

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Local Development Framework Cabinet Committee **Date:** Thursday, 27 May 2010

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.10 - 8.10 pm

Members Present: Mrs D Collins (Chairman), R Bassett, B Rolfe and Mrs M Sartin

Other Councillors: Mrs C Pond and D Stallan

Apologies: Ms S Stavrou and Mrs L Wagland

Officers Present: K Polyzoides (Assistant Director (Policy & Conservation)), I White (Forward Planning Manager) K Wright (Senior Planning Officer) and G Lunnun (Assistant Director (Democratic Services))

1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman advised that despite the notice on the agenda this meeting would not be webcast.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 April 2010 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Cabinet Committee noted its terms of reference, as agreed by the Council on 17 February 2009 (Minute 113(a)).

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that there was no other urgent business for consideration at this meeting.

6. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

The Cabinet Committee considered a report on the proposed content of the Landscape Character Assessment Study which would form part of the Local Development Framework Evidence Base.

Members noted that carefully drafted criteria-based policies in Local Development Documents, based on Landscape Character Assessments, should provide sufficient protection for rural areas which were not included in national designations.

The Forward Planning Manager reported that the Council had commissioned Chris Blandford Associates to undertake a Local Character Assessment of the District. The study had been produced in four sections:

- (a) an introduction which listed the aims and objectives and described the methodology;
- (b) an overview of the District, outlining the physical and historical influences which had shaped the present-day landscape, and identifying key forces for change;
- (c) the identification of 7 landscape character types, within which were 33 distinct landscape character areas; and
- (d) recommendations for taking the study forward including applications of the Assessment, incorporating Landscape Character, into the Local Development Framework; monitoring landscape change; and enhancing the Evidence Base.

The Cabinet Committee were advised that the Core Strategy should include at least one policy dealing with Landscape Character and a draft proposed policy was included within the study in order to ensure that the implications of different locations and patterns of strategic development were considered. Landscape Character should also feature in other Core Strategy policies, notably those addressing Nature and Heritage Conservation and Design. This would ensure that these policies were based upon comprehensive evidence which would help protect the unique features of the District. Members noted that the Assessment would be used to inform the Sustainability Appraisal of the Core Strategy and other Development Plan Documents. It would also provide a baseline for monitoring the impact of new development on landscape character, and the targeting of landscape enhancements in relation to development schemes.

The Forward Planning Manager reported that a Landscape Sensitivity Study had also been prepared by Chris Blandford Associates. That study had considered the main towns and villages in the District, and the sensitivity of the landscape to change. The outcomes of that study would be considered at a future meeting of the Cabinet Committee.

Members questioned the relevance of the assessment in view of the intention of the Coalition Government to abolish Regional Strategies and return decision making powers on planning to local councils. Members were advised that the Assessment was part of an Evidence Base which would be required in any event to ensure that future decisions were based on sound evidence.

Members also questioned the extent of the River Stort Valley identified on the plan showing Landscape Character Types and Assessments. The officers agreed to pursue this with Chris Blandford Associates.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the Landscape Character Assessment Study as part of the Local Development Framework Evidence Base be provisionally "signed off".

Reasons for Decision:

To ensure that full account was given to the protection and enhancement of landscapes in policy formulation, decisions on planning applications and to the management of land.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

To not include the study as part of the Evidence Base.

7. STRATEGIC HOUSING LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT - DRAFT METHODOLOGY

The Cabinet Committee considered a report proposing the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Draft Methodology for consultation with key local stakeholders and as the basis from which to appoint external consultants.

Members noted that in planning for housing development the Council was required to identify sufficient land for housing to cover the period of the Local Development Framework i.e. from 2011 to 2031.

The core strategy was the key document within the Local Development Framework and it was that document which would identify the broad locations for future development. The primary role of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment was to identify sites with the potential for housing, assess their housing capacity and assess when they could be developed.

The Cabinet Committee was informed that in formulating a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment there was a need to consult with house builders, developers, social housing providers and town and parish councils. Consultation on the methodology would ensure that the evidence provided by the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment would stand up to scrutiny when the Core Strategy was subject to Public Examination by a Planning Inspector.

The Cabinet Committee was advised that the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Practice Guidance allowed local planning authorities some discretion in designing the methodology to suit the local authority area. The draft Methodology involved a desktop review to identify potential sources of sites for housing development and for this purpose it was proposed that discretion be exercised in setting a site size threshold of 6 dwellings or 0.2 hectares for this District. If the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment did not identify sufficient land to meet the minimum housing target for the District smaller sites could then be considered.

Members considered the proposed standard questions in a Site Appraisal Sheet to be used as part of the desktop review. The questions were divided into three stages and, to be considered suitable for housing development, a site had to meet the minimum requirements of Stage 1. The aim of Stage 1 was to ensure that potential housing sites were located either within or adjoining an existing settlement, were not within the zone for the highest risk of flooding and would not impact on sites of European or National Conservation or Heritage importance. If a site met these minimum requirements then a further assessment was made in Stages 2 and 3 against a range of other constraints.

The Cabinet Committee considered the proposed list of stakeholders to be consulted and were advised that following consultation changes would be made to the draft Methodology as appropriate and a final Methodology published. At that stage consultants would be appointed to carry out the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment using the Methodology.

RESOLVED:

That the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Draft Methodology be approved for consultation with key local stakeholders and as the basis upon which to appoint external consultants subject to:

- (a) as part of the consultation exercise, the draft Methodology be published on the Council's website with an invitation for the public to comment;
- (b) the consultation exercise be drawn to the attention of statutory undertakers accepting that they may wish to reserve their comments until a later stage when specific sites have been identified;
- (c) as part of Stage 2 of the Methodology, information held by parish and town councils be taken into account in relation to urban extensions and new freestanding settlements; and
- (d) that an additional question regarding the Urban Open Spaces designated on the Proposals Map be included in the Appraisal Sheet.

Reasons for Decision:

Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3) required that the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment be carried out in consultation with key local stakeholders and the draft Methodology set out how the Assessment would be carried out and the criteria that would be used in making an assessment of sites. The Methodology was also required as the basis upon which to appoint external consultants to undertake the assessments.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

To not approve the draft Methodology for consultation. However as the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment was a key part of the evidence for the Local Development Framework the Core Strategy might be found to be unsound if the Assessment was not carried out correctly.

CHAIRMAN