

Report to the Local Development Framework Cabinet Committee



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: LDF-012-2009/10
Date of meeting: 12 April 2010

Portfolio: Leader

Subject: Consideration of Evidence Base reports for the Local Development Framework

Responsible Officer: Ian White (01992 564066).

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Decisions Required:

(1) That, as outlined in the report, one of the following three options be chosen for considering Evidence Base reports:

(i) To select those reports to be considered in detail at additional meetings of the Local Development Framework (LDF) Cabinet Committee, with author briefings, and accept synopses of the remaining reports;

(ii) To receive author briefings on all the reports at additional meetings of the LDF Cabinet Committee throughout April, May, June and July; or

(iii) As option (ii), but with a two week period following each LDF Cabinet Committee meeting for Members to comment upon a particular report before acceptance is assumed; and

(2) To consider the future presentation to the LDF Cabinet Committee of the studies commissioned in conjunction with Harlow and East Herts District Councils.

Executive Summary:

The report presents options for Member involvement in the preparation of the Evidence Base for the Local Development Framework. Members are also asked to consider the implications for co-ordinated working with Harlow and East Herts Councils.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The report presents options for Members to take a decision.

Other Options for Action:

Officers believe that the options discussed are the only ones which will allow this Council to proceed at more or less the same time and pace as Harlow and East Herts Councils.

Report:

1. For new planning policies to be judged sound, they must be based on robust and up-to-date evidence. Officers have therefore commissioned a number of technical studies which

will ultimately comprise the “evidence base” from which policies in the Local Development Framework will be derived. At the meeting on 11 March 2010 Members of this Committee requested greater involvement in the preparation, and therefore greater knowledge, of the content of these reports. The studies are not policy documents in themselves, but their content and conclusions will be used to identify issues and options for the initial consultation on the Core Strategy – it is at this stage that a start will be made on the development of new planning policies.

2. The evidence base will eventually include:

- Harlow Area Appraisal of Planning Transport and Infrastructure Options (known as the Harlow Options Appraisal);
- Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Core Strategy (preceded by the Scoping Report which is the subject of a separate report to this meeting);
- Harlow Stansted Gateway Transportation Model;
- Rye Meads Water Cycle Study;
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA);
- Viability Testing of the SHMA;
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA);
- Town Centres Study;
- Employment Land Study;
- Landscape Character Appraisal;
- Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study;
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment;
- Local Wildlife Sites Study;
- Audit of Open Spaces, Sports and Recreation Facilities;
- Assessment of further needs for open space and sports/recreation facilities;
- Ward Profiles; and
- Review of policies which deal with the Lea Valley Glasshouse Industry.

3. More details of these studies are given in the schedule which is an appendix to this report. The Rye Meads study is relatively peripheral to the district but is important in terms of the urban extensions to Harlow. While most of the reports are either complete or nearing their final versions, a small number have yet to be commissioned, e.g. the SHLAA, the assessment of open space etc needs and the glasshouses study.

4. Policy HA1 of the East of England Plan requires this Council to work jointly or in co-ordination with Harlow and East Herts District Councils to deliver the envisaged regeneration and growth of Harlow. The three authorities have been working in a co-ordinated fashion at officer level for at least a couple of years with the intention of preparing individual Core Strategies which will be subject to public consultation at more or less the same time. Harlow and East Herts are intending to consult on Issues and Options over the main summer holiday period which will mean that these exercises will be slightly extended to allow for the fact that many residents will be unable to respond while they are away. While it is not possible for this Council to meet this timing, officers believe it would be sensible to aim for an October start for consultation on Issues and Options. This would mean that there was not much delay between the end of the Harlow and East Herts consultations and the start of this Council’s exercise.

5. If Members accept that this is a reasonable target, the Evidence Base reports should ideally be signed off by the end of July, or at least those which are in their draft final versions. Officers believe that there are three options for assessing the Evidence Base reports:

(i) Members to select from the schedule of reports those which they wish to consider in

detail, and to accept from officers synopses of the other reports. Detailed consideration would include a presentation by the authors to a series of LDF Cabinet Committee meetings from April to July (dates to be arranged);

(ii) Members to receive author briefings on all the reports with more frequent meetings of the LDF Cabinet Committee through April, May, June and July. A final meeting of the Cabinet Committee could sign off all the reports; or

(iii) Broadly similar to the second option, but Members would have a period of 2 weeks after the Cabinet Committee meetings to respond to the briefings, otherwise it would be assumed that the reports had been accepted.

6. In the case of consultant briefings, Members may wish to consider whether they would prefer these as part of LDF Cabinet Committee meetings, or as separate exercises along the lines of the recent briefing on the St Johns Road area in Epping.

7. If Members wish to have author presentations on all, or a selection of, the reports, it should be noted that these have not been budgeted for in the contracts agreed with consultants. There will therefore be additional costs of approximately £500/person involved in the presentations.

8. Members will also need to decide if and how they wish the studies commissioned by Harlow and East Herts Councils to be reported to this Committee.

Resource Implications:

Additional costs if members wish to have consultants presenting their studies to LDF Cabinet, as described in the report.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Some of the studies involve several authorities (eg the SHMA), or more than one (eg the Harlow Options and the Employment Land Studies). Some of the involved authorities have already accepted the reports, so there could be complications if this Council were to ask for amendments after other authorities have made decisions.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

N/A.

Consultation Undertaken:

The reports have been subject to different degrees of consultation.

Background Papers:

N/A.

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

As outlined in the report, the main risk is to the timetable for consultation on the Issues and Options of the Core Strategy.

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.