

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Local Development Framework Cabinet Committee **Date:** 13 June 2011

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.00 - 7.50 pm

Members Present: Mrs L Wagland (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby, Mrs M McEwen and J Philip

Other

Councillors: K Avey, R Barrett, K Chana, Mrs A Grigg, Mrs S Jones, Mrs C Pond, D Stallan and C Whitbread

Apologies: J Knapman

Officers Present: K Polyzoides (Assistant Director (Policy & Conservation)) and G J Woodhall (Democratic Services Officer)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

2. MINUTES

Resolved:

(1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2011 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record; and

(2) That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2011 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

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

4. STRATEGIC HOUSING LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT - UPDATE

The Assistant Director (Policy & Conservation) presented a report which updated the Cabinet Committee on the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.

The Cabinet Committee was reminded that the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment was an essential piece of evidence that would determine the amount of land potentially available within the District for housing development. The draft methodology and Site Appraisal Form had been agreed for public consultation, and as the basis for the appointment of consultants in May 2010. However, due to staff shortages in the Forward Planning team, this work had not been advanced as quickly

as hoped, and neither the public consultation nor the appointment of consultants had yet taken place. It was now necessary to amend the methodology and Site Appraisal Form to bring these up to date before work continued.

The Assistant Director stated that the methodology had been updated to reflect the changing policy of the Government. The requirement for a detailed evidence base remained, but the Localism Bill would revoke the Regional Spatial Strategies, which had previously contained housing targets for all local authority areas, in early 2012. Therefore, work on this assessment needed to be started whilst at the same time monitoring the changing Government policy position.

The Assistant Director accepted that it would be difficult to protect people's homes from being blighted when areas were identified for possible future development, but the Cabinet Committee was reassured that every identified site would need to be fully evidenced and would be subject to a public consultation. A certain lack of coordination between the Assessment and the Joint Housing Market Assessment was acknowledged. There was the possibility that parts of the Evidence Base would have to be reviewed as the Assessment developed and changes in national planning policy were implemented.

The Assistant Director outlined the amendments to the Site Appraisal Form, which utilised a 'traffic light' system. Stage A had been re-ordered to consider first those issues which would cause a site to be immediately discounted with no further investigation. The wording throughout Stage B had been amended to make clear the difference between the "amber" and "red" outcomes, and the section regarding Conservation Areas had moved from Stage C to B as it related to local policy. Finally, in Stage C, clarification had been provided for the travel times relating to distances from amenities, which had been determined using a combination of national policy/guidance and previous good practice. Some of the distances had also been amended to reflect the frequency of the amenity and whether people would travel to reach the amenity, resulting in a greater distance to facilities that occurred more infrequently.

The Assistant Director stated that Green Belt land would only be examined if it was either a brownfield site or a greenfield site adjacent to an existing settlement, and that it would only be identified for further examination and not necessarily designated for future development. The Cabinet Committee felt that questions 4 and 5 regarding Green Belt land should be reviewed. Specifically that there could be occasions when the amber outcome to question 5, "Greenfield site within or adjoining an existing settlement boundary" would actually be a red outcome. The national guidance on the provision of "green lungs" close to urban areas could be reviewed to further prohibit the possibility of development on Green Belt land. The Assistant Director re-iterated that there were subtleties regarding the methodology, that this was the first stage in assessing general appropriateness of sites, and that the outcome would be reviewed carefully.

The Cabinet Committee expressed concerns about the calibre of consultants engaged by the Council to perform previous studies, some of whom had little or no local knowledge of the District. The Assistant Director stated that a list of potential consultants for consideration was not available, but that careful consideration would be given to the selection of consultants and Members could be notified of the options.

The Assistant Director added that map radii had been used when calculating walking distances in question 14. An attempt was made to assess approximate distances. The Cabinet Committee felt that potential consultants should be informed during pre-contract discussions that all identified routes should be assessed for being

reasonably accessible at all times and throughout the year, i.e. not over fields which could be impassable in Winter.

The Cabinet Committee noted that sites within or adjacent to conservation areas would be discouraged from development (question 13), land in domestic curtilages would not generally be included although the occasional instance might occur, and that Chingford would be added as a railway station close to the District to be considered in question 14(a)(iii).

Decision:

- (1) That questions four and five of the Site Appraisal Form be reviewed such that Green Belt significance was satisfactorily taken into account and outlined;
- (2) That all identified routes to be examined by the appointed Consultants for their practicality, accessibility at all times and availability throughout the year (question 14); and
- (3) That the minor amendments to the draft methodology for the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and Site Appraisal Form be approved.

Reasons for Decision:

To allow key local stakeholders to be consulted on the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment draft methodology and to appoint external consultants to undertake the assessments.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

To not approve the minor amendments to the draft methodology and Site Appraisal Form.

5. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

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

CHAIRMAN

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