

Report to the Local Plan Cabinet Committee



Report reference: *LPC-003-2012/13*
Date of meeting: *3 September 2012*

**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Planning

Subject: Local Plan Issues & Options – Community Choices

Responsible Officer: Amanda Thorn (01992 564543)

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- 1. To note progress with consultation on the Local Plan Issues & Options – Community Choices document**

Executive Summary:

The consultation for the Local Plan Issues & Options – Community Choices is currently underway, and will last for just over 11 weeks until midday 15 October 2012. This report provides a brief update on the actions undertaken so far.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To keep the Committee updated on the progress of the consultation.

Other Options for Action:

None.

Report:

1. The Forward Planning team commenced public consultation on the Local Plan Issues & Options – Community Choices document on 30 July 2012. The consultation ends at midday on 15 October 2012, providing a period of just over 11 weeks for comments and representations to be made.
2. Press briefings were held on 18 and 20 July, resulting in some fair and balanced articles in the local newspapers.
3. Leaflets advertising the consultation period, and the dates and locations of public drop-in sessions have been delivered to every household and business in the district. An issue has been identified around the distribution of leaflets in the Chigwell area, and the delivery company has apologised and undertaken to redeliver to this area a no additional cost.
4. Further to this initial leaflet, a further six drop-in sessions have been added to the schedule making a total of 13 sessions in all. See Appendix 1 for a copy of the revised leaflet which has been sent by email and post to each Town & Parish Council

for display and distribution. The Council's website, and Facebook and Twitter pages have been updated to advertise these additional dates, and a further press release has been published.

5. All of the documentation is available on the Council's website, and following some comments about its ease of use some changes have been made. This was followed by a noticeable increase in "hits" on the consultation section of the website.
6. Letters have been sent to a variety of consultees, planning agents, individual residents and community/resident groups in notification of the consultation period. Town/Parish Councils and known resident associations/groups have been provided with large consultation packs which include multiple copies of documentation, posters and leaflets. Similarly, copies of documentation have been distributed to all libraries and Council offices. Identified "hard-to-reach" groups have been specifically targeted to ensure they are aware of the consultation period. For example, leaflets have been handed out at a number of rail and Central Line stations in and close to the district, to ensure that commuters are aware of the consultation period. A DVD for the Gypsy, Roma & Traveller community is being prepared, as this method of engagement proved quite successful for the previous consultation on a DPD under the previous Government's Direction.
7. There is an exhibition in the Civic Offices for the duration of the consultation period, and temporary exhibitions are being staged in the district's libraries.
8. Meetings with individual Town & Parish Councils are being organised on request, with the intention being that officers will attend to give an overview of the consultation period and answer subsequent questions. Technical and non-technical workshops were held on 6 and 7 August, to discuss the key strategic issues raised by the Community Choices document.
9. Very few completed responses have been received, although this is to be expected at this early stage. Key messages that have been expressed so far from the meetings held and responses received are around the possible levels of growth, potential development in the Green Belt and infrastructure deficits/future provision.
10. Further oral updates are likely to be available at the Committee meeting.

Resource Implications:

Costs for the consultation period are within amounts allocated in the Local Plan budget.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012 dictate the way in which the new Local Plan must be prepared.

The National Planning Policy Framework requires that all local planning authorities prepare an up-to-date Local Plan as quickly as possible.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The current consultation period will provide evidence to support the preparation of the new Local Plan, which will encourage sustainable development in the district.

Consultation Undertaken:

The Issues & Options consultation is currently underway, and will end at midday on 15 October 2012.

Background Papers:

Previous Local Plan Cabinet Committee reports

Planning Our Future: Community Choices – Issues & Options for the Local Plan – July 2012

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

The consultation period is being carried out in accordance with the methods previously agreed by Councillors, in order that it is as comprehensive as possible. The potential risks of not carrying out the consultation robustly could be significant, hence the resources (both staff and financial) that are being focused on this at present.

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? **Yes** **No**

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? **Yes** **No**

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?

The consultation period is for all residents, businesses and those with an interest in the district, and is not restricted to any particular groups. In recognising that some people/groups may have more difficulty engaging with the process, some additional measures have been taken to seek comprehensive engagement.

Additional measures include consultation materials being available in a variety of formats, both online and in hard copy. Copies have been distributed around the district in public locations for view and collection.

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?

Hard-to-reach groups have been identified include those that work during the day, and the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller community. Leaflets have been handed out at rail/Central Line stations during morning & evening peak travel times, and a DVD for the GRT community is being prepared.