they have an 80% equity share, how could they afford to move on.

Ulrike Maccariello replied that shared owners would not always an 80% equity share, which was quite high. It may be that Hastoe would purchase 40% (of the 80%) and that they sold the remaining 40% to another local buyer.

Councillor Morgan commented that they had a rural scheme at Matching Tye and he highly recommended the scheme to the meeting. The member from Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers also recommended this scheme to the meeting.

Councillor Church (Abbess, Beauchamp and Berners Roding) asked if these houses could be made available for carers.

Ulrike Maccariello said they could, but only if the person had a local connection to the village.

The representative from Buckhurst Hill Parish Council asked if it was possible to arrange a visit to one of their sites so that they could see for themselves the layout and types of building that were erected for one of these schemes. John Lefever said they would be delighted to arrange such a trip for any interested Councillors.

The Chairman brought the item to a close and thanked the representatives from Hastoe Housing Association for their informative presentation and for answering the Committee's questions so fully.

5. HIGHWAYS ISSUES

The Chairman welcomed County Councillor Hume, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation and David Forkin the West Essex Area Highways Manager. They were attending the meeting to discuss local highways related issues.

Councillor Hume said, by way of introduction, that they now had a permanent area manager for West Essex and also a permanent deputy which would be good for long term planning. That the figures for killed or seriously injured were the lowest ever on record; and County has established an 'accident reduction board', which he chairs, the leading partner of this board is the police.

He was aware that the condition of the roads in the County mattered very much to people and that they were not all up to standard. Independent measures have moved Highways from the lowest quartile to the top quartile. They now invest more money in highways and will keep on working to maintain their position and improve where they can.

Councillor Hume then informed the meeting about their new 'Localism' initiative to give priority to schemes in local areas. The County worked with the District Council to set up local 'Highway Panels', this would allow them to have some influence over some of the money in the Highways Department. Local Councils could make recommendations as to where Highways could spend certain sums of money. Pilot areas have already been set up with their own 'Highways Panel' involving local councils and other local representatives. There will also be an additional resource of 'Highways Rangers' a team of two persons who will work with each highway panel to carry out minor cleaning works, repairs to carriageways and street furniture and also some trimming of vegetation. There are also plans for a customer contact centre to improve customer services.

The Chairman then took questions from the meeting.

The representative from Nazeing Parish Council asked about Hoe Lane, it was in a disgusting state. It had been surveyed in 2007 but there has been no follow up action since. David Forkin replied that it was in the improvements programme for this year. They will soon distribute details of schemes that they will deliver this financial year. There will be something for Hoe Lane.

Councillor Bateman, the representative from Chigwell Parish Council complimented the County Highways about their resurfacing work in the Grange Hill area. But, one of their big problems in the area was the pot holes. Also the West Mead Walkway has only been patched up; no resurfacing work had been done. Councillor Bateman also brought up four ways crossing at mini roundabouts. They need one in his area and he has seen a similar one in Buckhurst Hill. Councillor Hume replied that roundabouts are subject to safety audits, but they can be put forward under the new locality programme. There were also other considerations such as congestion to be taken into consideration. David Forkin added that they would look at the specific request, but generally they would not put in a four way roundabout.

Councillor Mrs Harding (Sherring PC) said that Government guidance said that potholes had to be 4cm deep before they were considered dangerous and should be filled in. Do you keep to this definition? Councillor Hume replied that the County had a new policy based on best practice and adopted this year. If a pothole is more than 50mm deep, then it must be repaired. Below 50mm it should be repaired only if it was considered dangerous to road users. If it was not considered dangerous then it would be put into a planned maintenance programme. The policy requires that engineers use their own judgement. That is our policy as far as potholes are concerned.

Councillor Mrs Cooper (Nazeing PC) said that Nazeing shared a border with Hertfordshire where a new site there discharges HGV traffic into Nazeing. As this site grows traffic will increase substantially. This means that large lorries are now going down single track roads, which are beginning to break up. What can you do about this? Councillor Hume sympathised with Mrs Cooper. 90% of damage done to roads is done by HGVs. They have trading standards looking at this and also doing some publicity about this. As for the new industrial site, that brings up employment and economic issues. They do comment on schemes when they come up and should have commented on the Hertfordshire scheme. Councillor Mrs Cooper replied that the County's policies were ineffectual and they needed more stringent measures and that trading standards cannot do this. Councillor Hume replied that he was not familiar with the situation that she was talking about. It would be incumbent that S106 money should have made things easier for the surrounding area. The Hertfordshire scheme would be difficult to put right. He had met with the MP for the area to discuss this.

