

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Local Development Framework Cabinet Committee **Date:** 3 October 2011

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 6.00 - 7.25 pm

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

Other Councillors: Mrs D Collins, Mrs A Grigg, Mrs C Pond, Mrs M Sartin, C Whitbread, Mrs J H Whitehouse and D Wixley

Apologies: None.

Officers Present: J Preston (Director of Planning and Economic Development), K Polyzoides (Assistant Director (Policy & Conservation)), N Richardson (Assistant Director (Development Control)), M Houseago (Olympics Regeneration Officer) and G J Woodhall (Democratic Services Officer)

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(a) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor Mrs M Sartin declared a personal interest in agenda item 5, Lee Valley White Water Centre Economic Development Study – Update, by virtue of being a member of the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority. The Councillor had determined that her interest was not prejudicial and would remain in the meeting for the consideration of the issue.

13. MINUTES

Resolved:

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

14. TERMS OF REFERENCE

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

15. LEE VALLEY WHITE WATER CENTRE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STUDY - UPDATE

The Cabinet Committee received a presentation from the Olympic Regeneration Officer, jointly funded by Epping Forest District, Broxbourne Borough and Hertfordshire County Councils.

The principal points of the presentation were:

- the appointment of consultants Nathaniel Lichfield to undertake the Economic Development Study for the White Water Centre;
- the development of additional leisure activities around the White Water Centre;
- the identification of activities for development in the short, medium and long terms;
- a review of existing activities in the area;
- the creation of zones for adrenaline, ecology, heritage and sports activities;
- the examination of linkages across the immediate and wider areas;
- a list of actions in the short, medium and long-terms to bring about the development of the White Water Centre; and
- a structure chart showing the responsibilities of the Legacy Board and the Olympic Regeneration Officer.

The Olympic Regeneration Officer stated that the next step would be to create cultural, health and wellbeing hubs. The emphasis would be upon family orientated activities with particular attention paid to the pricing involved. However, the White Water Centre had been oversubscribed since it had opened, despite the relatively high cost of the activities. The other White Water Centre in Nottingham had not been as successful, and the visitor numbers for the Centre in the Lee Valley Park had been very encouraging. The Assistant Director (Policy & Conservation) added that soft market testing of the proposed development ideas with leisure operators and developers would be the next stage, but admitted that the project was dependent to a certain degree on private involvement in the developments; the Legacy Board was laying the foundations for the future success and prosperity of the area.

In response to questions from the Members present, the Olympic Regeneration Officer agreed that it would be difficult to measure the success of some of the proposals and more provision should be made for educational and cultural events; there should not be a complete focus on adrenaline sports. The World Canoe Championships in 2015 would also benefit the area after the Olympics, but it was acknowledged that the potential development of hotels and housing could be problematic given their proposed proximity to the Lee Valley Regional Park. The Cabinet Committee was reminded that nature based educational facilities already existed within the Lee Valley Park.

It was highlighted that the future membership of the Legacy Board would be a critical issue to its future success and would need to command support from local residents and Councils. There was also a further issue over the accountability of the Legacy Board as well. The Olympic Regeneration Officer felt that the Board would develop over time and that its membership would change. However, consideration could be given to develop more local representation on the Board in future.

Finally, the Olympic Regeneration Officer outlined his proposed work programme for the next six months:

- (i) co-ordinate a master plan for an area-wide branding and marketing strategy;
- (ii) co-ordinate a strategy to implement a wayfinding, pathway and gateway improvement scheme for walking and cycling routes across the project area;
- (iii) create a business prospectus for potential leisure developers and operators;
- (iv) establish a business breakfast for developers and operators promoting the potential of the place; and

(v) co-ordinate the next round of submissions for the Heritage Lottery bid in respect of the Town Heritage Initiative for Waltham Abbey.

Recommended:

(1) That the projects related to the 2012 Olympic Games being delivered by the Council and its partners be noted;

(2) That the progress of and key findings and outputs from the Lee Valley White Water Centre Economic Study be noted; and

(3) That the six-month proposed work programme for the Olympic Regeneration Officer be approved.

Reasons for Decision:

To update the Cabinet Committee on the progress of the projects identified by the Council's Officers, the Olympic Regeneration Officer, and other partner agencies.

To approve the proposed work programme for the next 6 month period and propose any other actions and activities to be undertaken by the Olympic Regeneration Officer.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

To not approve the Olympic Regeneration Officer's proposed work programme for the next 6 months.

16. DRAFT NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK CONSULTATION

A report on the draft National Planning Policy Framework Consultation was introduced by the Director of Planning & Economic Development, and presented by the Assistant Director (Policy & Conservation).

The Assistant Director reported that the proposed National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) would replace the current Planning Policy Statements, Planning Policy Guidance Notes and a number of the circulars with a more concise single document. The aim was to reduce bureaucracy, promote sustainable growth, empower local communities, and make it easier for the public to engage in local planning decisions. The consultation consisted of 70 questions in total and was due to end on 17 October 2011. The suggested main principles for the Framework were outlined:

(i) planning should be plan-led;

(ii) all plans should be up-to-date, contain a presumption in favour of sustainable development, and make adequate provision for growth;

(iii) plans should be explicit about the housing, business and other development needs of their areas and how these needs would be met; and

(iv) development proposals should be agreed, except where they would compromise key sustainable development principles.

