

## **Report to the Local Development Framework Cabinet Committee**



**Report reference:** *LDF-008-2009/10*  
**Date of meeting:** *11 March 2010*

**Epping Forest District Council**

**Portfolio:** Leader  
**Subject:** Local Development Framework – Progress Update  
**Responsible Officer:** Kevin Wright (01992 564095)  
**Democratic Services Officer:** Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- (1) To note progress on the background studies required for the Local Development Framework (LDF); and**
- (2) To note that funding would initially be contained within the LDF budget, but that a future maximum supplementary estimate in the sum of £60,000 (£30,000 each) might be required for the:**
  - (a) Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment; and**
  - (b) review of planning policy on the Lea Valley glasshouse industry.**

### **Executive Summary:**

This report provides an update of progress on the different background studies for the LDF that will contribute to the evidence base and guide future decision making on planning matters in the District. The report sets out the work to be done on the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and a review of planning policy on the Lea Valley glasshouse industry. The work on the SHLAA was originally intended to be carried out in-house, but it is now considered that it would make better use of the available resources to engage consultants to complete this work. The last study of the glasshouse industry was published in 2003, and this influenced the policies in the Adopted Local Plan Alterations. It was always the intention to review these policies after a period of about five years.

### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

To keep Members informed of progress on the LDF evidence base.

To ensure funding is available to carry out key pieces of work to provide evidence for future decisions on housing and review planning policy on the Lea Valley glasshouse industry.

### **Other Options for Action:**

The work on the SHLAA could be carried out in-house as originally envisaged. However this has implications for use of officer time which is likely to be very significant, given the experience of other authorities. This could result in unacceptable delays to the overall LDF timetable.

A commitment was made in the Alterations to the Local Plan to review the planning policy on the Lea Valley glasshouse industry. A current planning application for the redevelopment of a Lea Valley glasshouse nursery for residential use has highlighted the need for a policy review to aid decision making on this and any further proposals.

## **Report:**

### Progress update on background studies for the LDF

1. *Employment Land Study* (Joint with Brentwood Borough Council) – Officers from Epping Forest worked with colleagues from Brentwood on the tendering process and are jointly managing the study. Working across local authority boundaries with Brentwood is a practical method for producing the study due to localised economic and employment issues. W S Atkins was appointed in December 2009 to carry out the work. The study will report on capacity and need for employment land within Epping Forest District for the period covered by the LDF from 2001 to 2021, and as much detail as is practicable for the period 2021 to 2031. The study is expected to report its findings in April 2010.

2. *Strategic Flood Risk Assessment* - This study is being prepared jointly by Epping Forest District Council and Harlow District Council to consider the nature and extent of flood risk across the area. Officers from Forward Planning and Land Drainage are carrying out the work in-house for the Epping Forest District area of the study. A final report is expected in April 2010.

3. *Town Centres Study* – A draft of the final report was presented to officers in October 2009 for checking and comment. As a result of discussion with Roger Tym & Partners it was decided that further work was needed to make the report as up to date as possible. The extra work is to ensure the report references Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth which was published in December 2009. PPS4 replaces four different national policy guidance documents, either in part or entirely, including PPS6: Planning for Town Centres. In addition more up to date information on expenditure growth in the District is to be added. It has been agreed with Roger Tym & Partners that the report will be completed by the end of March 2010.

### Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

4. PPS3: Housing requires all Local Planning Authorities to carry out a SHLAA that will demonstrate housing potential in the area for the following 5, 10 and 15 year periods. The SHLAA is intended to be an objective assessment of potential housing sites within Epping Forest District. The output will be a list of sites and their potential housing capacity that could be used to allocate new land for housing within the LDF when it replaces the existing Local Plan and Alterations. **It is important to note that the SHLAA does not make decisions about where housing should go or which sites are most suitable. It only provides information on potential housing sites.** The decisions about how many sites are needed and where these should be will be made as part of consultation on the LDF in particular the Core Strategy. The SHLAA is a key piece of evidence in decision making on the Core Strategy.

5. The SHLAA is a substantial piece of work as it involves investigating all potential housing sites across Epping Forest District. The work is initially desk based using maps, aerial photographs, land databases and data collected in the “Call for Sites” to find possible sites. This is followed by field visits to those that are not initially excluded for example because the site is within a nationally protected area. Assessment of potential sites will involve input from those with technical knowledge of the house building industry to test the

market viability of each site. A final report then brings together all the potential sites and their housing capacity. In the case of this District, it is particularly important to have an early and robust assessment of urban capacity, because this will determine the amount of Green Belt land that may need to be released.