District Councillor Knapman said he was pleased that stopping road deaths was a priority of the County. However, as a local Councillor he noted that the Parish Council had asked for a 40mph speed limit for Pudding Land – he could not understand why it was not closed. Councillor Hume said that he had to take a broader view and will implement a 40mph limit there, and improve road and drainage conditions to improve road safety. Road closures are not something we do.

The representative from Nazeing said that Broxbourne will spend £5m to send traffic over the Dobbs Weir Road. Councillor Hume replied that he would have to come and view this road for himself.

County Councillor Tompkins said that the speed limit at Rolls Park Corner and down Chigwell Lane was wrong and nothing had been done so far. Can it be done now? Councillor Hume said he could not change speed limits that quickly, he has asked for it to be looked at. It may be done this year.

Councillor Bassett thanked David Forkin, who had an impossible task and he appreciated his work on highways. He went on to say that they seemed to be reacting to problems. The District has roads not designed for purpose, it need bigger schemes such as by-passes etc. what are we doing about this? Councillor Hume replied that he understood the point being mad. The economy had grown and the highways had not kept pace with it, the infrastructure always grows after the economy. They have been allocated a certain amount of money and have put in several big schemes. Essex has about £70 million to spend on maintenance, a new by-pass can cost from £30 to £100 million. They also need to improve the use of rail freight, for which there are plans but for which funding was needed.

Councillor Bassett said that there was a shortage of roads going East-West. Councillor Hume agreed that East-West roads were critical. There are plans for improvements to the A120, which is one of their prime objectives.

The representative from Theydon Bois said they had not been consulted about their parking problems and the subsequent restrictions imposed. Are there any options to look at this again? Councillor Hume said he was unaware of any errors made on the marking out of the restricted areas. If any errors were made then we would of course rectify them. He was informed that a review of the area had been carried out and people consulted properly. Mr Forkin added that he did not think that they did this project incorrectly, and they did work with the Parish Council. Parking is always very emotive. They will review the scheme, but ask that the scheme be allowed to bed in before a review is carried out.

The member from Loughton Town Council wanted to know the latest status of the 'Search and Repair' initiative from last year. They had since heard that this scheme had been replaced by the Highways Rangers scheme. Councillor Hume replied that the Search and Repair scheme had been proposed but had never got of the ground because of cost problems. The Highways Rangers will replace it in time.

The representative from Epping Town asked if Quality Status councils get funding for Highways Panels. Councillor Hume said it was for District and Local Councils to decide how they operated the Highway Panels.

The representative from Waltham Abbey said that Lord Hanningfield announced £1 million funding for Town and Parish Councils. Can this be spent in addition to the current funding? Councillor Hume confirmed that there was an extra £1million for Town and Parish Councils, none had been distributed to date. It will be a competitive scheme and councils will have to apply for funding.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse wanted to know if the District could have a couple of the simpler versions of Zebra Crossing as she had heard that they could cost between £15 to £20 thousand pounds to install. Mr Forkin replied that it was the simpler kind of crossing that costed £15 to £20 thousand pounds. Some of the more expensive ones could cost about £70 thousand. The smaller type of schemes could be done through the Localism Scheme.

The representative from Lambourne Parish Council asked about a bridge in his area that is being demolished slowly, what can be done about it; bus services were being withdrawn; the road has a 60mph limit where families have to walk down, sometimes without a footway. Mr Forkin said he would look at the footway issue – it was probably overgrown hedges etc. we will remind landlords to cut them back. We will look at reducing the speed limit via the speed management survey.

The Chairman brought up the subject of potholes, when repaired they tended to fall out again (within two weeks). Are the County Council happy with the quality of the work carried out? Mr Forkin asked that he be supplied with a list of these potholes and he would investigate.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Hume and David Forkin for this valuable interactive session and hoped that it would strengthen Highway relationship with the Parishes.