The four main issues that the Cabinet Committee had indicated an interest in were: Sustainable Development; Green Belt issues; Town and Parish Plans; and Gypsy Roma Travellers.

The Assistant Director advised the Cabinet Committee that the Framework was looking to pursue the three components of sustainable development in an integrated fashion, with solutions that delivered multiple goals. Although never explicitly stated, the key components of sustainable development was assumed to be economic, social and environmental. The suggested Officer response to question 1a was that the Council strongly disagreed that the Framework had the right approach to establishing the presumption in favour of sustainable development. In question 1b, Officers had concerns that there was no practical definition of sustainable development; not even the glossary which accompanied the consultation had a definition. This would provide developers with opportunities to submit statements claiming that their development proposals were sustainable and that the presumption should be for the Council to grant planning permission.

The Cabinet Committee agreed that 'sustainable' had different meanings to different people, and that the lack of a specific definition with more loopholes would lead to a lack of clear planning decisions. Large areas of the District were not appropriate for any sort of development as they were designated as Green Belt land. The Framework, as currently worded, was felt to be encouraging an approach that was stronger than a presumption in favour of sustainable development, and that this should be included in the response to question 1b.

The Assistant Director informed the Cabinet Committee that the Framework retained the five key purposes of Green Belts, with the fundamental aim of preventing urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. However, there were four proposed changes to the detail of the policy:

- (i) extending 'major developed site' status to similar sites not previously identified;
- (ii) permit a wider range of local transport infrastructure to be permissible, such as bus shelters and small transport depots, within the Green Belt;
- (iii) Community Right to Build schemes to be permissible if backed by the local community; and
- (iv) extend the alteration or replacement of dwellings to include all buildings provided the original size of the building was retained.

Whilst Officers had been encouraged that the importance of Green Belt strategy had been retained in the Framework, there were concerns about the first of the four proposed changes. If land had not already been identified as a major developed site, then it had to be assumed that the local authority concerned had been satisfied that the current land usage had no significant effects upon the Green Belt. Also, it was felt that the appropriateness of any development within the Green Belt should be decided by the local community, in line with the Government's Localism approach. Of the other three proposed changes, Officers felt that a greater degree of guidance should be provided. Consequently, an additional paragraph for the Green Belt section had been suggested by Officers.

The Cabinet Committee felt that the use of the word 'similar' in the first proposed change was too vague, and that the Council's response to question 13a should be 'strongly disagree', not 'disagree'. There were also concerns with the fourth proposed

amendment; this could result in the replacement of barns with dwellings of the same size as the original building, which would lead to urban development within the Countryside.

The Assistant Director added that the guidance was for Neighbourhood Plans (also known as Town or Parish Plans) to be developed in tandem with the Local Plan and Local Development Framework. The process in compiling a Neighbourhood Plan was lengthy taking at least a year, as it involved consultations and referendums, and the estimated cost of production (anywhere between £17,000 and £63,000) would be a deterrent to most Town and Parish Councils. The *raison d'être* of a number of these Plans would be to deter development and protect the Green Belt, but there was a risk of developers taking advantage of this delay in producing a Neighbourhood Plan.

Allied to the Green Belt and Neighbourhood Plans was the issue of Land Supply to increase the delivery of new homes. The Director of Planning & Economic Development reported that proposals had been included for:

- (i) identifying and maintaining a continuous five-year supply of deliverable sites, including a minimum additional allowance of 20% to ensure choice and competition;
- (ii) any 'windfall' sites not to be included in the first ten years of supply, or any continuous five-year period afterwards unless there were special circumstances; and
- (iii) removing the national brownfield target for development and allowing local councils to choose the most suitable locations.

Following discussions with the Council's Housing Officers, most of the proposals were considerable favourable, but with some caveats about definitions and whether the protection of the Green Belt outweighed the delivery of new homes, and the proposed responses had reflected this. The Cabinet Committee felt that 'windfall' sites should be taken account of when identifying possible land for housing, both within the first ten years of supply and subsequent five-year periods, and requested that the Council's response be amended accordingly.

Finally, the Director of Planning & Economic Development highlighted the Council's response to the recent Government consultation on Gypsy Roma Travellers, which had been attached as an appendix to the report. It was highlighted that the work that had been performed by the Council in respect of the provision of land for sites for Gypsy Roma Travellers had delayed the process of producing the Local Development Framework quite considerably.

Recommended (to the Planning Services Scrutiny Panel):

- (1) That the proposed responses by Officers to key questions in the Government's consultation on the draft National Planning Policy Framework be recommended to the Planning Services Scrutiny Panel for approval, subject to the following amendments:
 - (a) question 1b, the wording of the Framework was encouraging an approach that was stronger than a presumption in favour of sustainable development;
 - (b) question 13a, to strongly disagree that the proposed Framework gave a strong, clear message on Green Belt protection; and
 - (c) question 10b, that allowance should be made for windfall sites, both in the first ten years of supply and the rolling five-year periods thereafter.

Reasons for Decision:

To respond proactively to the Government's consultation on the draft National Planning Policy Framework.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

To not respond to the consultation, however the Council's views would not then be considered by the government.

17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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

CHAIRMAN