

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Local Development Framework **Date:** 14 September 2010
Cabinet Committee

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, **Time:** 7.05 - 8.10 pm
High Street, Epping

Members Present: R Bassett (Chairman), B Rolfe, Mrs M Sartin and Ms S Stavrou

Other Councillors: K Chana, Mrs A Grigg, J Philip, Mrs P Smith, D Stallan and J M Whitehouse

Apologies: Mrs D Collins and Mrs L Wagland

Officers Present: I White (Forward Planning Manager) and G J Woodhall (Democratic Services Officer)

23. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

In the absence of the Chairman, nominations for the role of Chairman were requested from the Cabinet Committee.

RESOLVED:

(1) That Councillor R Bassett be elected Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

25. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

(1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2010 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record; and

(2) That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2010 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

26. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Cabinet Committee noted its Terms of Reference, as agreed by the Council on 17 February 2009 (minute 113(a) refers).

27. LOCAL WILDLIFE SITES - EVIDENCE BASE STUDY

The Forward Planning Manager presented a report regarding the Local Wildlife Sites Evidence Base Study. The last full review of Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) had taken place in the early 1990s. However, standards of assessment and knowledge of nature conservation issues had changed greatly since then, so a comprehensive review had been undertaken to ensure that the LDF evidence base was as up to date and as robust as possible.

The Forward Planning Manager added that the review had identified 66 new sites, to give a total of 222 sites located in the District. Policies NC2 and NC3 of the Local Plan offered a degree of protection for existing sites, however these new sites could only be given protection under these policies once they had been adopted by the Council. In order to ensure the 66 new LoWS were adopted, a strategy had been proposed, upon which the Cabinet committee was invited to comment. Developed in accordance with guidance provided by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the proposed strategy would seek to maximise site owner involvement as part of the Council's ambition to continue improving its links with the community.

The Forward Planning Manager added that a letter had been received from the Theydon Bois Action Group concerning the designation of Blunts Farm as a Brownfield site. The Cabinet Committee was informed that the term 'Brownfield' within the report referred to the condition and appearance of sites in terms of their wildlife habitat content at the time they were surveyed. It was not intended to mean 'previously developed land', which depended entirely upon the previous use and planning history of the land. Local Members pointed out that this designation was an error and was causing a certain amount of local confusion and consternation. The Cabinet Committee resolved that the wildlife site Ep87 should be renamed "Blunts Farm" and that all instances of the use of the term 'Brownfield' in connection with this site within the report should be removed.

In response to questions from the Members present, the Forward Planning Manager added that Local Wildlife Site status would be considered if the site was the subject of a planning application or appeal, although the degree of protection offered was not strong. The Countrycare team would also advise on the maintenance of any Local Wildlife Site if requested. The landowners would be informed if their site was designated as a Local Wildlife Site and about the availability of advice from Countrycare. The list attached to the report named the proposed new sites, not existing sites – some of which had been removed if they did not meet the criteria any longer. The deletion of Talbot Meadow as a site was queried by the Cabinet Committee, and it was explained that the Meadow had been ploughed since the study thereby decreasing its wildlife value.

The Forward Planning Manager confirmed the locations of Ep130, Ongar Radio Station – mosaic of old grassland and wood, and Ep146, Weald Bridge Meadow – unimproved grassland, and agreed to check whether Ep49, Parndon Wood – ancient woodland fragment, and Ep104, Hainault Forest Golf Course – acid grassland and wood, were actually in the District.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the completion of the Local Wildlife Review and its adoption by the Local Area Agreement Biodiversity Indicators Steering Group be noted;

(2) That the proposed new wildlife site Ep87 be renamed “Blunts Farm”, with all instances of the use of the term ‘Brownfield’ in connection with this site removed from the report; and

RECOMMENDED:

(3) That the strategy for the formal adoption of the Local Wildlife Sites Review by the Council be recommended to the Council for approval.