6. Officers have reappraised their original decision to carry out the SHLAA in-house. Experience elsewhere suggests the SHLAA evolves to be a much larger piece of work than was envisaged at the outset. In some planning authorities the work has taken two officers working full-time up to 18 months. Apart from the pressure on officer time to do other background studies and work connected to the LDF process there is time pressure to obtain information from the SHLAA in the short term to feed into consultation on the Core Strategy.

7. The way forward would be carry out the initial desk top work in-house with the site visits and related work, in particular viability testing, to be tendered out for consultants to complete. The additional budget for the SHLAA would be used for consultants to carry out the site visits and viability testing of sites that requires input from the property industry.

8. Brentwood Borough Council appointed consultants to carry out 250 site visits and related work for a cost of around £30,000. It is estimated that a similar figure of £30,000 will be required for consultants to carry out work on the SHLAA on behalf of Epping Forest District Council.

#### Update of research into the Lea Valley glasshouse industry

9. Policy E13 of the original Local Plan designated areas of the Lea Valley for the glasshouse industry. The intention was to concentrate glasshouses into specific areas of the Lea Valley. Defined as temporary structures for horticulture, glasshouses are considered appropriate development within the Green Belt. However their impact on the openness of the Green Belt can be intrusive and in part the concentration policy was to locate glasshouses in areas where they would be visually less intrusive. It was also hoped to assist the glasshouse industry by providing land for expansion close to existing operations.

10. A study of the industry in the Lea Valley was completed in 2003, and this work provided evidence on which to base revised planning policies. The Alterations to the Local Plan were adopted in 2006, and replaced policy E13 with policies E13A, B and C. The policy of concentration was continued, planning decisions now had to consider harm to the overall viability/vitality of the Lea Valley glasshouse industry, and the dereliction of new glasshouse sites was to be prevented. The Alterations acknowledged that the Lea Valley glasshouse industry had changed since the Local Plan was adopted in 1998. As a result some glasshouse sites were identified for immediate de-designation and others were identified for future potential de-designation when the policy was again reviewed.

11. As with much of Epping Forest District, there are competing pressures for land in the Lea Valley with high values for housing development if planning consent can be gained. "Hope value" for future housing development could lead owners of glasshouse sites to allow the current land use to deteriorate. Recent work by the Greater London Authority on food production within the Green Belt highlighted the sustainability advantages of growing food in close proximity to the London market. A further important consideration is the long-term vitality of the successful parts of the Lea Valley glasshouse industry and how planning policy could best assist this aim.

12. A current planning application in the Lea Valley has highlighted the need for further information on the above issues. The proposal is for residential development on a glasshouse site that was identified for potential future de-designation. Decision making on individual sites needs to be made in the context of the wider Lea Valley glasshouse industry. It is therefore

necessary to undertake a further review of the glasshouse industry in the District to take into account the issues raised above. This is also a good opportunity to review the forecasts made in the last study in light of the impact the recession may have had, and the potential impact of significant recent developments such as "Planet Thanet".

13. The work required is very specialised and would be carried out by external consultants. Initial contact with potential consultants suggests that a study and review of the existing policy could cost up to approximately £30,000.

**Resource Implications:**

The current LDF budget does not make provision for either the SHLAA or the review of policy on the Lea Valley Glasshouse industry to be undertaken by external consultants. Officers are attempting to contain these costs within existing resources. However a future supplementary estimate up to £60,000 may be required.

**Legal and Governance Implications:**

N/A

**Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

N/A

**Consultation Undertaken:**

None

**Background Papers:**

PPS12: Local Spatial Planning (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008);

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments: Practice Guidance (Department for Communities and Local Government, July 2007);

Viability of the Horticultural Glasshouse Industry in Epping Forest District; Prospects for the future and likely scale of development over the next 10 to 15 years (Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd in association with Gerry Hayman and Hennock Industries Ltd, September 2003)

**Impact Assessments:**

Risk Management

Delays to the SHLAA will impact on the overall timetable for the LDF in particular the Core Strategy. A later review of the planning policy on the Lea Valley glasshouse industry could compromise strategic decisions and again result in delays to the LDF process.

Equality and Diversity:

*Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications?* No

*Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken?* N/A

*What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?*  
N/A.

*How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?*  
N/A.