6. EAST OF ENGLAND PLAN - FINAL APPROVAL (ON 12 MAY 2008)

The Assistant Director of Planning, Paul Sutton, brought the meeting up to date with the final version of the East of England Plan. This was a long time in the making and it set the regional strategy for several counties. All documents produced by local councils will now have to conform to this document. The intention is to roll the plan forward to 2021. The whole document is available on www.communities.gov.uk

The Key issues on housing were the urban extension of Harlow, a greenbelt review and a homelessness policy.

There is a provision for up to 16000 additional dwellings by 2021. We have not been given any figures on how the units would be spread as yet. Figures are usually minimum figures and it may mean about 4.5 thousand house expansion into the district from Harlow. There will be a need for joint working with neighbouring councils, or the government will impose a structure on us. There maybe a need for a joint planning committee. For the rest of the District the policy states the need for an extra 3.5 thousand houses from 2001 to 2021, some of which have already been built.

The greenbelt review will look at Harlow and other settlements in the district, there are also BVPI targets for Brownfield sites. The report also puts up the affordable housing target from 35% to 40%.

The East of England plan goes up to 2031, and a review will be starting soon, looking at Housing up to 2031. The plan also calls for Essex to provide 56,000 jobs and provision for extra infrastructure, such as plans for a by-pass for the M11, details of which were not forthcoming at present.

Councillor Mrs Collins asked about a meeting she attended recently on the 'Harlow Renaissance', when she met with Harlow Councillors. One of the suggestions was about a joint Planning Committee, which was not well received, as Harlow wanted all the S106 money. It is likely that Harlow's first build will be in Epping Forest, any new infrastructure (such as the M11 by-pass) would be built after the new homes were built.

Councillor Mrs Sartin asked if the greenbelt review would be complete before current planning applications come into force. Mr Sutton was not sure, consultations with developers will be started before the greenbelt review is carried out. Each step has to be consulted on. The first step would be to ask town and parish councils.

The representative from Epping Upland asked about creating more jobs and the inevitable crowded roads. Would the infrastructure be in place for the rail and tube. It is increasingly more difficult to use without the additional pressure of more jobs. Mr Sutton replied that the plan was light on infrastructure but heavy on sustainability. The roads can't take the traffic as it is, the plan will be looking at bus routes etc. and may even put them in before the houses are built.

Councillor Mrs Collins was aware of these problems. She believed that people would live here but work in London. This will increase our dependency on transport links. There is a need to put this in the local delivery framework as quickly as possible.

7. UPDATE ON GYPSY AND TRAVELLER DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

The Assistant Director of Planning, Paul Sutton, reported that a report went to Cabinet last Monday on a single issue review which EFDC made a response to the government by 16 May. They had objected to the draft policy in which the government made a number of false assumptions. Also work was done on the Development Plan document on traveller sites. EFDC had a consultant working on this and will keep him on until it is published in September next year.

The District's letter to the Government says that our additional pitches should be 35 and not 40. We are currently looking for individual sites.

Councillor Mrs D Collins confirmed that EFDC has a consultant looking at this. We have asked that they be shared out fairly over the Eastern Region, asking for Councils that do not have any sites to take about 15 pitches. Hopefully we will be listened to.

Paul Sutton added that all parish and Town Councils would be consulted on this.

The Chairman thanked Mr Sutton for his two presentations and wished him well in his new job.

8. ISSUES RAISED BY LOCAL COUNCILS

No issues were raised by the Local Councils.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A number of Town and parish clerks were concerned that they had not been informed of the pre meeting for the Town and Parish Councils, normally held before this meeting. They made a plea for adequate, timely notification of these meetings.

The Chairman proposed that an agenda item be put on the next meeting for Councillors J Salter and/or B Surtees to report on how the process for arranging these 'pre-meeting' work.

ACTION: Councillors J Salter / B Surtees to report back to the next Local Council Liaison Meeting on the arrangements for the Local Councils pre-meetings.

10. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The future meeting dates for this Committee were noted.

CHAIRMAN