

## **EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES**

**Committee:** Local Plan Cabinet Committee      **Date:** 3 September 2012

**Place:** Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping      **Time:** 7.00 - 7.45 pm

**Members Present:** R Bassett (Chairman), W Breare-Hall, Mrs A Grigg, D Stallan and C Whitbread

**Other Councillors:** K Avey, J Knapman, Mrs J Lea, Mrs M McEwen, A Mitchell MBE, Mrs C Pond, B Rolfe, Mrs M Sartin, Ms S Stavrou and G Waller

**Apologies:** -

**Officers Present:** I White (Forward Planning Manager), J Cordell (Senior Planning Officer), G J Woodhall (Democratic Services Officer) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

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### **8. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION**

The Chairman reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

### **9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

### **10. MINUTES**

**Resolved:**

(1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2012 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### **11. TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Cabinet Committee noted its terms of reference, as amended by the Leader of the Council.

### **12. PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISIONS AGREED SINCE THE LAST MEETING**

The Cabinet Committee noted that the following Portfolio Holder decisions in relation to the Local Plan had been agreed since the last meeting on 2 July 2012:

(i) Inclusion of the Heritage Asset Review as part of the Local Plan Evidence Base;

- (ii) Open Space Sport and Recreation Assessment; and
- (iii) Local Plan Evidence Base report – The Lea Valley Glasshouse Industry: Planning for the Future.

### 13. LOCAL PLAN ISSUES & OPTIONS – COMMUNITY CHOICES

The Forward Planning Manager presented a progress report on the consultation for the Local Plan 'Issues & Options – Community Choices' document.

The Forward Planning Manager reported that public consultation on the Local Plan 'Issues & Options – Community Choices' document commenced on 30 July 2012, and would run for 11 weeks until 15 October 2012. Press briefings had been held in July and leaflets advertising the dates and locations of the public drop-in sessions had been delivered to every household and business in the District. Problems with the delivery of leaflets in Chigwell had been resolved, and possible further problems in Ninefields, Waltham Abbey were being investigated. A total of 14 drop-in sessions throughout the District had been planned, and details had been sent to all Town and Parish Councils, as well as being posted on the Council's website, Facebook and Twitter pages.

The Forward Planning Manager advised that letters had been sent to a variety of consultees and groups advertising the consultation, and specific hard-to-reach groups had been targeted to ensure they were aware of the consultation. There would be an exhibition in the Civic Offices throughout the consultation period, and temporary exhibitions would be staged in local libraries around the District. The number of responses to the consultation had started to increase following the first of the drop-in sessions taking place, and it was expected that more responses would be received as the consultation period progressed.

The Chairman added that a meeting had taken place between the Lea Valley growers, the National Farmers Union and the Local Strategic Partnership to discuss the recent Glass House Industry report, and work on some of the issues raised in respect of the Green Belt and Parkland areas, to enable the growers to concentrate on food production. The Local Strategic Partnership would lead this process, and the outcome would be reported back to the Cabinet Committee.

There were further claims made about the non-delivery of leaflets in other areas by Members present at the meeting. The Forward Planning Manager responded that the Council had access to telemetric data about the leaflet deliveries, but Officers could investigate further the details of any roads that had not been delivered to. The Chairman stated that further resources had been made available to hold extra local meetings, for which press releases would be issued, but the public could telephone Officers with questions at any time. A DVD would be made for distribution amongst the Gypsy & Traveller community, and this would also be made available on the Council's website with copies available on request to the public. The Cabinet Committee was reminded that local Parish Magazines could also be used to disseminate information.

A local Member for Chigwell Village reported that there was huge suspicion in the Chigwell area. Residents believed that this was not a consultation, and that the Local Plan had already been finalised with building on Green Belt land in the area proposed. It was also felt that the consultation had been poorly put together and was biased; it was too complicated for ordinary people to understand and two computers were required to cross-reference the consultation document with the feedback form.