Reasons for Decision:

To ensure the new list of sites was adopted as quickly as possible so that relevant Local Plan Policies could be used, the new sites could be added, and deletions could be made to the revised Local Plan Proposals Map, and full account could be taken of this tier of wildlife sites in the preparation of the Local Development Framework.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

To not include the study as part of the evidence base, or to agree a different strategy to formally adopt the completed Local Wildlife Sites Review.

28. LOCAL INVESTMENT PLAN

The Forward Planning Manager presented a report on the Local Investment Plan.

The Cabinet Committee was informed that the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) required each Council to submit a Local Investment Plan (LIP), or combine with nearby authorities to submit a Joint Investment Plan (JIP), to gain funding for affordable housing over the next five years. A draft Evidence Base document had been prepared to feed into a proposed Joint Investment Plan for Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford District Councils. The draft document gave background information on the District, the particular challenges it faced and details of the investment priorities for the next five years. Most of the sites put forward in the document involved affordable housing for which the Council was seeking HCA funding, but some sites also involved retail, business and leisure elements. The sites put forward were split into sections relating to their status, as some had planning permission, some did not, and some were only ‘under consideration’. Where possible the funding being sought had been quantified.

The Forward Planning Manager reported on the joint workshop at which the process of formulating the Joint Investment Plan would begin, using the evidence documents prepared individually, that had taken place on 6 September 2010. There were four aspects to the Joint Investment Plan that needed addressing:

(i) The three separate presentations by the Councils did not address the benefits of coordinated working; the final Plan would need to emphasise the benefits of a joint submission with more significance attached to the provision of Gypsy & Traveller pitches.

(ii) Harlow was not a sub-regional centre of sufficient quality or attractiveness; People preferred to live in either Epping Forest or Uttlesford, both of which had affordable housing needs whilst Harlow required aspirational housing; Roydon, Sheering and Nazeing tended to use Harlow for services and facilities, whilst the southern sector of the District tended to use the neighbouring London Boroughs.

(iii) Investment funding was the main objective of the Joint Plan, but the use of a deliverability calculator could assist with the prioritisation of competing schemes.

(iv) It was suggested that the various schemes could be combined into bands to compare the schemes between the different authorities, although there was likely to be further sub-divisions.

The draft Joint Investment Plan would be sent to the three Councils by 16 September, with the final version to be sent to the Homes & Community agency by 24 September 2010.

The Cabinet Committee was concerned at both the lack of Member involvement in the decisions being made and the rapid speed of the process. The Forward Planning Manager responded that the Council had no option but to comply with the timetable in order to retain the possibility of receiving funding from the HCA. A report could be prepared about the final version of the Joint Investment Plan for the Cabinet Committee's next scheduled meeting on 4 October 2010, although it would probably be published as a supplementary agenda. Copies of Harlow's and Uttlesford's Local Investment Plans were available and would be placed in the Members' Room. It was highlighted that the Joint Investment Plan would change as the individual Local Development Frameworks were progressed.

The Cabinet Committee requested that reports from the joint meetings be submitted for consideration at their meetings, and that a structure chart be devised to indicate the relationship between the different documents making up the Joint Investment Plan.

RESOLVED:

(1) That progress reports upon the joint meetings with Harlow and Uttlesford District Councils be submitted to the Cabinet Committee for consideration; and

(2) That a structure chart be devised to illustrate the relationships between the different documents making up the Joint Investment Plan; and

RECOMMENDED:

(3) That the draft Local Investment Plan Evidence document 2010-15 be endorsed for submission and inclusion within the Joint Investment Plan for Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford District Councils.

Reasons for Decision:

The submission of evidence by the Council into the Joint Investment Plan enabled funding for affordable housing on sites in the District to be made available and allocated by the Homes and Communities Agency over the next five years.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

To not endorse the document for submission into the Joint Local Investment Plan, however, this ran the risk of the level of funding allocated for affordable housing in the District in the next 5 years being lower than required. Also, if the Council did not feed into the Joint Investment Plan sufficiently, the Plan could focus more on the requirements of Harlow and Uttlesford Councils, to the detriment of the needs of Epping Forest District.

29. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There was no other urgent business for the Cabinet Committee to consider.

CHAIRMAN

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