The Chairman reassured the Member that all the sites in the consultation document had already been assessed as part of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment, but that the Council would always look to develop brownfield sites first before building on Green Belt land. Work had recently been completed to improve the website, but residents always had the option to request a hard copy of the documents if that was easier. The Council would hold workshops with Members and local groups after the consultation period had finished and before any decisions were made about the Council's preferred options. The preferred options would be subject to further public consultation and an Examination in Public. It was a long process but the Council had to follow the procedure correctly to prevent the Local Plan being found unsound. The Leader of the Council added that it had taken the Council four years to get to this stage and it was imperative for residents to respond to the current consultation. The documentation made it very clear that the current stage was only a consultation, and it was reiterated that the Council would prioritise new development on brownfield sites rather than green field sites.

The local Member for Chigwell Village welcomed the Leader's comments regarding priority for development on brownfield sites and that message would be conveyed to his residents. However, it was still felt that the consultation documents used Forward Planning terminology, which residents did not understand. The Portfolio for Finance & Technology advised that Members were under a duty to consider the Local Plan for the whole District, not just the consequences for their own areas.

**Decision:**

(1) That the progress made with consultation on the 'Local Plan Issues & Options – Community Choices' document be noted.

**Reasons for Decision:**

To keep the Cabinet Committee informed on the progress of the consultation.

**Other Options Considered and Rejected:**

None at the current time.

**14. ASSESSMENT OF PURPOSES OF INCLUDING LAND WITHIN THE GREEN BELT - PROPOSED METHODOLOGY**

The Senior Planning Officer presented a report regarding a proposed methodology for the assessment of purposes of including land within the Green Belt for the new Local Plan.

The Senior Planning Officer reported that the Council was currently consulting on areas for potential growth for the next plan period to 2033. In order to achieve even the lowest level of growth required over the next 20 years, some release of Green Belt land would be required. Previous work on the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) looked at whether areas of land were available or deliverable. The purpose of a Green Belt assessment was to follow the SLAA work and determine which areas from those being considered were the least harmful to release from the Green Belt. Any release of Green Belt land had to be carried out in the context of the five purposes of including land in the Green Belt, and with close reference to existing guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The Senior Planning Officer advised the Cabinet Committee that a methodology had to be considered for assessing the impacts of releasing the various sites, to

determine which sites would cause the least harm to the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. The proposed methodology had been attached at Appendix 1 of the report. The Green Belt assessment would be carried out at approximately the same time as further Sustainability Appraisal work. The recommendations of the Green Belt assessment could then be used alongside the results of the consultation and further evidence gathering to identify the best range of sites or areas to consider for further testing prior to potential allocation.

The Chairman emphasised that any assessment had to conform with the guidance given in paragraphs 79 – 92 of the NPPF. It should consider the impact on the openness and permanence of the land and the five main purposes for including land in the Green Belt, namely:

- (i) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- (ii) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- (iii) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- (iv) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- (v) to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

The Cabinet Committee were reassured that the second purpose listed above would be applied to villages as well as towns, and the Forward Planning Manager confirmed that this purpose had always been interpreted as all settlements by Officers, but that the wording was proscribed by the NPPF. The Senior Planning Officer affirmed that sustainability issues were dealt with under separate policies, and hence had not been included in the methodology as this focused solely on the Green Belt. The Chairman stated that the proposed methodology incorporated best practices from other authorities and commended it to the Cabinet Committee for approval.

**Decision:**

- (1) That, using the methodology in Appendix 1 of the report, an assessment against the purposes of including land within the Green Belt for the new Local Plan be conducted by the Council.

**Reasons for Decision:**

To permit Officers to undertake an assessment for progressing land allocations within the Green Belt and the new Local Plan.

**Other Options Considered and Rejected:**

To not approve a methodology for an assessment against the purposes of the Green Belt. However, this would risk insufficient land allocations being made to accommodate the District's growth, and the Local Plan being found unsound at the Examination in Public.

To carry out further assessments of the Green Belt, which would result in delays to the Local Plan process.

**15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

It was noted by the Cabinet Committee that there was no other urgent business for consideration.

**CHAIRMAN**

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